

Bela Kun

The
Ideological
Principles of
Trotskyism





Contents

Is there a Trotskyism?	4
What is Trotskyism?	10
The Methods of Trotskyism	25
The Policy of Abrupt Changes in Actual Practice... ..	29
Centrism in Organisatory Questions.....	37
The Abrupt Change before October.	43
Without Trotsky and in Spite of Trotskyism.....	46

Bela Kun

The Ideological Principles of Trotskyism.

International Press Correspondence, 1925, N°10.

Is there a Trotskyism?

Comrades Brandler and Thalheimer have deemed it necessary to turn the back on Trotsky's recent attack, Not from Trotskyism, of which they either know nothing or profess not to know anything but from Trotsky. The Czech Right (Hula, Kreibich) also deny the existence of a Trotskyism. In their opinion, Trotskyism is a deliberate construction on the part of Trotsky's enemies, if not simply a flight of imagination. And they consider the confrontation of Trotskyism and Leninism to be even more arbitrary, and entirely attributable to certain *personal* antagonisms. This has also been to a great extent the standpoint of the Polish Right, the standpoint of a large section of the French Right, and approximately the line of retreat taken by the Russian opposition.

We are told that the decisive factor is not that Trotsky opposed Lenin and the Bolsheviks for a decade and a half, but that he was with Lenin at the front *at the time of the October revolution*. The old antagonism with regard to principles, tactics, and organisation can be relegated to the annals of *Party*

history, their actual political significance has ceased to exist in the course of time.

The antagonism which have cropped up since the victory of the revolution have “no connection with these historical questions”. Tactical deviations of an “episodical character” cannot be attributed to any common fundamental principle — and thus such a thing as Trotskyism does not exist. This manner of stating the case fairly sums up the colourless air of unconscious naiveness with which the international Right supports Trotskyism.

But this argumentation on the part of the Right has been knocked on the head by Trotsky himself. Though Trotsky may have had the wish to revise Leninism under the flag of Trotskyism, still his own Trotskyism does not permit him to deny a special ideology of its own to Trotskyism. When writing of the theory of permanent revolution, the essential constituent of Trotskyism, combatted consistently by Lenin for a decade, he makes the following declaration:

“I (Trotsky) see no reason to withdraw anything which I may have said on this question in the years 1904/5/6 and later”. (*The New Course*.)

In the course of a letter written in December 1921 he writes to the well known veteran of Bolshevism, Olminsky (See *Inprecorr*, No 8, 1925.):

“I do not by any means believe that I have been altogether wrong in my differences of opinion with the Bolsheviks.”

Trotsky thus continues to maintain his front against Lenin in fundamental questions of the theoretical problems of revolution. He pursues his struggle against Lenin's "errors". He continues to affirm his old standpoint in the most important methodological question of revolution: the question of the driving forces of the Russian revolution. This circumstance at once places Trotsky in a *special* position in the Bolshevik Party. It need not be emphasised that the standpoint is one which has nothing in common with Bolshevism. At present it is only necessary, when dealing with the question of whether there a Trotskyism actually exists or not, to ascertain beyond doubt that it does exist, from Trotsky's own admissions:

1. Trotsky continues to maintain his front against Lenin and Bolshevism in the fundamental question of revolution — in the question of its methodology, This methodology can not change, even after the victory of the revolution.

2. Trotsky opposes Leninism in the sphere of the concrete analysis of the internal forces of revolution. His standpoint involves a disavowal of the role played by the peasantry as a revolutionary force, and the complete denial of the internal vitality of the Russian revolution without a speedy "state support" on the part of the West European proletariat.

3. Thus Trotsky himself evidence that there is an indivisible fundamental connection between the post war Trotsky and the pre-war Trotsky, and that the principle upon which this connection is based

represents a fundamental antagonism between his view and Lenin's in the chief questions of revolution. It thus follows that:

4. A Trotskyism exists, and consists of a standpoint and methods differing in ideology and principles to Leninism, inevitably resulting in previously determinable tactical and organisatory views deviating from Leninism and in opposition to this.

It is mere lack of principle to refuse to see principles at all in these principles, and to argue that no principles are involved in the contention, but merely personal antagonisms. It is mere lack of principle to draw away from Trotsky's latest book with the excuse that "all the enemies of the Soviet power are bound to father round any opposition", and to profess to regard it as purely "accidental", or even not to notice the fact at all, that precisely Trotsky's opposition against the Party forms a power of attraction for counter-revolution. The would — be psychological and virtuous standpoint represented by this lack of principle, in reality an endeavour to avoid the necessity of adopting any definite attitude, assumes approximately the following form:

There is no such thing as Trotskyism as a complete and definite system; lack of system is precisely the distinguishing characteristic of the various utterances made by Trotsky in the course of the discussion, The motive for these utterances is mainly to be found in the individuality and psychological structure of Trotsky, and in the fact that he does not

choose the right moment for his declaration, etc. All this goes to show that there is actually no such thing as Trotskyism, but merely simple errors on Trotsky's part, temporary deviations from the Bolshevik line. At bottom Trotsky is a Bolshevik, a revolutionist, the organiser of victory, etc.

