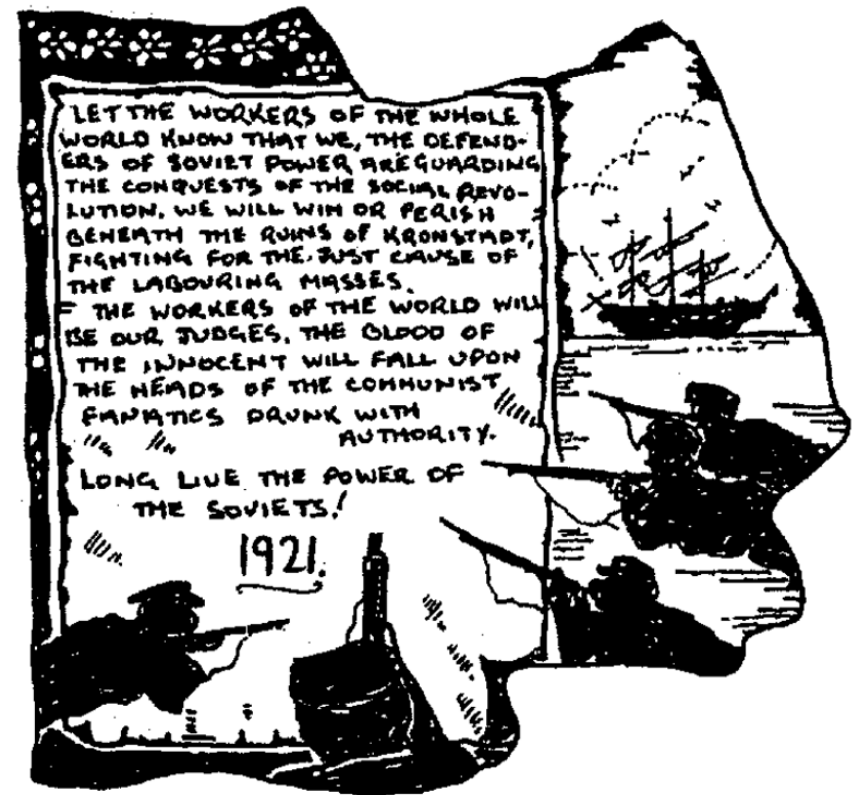


# The Russian Revolution Destroyed



## The Strategy and Nature of Bolshevism



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nevertheless right to assert that the workers must rebuild the social edifice from top to bottom. The Workers' Opposition was the last voice inside the official Marxist movement to call for direct control, to express confidence in the creative capacity of the proletariat, to proclaim that the socialist revolution must usher in a new period in human history. This was the voice of the Kronstadt workers and so clear and loud was their message that it could only be silenced with cannon.

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the Russian Revolution is that, while the 'revolutionary' party retained power, the working class itself lost it; that it was their own party that defeated the workers, and not the classical forces of the counter-revolution. What Rosa Luxemburg had to say about the German revolution, just before her death, applies in full to the Russian Revolution as well: 'In all previous revolutions, the contenders were ranged on two clear sides, class against class, programme against programme. In the present revolution, the defenders of the old order do not fight under the banner of the ruling class, but under the social democratic banner.'

The only difference is that in Germany, the Social Democrats served as a front for the bourgeoisie, while in Russia, the Bolshevik wing of the Social Democratic Party took the place of the bourgeoisie. From 1918 to 1921, the Bolsheviks were concerned to give Russia a well-organised economy based on the then capitalist model, i.e. State capitalism. This is a term that kept recurring in Lenin's writings. And what he and Trotsky said time and again was that Russia must learn from the advanced capitalist countries, that there is only one way of developing production: the application of capitalist ideas on management and industrial rationalisation. Trotsky, for example, believed that the actual organisation of the army did not matter so long as it fought on the right side. Thus an army is not bourgeois because of its structure (e.g. hierarchy and discipline) but only if it serves the bourgeoisie. Similarly an industrial system is not considered bourgeois because its discipline, hierarchy, and incentives (bonuses, piece work, etc.) are those used by the bourgeois system. All that matters, apparently, is whose power is enshrined in what Lenin so proudly referred to as his 'constitution'. The idea that the same means cannot serve different ends, that neither the army nor a factory are simple 'instruments' but socialist structures embodying productive relationships and hence the real power - this idea, so obvious to Marxists, was completely 'forgotten'. True, the Bolsheviks abolished private property, and 'the anarchy of the market', but the practical reorganisation of capitalist production when it came, took none of the forms the Russian Social Democrats had envisaged during twenty years of debate. 'The revolutionary bureaucracy which directed the proletariat and seized the State machine imposed a new form of class domination on society.' (Guy Debord: *La Societe du Spectacle*.)

The most unshakeable belief of the Communist Party, indeed of every party of the Bolshevik type, is precisely that it must direct the revolution as well as the economy. The only Communists to challenge this view at the time were a handful of clear-sighted comrades, including Rosa Luxemburg, Anton Pannekoek and the far-left German KAPD who, before and after the Revolution, stressed the fact that centralisation was bound to dampen the spontaneity and self-confidence of the masses. The reason why the Bolshevik Party was able to usher in a counter-revolution, is because it has crushed, rather than led, the proletariat; because no organisation can represent the proletariat: whenever a minority acts in the name of the proletariat it acts only to betray them in the end. The defeat of all the opposition groups inside the party - the Left-Wing Communists in 1918, the Centralist Democrats in 1919 and finally the Workers' Opposition in 1921 - are so many nails in the coffin of the Russian proletariat. The Workers' Opposition, despite its theoretical confusion and weakness, was



## The Role of the Bolshevik Party during the Russian Revolution

On reading Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* we are struck by a fundamental contradiction: as an honest historian he shows us just how much the Party lagged behind the masses, and as a Bolshevik theorist he must reaffirm that the Party was necessary for the success of the revolution. Thus he writes: The soldiers lagged behind the shop committees. The committees lagged behind the masses ... The party also lagged behind the revolutionary dynamic - an organisation which had the least right to lag, especially in a time of revolution ... The most revolutionary party which human history until this time had ever known was nevertheless caught unawares by the events of history. It reconstructed itself in the fires, and straightened out its ranks under the onslaught of events. The masses at the turning point were a hundred times to the left of the extreme left party.' (*History of the Russian Revolution*\* Volume I, 403 f.)

This passage alone should suffice to destroy the myth of the Bolshevik Party as the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat. Its 'lagging behind' was patent even during the first days of February 1917 - the overthrow of the Czar and the creation of workers' councils, were the work of the masses themselves. In this connexion Trotsky quotes Mstislavsky (a leader of the left wing of the Social Revolutionaries who subsequently went over to the Bolsheviks) as saying: The revolution caught us napping, the party people of those days, like the foolish virgins of the Bible.' To which Trotsky himself adds: 'It does not matter how much they resembled the virgins, but it is true they were all fast asleep.' (*op. cit.* Volume I, 147.)

This was as true of the Bolshevik Party as of all other left-wing organisations. In effect: 'Up to the very last hour, these leaders thought it was a question of a revolutionary manifestation, one among many, and not at all an armed insurrection... The Central Committee was unable to give any directives for the coming day.' (*op. cit.* Volume 1, 147.) In short, the Bolsheviks were anything but leaders of the masses in February, and subsequently they lagged behind both the action of the masses and also their revolutionary spirit. Thus in July 1917, when 'about 10,000 men assembled, to shouts of encouragement, the machine-gunners told how they had received

\* Gollanez and Sphere Books, London. All page references are to the Sphere edition.

an order to go to the Front on 4 July, but they had decided not to go to the German Front against the German proletariat but against their own capitalist ministers. Feeling ran high. "Let's get moving!" cried the workers. The secretary of the factory committee, a Bolshevik, objected, suggesting that they ask instructions from the party. Protests from all sides: "Down with it. Again you want to postpone things. We can't live that way any longer." Towards six o'clock came representatives from the Executive Committee, but they succeeded still less with the workers.' (*op. cit.* Volume II, 127.)

The Bolsheviks not only played no part in this struggle but tried to squash it; they wanted to refer the whole matter back to Party Headquarters, and when their leaders arrived these were shouted down. A wide gulf had opened up between the Party and the 'masses' who had a dynamic of their own and, from the start, set up their own soldiers' and workers' Soviets. It was here and nowhere else that the real decisions were taken. In the workers' Soviets, each member, Bolshevik or not, could make his voice heard and hence influence events. No political group as such had the right to decide any issues, even though the delegates were originally chosen from among Party militants (Mensheviks first, and then Bolsheviks). However, these men were picked not for their political orthodoxy but because of their active participation in the workers' struggle, and when they tried to act as dampers they were generally dismissed very quickly - at least while Soviet democracy still existed. Trotsky has described the role of the Bolsheviks in July 1917, as follows: 'The Bolsheviks were caught up by the movement and dragged into it, looking around the while for some justification for an action which flatly contravened the official decision of the party', (*op. cit.* Volume II, 30.) And, so as not to lose face, rank and file Bolsheviks were forced to go flatly against the decisions of their leaders: Their Central Committee addressed an appeal to the workers and soldiers: "Unknown persons... are summoning you into the streets under arms, and that proves that the summons does not come from any of the Soviet parties..." Thus the Central Committee - both of the Party and the Soviet - proposed, but the masses disposed.' (*op. cit.* Volume II, 33.)

