

## Chapter X

### THE WORLD REVOLUTION AND RUSSIAN RE-ORIENTATION

The Russian revolution in its early periods was viewed by its authors as a mere incident in the impending international proletarian revolution, as a fulfilment of the Marxian prediction that Russia may "give the signal for a working class revolution in the West, so that both may supplement each other."

The Bolsheviki in power did not think it possible that a Socialist Russia could stand alone for any considerable length of time amidst a non-Socialist world. They considered themselves in the light of a vanguard of the world revolution charged with the task of holding the fort until re-inforcement would come from the West. They counted upon the immediate breakdown of the capitalist rule in Europe and America as a political reality, and their social theories and practical policies were shaped on that assumption.

Almost half a year after the successful accomplishment of the Bolshevik revolution, on April 14, 1918, Leo Trotzky, who is among the most optimistic leaders of Russian Communism, made this explicit avowal in a public speech:

"From the very first days of the revolution we said that the Russian revolution would be able to win and to free the Russian people only on the condition that it marked the beginning of a revolution in all countries; but that if in Germany the reign of capital remained, if in New York the supremacy of the stock exchange continued, if in England British imperialism held its sway as heretofore, then we should be done for, since they were stronger, richer than we, as yet better educated, and their military machines stronger than ours."<sup>1</sup>

And again:

"Our task at the present moment is to procrastinate, to hold out till the revolution begins in all European countries—to hold out, to consolidate our strength and to stand firmer on our feet, since at present we are feeble, shattered, and morally feeble."<sup>2</sup>

Karl Radeck, speaking retrospectively of the same period, adds the following interesting testimony: "At the conclusion of the Brest treaty, the Soviet Government estimated the breathing spell afforded by that peace as a very short one; either the world revolution would soon come and rescue Soviet Russia, or Soviet Russia would go down in the unequal conflict—such was our view at that time. And this conception was in accordance with the situation at that moment."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "A Paradise in This World," Publication of British Socialist Party, London, page 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 13.

<sup>3</sup> "Soviet Russian Concession to Capital," Article in *Soviet Russia Magazine*, N. Y., February 12, 1921.

The hope and belief in an impending world revolution of the working class persisted tenaciously among the leaders of the Russian revolution.

Lenin's spirited polemic with Karl Kautsky concludes with this postscript: "The above lines were written on November 9, 1918. In the night following news was received from Germany announcing the beginning of a *victorious revolution*, at first at Kiel and other northern towns and ports, where power had passed into the hands of Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates, and then in Berlin, where the authority has also passed into the hands of the Soviet. The conclusion which I was going to write on Kautsky's pamphlet and on the *proletarian revolution* has thereby been rendered superfluous." <sup>4</sup> (Italics mine.)

The failure of the German rising as a proletarian Soviet revolution and the similar disappointments elsewhere had but little effect upon the Messianic faith of the Russian Communists, and for a long time they continued to acclaim every new political or industrial struggle on a large scale in the countries of the West as the beginning of a decisive proletarian revolution.

Only when the Sparticide risings in Germany were quelled and the Hungarian Soviet government was overthrown; when the great struggle in the Italian metal industry was settled by mutual concessions, and

<sup>4</sup> "The Proletarian Revolution," page 113.

the oft-announced general strikes in England systematically failed to materialize; when the spirit of unrest and rebellion engendered by the war and the Versailles "settlement" was succeeded by a state of sullen apathy, and the capitalist world settled down to a spell of heavy political reaction, only then did the Communists begin to lose faith in an imminent world revolution.

The Russian revolution could no longer be treated as the mere initial phase of a spontaneous and simultaneous international working-class rising. It was a phenomenon by itself, to be accounted for by its own peculiar causes and dependent for its continuance largely upon its own resources. The recognition of this fact forced a sharp re-orientation in the theoretical bases and practical policies of the Soviet government.

2. So long as the Russian revolution was viewed as an integral part of a general world-wide rising of the working class, it was possible to bring it within the accepted Marxian concept, but as an isolated event it calls for a new and different theoretical foundation. And the Bolshevik authorities, never embarrassed or abashed about theories, promptly met the need. \*

In his report on National and Colonial Questions before the Second Congress of the Communist International Lenin raises the question of the functions of the Communist Party in "pre-capitalist" countries, and arrives at the following answer:

"In such countries it is quite possible to establish a Soviet authority. The experiences of Russia and of

various Mussulman republics—for example, Turkestan—show that the Soviet republic can be successful not only in proletarian countries but even in those countries where pre-capitalist relations exist. In these countries great difficulty is experienced in organizing Soviets, but without question it is possible to arouse an independent revolutionary consciousness and movement even in these countries. The Soviet idea is very simple and can be understood not only by the proletariat, but also by the broader non-proletarian masses. \* \* \*

*"We must abandon scientific prejudices that each country must absolutely pass through capitalist exploitation. The régime of Soviets, when there is a powerful proletariat uprising on a world scale, can be established in those countries in which the capitalist development has not attained any serious proportions."*<sup>5</sup> (Italics mine.)

