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**Misinterpretations
of the Historical
Experience
of the OCTOBER
Socialist
Revolution**

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The October Revolution and
Our Time

•
The Current Versions

•
From Positions of
"Superrevolutionism"



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of the OCTOBER
Socialist
Revolution**

A Brief Survey



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Foreword

The social, economic and cultural pattern of every historical epoch is determined by a "pivotal" event. The pattern of the 20th century has been determined by the liberation revolutions sparked off by the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 in Russia.

Marx called social revolutions "the locomotives of history". Opening up before mankind the way into the future, revolutions further its advance to a new, higher level of development. Since the days of the Paris Commune of 1871 more than a hundred revolutions and major class battles have taken place in various countries, dramatically changing the picture of the modern world and giving a powerful impetus to the course of world history.

A revolution is always an offspring of objective reality. So long as contradictions exist in the world, which are due to the conflict between antagonistic classes, social revolutions are inevitable.

This fundamental law governing the development of the modern world is being disputed in all possible ways by Western ideologists, be they bourgeois conservatives or "leftists".

Though they advance different arguments, they share a common desire to prove what cannot be proved; they maintain, for example, that revolutions, such as the Great October Revolution in Russia, are

an archaism, a stage that mankind has already passed, at least with regard to the industrial capitalist countries. And they go out of their way to belittle the significance of the October Revolution itself, misinterpreting its causes and its consequences.

In 1957, the year which marked the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution, a book entitled *The Two Revolutions. An Eye-Witness Study of Russia, 1917* appeared in London. Its author, R. H. Bruce Lockhart, was a British secret agent holding a diplomatic passport during his assignment in Russia before and immediately after the victory of the October Revolution. Comparing the February and the October Revolutions of 1917, he failed to understand the difference between them and to explain why the working people of Russia followed the Bolsheviks and fully accepted their programme, and why the bourgeois Provisional Government ended up like the "emperor without clothes".

The author concludes his book with these words: "It is still too early for anyone to attempt a complete balance of the virtues and evils of the Russian Revolutions."¹

Lockhart was either being sly or was genuinely mistaken, but this is of no importance in the given case. Time is not to be blamed for the fact that Lockhart and like-minded politicians and ideologists utterly failed to understand the essence of the October Revolution. What is of importance is the class stand from which this or that author looks at the October Revolution and assesses the changes it has brought about.

The essence of any political doctrine, theory or concept, their class roots and political substance, are

¹ R. H. Bruce Lockhart. *The Two Revolutions. An Eye-Witness Study of Russia, 1917*, London Phoenix House Ltd., 1957, p. 115.

most clearly revealed in their attitude towards the October Revolution; their place in today's ideological struggle and the degree of their influence on the development of social life are determined by it. This fact is admitted by bourgeois authors themselves. For instance, Professor James H. Billington of Princeton University has noted that while the chief task of the thinker of the 19th century was to define his attitude towards the French Revolution, the central task of the man in our time is to assess the Russian Revolution.

Professor V. L. Allen, a member of the National Council of Britain's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, justly pointed out that the anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917 is not merely a memorable historical date; the October Revolution is an outstanding political event. Professor Allen stressed that the significance of the October Revolution cannot be confined to 1917 since it is not merely a Russian revolution but a revolution accomplished by the working class of Russia, not an isolated episode but a historical process.

Each anniversary of the October Revolution is a landmark on the way towards the revolutionary renovation of reality. It is also an occasion for the falsifiers of history to step up their attacks on the homeland of the world's first socialist revolution, to violently distort everything that is associated with the revolutionary struggle of the working people of Russia.

In the year marking the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution, the aims of these attacks and distortions are even more apparent although there is nothing striking or new in their ideological and political content.

Two hundred years ago one of the leaders of bourgeois revolution in France, Maximilien

Robespierre, warned the insurgent people against taking an overserious attitude towards the opponents of the revolution, "these pitiful men", as he called them. "I know full well," he told the National Convent of the French Republic, "that they want the Republic to think only of them, but the Republic is occupied with the cause of freedom."

The same is true of our time. Today, when many revolutionary movements on all continents are fighting for the "cause of freedom" it is hardly worth paying too much attention to criticisms of revolutionary theory and practice. But we should not ignore them altogether either. They deserve some attention because by distorting the real meaning of the historical experience of the October Revolution of 1917 and of the experience in the building of a new society following the revolution, the critics give the masses a wrong interpretation of that historic event, of its causes and social consequences.

But before examining the misinterpretations of the essence and historical experience of the October Revolution commonly found in contemporary ideological literature in the West, let us indicate—without going into all the specific events of those days (they are dealt with in works by Soviet historians, many of which were translated into foreign languages)—only those major aspects of the experience of the socialist revolution in Russia which are relevant to the progressive movements of our time.

The October Revolution and Our Time

The October Revolution of 1917 was brought about by many historical circumstances. The Russia of those days happened to be that link in the general chain of capitalism where all the inherent contradictions of capitalism were concentrated in the most acute form. There is no doubt that the time and place of the October Revolution were predetermined historically. It is equally beyond doubt that the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia and, following it, the building of a socio-economic structure unprecedented in history drastically changed the face of the entire contemporary world. From that moment began the chronicle of a human civilization that is free of exploitation.

It took feudalism about two centuries to prove its superiority over the slave-owning mode of production. And no less than a century passed before capitalism was able to overcome feudalism. Socialism needed only about twenty-five years to establish itself; in thirty years' time it has become a world system.

The example of the workers and peasants of Russia, who for the first time in the history of mankind took power into their own hands (which meant a radical change in the political function of the masses who henceforth stepped into the role of active

builders of the new social system), is being followed, in one way or another, to a greater or lesser degree, by many nations around the world. This bears out what Lenin said in his report *Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution*: "The farther that great day recedes from us, the more clearly we see the significance of the proletarian revolution in Russia..."¹

The slogans under which the October Revolution triumphed are not something of bygone days; they are still relevant today.

The basic features of the Russian revolution are: the vanguard role of the proletariat; its alliance with other toiling sections of the population, above all the working peasantry; the decisive political influence and leadership of the revolutionary party of the working class; and the replacement of capitalist private ownership of the basic means of production by public ownership. These general laws of the revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism have been confirmed by recent history. Over the seven decades that have passed since the October Revolution they have been corroborated by the social practice of the nations that have carried out a socialist revolution. Naturally, in each of these countries the struggle of the working people has had and will always have distinctive features of its own, depending on the level of political, economic and cultural development of the given country and on its national traditions. Lenin said: "The revolution proceeds in its own way in every country... Every country has to go through definite political stages."²

After embarking on the socialist path these countries began tackling in their own way the problems of setting up their systems of government, building their

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 33, p. 51.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, p. 123.

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industrial bases, transforming agriculture and promoting cultural and intellectual development.

In none of the socialist countries were the ways, forms and methods of accomplishing the socialist revolution a mere mechanical repetition of another nation's experience. In each of these countries—whether in the German Democratic Republic or Poland, Hungary or Cuba, Mongolia or Yugoslavia, Laos or China—the revolution took a form that was dictated by the particular alignment of class forces in the country, by the national way of life, and by external political conditions. But the revolutions in these countries had one common determining factor: they all signified a transition to a fundamentally new type of social relations.

Future revolutions will introduce even greater diversity into the concrete forms of transition to the new social system. But this diversity will not nullify that common factor which determines the essence of the socialist revolution and socialist development. In this matter, too, the Great October Socialist Revolution has been and remains an invaluable source of experience, a school for creative revolutionary work of the masses.

Taken as a whole, that experience shows that in its essence and in its impact on the course of world history the socialist revolution differs radically from all previous social revolutions: instead of merely changing the forms of exploitation it eradicates it altogether, thereby transferring power to the working people and impelling them to social actions unprecedented in scope. In this sense the socialist revolution is that milestone from which the conscious and purposeful making of history begins.

Of course, life itself indicates the correct ways of utilizing past experience and reminds us again and again that we must take a historical approach when

analysing the general and the particular in the development of the revolutionary process, while at the same time recognizing the universality of the objective laws of revolutionary struggle disclosed by the October Revolution.

With the formation of the world socialist system the very conditions for the transition to socialism of nations that had embarked upon this path have changed substantially. It may be recalled that by 1919 socialism was a reality in one country alone, namely, Soviet Russia, which accounted for 16 per cent of the world's territory and eight per cent of its population. Soviet Russia's "weight" in the world economy was insignificant: it produced about one per cent of world industrial output. By the mid-1980s socialism had become a reality in fifteen countries on three continents—Europe, Asia and Latin America. These countries account for 26 per cent of the territory of the world, 33 per cent of its population, and for 40 per cent of world industrial production.