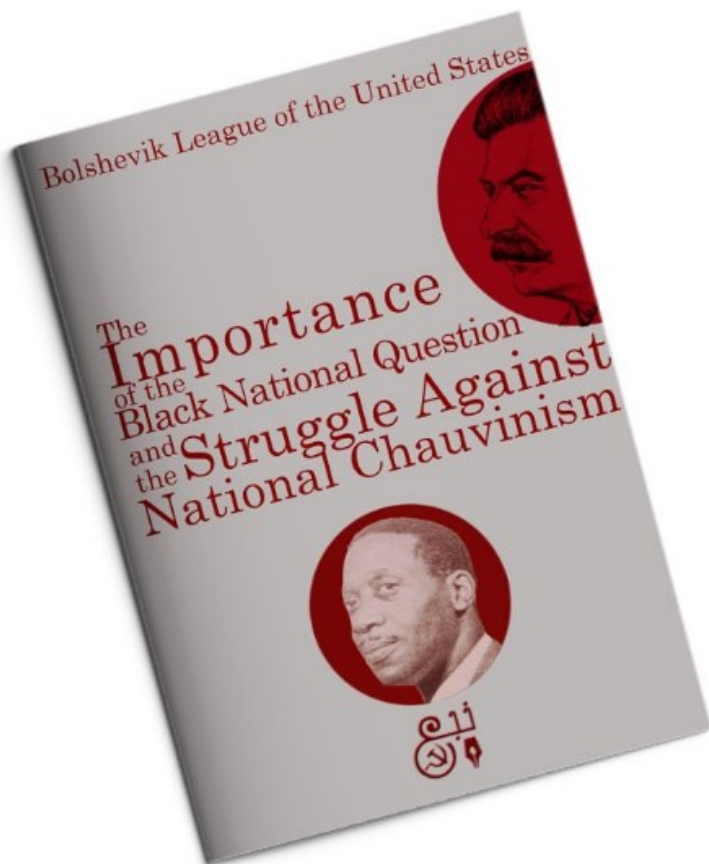
Every worker whose knowledge of the history of the Russian revolution is merely superficial, and gained chiefly in the form of legends, may easily fall a victim to this viewpoint. The lack of principle involved may be opposed as follows:

1. It is perfectly true that Trotskyism does, not consist of any complete and definite system of principles, but of precisely the contrary, Trotskyism consists of lack of system. But just as Hamlet speaks of there being "method in madness", Trotsky's lack of system is systematic. In the sphere of principles and theories, and in the sphere of practical politics, this system means: eclecticism, Menshevism, and this without exception, except when the current itself drives the ship of politics with irresistible force, and without the compass of theory, in the direction of revolution (that is of Bolshevism).

2. Trotsky's deviations are thus not deviations from the line of Bolshevik politics, but — in so far as deviations are to be observed at all in Trotsky's political career — the deviations have been from a line alien and opposed to Bolshevism.

Every psychological explanation of this circumstance, aiming at depriving this struggle, in which the Russian CP is defending the most precious

treasure owned by the Party and by the Communist International — Leninism — of its objective basis and principles, is an unprincipled attempt at concealment, and is in itself, so to speak, Trotskyism.



What is Trotskyism?

Our thesis is that Trotskyism is a system entirely separate from Bolshevism, and is opposed and hostile to it. We must thus attempt to examine the structure of this system, and to describe its theoretical bases with their resultant tactics and organisation. In order to do this, it does not suffice to throw upon the screen the whole of Trotsky's political career, with all its zigzags. It is necessary to go to the bottom of the point of view involved, and to order its teachings in accordance with the theoretical tactical, and organisatory questions of revolution.

We believe that in the course of this examination we shall be able to show that Trotsky, in the midst of a Marxist-Leninist Party, is bound to take the path characterised' above: the path from internal Party discussion with the Party to discussion against the Party.

Trotsky's Relations to Revolutionary Marxism.

It is usually assumed that Trotsky is an *orthodox Marxist*. And it is true that he arrived by a roundabout way "fighting", as he puts it — at Leninism, the Marxism of the stage of imperialism and proletarian revolution.

As far as "orthodoxy" is concerned, there is no lack of this — in words — even among the Marxist Centralists of Western Europe or the Menshevist wing of Russian social democracy. This section of the

Russian Mensheviks (Martov, Martynov (Now a faithful adherent of Bolshevism), etc.) have always been anxious to settle the struggle with the Bolsheviks by means of floods of quotations. History shows the Mensheviks and all their quotations sailing across into the waters of counter-revolution. In the Russian labour movement, Trotsky considered himself (as he has repeatedly stated) to be the representative of advanced "European Marxism", but after his conversion to the Bolsheviks he was unable to make his special viewpoint harmonise with Bolshevism, that is, with revolutionary Marxism. He was thus obliged to make some fundamental differentiation between the Marxism of the so called Marxist "Centre" and the pertaining wing of the Russian Mensheviks, to which Trotsky's Marxism also belongs, and the Marxism of the Bolsheviks. This fundamental difference lies in the method. The method of the revolutionary Marxism of Leninism is materialist dialectics. This method of dialectic logic signifies that the subject under examination is analysed in its totality, and with reference to its associations. It signifies the consideration of evolution in objective "self movement", it asserts that "there is no abstract truth, since truth is always concrete", and thus, demands strictest harmony of theory and practice.

This method is the principle of Leninism. It has been restored. Marxism as revolutionary teaching. This is apposed by Trotsky's method: *eclectics*, precisely the contrary of dialectics, or at best its falsification. In order to show from the very beginning what this

method really is, we give a typical quotation from Trotsky:

“Marxist tactics have chemically combined the reformist and revolutionary tendencies of the revolutionary Struggle. Liquidation and Pravdaism (that is, Bolshevism, already grouped at that time around the Petersburg Pravda) were disintegrating Marxism in their struggle for influence over the workers, preaching labour reformism at one end and vulgar ‘revolutionism’ at the other”. (*The Fight*, July 1914). (The emphasis is mine. — B. K.)

In the above example, Trotsky’s eclectic method in its purest form confronts the dialectics of Marxian Leninism, and not only with reference to the methodological antagonism, but at the same time with the whole of the political results of this antagonism. For Trotsky the antagonism between Bolshevism and Menshevism is not the antagonism between revolution and counter-revolution, between which no harmony can ever exist. Trotsky was totally unable to observe the total irreconcilableness of this antagonism, for he made no attempt at analysing the differences in their historical development under given conditions, and in their connection with the Russian revolution. Instead of doing this, he seized upon an abstraction, an utterly false but hypocritically plausible phrase on the “chemical” combination of reformism and revolution. The chemical recipe is prepared somewhat as follows: first take the “revolutionism” (but not the revolutionary methods!) of the Bolsheviks, then the “labour reformism” of the liquidators, and make a

mixture of these two, The resultant compound is Marxist tactics on the basis of the semi-feudal, semi-capitalist state of society obtaining in Czarist Russia. And all this in July 1914, when the mass strike of the Petersburg workers had almost developed into an armed insurrection.

