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## The Soviet union and the fourth International, the class nature of the soviet state

Leon Trotsky

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*The*  
SOVIET UNION  
*and the*  
FOURTH  
INTERNATIONAL

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The Class Nature of the  
Soviet State

TEN CENTS

*LEON TROTSKY*

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# THE CLASS NATURE OF THE SOVIET STATE

## How the Question is Posed

The break with the Communist International and the orientation toward the New International have posed anew the question of the social character of the U. S. S. R. Doesn't the collapse of the Communist International also mean at the same time the collapse of that state which emerged from the October Revolution? Here, indeed, in both instances one and the same ruling organization is concerned: the Stalinist apparatus. It had applied identical methods within the U. S. S. R. as in the international arena. We, Marxists, were never patrons of the double bookkeeping system of the Brandlerites according to which the policies of the Stalinists are impeccable in the U.S.S.R. but ruinous outside the boundaries of U.S.S.R.\* It is our conviction that they are equally ruinous in both instances. If so, isn't it then necessary to recognize the simultaneous collapse of the Communist International and the liquidation of the proletarian dictatorship in the U. S. S. R.?

At first sight such reasoning appears to be irrefutable. But it is erroneous. While the methods of the Stalinist bureaucracy are homogeneous in all spheres, the objective results of these methods depend upon external conditions, or to use the language of mechanics, the resistivity of the ma-

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\* Sage American Brandlerites (the Lovestone group) complicate the question; the economic policy of the Stalinists, if you please, is impeccable, but the political regime in the U. S. S. R. is bad: there is no democracy. It does not occur to these theoreticians to ask themselves why then does Stalin liquidate democracy if his economic policies are correct and successful? Isn't it out of fear that if proletarian democracy obtained, the party and the working class would express much too restlessly and violently their enthusiasm over his economic policies?



terial. The Communist International represented an instrument that was intended for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Soviet government represents an instrument for the preservation of conquests of an already accomplished overturn. The Communist parties of the West have no inherited capital. Their strength (in reality, their weakness) lies within themselves and only within themselves. Ninetenths of the strength of the Stalinist apparatus lies not in itself but in the social changes wrought by the victorious revolution. Still, this consideration alone does not decide the question: but it does bear a great methodological significance. It shows us how and why the Stalinist apparatus could completely squander its meaning as the international revolutionary factor, and yet preserve a part of its progressive meaning as the gate-keeper of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution. This dual position—we may add—represents in itself one of the manifestations of the unevenness of historical development.

The correct policies of a workers' state are not reducible *solely* to national economic construction. If the revolution does not expand on the international arena along the proletarian spiral, it must immutably begin to contract along the bureaucratic spiral within the national framework. If the dictatorship of the proletariat does not become European and world-wide, it must head towards its own collapse. All this is entirely incontestable on a wide historical perspective. But everything revolves around the concrete historical periods. Can one say that the policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy have led *already* to the liquidation of the workers' state? That is the question now.

Against the assertion that the workers' state is apparently already liquidated there arises first and foremost the important methodological position of Marxism. The dictatorship of the proletariat was established by means of a political overturn and a civil war of three years. The class theory of society and historical experience both equally

testify to the impossibility of the victory of the proletariat through peaceful methods, that is, without grandiose class battles, weapons in hand. How, in that case, is the imperceptible, "gradual", bourgeois counter-revolution conceivable? Until now, in any case, feudal as well as bourgeois counter-revolutions have never taken place "organically" but they have invariably required the intervention of military surgery. In the last analysis the theories of reformism, in so far as reformism generally has attained to theory, are always based upon the inability to understand that class antagonisms are profound and irreconcilable; hence, the perspective of a peaceful transformation of capitalism into socialism. The Marxian thesis relating to the catastrophic character of the transfer of power from the hands of one class into the hands of another applies not only to revolutionary periods, when history madly sweeps ahead, but also to the periods of counter-revolution when society rolls backwards. He who asserts that the Soviet government has been *gradually* changed from proletarian to bourgeois is only, so to speak, running backwards the film of reformism.

Our opponents may gainsay, this is a general methodologic proposition and that no matter how important in itself it is nevertheless too abstract to solve the question. Truth is always concrete. The thesis of the irreconcilability of class contradictions should and must direct us in our analysis but cannot replace its results. One must probe deeply into the material content of the historical process itself.

We reply, it is true, a methodological argument does not exhaust the problem. But in any case it transfers the burden of proof to the opposing side. Critics, who consider themselves Marxists, must demonstrate in what manner the bourgeoisie that had lost power in a three years' struggle could resume this power without any battles. However, since our opponents make no attempt to invest their appraisal of the Soviet state with any sort of serious theoretical expression we shall try to perform this labor for them here.

## “The Dictatorship over the Proletariat”

The most widespread, popular and at first sight irrefutable argument in favor of the non-proletarian character of the present Soviet state is based upon the reference to the strangulation of the liberties of proletarian organizations and to the almightiness of the bureaucracy. Is it really possible to identify the dictatorship of an apparatus, which has led to the dictatorship of a single person, with the dictatorship of the proletariat as a class? Isn't it clear that the dictatorship of the proletariat is excluded by the dictatorship *over* the proletariat?

Such enticing reasoning is constructed not upon a materialistic analysis of the process as it develops in reality but upon pure idealistic schemas, upon the Kantian norms. Certain noble “friends” of the revolution have provided themselves with a very radiant conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and they are completely prostrated in the face of the fact that the real dictatorship with all its heritage of class barbarism, with all its internal contradictions, with the mistakes and crimes of the leadership fails entirely to resemble that sleek image which they have provided. Disillusioned in their most beautiful emotions they turn their backs to the Soviet Union.