In July 1918, speaking of the October Revolution's impact on social progress worldwide, Lenin pointed out that the epoch had come when socialism would be moving from the realm of theory to the realm of the practical work of the masses. "The times have passed... when we used to argue about the socialist programme on the basis of book knowledge," he said. "Today socialism can be discussed only on the basis of experience."¹

Over the last four decades the socialist world has developed new means and methods of organizing production and management and of solving major economic problems.

While appreciating what has been achieved, the Communist Parties of the socialist countries, far from

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 27, p. 514.

resting on their laurels, are aware that there are difficulties both of an objective and subjective nature in the development of their countries. For it is impossible to accomplish at once such major tasks as the going over to the intensive development of the economy, the implementation of social programmes, and the overcoming of the psychology and morality that are alien to socialism. The solution of these problems requires time, creative search and, of course, the accumulated experience of the socialist states.

The victory of the workers and peasants of multi-national Russia, the movement in its former backward outlying districts for political, economic and cultural equality with the central regions of the country, the tremendous experience in the search for and application of the means and methods of accelerating that movement—all these gave a powerful impetus to the anti-imperialist, national liberation struggle of the peoples of the colonies and semi-colonies. Today, according to United Nations figures, there remain only about twenty non-self-governing territories in the world.

The October Revolution of 1917 highlighted the issue which Émile Zola at the end of the last century defined as "the great issue of the 20th century", namely, the struggle between labour and capital, between the bourgeoisie and the working class.

This struggle is taking on new aspects today. The organized actions of workers are acquiring increasingly mass character and becoming more dynamic. The very nature of their social and political demands is changing: they are now increasingly aimed against the monopolies.

As the experience of the October Revolution has shown, the key factor in forming an anti-monopoly and socialist ideology and in organizing mass

struggle for socialist goals is the Marxist-Leninist parties—the revolutionary vanguard of the working class and its allies. When the Communist parties first emerged their membership, with few exceptions, was small. Today there are more than 80 million Communists in nearly one hundred countries. During the 1970s alone the number of Communists increased from 2.3 to 3 million in Western Europe, from 630,000 to 1.3 million in the non-socialist countries of Asia, in Australia and Oceania, from 20,000 to 70,000 in Africa, and from 400,000 to 490,000 in North and South America.

To be sure, the struggle for socialist transformations had its ups and downs. Errors were also made often owing to “revolutionary impatience”. The French Communist writer André Wurmser has noted: “We underestimated the difficulties in searching for new ways... We thought that if one link in the chain had been broken the whole chain was smashed, and that if the revolution had triumphed in Russia yesterday it meant we would be victorious tomorrow. Probably we had not quite correctly assessed imperialism’s capacity for mobilizing its forces in the fight for its existence.” Whatever might have been the case, Wurmser concludes, “We appreciate the significance of the October Revolution no matter what time will it take to implement the radical changes whose main foundation it had laid.”

Here is what James Stewart, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland, writes: “‘Land, bread and peace’ was the revolutionary programme of the Bolsheviks, which revolutionized not only the former tsarist empire but changed the world, creating conditions for the appearance of the socialist community...”¹

¹ *World Marxist Review*, November 1984, p. 11.

The October Revolution has had a real impact on the destinies of not only Russia but the whole world. This is something which cannot be denied.

Amplitude of Assessments

Even the opponents of the October Revolution have to reckon with this. For all their diversity, their appraisals show that facts cannot be hushed up. It has proved impossible simply to "disregard" the October Revolution, to dismiss it as a "curious episode in history", and to "neglect" the qualitative, deep-going social, economic and political changes initiated by the revolution.

And so there are different and even contradictory appraisals of the October Revolution by bourgeois historians. This has been noted by the French bourgeois historian Marc Ferro, who writes in his book *The October Revolution of 1917: Birth of a Society* (Paris, 1976): "Some assert that the October Revolution was a coup d'état, while others call it an uprising or an upheaval. Some emphasize the mass character of the movement that unfolded and the fact that it was joined by the majority of the population, while others insist on the version of a party plot..."

Many non-Marxist historians of the October Revolution, however, are compelled to give a correct interpretation of the significance of that revolution, of its essence and character. For example, Robert Service, lecturer in history at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University of London, the author of a five-volume political biography of Lenin, writes that "the October Revolution is the crucial event in our modern times. It transformed Russia and led to a re-shaping of politics across the European continent; its repercussions

are still being registered around the globe today.”¹

This passage reflects the point of view of those social scientists abroad who do not absolutely deny the significance of the October Revolution. Their intention is to make a more or less realistic assessment of the causes of the “Russian revolution”, of its motive forces, of the role of the Bolshevik Party and its leaders, and of Lenin’s role in particular.

In noting the significance of the October Revolution for the destinies of the peoples of Russia and the whole world, Robert Service stresses Lenin’s role in organizing the October Revolution and in the subsequent implementation of its ideals. “Lenin helped to inaugurate a new political order,” he writes. “Decades after his death, it remains a matter of consequence to elucidate the meaning of his momentous life.”² This point of view is shared by another British political scientist, Elyse Topalian.³

Researchers who take this approach reject many of the cock-and-bull stories invented by bourgeois propaganda as regards the events of October 1917 in Russia. They use in their research documents of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet government, the works of Lenin and other Soviet leaders, and Marxist works, mostly by Soviet historians. The standpoint of these bourgeois researchers is well stated by the British social scientist John Keep in his book *The Russian Revolution. A Study in Mass Mobilization*, which came out in 1976. He writes: “Anyone seeking to probe into the lower depths of Russian political life in 1917 requires a keen scalpel and an ample reserve of patience; he must dissect what seems to be a homogeneous

¹ Robert Service, *Lenin: a Political Life*, Vol. I, *The Strength of Contradiction*, London; Macmillan Press Ltd., 1985, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ See Elyse Topalian, *Lenin*, London, 1983.

organization into its constituent parts and locate the actual whereabouts of its directing centre; he must follow closely its evolution in time..."¹

But even such authors tend to misinterpret certain aspects of the October Revolution. This bears out Lenin's appraisal of the class essence of bourgeois social science: "The bourgeoisie's recognition of the revolution cannot be sincere, irrespective of the personal integrity of one bourgeois ideologist or another."² They also sometimes confuse—whether they do so deliberately or not is of no particular importance—historical facts, exaggerate or underestimate the role of this or that personality, mostly of the leaders of the Bolshevik Party, and the achievements of the Soviet government formed in 1917.

In our approach to such Sovietologists we should base ourselves on Lenin's well-known idea which he put forth in connection with foreign-policy activities but which has a much broader meaning. He said: "It is obviously by no means a matter of indifference to us whether we shall deal with those people from the bourgeois camp who are inclined to settle the problem by war, or with those who are inclined towards pacifism, even the worst kind of pacifism, which from the communist viewpoint will not stand the slightest criticism."³ In other words, we should not be indifferent to the political and scientific orientation of the interpreters of the October Revolution. For it is one thing when bourgeois ideologists, in the course of their research, rectify their views, abandon certain speculations and even come quite close to a genuinely scientific treatment of the subject (such people are few, of course); and quite another when bourgeois

¹ John L. H. Keep, *The Russian Revolution. A Study in Mass Mobilization*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976, p. XII.

² V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 9, p. 126.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 33, p. 264.

and other authors care nothing about the development of historical science, let alone historical truth. This section of Sovietologists is concerned about one thing only—how to prevent the working people in the non-socialist world from having a correct idea about the October Revolution. In this endeavour they do not even observe the norms of scientific discussions.

Such interpreters of the October Revolution are entirely unscrupulous. Their methods are very similar to those Lenin wrote of in his article *A Partnership of Lies* back in April 1917, when the Bolshevik Party (which had embarked on preparations for and conduct of the socialist revolution) and its leaders came under a torrent of slanderous attacks. He wrote: "It is the capitalists and the capitalist press who are making a great noise, who are trying to *shout down* the truth, to prevent it from being heard, to drown it in a torrent of invective and shouts, to *prevent* an earnest *elucidation* of the facts."¹

In the last few years some new elements have appeared in the attacks on the October Revolution. But the difference between them and the earlier methods is of minor importance: they affect mostly particulars, not the basic principles. For example, blatant lies are less often made use of. More pains are taken to clothe the substance of the anti-communist speeches and works in a semblance of objectiveness. The task amounts to creating an effect of plausibility. The arguments, theoretical propositions and conclusions can be summarized and grouped into several versions.

Let us have a look at them.

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 24, p. 118.