This is eclecticism in its most classic form, in its utter bloodless emptiness. And for the sake of this eclecticism Marxism had to be falsified, and revolutionary Marxism transformed into a mixture of reformist and revolutionary spirit. Truly an “orthodox Marxism”, and “simplified revolutionism”. Or did Trotsky perhaps assume that he was in possession of an alchemy enabling him to combine two irreconcilable ingredients?

It may be here objected that Trotsky has long since recognised this error, and that his above mentioned letter to Olminsky admits his mistake regarding the estimate made of the two fractions of the Russian labour movement: the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. Externally, this is true. But the standpoint *still maintained* by Trotsky in this same letter, his declaration that he believes his estimate of the driving forces of the revolution to have been unconditionally correct, is based on the same old method.

From this, we see that:

1. In Trotsky's eyes Marxism is a mixture of reformism and revolutionary theory. It is not a question of reform and revolution, but of reformism and revolutionary methods. The Bolsheviks were

never opposed to reforms as by-products of revolution, or as means towards the strengthening of revolution; but they have always been the deadly enemies of reformism as opponent of revolutionary methods.

2. That which Trotsky calls Marxism is Trotskyism itself: a strange eclectic mixture of various elements, partly reformist, partly revolutionary.

3. The method upon which Trotsky's political, tactical, and organisatory views are based is thus not the method of revolutionary Marxism, of Leninism, but an opposite method.

This mixing together of political elements in reality irreconcilable is merely one aspect of Trotskyism. The other aspect runs no less counter to Marxism, to Leninism; it is the mechanical separation of elements in reality belonging to one another, the questioning of the harmony and general validity of the Marxist methods (dialectics).

“Marxism is a harmonious view of life”. The method of Marxism applies — even for those who are anxious to limit the validity of this method — to every phenomenon of social life. What is the attitude adopted by the “Marxist” military writer Trotsky towards this method? Trotsky denies that Marxism can be applied to military questions. Marxism is applicable to politics, but not to the “theory of war”, and has nothing whatever to do with military questions. At most it may be applied to the history of war.

This eclectic method has of course affected Trotsky's military strategy. In this place this is only of interest to us with reference to the attitude taken by Trotskyism towards Marxism, and enables us to supplement our first three conclusions by the following;

4. Trotskyism opens out a chasm between theory and practice, entirely contrary to the Marxist thesis of the dialectic harmony of theory and practice.

5. The method of Trotskyism is a variation, a special form of centrism, hanging between Bolshevism and Menshevism, and stuck fast on the road to Bolshevism.

The Revolution Methodology of Trotskyism.

It has naturally not been possible for the attitude adopted by Trotskyism towards Marxism to fail of taking effect upon the special revolutionary theory and special revolutionary method of Trotskyism. This eclectic method peculiar to Trotskyism has created *the theory of permanent revolution*.

The theory of permanent revolution is a scheme of revolutionary development drawn up by Trotsky, showing the lines upon which the revolution of 1905 "should" have developed, the lines upon which the revolution of 1917 — so maintain Trotsky and his adherents — actually did develop. According to this theory, the 1905 revolution should have developed as follows:

1. The actual starting point is: 9, January 1905. A broad revolutionary movement among the workers.

Revolutionary unrest and an attempt at organising the peasantry (peasants' league). The Czarist power is getting weaker, but the labour party organisation is still weak as well. The bourgeoisie betrays the revolution immediately. Trotsky, in the camp of the Mensheviks, and fighting relentlessly against the organisatory plans and principles directed by the Bolsheviks towards revolution, and against everything in connection with the technical preparation for revolution, deserts his Menshevik comrades and designates the actual task of revolution as follows:

“Every separate and spontaneous action of the masses must be permeated with the idea of the necessity of a simultaneous All Russian action. Every committee must immediately create a new organ, a “military” one. This organ will grow rapidly, and will completely subordinate all the others when the time for action comes”.

2. In the midst of the risings among the peasantry, Trotsky discovers that the proletariat alone is entirely without allies in Russia. It cannot reckon upon the help of the peasantry, or of the petty bourgeoisie of the towns, or of the intelligenzia. These strata cannot play any serious part in the revolution.

3. For this reason the revolution is declared to be permanent; that is, the proletariat emerges victorious from the armed insurrection, and the provisional revolutionary government will be a government of the social-democratic party. The armed insurrection thus ends with the proletarian

dictatorship. The working class government will be obliged to enter on the task of realising socialism.

Meanwhile Trotsky discovers the peasantry, and promises it “the intervention, of the proletariat in agriculture”, this of course not consisting of:

“fettering individual workers to separate scraps of ground, but *beginning* with the cultivation of extensive lands under state and municipal administration”.

4. And finally, according to the scheme of permanent revolution, after the peasantry has deserted the proletariat, and world reaction has turned upon revolutionary Russia, the dictatorship of the Russian proletariat has no other hope of salvation than to stake everything upon a single card, to join its destiny with the destinies of European socialist revolution (in 1906!), and to appeal to the proletariat of Europe with the cry: Workers of the world, unite!

This is the theory of permanent revolution, of which, Trotsky writes repeatedly, even up to quite recently, that he sees no reason to withdraw it, and that it has been the basis of the policy of the Russian CP since 1917.

This theory is entirely “left”, and it would seem as if Trotsky had not merely taken a flying leap out of Menshevism, but had sprung clear over the heads of the Bolsheviks over to the extreme left of the revolutionary labour movement. The demands of the Bolsheviks were much more modest. Not socialist labour government and proletarian dictatorship, but

provisional government, democratic dictatorship of workers and peasantry. This was the slogan of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and the immediate object striven for was to make sure that the bourgeois revolution was really carried out. Not immediate social revolution all over Europe, as promised by Trotsky's scheme, but a much more modest prospect, as pointed out by Lenin in 1905:

“Under the conditions given by a revolutionary democratic dictatorship we shall mobilise many millions of the poor of town and country (here we have the idea of the Red Army. — *B. K.*); we shall make the Russian proletarian revolution a prologue to the European proletarian revolution”.