The "scientific prejudices" here mentioned have reference to the theory that every country must pass through the phase of capitalist development before it is ripe for Socialism, which Karl Marx has formulated in the preface to the first edition of his Capital in the following characteristically vigorous language:

"Intrinsically, it is not a question of a higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonisms that result from the natural laws of capitalist produc-

<sup>5</sup> "The Second Congress of the Communist International," pages 38 and 39.

tion. It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results. The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the lesser developed, the image of its own future."

Are we justified in discarding this theory as a mere "scientific prejudice?" The experience of Russia has concretely demonstrated that a Socialist revolution has been possible at least in one great country "in which capitalist development had not attained any serious proportions." Whether that experience is altogether *sui generis* or can be reasonably generalized into a law of social development, and particularly whether the operation of such a law can be extended to Asiatic countries of Mohammedan culture is fairly open to discussion, but the interesting point is that the new doctrine marks a clear departure from one of the fundamental tenets of Marxian historical science.

While Lenin is still cautious in his statement and limits the possibility of "leaping over" the capitalist phase of development to conditions "when there is a powerful uprising on a world scale," Bukharin proceeds frankly and boldly to build an entirely novel and universal theory of revolution. He admits that the type of the Socialist or Communist revolution must of necessity be higher in the countries of advanced capitalist development and proletarian organization than in those of pre-capitalist economy, but declares that the superiority of the type of such revolutions must not be

confused with the question of their chronological order. Summing up his theory, he arrives at the following interesting results: "If we examine the revolutionary process on a world-wide scale, we may draw the following general conclusions: The revolutionary world process begins in those parts of the economic system of the world in which the degree of development is lower, in which the victory of the proletariat is easier, but the crystallization of the new system is more difficult. The rapidity with which a revolution is accomplished stands in inverse ratio to the maturity of capitalist development and to the height of the revolutionary type achieved."

Here is the late Peter Nikitich Tkachoff resurrected, modernized and generalized. Under the new doctrine of the "ultra Marxian" Bukharin it is not difficult to discern the cloven hoof of the old "Narodnik" with his specious argument: "We have no proletariat, but we also have no bourgeoisie, hence the struggle of our workers is easier."

Bukharin's striking conclusions proceed from the theory that the war in destroying the unstable equilibrium of international capitalist organization has broken down the entire world system of capitalist economy, and that the weaker parts of the system, no longer able to lean on its stronger links, will automatically collapse.

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\* "The Process of World Revolution and the World System of Communism."

He takes it for granted that such collapse must assume the form of proletarian revolutions.

The revolution is thus viewed as a purely passive process. Its success is made to depend not on the strength of the proletarian attack but solely on the weakness of the bourgeois resistance. Bukharin seems to overlook the pertinent fact that in the countries of the "lowest level of capitalist development," there is a rule no revolutionary proletariat to contest even the feeble rule of the bourgeoisie.

The Bolshevik theoreticians have "learned over" a great deal since the pre-revolutionary days of 1915, when Lenin wrote:

"A revolution is not produced by every revolutionary situation; it is produced when, in addition to the objective changes enumerated above (a weakened ruling class and intense suffering and activity of the masses) certain subjective changes take place, viz., *when a revolutionary class shows ability to take revolutionary mass action sufficiently forceful to break, or at least to damage, the existing government. Even in times of crises, governments do not 'tumble down of their own accord,' but require a force to 'overthrow' them.*"<sup>7</sup>

But the theoretical re-orientation is of only slight importance compared with the radical modifications of the practical policies which the Russian Communists

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<sup>7</sup> "The Collapse of the Second International," Glasgow, page 17.



adopted as a result of their disillusionment on the subject of the impending world revolution. Both the foreign policy and the internal economy of Soviet Russia were profoundly affected by the new point of view.

As to the change in Russia's foreign policy Karl Radek with his customary frankness makes the following explanation:

"The fact that the world war has been ended, that the demobilization crisis has been overcome, that the world revolution has not broken up the capitalist world in the form of an explosion, but in the form of a gradual corrosion—*this fact completely alters the situation, the conditions, of the foreign policies of the Soviet Government.*

On the one hand, the Soviet Government cannot reckon on a swift mechanical liberation through a mass movement that would completely overthrow the Clemenceaus, Lloyd Georges, and all they stand for, and, on the other hand, the Soviet Government may be mathematically certain that the process of capitalistic disintegration will continue and lighten its burdens. *But as this is a long process,* Soviet Russia cannot escape the question of seeking a *modus vivendi* with those states that are still capitalistic."<sup>8</sup> (Italics mine.)

And Lenin expresses a similar view in a recent speech before the Soviet functionaries of Moscow. "So long as the world revolution is not here," he says, "we need

<sup>8</sup> *Soviet Russia Magazine*, N. Y., February 12, 1921.

bourgeois capital. Since our country is in a position of extreme economic weakness, how can we accelerate the process of industrial development? With the aid of bourgeois capital.”<sup>9</sup>

The first practical application of this principle of compromise was made in connection with several important “concessions” to foreign bourgeois capital. These concessions cover vast areas of forest land, coal and iron mining districts, and several valuable industrial franchises. As indicating the length to which the Soviet government is ready to go, it is interesting to note that these concessions, which run for long terms (in the case of the American promoter Washington D. Vanderlip, for 60 years), carry express guaranties embodied in a formal decree of the Council of Peoples’ Commissars to the effect that the concessionaires’ investments and property would at no time be “nationalized, confiscated or requisitioned” and that the concessionaires would have the right to employ Russian workers as wage laborers subject to the observance of the labor laws of the country.

