PAUL CARDAN

from bolshevism to the bureaucracy

A JOINT SOLIDARITY (LONDON) AND SOLIDARITY (SCOTLAND) PAMPHLET

FROM BOLSHEVISM TO THE BUREAUCRACY

'Unquestioning submission to a single will is absolutely necessary for the sucess of labour processes that are based on large scale machine industry..... The Revolution demands, in the interests of Socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process.' (i)

'I consider that if the Civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independant, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully.' (ii)

In 1962 SOLIDARITY decided to republish Alexandra Kollontai's article on 'THE WORKERS OPPOSITION IN RUSSIA' which had been unobtainable in Britain for over thirty years. (iii) (Copies of 'THE WORKERS OPP-

(i) Lenin: 'The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government'. Selected Works (vol V11 p 342). This was written in the spring of 1918.
(ii) Trotsky: Report to the Third All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions. (April 6- April 15 1920). Published in 'Terrorism and Communism' (Ann Arbor edition, 1961, pp 162-163).
(iii) The first English translation had appeared in successive issues of Sylvia Pankhurst's WORKERS DREADNOUGHT between April 22 and August 19 1921. Our pamphlet (Solidarity Pamphlet No 8. 'THE WORKERS OPPOSITION' by Alexandra Kollontai - 3/- post free) is fully annotated.

OSITION' (Solidarity Pamphlet No. 8) may be consulted at a) The British Museum; b) The library of the London School of Economics; c) The library of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam; d) The library of the Instituto di Storia Moderna, Genoa; and e) The Serials and Documents Section, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, USA.)

Kollontai's text, hastily written in the weeks preceding the 10th Congress of the Bolshevik Party (March 1921) describes the growth of the bureaucracy in Russia in a most perceptive and almost prophetic manner. It deals in detail with the great controversy (one man management or collective management of industry) then racking the Party and warns, in passionate terms, of the dangers inherent in the course then being pursued. It poses the alternatives in the clearest possible terms: bureaucratic control from above or the autonomous, creative activity of the masses themselves.

In 1964, Kollontai's classic was translated into French and published in issue No. 35 of the journal 'SOCIALISME OU BARBARIE', with a preface by Paul Cardan on 'The role of Bolshevik ideology in the development of the bureaucracy'. The pamphlet now in your hands is a translation of this preface.

We believe this text to be important for two main reasons: firstly there is still a widespread belief among revolutionaries that the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution only started after - and largely as a result of - the Civil War. Cardan's text goes a long way to show that this is an incomplete interpretation of what happened. The isolation of the revolution, the devastation of the civil war, the famine and the tremendous material difficulties confronting the Bolsheviks undoubtedly accelerated the process of bureaucratic degeneration, imprinting on it many of its specific features. The seeds however had been sown before. This can be seen by anyone seriously prepared to study the writings and speeches, the proclamations and decrees of the Bolsheviks in the months that followed their accession to power. In the last analysis, the ideas that inspire the actions of men are as much an objective factor in history as the material environment in which they develop and as the social reality which they seek to transform.

Secondly, this text is of interest because of the various nuances it throws on the concept of bureaucracy, a term we have ourselves at times been guilty of using without adequate definition. Cardan shows how a managerial bureaucracy can arise from very different historical antecedents. It can arise from the degeneration of a proletarian revolution, or as a 'solution' to the state of chronic crisis of economically backward countries or finally as the ultimate personification of state capital in modern industrial communities. Cardan points out the common features of these bureaucracies as well as the important aspects in which they differ. Such an analysis undoubtedly shatters many of the orderly schemata of traditional socialist thought. Too bad! This need only worry the conservatives in the revolutionary movement.

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Discussions about the Russian Revolution, its problems, its degeneration and about the society that it finally produced, cannot be brought to a close. How could they be? Of all the working class revolutions, the Russian Revolution was the only 'victorious' one. But it also proved the most profound and instructive of all working class defeats.

The crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871 - or of the Budapest uprising of 1956 - showed that proletarian revolts face immensely difficult problems of organisation and of politics. They showed that an insurrection can be isolated and that the ruling classes will not hesitate to employ any violence or savagery when their power is at stake. But what happened to the Russian Revolution compels us to consider not only the conditions for working class victory, but also the content and the possible fate of such a victory, its consolidation, its development, and the seeds that it might contain of a defeat, infinitely more far-reaching than the ones inflicted by the troops of the Versaillese or by Kruschev's tanks.