The Current Versions

Plato once said that anyone who wishes to get to know another person well must have three qualities: understanding, goodwill and boldness. Judging from what is said and written by the anti-communists about the October Revolution, we can safely say that none of them has any of these qualities.

The "Incitement Theory". Widespread among the misinterpretations of the October Revolution is the "incitement theory", which distorts not only the causes of the socialist revolution in Russia and the way it proceeded, but also Lenin's position as leader of that revolution. In this version Lenin allegedly regarded the Russian socialist revolution merely as a means of bringing about a world revolution. The British sociologist and historian Robert Daniels, for example, maintains that Lenin saw the principal role of the October Revolution in giving an impetus to the revolution in the West.¹ The director of the Paris newspaper *Le Monde*, André Fontaine, is of the same opinion.²

This and similar conclusions show a basic unwillingness to recognize that socialist revolutions can

¹ See Robert V. Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism*, Vol. 1, *Communism in Russia*, London, I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1985, p. XXVII.

² See *Le Monde*, March 22, 1985.

triumph in individual countries; the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism do not warrant such an attitude. So references to Lenin are absolutely irrelevant here.

None other than Lenin himself, analysing the contradictions of capitalism's imperialist stage and the general state of affairs in the world, substantiated and formulated the conclusion that it is possible, owing to the uneven economic and political development of states, for the revolution and socialism to triumph first in several or even in one country. He thereby showed that the worldwide liberation movement of the proletariat and of all working people constitutes an entire historical phase consisting of a series of battles against the exploitative system. The above-mentioned authors would do well to read Lenin carefully. Lenin showed that although the capitalist system was on the whole ripe for socialist revolutions, the rate of growth of the contradictions differed greatly in its various links owing to the aforementioned unevenness. The degree of their intensity and acuteness also differed from country to country. It was precisely the internal social contradictions, exacerbated by the sharp inter-imperialist conflicts that brought about the First World War, that manifested themselves most forcefully in Russia. That is why it became the centre of the world revolutionary movement. The Russian proletariat and its allies were faced with a vital and most difficult task—to be the first to smash the chain of the world domination of the bourgeoisie. The chain was broken.

Of course, the socialist revolution unfolding in Russia could not but exert a powerful impact on the development of socialist revolutions in other countries. Marx and Engels had said that a socialist revolution, in whatever country it has started, is a

matter of concern to the proletariat of all countries. Proceeding from this assumption Lenin regarded the Russian revolution as the bastion of the world revolution. At the Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets in January 1918, Lenin quoted Marx and Engels who said: "The Frenchman will begin it, and the German will finish it," and added: "Things have turned out differently from what Marx and Engels expected and we, the Russian working and exploited classes, have the honour of being the vanguard of the international socialist revolution; we can now see clearly how far the development of the revolution will go."¹

Indeed, the socialist revolution on an international scale consists of a number of stages divided by small or big intervals, while revolutions in individual countries are links in a single chain encompassing an entire historical epoch. Moreover, in each country the revolutionary process unfolds in specific national-historical conditions, and each country has its own valuable historical experience. It is therefore an irrefutable fact that socialist revolutions carried out by individual nations have a value of their own which does not fit into the framework forced upon it by the "incitement theory".

The Thesis on the "Military Origin" of the October Revolution. According to this thesis the October Revolution was a direct consequence of the First World War. This version was put forth almost immediately after the victory of the revolution. It was zealously advocated by the White Russian emigrés, particularly by the former leaders of parties which expressed the interests and aspirations of the big and middle bourgeoisie of Russia. And it is circulating to this day.

For instance, the sociologist Paul Mattick writes in

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 26, p. 472.

his book *Marxism. Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie?*: "The concept of world revolution was the expected result of the imperialist war."¹ He is echoed by the "new philosophers" of France, who made so much noise in the late 1970s and early 1980s with their "models" of development of the present-day world. One of them, André Glucksmann, wrote: "Marxism has always come to power as a result of wars. It is in the course of a war that it has emerged, and in war it continues to see the mode of its existence."²

Is this similarity of views between men of different ideological-political views a coincidence? Hardly, considering that their judgements are based on one and the same approach towards the analysis of events. They take the outward aspects of events for their essence, and their effect for their cause. Besides, the logic of their arguments is in glaring conflict with the logic of the given historical processes.

Of course, a war brought about by the contradictions inherent in capitalism cannot but aggravate the social antagonisms and the crisis of the entire social system, and lead to the awakening of revolutionary sentiments among the working people. While emphasizing this, Lenin warned that even in such a case the social crisis and the revolutionary sentiments of the masses arise only when a revolutionary situation has emerged.³

It was the same with the Second World War, at the end of which (and also in the first postwar years) socialist revolutions occurred in a number of countries. The proponents of the concept that "war gives birth to revolution" are confident that these facts

¹ Paul Mattick, *Marxism. Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie?*, M. E. Sharpe, Inc. Armonk, New York, The Merlin Press, London, 1983, p. 261.

² *L'Express*, June 30, 1979, p. 26.

³ See V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 21, p. 313.

fully confirm their thesis. They are mistaken. Not every war inevitably leads to a revolutionary explosion, just as the road to the revolution does not necessarily lie through war. In our time there are quite a few wars which have had the opposite effect. For example, the Arab-Israeli wars of the 1960s-1970s, or the senseless Iraq-Iran war which has already taken more than a million lives.

On the other hand, a revolutionary situation may emerge in peacetime too. The revolution in Cuba, for example, took place when the country was not waging a war. The same is true of the revolutions in Chile (which was defeated) and in Nicaragua, as well as of the revolutionary changes in Ethiopia, which have not been connected with wars between countries. So the thesis according to which Russia's Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 was solely a direct result of the First World War is incorrect. This is borne out by subsequent experience of the revolutionary transformation of the world.

The Concept of "Russian Backwardness". Equally groundless is the assertion that Russia was "unprepared" for the socialist revolution and for the building of socialism because of its extreme economic backwardness. The October Revolution is thus said to have merely "completed" what had been started by the bourgeois February Revolution of 1917, i.e., to have paved the way for the establishment of developed capitalism in Russia. Paul Mattick, for instance, writes: "The Russian revolution could not be a socialist revolution, something that, in a sentence, implies the abolition of wage labour and the socialization of all the means of production. Such a revolution presupposes a developed capitalism and the existence of a proletariat able to determine the social production process. Such conditions did not

exist in Russia except in the first stages of their development.”¹

Lenin had described as incredibly pedantic and “infinitely stereotyped” the opinion of those who held that Russia was “not yet ripe for socialism, that, as certain ‘learned’ gentlemen... put it, the objective economic premises for socialism do not exist in our country.”² In fact such premises did exist.

At the end of the 19th century, Lenin, carrying on polemics with the peasant-oriented Socialists-Populists, proved that Russia had been developing in accordance with the general laws of capitalism, and that it had entered, though somewhat late, the highest stage of capitalism. After making profound study of the economic situation in the leading capitalist powers, Lenin divided them into three groups.

In the first group he included what he called the “three chief (fully independent) countries: Great Britain, Germany and the United States.” In the second group—“secondary (first class, but not fully independent)” countries: France, Russia and Japan. And in the third group—Italy and Austria-Hungary.³ “But the basic forces—and the basic forms of social economy—are the same in Russia as in any capitalist country,”⁴ Lenin emphasized. In Russia the degree of concentration of production was even higher than in many more developed countries. Thus, in 1909, in only 45 industries there were more than 140 associations controlled by monopoly capital.

On the other hand, Lenin repeatedly pointed out that notwithstanding its great industrial centres, its high concentration of production and capital, and its monopoly associations, Russia had, particularly in its

¹ Mattick, *Op. cit.* pp. 198-199.

² V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 477-478.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 39, p. 202.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, p. 108.

agriculture, conspicuous survivals of feudalism, and that the country was dependent on foreign capital. Having in mind precisely these "secondary" factors in the development of the country, Lenin more than once called it "backward".

Nowadays these statements are used by unscrupulous critics of the October Revolution as "proof" that it was a "revolution of backwardness". In this way Lenin's statements are torn away from the general context of his discussions on the ways of development of Russia, on its role and place in the world capitalist system. They are examined apart from their dialectical interconnection with the specific historical conditions. Moreover, these critics deliberately disregard the fact that Lenin as a rule used the term "backwardness" as a relative quantity, only when comparing Russia with the aforementioned first group of capitalist powers.