Where and in what books can one find a faultless prescription for a proletarian dictatorship? The dictatorship of a class does not mean by a long shot that its entire mass always participates in the management of the state. This we have seen, first of all, in the case of the propertied classes. The nobility ruled through the monarchy before which the noble stood on his knees. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie took on comparatively developed democratic forms only under the conditions of capitalist upswing when the ruling class had nothing to fear. Before our own eyes, democracy has been supplanted in Germany by Hitler's autocracy, with all the traditional bourgeois parties smashed to smithereens. Today, the German bourgeoisie does not rule



directly, politically it is placed under complete subjection to Hitler and his bands. Nevertheless, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie remains inviolate in Germany, because all the conditions of its social hegemony have been preserved and strengthened. By expropriating the bourgeoisie politically Hitler saved it, even if temporarily, from economic expropriation. The fact that the bourgeoisie was compelled to resort to the Fascist regime testifies to the fact that its hegemony was endangered but not at all that it had fallen.

Anticipating our subsequent arguments, our opponents will hasten to refute: although the bourgeoisie, as an exploiting minority can also preserve its hegemony by means of a Fascist dictatorship, the proletariat building a socialist society must manage its government itself, directly drawing ever wider masses of the people into the task of government. In its general form, this argument is undebatable, but in the *given* case it merely means that the present Soviet dictatorship is a sick dictatorship. The frightful difficulties of Socialist construction in an isolated and backward country coupled with the false policies of the leadership—which in the last analysis also reflects the pressure of backwardness and isolation—have led to the result that the bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order to guard its social conquests with *its own* methods. The anatomy of society is determined by its economic relations. So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class.

Dissertations upon “the dictatorship of the bureaucracy over the proletariat” without a much deeper analysis, that is, without a clear explanation of the social roots and the class limits of bureaucratic domination, boil down merely to high-falluting democratic phrases so extremely popular among the Mensheviks. One need not doubt that the overwhelming majority<sup>1</sup> of Soviet workers are dissatisfied with the bureaucracy and that a considerable section, by no means the worst, hates it. However, it is not only due

to repressions that this dissatisfaction does not assume violent mass forms: the workers fear that they will clear the field for the class enemy, if they overthrow the bureaucracy. The inter-relations between the bureaucracy and the class are really much more complex than they appear to be to the frothy "democrats". The Soviet workers would have settled accounts with the despotism of the apparatus had other perspectives opened before them, had the Western horizon flamed not with the brown color of Fascism but with the red of revolution. So long as this does not happen, the proletariat with clenched teeth bears ("tolerates") the bureaucracy, and in this sense recognizes it as the bearer of the proletarian dictatorship. In a heart to heart conversation, no Soviet worker would be sparing of strong words addressed to the Stalinist bureaucracy. But not a single one of them would allow that the counter-revolution has already taken place. The proletariat is the spine of the Soviet state. But in so far as the function of governing is concentrated in the hands of an irresponsible bureaucracy we have before us an obviously sick state. Can it be cured? Will not further attempts at cures mean a fruitless expenditure of precious time? The question is badly put. By cures we understand not all sorts of artificial measures separate and apart from the world revolutionary movement but a further struggle under the banner of Marxism. Merciless criticism of the Stalinist bureaucracy, training the cadres of the New International, resurrecting the fighting capacity of the world proletarian vanguard—this is the essence of the "cure". It coincides with the fundamental direction of historical progress.

During the last few years—appropriately enough—our opponents have told us more than once that we "are losing time in vain" by occupying ourselves with curing the Comintern. We never promised anybody that we would *cure* the Comintern. We only refused, until the decisive test, to pronounce the sick as dead, or hopelessly ill. In any case, we did not waste a single day "curing". We formed rev-

olutionary cadres, and, what is no less important, we prepared the fundamental theoretical and programmatic positions of the new International.

## The Dictatorship of the Proletariat as an Idealistic Norm

Messrs. "Kantian" sociologists (we apologize to the shade of Kant) often reach the conclusion that a "real" dictatorship, that is one which conforms to their ideal norms existed only in the days of the Paris Commune, or during the first period of the October revolution, up to the Brest-Litovsk peace or, at best, up to the NEP. This is indeed sharpshooting: aim a finger at the sky and hit the bull's eye! If Marx and Engels called the Paris Commune "the dictatorship of the proletariat" it was only because of the force of the possibilities lodged in it. But by itself the Commune was not *yet* the dictatorship of the proletariat. Having seized power, it hardly knew how to use it; instead of assuming the offensive, it waited; it remained isolated within the circle of Paris; it dared not touch the state bank; it did not and indeed could not put through the overturn in property relations because it did not wield power on a national scale. To this must be added Blanquist one-sidedness and Proudhonist prejudices which prevented even the leaders of the movement from completely understanding the Commune as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The reference to the first period of the October revolution is not any more fortunate. Not only up to the Brest-Litovsk peace but even up to autumn of 1918, the social content of the revolution was restricted to a petty-bourgeois agrarian overturn and workers' control over production. This means that the revolution in its actions had not yet passed the boundaries of bourgeois society. During this first period soldiers' soviets ruled side by side with workers' soviets, and often elbowed them aside. Only toward the autumn of 1918, did the petty bourgeois soldier-agrarian elemental wave recede a little to its shores, and the workers went forward with the nationalization of the means of



production. Only from this time can one speak of the inception of a real dictatorship of the proletariat. But even here it is necessary to make certain large reservations. During those initial years the dictatorship was geographically confined to the old Moscow principality and was compelled to wage a three years' war along all the radii from Moscow to the periphery. This means that up to 1921, precisely up to the NEP that is, what went on was still the struggle to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat upon the national scale. And since, in the opinion of the pseudo-Marxist philistines, the dictatorship had disappeared with the beginning of the NEP, then it means that, in general, it had never existed. To these gentlemen the dictatorship of the proletariat is simply an imponderable concept, an ideal norm not to be realized upon our sinful planet. Small wonder that "theoreticians" of this stripe, insofar as they do not renounce altogether the very word dictatorship, strive to smear over the irreconcilable contradiction between the latter and bourgeois democracy.

