

18. THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION TO THE NEW
ECONOMIC POLICY; THE STRUGGLE AGAINST
THE OPPORTUNIST FACTIONS OF TROTSKY,
BUKHARIN AND OTHERS

THE SITUATION AND TASKS DURING THE PERIOD OF
NATIONAL ECONOMIC RESTORATION

Shortly after the October Revolution Lenin placed on the agenda the great task of organizing the socialist economy. In "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government" he wrote:

We have *won* Russia from the rich for the poor, from the exploiters for the toilers. Now we must *administer* Russia. . . .

. . . We must prove worthy executors of this most difficult (and most grateful) task of the socialist revolution. We must *ponder over the fact* that *in addition* to being able to convince people, in addition to being able to conquer in civil war, it is necessary to be able to do practical *organisational* work in order that the administration may be successful. It is a very difficult task, because it is a matter of organising in a new way the most deep-rooted, the economic foundations of life of tens and tens of millions of people. And it is a very grateful task because, *only after* it has been *fulfilled* (in the principal and main outlines) will it be possible

to say that Russia *has become* not only a Soviet, but also a Socialist Republic.¹

However, the work of economic construction was interrupted by foreign armed intervention and civil war. It was not until 1921 that the Party resumed the work of restoring the national economy and undertaking socialist construction.

The economic situation was then a good deal worse. Following four years of the imperialist war and three years of civil war, production was seriously damaged and there was an acute shortage of food and fuel. War Communism, introduced in the years of civil war, was now in conflict with the interests of the peasantry, and the workers, too, were dissatisfied. Obviously, a new policy responding to the changed conditions was needed.

Lenin declared that the immediate task was to revive industry on the basis of the restoration of agriculture and to build up a new economic foundation for the alliance of the workers and peasants. To revive agriculture it was necessary to replace the surplus-appropriation system introduced in the period of War Communism by a tax in kind, to expand the circulation of commodities on a countrywide scale and to allow certain freedom for private trade. The peasants would then be more interested and active, and a quick restoration of agriculture could be expected, on the basis of which industry would revive and develop. This, in turn, would provide the material conditions for the remoulding of the individual peasants.

As early as 1918, in his "‘Left-Wing’ Childishness and Petty-Bourgeois Mentality", Lenin had analysed the

¹ *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 7, pp. 316-17.

economic structure of Russia in the transition period, pointing out that there were five economic forms in Russia—the patriarchal, natural economy, the small commodity production of the individual peasants, private capitalism, state capitalism, and socialism. He later classified them into three basic forms, i.e., capitalism, small commodity production, and socialism, represented respectively by the three social forces of the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie (peasantry) and the proletariat. During the transition period, the struggle of "Who will win?" went on between socialism and capitalism, and socialism could achieve victory only when the proletariat defeated capitalism and all small commodity production was taken into the orbit of the large-scale socialist economy. The New Economic Policy, which became operative with the implementation of the tax in kind, was a policy for ensuring the establishment of socialist economic foundations. On the initiative of Lenin, the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) adopted the New Economic Policy and Lenin fully explained it in "The Tax in Kind". As Stalin said, the New Economic Policy was "a special policy of the proletarian state aimed at permitting capitalism while the commanding positions are held by the proletarian state, aimed at a struggle between the capitalist and socialist elements, aimed at increasing the role of the socialist elements to the detriment of the capitalist elements, aimed at the victory of the socialist elements over the capitalist elements, aimed at the abolition of classes and the building of the foundations of a socialist economy".¹

¹ Stalin, "The Fourteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U. (B.)", *Works*, Moscow, Vol. 7, p. 374.

There was ideological confusion and political wavering among quite a number of people when Party policy made this momentous change. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Trotsky opened up an attack on the Party and maliciously provoked a great debate. This was followed by a campaign against Lenin launched by opportunist groups of various hues, such as the "Left Communists" headed by Bukharin, the "Workers' Opposition" and the "Democratic-Centralists".