Here we are not so much interested in whether or not the Bolsheviks had good reasons for opposing these demonstrations as in the fact that they had no sway over the masses. Clearly, five months after the Revolution and three months after the October uprising, the masses were still governing themselves, and the Bolshevik vanguard simply had to toe the line. 'Popular Bolsheviks - Nevsky, Lashevich, Padvoisky - speaking from the balcony, tried to send the regiments home. They were answered from below: "Go to hell! Go to hell!" Such cries the Bolshevik balcony had never yet heard from the soldiers, it was an alarming sign... What was to be done? Could the Bolsheviks possibly stand aside? The members of the Petrograd Committee together with the delegates of the Conference and representatives from the regiments and factories, passed a resolution: To end all fruitless attempts to restrain the masses and guide the developing movement in such a way that the government crisis may be decided in the interests of the people (sic!)...' (*op. cit.* Volume II, 33 f.) The fiction of the proletarian vanguard had to be maintained at

all antagonists came out into the open and when the political struggle becomes transformed into Civil War, the party in power has other statistics for evaluating the correctness of its line of conduct than the circulation figures of Menshevik journals ... Noske tried to squash the Communists but their numbers kept growing, whereas we succeeded in demolishing the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries until nothing remained of them. This criterion suffices us.'

It suffices us as well. The German Social Democrat Noske did smash the German Revolution while the number of Communists kept increasing, but all this proves is that Trotsky was good at figures and not necessarily at political analysis. In fact, the German Communist Party enjoyed full parliamentary immunity in the Weimar Republic. However, as soon as Hitler took power in 1933, not only the number of Jews but also that of German Communists diminished by leaps and bounds. Is this a justification of Hitlerism? Again, the number of Trotskyists in Russia dwindled to almost nothing from 1923 to 1940. Is this a Trotskyist justification of Stalinism? All it proves is the power of the repressive system.

In 1921, the fate of the Russian Revolution was finally sealed and the bureaucracy triumphed. Henceforth it would grow daily in strength. It is not surprising that the working class, having been weakened by years of civil war and famine and then by the destruction of the Soviets, should have stood by passively while Trotsky himself was 'liquidated'. Stalin could even permit himself the indulgence of calling Trotsky 'the patriarch of all bureaucrats'.

As far as we are concerned there is no break between the ideology of the old Bolshevik Party and that of the new bureaucracy.

The direction of the proletariat, acting through a clandestine and disciplined party, and run by intellectuals turned professional revolutionaries, had no need to come to terms with other managerial classes, and so became the absolute dictator of society.' (Guy Debord: *La Societe du Spectacle*)

Now, while it is undeniable that the Russian Revolution took place in a backward country - one in which the peasantry was predominant; that it was isolated, largely due to the failure of the German revolution, and that it was severely weakened by the Civil War, these general factors can in no way explain the specific turn it took. For instance, like the Commune of 1871 or like the German revolution, it might have been smashed from without and replaced by the old capitalist system. Even the introduction of state capitalism might have taken quite different forms than it did, in fact, take in the Soviet Union. Moreover, backwardness and isolation have long been overcome: today the Soviet Union is a powerful industrial giant with an empire that covers more than half of Europe. No, the specific failure of the Russian Revolution must be laid squarely at the door of the Bolshevik party. That failure was far more significant even than the defeat of the French Commune at the hands of reaction, of the Spanish Revolution at the hands of Franco, or the Hungarian uprising by Krushchev's tanks - simply because the Russian Revolution had triumphed over the forces of external reaction only to succumb to the bureaucracy the Revolution itself had engendered. It forces us to reflect on the nature of workers' powers and on what we mean by socialism. What is specific in the degeneration of

Kronstadt, as Voline has rightly pointed out, was a genuine attempt by the workers to run their own lives, without the help of political leaders, tutors, or shepherds. And Alexander Berkman added: 'Kronstadt destroyed the myth of the workers' state; it provided the proof of an incompatibility between the dictatorship of the Communist Party and the Revolution.'

The Kronstadt *Izvestia* had this to say: 'Be careful, Trotsky! You may escape the judgement of the people, you may shoot down innocent men and women by the score, but even you cannot kill the truth.'

And on 8 March, the rebels wrote: 'At Kronstadt the foundation stone has been laid of the Third Revolution. This will break the final chains which still bind the working masses and will open up new paths of socialist creation.'

It is in the light of the events of February 1917, and March 1921, that we must read the following text by Trotsky: 'It has been said more than once that we have substituted the dictatorship of the Party for the dictatorship of the Soviets. However, we can claim without fear of contradiction that the dictatorship of the Soviets was only made possible by the dictatorship of the Party ... In fact there has been no substitution at all, since the Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class ... (In a revolutionary period) the Communists become the true representatives of the working class as a whole.'

Now this is the very essence of Bolshevism: the working class is incapable of socialist consciousness, of making a revolution, of running socialist society - hence the Party must step in on its behalf and, if necessary, ignore the 'temporary aberrations' of the proletariat. What then is the meaning of the phrase '*the emancipation of the workers can only be achieved by the workers themselves*'?

Lenin's answer was that the 'domination by the working class rests on the Constitution, in the new property system'. De Gaulle ought to take a leaf out of his book: enshrine workers' control in the French Constitution but leave the real power with the bourgeoisie as heretofore, since running society, according to Lenin, requires a kind of skill the working class does not have. Fancy a cook running a ministry!

And so, when the party robbed the workers and the Soviets of their powers, they were obviously acting in the best interests of what was no more than an ignorant and illiterate mass.

And if only the Party can wield power for them, only the Party must be allowed to wield power. Let us listen to Trotsky again: 'But who will guarantee, some evil tongues have asked, that your party alone represents the cause of historical development? In suppressing or overshadowing the other parties, they say, you have rid yourself of political rivals, and hence prevented any chance of evaluating the correctness of your own line of conduct.' Before looking at Trotsky's reply to his own rhetorical question, we must repeat that not only had the Bolshevik leaders squashed all opposition outside the Party, but that they had also outlawed all opposition *within* the Party - as Trotsky himself was to discover when his turn came to challenge the authority of Stalin. But let us hear what he said at the time: 'This question reflects purely liberal ideas on the progress of the revolution. At a period when

any price!

Trotsky himself added: 'The members of the Central Committee who were present sanctioned this change of tactics.' (*op. cit.* Volume II, 34.) As if they had had any choice in the matter! (At least before 1921, by which date the secret police and the army could be mustered against the masses.)

But the Party could not just sit by with folded arms. Speaking for the Party leadership, Kamenev said:

' "We did not summon the manifestation, the popular masses themselves came into the street... but once the masses have come out, our place is among them ... Our present task is to give the movement an organised character." ' (*op. cit.* Volume II, 37.) Kamenev therefore admitted that the Party was no longer at the head, that it was no longer directing anything, that all it could do was to organize *post facto*. And how? The afternoon summons from the Central Committee to stop the demonstration was torn from the presses - but too late to replace it with a new text.' (*op. cit.* Volume II, 42.)

*Pravda* accordingly appeared with a blank page, and this is what the Bolsheviks call organising a movement! And despite all their efforts, the demonstration did take place, and attracted 'at least 500,000 persons'.

The conclusion is obvious: The movement had begun from below irrespective of the Bolsheviks - to a certain extent against their will.' (*op. cit.* Volume II, 71.) Trotsky, moreover, declared in a speech at about that time:

They accuse us of creating the mood of the masses; that is wrong, we only try to formulate it.' (*op. cit.* Volume II, 7A.)

In short, the great vanguard was reduced to the role of mere mouthpiece, and failed even in this. Still, it might be argued that though the Party was sleeping in February, and though it lagged behind the masses in July, it nevertheless has the October Revolution to its credit. Nothing could be further from the truth.

From April to October, Lenin had to fight a constant battle to keep the Party leadership in tune with the masses: 'Even the victory of the insurrection in Petrograd was far from breaking everywhere the inertia of the waiting policy and the direct resistance of the right wing. The wavering of the leaders subsequently almost shipwrecked the insurrection in Moscow. In Kiev, the committee, headed by Piatakov, which had been conducting a purely defensive policy, turned over the initiative in the long run - and also the power - to the Rada ... The actual overturn in Voronezh ... was carried out not by a committee of the party but by its active minority ... In a whole series of provincial cities, the Bolsheviks formed in October a bloc with the Compromisers "against the counter-revolution" ... In spite of the vast work that has been done in recent years towards concealing these facts ... plenty of testimony has been preserved in the newspapers, memoirs and historic journals of the time, to prove that on the eve of the overturn of the official machine even the most revolutionary party put up a big resistance.' (*op. cit.* Volume III, 145 f.)