Extremely characteristic, from the laboratory and not the political point of view, is the Parisian sect of "Communist-democrats" (Souvarine & Co.). The very name already implies a break with Marxism. In the critique of the Gotha program, Marx rejected the name social democracy in view of the fact that it places the revolutionary socialist struggle under the formal control of democracy. It is quite obvious that there is no difference in principle between "communist democrats" and "socialist democrats", social democrats that is. There is no hard and fast partition between socialism and communism. Transgression begins only when socialism and communism as a movement or as a state is subordinated not to the actual course of the class struggle, not to the material conditions of the historical process but to the supra-social and supra-historical abstraction, "democracy" which in reality is a weapon of self-defense serving the bourgeoisie against the proletarian dictatorship. If during the epoch of the Gotha Program it

was still possible to see in the word social democracy only an incorrect and non-scientific name for a proletarian party, whose spirit was healthy, then the entire subsequent history of bourgeois and "social" democracy turns the banner of "*democratic communism (?)*" into the banner of an outright class betrayal\*.

### Bonapartism

An opponent of the Urbahns type will say that there has been really no restoration of the bourgeois regime as yet but also there is no longer a workers' state; the present soviet regime is a supra-class or an inter-class Bonapartist government. In its own time we settled our accounts with this theory. Historically, Bonapartism was and remains the government of the bourgeoisie during periods of crises in bourgeois society. It is possible and it is necessary to distinguish between the "progressive" Bonapartism that consolidates the purely capitalistic conquests of bourgeois revolution and the Bonapartism of the decay of capitalist society, the convulsive Bonapartism of our epoch (von Papen—Schleicher, Dolfuss, and the candidate for Dutch Bonapartism, Colijn, etc.) Bonapartism always implies political veering between classes; but under Bonapartism in all its historical transmigrations there is preserved the one and the same social base: bourgeois property. Nothing is more absurd than to draw the conclusion of the classless character of the Bonapartist state from the Bonapartist wagging between classes or from the "supra-class" position of the Bonapartist gang. Monstrous nonsense! Bonapartism is only one of the varieties of capitalist hegemony.

If Urbahns wants to extend the concept of Bonapartism to include also the present Soviet regime then we are ready to accept such a widened interpretation—under one

\* Those who are interested, if there are such, may become acquainted with the "platform" of "communist (!) democrats" themselves. From the viewpoint of the fundamentals of Marxism it is difficult to conceive of a more charlatanistic document.

condition: if the social content of the Soviet "Bonapartism" will be defined with the requisite clarity. It is absolutely correct that the self-rule of the Soviet bureaucracy was built upon the soil of veering between class forces both internal as well as international. Insofar as the bureaucratic veering has been crowned by the personal plebiscitary regime of Stalin, it is possible to speak of soviet Bonapartism. But while the Bonapartism of both Bonapartes as well as their present pitiful followers has developed and is developing on the basis of a bourgeois regime, the Bonapartism of soviet bureaucracy has under it the soil of a soviet regime. Terminological innovations or historical analogies can serve as conveniences in one manner or another for analysis but they cannot change the social nature of the soviet state.

### "State Capitalism"

During the last period, Urbahns, incidentally, has created a new theory: the Soviet economic structure, it appears, is a variety of "state capitalism". The "progress" lies in that Urbahns has descended from his terminological exercises in the sphere of the political superstructure down to the economic foundation. But this descent—alas!—did him no good.

According to Urbahns, the newest form of self-defense of the bourgeois regime is state capitalism: one need only take a look at the corporate "planned" state in Italy, Germany, and the United States. Accustomed to broad gestures, Urbahns also throws in here the U. S. S. R. We shall speak of this later. Insofar as the matter touches the capitalist states, Urbahns concerns himself with a very important phenomenon of our epoch. Monopoly capital has long since outgrown both the private ownership of the means of production and the boundaries of the national state. Paralyzed, however, by its own organizations, the working class was unable to free in time the productive forces of society



from their capitalist fetters. Hence arises the protracted epoch of economic and political convulsions. The productive forces pound against the barriers of private property and of national boundaries. The bourgeois governments are obliged to pacify the mutiny of their own productive forces with a police club. This is what constitutes the so-called "planned economy". Insofar as the state attempts to harness and discipline capitalist anarchy, it may be called conditionally "state capitalism".

But we should remember that originally Marxists understood by state capitalism only the independent economic enterprises of the state itself. When the reformists dreamed of overcoming capitalism by means of the municipalization or governmentalization of ever greater numbers of transport and industrial enterprises, the Marxists used to reply in refutation: this is not socialism but state capitalism. Subsequently, however, this concept acquired a broader meaning, and begun to apply to all the varieties of state intervention into economy; the French use the word "étatisme" (statification) in this sense.