Because the Russian Revolution both crushed the White armies and succumbed to a bureaucracy, which it had itself generated, it confronts us with problems of a different order from those involved in the study of tactics of armed insurrection. It demands more than just a correct analysis of the relation of forces at any given moment. It compels us to think about the nature of working class power and about what we mean by socialism. The Russian Revolution culminated in a system in which the concentration of the economy, the totalitarian power of the rulers and the exploitation of the workers were pushed to the limit, producing an extreme form of centralisation of capital and of its fusion with the state. It resulted in what was - and in many ways still remains - the most highly developed and "purest" form of modern exploiting society.

Embodying marxism for the first time in history - only to display it soon after as a deformed caricature - the Russian Revolution has made it possible for revolutionaries to gain insights into marxism greater than those marxism ever provided in understanding the Russian Revolution. The social system which the revolution produced has become the touchstone of all current thinking, bourgeois and marxist alike. It destroyed classical marxist thinking in fulfilling it, and fulfilled the deepest content of other systems of thought, through their apparent refutation. Because of its extension over a third of the globe, because of recent workers' revolts against it, because of its attempts at self-reform and because of its schism into Russian and Chinese sections, post revolutionary bureaucratic society continues to pose highly topical questions. The world in which we live, think, and act was launched on its present course by the workers and Bolsheviks of Petrograd, in October 1917.

2. THE MAIN QUESTIONS

Among the innumerable questions posed by the fate of the Russian Revolution, there are two which form poles around which the others can be grouped.

The first question is: what kind of society was produced by the degeneration of the Revolution? (What is the nature and the dynamic of this system? What is the Russian bureaucracy? What is its relationship to capitalism and the proletariat? What is its historical role and what are its present problems?) The second question is: how could a workers' revolution give rise to a bureaucracy and how did this happen in Russia? We have studied this problem at a theoretical level (1), but we have so far said little about the concrete events of history.

There is an almost insurmountable obstacle to the study of the particularly obscure period going from October 1917 to March 1921 during which the fate of the Revolution was settled. The question of most concern to us is that of deciding to what degree the Russian workers sought to take control of their society into their own hands. To what degree did they aspire to manage production, regulate the economy and decide political questions themselves? What was the level of their consciousness and what was their own spontaneous activity? What was their attitude to the Bolshevik Party and to the developing bureaucracy?

Unfortunately, it is not the workers who write history, it is always 'the others'. And these 'others', whoever they may be, only exist historically inasmuch as the workers are passive or inasmuch as they are only active in the sense of providing 'the others' with support. Most of the time, 'official' historians don't have eyes to see or ears to hear the acts and words which express the workers' spontaneous activity. In the best instances they will vaunt rank and file activity as long as it 'miraculously' happens to coincide with their own line, but will radically condemn it and impute the basest motives to it, as soon as it deviates from their line. Trotsky, for example, described the anonymous workers of Petrograd in glowing terms when they flocked into the Bolshevik Party or when they mobilised themselves during the Civil War. But he was later to call the Kronstadt mutineers 'stool-pigeons' and 'hirelings of the French High Command'. 'Official' historians lack the categories of thought - one might also say the brain-cells - necessary to understand or even to perceive this activity as it really is. To them an activity which has no leader or programme, no institutions and no statutes, can only be described as "troubles" or "disorder". The spontaneous activity of the masses belongs, by definition, to what history suppresses.

---

(1) See Socialism Reaffirmed published by Solidarity (London) in 1961. This is a translation of the editorial of issue No 1 of Socialisme ou Barbarie.

It is not only that the documentary record of the events which interest us is fragmentary, or even that it was and remains systematically suppressed by the victorious bureaucracy. What is more important is that what record we have is infinitely more selective and slanted than any other historical evidence. The reactionary rage of bourgeois witnesses, the almost equally vicious hostility of the social-democrats, the muddled moans of the anarchists, the 'official' chronicles that are periodically rewritten according to the needs of the bureaucracy, the Trotskyist 'histories' that are only concerned with justifying their own tendency retrospectively (and in hiding the role that Trotskyism played at the onset of the degeneration) - all these have one thing in common: they ignore the autonomous activity of the masses, or, at best, they "prove" that it was logically impossible for it to have existed.