Early in October, Lenin could only impose his view by going over the head of his Central Committee: 'His letter to the Central Committee he not only sent to the Petrograd and Moscow Committees, but he also saw to it that copies fell into the

hands of the more reliable party workers of the district locals.’ (*op. cit.* Volume III, 1931)

And again: ‘Lenin appealed to a Petrograd party conference to speak a firm word in favour of insurrection. Upon his initiative, the conference insistently requested the Central Committee to take all measures for the leadership of the inevitable insurrection of the workers, soldiers and peasants.’ (*op. cit.* Volume II, 132.)

Thus Lenin, aware that the glorious vanguard was again lagging behind the masses, tried desperately to preserve its prophetic role and, in so doing, had to break the very rules of democratic centralism he himself had formulated.

‘In the upper circles of the party,’ he wrote, ‘a wavering is to be observed, a sort of dread of the struggle for power, an inclination to replace the struggle with resolutions, protests and conferences.’ And this is what Trotsky had to say about it: This is already almost a direct pitting of the party against the Central Committee. Lenin did not decide lightly upon such steps, but it was a question of the fate of the revolution and all other considerations fell away.’ (*op. cit.* Volume III, 132 f.)

In short, the success of the revolution called for action against the ‘highest circles of the party’, who, from February to October, utterly failed to play the revolutionary role they ought to have taken in theory. The masses themselves made the revolution, with or even against the party - this much at least was clear to Trotsky the historian. But far from drawing the correct conclusion, Trotsky the theorist continued to argue that the masses are incapable of making a revolution without a leader. To begin with he admits that Tugan-Baranovsky is right when he says that the February revolution was accomplished by workers and peasants - the latter in the person of the soldiers. But there still remains the great question: who led the revolution, who led the workers to their feet? ... It was solved most simply by the universal formula: nobody led the revolution, it happened of itself.’ (*op. cit.* Volume I, 145.)

Trotsky not only put the question very well but also gave a clear answer: the Revolution was the spontaneous expression of the will of the masses - not just in theory but in actual practice. But Trotsky the theorist could not accept the obvious answer: he had to refute it since the idea of a centralised leadership is the crux of his dogma and must be upheld at all costs. Hence he quoted with approval Zavadsky’s dictum that ‘spontaneous conception is still more out of place in sociology than in natural science. Owing to the fact that none of the revolutionary leaders with a name was able to hang his label on the movement, it becomes not impersonal but merely nameless.’ (*op. cit.* Volume I, 151.)

We wish to say no more. Anonymity is precisely what characterises a spontaneous movement, i.e. one that disdains the tutelage of official organisations, that will have no official name. Trotsky’s argument is quite different: there can be no revolution without leadership and if no leaders can be pointed out, it is simply because the leaders are anonymous. Thus, after recalling that the ‘Union of Officers of February 27’, formed just after the revolution, tried to determine with a questionnaire who first led out the Volynsky Regiment, Trotsky explains: “They received seven answers naming seven initiators of this decisive action. It is very likely, we may add, that a part of the initiative really did belong to several soldiers.’ (*op. cit.* Volume I, 150.)

representatives of the Government must be freed immediately. Only those who surrender unconditionally will be able to count on the clemency of the Soviet Republic. I am meanwhile giving orders that everything be prepared to smash the revolt and the rebels by force of arms. The responsibility for the disasters that will affect the civilian population must fall squarely on the heads of the White Guard insurgents.

**‘Signed: TROTSKY, President of the Military Revolutionary Council of the Soviet Republic. KAMENEV,\* Glavkom (Commanding Officer).’**

No matter how often the workers of Kronstadt affirmed their loyalty to Soviet Socialism, Kronstadt, like Carthage, was destroyed; its appeal to the truth went unheard:

### ‘TO ALL, TO ALL, TO ALL’

‘Comrades, workers, red soldiers and sailors! Here in Kronstadt we know full well how much you and your wives and your children are suffering under the iron rule of the Party. We have overthrown the Party-dominated Soviet. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee is today starting elections to a new Soviet. It will be freely elected, and it will reflect the wishes of the *whole* working population, and of the garrison - and not just those of a handful of Party members.

‘Our cause is just. We stand for the power of the Soviets, not for that of the Party. We stand for freely elected representatives of the toiling masses. Deformed Soviets, dominated by the Party, have remained deaf to our pleas. Our appeals have been answered with bullets.

The workers’ patience is becoming exhausted. So now they are seeking to pacify you with crumbs. On Zinoviev’s orders the militia barrages have been withdrawn. Moscow has allocated ten million gold roubles for the purchase of foodstuffs and other articles of first necessity. But we know that the Petrograd proletariat will not be bought over in this way. Over the heads of the Party, we hold out to you the fraternal hand of revolutionary Kronstadt.

‘Comrades, you are being deceived. And truth is being distorted by the basest of calumnies.

‘Comrades, don’t allow yourselves to be misled.

‘In Kronstadt, power is in the hands of the sailors, of the red soldiers and of the revolutionary workers. It is *not* in the hands of White Guards commanded by General Kozlovsky, as Moscow Radio lyingly asserts.

**‘Signed: The Provisional Revolutionary Committee.’**

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\* This Kamenev was an ex-Tsarist officer, now collaborating with the Soviet Government. He was a different Kamenev from the one shot by the Stalinists in 1936.

the recent Kronstadt revolt, the Bolshevik military authorities have taken a whole series of measures to isolate the town and to prevent the soldiers and sailors of Kronstadt from entering Petrograd.”

‘It is therefore clear that the Kronstadt revolt is being led from Paris. The French counter espionage is mixed up in the whole affair. History is repeating itself. The Socialist Revolutionaries, who have their headquarters in Paris, are preparing the ground for an insurrection against the Soviet power. The ground prepared, their real master, the Tsarist general appeared. The history of Koltchak, installing his power in the wake of that of the Socialist Revolutionaries, is being repeated.’

Faced with all these lies and also with an imminent attack by the Central Government, local Bolsheviks deserted their party en masse. To appreciate just how strongly they felt, we need only read some of the letters they sent to the Kronstadt *Izvestia*. The teacher Denissov wrote: ‘I openly declare to the Provisional Revolutionary Committee that as from gunfire directed at Kronstadt, I no longer consider myself a member of the Party. I support the call issued by the workers of Kronstadt. All power to the Soviets, not to the Party!’

A military group assigned to the special company dealing with discipline also issued a declaration:

‘We, the undersigned joined the Party believing it to express the wishes of the working masses. In fact the Party has proved itself an executioner of workers and peasants. This is revealed quite clearly by recent events in Petrograd. These events show up the face of the Party leaders. The recent broadcasts from Moscow show clearly that the Party leaders are prepared to resort to any means in order to retain power.

‘We ask that henceforth, we no longer be considered Party members. We rally to the call issued by the Kronstadt garrison in its resolution of 2 March. We invite other comrades who have become aware of the error of their ways, publicly to recognise the fact.

**‘Signed: GUTMAN, YEFIMOV, KOUDRIATZEV, ANDREEV.’**  
(*Izvestia* of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, 7 March 1921.)

Every attempt to settle matters peacefully was rejected out of hand by the government; Trotsky ordered his troops ‘to shoot the Kronstadt “rebels” down like partridges’, and entrusted the task to Toukhatchevsky, a military expert taken over from the Old Regime. On 6 March, Trotsky addressed the following radio appeal to the Kronstadt garrison over the radio:

‘The Workers’ and Peasants’ Government has decided to reassert its authority without delay, both over Kronstadt and over the mutinous battleships, and to put them at the disposal of the Soviet Republic. I therefore order all those who have raised a hand against the Socialist Fatherland, immediately to lay down their weapons. Those who resist will be disarmed and put at the disposal of the Soviet Command. The arrested commissars and other

Why then will he not admit that the soldiers took more than ‘part’ of the initiative?

Because Trotsky prefers another explanation: ‘It is not impossible that the chief initiator fell in the street fighting carrying his name with him into oblivion.’ Thus Trotsky, the historian, doctors the historical evidence to introduce a mythical leader, whose existence cannot be verified because he is dead! Another example quoted by Trotsky highlights the absurdity of this line of argument: ‘On Friday, 24 February, nobody in the upper circles as yet expected a revolution ... a tram car in which a senator was riding turned off quite unexpectedly with such a jar that the windows rattled and one was broken ... Its conductor told everybody to get off: “The car isn’t going any further” ... The movement of the tramways stopped everywhere as far as the eye could see.’ (*op. cit.* Volume I, 151.)

Trotsky makes the following comment: That resolute conductor, in whom the liberal officials could already catch a glimpse of the “wolf-look” must have been dominated by a high sense of duty in order all by himself to stop a car containing officials on the streets of imperial Petersburg in time of war. It was just such conductors who stopped the car of the monarchy and with practically the same words - This car does not go any further! ... The conductor on the Liteiny boulevard was a conscious factor of history. It had been necessary to educate him in advance.’ (*op. cit.* Volume I, 151 f.) And a few lines further down he repeats the same refrain: Those nameless, austere statesmen of the factory and street did not fall out of the sky: they had to be educated.’ (*op. cit.* Volume I, 152.)