But Urbahns not only expounds the travails of "state capitalism"—he appraises them after his own manner. Insofar as it is generally possible to understand him, he pronounces the regime of "state capitalism" to be a necessary and, moreover, a progressive stage in the development of society, in the same sense as trusts are progressive compared with the disparate enterprises. So fundamental an error in appraising capitalist planning is enough to bury any approach whatsoever.

While, during the epoch of the capitalist upswing to which the war put an end, it was possible to view—under certain political pre-conditions—the various forms of statification as progressive manifestations, that is, consider that state capitalism acts to lead society forward and facilitates the future economic labor of the proletarian dictatorship; the present "planned economy" must be viewed as a stage that is reactionary through and through: state capitalism

strives to tear economy away from the world wide division of labor, to adapt the productive forces to the Procrustean bed of the national state; to constrict production artificially in some branches and to create just as artificially other branches by means of enormous unprofitable expenditures. The economic policies of the present state—beginning with tariff walls upon the ancient Chinese pattern and ending with the episodes of forbidding the use of machinery under Hitler's "planned economy"—attain an unstable regulation at the cost of causing the national economy to decline, bringing chaos into world relations, and completely disrupting the monetary system which will be very much needed for socialist planning. The present state capitalism neither prepares nor lightens the future work of the socialist state, but, on the contrary, creates for it colossal additional difficulties. The proletariat let slip a series of opportune periods for the seizure of power. Through this it has created the conditions for Fascist barbarism—in politics; and for the destructive work of "state capitalism"—in economy. After the conquest of power, the proletariat will have to pay economically for its political lapses.

### The Economy of the U.S.S.R.

However, what interests us most within the limits of this analysis is the circumstance that Urbahns attempts to include also the economy of the U. S. S. R. under the term "state capitalism." And while so doing he refers—it is hardly believable!—to Lenin. There is only one possible way of explaining this reference: as the eternal inventor who creates a new theory a month, Urbahns has no time to read the books he refers to. Lenin did actually apply the term "state capitalism" but not to the Soviet economy as a whole, only to a certain section of it: the foreign concessions, the mixed industrial and commercial companies, and, in part, to the peasant, and largely kulak co-operatives under state control. All these are indubitable elements of capitalism; but since they are controlled by the state, and

even function as mixed companies through its direct participation, Lenin conditionally, or, according to his own expression "in quotes", called these economic forms, "state capitalism". The conditioning of this term depended upon the fact that a proletarian, and not a bourgeois state was involved; the quotation marks were intended to stress just this difference of no little importance. However, insofar as the proletarian state allowed private capital and permitted it within definite restrictions to exploit the workers, it shielded bourgeois relations under one of its wings. In this strictly limited sense, one could speak of "state capitalism."

Lenin came out with this very term at the time of the transition to the NEP, when he presupposed that the concessions and the "mixed companies", that is, enterprises based upon the correlation of state and private capital, would occupy a major position in Soviet economy alongside of the pure state trusts and syndicates. In contradistinction to the state capitalist enterprises,—concessions, etc., that is—Lenin defined the Soviet trusts and syndicates as "enterprises of a consistently socialist type." Lenin envisioned the subsequent development of Soviet economy, of industry in particular, as a competition between the state capitalist and the pure state enterprises.

We trust that it is clear now within what limits Lenin used this term which has led Urbahns into temptation. In order to round out the theoretical catastrophe of the leader of the "Lenin (!) Bund", we must recall that contrary to Lenin's original expectations neither the concessions nor the mixed companies played any appreciable role whatsoever in the development of Soviet economy. Nothing has now remained generally of these "state capitalist" enterprises. On the other hand, the Soviet trusts whose fate appeared so very murky at the dawn of the NEP underwent a gigantic development in the years after Lenin's death. Thus, if one were to use Lenin's terminology conscientiously and with some comprehension of the matter, one would have to say that the Soviet economic development passed by completely the



stage of "state capitalism", and unfolded along the channel of the enterprises of the "consistently socialist type".

Here, however, we must also forestall any possible misunderstandings, and this time of just the opposite character. Lenin chose his terms with precision. He called the trusts not *socialist* enterprises, as the Stalinists now label them, but enterprises of the "socialist *type*". Under Lenin's pen, this subtle terminological distinction implied that the trusts will have the right to be called socialist not by type, not by tendency, that is; but by their genuine content, after the rural economy will have been revolutionized; after the contradiction between the city and the village will have been destroyed; after men will have learned to fully satisfy all human wants; in other words, only in proportion as a real socialist society would arise on the bases of nationalized industry and collectivized rural economy. Lenin conceived that the attainment of this goal would require the successive labors of two or three generations, and moreover, in indissoluble connection with the development of the international revolution.

To summarize. Under state capitalism, in the strict sense of the word, we must understand the management of industrial and other enterprises by the bourgeois state on its own account, or the "regulating" intervention of the bourgeois state into the workings of private capitalist enterprises. By state capitalism "in quotes" Lenin meant the control of the proletarian state over private capitalist enterprises and relations. Not one of these definitions applies from any side to the present Soviet economy. It remains a deep secret what concrete economic content Urbahns himself puts into his understanding of the Soviet "state capitalism". To put it plainly, his newest theory is entirely built around a badly read quotation.