From this point of view, the information contained in Alexandra Kollontai's text (2) is of priceless value. Firstly Kollontai supplies direct evidence about the attitudes and reactions of a whole layer of Russian workers to the politics of the Bolshevik Party. Secondly, she shows that a large proportion of the working-class base of the Party was conscious of the bureaucratisation and struggled against it. Once this text has been read, it will no longer be possible to continue describing the Russia of 1920 as 'just chaos', as 'just a mass of ruins', where the ideas of Lenin and the 'iron will' of the Bolsheviks were the only elements of order. The workers did have aspirations of their own. They showed this through the Workers' Oppisition within the Party, and through the strikes of Petrograd and the Kronstadt revolt outside the Party. It was necessary for both to be crushed by Lenin and Trotsky for Stalin to emerge victorious.

3. THE TRADITIONAL 'ANSWERS'

How could the Russian Revolution have produced the bureaucracy? The usual answer (first put forward by Trotsky, later taken up by the fellow-travellers of Stalinism and, more recently still by Isaac Deutscher) consists of 'explaining' the 'bureaucratic deformations' of what is 'fundamentally a socialist system' by pointing out that the Revolution occurred in a backward country, which could not have built socialism on its own, that Russia was isolated by the defeat of the revolution in Europe (and more particularly in Germany between 1919 and 1920) and that the country had been completely devastated by the Civil War.

This answer would not deserve a moment's consideration, were it not for the fact that it is widely accepted and that it continues to play a mystifying role. The answer is, in fact, completely beside the point.

---

(2) The Workers' Opposition by Alexandra Kollontai, Solidarity Pamphlet No 7.

The backwardness of the country, its isolation and the widespread devastation - all indisputable facts - could equally well have resulted in a straight-forward defeat of the Revolution and in the restoration of classical capitalism. But what is being asked is precisely why no such simple defeat occurred, why the revolution defeated its external enemies only to collapse internally, why the degeneration took the specific form that led to the power of the bureaucracy.

Trotsky's answer, if we may use a metaphor, is like saying: "This patient developed tuberculosis because he was terribly run down." But being run down, the patient might have died. Or he might have contracted some other disease. Why did he contract this particular disease? What has to be explained in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, is why it was specifically a bureaucratic degeneration. This cannot be done by referring to factors as general as 'backwardness' or 'isolation'. We might add in passing that this 'answer' teaches us nothing that we can extend beyond the confines of the Russian situation. The only conclusion to be drawn from this kind of 'analysis' is that revolutionaries should ardently hope that future revolutions should only break out in the more advanced countries, that they shouldn't remain isolated and that civil wars should, wherever possible, not lead to chaos or devastation.

The fact, after all, that during the last twenty years, the bureaucratic system has extended its frontiers far beyond those of Russia, that it has established itself in countries that can hardly be called 'backward' (for instance Czechoslovakia and East Germany) and that industrialisation - which has made Russia the second power in the world - has in no way weakened this bureaucracy, shows that interpretations of the bureaucratic phenomenon based on 'backwardness' and/or 'isolation' are both insufficient and anachronistic.

4. BUREAUCRACY IN THE MODERN WORLD

If we wish to understand the emergence of the bureaucracy as an increasingly important class in the modern world, we must first note that paradoxically, it has emerged at the two opposite poles of social development. On the one hand, the managerial bureaucracy has appeared as a natural product in the evolution of fully developed capitalist societies. On the other hand, it has emerged as the 'forced answer' of backward countries to the problems of their own transition to industrialisation. The Russian bureaucracy is a particular variant, and will be discussed after the other two.

A. Modern capitalist societies

Here there is no mystery about the emergence of the bureaucracy. The concentration of production necessarily leads to the formation within industry of a managerial stratum, whose function is collectively to undertake the management of immense economic units, the administration of which is beyond the capacities of any one individual owner. The increasing role played by the state, in the economic as well as in other spheres, leads both to a quantitative extension of the bureaucratic state machine and to a qualitative change in its nature.