The Party as such played no role in these decisive days, but those who were the real actors, ‘the conscious instruments of history’ had needs to be educated, and by whom if not by the Party? In short, the past actions of the Party justify its present inactivity. There are but two alternatives for Trotsky: either people have fallen out of the sky or else they must have been educated by the Party. The first hypothesis being absurd, the second is the only possible answer. But as the Jewish father said to his son: ‘My boy, whenever there are two alternatives, choose the third.’ Now that alternative is simply that the workers could have managed without a Party, just as they do in their everyday life. Let us see what Trotsky himself has to say on this subject: The anaemic and pretentious intelligentsia ... was burning with desire to teach the popular masses ... but was absolutely incapable of understanding them and of learning anything from them. Now, failing this, there can be no revolutionary politics.’ This judgement applies equally well to Trotsky himself, who was responsible for the regimentation of labour and for shooting the Kronstadt rebels. But Trotsky is not aware of this fact, and his *History* is so valuable precisely because he is honest, or stupid, enough to list the facts that contradict his every conclusion. Forgetting what he has written on page 151, he notes that ‘one of the factories carried this placard: “The Right to Life is Higher than the Rights of Private Property”. This slogan had not been suggested by the party.’ (*op. cit.* Volume I, 419.)

No one would wish to challenge his claim that ‘the thought of the worker has become more scientific ... because it was fertilised to a large extent by the methods of Marxism.’ True, the use of the term ‘scientific thought’ is questionable, but there is no doubt that scientific Marxism has played a large part in the education of both



Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. It should be added that other trends - anarcho-syndicalist, anarchist, social revolutionary - made their contribution too. And as Trotsky himself admits when discussing working class thought, its development was chiefly due to 'the living experience of the masses'.

It was this living experience that went into the creation of the Soviets in 1905, Soviets that the Bolshevik Party largely ignored, a fact for which Trotsky himself severely criticized the Party at the time. But as soon as he himself turned Bolshevik theorist, he had perforce to dismiss the whole idea of workers' spontaneity. Thus while he says in Volume II, page 72, that the masses were complaining that 'even the Bolsheviks are dawdling and holding us back,' he goes on to say on page 88: 'What they (the German Spartacists) lacked was a Bolshevik party.'

The absurdity of his hypotheses - all due to the fact that he cannot admit the idea of a spontaneous revolution - becomes even clearer in the following passage: 'A careful study of the materials characterising the party life during the war and the beginning of the revolution ... reveals more clearly every day the immense intellectual backsliding of the upper stratum of the Bolsheviks during the war when the proper life of the party practically came to an end. The cause of this backsliding is twofold: isolation from the masses and isolation from those abroad, that is primarily from Lenin.' (*op. cit.* Volume III, 134.) This 'twofold backsliding' is nothing less than an indictment of the Bolshevik Party: by stressing the importance of Lenin in the way he does, Trotsky is, in fact, depreciating the value of the Party. And Lenin, far from being the infallible revolutionary Trotsky makes him out to be, between February and October 1917, went back on a good many positions he had earlier defended. Thus while he had stressed the importance of Soviets in 1905, in January 1917, when he gave a lecture to Swiss workers, he merely mentioned the Soviets in passing. This did not prevent him, a few months later, to the dismay of the majority of the Party, from once again adopting the anarchist slogan: All power to the Soviets! The Party, faithful and disciplined though it was, could not perform these gyrations with the same speed. The break between Lenin and the Party may prove Lenin's genius when it comes to changing the political line, but it also proves how ill-fitted a Party of the Bolshevik type is to deal with a revolutionary situation. Hence Trotsky's claim that 'the March leadership of Kamenev and Stalin lagged behind the gigantic historic tasks.' (*op. cit.* Volume I, 403.)

However, Trotsky was quick to refute this line of reasoning when it was dished up to explain the failure of the White Guards. Thus he had this to say about the abortive Kornilov putsch: The sums of money set aside for organisation were, according to Vinberg, appropriated by the principal participants and squandered on dinner parties ... One of the secret contributors, who was to deliver to some officers a considerable sum of money, upon arrival at the designated place found the conspirators in such a state of inebriation that he could not deliver the goods. Vinberg himself thinks that if it had not been for these truly vexatious "accidents", the plan might have been crowned with complete success. But the question remains: Why was a patriotic enterprise entered into and surrounded, for the most part, by drunkards, spendthrifts and traitors? Is it not because every historic task mobilises the cadres that are ade-

class and peasant organisations.

6. The election of a commission to look into the dossiers of all those detained in prisons and concentration camps.
7. The abolition of all political sections in the armed forces. No political party should have privileges for the propagation of its ideas, or receive State subsidies to this end. In the place of the political sections, various cultural groups should be set up, deriving resources from the State.
8. The immediate abolition of the militia detachments set up between towns and countryside.
9. The equalisation of rations for all workers, except those engaged in dangerous or unhealthy jobs.
10. The abolition of Party combat detachments in all military groups. The abolition of Party guards in factories and enterprises. If guards are required, they should be nominated, taking into account the views of the workers.
11. The granting to the peasants of freedom of action on their own soil, and of the right to own cattle, provided they look after them themselves and do not employ hired labour.
12. We request that all military units and officer trainee groups associate themselves with this resolution.
13. We demand that the Press give proper publicity to this resolution.
14. We demand the institution of mobile workers' control groups.
15. We demand that handicraft production be authorised provided it does not utilise wage labour.'

The workers and sailors of Kronstadt were, in fact, defending the power of the Soviets against the power of the Party.

The Kronstadt resolution had the merit of stating things openly and clearly. But it was breaking no new ground. Its main ideas were being discussed everywhere. For having, in one way or another, put forward precisely such ideas, workers and peasants were already filling the prisons and the recently set up concentration camps.

And while all this was going on, Radio Moscow kept spreading lies and calumnies against the workers. Thus when Stalin accused Trotsky a few years later of conspiring with a White Guard officer of the Wrangel Army, he was merely using the same smear campaign Trotsky had used against the Kronstadt sailors.

On 3 March, for instance, Radio Moscow launched the following appeal: 'Struggle against the White Guard Plot ... Just like other White Guard insurrections, the mutiny of ex-General Kozlovsky and the crew of the battleship *Petropavlovsk* has been organised by Entente spies. This is clear from the fact that the French paper *Le Monde* published the following message from Helsingfors two weeks before the revolt of General Kozlovsky: "We are informed from Petrograd that as the result of



## Kronstadt

At the end of February 1921, the workers of Petrograd, who had been making an enormous productive effort despite the short rations they were allowed, went on strike against their intolerable conditions. The Party and Zinoviev, who was responsible for the defence of Petrograd, could think of only one answer: to send a detachment of the Koursanty (cadet officers) against the strikers, and to proclaim a state of siege in Petrograd. In *The Kronstadt Commune*\*, Ida Mett tells what happened next.

On 26 February the Kronstadt sailors, naturally interested in all that was going on in Petrograd, sent delegates to find out about the strikes. The delegation visited a number of factories. It returned to Kronstadt on the 28th. That same day, the crew of the battleship *Petropavlovsk*, having discussed the situation, voted the following resolution:

‘Having heard the reports of the representatives sent by the General Assembly of the Fleet to find out about the situation in Petrograd, the sailors demand:

1. Immediate new elections to the Soviets. The present Soviets no longer express the wishes of the workers and peasants. The new elections should be by secret ballot, and should be preceded by free electoral propaganda.
2. Freedom of speech and of the press for workers and peasants, for the anarchists, and for the Left Socialist parties.
3. The right of assembly, and freedom for trade union and peasant organisations.
4. The organisation, at the latest on 10 March 1921, of a Conference of non-Party workers, soldiers and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt and the Petrograd District.
5. The liberation of all political prisoners of the Socialist parties, and of all imprisoned workers and peasants, soldiers and sailors belonging to working

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\* Ida Mett: *The Kronstadt Commune*, Solidarity Pamphlet No 27, available for download from the Zabalaza Books site.

quate to it?’ (*op. cit.* Volume II, 219 f.)

Now if every historical task indeed mobilises the necessary cadres, it will do this for the revolution no less than for the counter-revolution. Hence Trotsky should not really blame the Bolshevik leaders for the failure of the Party to rise to its ‘historic task’. The reason Stalin and Kamenev found themselves at the head of the Party was because they were elected by the whole of that Party, and it is therefore the Party as such that is to blame and not *x* or *y*. Again, if the presence or absence of Lenin explains the success or failure of the Party, the Party reduces to Lenin and becomes superfluous.