### Bureaucracy and the Ruling Class

There is, however, also another theory concerning the "non-proletarian" character of the Soviet state, much more

ingenious, much more cautious, but not any more serious. The French social democrat Lucien Laurat, Blum's colleague and Souvarine's teacher, has written a booklet defending the view that the Soviet society, being neither proletarian nor bourgeois, represents an absolutely new type of a class organization, because the bureaucracy not only rules over the proletariat politically but also exploits it economically, devouring that surplus value which hitherto fell to the lot of the bourgeoisie. Laurat invests his revelations with the weighty formulae of *Das Kapital*, and, in this manner gives an appearance of profundity to his superficial and purely descriptive "sociology". The compiler is obviously unaware that his entire theory had been formulated, only with much more fire and splendor, over thirty years ago by the Russo-Polish revolutionist Makhaisky, who was superior to his French vulgarizer in that he awaited neither the October revolution nor the Stalinist bureaucracy in order to define "the dictatorship of the proletariat" as a scaffold for the commanding posts of an exploiting bureaucracy. But even Makhaisky did not suck his theory out of his thumb: he only "deepened" sociologically and economically the anarchistic prejudices against state socialism. Makhaisky, by the way, also utilized Marx's formulae but in a manner much more consistent than Laurat's: according to Makhaisky, the author of *Das Kapital* covered up, with malice aforethought, in his formulae of reproduction (volume II), that portion of surplus value which would be devoured by the socialist intelligentsia (the bureaucracy).

In our own time, a "theory" of this kind, but without an exposure of Marx, the exploiter, was defended by Myasnikov who proclaimed that the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union had been supplanted by the hegemony of a new class: *the social bureaucracy*. In all probability, Laurat borrowed his theory, directly or indirectly, precisely from Myasnikov, investing it only with a pedantically "learned" air. For completeness sake it should also be added that Laurat has assimilated all the mistakes (and only

the mistakes) of Rosa Luxemburg, among them even those that she herself had renounced.

Let us, however, examine more closely the "theory" itself. The *class* has an exceptionally important and moreover a scientifically restricted meaning to a Marxist. A class is defined not by its participation in the distribution of the national income alone, but by its independent role in the general structure of economy and by its independent roots in the economic foundation of society. Each class (the feudal nobility, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, the capitalist bourgeoisie, and the proletariat) works out its own special forms of property. The bureaucracy lacks all these social traits. It has no independent position in the process of production and distribution. It has no independent property roots. Its functions relate basically to the political *technique* of class rule. The existence of a bureaucracy, in all its variety of forms and differences in specific weight, characterizes *every* class regime. Its power is of a reflected character. The bureaucracy is indissolubly bound up with ruling economic class, feeding itself upon the social roots of the latter, maintaining itself and falling together with it.

### Class Exploitation and Social Parasitism

Laurat will say that he "does not object" to the bureaucracy being paid for its labor insofar as it fulfills the necessary political, economic, and cultural functions; but what is involved is its uncontrolled appropriation of an absolutely disproportionate part of the national income: precisely in this sense does it appear as the "exploiting class". This argument, based on undubitable facts, does not, however, change the social physiognomy of the bureaucracy.

Always and in every regime, the bureaucracy devours no small portion of surplus value. It might not be uninteresting, for example, to compute what portion of the national income is devoured by the Fascist locusts in Italy or Germany! But this fact, of no small importance by itself,



is entirely insufficient to transform the Fascist bureaucracy into an *independent* ruling class. It is the hireling of the bourgeoisie. True, this hireling straddles the boss's neck, tears from his mouth at times the juiciest pieces, and spits on his bald spot besides. Say what you will, a most inconvenient hireling! But, nevertheless, only a hireling. The bourgeoisie abides with him because without him, it and its regime would absolutely go to the dogs.

*Mutatis Mutandis* (changing what should be changed), what has been said above can be applied to the Stalinist bureaucracy as well. It devours, wastes, and embezzles a considerable portion of the national income. Its management costs the proletariat very dearly. In the Soviet society, it occupies an extremely privileged position not only in the sense of having political and administrative prerogatives but also in the sense of possessing enormous material advantages. Still, the biggest apartments, the juiciest steaks, and even Rolls Royces are not enough to transform the bureaucracy into an independent ruling class.

Inequality, moreover, such crying inequality, would, of course, be absolutely impossible in a socialist society. But contrary to official and semi-official lies the present Soviet regime is not socialist but transitional. It still bears within it the monstrous heritage of capitalism, social inequality in particular, not only between the bureaucracy and the proletariat, but also within the bureaucracy itself and within the proletariat. At the given stage, inequality still remains, within certain limits, the bourgeois instrument of socialist progress: differential wages, bonuses, etc., as stimuli for emulation.

While it explains the inequality, the transitional character of the present system nowise justifies those monstrous, open, and secret privileges that have been arrogated to themselves by the uncontrolled tops of the bureaucracy. The Left Opposition did not await the revelations of Urbahns,

Laurat, Souvarine and Simone Weil\*, etc., before announcing that the bureaucracy in all its manifestations is pulling apart the moral tie-rods of the Soviet society; engendering an acute and a lawful dissatisfaction among the masses; and preparing the ground for great dangers. Nevertheless, the privileges of the bureaucracy by themselves do not change the bases of the Soviet society, because the bureaucracy derives its privileges not from any special property relations, peculiar to it as a "class", but from those property relations which have been created by the October revolution, and which are fundamentally adequate for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

To put it plainly, insofar as the bureaucracy robs the people (and this is done in various ways by every bureaucracy), we have to deal not with *class exploitation*, in the scientific sense of the word, but with *social parasitism*, although on a very large scale. During the middle ages the clergy constituted a class or an estate, insofar as its rule depended upon a specific system of land property and forced labor. The present day church constitutes not an exploiting class but a parasitic corporation. It would be silly to actually speak of the American clergy as a special ruling class; yet, it is indubitable that the priests of the different colors and denominations devour in the United States a big portion of the surplus value. In its traits of parasitism,

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\* Having fallen into despair over the "unsuccessful" experiments of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Simone Weil has found solace in a new vocation: the defense of her personality against society. The hoary formula of liberalism, vivified with cheap anarchistic exaltation! And think of it—Simone Weil speaks loftily about our "illusions". She and those like her require many years of stubborn perseverance in order to free themselves from the most reactionary lower middle class prejudices. Appropriately enough her new views have found a haven in an organ that bears the obviously ironic name, "The Proletarian Revolution". This Louzon publication is ideally suited for revolutionary melancholiacs, and political rentiers living on the dividends from their capital of recollections, and pretentious philosophizers who will perhaps adhere to the revolution....after it will have been achieved.

the bureaucracy, as well as the clergy, approximates to the lumpen-proletariat, which likewise does not represent, as is well known, an independent "class".