It must further be observed that in the question of the driving forces of revolution there existed most important and fundamental differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks as to whether the peasantry or the liberal bourgeoisie are to be the allies of the proletariat in revolution.

Trotsky, who left the Mensheviks without joining the Bolsheviks, created his “permanent theory” in his usual eclectic manner by — as Lenin observed —

“adopting from the Bolsheviks the demand for a decisive revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for the seizure of power, and from the Mensheviks the disavowal of the role played by the peasantry”.

To ignore the peasantry, consisting for the greater part of proletarian and of independent economic elements, as factor of the driving forces of revolution, is to rob the Russian revolution of one of the most

essential constituents. In Trotsky's hands, the proletarian dictatorship becomes an empty agitatorial phrase for the proletariat, this narrow (narrower in 1905 than in 1917) stratum of the Russian people, without the peasantry as ally, would neither have been able to seize power nor to maintain it. Deprived of its broad social basis, the socialist labour government would not only have been unable to "place collectivism on the agenda", but it would have had no other choice but to die "in beauty", appealing to the hesitating proletariat of Europe with the revolutionary cry of: Workers of the world, unite!

This scheme of development of the Russian revolution, worked out by Trotsky in collaboration with Parvus, or rather by Parvus in collaboration with Trotsky, such one as many would like to put forward as the strategic basis of the revolution of 1917, was never anything more than an eclectic and bloodless scheme, bare of all connection with social, reality, both in 1905 and in 1917.

The realisation of the proletarian dictatorship, and its outlook with regard to international revolution, are also likely to create the outward impression that the revolution of 1917 has really become "permanent" in the sense meant by Trotsky.

But when the inner forces and course of evolution of the revolution are closely examined, it becomes evident at once that in reality the development of the October revolution runs directly counter to all the theses of permanent revolution, for:

1. The October revolution did not take place under such conditions that the peasantry deserted the working class; on the contrary, it was based upon the armed alliance of working class and peasantry;

2. Thus the Russian proletariat, despite the utmost endeavours of international reaction and the postponement of international proletarian revolution, has been able to maintain its position. The armed alliance between working class and peasantry has expanded into an economic alliance.

The strategy of defeat represented by Trotsky does not therefore “fully and completely agree with the standpoint of our Party since 1917”. On the contrary! Since the October victory, the policy of the Party in all fundamental questions has been a struggle against Trotskyism, against his standpoint in the peasantry question, and has signified an actual victory over Trotskyism.

Trotsky has continued to defend the theory of permanent revolution, even in the Bolshevik Party. The chief stages of this theory, as applied to the problems of proletarian dictatorship, are as follows:

1. *Brest Litovsk*. German imperialism still stands unshaken; the German proletariat, for lack of competent revolutionary organisations, cannot strike a decisive blow. The Russian peasant “votes on the peace question with his feet”, he runs away from the front. There are two currents in the Party: The majority, under the leadership of Lenin, takes into account the trend of feeling in the peasantry and in the overwhelming majority of the working class as

also the existing proportions of forces, and declares itself in favour of peace, in order that the Russian proletariat may gain a pause for breath permitting it to wait for the victory of international revolution. The Left Communists, collaborating with Trotsky, cling to the idea of a revolutionary war, and are frivolously ready to throw the forces of the Russian revolution, of the proletarian dictatorship, “into the scale of the class war of the whole capitalist world”. (This Trotsky recommended in 1906, when, writing on the results and prospects of the Russian revolution).

Later on Trotsky drops the plan of a revolutionary war, and takes a retreat with a fresh eclectic formula: “Neither peace nor war”. From Left communism he selects the ignoring of the social classification of the country and the trend of feeling in the peasantry; from Leninist Bolshevism he retains the recognition of the power of international imperialism. The result of Trotsky’s opposition is: Worsened peace conditions and the necessity of far reaching capitulation to German imperialism.

2. The method employed by Trotsky for forming the theory of permanent revolution bears further fruit. The trade union discussion was raised by Trotsky just at a time when the peasantry was demanding, with elementary impetus, the abolition of the measures of war communism, which were hampering the development of productive forces. The alliance between proletariat and peasantry had not only weakened, but was near dissolution. The feeling among the peasantry was communicated to the cities through the medium of the working masses

in close contact with the peasantry, The result was a strike wave and clamorous demands for bread. The so-called “workers’ opposition” made a syndicalist demand that the control of production be placed in the hands of the trade unions, Trotsky was not deaf to the demands for bread. He drew the conclusion that production must be developed, in order that this demand might be met. But he did not see that the chief hindrance to the productive powers of agriculture was war communism, and that until these productive forces were released no commencement could be made with the development of industrial production.

Trotsky, too, was anxious to place the control of production in the hands of the trade unions, and was here in agreement with the workers opposition, with its syndicalist tendencies. But in his opinion the trade unions would have to be first “shaken up”. A state apparatus of military organisation was to be formed of the mass organisations of the workers. For this purpose the old Bolshevik trade union cadres, possessing the confidence of the masses, were to be substituted by the appointment, from above, of persons possessing “military administrative” experience. This was Trotsky’s recipe, immediately before the introduction of the new economic policy.

In this eclectic construction we again find one of the main factors missing the peasantry as immediate and decisive accessory for the social structure of the Soviet state. And the peasantry is again missing as indirect factor, influencing the masses of workers in social contact with the peasantry, What is lacking is

thus the strata-classification of the working class. The recipe is the old one: From Bolshevik policy we select the demand for the development of productive forces and for labour discipline, in the interests of the socialist reconstruction. From Menshevism we take the ignoring of the strata classification of the peasantry and of the working class. To this we add a pinch of syndicalism, that is, the idea that the control of production should be in the hands of the trade unions. All this is to be so mixed together that the conflicting elements become combined, and the result is Trotskyism, as it existed at that stage of the development of the proletarian dictatorship preceding the introduction of the new economic policy, at the time of the collapse of war communism.

The revolutionary methodology of Trotsky may be further characterised by the empty and dangerous demand for a “dictatorship of industry” (as continuation of the theory of permanent revolution), made in the year 1922. This demand ignored the economic and class structure of the Soviet state as completely as it did the role played by the peasantry.