As for the gap between the Party and the masses, it can have two causes: either the masses are too apathetic for revolution or else, as happened in 1917, the masses are only too anxious to carry the revolution a step further, and the Party itself is apathetic. In the second case it is not the masses who cannot ‘rise’ to its historic task but the Party. This rupture between the Party and the masses is due to the Party’s very nature: a small, closed group of professional revolutionaries, sure of being the repository of truth and incapable of adapting themselves to any independent initiative of the masses. A case in point was their attitude to the Soviets, or workers’ councils, which gave the atomised masses their own centres for action and collective decisions. The Soviets sprang up quite spontaneously in 1905 and did not figure in any party programme. It was only in retrospect that they were analysed by various writers of the Left. Some of these - particularly the anarchists, the extreme left Social Revolutionaries and minority groups within the Social Democratic Party, were frankly in favour of the Soviets - and so, in 1905, was Leon Trotsky. Anton Pannekoek was another and his movement for workers’ control was attacked by Lenin in *‘Left-wing’ Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. All the Bolsheviks were frankly hostile. Those in St Petersburg were convinced that ‘only a party based on class conceptions can direct the political movement of the proletariat and preserve the purity of its intentions, whereas the workers’ councils are so many heterogeneous and indecisive bodies’. (Quoted by Oscar Auweiler in *The Workers’ Councils in Russia 1905-1929*.) At the same time, P. Mendeleev declared in the name of the Bolsheviks: ‘The council of workers’ deputies is a political organisation and Social Democrats (Bolsheviks and Mensheviks) must leave it because its very existence impedes the development of the social democratic movement. The workers’ council may exist as a trade union or not at all.’ Whence Mendeleev concluded that the Bolsheviks should use the following strategy: ‘First of all we must try to get the workers’ council to limit itself to its trade union tasks, and secondly, in case this attempt fails, the workers’ council must be made to acknowledge the leadership of the Social Democratic Party, and thirdly, this having been done, it must be dissolved as quickly as possible, seeing that its parallel existence with other social democratic organisations serves no purpose.’ And this at a time when workers were beginning to form workers’ councils in all the factories, and workers’ ‘parliaments’ in all the major towns! The Social Democrats did not even think fit to invite the workers to participate in their party’s august deliberations, but expected them to carry out blindly what the proletarian vanguard ordered from on high, and then to declare themselves redundant. That the workers’

councils 'impeded' this sort of development is a truism - they challenged the wisdom of the Party leaders in practice and not simply in theory. This was more than our professional revolutionaries were prepared to swallow. In 1907, Lenin got the Fifth Congress of the Social Democratic Workers' Party to pass a resolution whose subject was highly revealing: 'On the independent workers' organisation and the anarcho-syndicalist currents within the proletariat.' He condemned all these 'currents', and declared: The participation of Social Democratic organisations in councils composed of delegates and workers' deputies without distinction of party ... or the creation of such councils, cannot be countenanced unless we can be sure that the party can benefit and that its interests are fully protected.' (Quoted by Oscar Auweiler, page 103.)

In dealing with workers' organisations, the Bolsheviks had but one major concern: to strengthen their own organisation. Since the Party was the sole guardian of the proletariat and the revolution, any attempt by the workers to make a revolution without the Party must clearly be wrong or indeed impossible, as Trotsky argues in his *History of the Russian Revolution*. When the workers disavow the Party in practice, the Party simply disavows the practice of the workers.

This disdain for the working class and its capacity for self-emancipation can be heard most clearly in Lenin's *What is to be done?*, a theoretical justification of the leadership principle. In it, Lenin simply repeats the words of Karl Kautsky, whom he still admired at the time: The workers, we have said, still lacked a Social-Democratic consciousness; it could only come to them from the outside. History in all countries attests that, on its own, the working class cannot go beyond the level of trade union consciousness, the realisation that they must combine into trade unions, fight against the employers, force the government to pass such laws as benefit the condition of the workers ... As for the Socialist doctrine, it was constructed out of philosophical, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated members of the ruling class, by intellectuals. Thus Marx and Engels, the founders of modern scientific socialism, were bourgeois intellectuals. Similarly in Russia, the social democratic doctrine sprang up almost independently of the spontaneous development of the working class movement ...'

Lenin summed it all up by saying: 'The workers can acquire class political consciousness *only from without*, that is, only outside of the economic struggle, outside of the sphere of the relation between workers and employers.'

Now this claim that class political consciousness can only reach the working class from the outside, has been refuted in practice, and ought to cease being part of any socialist's stock of ideas. The history of French trade unionism before 1914 in itself is sufficient proof that the workers can transcend what Lenin calls their 'trade union consciousness'. The Charter of Amiens adopted in 1906 makes this quite explicit: 'The CGT is affiliated to no political party, but is a union of class-conscious workers fighting for the abolition of wage-slaves and employers. The Congress pledges itself to support the workers in their class struggle against all forms of capitalist exploitation and oppression, both material and moral. Accordingly the Congress sets itself the following tasks: in the short term, trade unionists will try to improve the workers'

*Opposition*, had been deliberately sabotaged.

Lenin denounced the Worker's Opposition at the very beginning of the Congress, calling it 'a menace to the Revolution'. The atmosphere of the Congress was electric, particularly when Kollontai, Ignatov and many others attacked the bureaucracy, its class character, and the transformation of the Party into a non-proletarian one by the influx of new elements. What the 'Leftist' Communists had foreseen in 1918, what Voline and the anarchists had prophesied all along, had become reality: 'The party had become the springboard for bureaucratic careerists.' Lenin and Trotsky were to triumph over the Workers' Opposition, and when they had done so, the last voice to speak up for the Soviet working class was silenced. The Congress ordered the dissolution of all factions within the Party - having squashed freedom of expression outside, the Party leaders now finished off the opposition within. Nor was it simply a struggle of ideas - it was the very fate of the working class that was at stake in this battle. While ostensibly attacking the Left-wing Communists, the Centrist Democrats and the Workers' Opposition, it was in fact the working class itself that was being clubbed down, that lost every right to manage its own destiny.

At the Congress, Trotsky accused the Workers' Opposition of putting forward dangerous slogans. They turn democratic principles into a fetish. They put the right of the workers to elect their own representatives above the Party, thus challenging the right of the Party to affirm its dictatorship, even when this dictatorship comes into conflict with the evanescent mood of the workers' democracy. We must bear in mind the historical mission of our Party. The Party is forced to maintain its dictatorship without stopping for these vacillations, nor even the momentary falterings of the working class. This realisation is the mortar that cements our unity. The dictatorship of the proletariat does not always have to conform to formal principles of democracy.'

And Lenin mocked at the Workers' Opposition: 'A producers' Congress! What precisely does that mean? It is difficult to find words to describe this folly. I keep asking myself, can they be joking? Can one really take these people seriously? While production is always necessary, democracy is not. Democracy of production engenders a series of radically false ideas.'

Lenin should not have laughed quite so loudly at all this 'folly', for it was precisely what he himself had written in 1917, in his *State and Revolution*. Every phrase of that book is a denunciation of the Bolshevik policy in 1920-21, for it was written at a time when the masses forced Lenin to be an anarchist rather than a Bolshevik. When it suited him, Lenin buried the *State and Revolution*. And even while Trotsky was still thundering on about the Workers' Opposition, Lenin was forced, and not by words only, to correct 'the temporary falterings of the working class'. This he did at Kronstadt, where the bullets of the Party finally settled 'the conflict between its dictatorship and the vanescent moods of the workers' democracy'.

tifies Debord's remark: 'Its claim to a monopoly of the representation and defence of the workers, turned the Bolshevik Party into what it is today: the masters of the proletariat...' (*La Societe du Spectacle*).

'Was it true,' Trotsky asked, 'that compulsory labour was always unproductive?' He denounced this view as 'wretched and miserable liberal prejudice', learnedly pointing out that 'chattel slavery, too, was productive' - and that compulsory serf labour was in its times 'a progressive phenomenon'. He told the unions that 'coercion, regimentation and militarisation of labour were no mere emergency measures and that the workers' State *normally* had the right to coerce *any* citizen to perform *any* work at *any* place of its choosing'. A little later he proclaimed that the 'militarisation of the trade unions and the militarisation of transport required an *internal, ideological* militarisation'.

And this was precisely what Stalin achieved, when he stepped into the shoes of that great strategist who later became his bitterest opponent. Trotsky, who had already 'disciplined' the army by abolishing the soldiers' Soviets, early in 1920, took over the Commissariat of Transport, in addition to his defence post. The Politburo offered to back him to the hilt, in any course of action he might take, no matter how severe. Once in charge of Transport, Trotsky was immediately to implement his pet ideas on the 'militarisation of labour'.

The railwaymen and the personnel of the repair workshops were put under martial law. There was a major outcry. To silence his critics, and with the full endorsement of the Party leadership, Trotsky ousted the elected leaders of the union and appointed others who were willing to do his bidding. He repeated the procedure in other unions of transport workers.

Perhaps it is of these men he was thinking when he wrote: 'It is a general rule that man will try to get out of work. Man is a lazy animal.' And in his *Terrorism and Communism*, a piece of Trotskyist writing if ever there was one, he proclaimed: 'Those workers who contribute more than the rest to the general good have every right to receive a larger share of the socialist product than layabouts, idlers and the undisciplined.'

The last battle over the militarisation of work was fought inside the party in 1920-21. Those opposed to Trotsky's ideas formed the 'Workers' Opposition', whose history has been recorded by Alexandra Kollontai. A Party conference held in Moscow in November 1920 showed that the 'Workers' Opposition' was growing rapidly in strength. They, the Centralist Democrats and the Ignatov group (closely associated with the "Workers' Opposition" obtained 124 seats as against the 154 obtained by the supporters of the Central Committee.' (Daniels: *The Conscience of the Revolution*.)