## Two Perspectives

The question will stand out before us in bolder relief if we take it not in its static but in its dynamic cross-section. Squandering unproductively a tremendous portion of the national income, the Soviet bureaucracy is interested at the same time by its very function, in the economic and cultural growth of the country: the higher the national income, the more copious its funds of privileges. Concurrently, upon the social foundations of the Soviet state, the economic and cultural uplift of the laboring masses must tend to undermine the very bases of bureaucratic domination. Clearly, in the light of this fortunate historical variant, the bureaucracy turns out to be only the instrument—a bad and an expensive instrument—of the socialist state.

But by squandering an ever bigger portion of the national income and by disrupting the basic proportions of economy—it will be gainsaid—the bureaucracy *retards* the economic and cultural growth of the country. Absolutely correct! The further unhindered development of bureaucratism must lead inevitably to the cessation of economic and cultural growth, to a terrible social crisis, and to the downward plunge of the entire society. But this would imply not only the collapse of the proletarian dictatorship, but at the same time the end of bureaucratic domination. In place of the workers state would come not "social bureaucratic" but capitalist relations.

We trust that by thus posing the question in perspective we shall be able once for all to probe thoroughly into the controversy over the class nature of the U. S. S. R.; whether we take the variant of further successes for the Soviet regime, or, contrariwise, the variant of its collapse, the bureaucracy in either case turns out to be not an independ-



ent class but an excrescence upon the proletariat. A tumor can grow to tremendous size and even strangle the living organism, but a tumor can never become an independent organism.

Finally, we may add for the sake of complete clarity: if in the U. S. S. R., today, the Marxist party were in power, it would renovate the entire political regime: it would shuffle and cleanse the bureaucracy, and place it under the control of the masses; it would transform all of the administrative practises, and inaugurate a series of capital reforms in the management of economy; but in no case would it have to undertake an *overturn in the property relations, i. e., a new social revolution.*

### The Possible Paths of Counter-Revolution

The bureaucracy is not a ruling class. But the further development of the bureaucratic regime can lead to the inception of a new ruling class: not organically, through degeneration, but through counter-revolution. We call the Stalinist apparatus *centrist* precisely because it fulfills a dual role; *today*, when there is *no longer* a Marxist leadership, and none forthcoming *as yet*, it defends the proletarian dictatorship with its own methods; but these methods are such as facilitate the victory of the enemy *tomorrow*. Whoever fails to understand this dual role of Stalinism in the U. S. S. R., has understood nothing.

The socialist society will live its life without a party, just as it will live without a state. Under the conditions of the transitional epoch the political superstructure plays a *decisive* role. A developed and stable dictatorship of the proletariat presupposes that the party functions in the leading role as a self-acting vanguard; that the proletariat is welded together by means of trade unions; that the toilers are indissolubly bound up with the State through the system of soviets; and finally, that the workers' state is aligned through the International into a fighting unit with the world proletariat. In the meantime the bureaucracy has strangled

the party and the trade unions and the soviets and the Communist International. There is no need to explain here what a gigantic portion of the guilt for the degeneration of the proletarian regime falls upon the international social democracy which is so splashed with crimes and betrayals, —and to which, by the way, M. Laurat also belongs.\*

But whatever the actual apportionment of the historical responsibility may be, the result remains the same: the strangulation of the party, the soviets, and the trade unions implies the political atomization of the proletariat. Social antagonisms instead of being overcome politically are suppressed administratively. These collect under pressure to the same extent that the political resources disappear for solving them normally. The first social shock, external or internal, may throw the atomized Soviet society into civil war. The workers, having lost control over the state and economy, may resort to mass strikes, as weapons of self-defense. The discipline of the dictatorship would be broken. Under the onslaught of the workers and because of the pressure of economic difficulties the trusts would be forced to disrupt the planned beginnings and enter into competition with one another. The dissolution of the regime would naturally find its violent and chaotic echo in the village, and would inevitably be thrown over into the army. The social-

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\* This prophet accuses the Russian Bolshevik-Leninists of lacking revolutionary decisiveness. Confusing, in the Austro-Marxist style, revolution with counter-revolution, and the return to bourgeois democracy with the preservation of the proletarian dictatorship, Laurat lectures Rakovsky upon revolutionary struggles. This same gentleman in passing adjudges Lenin to be a "mediocre theoretician". Small wonder! Lenin who formulated in the simplest manner the most complex theoretical conclusions cannot overawe the pretentious philistine who endows his thin and flat generalizations with a cabalistic air.

Layout for a visiting card: "Lucien Laurat: by avocation, a reserve theoretician and strategist of the proletarian revolution... for Russia; by profession, assistant to Leon Blum."

The inscription is somewhat long but correct. It is said that this "theoretician" has adherents among the youth. Poor youth!

ist state would collapse giving place to the capitalist regime, or, more correctly, to capitalist chaos.