What is the result of the continual application of this eclectic method to politics? Lenin replied to this question as follows at the time of the trade union discussion:

“A rupture in the middle of the transmission system of driving belts”.

This explains why Trotsky’s views lack the transitions.

“Down with the Czar — Up with the labour government!”; this was the slogan of Trotskyism issued by Parvus in the year 1905, at the time when the theory of permanent revolution originated.

“Long live the revolutionary labour government!” repeated Trotsky on 20, March 1917. This he designated as the sole “*concretely positive*” slogan, and he called for the seizure of power at a time when Lenin, in his theses of 4, April, was still speaking of “patient enlightenment as one of the first tasks”, Trotsky, in his *Lessons of October*, maintains that this slogan was in accordance with Lenin’s slogan. But this is not in the least the case!

“It is of first importance that we determine the time of the revolution, and that the technical preparations are made on a plan based on the calendar”.

This was Trotsky’s slogan in September 1923, when the thunder clouds of the German revolution were gathering, This slogan was easily issued after he had designated as putschist everyone who was not inclined to swear by the exclusive validity of the prospects of revolution in Europe.

The absence of transitions in such situations means the ignoring in one case of a whole class (the peasantry), and in another case of a party like that of German social-democracy (the left wing of the bourgeoisie). This is the natural consequence of the methods of revolutionary strategy involved in Trotskyism.

The Methods of Trotskyism in Tactical and Organisatory Questions.

The method of Trotskyism has accomplished the feat of chemically combining reformism and revolutionary theory in one “revolutionary Marxism”, and of causing the peasant class to vanish from among the driving forces of revolution. And in tactical and organisatory questions Trotsky has found equal opportunity for the application of his method. Although Trotsky has beat a much more energetic retreat in these questions than in matters pertaining to the method and strategy of revolution, he has not been able to withdraw everything referring to the estimate of the Menshevist and Bolshevist fractions: In this sphere he has not been able to free himself from Trotskyism, and has proved as little able to assimilate the organisatory and tactical methods of Leninism as the revolutionary strategy of Leninism.

Nothing is more natural. Marxism and Leninism are so complete in their systems of methodology that they do not tolerate any eclectic intermezzos. Either we accept them without reservation, and become Marxists and Leninists, or those who seize upon the train of the Marxian garment, intending to drag it off altogether, find that this train slips from their fingers — exposing the whole of their fundamental antagonism. This is what happened to Trotsky when he tried to reconstruct the tactical and organisatory principles of Leninism to correspond with his revolutionary theory, but did not observe that

Leninism is not merely a totality of tactical and organisatory principles, but is, as the historical and logical completion of Marxism, a *complete method*. The attitude adopted by Trotsky towards the question of the tactics and organisatory principles of Leninism, in his later proclamations, is not so definite and unequivocal as his attitude towards revolutionary method. Here he candidly and clearly maintains the validity of Trotskyism. There (in tactical and organisatory questions) he performs his circumlocutory movement, aiming at enhancing Trotskyism to the position of always having been Bolshevik tactics, not only in the present (1917), but also in the past. At the time of the discussion preceding the 13th Party Conference, Trotsky made the following statement with respect to the tactical questions of the Party:

“If we *now* regard our Party in the light of its revolutionary past, and in the light of its past since October, we find that the fundamentally advantageous factor of its tactics is its capacity for rapid accommodation to circumstances, its ability to adapt itself to abrupt changes of tactics, to the use of new weapons and the application of new methods; *in a word, its capacity for adaptation to the policy of abrupt changes*”. (The emphasis is mine. – B. K.)

It would perhaps sound crude to say that Trotsky, in thus summing up Leninist tactics and organisation under the heading of a “policy of abrupt changes”, does so solely for the purpose of *justifying* his past, and does this the more that this formulation aims at substituting Leninism by Trotskyism *not only in the*

past. It is needless to refer in detail to the care expended by Lenin on *his analyses*, to the exactitude with which he sought the *special* in every concrete situation, or to the care he took to ensure that every transition in the objective situation was mirrored in the forms assumed by the corresponding tactical transitions in the policy of the Party.

All that is necessary is to analyse the eclectic character of the Trotsky thesis adduced above:

1. It is true that the *capacity of rapid accommodation* is one of the advantages of the Bolshevik Party, of Leninism, an advantage due to its methodology, its dialectic logic.

2. After Leninism has adapted itself rapidly to circumstances, it finds *as a rule* the corresponding methods and fresh media required by the new situation, and *as a rule* it observes the necessity of the transition at the proper time. At the same time it establishes the nature of the transition.

3. *Abrupt* changes in policy are thus not the rule in Bolshevism, but form an exception, occurring only when the Party has not quite kept pace with events, but has been taken by surprise to a certain extent. (The change to the new economic policy may be regarded in a certain degree as an abrupt change. It may be that the Party did not see in time that a change was about to take place in the objective situation. When the Party did observe this, it was hampered in its efforts to carry out the necessary transitional measures by the trade union discussion introduced by Trotsky, who, instead of aiding the

liquidation of war communism, recommended its retention with a perseverance worthy of a better cause.);

4. All that Trotsky has written about the excellent tactical capabilities of the Bolshevik Party is entirely correct. It is true that the Party knows how to adapt itself rapidly to circumstances, it is true that the Party is capable of abruptly changing its tactics, of fighting with new weapons, and of applying fresh methods. *But what is not true is precisely the conclusion drawn: that the policy of the Party is a policy of abrupt changes.*

5. The conclusion drawn by Trotsky is false for the simple reason that this is not the Policy of Bolshevism, but of Trotskyism, It is Trotskyism which has made a policy of staggering to and fro between the views of various parties, instead of analysing the objective conditions, both before and since the revolution.