The Party leadership took fright and introduced a whole series of counter-measures, some of which were so scandalous that the Moscow Committee passed a resolution publicly censoring the Petrograd Party 'for not observing the rules of correct discussion'. The Central Committee, too, was criticised and instructed to 'ensure that the allocation of printed matter and speakers was such that all points of view can be honestly represented'. At the Tenth Congress, Alexandra Kollontai nevertheless felt impelled to protest that the distribution of her pamphlet. *The Workers'*

lot by calling for such immediate reforms as increases in wages, a shorter working week, etc. But this is only one aspect of our work. The trade unions also pave the way for the complete emancipation of the working class, which cannot be achieved except by expropriation or the capitalists. To that end, they will call general strikes, so that those resisting capitalism on the wages front today may tomorrow take charge of production and distribution and so usher in a completely new era...'

This text shows clearly that the working class can rise a great deal beyond the 'trade union consciousness', and precisely in a country where the influence of the Social Democrats was extremely tenuous. Conversely it was when Social Democrats started to gain influence in France that the trade unions reverted to their role of economic intermediaries, and changed into the bureaucratic machines of today, machines that form an integral part of capitalist society. The Leninist ideology, in postulating the incapacity of the working class to make a revolution, or, as we shall see, to manage production in post-revolutionary society, is in direct conflict with the inaugural declaration of the First International: The emancipation of the workers must be brought about by the workers themselves'. The fact that 'scientific socialism' was the creation of bourgeois intellectuals is undeniable, and, indeed, it bears the unmistakable marks of this: it is alien to the proletariat and perhaps it ought not to be quite so proud of this alienation as it obviously is. Moreover, Bolshevik organisations were born in an industrially backward country (which explains rather than justifies their own backward nature). This type of organisation, and the ideology that went hand in hand with it, would, after 1917, seize upon the backwardness of Russia and also on the lack of revolutionary spirit among the workers outside, as a pretext for bringing to fruit the counter-revolutionary germs it contained from the very beginning.

The Leninist belief that the workers cannot spontaneously go beyond the level of trade union consciousness is tantamount to beheading the proletariat, and then insinuating the Party as the head. The original aims of French trade unionism, and the creation of Soviets show that Lenin was wrong, and, in fact, in Russia, the Party was forced to decapitate the workers' movement with the help of the political police and the Red Army under the brilliant leadership of Trotsky and Lenin. Moreover, the decapitation was not enough, the body, too, had to be destroyed, and since this task required less finesse and revolutionary education, the honour of finishing the work so brilliantly begun by Lenin and Trotsky, fell to the uncultured Stalin.

However, in fairness to Trotsky, it must be said that, in 1902, when Lenin wrote *What is to be done?*, Trotsky not only opposed it violently but had the wit to foresee its worst dangers: that the Party would substitute itself for the working class, the Central Committee for the party, the Politburo for the Central Committee, and finally the General Secretary for the Politburo. It is to be hoped that Trotsky's critique may one day be published in full, for it, better than anything else, would provide us with a critique of modern Trotskyism. Lenin's views were also challenged by Rosa Luxemburg, representing the far-left wing of the German Social Democratic Movement. While she shared Lenin's disgust with the reformist and parliamentary German Social Democratic Party, she also attacked his own centralism and his ideas

of discipline.

In his 'One step forward and two steps back', Lenin glorified the educational effect of factory life which 'accustoms the proletariat to discipline and organisation'. To this Rosa Luxemburg replied: The discipline which Lenin has in mind is driven home to the proletariat not only in the factory but also in the barracks and by all sorts of bureaucrats, in short by the whole power machine of the centralised bourgeois state ... It is an abuse of words to apply the same term "discipline" to two such unrelated concepts as the mindless reflex motions of a body with a thousand hands and a thousand legs, and the spontaneous co-ordination of the conscious political acts of a group of men. What can the well-ordered docility of the former have in common with the aspirations of a class struggling for its total emancipation?' (*The Organisation of the Social Democratic Party in Russia.*)

In fact, it was Lenin's own consciousness that failed to transcend the organisational level of the bourgeoisie. Speaking of the revolutionary movement that, at the turn of the century, shook the autocratic Russian Empire and later culminated in the Russian Revolution of 1905, Rosa Luxemburg wrote (in 1904): 'Our cause (i.e. Socialism) has made immense progress. However, in this, the initiative and conscious direction of the Social Democratic organisation played no more than an insignificant part. This fact cannot be explained away by arguing that our organisation was not prepared for such great events (although this was true), and even less by the absence of the all-powerful central apparatus Lenin has recommended. On the contrary, it is more than likely that such an apparatus would simply have increased the confusion of the local committees, stressing the gulf between the impetuous masses and the cautious attitude of the Social Democratic Party.' (*The Organisation of the Social Democratic Party in Russia.*)

The ultra-centralisation advocated by Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg continued, 'is filled, not with a positive and creative spirit, but with the sterile spirit of the night watchman.' Prophetic words these, for within a few months the Party became incapable of understanding, and even fought, the establishment of workers' councils. Prophetic also for what happened in 1917, when the Party proved quite incapable of playing the leading part for which it had been prepared so long, and left the entire job to a Lenin (*quod Jovi licet non bovi licet*). Rosa Luxemburg had clearly foreseen all this, and had accordingly advocated the 'tearing down of that barbed wire fence which prevents the Party from accomplishing the formidable task of the hour'. In fact, far from dismantling the fence, the Party eventually put the entire Russian proletariat behind it.

Rosa Luxemburg's conclusions are no less relevant today than they were at the time they were written: 'Finally we saw the birth of a far more legitimate offspring of the historical process: the Russian workers' movement, which, for the first time, gave expression to the real will of the popular masses. Then the leadership of the Russian revolution leapt up to balance on their shoulders, and once more appointed itself the all-powerful director of history, this time in the person of His Highness the Central Committee of the Social Democratic Workers' Party. This skilful acrobat did not even realise that the only one capable of playing the part of director is the "collective" ego

port against the proletariat from another class (e.g. the peasantry), and by this it will destroy itself as the dictatorship of the proletariat. Socialism and socialist organisation must be set up by the proletariat itself, or they will not be set up at all; something else will be set up: state capitalism.'

These prophetic phrases, and the reception they were given by Lenin and Trotsky, should put an end to all the 'revolutionary' arguments that it was Stalin the Terrible alone who perverted socialism into a bureaucratic dictatorship.

Thus it was Trotsky, not Stalin, who, towards the end of 1919, submitted to the Central Committee the famous thesis 'transition from war to peace'. The most important of his propositions was the call for the 'militarisation of the proletariat'.

Trotsky did not believe that these propositions would go further than the Central Committee; like all good bureaucrats he liked to take the most important decisions behind closed doors. But by 'mistake', Bukharin published its text in *Pravda* of 17 December 1919. According to Isaac Deutscher, this indiscretion caused an extremely tense public controversy and one that continued for more than a year, as the working class seized on this unexpected opportunity of discussing its own fate. Trotsky defended his views before the Ninth Congress of the Bolshevik Party in 1920: The workers must not be allowed to roam all over Russia. They must be sent where they are needed, called up and directed like soldiers. Labour must be directed most intensely during the transition of capitalism to socialism.' We might add, in parenthesis, that since this transition has not yet been made, and never will be made unless there is another revolution. Soviet workers must prepare to settle down to a further spell of forced labour. 'It is essential,' Trotsky went on, 'to form punitive contingents and to put all those who shirk work into concentration camps.'

Stalin, who as Trotsky himself has repeatedly pointed out, lacked theoretical imagination, did in fact very little more than pursue the theoretical and practical path opened up by Trotsky. In particular, Trotsky introduced Stakhanovism when he offered special bonuses for extra effort 'worthy of socialist emulation'; he also spoke of the need to adopt the 'progressive essence of Taylorism' - at that time the most extreme form of capitalist exploitation. Lenin's thesis of one-man management and 'work discipline' were adopted at this Congress.

After the Ninth Congress, Trotsky wrote: 'The young workers' state requires trade unions not for a struggle for better conditions of labour ... but to organise the working class for the ends of production, to educate, to discipline the workers ... to exercise their authority hand in hand with the State, to lead the workers into the framework of a single economic plan ...' (Trotsky: *Dictatorship vs. Democracy*, page 14.) 'The unions should discipline the workers and teach them to place the interests of production above their own needs and demands.' Of the militarisation of labour Trotsky said: 'This term at once brings us into the region of the greatest possible superstitions and outcries from the opposition.' (*ibid.*, page 14.) He denounced his opponents as Mensheviks, and 'people full of trade unionist prejudices'.