Russia was one of those countries with a middle level of development where already in the first decade of the 20th century state monopoly capital had taken deep roots. "Capitalism had developed into imperialism, i.e., into monopoly capitalism," Lenin wrote, "and under the influence of the war it has become state monopoly capitalism. We have now reached the stage of world economy that is the immediate stepping stone to socialism."¹

After the victory of the October Revolution, Lenin, criticizing the views of a leading Party worker, Nikolai Bukharin, according to whom Russia was one of the underdeveloped countries, wrote: "Had we not reached a certain height of capitalism, we would not have been able to get anywhere."²

The Russian Communist Party's course towards

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 26, p. 386.

² *A Collection of Lenin's Works*, XI, p. 397 (in Russian).

the socialist revolution and the building of socialism rested on a solid foundation, namely: government by the proletariat allied with the poorest sections of the peasantry, ownership by the Soviet state of the basic means of production, and the alliance of the proletariat with other labouring classes, with the proletariat playing the leading role. "It is still not the building of socialist society, but it is all that is necessary and sufficient for it,"¹ Lenin wrote.

The October Revolution showed that it is quite unnecessary that there should be a bourgeois revolution first, and only after it has been carried out can a socialist revolution be undertaken. The October Revolution successfully accomplished all the democratic tasks it inherited from the February Revolution. Among them were: the abolition of the vestiges of feudalism and serfdom, and of the privileges enjoyed by certain social groups; the elimination of inequality between the nations, and of the inequality of women. The October Revolution implemented these and other, more specific tasks as the basic socialist transformations were carried out in the sphere of material production and relations of production.

The "Totalitarian Revolution" Version. Quite a few misinterpretations of the October Revolution are based on the idea that it was undemocratic in nature. It is said to have been a coup carried out by a clique which did not profoundly affect the nation's life and was imposed on the working people by "Bolshevik extremists" headed by Lenin. This version "fits" the October Revolution into the theory of "Soviet totalitarianism", which was particularly fashionable in the early 1980s among outspoken anti-Marxist authors as well as among those flirting with Marxism. For example, American Professor Stephen F. Cohen of

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 33, p. 468.

Princeton University writes: "In October 1917, the Bolsheviks (Communists), a small unrepresentative, and already or embryonically totalitarian party, usurped power... From that moment on, as of 1917, Soviet history was determined by the totalitarian political dynamics..."¹

And here is how the French sociologist Jacques Ellul treats the same subject: "The revolution of 1917 was accomplished not by the industrial proletariat, but by the vanquished and demoralized Russian army which was retreating in disorder and which Lenin managed to use for the usurpation of power." Since the Russian proletariat was not a participant in the revolution, Ellul continues, and since the seizure of power was not effected by the proletarian majority, there was no question of the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship on the country. "In Russia," he writes, "the working class was not an organized force at all. There was neither a genuinely proletarian party, nor sufficiently influential trade unions of workers. When power was usurped no proletarian organizations existed. That is why it was seized by a small group of people against the wishes of the proletariat, though it did so in the name of the proletariat. The [Soviet] government was born as a result of putsch."² And according to the American sociologist Douglas Kellner, author of *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, "the Russian Revolution has not resulted in liberation, but rather in a 'change in the mode of domination'."³

¹ Stephen F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience. Politics, History, Science, 1917*, New York, 1985, p. 5.

² Jacques Ellul, *Changer de révolution. L'inéluctable prolétariat*, Paris, 1982, p. 37.

³ Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984, p. 205.

Such views of bourgeois authors, as we have already noted, have something in common or fully coincide with those of the revisionists of Marxism. The latter are in the habit of distorting the views of Marx and Engels on revolution and opposing them to the views of Lenin. The French philosopher Roger Garaudy, for example, maintains that it was Marx's strong belief that socialism, as it stems from capitalism's contradictions which must develop to their logical end, can be established by exclusively peaceful means. Lenin, disregarding Marx's views, asserted, "used an opposite scheme and accomplished a voluntarist revolution in the name of the proletariat, which was in a minority (accounting for a mere three per cent of the gainfully-employed population in 1917)."¹

Such arguments pursue one specific purpose—to make the various classes and strata of the population, especially the petty bourgeoisie, doubt the ability of the proletariat to perform the role of vanguard in the anti-monopoly struggle, and particularly in the building of a new, non-exploitative civilization. Another aim is to discredit the role of the Bolshevik Party as organizer of the victorious October Revolution.

The real situation was different: Russia did have a working class that was ideologically quite mature. And all the four requisites which determined the strength of the proletariat were present: its comparatively large numerical strength; its leading role in the economy; its close contact with the masses; its good organization. The October Revolution vividly demonstrated that the Russian proletariat made maximum use of these qualities.

Let us look at its numerical strength first. It was three times larger than Garaudy's estimate and had

¹ *Le Monde*, December 20, 1984.

reached 15 million, which made up 10 per cent of the country's gainfully-employed population. And particularly numerous were its contingents that were concentrated in the key sectors of industry—in the heavy and mining industries, and also in transport. By early 1917 these branches employed 4,253,000 workers.

But that is not the only point. The October Revolution disclosed a most important objective law of the class struggle and of the entire historical—and not only revolutionary—process, namely, the fact that the strength of the proletariat is greater than its proportion in the whole population. This is explained by the fact that the proletariat expresses most accurately the vital interests of the vast majority of the population. That is why it succeeds in rallying in the common struggle all working people, i.e., it acts as the main driving force of the socialist revolution.

Were it not for the workers, for their growing class consciousness, for their determination to fight and win, for the efficient leadership of their political vanguard—the Bolshevik Party, there would have been no revolution in Russia. Lenin more than once emphasized: "We do not want a 'seizure' of power, because the entire experience of past revolutions teaches us that the only stable power is the one that has the backing of the majority of the population. 'Seizure' of power, therefore, would be adventurism, and our Party will not have it."¹

Thanks to this policy the Bolsheviks acquired tremendous prestige also in the eyes of the largest class in Russia—the peasantry. This became possible because Lenin's Party adopted and implemented a general democratic programme of action. "At the very moment of the October Revolution," Lenin

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 24, p. 418.

wrote, "we entered into an informal but very important (and very successful) political bloc with the petty-bourgeois peasantry by adopting the *Socialist-Revolutionary** agrarian programme in its entirety, without a single alteration—i.e., we effected an undeniable compromise in order to prove to the peasants that we wanted, not to 'steam-roller' them but to reach agreement with them."¹

The results of the elections to the City Dumas (Councils) in the summer and autumn of 1917 confirmed that the Bolsheviks had the support of the majority of the people. The results of the elections to the Petrograd City Duma (Petrograd was then the capital) in August 1917 showed that the proportion of the population supporting the Bolsheviks had increased from 20 to 33 per cent, and in the September elections to the Moscow Duma the figure had risen from 11 to 52 per cent.

But Lenin and the Party did not consider these quantitative indicators as an absolute. In the revolutionary struggle they attached paramount importance to the initiative of the advanced workers who inspired the masses to resolute actions.

None of the petty-bourgeois parties and organizations was making any serious preparations for the great upheaval, while the Bolshevik Party directed all its energies and organizational ability, and the entire strength of its Marxist conviction towards the accomplishment of the socialist revolution.

* The SRs (Socialist Revolutionaries) set up their party in 1902. They spoke on behalf of the "peasantry as a whole", refusing to recognize the class stratification of the countryside and the revolutionism of the industrial proletariat. When the revolutionary process developed and deepened in 1917, there emerged from the Socialist Revolutionary Party a Left Wing which opted for "ultra-revolutionism" and political extremism.—*Ed.*

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 31, p. 72

The directing body of the Bolsheviks—the Russian Bureau of the Party Central Committee—guided the work of Party organizations and groups in more than 200 cities and towns and on a number of major fronts of the First World War. The Party had politically well-educated workers who were dedicated to the cause of the proletariat. The Petrograd Party organization, with a membership of 2,000, had the closest contacts with Party committees in many cities.

Those who say that Lenin and the Bolsheviks preferred armed means to the peaceful means of taking over power are either mistaken or are deliberately distorting the facts. They forget, or pretend to forget, that Lenin himself was constantly developing the idea of Marx and Engels about the possibility of accomplishing the socialist revolution by peaceful means. "We Marxists have always been proud that we determined the expediency of any form of struggle by a precise calculation of the mass forces and class relationships," Lenin pointed out. "We have said that an insurrection is not always expedient: unless the prerequisites exist among the masses it is a gamble..."¹

In 1917 the working class of Russia did not manage to take power into its own hands by peaceful means. But their failure was by no means due to "extremism" on the part of the Bolsheviks, as the enemies of the October Revolution claimed in those days and still do now. The chief cause of the failure of a peaceful takeover of power was the policy of compromise towards the bourgeoisie adopted by the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) and Mensheviks and by their groups in the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. It was they, who had a majority in the Soviets, that refused to take over power by

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 27, p. 24.

peaceful means, on which the Bolsheviks insisted. Thus, the SRs and Mensheviks proved to be the opponents of the peaceful path in the revolution though such a path was possible at a certain time.