Within modern capitalist society, the working class movement degenerates through bureaucratisation. It becomes bureaucratic through becoming integrated with the established order, and it cannot be so integrated without being bureaucratised. In a modern capitalist society, the different elements constituting the bureaucracy - technico-economic, statist and "working-class" - coexist with varying degrees of success. They coexist both with each other and with the truly "bourgeois" elements (owners of the means of production). The importance of these new elements in the management of modern society is constantly increasing. In this sense, it might be said that the emergence of the bureaucracy corresponds to a final phase in the concentration of capital, and that the bureaucracy is the personification of capital during this phase, in much the same way as the bourgeoisie was its personification during the previous phase.

As far as its origins and its historical and social roles are concerned, the nature of this particular type of bureaucracy can be understood in terms of the classical marxist categories. (It doesn't matter in this respect that those who today claim to be marxists fall so far short of the possibilities of their own theory that they cannot give any historico-social definition of the modern bureaucracy. They believe that in their theory there is no room for any such thing as the bureaucracy, and so they deny its existence and speak of modern capitalism as though nothing had fundamentally changed in the last 50 or 100 years.)

B. The economically 'backward' countries

Here the bureaucracy emerges, one might say, because of a vacuum in society. In almost all backward societies, it is clear that the old ruling classes are incapable of carrying out industrialisation. Foreign capital creates, at best, only isolated pockets of modern exploitation. The young native bourgeoisie has neither the strength nor the courage to revolutionise the old social structure from top to bottom, in the way that a genuine modernisation would require. We might add that the native working class, because of this very fact, is too weak to

play the role assigned to it in Trotsky's theory of the "permanent revolution". It is too weak to eliminate the old ruling classes and to undertake a social transformation which would lead, without interruption, from bourgeois democracy through to socialism.

What happens then? A backward society can stagnate for a longer or shorter period. This is the situation today of many backward countries, whether recently constituted into states or whether they have been states for some time. But this stagnation means in fact a relativeand sometimes even an absolute lowering of economic and social standards, and constant disruptions in the old social equilibrium. This is almost always aggravated by factors which appear accidental, but which are really inevitable and which are greatly amplified in a society that is disintegrating. Each break in equilibrium develops into a crisis, nearly always coloured by some national component. The result may be an open and prolonged social and nationalstruggle (China, Algeria, Cuba, Indochina), or it may be a coup d'Etat, almost inevitably of a military nature (Egypt). The two examples are very different, but they also have features in common.

In the first type of example (China, etc), the politico-military leadership of the struggle gradually develops into an independent caste, which directs the 'revolution' and, after 'victory', takes in hand the reconstrcution of the country. To this end it incorporates converted elements from the old privileged classes, and seeks a certain popular basis. As well as developing the industry of the country, it comes to constitute the hierarchical pyramid which will be the skeleton of the new social structure. Industrialisation is carried out of course according to the classical methods of primitive accumulation. These involve intense exploitation of the workers and an even more intense exploitation of the peasants, who are more or less forcibly press-ganged into an industrial army of labour.

In the second example (Egypt, etc), the state-military bureaucracy, while exercising a certain power over the old privileged classes, does not completely eliminate them or the social interests they represent. The complete industrialisation of such countries will probably never be achieved without a further violent convulsion. But what is interesting from our point of view, is that in both instances the bureaucracy substitutes or tends to substitute itself for the bourgeoisie as the social stratum carrying out the task of primitive accumulation.

The emergence of this type of bureaucracy exploded the traditional categories of marxism. In no way did this new social class gradually form, grow and develop within the womb of the preceding society. The new class does not emerge because of the development of new modes of production, whose extension has become incompatible with the old social and economic relations.

It is, on the contrary, the bureaucracy which brings the new mode of production into existence. The bureaucracy does not even arise out of the normal functioning of the society. It arises from the fact that the society is no longer capable of functioning. Almost literally, it orininates from a social vacuum. Its historical roots lie wholly in the future. It is obviously nonsensical to say that the Chinese bureaucracy, for instance, originates from the industrialisation of the country. It would be far more accurate to say that industrialisation is the result of the bureaucracy's accession to power. In the present epoch, and short of a revolutionary solution on an international scale, a backward country cannot be industrialised without being bureaucratised.