'The militarisation of labour,' he declared at the Third Congress of Trade Unions, '... is the indispensable basic method for the organisation of our labour forces.' This use of the word 'our' when referring to the labour forces of the working class fully jus-

tendency for industrial management to be placed in the hands of non-Communist 'specialists' and the conclusion of all sorts of unofficial deals with previous owners 'to ensure their co-operation'. It pointed out that 'the logical outcome of management based on the participation of capitalists and on the principle of bureaucratic centralisation was the institution of a labour policy which would seek to re-establish regimentation of workers on the pretext of voluntary discipline. Governmental forms would then evolve towards bureaucratic centralisation, the rule of all sorts of commissars, loss of independence for local Soviets and, in practice, the abandonment of government from below'. 'It was all very well,' Bukharin pointed out, 'to say as Lenin had (in *State and Revolution*) that "each cook should learn to manage the State". But what happened when each cook had a commissar appointed to order him about?'

The conflict between the Leninists and the 'left' Communists came to a head during May and June 1918, during the First Congress of Economic Councils. Lenin spoke out strongly in favour of 'labour discipline', of 'one-man management' and of the need to use bourgeois specialists. Ossinsky, Smirnov and Obolensky, supported by numerous provincial delegates, demanded 'a workers' administration ... not only from above but from below'. They urged that two-thirds of the representatives on the management boards of industrial enterprises should be elected from among the workers. They succeeded in getting a Congress sub-committee to accept this resolution. Lenin was furious at this 'stupid decision'. Under his guidance a plenary session of the Congress 'corrected' the resolution, decreed that no more than one-third of the managerial personnel should be elected, and set up a complex hierarchical structure vesting veto rights in a Supreme Economic Council, at the apex of an administrative pyramid.

A split occurred at this time among the 'left' Communists. Radek was willing to make a deal with the Leninists. He was prepared to accept the 'one-man management' principle in exchange for the extensive nationalisation decrees of June 1918, which heralded the period of War Communism, and which in his opinion would ensure the proletarian basis of the regime. Bukharin also broke with Ossinsky and rejoined the fold. The ideas developed by the left Communists continued to find an echo, however, despite the defection of most of those who had first advocated them. Ossinsky and his supporters formed the new opposition group of 'Democratic Centralists'. Their ideas on workers' management of production (and those of the original group of 'left' Communists) were to play an important part in the development, two years later, of the Workers' Opposition.

Writing in the second issue of the *Kommunist*, Ossinsky was to issue a prophetic warning: 'We stand,' he wrote, 'for the construction of a proletarian society by the class creativity of the workers themselves, not by ukases from the "captains of industry" ... We proceed from trust in the class instinct, and in the active class initiative of the proletariat. It cannot be otherwise. If the workers themselves do not know how to create the necessary prerequisites for the socialist organisation of labour - no one can do this for them, nor can the workers be forced to do it. The stick, if raised against the workers, will find itself either in the hands of another social force ... or in the hands of the soviet power. But then the soviet power will be forced to seek sup-

of the working class, which has a sovereign right to make mistakes and to learn the dialectics of history by itself. Let us put it quite bluntly: the errors committed by a truly revolutionary workers' movement are historically far more fruitful and valuable than the infallibility of even the best Central Committee.' (*Organisation of Social Democratic Party in Russia.*)

The value of these remarks is in no way diminished by the fact that, today, we have dozens of Central Committees each insisting on its own infallibility, and all alike unable to learn the lessons of the Russian Revolution on which they base most of their self-justifications.

In February 1917, we have said, the Party line and dynamic was opposed to that of the masses organised in Soviets. Lenin had to labour hard, not to convince the masses of the need to seize power in the factories and towns, but to convince his own party that the masses were ready for this step. It was the party that had to rise to the level of the masses, not the other way round. Lenin had to turn 'anarchist', and to carry an incredulous party with him. October thus represents the point where the action and aspiration of the masses coincided with those of the temporarily de-Bolshevised Bolshevik Party, and this happy state persisted until the spring of 1918. The Bolshevik Party could not, moreover, behave otherwise, because it was still trying to win the support of the workers. The previous eight months (i.e. February to October 1917) had brought on an extraordinary proliferation of factory and workshop committees. In April 1917 a conference of factory committees at Petrograd had declared: 'All decisions affecting the internal management of factories, such as the length of the working day, wages, hiring and dismissing of workers, etc. must come from the factory committee.' Another conference of factory committees held in June 1917 demanded 'the organisation of complete control by the workers of production and distribution' and 'a proletarian majority in all institutions wielding executive power'. Still another congress, after the seizure of power, declared: 'The workers' control commissions must not merely be used to check production ... but must prepare for the transfer of production into the hands of the workers.'

The January 1918 issue of *Vestnik Metalista* (Metalworkers' News) contained an article by the worker N. Filipov which said, *inter alia*: The working class, by its very nature, must hold a central place in the productive process. In the future, all production must reflect the spirit and the will of the proletariat.'

In this truly revolutionary period, Lenin told the Third Congress of Soviets held at the beginning of 1918: 'Anarchist ideas have assumed virulent forms.'

A. Pantakrava wrote: 'On the morrow of the October Revolution, these anarchist tendencies have become prevalent, precisely because the capitalists have increased their resistance to the application of the Decree on Workers' Control and continue to oppose the workers' management of production.'

We shall see that from the spring of 1918 it was the Bolshevik-Leninists themselves who opposed workers' management. Before that happened, the anarcho-syndicalist Maximov could still write: 'The Bolsheviks have abandoned not only their theory of the withering away of the state, but Marxist ideology as a whole. They have become anarchists of a sort.'

However, the anarchist Voline, writing in *Golos Truda* (The Voice of Labour) at the end of 1917, had this to say: 'Once their power has been consolidated and legalised, the Bolsheviks, as state socialists, that is as men who believe in centralised and authoritarian leadership - will start running the life of the country and of the people from the top. Your Soviets ... will gradually become simple tools of the central government ... You will soon see the inauguration of an authoritarian political and state apparatus that will crush all opposition with an iron fist ... "All power to the Soviets" will become "all power to the leaders of the party".'

And this is precisely what happened in 1918. To achieve their ends, the Bolsheviks had to smash all opposition and the anarchists in particular. This political repression went hand in hand with the repression of the workers in the factory.

Thus Captain Jacques Sadaul wrote: 'The anarchist party is the most active and militant and probably the most popular opposition group of all ... The Bolsheviks are greatly disturbed.'

Voline confirmed this account: To tolerate anarchist propaganda would have been suicide for Lenin. It (the Bolshevik authority) did everything possible to impede and then forbid and repress by brute force, all manifestations of libertarian ideas.'

This repression began with a change of attitude on the question of workers' management. From 1918 onwards, opposition was kept within the Bolshevik party - outside all criticism was suppressed. Hence it is by looking at developments inside the Bolshevik Party that we can best follow the process of repression, which culminated in the silencing, even within the party, of anyone who spoke up for the crushed proletariat. The Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party, in March 1921 dissolved all Party fractions, while outside, the Party was busy firing on the workers and sailors at Kronstadt, and on what pockets of resistance there still were in the rest of the country. In particular, the Ukrainian Makhno Movement was a force the Bolsheviks had to destroy at all costs.

favour of the individual management of industrial enterprises. 'The struggle that is developing around the recent decree on the management of the railways, *the decree which grants individual leaders dictatorial powers* (or "unlimited powers") is characteristic,' he wrote. Only the 'conscious representatives of petty-bourgeois laxity' could see 'in this granting of unlimited (i.e. dictatorial) powers to individual persons a departure from the collegium principle, a departure from democracy and from other principles of Soviet government'. 'Large scale machine industry,' he went on, '- which is the material productive source and foundation of socialism - calls for absolute and strict unity of will ... How can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one.'

What of discussion and initiative at shop floor level? The idea was summarily dismissed. 'The revolution demands,' Lenin wrote, 'in the interests of socialism that the masses *unquestioningly* obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process.' No nonsense here about workers' management of production, about collective decisions, about government from below. Nor are we left in any doubt as to who the 'leaders of the labour process' were to be. There was, Lenin said, to be 'unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during work time' - 'iron discipline while at work, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader.'

Lenin's oft-repeated views on labour discipline did not go unchallenged. Opposition developed within the Party itself. Early in 1918, the Leningrad District Committee published the first issue of the 'left' Communist paper *Kommunist*. This was edited by Bukharin, Radek and Ossinsky (Obolonsky and Smirnov were later to join the editorial board). The journal issued a far-sighted warning: The introduction of labour discipline in connexion with the restoration of capitalist management of industry cannot really increase the productivity of labour, but it will diminish the class initiative, activity and organisation of the proletariat. It threatens to enslave the working class. It will rouse discontent among the backward elements as well as among the vanguard of the proletariat. In order to introduce this system in the face of the hatred prevailing at present among the proletariat for the "capitalist saboteurs", the Communist Party would have to rely on the petty-bourgeoisie, as against the workers, and in this way it would ruin itself as the party of the proletariat.'