To sum up: there was no "plotting by a clique" in the pre-October period or in the days of the October Revolution, nor could there be. At the head of the workers and peasants of Russia stood the Bolshevik Party, steeled in political battles and armed with an advanced revolutionary theory. Lenin had given the Party a clear perspective of the struggle, which ended in the victory of the socialist revolution.

From Positions of "Superrevolutionism"

"There are people who are like shadows: they always slip away and escape observation; you cannot approach them or come close to their hearts. Even after long years of being in contact with them it is difficult to form a definite opinion of them. Not because they are complicated beings, but because they are spiritually impoverished."

These words belong to the prominent Soviet writer Fyodor Gladkov. They can be said not only of a certain type of politically neutral people, but also of a certain kind of politicians. As regards the latter, it means that, wishing to present themselves in a most favourable light, they prefer to manoeuvre, adapt, not to profess clearly outlined political and ideological views. They indeed are very poor spiritually.

This is precisely the political mask of the followers of Trotskyism, anarchism and other trends of petty-bourgeois pseudo-revolutionism. At the time of the October Revolution and immediately after it these trends were quite popular in Russia among certain social strata which temporarily affiliated themselves to the revolution and which tended to be impulsive and shunned day-to-day consistent Party work. Utilizing this "spontaneous revolutionism" and "revolutionary impatience" the leaders of these pseudo-revolutionary groups tried to challenge the Bolshevik

Party, Lenin and his followers. But the clear-cut programme of Lenin's Party and its consistent implementation enabled the Bolsheviks to free from the influence of the political adventurers a sizable section of those revolutionary-minded people who had mistakenly followed them. The mass base of the revolution was thus broadened.

In the USSR and other countries of the socialist community today there is no hotbed of pseudo-revolutionism. But in the non-socialist world there is.

In capitalist countries ultra-leftism has found a social audience. Moreover, this trend lives parasitically both on the successes of the working people's struggle and on its difficulties and setbacks. Today more than 800 ultra-left, mostly anarchist and Trotskyist groupings are operating in more than 90 non-socialist countries. These figures do not mean, of course, that ultra-leftism has turned into a major political factor. With few exceptions, the ultra-left groups are nothing more than "newspaper parties". No wonder one of the leaders of Latin American Trotskyists, Julio Posadas, has admitted: "The masses are not with us."

Ultra-leftism is dangerous for another reason. It impedes the formation of a genuinely revolutionary world outlook, sometimes bringing the anti-imperialist movement into a blind ally.

In recent years in a number of countries (France, Peru, Colombia) the ultra-leftists have been getting two to three per cent of the votes in elections to various bodies; in each case this means several hundred thousand votes. It reflects the degree to which pseudo-revolutionary ideology influences some sections of the working people. This is not something that can be disregarded.

It should be noted that since the 1970s there has been an increased tendency to spread anti-communist

and anti-Soviet views, even traditionally bourgeois views, with the use of "leftist", pseudo-Marxist rhetoric. This also applies to the question of the October Revolution. The polemic with pseudo-revolutionism, therefore, helps not only to show the harm done by the ultra-leftists, but also to reduce the influence of bourgeois propaganda which uses them to falsify the experience of the October Revolution and the theory and policies of real socialism.

The "Alchemists"

A characteristic feature of ultra-leftism is its unscrupulous use of legacy of the October Revolution under the pretext of the need to "revive" its ideals. The Trotskyists even define the period when these ideals were allegedly "trampled upon"—between 1923 and 1927. They point to those years because it was then that in the USSR the Communist Party completed its struggle against Trotskyism as a petty-bourgeois political trend which had tried to replace the Marxist-Leninist concept of the revolution and socialism by the Trotskyist theory of "permanent revolution", and Leninism with Trotsky's views.

The modern Trotskyists and bourgeois historians writing on the October Revolution generally pass over in silence the fact that Trotskyism was defeated in the Soviet Union. And if mentioned it is presented as a "deviation" from "revolutionary Marxism". The "cult of Leninism", writes the British Trotskyist Duncan Hallas, was used to counterbalance Trotsky's policy.¹

The anarchists give their own interpretation of the October events. They depict the October Revolution

¹ See Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern*, London, Brookmarks, 1985.

as no more than a variety of spontaneous mass protest against the autocracy and all kinds of government in general, as an exclusively anti-authoritarian movement.¹

The view that the October Revolution embodied the conceptions of anarchism and ultra-left adventurism is very widespread in the West. What is more, it forms the basis of a whole trend of criticism of the October Revolution. The political and ideological function of this trend is to belittle Marxism-Leninism as a unity of revolutionary theory and practice.

Things are made worse by the fact that in many countries Marxist-Leninist literature is hard to come by. Very often all manner of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois "theories of Marxism" are passed off as Marxist doctrines, while Marxism-Leninism itself is reduced to an armchair doctrine, to one of numerous branches of political extremism.

Such falsifications have had their effect. For example, in a survey conducted among young people by *l'Humanité*, the newspaper of the French Communist Party, many answered the question "What do you understand by Marxism?" by asking: "Which Marxism do you mean?" And few knew that it was owing to Marxism that the revolutionary movement had achieved notable successes and many nations had accomplished socialist revolutions and built socialism. "Marxism is great," said a 17-year-old girl, "but it is absolutely impracticable." Thus, *l'Humanité* comments, "Marxism is something brilliant, while communism is rejected."²

It is such attitudes that the anti-Marxists and anti-communists want to cultivate. "The crisis of Marxism

¹ See *The Russian Review*, January 1984, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 1-2; B. Bondjovani, *L'Anti-stalinismo di sinistra et la nature sociale dell'URSS*, Milano, 1975, p. 36.

² *l'Humanité*, May 20, 1986.

broke out when it began to be put into practice," maintains the Italian Professor Lucio Colletti. The anarchists argue in the same vain, but they go even farther. Every "-ism" that exists today, according to the West German anarchists, for example, is like honey: the more you lick it, the less you are satiated. Hence their conclusion: "Down with all ideologies!" Our aim, they say, is "to do away with the senseless ideological struggle, which is sapping our strength."¹

This aim is fully in accord with "classical" bourgeois ideology, the "antipode" of anarchism (extremes meet!). Bourgeois ideology sets out to embellish exploitative nature of capitalism and reduce to nought the ideological debate around the social problems that are tearing capitalist society apart. The views of the ultra-leftists are also used by bourgeois propaganda to prove the thesis that Marxist-Leninists have failed to reach agreement among themselves. What does Marxism-Leninism mean? What is the theory and practice of revolution? About these issues the propaganda keeps silent. "How to differentiate between Marxism, Leninism, Bolshevism, Stalinism, Maoism, Castroism and so on?" asks Professor Georges Labica. "In what do revisionism, Trotskyism, Eurocommunism, opportunism and so forth differ from each other?"²

Definite attempts are made to "dissolve" Marxism-Leninism in Trotskyist, anarchist and other non-proletarian ideologies. This reflects a desire to deny Marxism-Leninism, its universal character, by interpreting it in a manner that obscures its essence.

But let us return to ultra-leftism and its interpretation of the socialist revolution. That the ultra-left

¹ Jochen Weichold. *Anarchismus dnes*, Bratislava, 1984, pp. 123-124.

² Georges Labica, *Le marxisme-léninisme*, Paris, 1984, p. 8.

ideologists are inclined to theorize about forms of struggle without being in touch with the realities is most clearly seen in the Trotskyist theory of "permanent revolution". In this theory the Marxist idea of continuity of the revolution as the succession of the stages in the revolutionary struggle, each of which prepares the conditions necessary for transition to the next stage, is opposed by the subjectivist concept of "combined development", which deliberately mixes up different stages of revolutionary transformations. Like the alchemists of the past who thought in terms of "either the one or the other" and drew only on such mutually exclusive concepts as "warmth—cold", "dryness—dampness", the Trotskyists abide by the principle of "all or nothing". This brings them closer to the anarchist interpretation of the revolution as the voluntarist act of men who have risen in revolt. That is precisely why the anarchists support the Trotskyist theory, regarding it as a confirmation of their own idea of overthrowing capitalism "at one stroke" and of replacing it with "anarchist socialism".