C. Russia

Here the bureaucracy appears retrospectively to have played the historic role of the bourgeoisie of an earlier period, or of the bureaucracy of a backward country today, and it can therefore be identified to a certain extent with the latter. The conditions in which it arose however were entirely different. They were different precisely because Russia was not simply a 'backward' country in 1917, but a country which, side by side with its backwardness, presented certain well-developed capitalist features. (Russia was, after all, the fifth industrial power in the world in 1913.) These capitalist features were so well developed that Russia was the theatre of a proletarian revolution, which called itself socialist (long before this word had come to mean anything or nothing).

The first bureaucracy to become the ruling class in modern society, the Russian bureaucracy was the final product of a revolution which appeared to the whole world to have given power to the proletariat. The Russian bureaucracy, therefore, represents a very specific third type of bureaucracy (although it was in fact the first clearly to emerge in modern history). It is the bureaucracy which arises from the degeneration of a workers' revolution, the bureaucracy which is the degeneration of that revolution. This remains true, even though the Russian bureaucracy, from the onset, was partly a stratum 'managing centralised capital' and partly a 'social group whose objective was to develop industry by every possible means'.

5. THE WORKING CLASS IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

In what sense can one say that the October Revolution was proletarian, given the subsequent development of that revolution? Although the seizure of power in October 1917 was organised and led by the Bolshevik Party - and although this Party assumed power almost from the very first day - one has to ask this question if one refuses simply to identify a class with a party claiming to represent it.

Many people (various social democrats, sundry anarchists and the Socialist Party of Great Britain) have said that nothing really happened in Russia except a coup d'Etat carried out by a Party which, having somehow obtained the support of the working class, sought only to establish its own dictatorship and succeeded in doing so.

We don't wish to discuss this question in an academic manner. Our aim is not to decide whether the Russian Revolution warrants the label of proletarian revolution. The questions which are important for us are different ones. Did the Russian working class play a historical role of its own during this period? Or was it merely a sort of infantry, mobilised to serve the interests of other, already established forces? Did the Russian working class appear as a relatively independent force in the great tornado of actions, demands, ideas, forms of organisation, of these early years? Or was it just an object manipulated without much difficulty or risk, merely receiving impulses that originated elsewhere? Anyone with the slightest knowledge of the real history of the Russian Revolution could answer without hesitation. The independent role played by the proletariat was clear-cut and undeniable. The Petrograd of 1917 and even later was neither Prague in 1948 or Canton in 1949.

This independent role was shown, in the first place, by the very way in which the workers flocked to the ranks of the Bolshevik Party, giving it support, which no one at that time could have extorted from them. The independent role of the working class is shown by the relationship between the workers and this Party and in the way they spontaneously accepted the burdens of the civil war. It is shown above all, by their spontaneous activity in February and July 1917, and even more in October, when they expropriated the capitalists without waiting for Party directives, and in fact, often acting against such directives. It is shown in the manner in which they themselves sought to organise production. It is shown finally in the autonomous organs they set up: the factory committees and the Soviets.

The Revolution only proved possible because a vast movement of total revolt of the working masses, wishing to change their conditions of existence and to rid themselves of both bosses

and Czar, converged with the activity of the Bolshevik Party. It is true that the Bolshevik Party alone, in October 1917, gave articulate expression to the aspirations of the workers, peasants and soldiers, and provided them with a precise short-term objective: the overthrow of the Provisional Government. But this does not mean that the workers were just passive pawns. Without the workers, both inside and outside its ranks, the Party would have been physically and politically non-existent. Without the pressure arising from their increasingly radical attitudes, the Party would not even have adopted a revolutionary line. Even several months after the seizure of power, the Party could not be said to dominate the working masses.

But this convergence between workers and Party, which culminated in the overthrow of the Provisional Government and in the formation of a predominantly Bolshevik Government, turned out to be transitory. Signs of a divergence between Party and masses appeared very early, even though these divergencies, by their very nature, could not be as clear-cut as those between organised political trends. The workers certainly expected of the Revolution, a complete change in the conditions of their lives. They undoubtedly expected an improvement in their material conditions, although they knew quite well that this would not be possible immediately. But only those of limited imagination could analyse the Revolution in terms of this factor alone, or explain the ultimate disillusionment of the workers by the incapacity of the new regime to satisfy working class hopes of material advancement. The Revolution started, in a sense, with a demand for bread. But long before October, it had already gone beyond the problem of bread: it had obtained men's total commitment.