The Stalinist press, of course, will reprint our warning analysis as a counter-revolutionary prophecy, or even as the expressed "desire" of the Trotskyites. Toward the newspaper hacks of the apparatus we have long since had no other feeling save that of silent contempt. In our opinion, the situation is dangerous but not at all hopeless. In any case, it would be an act of abysmal cowardice and of direct betrayal to announce that the greatest revolutionary post has been lost,—before the battle, and without a battle.

### Is it Possible to Remove the Bureaucracy "Peacefully"?

If it is true that the bureaucracy has concentrated all power and all the avenues to power in its hands,—and it is true—then a question arises of no little importance: How approach the reorganization of the Soviet state? And, is it possible to solve this task with peaceful methods?

We must set down, first of all, as an immutable axiom—that this task can be solved only by a revolutionary *party*. The fundamental historic task is to create the revolutionary party in the U. S. S. R. from among the healthy elements of the old party and from among the youth. Later we shall deal with the conditions under which it can be solved. Let us assume, however, that such a party is already in existence. Through what ways could it assume power? As early as 1927 Stalin said, addressing the Opposition, "The present ruling group can be eliminated only through civil war." This challenge, Bonapartist in spirit, was addressed not to the Left Opposition but—to the party. Having concentrated all the levers in its hands, the bureaucracy proclaimed openly that it would not permit the proletariat to raise its head any longer. The subsequent course of events has added great weight to this challenge. After the experiences of the last few years, it would be childish to suppose that the Stalinist bureaucracy can be removed by means of a party or soviet congress. In reality, the last congress of the Bolshevik



party took place at the beginning of 1923, the 12th party Congress. All subsequent congresses were bureaucratic parades. Today, even such congresses have been discarded. No normal "constitutional" ways remain to remove the ruling clique. The bureaucracy can be compelled to yield power into the hands of the proletarian vanguard only by force.

All the hacks will immediately howl in chorus: The "Trotskyites", like Kautsky, are preaching an armed insurrection against the dictatorship of the proletariat. But let us pass on. The question of seizing power will arise as a practical question for the new party only when it will have consolidated around itself the majority of the working class. In the course of such a radical change in the relation of forces, the bureaucracy would become more and more isolated, more and more split. As we know, the social roots of the bureaucracy lie in the proletariat, if not in its active support, then, at any rate, in its "toleration". When the proletariat springs into action, the Stalinist apparatus will remain suspended in mid-air. Should it still attempt to resist, it will then be necessary to apply against it not the measures of civil war, but rather measures of police character. In any case, what will be involved is not an armed insurrection against the dictatorship of the proletariat but the removal of a malignant growth upon it.

A real civil war could develop not between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the resurgent proletariat but between the proletariat and the active forces of the counter-revolution. In the event of an open clash between the two mass camps, there cannot even be talk of the bureaucracy playing an independent role. Its polar flanks would be flung to the different sides of the barricade. The fate of the subsequent development would be determined, of course, by the outcome of the struggle. The victory of the revolutionary camp, in any case, is conceivable only under the leadership of a proletarian party which would naturally be raised to power by victory over the counter-revolution.

## The New Party in the U.S.S.R.

Which is closer: the danger of the collapse of the Soviet power which has been sapped by bureaucratism, or the hour of the consolidation of the proletariat around a new party which is capable of saving the October heritage? There is no *a priori* answer to such a question; the struggle will decide. A major historical test—which may be a war—will determine the relation of forces. It is clear, in any case, that with the further decline of the world proletarian movement and the further extension of the Fascist domination, it is not possible to maintain the Soviet power for any length of time by means of the internal forces alone. The fundamental condition for the only rock-bottom reform of the Soviet state is the victorious spread of the *world revolution*.

In the West the revolutionary movement may revive even without a party, but it can conquer only under the leadership of the party. Throughout the entire epoch of the social revolution, that is, for a series of decades, the international revolutionary party remains the basic instrument of historic progress. Urbahns by raising the cry that “old forms” are outlived and that something “new” is needed—precisely what?—exposes only the muddle he is in . . . in rather old forms. Trade union work, under the conditions of “planned” capitalism, and the struggle against Fascism, and the impending war will indubitably result in producing divers new methods and types of fighting organizations. Only, instead of indulging like the Brandlerites in phantasies upon the illegal trade unions, one must study attentively the actual course of the struggle, seizing upon the initiative of the workers themselves, extending and generalizing it. But, first and foremost, a party, i. e., a politically welded core of the proletarian vanguard, is required to accomplish this work. Urbahns’s position is subjective: he became disillusioned in the party, after he had successfully wrecked his own “party” on the rocks.

Among the innovators, a few proclaim,—we said “long

ago" that new parties are needed; now, at last, the "Trotskyites" have also come around to it; in time, they will also understand that the Soviet Union is not—a workers' state. Instead of studying the actual historic process, these people are busy making astronomical "discoveries". As early as 1921, Gorter's sect and the German "Communist Labor Party" decided that the Comintern was doomed. Since then, there has been no lack of such announcements (Loriot, Korsch, Souvarine and so forth). However, absolutely nothing came out of these "diagnoses" because they reflected only the subjective disillusion of circles and personalities and not the objective demands of the historical process. It is precisely for this reason that the loud innovators remain on the side lines right now.\*

The course of events follows no pre-arranged route. The Comintern ruined itself by its capitulation before Fascism in the eyes of the masses, and not of individuals. But even after the collapse of the Comintern, the Soviet state still exists; true, with its revolutionary authority greatly reduced. One must take the facts as they are given by the actual development, and not become capricious, and purse one's lips like Simone Weil; one must not take offense at history, nor turn one's back to it.