Back in the years preceding the October Revolution Lenin showed that the theory of "permanent revolution" is an extremist one and has nothing in common with proletarian revolutionism. Trotskyists, and other ultra-leftists for that matter, gamble on the anti-capitalist sentiments of the petty bourgeoisie and profit from its desire to get rid as soon as possible of the power of Big Business which is its chief enemy and rival. That is why the Trotskyists and anarchists, though they may support the working class in the anti-capitalist struggle, manifest even greater haste and impatience than the working class itself. They are inclined to resort to "the most resolute" actions. But this ostentatious resoluteness also reveals a different aspect of petty-bourgeois pseudo-revolutionism—its wavering cha-

racter, its tendency to give in when the struggle runs into inevitable difficulties. Both these aspects can be clearly seen in the theory of "permanent revolution".

The interpretation of "permanent revolution" as a revolution that has no limit, that has a beginning but no end, or, to be more precise, whose completion is postponed to a historically indefinite period, reflects the views of those who accept only the first part of the socialist revolution—abolition of the power of the big capitalists—but reject its second part, namely, the building of socialism, for the sake of which, as a matter of fact, the revolution is accomplished.

It is from this standpoint that the Trotskyists have always denied the socialist character of the October Revolution, depicting it as merely a variety of an ordinary bourgeois revolution.

Trotsky and his supporters said that the October Revolution was of no historic consequence. This conclusion was a direct result of the discrepancy between the Trotskyist theory and the objective revolutionary practice. The same yardstick is used by Trotskyists even today in assessing any particular revolutionary event.

Trotskyism's right to make such an assessment is questioned even by bourgeois historians. Some of them doubt whether the Trotskyist theory reflects the real state of things and contains sound propositions. For example, the French sociologist Claude Journès, writes: "Trotsky was not a theorist. His writings were, as a rule, purely polemical, and therefore they create the impression that their author was in constant need of self-defence."¹ One cannot put the matter more succinctly.

¹ Claude Journès, *L'extrême gauche en Grande-Bretagne*, Paris, 1977, p. 113.

While calling themselves Marxists, the Trotskyists, anarchists and other ultra-leftists have always been trying to replace Marxism-Leninism with conceptions which do not accord with the revolutionary realities.

A New Propaganda Stunt: "The True Leaders of the October Revolution"

There is currently yet another trend in the mis-interpretation of the October Revolution. This trend aims at falsifying the facts concerning the place and role of some Party leaders in the pre-October and October events and in the socialist construction that began after the revolution. Although this trend emerged relatively recently, its roots go back to the period immediately preceding the October Revolution.

"All their concealed hatred for the popular masses rising to power they vented on Lenin," Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife and associate, wrote of the enemies of the revolution. "To them he personified the transfer of power to the workers, which threatened the entire existing order and all the privileges of the rich and of those who only recently were the rulers."¹

It is they who for a long time circulated the myth about Lenin and other prominent Party leaders being brought to Russia in a "sealed carriage", about the "German origin" of Bolshevism whose leaders were allegedly in the pay of German intelligence, and other absurdities. Curiously, even after so many years these ridiculous allegations are still going round.

Today less use is made of such crude slander since reading public have a better knowledge of history,

¹ Nadezhda K. Krupskaya, *Lenin and the Party*, Moscow, 1963, p. 14 (in Russian).

and it has become necessary to make such slander sound scientific. Nevertheless, we must not underestimate its tenacity. For the falsehoods spread today are based essentially on the same arguments. In most versions an attempt is made to oppose to Lenin other leaders, especially those who, before and after the victory of the October Revolution, had denounced Lenin's course for the socialist revolution and the building of socialism. "Lenin versus Trotsky" is a most common theme.

"**Leader Number One**" Trotsky is depicted as "the leader and organizer of the October Revolution". If Lenin planned the Bolshevik revolution, according to this version, Trotsky was its organizer. To make this sound convincing, the bourgeois press mentions the name of Lenin side by side with that of Trotsky whenever it deals with the October Revolution. The West German magazine *Stern*, for example, in one of its issues carried the portraits of prominent revolutionaries, with Lenin's photograph put next to Trotsky, calling the latter a "Marxist and revolutionary".¹

Those authors who seek to prove the thesis that Trotsky took part in directing the October insurrection (such authors are mostly Trotskyists) claim that Trotsky's joining the Bolshevik Party on the eve of the 1917 October Revolution was welcomed by Lenin. "Lenin did not lay down any conditions for admitting Trotsky into the Party,"² write the French Trotskyists Georges Haupt and Jean-Jacques Marie. And according to the American Trotskyist F. Dobbs, the differences between Lenin and Trotsky concerned secondary matters and not matters of principle.³

¹ *Stern*, October 3, 1985, p. 79.

² Georges Haupt, Jean-Jacques Marie, *Les bolchéviques par eux-mêmes*, Paris, 1969, p. 19.

³ See F. Dobbs, *Revolutionary Continuity. The Early Years, 1848-1917*, New York, 1980, p. 153.

Such assertions are taken up by bourgeois scholars. For instance, the Italian bourgeois historian Massimo L. Salvadori writes: "1917 showed that the differences of opinion that had existed between Lenin and Trotsky previously were of a secondary importance."¹

In this case, too, the opponents of the October Revolution have misinterpreted the facts of history. The facts are as follows. The day before Trotsky's return to Russia in May 1917, Lenin described his political methods in a letter to Inessa Armand, a prominent figure in the Russian revolutionary movement: "... Trotsky arrived ... Always true to himself—twists, swindles, poses as a Left, *helps* the Right so long as he can..."²

In May 1917 Trotsky became a member of the Inter-District Organization of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks), or *Mezhraionka*, whose membership included Social Democrats who held internationalist positions and opposed but did not break with the so-called "defenders" (who were for carrying on the war with Germany "to the victorious end"). There Trotsky did his utmost to prevent the organization from drawing closer to the Bolsheviks. It was on his initiative that in May 1917 the Petrograd City Conference of the Inter-District Organization rejected Lenin's plan for a merging of the organization and the Bolshevik Party. According to notes made by Lenin, who attended the conference, Trotsky had declared: "I cannot call myself a Bolshevik... Recognition of Bolshevism is not to be demanded of us."³ In other

¹ Massimo L. Salvadori, *Storia del pensiero comunista, Da Lenin alla crisi dell'internazionalismo*, Milano; Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1984, p. 120.

² V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 35, p. 288.

³ *A Collection of Lenin's Works*, IV, p. 303 (in Russian).

words, Trotsky wanted the Party to be "united" on the basis of Trotskyism, not Bolshevism. That is why he insisted that the members of the Inter-District Organization should retain their autonomy within the RSDLP(B).

In spite of Trotsky's plans, in August 1917 the members of the Inter-District Organization joined the RSDLP(B) and began to work within it. During preparations for the next congress of the Bolshevik Party, in accordance with an agreement reached earlier, it was proposed that two members of the Inter-District Organization should be included in the future Central Committee of the Party. Thus from the former Inter-District Organization Trotsky, together with Moisei Uritsky, entered the Central Committee of the RSDLP(B).

According to Trotsky himself, Lenin met him with "restraint and alertness". And he had reason to do so. Trotsky was in no hurry to accept Bolshevik tactics. His joining the RSDLP(B) had been dictated by temporary considerations. By August 1917 Trotsky had formed a clear idea of "who was who" and understood that there was no greater political force in Russia than the Bolsheviks. So, afraid to "miss the boat", Trotsky, who, in Lenin's words, was "in the habit of joining *any* group that happens to be in the majority at the moment,"¹ made no objection to his being included in the Central Committee.

This fact is also noted by foreign authors. The political and ideological weapons used by Trotsky, writes the Italian publicist Giuseppe Boffa, "had already been forged by others, namely, the Bolshevik Party founded by Lenin, by its spirit, determination and organizational talent."²

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 17, p. 36.

² *Rinascita*, June 22, 1979, p. 24.

On joining the Party Trotsky did not discard his previous views. This fact, too, is acknowledged by some bourgeois historians. "Trotsky never became a Bolshevik,"¹ writes the French historian René Sédillot. The Paris journal *Spartacus* is even more explicit: "He was seeking to destroy the Party, and for this purpose he moved into its ranks in order to impose on it his theory of permanent revolution."²

Inside the RSDLP(B) Trotsky became close to Kamenev, Zinoviev and Rykov. It was on the initiative of Kamenev, to whom Trotsky was related (he was married to Kamenev's sister), that in September 1917 Trotsky was recommended for the post of Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

"Up to that moment [to the time of the October uprising]," writes G. Boffa, "the atmosphere of debates over the democracy, which prevailed in the Soviets, provided the most congenial environment to Trotsky."³

Trotsky "debated" at such length that the Central Committee of the RSDLP(B), at its sitting on October 21, 1917, had to consider specially the question of the work of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet.