For more than three years the Russian workers bore the most extreme material privations without flinching, in order to supply the armies which fought the Whites. For them it was a question of freedom from the oppression of the capitalist class and of its state. Organised in soviets and factory committees, the workers could not imagine, either before, but more particularly after October, that the capitalists might be allowed to stay. And once rid of the capitalists, they discovered that they had to organise and manage production themselves. It was the workers themselves, who expropriated the capitalists, acting against the line of the Bolshevik Party (the nationalisation decrees, passed in the summer of 1918, merely recognised an established fact). And it was the workers who got the factories running once more.

6. THE BOLSHEVIK POLICY

The Bolsheviks saw things very differently. In so far as the Party had a clear-cut perspective after October (and contrary to Stalinist and Trotskyist mythology, there is documentary proof that the Party was utterly in the dark as to its plans for after seizure of power) the Party wished to establish a "well-organised" economy on "state capitalist" lines (an expression constantly used by Lenin) on which 'working class political power' would be superimposed (3). This power would be exercised by the Bolshevik Party, 'the party of the workers'. 'Socialism' (which Lenin clearly implies to mean the 'collective management of production') would come later.

All this was not just a 'line', not just something said or thought. In its mentality and in its profoundest attitudes the Party was permeated from top to bottom by the undisputed conviction that it had to manage and direct in the fullest sense. This conviction dated from long before the Revolution, as Trotsky himself showed when, in his biography of Stalin, he discusses the 'committee mentality'. The attitude was shared at the time by nearly all socialists (with a few exceptions, such as Rosa Luxembourg, the Gorter-Pannekoek trend in Holland, or the 'left communists' in Germany). This conviction was to be tremendously strengthened by the seizure of power, the civil war, and the consolidation of the Party's power. Trotsky expressed this attitude most clearly at the time, when he proclaimed the Party's 'historical birthright'.

This was more than just a frame of mind. After the seizure of power, all this becomes part of the real social situation. Party members individually assume managing positions in all realms of social life. Of course this is partly because "it is impossible to do otherwise" - but in its turn this soon comes to mean that whatever the Party does makes it increasingly difficult to do otherwise.

Collectively, the Party is the only real instance of power. And very soon, it is only the summits of the Party. Almost immediately after October, the soviets are reduced to merely

---

(3) One quote, from among hundreds, will illustrate this kind of thinking: "History took such an original course that it brought forth in 1918 two unconnected halves of Socialism, existing side by side like two future chickens in the single shell of international imperialism. In 1918 Germany and Russia were the embodiment of the most striking material realisation of the economic, the productive, the social economic conditions of socialism, on the one hand, and of the political conditions on the other." "Left Wing Communism - an Infantile Disorder", Selected Works. Vol. VII., p. 365.

decorative institutions. (As witness to this, it is interesting to note that they played no role whatsoever in the heated discussions which preceded the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, in the spring of 1918.)

If it is true that the real social conditions of men determine their consciousness, then it is illusory to ask of the Bolshevik Party that it should act in a way not in accord with its real social position. The real social situation of the Party is henceforth that of an organisation ruling society: the Party's point of view will no longer necessarily coincide with that of the society itself.

The workers offer no serious resistance to this development, or rather to this sudden revelation of the essential nature of the Bolshevik Party. At least we have no direct evidence that they did. Between the expropriation of the capitalists and the taking over of the factories (1917 - 1918) and the Petrograd strikes and the Kronstadt revolt (winter of 1920 - 1921), we have no articulate expression of the workers' independent activity. The Civil War and the continuous military mobilisation, the concern with immediate practical problems (production, food supplies, etc.) the obscurity of the problems, and, above all, the workers' confidence in 'their' party, account in part for this silence.

There are certainly two elements in the workers' attitude. On the one hand, there is the desire to be rid of all domination and to take the management of their affairs into their own hands. On the other hand, there is a tendency to delegate power to the one Party, which had proved itself to be irreconcilably opposed to the capitalists and which was leading the war against them. The contradiction between these two elements was not clearly perceived at the time, and one is tempted to say that it could not clearly have been perceived.