THE DEBATE OVER THE QUESTION OF THE TRADE UNIONS

The debate started over the question of the trade unions. However, the trade unions were not in fact the main question confronting Party policy at that time, and the debate went far beyond the trade union question. The actual point at issue was "the policy to be adopted towards the peasantry, who were rising against War Communism, the policy to be adopted towards the mass of the non-Party workers, and, in general, what was to be the approach of the Party to the masses in the period when the Civil War was coming to an end", as was later pointed out in the resolution of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), adopted in January 1925.¹

In order to revive the national economy, the masses of the workers had to be induced to rally ever more closely around the Party and the Soviet government and take an

¹ *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course*, Moscow, 1951, p. 389.

active part in restoring and developing industry. Undoubtedly, this would have to be done by the Party and the trade unions by the method of persuasion. Trotsky, however, demanded a "shaking up" of the trade unions, regarding them as government bodies, and he urged the introduction of coercion and military methods. His policy was aimed at setting the worker masses against the Party and splitting the working class. Lenin said:

If the Party splits with the trade unions, then it is the Party's fault, and Soviet power will be sure to perish. We have no mainstay other than the millions of proletarians. . . .¹

In criticizing Trotsky, Lenin explained the nature and role of the trade unions, and the relations of the trade unions to the state, the Party and the proletariat. He defined the trade unions as "schools of administration, schools of management, schools of Communism".² The trade union was the bridge linking the Party and the working class. Lenin said:

. . . the organisations which embrace the whole class cannot directly effect the proletarian dictatorship. The dictatorship can be effected only by the vanguard which has absorbed into itself the revolutionary energy of the class.³

¹ "Report on the Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions at a Meeting of the Communist Fraction of the Second All-Russian Mineworkers' Congress", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 32, p. 37.

² "The Trade Unions, the Present Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 9, p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Though Bukharin formed a "buffer" group in this debate he actually supported Trotsky's opposition to Lenin. Lenin said that what Bukharin did was to pour kerosene on the fire and call it "buffer kerosene".

In the course of the debate Trotsky attacked Lenin, saying that Lenin approached the question "politically", while he approached it "economically" and was "concerned about production". Bukharin took an eclectic stand, declaring that it was of equal value to approach it either "economically" or "politically", and that Lenin and Trotsky had each overemphasized one aspect of the question. Lenin refuted these erroneous views and in his "Once Again on the Trade Unions, the Present Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin", he provided a profound explanation of the dialectical relationship between politics and economics. He wrote:

Politics are the concentrated expression of economics, I repeated in my speech, because I had already heard this totally unjustified — and from the lips of a Marxist totally impermissible — reproach about my "political" approach before. Politics cannot but have precedence over economics. To argue differently means forgetting the A B C of Marxism.

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... the *only* way the matter stands (and it is the only way the matter *can* stand from the Marxian point of view) is that without a proper political approach to the subject the given class cannot maintain its rule, and *consequently* cannot solve *its own production problems*.¹

¹ *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 9, pp. 54, 55.

On the heels of Trotsky in his campaign against Lenin came the "Workers' Opposition", an anarcho-syndicalist factional group. Though they were apparently at opposite poles the "Workers' Opposition" and Trotsky joined forces. The latter was trying to disintegrate the Party and the dictatorship of the proletariat through the "governmentalization of the trade unions", while the former was aiming to abolish the leadership of the Party and the dictatorship of the proletariat through the transfer of all economic management to an "All-Russian Producers' Congress".

Lenin said that syndicalism transferred the management of branches of industry to the masses of non-Party workers, who were divided according to industry, "thus destroying the need for the Party, and without carrying on prolonged work either in training the masses or in *actually* concentrating in *their* hands the management of the whole of national economy".¹ He further said:

In order to govern, it is necessary to have an army of steeled communist revolutionaries; this exists and is called the Party. All the syndicalist nonsense — the stipulation that candidates must be producers — all this should be thrown into the waste-paper basket.²

At the Tenth Congress of the Party Lenin went further in repudiating these deviations. He said that what the

¹ "The Party Crisis", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 9, p. 35.

² "Report on the Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions at a Meeting of the Communist Fraction of the Second All-Russian Mineworkers' Congress", *op. cit.*, p. 41.

syndicalists advocated represented a complete departure from Marxism. This was because:

Firstly, the concept "producer" combines proletarians with semiproletarians and small commodity producers, thus radically departing from the fundamental concept of the class struggle and from the fundamental demand for drawing a precise distinction between classes.