Lenin reacted violently. He called such views 'a disgrace', 'a complete renunciation of communism in practice', 'a complete desertion to the camp of the petty-bourgeoisie'. ('Left-wing Childishness and Petty-bourgeois Mentality', *Selected Works* Vol. VII, p. 374). The Left were being 'provoked by the Isuvs (Mensheviks) and other Judases of capitalism'. He lumped together leaders of the 'left' and open enemies of the revolution, thus initiating the technique of the political smear that was to be used so successfully by Stalin in later years. A campaign was whipped up in Leningrad that compelled the *Kommunist* to transfer publication to Moscow, where the paper reappeared in April 1918, first under the auspices of the Moscow regional organisation of the Party, later as the 'unofficial' mouthpiece of a group of comrades.

The controversy smouldered on throughout 1918. *Kommunist* repeatedly denounced the replacement of workers' control by 'labour discipline', the increasing

Poles and other rabble of the White Army, the better to suppress the popular movement of the revolutionary insurgents, of the oppressed, of the rebels against the yoke of all authority.

'But the threats of the White and Red commanders do not frighten us. We shall reply to violence with violence. If necessary, we, a small handful of people shall put to flight the divisions of the Red Army because we are free and love our liberty. We are revolutionaries who have risen up in a just cause.

'Comrades, think for whom you are fighting and against whom! Throw off your shackles, you are free men!'

**'The Revolutionary Makhnovites.'**

Let us hope that one day some publisher will see fit to translate Arshinov's *History of the Makhno Movement* which is unobtainable today but is fundamental to any true understanding of the history of the Russian Revolution. Makhno's defeat spelled the defeat of the Revolution; Trotsky's victory, the victory of the bureaucratic counter-revolution.

Even while the struggle for Soviet democracy was still being carried on under a black banner in the Ukraine, elsewhere the Bolsheviks had succeeded in crushing every form of resistance. Inside the party, a bitter controversy on the question of 'one-man management' was started in the spring of 1918. The deliberate policy of the Bolshevik leaders to run all factories by State-appointed managers was not only a flagrant breach of Bolshevik promises but also led to the demoralisation of the most advanced sectors of the Russian proletariat. This development was a strong contributive factor to the bureaucratic degeneration of the Bolshevik party. Lenin's 'The immediate tasks of the Soviet Government', published in *Izvestia* on 28 April 1918, explained the stand of the Party leadership in quite unambiguous terms: it emphasized discipline, obedience and the need for individual rather than collective management. 'Discipline is a prerequisite of economic renewal ... Greater output is essential ... The class-conscious vanguard of the Russian proletariat has already tackled the task of enforcing discipline at work, for example, the Central Committee of the Metal Workers Union and the Central Council of the Trade Unions, have begun to draft the necessary measures and decrees.'

These 'measures and decrees' whereby 'labour discipline' was to be enforced make tragic reading in the light of subsequent events. They start by bemoaning the 'absence of all industrial discipline'. They then prescribe measures 'for the purpose of improving labour discipline such as: the introduction of a card system for registering the productivity of each worker, the introduction of factory regulations in every enterprise, the establishment of rate of output bureaux for the purpose of fixing the output of each worker and the payment of bonuses for increased productivity.' (Lenin: *Selected Works*, Vol. VII, page 504.)

It requires no great imagination to see in the pen-pushers recording the 'productivity of each worker' and in the clerks manning 'the rate of output bureaux' the as yet amorphous elements of the new bureaucracy.

But Lenin went much further. He quite explicitly came out, as early as 1918, in



## **The Makhno Movement and Opposition within the Party**

The Makhnovchina, better perhaps than any other movement, shows that the Russian Revolution could have become a great liberating force. It was inspired by Makhno, a young Ukrainian anarchist, and has been almost totally ignored by bourgeois historians no less than by Stalinist and Trotskyist apologists - and for good reason. It shows the Bolsheviks stifling workers and peasants with lies and calumnies, and then crushing them in a bloody massacre.

Geographically, the Makhno movement covered a region inhabited by seven million people and measuring some 150 miles in diameter. Its centre was the small Ukrainian town of Gulye Polye with 30,000 inhabitants.

The movement flourished from 1918 until the summer of 1921, when it was finally crushed by the Red Army.

From 1918 to 1921, armed Makhnovite groups fought the White Guards and later the Red Army without respite. They were responsible for holding the Ukrainian front against the White general Denikin, whose armies Makhno defeated in 1919, and then against General Wrangel. The best way of showing who they were and what they stood for is to quote from the manifesto published by the Cultural and Educational Section of the Insurrectional Makhnovite Army. It was widely distributed among the peasants and workers.

### **i. Who are the Makhnovites and what are they fighting for?**

'The Makhnovites are peasants and workers who in 1918 rose up against the brutality of the German, Hungarian and Austrian interventionists and against the Hetman of the Ukraine.

'The Makhnovites are workers who have carried the battle-standard against Denikin and against every form of oppression and violence, who have rejected lies from whatever source.

'The Makhnovites are the workers who by their life's labour have enriched and fattened the bourgeoisie in the past, and are today enriching new masters.



**ii. Why are they called Makhnovites?**

‘Because during the greatest and most painful days of reactionary intervention in the Ukraine, they had within their ranks the staunch friend and comrade, Makhno, whose voice was heard across the entire Ukraine, challenging every act of violence against the workers, calling for struggle against the oppressors, the thieves, the usurpers and those charlatans who were deceiving the workers. That voice still rings among us today, and unwaveringly calls for the liberation and emancipation of the workers from all oppression.

**iii. How do you think you will obtain this liberation?**

‘By overthrowing the coalition of monarchists, republicans, social democrats, communists and Bolsheviks. In its place we call for the free election of workers’ councils that will not rule by arbitrary laws because no true soviet system can be authoritarian. Ours is the purest form of socialism, anti-authoritarian and anti-government, it calls for the free organisation of the social life of the workers, independent of authority, a life in which each worker, in a free association with his brothers, can build his own happiness and well-being in accordance with the principles of solidarity, amity and equality.

**iv. What do the Makhnovites think of the Soviet regime?**

The workers themselves must choose their own councils (soviets), to express the will and carry out the orders of these self-same workers. The Soviets will be executive organs of, and not authorities over, the workers. The land, the factories, the businesses, the mines, transport, etc. must belong to those who work in them. All that the people inherit must be socialised.

**v. What are the paths that will lead to the final goals of the Makhnovites?**

‘A consistent and implacable revolutionary battle against all false theories, against all arbitrary power and violence, no matter from what quarter, a struggle to the death. Free speech, justice, honest battle with guns in our hands.

‘Only by overthrowing all governments, every representative of authority, by destroying all political, economic and authoritarian lies, wherever they are found, by destroying the state, by a social revolution, can we introduce a true system of workers’ and peasants’ Soviets and advance towards socialism.’

Trotsky was one of Makhno’s bitterest adversaries among the Bolsheviks, and never forgave Makhno for refusing to serve under his supreme command in the Red Army. On 4 June 1919, Trotsky began his first campaign of calumny and military intimidation; by publishing the notorious order No. 1824. It forbade the holding of a congress in the Ukraine, and accused Makhno of delivering this front over to the enemy. The Makhno brigade has constantly retreated before the White Guards,

owing to the incapacity, criminal tendencies, and the treachery of its leaders.’

Trotsky’s order stipulated, *inter alia*:

1. It is forbidden to hold this congress, which must not take place under any circumstances;
2. Participation in the congress by any worker or peasant will be deemed to constitute an act of high treason;
3. All delegates to the said congress must be apprehended and brought before the revolutionary tribunal of the Fourteenth Army of the Ukraine.’

So much for Trotsky’s respect for the workers’ right of free assembly!

The accusation that Makhno had retreated before the White Guards, when in fact he defeated them, was repeated by the entire Soviet press. But for the time being, continued attacks by the White Guards prevented Trotsky from implementing his Order 1824 - he shelved it but did not forget it. In November 1920, the Soviet authorities invited several officers of Makhno’s army to a military council meeting, and shot them. The ensuing battle raged for nine long months. At the end, Trotsky’s troops, who were superior in number and in arms and had constant replacements, won the day. It was in the course of the last battle that the Makhnovites issued the following appeal to their brethren in the Red Army:

**‘STOP, READ AND THINK!’**

**‘Comrades of the Red Army!’**

‘You have been sent out by your commissars to fight the revolutionary Makhnovites.

‘On the orders of your commander you ruin peaceful villages, you will raid, arrest, and kill men and women whom you do not know but who have been presented to you as enemies of the people, bandits and counter-revolutionary. You will be told to kill us, you will not be asked. You will be made to march like slaves. You will arrest and you will murder. Why? For what cause?

‘Think, comrades of the Red Army; think, workers, peasants suffering under the lash of new masters who bear the high-sounding name of “worker-peasant authorities”! We are revolutionary Makhnovites. The same peasants and workers as you, our brethren in the Red Army. We have risen up against oppression and slavery, we fight for a better life and a more enlightened one. Our ideal is to build a community of workers without authorities, without parasites, and without commissars. Our immediate aim is to establish a free Soviet regime, not controlled by the Bolsheviks, without the pressure of any party.

‘The government of the Bolsheviks and Communists has sent you out on a punitive expedition. It hastens to make peace with Denikin and with the rich