It was seen, however, and with great insight, within the Party itself. From the beginning of 1918 until the banning of factions in March 1921, there were tendencies within the Bolshevik Party which opposed the Party's line and the rapid bureaucratisation with astonishing clarity and far-sightedness. These were the "Left Communists" (at the beginning of 1918), the "Democratic Centralist" faction (1919) and the "Workers' Opposition" (1920 - 1921).

We have published details on the ideas and activities of these factions in the historical notes following Kollontai's text (4). The ideas of these groups expressed the reaction of the workers in the Party - and, no doubt, of proletarian circles outside the Party - to the state-capitalist line of the leadership. They expressed what might be called "the other component" of Marxism, the one which calls for actions by the workers themselves and proclaims that their emancipation will only be achieved through their own activity.

But these opposition factions were defeated one by one, and they were finally smashed in 1921, at the same time as the Kronstadt revolt was crushed. The feeble echoes of their criticism of the bureaucracy to be found in the Trotskyist "Left Opposition" after 1923, do not have the same significance. Trotsky is opposed to the wrong political line of the bureaucracy and to its having excessive power. He never questions the essential nature of the bureaucracy. Until almost the very end of his life Trotsky ignores the questions raised by the oppositions of 1918 - 1921, questions such as: "who is to manage production?" and "what is the proletariat supposed to do during the dictatorship of the proletariat - apart from working hard and carrying out the orders of 'its Party'?"

We may therefore conclude that, contrary to established mythology, it was not in 1927, nor in 1923, nor even in 1921, that the game was played and lost, but much earlier, during the period between 1918 and 1920. By 1921 a revolution in the full sense of the word would have been needed to re-establish the situation. As events proved, a mere revolt such as that of Kronstadt was insufficient to bring about essential changes. The Kronstadt warning did induce the Bolshevik Party to rectify certain mistakes relating to other problems (essentially those concerning the peasantry and the relationship between the urban and rural economy). It led to a lessening of the tensions provoked by the economic collapse and to the beginning of the economic reconstruction. But this "reconstruction" was firmly to be carried out along the lines of bureaucratic capitalism.

It was, in fact, between 1917 and 1920 that the Bolshevik Party established itself so firmly in power that it could not have been dislodged without armed force. The uncertainties in its line were soon eliminated, the ambiguities abolished and the contradictions resolved. In the new state,

---

(4) See The Workers' Opposition by Alexandra Kollontai. Solidarity pamphlet, No. 7.

the proletariat had to work, to be mobilised, and if necessary to die, in the defence of the new power. It had to give its most "conscious" and "capable" elements to "its" Party, where they were supposed to become the rulers of society. The working class had to be "active" and to "participate" whenever the Party demanded it, but only and exactly to the extent that the Party demanded. It had to be absolutely guided by the Party in relation to all essentials. As Trotsky wrote during this period, in a text which had an enormous circulation inside and outside Russia: "the worker does not merely bargain with the Soviet State: no, he is subordinated to the Soviet State, under its orders in every direction - for it is HIS State".(5)

7. THE MANAGEMENT OF PRODUCTION

The role of the working class in the new state was clear. It was that of the enthusiastic but passive citizen. The role of the working class in production was no less clear. It was to be the same as before - under private capitalism - except that workers of "character and capacity" (6)were now chosen to replace factory managers who fled. The main concern of the Bolshevik Party during this period was not: how can the taking-over by the workers of the management of production be facilitated? It was: what is the quickest way to develop a layer of managers and administrators of the economy? When one reads the official texts of the period, one is left in no doubt on this score. The formation of a bureaucracy as the managing stratum in production (necessarily having economic priveleges) was, almost from the onset, the conscious, honest and sincere aim of the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and Trotsky.

This was honestly and sincerely considered to be a Socialist policy - or, more precisely, to be an 'administrative technique' that could be put at the disposal of socialism, in that the stratum of administrators managing production would be under the control of the working class, "personified by its Communist Party". According to Trotsky: the decision to have a manager at the head of a factory rather than a workers' committee had no political significance. He wrote: "It may be correct or incorrect from the point of view of the technique of administration. It would consequently be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the heads of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered." (7)

---

(5) Terrorism and Communism, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1961, p. 168.
(6) Ibid, p. 260.
(7) Ibid, p. 162.