While Kamenev supported Trotsky in the Soviet, Trotsky backed Kamenev and Zinoviev in boycotting the Party's decision on the October insurrection. "In our country," he asserted, "the proletariat has not found sufficient will to seize power." At the same time, he tried to confuse the masses as regards the purpose and activities of the Military-Revolutionary Committee formed on October 16 at Lenin's initia-

¹ René Sédillot, *Histoire des socialismes*, Paris, 1977.

² *Spartacus*, April 1982, p. 72.

³ *Rinascita*, June 22, 1979, p. 24.

tive, which was the headquarters for the preparation of the October insurrection. "The Military-Revolutionary Committee," Trotsky declared, "did not emerge as an organ of the uprising..."

Trotsky proposed postponing the insurrection until the convocation of the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets. He failed to attend the famous session of the Central Committee of the RSDLP(B) on October 14, 1917, which decided on the day the insurrection was to take place. On this issue Trotsky sided fully with Kamenev and Zinoviev.

Lenin explained that the seizure of power by the Soviets was a task which could only be accomplished by a successful uprising. He wrote: "To insist on connecting this task with the Congress of Soviets, to subordinate it to this Congress, means *to be merely playing at insurrection* by setting a definite date beforehand, by making it easier for the government to prepare troops, by confusing the masses with the illusion that a 'resolution' of the Congress of Soviets can solve a task which only the insurrectionary proletariat is capable of solving by force."¹

Trotsky paid no heed to Lenin's warnings. Even on the eve of the insurrection he twice denounced it: first at a session of the Bolshevik group at the Second Congress of Soviets which was just going to open, and then at a sitting of the Petrograd Soviet. "An armed conflict today or tomorrow is not in our plans when we are on the threshold of the All-Russia Congress of Soviets," Trotsky told the session of the Petrograd Soviet on the evening of October 24. "We believe that the All-Russia Congress of Soviets will carry through our slogan with greater force and authority."

Trotsky was even more categorical when he de-

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 26, pp. 143-144.

clared: "Our only salvation lies in a firm policy of the Congress. The arrest of the Provisional Government is not on the agenda as an independent policy."

So at the crucial moment, when maximum discipline and presence of mind as well as unity of action were needed, Trotsky behaved like a Philistine and a coward, afraid to break the law. His cowardice and Philistinism were due to his quite superficial knowledge of Russia's realities, the realities which had made it imperative to overthrow the bourgeois Provisional Government, a government that had failed to solve any of the urgent problems facing the country. Trotsky was unable to appreciate the revolutionary qualities of the working class and the resoluteness of the millions of peasants in Russia.

It was Lenin who became the true leader of the October Revolution. And indeed only he could have become such a leader, for throughout his life he had been a great revolutionary and thinker and also an ardent patriot.¹

"Trotsky had no idea of the real Russia," writes the French Marxist François Hincker. "Apart from St. Petersburg, the most Western-like city, he knew nothing. It was not until 1920 that Trotsky became acquainted with Moscow. He had observed the country in the war years, but knew nothing about it in peace time.

"The ultra-leftists of today behave in exactly the same way. They like to discuss everything on earth... but do not have the faintest idea about any concrete issue—in this case French monopoly capitalism—about the needs of the French working people, about their struggle for socialism on French soil."²

Modern Trotskyists try to present Trotsky as a

¹ See Paul Piccone, *Italian Marxism*, London, 1983, p. 4.

² *La Nouvelle critique*, 1966, No. 175, pp. 99-100.

"continuer" of Lenin's cause and even a founder of the worker-peasant state, who worked indefatigably for the good of that state. In so doing they refer to Lenin's famous *Letter to the Congress*, but quote only part of his description of Trotsky's character. They omit Lenin's assessment of his qualities as a politician, the passage where Lenin said that Trotsky "has displayed excessive self-assurance and shown excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work."¹

These negative qualities of Trotsky, both as a person and a politician, were dominant in him. This was subsequently confirmed when they became obnoxious and repelled people, even like-minded men. He seemed to have set out to act in defiance of Lenin's well-known precept that the Communists' "strength lies in complete clarity and the sober consideration of all the existing class magnitudes, both Russian and international; and in the inexhaustible energy, iron resolve and devotion in struggle that arise from this."²

In place of proletarian optimism underlying the activities of the Party and of the forward sections of the working people, Trotsky advocated petty-bourgeois pessimism veiled in "leftist" phrases. He tried to formulate in the language of pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric the Menshevik thesis that Russia lacked the prerequisites for the socialist transformation of society. According to the theory of "permanent revolution", it would be far easier for the proletariat in the West to defeat the world bourgeoisie, who held political and economic power, than for the Russian proletariat to defeat its bourgeoisie. Actually it was not so. By that time the Russian

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 36, p. 595.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, p. 361.

bourgeoisie was in fact losing one position after another both in the economic and political spheres. Nevertheless, Trotsky was trying to push through his defeatist thesis that the course adopted by Lenin's Party towards socialist construction was a Bolshevik "venture", as the necessary conditions for the building of socialism were allegedly lacking. "Assurance that a socialist society can be built in Russia," Trotsky theorized in his book *The History of the Russian Revolution*,¹ "was something the Bolsheviks were not looking for."

Trotsky ignored the concrete situation that developed in the first post-October years and had no wish to see the prospects for the development of the Soviet Union along the path of socialism. In a letter he sent to the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928, when industrialization was in full swing in the Soviet Republic, i.e., when the conditions were being created for further industrial growth, Trotsky stubbornly reiterated that the Communist Party's conviction that the country had everything necessary for the building of socialism was ill-founded.

Casting aspersions on the October Revolution, Trotsky came to reject the objective laws governing the Soviet Union's transition from capitalism to socialism. Could such a person lay claim to being the indisputable leader of the Party and country? Of course not. And he had never been such a leader.

"Leader Number Two". In their attempt to play down Lenin's historic role, the "makers of leaders" laud to the skies some other prominent Party workers who in one way or another opposed Lenin's domestic and foreign policies. Bukharin was one of them.

¹ See Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, London, New York, 1932-1933.

The ideological opponents of the October Revolution have always been keen on publicizing the political activities of this really prominent Party worker and author of a number of theoretical works (mostly on the economy of socialism). But the furor raised over Bukharin in the West today is unprecedented.

Bukharin's own works, as well as books about him, are printed in larger and larger editions every year. The authors of these books, who represent diverse political trends ranging from the extreme right to the extreme left, try to outsmart one another in their attempts to present Bukharin as their ally. His works are included in the study programmes of highly respectable educational establishments, and diploma theses and doctoral dissertations are written on him. In short, like Trotsky, Bukharin is one of the most popular figures in the body of literature that falsifies the October Revolution and the realities of the first post-October years. What has brought about such a keen interest in Bukharin?

There are several reasons. The political motive behind Bukharin's "renaissance" is primarily a desire to use his ideas to step up the attacks on the experience of the October Revolution and on socialism as realized in the social practice of the USSR and other socialist countries. From the ideological legacy of Bukharin the opponents of the revolution and real socialism extract only what is needed for this central task, i.e., only that which contradicts Leninism and the theory and practice of the building of socialism in the Soviet Union. The rest is dismissed as "irrelevant".

Such a "truncated" approach to the works of Bukharin is particularly characteristic of the aforementioned Professor Stephen Cohen of Princeton University, who is regarded in the West as an "au-

thority on Bukharin". He is even said to be the creator of a new trend in contemporary Sovietology, namely, "Bukharin Studies". Indeed, Cohen has written many books and articles on the subject of Bukharin, the revolution and socialism. In all his publications he plays up in various ways the term "Bukharinism", newly introduced in Sovietology. He insists that Bukharinism is a complete doctrine, which is one of the branches of present-day Marxism. "Bukharinism," Cohen writes, "was a more liberal, human variant of Russian Communism, with its native authoritarian traditions..."¹

Cohen depicts Bukharin as the founding father of "contemporary liberal Marxism". To back up his thesis he constantly refers to the *Letter to the Congress* and some other writings by Lenin. And as in the case of Trotsky, the quotations from Lenin are highly selective. From Lenin's works, in particular from the *Letter*, only those lines are cited which put Bukharin in a favourable light.

For instance, Cohen quotes Lenin as saying in his letter that Bukharin was "a most valuable and major theorist of the Party" and was considered "the favourite of the whole Party".² Here the quotation ends abruptly. But after these words come the following lines: "But his [Bukharin's] theoretical views can be classified as fully Marxist only with great reserve, for there is something scholastic about him (he has never made a study of dialectics, and, I think, never fully understood it)."³

Assessments of Bukharin's political and theoretical views are found in many places in Lenin's works. In

¹ Stephen F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience. Politics. History. Science. 1917*, New York, 1985, p. 91.