Secondly, banking on the non-Party masses, flirting with them . . . is no less a radical departure from Marxism.¹

To cover up its anarcho-syndicalist stand, the "Workers' Opposition" defended itself by quoting Engels' point of view on the union of producers. Lenin pointed out that it was utterly impossible for the "Workers' Opposition" to defend its point on the basis of Engels' thesis, "because it is quite obvious, and an exact quotation of the corresponding passage will prove, that Engels talked about Communist society, in which there would be no classes. This is indisputable to all of us. When there will be no classes in society there will be only producers; there will be no workers and peasants. And we know perfectly well from all the works of Marx and Engels that they drew a very clear distinction between the period in which classes still exist and the period in which they will no longer exist. Marx and Engels pitilessly ridiculed all ideas, talk and assumptions about the disappearance of classes before Communism. . . ."²

¹"Preliminary Draft of the Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party on the Syndicalist and Anarchist Deviation in Our Party", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 503.

²"Party Unity and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Deviation", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 9, p. 124.

Lenin analysed the origin of the anarcho-syndicalist deviation. He said:

The said deviation is due partly to the influx into the Party of former Mensheviks and also of workers and peasants who have not yet fully assimilated the communist world outlook; mainly, however, this deviation is due to the influence exercised upon the proletariat and on the Russian Communist Party by the petty-bourgeois element. . . .¹

The Party organizations rallied closely around Lenin during his debate with Trotsky, Bukharin and the "Workers' Opposition" and it ended with the defeat of these opportunist groups. In March 1921, the Tenth Congress of the Party summarized the debate over the trade union question and adopted resolutions on "Party Unity" and "The Syndicalist and Anarchist Deviation in Our Party", both of which had been drafted by Lenin.

GETTING THE PEASANTS TO TAKE THE SOCIALIST ROAD VIA CO-OPERATION

Lenin always maintained the view that after gaining political power, the proletariat must lead the peasant masses to embark on the road to socialism by way of collectivization. After the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) he went further in the concrete study of this question and put forward a plan

¹"Preliminary Draft of the Resolution of the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party on the Syndicalist and Anarchist Deviation in Our Party", *op. cit.*, p. 502.

for co-operatives which was designed to induce the peasants to join in the building of socialism.

Diametrically opposed to Lenin's views on this question were those of the Right and "Left" opportunists. The Right opportunists held that the proletariat should not raise the question of the seizure of power and the socialization of the means of production until after capitalism had concentrated the agricultural means of production by ruining the millions of peasants and turning them into farm labourers. The "Left" opportunists maintained that after assuming power the proletariat should turn the means of production of the small peasants into public property by the method of expropriation.

These ridiculous notions of the opportunists were refuted by Lenin in "The Tax in Kind", and in his last works, such as "On Co-operation", "Our Revolution", and "Better Fewer, But Better".

Stalin outlined Lenin's thesis as follows:

a) Favourable conditions for the assumption of power should not be missed — the proletariat should assume power without waiting until capitalism succeeded in ruining the millions of small and medium individual producers;

b) The means of production in industry should be expropriated and converted into public property;

c) As to the small and medium individual producers, they should be gradually united in producers' co-operatives, i.e., in large agricultural enterprises, collective farms;

d) Industry should be developed to the utmost and the collective farms should be placed on the modern technical basis of large-scale production, not expro-

priating them, but on the contrary generously supplying them with first-class tractors and other machines;

e) In order to ensure an economic bond between town and country, between industry and agriculture, commodity production (exchange through purchase and sale) should be preserved for a certain period, it being the form of economic tie with the town which is *alone acceptable* to the peasants, and Soviet trade — state, cooperative, and collective-farm — should be developed to the full and the capitalists of all types and descriptions ousted from trading activity.¹

Lenin's co-operative plan was a great programme for inducing the peasant masses to take the socialist road under working-class leadership and build socialism together with the working class.

¹Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*, F.L.P.H., Moscow, pp. 16-17.