And again we put the question: How is it that Trotsky possesses this wonderful capacity for drawing false conclusions from a number of correct premises? We reject the psychological explanation, and hold to the ideological explanation. We once more point out that the whole explanation lies in his method, his eclecticism, which separates things, which pertain to one another, and combines things foreign to one another. The application of this method to the Party, to its tactics, and to its organisation, leads to the same consequences as its application to the sphere of theory, of strategy, and

revolution: to the thesis of permanent revolution and its logical consequence, to the policy pursued by Trotskyism at Brest, to its standpoint with regard to the trade union discussion, to the demand for the dictatorship of industry, etc.

The application of this method to tactics and organisation is revealed in two important errors:

1. In a false and anti-Leninist estimate of the role played by the Party in the struggle for the dictatorship.

2. In a false estimate of the inner structure and all inner problems of the Party, on the lines of the Marxist "Centre".

The Policy of Abrupt Changes in Actual Practice.

These peculiarities of Trotskyism follow, theoretically and historically, the manner in which the role played by spontaneity and consciousness is estimated. We know that Lenin — without denying the role and significance of spontaneity in the labour movement — designated it as the task of the revolutionary labour party to carry revolutionary consciousness into the working class, and to defend this revolutionary consciousness in the capacity of an *organised vanguard*, not "clinging to the tail of events", but preceding and leading events. This view is at the same time the basis of the Bolshevist system

of organisation: centralisation, discipline, unity, etc. This principle does not “dissolve among the broad masses of the workers”, but is adapted to combining with these masses, and can amalgamate with them in a certain sense.

Ever since the commencement of the conflict between the Bolshevik and Menshevik fractions, Trotsky has tended to “West European Marxism” in tactical and organisatory questions. That is, to those parties which have preserved in their phraseology at most something of revolutionary ideology, but are in reality bereft of the slightest will to revolution. Thus he rejects the theory of the task of the revolutionary vanguard, a theory based on the correct estimate of the function of “consciousness” in the labour movement, as follows:

“If the “economists” thus straggle behind the proletariat, instead of leading it, the “politicians” (the Bolsheviks, B. K.) for their part do not lead the proletariat, since they themselves undertake its duties. If the “economists” seek to evade the gigantic task by means of contenting themselves with the modest role of hanging on to history as its tail, then the “politicians” solve the question by trying to make history into their own tail”.

The Party — the organisation of the class-conscious vanguard — cannot decide until history has decided, until the spontaneous movement has progressed to the same level as the Party. But without this decision there is no united will, and no organisatory preparation for action is possible. In

1904 (a few months before the outbreak of the revolution!) Trotsky was however of the opinion that this was not at all necessary, for he wrote:

“The whole of our tasks are fully and completely concentrated upon the sphere of political tactics. We, the so-called “minority”, set the Party no independent organisatory tasks, and are of the opinion that the most urgent tasks are accomplished during events themselves, in the course of the political struggle. In this respect, we do indeed stand for an “opportunism in organisatory questions”. It must however be recollected that the organisatory rigidity opposed to our opportunism represents nothing, more nor less than the reverse side of political stupidity”.

Bela Kun



The International
Importance of Stalin's
Foundations of Leninism
1934



All these factors, the complete ignoring of objective conditions, the denial of the role played by the Party as vanguard, and, what is synonymous with this, the denial of the part played by organisation, combine to make the policy of abrupt changes a necessity for Trotskyism.

There will be some who tell us that what we here prove on Trotsky's authority belongs to past history, and to these we reply by reminding them of the attitude taken by Trotsky towards the question of the German events in 1923. Trotsky himself writes of this in his "Lessons of October". Summed up briefly, his attitude was as follows:

1. *At the 4th World Congress of the CI*, held at the end of the autumn of 1922, and then again later on, Trotsky prophesied the advent of the democratic-pacifist era, following Fascism and imperialism of the Poincaré type. Generally speaking, the prophesy has proved true. No great contention has arisen with regard to this. Trotsky then designated the immediate tasks of the communists in the light of the impending democratic pacifist era. It is however not possible to maintain that he reckoned with the possibility of the Ruhr occupation when defining these tasks. Thus he was equally unable to take into account the resultant economic and political situation in Germany, so that he failed to observe the necessity for preparations in Germany for an immediate struggle for power, or for preparations in the neighbouring countries in support of this struggle. The communist tasks, as defined by

Trotsky, lay partly in the sphere of tactics, but chiefly in the sphere of agitation.

2. *In the winter of 1923 the Ruhr valley was occupied.* Trotsky did not observe the revolutionary significance and consequences of this fact any more than Brandler and his companions did. Trotsky did not observe this link in the chain between Fascism and the democratic pacifist era, or at least he did not deem it necessary to let the occupation of the Ruhr territory alter anything with regard to the immediate tasks defined by the 4th Congress.

3. *Conference of the Enlarged Executive of the CI in the spring of 1923.* The representatives of the German Party did not propose any discussion upon the necessity of tactical and organisatory preparations in order to take advantage of the revolutionary development of the situation. Neither did Trotsky take any initiative in this matter. Zinoviev called attention to the change in the situation — though not definitely enough — and at the same time to the necessity of a corresponding change in tactics. The slogan of the workers' and peasants' government was assumed to be best adapted to the character of this change of tactics.

4. *The Cuno strike in August.* Trotsky preserved silence. And even later on he did not utter one word against the members of his fraction who choked off the anti-Fascist demonstration of the German Party in Prussia. And then in September the “abrupt change”. Political preparation is a question of *secondary importance*, the first place is taken by the

preparations pertaining to military technics! *The revolution to take place on a fixed date, exactly according to the calendar!*

The only thing more abrupt than this “abrupt change” is the fact that Trotsky has combined wholesale with Radek and the German Right, since the “German October” in the defence of the Brandlerist tactics, and endeavoured to cast the whole responsibility for the failure of the German revolution exclusively upon the objective situation. Given this situation, he has considered that the German Right pursued the sole possible tactics. But now an even more abrupt change, for Trotsky, speaking of the experiences won in the October revolution, declares that as result of the error of the CI, the German Party missed an opportunity of world historical importance, and thus wiped the German revolution from our agenda for a long time to come. Taking the above as basis, we may establish the following with regard to the tactical method of Trotskyism:

1. To Trotskyism the political situations appear as isolated *tactical* and organisatory periods;

2. He thus has various conceptions of the role played by the Party, but invariably underestimates it. During the “tactical” period the part played by the Party is solely that of an agitator, acting as intermediary and issuing slogans. During the “organisatory” period the Party is omnipotent.