² V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 36, p. 595.

³ *Ibid.*

the notes Lenin made in May 1920 in the margins of Bukharin's book *The Economy of the Transition Period* we read: "To the author ... the dialectical 'point of view' is but one of many equally valid 'points of view.' Wrong!"¹ Or take Lenin's article *Once Again on the Trade Unions, the Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin*, written in January 1921. In it Lenin points out that "Bukharin's fundamental theoretical mistake ... is substitution of eclecticism (especially popular with the authors of diverse 'fashionable' and reactionary philosophical systems) for Marxist dialectics."² Finally, it is appropriate to recall here that on the eve of the October Revolution Lenin said that Bukharin "is... devilishly *unstable* in politics".³

Bukharin's instability manifested itself in all important matters, beginning with his attitude towards Lenin's theory of socialist revolution. Bukharin's views (political, ideological and philosophical) are a classic example of inconsistency and contradictoriness.

All these vacillations are reflected in his books and articles, especially in those written after the victory of the October Revolution. Here is the amplitude of his waverings: from supporting the platform of the "Left Communists" (who demanded that the war should be waged till the victorious end and therefore refused to recognize the necessity of concluding a peace treaty with Germany in the spring of 1918) to sliding to positions of Right opportunism (seen, for example, in his theory of the "integration of the kulaks into socialism", the slogan of "Get rich!", etc.).

The assertions of bourgeois scholars concerning

¹ *A Collection of Lenin's Works*, XI, p. 387 (in Russian).

² V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 32, p. 92.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 215.

Bukharin's "liberalism" are not convincing either. Without going into all aspects of his ideological views, let us consider his ideas about the socialist revolution both before and after the victory of the October Revolution.

The Sixth Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) met in July 1917 in Petrograd in semi-legal conditions. Owing to the conciliationist position of the Soviets, the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie was the master of the situation in the country. The peaceful development of the revolution became impossible. The Congress opted for a course towards an armed uprising aimed at overthrowing the bourgeois Provisional Government by force of arms. "The correct slogan at the present time can only be the total elimination of the dictatorship of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie," said the Congress resolution *On the Political Situation*. "Only the revolutionary proletariat, provided it has the support of the poorest sections of the peasantry, is capable of accomplishing this task, which is to bring about a fresh revolutionary upsurge."

Bukharin was among those who opposed the Party's strategic line. He essentially failed to recognize the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and thus questioned the need for an alliance of the working class and the peasantry. "Our peasantry is an acquisitive group," Bukharin told the Congress. "Herein lies the root of the fundamental difference between the peasantry and the proletariat." Further on he declared: "To my mind the new upsurge of the revolution consists of two successive phases: the first phase—with the participation of the peasantry, who seeks to obtain land; and the second phase, the phase of the proletarian revolution—when the satisfied peasantry has dropped out of the picture and when

the Russian working class will be supported only by proletarian elements and the proletariat in Western Europe."¹

So Bukharin was actually saying in his speech that once the proletariat emerged victorious in the revolution it would inevitably clash with not only all bourgeois groupings, but also with the broad masses of the peasantry (with whose assistance it would come to power!).

This thesis, which clearly revealed Bukharin's sectarianism, was totally erroneous. For the working class and the peasantry do not oppose one another as antagonistic classes. On the contrary, they have a common enemy, the exploiting capitalist class—one in town, and another in the countryside. The difference lies only in the conditions of urban life and those of village life. The working peasantry is the natural ally of the working class. "The alliance of the workers and peasants is effected with difficulty," Lenin said, "but... at any rate it is the only invincible alliance against the capitalists."² This was borne out by the October Revolution.

As to the question of whether a socialist revolution can triumph in one country, Bukharin's opinion on the matter coincides with that of Trotsky. "The final victory of the Russian revolution," Bukharin wrote in the summer of 1917 in his book *The Class Struggle and the Revolution in Russia*, "is inconceivable without the victory of an international revolution." He adhered to this view after the triumph of the October Revolution. In the book *The ABC of Communism*, which he wrote in 1920 jointly with Preobrazhensky, a Trotskyist, it is said: "The communist revolution

¹ *The Sixth Congress of the RSDLP(B)*, August 1917, Record of Proceedings, Moscow, 1958, pp. 102, 138 (in Russian).

² V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 30, p. 134.

can triumph only as a world revolution." To make this point quite clear, the authors explained: "If the working class happens to come to power in any one country, while in other countries it is loyal to capital not from fear but honestly, then in the end this country will be strangled by the bandit states."

There is one more aspect of Bukharin's views which should be considered. Bukharin denied that there was a dialectical interconnection between two opposites which became fused in the socialist revolution: destruction with regard to the institutions of the old society, and construction, or the building of the new social system. Bukharin saw in the revolution only destruction and nothing else.

Bukharin also denied that it was possible to carry out a revolution by peaceful means. "To say that a revolution is possible without a civil war," it is said in *The ABC of Communism*, "is to admit that a 'peaceful revolution' is possible. Anybody who thinks so ... goes back from Marx to the old-fashioned socialists who believed you could talk a factory-owner into doing what you want of him."

Bukharin refused to recognize that the "price" of the revolution depended entirely on the behaviour of its enemies, on the degree of their resistance. Yet, revolutionary experience—and not only in Russia for that matter—has shown that it is the overthrown exploiter classes and not the victorious proletariat who make the revolutionary struggle difficult and fierce. It is they who hamper the normalization of economic life and the restructuring of the economy and society on the new, socialist principles. The revolutionary masses were not interested in violence at all. The use of force to the counter-revolutionaries was something enforced on them. "When there is no reactionary violence which is to be combated, then there can be no question of any revolutionary vio-

lence,"¹ the founders of Marxism had repeatedly emphasized.

This conclusion was confirmed by the 1917 October Revolution in Russia. Quite often representatives of the revolutionary people let former tsarist generals and officers go free provided the latter gave their word of honour that they would not fight against the revolution. Later on, however, some of them, breaking their word, became leaders of the Russian White Guard movement and initiators of counter-revolutionary violence against the revolutionary people.

Explaining why the Soviet government decided to take severe measures of counter-resistance, Lenin wrote:

"Firstly, *at that time* capital put up military resistance... Military resistance cannot be broken except by military means...

"Secondly, we could not at that time put methods of administration in the forefront in place of methods of suppression, because the art of administration is not innate, but is acquired by experience. At that time we lacked this experience...

"Thirdly, at that time we could not have specialists in the various fields of knowledge and technology at our disposal."² Those specialists were either fighting in the ranks of counter-revolution or were putting up resistance by way of sabotage.

The October Revolution is not to be blamed for the disastrous situation in which the country's economy found itself after October 25, 1917 (old style). The proletarian state had inherited from tsarism, from the Russian bourgeoisie and landlords unprecedented economic dislocations. During the

¹ K. Marx, F. Engels, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 38, p. 419 (in Russian).

² V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 27, p. 247.

First World War Russia's productive forces decreased by half, and in a number of economic branches by 90 per cent. Agriculture was particularly hard hit.

A food crisis and then a famine began long before the revolution. Tsarism had failed to cope with the economic dislocations. Nor the bourgeois Provisional Government that succeeded the tsarist government could take effective measures.

In the spring of 1918 the Soviet government got down to constructive work. It nationalized the key branches of industry, transport, and the banks. Vigorous measures were taken to overcome the economic disruption and solve the food problem; a monopoly on grain was established and prices for grain were set.

After the end of the Civil War of 1918-1920, the national economy began to be rebuilt. By the end of 1925 the Soviet Russia had virtually reached the prewar levels in industry and agriculture. With a stable state budget, wages and salaries were raised, and labour productivity somewhat increased.

Such are the facts. Far from destroying the country's productive forces, the October Revolution opened up the way for utilizing those advantages which derive from the socialist principles of economic management. Thus, Bukharin's theoretical postulates and political forecasts have proved wrong.

* * *

We have touched upon only some of the trends in the misinterpretation of the theoretical and practical legacy of the October Revolution. They all try to deny the revolution's relevance today. But life itself, the realities of the times have demonstrated the

universal significance of the experience of history's first socialist revolution and of those fundamental theoretical and tactical principles and methods which the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had worked out in the struggle against its ideological opponents of different class and political orientations.

Николай Александрович Васецкий
ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЙ ОПЫТ ОКТЯБРЬСКОЙ РЕВОЛЮЦИИ:
ЛОЖНЫЕ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ

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**Misinterpretations
of the Historical
Experience
of the OCTOBER
Socialist
Revolution**