To build the new parties and the new International, first of all, reliable principled bases are required and those that stand upon the level of our epoch. We have no illusions concerning the deficiencies and lapses in the theoretical inventory of the Bolshevik-Leninists. However, their ten years' work has prepared the fundamental *theoretical and strategic pre-requisites for the building of the new interna-*

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\* By its very nature what has been said above cannot apply to those organizations which have comparatively recently split away from the social democracy, or which, generally, had their own particular type of development (like the Socialist Revolutionary Party of Holland) and which naturally refused to link their fate with the fate of the Comintern in the period of its decay. The best of these organizations are now placing themselves under the banner of the new International. Others will place themselves tomorrow.



*tional.* Hand in hand with our new allies we will develop these pre-requisites and concretize them upon the basis of criticism in the actual course of the struggle.

#### Fourth International and the U.S.S.R.

In the U. S. S. R., the core of the new party,—in reality, the Bolshevik party revived under new conditions—will be the group of Bolshevik-Leninists. Even the official Soviet press during the last few months has testified that our adherents have been carrying on their work courageously and not unsuccessfully. But illusions would be out of place here: the party of revolutionary internationalism will be able to free the workers from the decomposing influence of the national bureaucracy only in the event that the international proletarian vanguard will once again appear as a fighting force on the world arena.

From the beginning of the imperialist war, and in developed form—since the October revolution, the Bolshevik party played the leading role in the world revolutionary struggle. Today, this position has been completely lost. This applies not only to the official caricature of a party. The extremely difficult conditions under which the Russian Bolshevik-Leninists work exclude them from the possibility of playing the leading role on the international scale. More than this; the Left Opposition group in the U. S. S. R. can develop into a new party only as a result of the successful formation and growth of the new International. The revolutionary center of gravity has shifted definitely to the West where the immediate possibilities of building parties are immeasurably greater.

Under the influence of the tragic experiences of recent years, a great number of revolutionary elements within the proletariat of all countries has gathered, who await a clear call, and an unspotted banner. True, the convulsions of the Comintern have almost everywhere impelled new strata of workers towards the social democracy. But pre-

cisely this influx of alarmed masses becomes a mortal danger for reformism; it is ripping at the seams, disintegrating into factions, and everywhere extruding a revolutionary wing. Such are the immediate political pre-conditions for the new International. The corner stone has been laid already: it is the declaration of principles by the four organizations.

The condition for further successes is the correct evaluation of the world situation, including the class nature of the Soviet Union. Along this line, the new International will be subjected to tests from the very first days of its existence. Before it will be able to reform the Soviet state, it must take upon itself its defense.

Every political tendency that waves its hand hopelessly at the Soviet Union, under the pretext of its "non-proletarian" character, runs the risk of becoming the passive instrument of imperialism. And from our standpoint, of course, the tragic possibility is not excluded that the first workers' state weakened by its bureaucracy will fall under the joint blows of its internal and external enemies. But even in the event of this worst possible variant, a tremendous significance for the subsequent course of the revolutionary struggle will be borne by the question: *Where* are those guilty for the catastrophe? Not the slightest taint of guilt must fall upon the revolutionary internationalists. In the hour of mortal danger they must remain on the last barricade.

Today, the rupture of the bureaucratic equilibrium in the U. S. S. R. would almost surely serve in favor of the counter-revolutionary forces. However, given a genuine revolutionary International, the inevitable crisis of the Stalinist regime would open the possibility of revival in the U. S. S. R. This is our basic course.

Every day the foreign policies of the Kremlin deal new blows to the world proletariat. Adrift from the masses, the diplomatic functionaries under the leadership of Stalin trample over the most elementary revolutionary feelings of the workers of all countries, first of all, to the greatest de-

triment of the Soviet Union itself. But in this, there is nothing unexpected. The foreign policies of the bureaucracy supplement the domestic. We fight as much against the one as the other. But we wage our struggle from the standpoint of defending the workers' state.

The functionaries of the decomposing Comintern, in different countries, continue to swear their loyalty to the Soviet Union. It would be an act of inexcusable stupidity to build anything at all upon these oaths. For the majority of these people, the noisy "defense" of the U. S. S. R. is not a conviction but a profession. They do not fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat; they mop up the tracks of the Stalinist bureaucracy (see, for example, *l'Humanité*). In the hour of crisis the Barbus-sized Comintern will be capable of offering no greater support to the Soviet Union than the opposition it had offered to Hitler. But it is otherwise with the revolutionary internationalists. Ingloriously hounded for a decade by the bureaucracy, they indefatigably call the workers to the defense of the Soviet Union.

On that day when the new International will demonstrate to the Russian workers not in words but in action that it, and it alone, stands for the defense of the workers' state, the position of the Bolshevik-Leninists inside the Soviet Union will change within 24 hours. The new International will offer the Stalinist bureaucracy a united front against the common foe. And if our International represents a force, the bureaucracy will be unable to evade the united front in the moment of danger. What then will remain of the many years' encrustation of lies and slander?

Even in the event of war, the united front with the Stalinist bureaucracy will not imply a "holy alliance" after the manner of bourgeois and social democratic parties who during the time of an imperialist brawl suspend mutual criticism in order to better dupe the people thereby. No; even in the event of war, we will maintain a critical irreconcilability toward bureaucratic centrism, which will not be



able to cover up its incapacity to lead a genuine revolutionary war.

The problem of the world revolution as well as the problem of the Soviet Union may be summed up in one and the same brief formula:

*The Fourth International*

*October 1, 1933.*

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