In 1905, Trotsky was anxious to convert every movement of the masses into the starting point for an

All Russian action. In November 1923 he was anxious to have every military technical preparation completed by precisely the 9, November, according to a plan exactly in accordance with the calendar, the work to be done by a Party scarcely possessing a semi-functioning and illegal apparatus. But Trotsky underestimates the importance of the Party even in the “organisatory” period, for he wishes to subordinate the political leadership to the military;

3. The policy of “abrupt changes” represented by Trotskyism is thus to be attributed to the fact that Trotsky does not recognise the necessity of a conscious guidance and organisation of revolution until he is raised on the crest of a billow of spontaneous movement. In periods in which the revolutionary wave has ebbed, and the spontaneous movements have not possessed sufficient power to force Trotsky to acknowledge the Party as vanguard, leader, and organiser, he invariably bows down (in a genuinely Menshevik manner) before spontaneity, and strives to deal with the Party from the standpoint of spontaneity.

4. The tactics of Trotskyism are thus Menshevik until the tide of revolution rises to a certain height, and only then — *and that conditionally* — do they become *revolutionary*. Trotsky follows along at the tail of spontaneous movements instead of leading them, and we shall further see how this strange mixture of “Chvostism” (tail policy) and revolution drew Trotsky into the camp of the Bolsheviks shortly before the October revolution, and how he became one of the best agitators for the revolution.

Centrism in Organisatory Questions.

The policy of “abrupt changes” would logically lead us to suppose that Trotsky at the same time provides for a corresponding system of organisatory structure in the Party, assuring an easy and painless realisation of such abrupt changes, that is, a social equality ensuring ideological unity in the Party, assurance for the continuity of our leadership, strict centralisation, discipline, and an elastic form of organisation, adapting itself to the masses.

If this were the case, it would be quite in order, both from the viewpoint of Trotskyism as well as from that — actually — of Leninism. Lenin made precisely these demands with reference to the organisation of the vanguard of the proletariat, He did this in order that the Party, as highest form of organisation of the proletarian class, should be capable of the rapid adaptation necessary for the preparation and leadership of revolution, of forming rapid and united decisions, of putting such decisions into immediate and united practice, and of performing all requisite manoeuvres. An organisation possessing such a structure is really capable of accomplishing an “abrupt change” if required.

On the other hand, it is possible for a tactical leadership to be formed within such an organisation, and for this to render the policy of “abrupt changes” superfluous. It is only such an organisation which can raise itself beyond the spontaneity of the labour movement, up to the level of a conscious vanguard.

Such an organisation is capable of placing the Party at the head of the masses when the tide of revolution rises, and it is equally capable of retreating in good order, at the right time and without panic, if needs be.

But Trotsky is never deserted by his eclecticism. Every declaration made by him on organisatory questions, during the whole of his career, shows this:

1. With reference to the social strata within the Party his chief anxiety, at the commencement of the struggle between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, was the question of how the students of the intermediate schools could enter the Party in case of the acceptance of Lenin's organisation statue, and he expressed himself in favour of a "loose" form of organisation. At the time of the Party discussion preceding the 13th Party Conference his watchword was "student youth as barometer" of the Party in relation to the workers;

2. With reference to the ideological unity of the Party, his standpoint immediately before the war was as follows:

"Real unity can only exist if the Party possesses not only the two wings, but at the same time a backbone, a Marxist centre which has overcome the centrifugal tendencies of the right and left wings, and had, become the support of public opinion in the Party and of Party discipline. German social-democracy would never have been able to preserve its unity had its opportunist wing (Bernstein, David, etc.) simply stood face to face with the ultra-left (!) wing (R.

Luxemburg, etc.). The stay and support of unity and discipline in the Party of the German proletariat is the *Marxist* centre around Bebel and Kautsky". (*The struggle*, July 1914, Nos, 7/8.)

Thus unity and ideological agreement are substituted by the introduction of wings and fractions as institutions, under the ideological, tactical, and organisatory hegemony of the "Marxist centre". This centrist view here field by Trotsky is by no means merely incidental. Later on, during the war, in March 1916, he spoke as follows on the tasks of the Internationalists:

"The undisputed aim of our present intellectual and organisatory struggle is the purification of the International from social chauvinism".

No word about the Marxist centre, from whose real countenance the veil had already fallen. But at the same time he characterised the policy of the Bolshevik organ, the "Sozial-demokrat", conducted by Lenin and Zinoviev, as a "split at any price", and condemned it, (These and similar articles were published by Trotsky in 1923 under the collective title of *Preparation of the Communist International*. (!!))

He returned to the same organisatory tactics during last year's Party discussion, demanding the freedom to form fractions and groups.

3. "Chvostism" in the question of centralisation, and "chvostism" in organisatory questions, forms another characteristic feature of Trotskyism.

In 1904, Trotsky wrote:

“In internal Party politics these methods lead, as we shall see further on, to the “representation” of the Party by the Party organisation, to the representation of the Party organisation by the CC, and finally to the representation of the CC by a “dictatorship”; it also leads to the committees possessing the power to determine and alter, whilst the people preserve silence”.

In 1924 he wrote:

“The approach of the German events aroused the Party to attention. Precisely at this juncture it became more evident than ever that the Party is living on two stories; on the upper floor the decisions are made, on the lower floor the decisions are merely reported”.

A classic example of how it is possible to dismember the elements of a unit on eclectic methods.