X Capitalism, which was officially banished from Soviet Russia is thus allowed to come back at least in spots by way of the back door. X

A compromise of a somewhat different character is involved in the efforts to conclude trade agreements

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<sup>9</sup> “German Translation in New Yorker Volkszeitung,” February 8, 1921.

with foreign capitalist countries. Foreign trade has always been a necessity for Russia. It has become more vital than ever at this time on account of the progressive destruction of the country's mechanical implements of production and means of transportation since the outbreak of the war. If the industrial countries of Europe and America, or some of them, had been under proletarian rule, trade agreements with Russia would, of course, be effected without any compromise of principle or policy. But the *Realpolitiker* of Soviet Russia understand perfectly well that they cannot reach any agreement with the capitalist governments of the West so long as they are engaged in open and active propaganda for the overthrow of these very governments. The *modus vivendi* with foreign capitalist governments thus necessarily implies a serious curtailment of Soviet Russia's international revolutionary activities.

The very first article of the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement provides: "That each party refrains from hostile action or undertakings against the other and from conducting outside of its own borders any official propaganda, *direct or indirect*, against the institutions of the British Empire or the Russian Soviet Republic, respectively, and *more particularly that the Russian Soviet Government refrains from any attempt*, by military or diplomatic or any other form of action or *propaganda*, to encourage any of the peoples of Asia in any form of hostile action against British interests or the British Empire."

And the paragraph is emphasized by the further explanatory provision "that the term 'conducting any official propaganda' includes the giving by either party of assistance or *encouragement to any propaganda* conducted outside of its own borders." (Italics mine.)

At least to the uninitiated this stipulation sounds like a complete abandonment of the Communist efforts "to arouse an independent and revolutionary consciousness and movement in the 'various Mussulman republics.'" It seems to confirm Martoff's charge that the Communists use the peoples of the East "as pawns on the chess-board of the diplomatic war with the Entente"<sup>10</sup> and to lend point to Radek's reported admission that the "levers of the Oriental upheaval are all in the Kremlin, and Moscow could pull them or leave them untouched exactly as her own interests dictated."<sup>11</sup>

Similarly the recent note of the Soviet government addressed to President Harding after expressing the hope "that intimate and solid ties would be created between the two republics" (the Communist workers' republic of Russia and the ultra-bourgeois republic of the United States) conveys the "categorical declaration" of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee that the Soviet Republic "has not the intention of intervening in the internal affairs of America."

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<sup>10</sup> "U. S. P. D. Protokoll," page 214.

<sup>11</sup> H. N. Brailsford in *London Daily Herald*, December 28, 1920.

But with all its efforts to placate foreign capital the government of Soviet Russia is too wise to expect very substantial help for the economic reconstruction of the country from that source. The task of rebuilding Russia must be accomplished in the first line by Russia herself, and in justice to the Communist leaders it must be said that they never hesitated to sacrifice pet theories to practical tasks.

The industrial system of Soviet Russia was inaugurated as one of "Workmen's Control," based on the management of the workers in each plant through Shop Stewards' Committees elected by them and on the subordination of the "bourgeois" manager or expert to such committees. The workers were to have complete self-government and democracy in production. The immaturity of the Russian proletariat, its lack of training, discipline and organizing capacity rendered the new system utterly unworkable. It was abandoned with summary dispatch and supplanted by a system of state Socialism of an almost military character.

The shop committee was abolished, and the shop placed under one-man management mostly represented by a "specialist of the bourgeois school."

X The universal duty to work was proclaimed and industrial conscription introduced. X To secure the utmost production the Soviet government not only resorted to the well-known capitalist methods of stimulation through varying wages, piece work, bonuses, extra pay for over-time, etc., but established a minimum

standard of production and a system of fines for falling below the standard.

All these measures are, of course, considered in the light of temporary institutions necessitated by the exigencies of the acute struggles of the Soviet régime. It is expected that work will become more voluntary, compensation more equal, and management more democratic, with the progressive improvements in the industrial system, and the growing development of the workers in skill, discipline and productivity. 1. 2.

The expectation may be well founded. But <sup>2.</sup> the course of Soviet Russia's industrial and political policies once more goes to show the precarious nature of any "leap" over a historical phase of development. The Soviet régime of Russia undertook a jump beyond the limits of physical possibility. It has had to pay a heavy penalty for the levity of its youthful enthusiasm and to take a fresh and harder start at more realistic beginnings. For the future of Russia and for the Socialist movement of the rest of the world the lesson is of tremendous importance.

In Russia Political Super-Str. is  
 in adv. of econ. dev. - material  
 & "dogmatic" behind.