Trotsky’s attitude towards organisatory questions is equally attributable to his views on spontaneity and conscious-ness, and to the resultant “Chvostism”. In consequence of the method peculiar to Trotskyism, there is a lack of dialectic connection between object, means, and method. A revolutionary aim is fixed, but followed by a revolutionary strategy in which the forces decisive for the realisation of revolution are lacking. Trotsky thinks to realise revolution either entirely without the aid of organisatory preparation and leadership, relying solely on spontaneity, on the instincts of the working class, or he transplants the organisatory principles of

foreign soils to Russian ground, without consideration of the objective differences. When Trotsky, in the course of the revolution, regards the stage of maturity calling for conscious guidance work to have been reached, the consciousness then brought by Trotskyism into the revolution is not the consciousness of the Party, it has not grown in and with the Party, it does not consist of the collective experiences of the Party, and is not a generalisation of these experiences into an ideology. Thus the elements of consciousness contained in Trotskyism give the impression of an abstract idealism, even though Trotsky otherwise confesses to materialism.

In organisatory questions Trotskyism is equally a disavowal of the Party and the role it plays, and the “super-administration” spoken of by Lenin when characterising Trotsky’s methods of statesmanship is one of the results of this disavowal.

Trotsky has directed violent attacks against the Party apparatus. The methodological source of these attacks is however nothing more nor less than the fact that Trotsky, denying the role played by the Party, degrades the Party as totality to the level of an “apparatus”. To an apparatus serving for the realisation of an abstract consciousness, of an idea sometimes finding self expression, This is what he wanted to make out of the broad mass organisations of the workers, the trade unions, and this is what he would make of the Party, if it were possible for the collective and concrete consciousness of the Party to subordinate itself to such an idea.

The
Karnik-Roy-Shetty
Group

1934



The Abrupt Change before October.

After all this someone may ask: And if we admit that Trotskyism is an eclectic method running counter to the dialectic method of Marxism-Leninism, that with reference to revolutionary strategy it is synonymous with the strategy of the revolutionary phrase, and that it represents, with regard to tactics and organisatory principles, a denial of the role played by the Party, with regard to tactical and organisatory questions a Menshevist “Chvostism”, and with regard to its whole political attitude a remnant of centrism in the CI, then how can we explain the fact that in 1905 and 1917 Trotsky was none the less one of the leading personalities of the revolution?

We are of the opinion that here again the explanation need not be sought outside of the ideology of the individual, in his psychology. Nothing would be more crude than to adduce Trotsky’s “revolutionary temperament” to decide the question, This would be on a par with the methods pursued by the virtuous centrists of the old 2nd International, who attempted to attribute the antagonism between the revisionists and the Left radicals to “differences of temperament”.

The peculiar eclectic method of Trotskyism placed him at the head of the revolution, just as it has

prevented him from continuing to be a leader during the period of liquidatory counter-revolution, and has reduced him to the position of literary trainbearer of Menshevism. His method and his standpoint have placed him in both positions.

We have seen that in the question of spontaneity and consciousness the methods of Trotskyism have led to the result that the Party “should not fulfil the tasks of the proletariat”. In other words, the Party is not to be a conscious vanguard, deciding, acting, and organising, *before* the spontaneous mass movement has attained even that minimum of consciousness called forth by the revolution and the struggle for power. For Trotsky and Trotskyism this period signifies the ascendancy of the reformist elements, as follows: With reference to method: subordination to spontaneity; to tactics; abandonment of the revolutionary slogans (petition campaign); to organisation: agreement to the liquidation of the Party.

The role of the conscious vanguard is not to be played, nor is the moment for the conscious leadership of the activity which is organising the revolution to be recognised as having for the Party arrived, until the spontaneous movements in the working class work their way upward, and the wave of revolution rises. This means, subjectively, a tempestuous pace of development of the consciousness of the masses of the proletariat outside of the Party. These masses, far behind the Party, and even working against it at times (Against the current!), masses with which the Party has been

unable to gain sufficient contact, despite every endeavour and despite intervention in matters concerning daily life, now affiliate themselves closely to the Party. The difference between the consciousness of the vanguard and the consciousness of the masses has quantitatively diminished.

For Trotsky this period theoretically signifies that the revolutionary elements contained in the “chemical combination” of Marxism are in the ascendancy; from the viewpoint of method it signifies the adjustment of spontaneity and conscious-ness; from the viewpoint of tactics: that by means of this method the difference between the masses and the vanguard is balanced by the spontaneous revolutionary movement. The revolutionary method drives the organisatory part of the movement forward, and emphasises the revolutionary military role of the Party to an extreme point. The narrowing of the gap *between the conscious state of the spontaneous mass movement and the consciousness of the leading Party enabled Trotsky to take the leap — under the influence of mass pressure — into the embodiment of this leading consciousness, the Bolshevik Party.*

That “Chvostism” which made a Menshevik of Trotsky in his anti-revolutionary period also brought him into the camp of the Bolsheviks during the revolutionary period, and found him at the head of the masses during the revolution. Thus Trotsky became the tribune of the revolution, the eloquent agitator for the Bolshevik Party, transmitting to the masses, agitated by the revolution, everything which

the Bolshevik Party, under Lenin's leadership, had created in decades of collective and conscious work.

Without Trotsky and in Spite of Trotskyism.

Trotsky's Trotskyism was however not dead when Trotsky was carried over to the Bolsheviks (though not to Bolshevism!) by the spontaneous movement of the masses, It was merely suppressed for a time by the revolutionary events. This has been amply proved by the attitude taken by Trotsky in all essential questions of the revolution, and in tactical and organisatory matters.

It is just for this reason that it is methodologically wrong to speak of "deviations" on Trotsky's part in connection with the various discussions in the Party. If we regard Trotsky's political career in the light of the system of Trotskyism — and only thus is it possible to form a correct judgment — then the actual deviation is not that which is generally assumed: not Brest-Litovsk, nor the trade union discussion, nor the demand for the dictatorship of industry, nor the petty bourgeoisie standpoint adopted with reference to the inner Party problems during the latest Party discussion. Trotsky's actual deviation consisted of his entry into the Bolshevik Party, for this was inconsistent with his views on the question of liquidation, with his theory of permanent revolution, and with the rejection of the Party as bearer of the

consciousness of the proletariat. This was the deviation from that definite course whose fundamental is an eclectic method-running counter to Marxism in all revolutionary questions, or, in one word, a form of *Centrism* corresponding to the external and internal conditions of the Russian labour movement.