In Trotsky's sentence: "the collective will of the workers" is a metaphor for the will of the Bolshevik Party. The Bolshevik leaders stated this without hypocrisy, unlike certain of their "defenders" today. Trotsky wrote at the time: "In this substitution of the power of the Party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that in the period which brings up those interests, in all their magnitude, on to the order of the day, the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole."(8) One could easily find dozens of quotations from Lenin expressing the same idea.

So we had the unquestioned power of the managers in the factories, 'controlled' only by the Party (what control was it, in reality?). We had the unquestioned power of the Party over society, controlled by no one. Given this situation, nobody could prevent these two powers from fusing. Nobody could prevent the interpenetration of the two social groups personifying these areas of power, or the establishment of an immovable bureaucracy, dominating all sectors of social life. The process may have been accelerated or magnified by the mass entry of non-proletarian elements into the Party, rushing in to jump on the band-wagon. But this was the result of the Party's policy - and not its cause.

It was during the discussion on the "trade union question" (1920-1921), preceding the Tenth Party Congress, that the opposition to this policy within the Party was most forcibly expressed. Formally, the question was that of the role of the trade unions in the management of the factories and of the economy. The discussion inevitably focussed attention once again on the problems of 'one-man management' in the factories and of the 'role of the specialists' - questions which had already been debated bitterly and at great length during the past two years. Readers will find an account of the different viewpoints on these issues in Kollontai's text itself and in the historical notes that followed it.

Briefly Lenin's attitude, and that of the Party leadership, was that the management of production should be in the hands of individual managers (either bourgeois 'specialists' or workers selected for their 'ability and character'). These would act under the control of the Party. The trade unions would have the task of educating the workers and of defending them against 'their' managers and 'their' state. Trotsky demanded that the trade unions be completely subordinated to the state: that they be transformed into organs of the state (and the Party). His reasoning was that in a workers' state, the workers and the state were one and the same. The workers therefore did not need a separate organisation to defend themselves against 'their' state. The Workers' Opposition wanted the management of production and of the economy gradually to be entrusted to "workers' collectives in the factories", based on the trade unions;

---

(8) Ibid, p. 109.

they wanted "one-man" management" to be replaced by "collective management" and the role of the specialists and technicians reduced. The Workers' Opposition emphasized that the post-revolutionary development of production was a social and political problem, whose solution depended on utilising the iniative and creativity of the working masses, and that it was not just an administrative or technical problem. It criticised the increasing bureaucratisation of both State and Party (at that time all posts of any importance were already filled by nomination from above and not by election) and the increasing separation of the Party from the working class.

The ideas of the Workers' Opposition were confused on some of these points. The discussion seems on the whole to have taken place at rather an abstract level and the solutions proposed involved forms rather than fundamentals. (In any case the fundamentals had already been decided elsewhere.) Thus the Opposition (and Kollontai in her text) never distinguish clearly between the essential role of the specialists and technicians as specialists and technicians, under the control of the workers, and their transformation into uncontrolled managers of production. The Opposition formulated a general criticism of specialists and technicians. This left it exposed to attacks by Lenin and Trotsky, who had no difficulty in proving that there could not be factories without engineering experts - but who gradually arrived at the astonishing conclusion that these experts had, for this reason alone, to be allowed dictatorial managerial powers over the whole functioning of the factory. The Opposition fought ferociously for "collective management" as opposed to "one man management", which is a fairly formal aspect of the problem (collective management can, after all, be just as bureaucratic as one man management). The discussion left out the real problem, that of where the source of authority was to lie. Thus Trotsky was able to say: "The independence of the workers is determined and measured, not by whether three workers or one are placed at the head of a factory, but by factors and phenomena of a much more profound character."(9) This absolved him from having to discuss the real problem, which is that of the relationship between the 'one' or 'three' managers and the body of the workers in the enterprise.

The Opposition also showed a certain fetishism about trade unions at a time when the unions had already come under the almost complete control of the Party bureaucracy. "The continuous 'independence' of the trade union movement, in the period of the proletarian revolution, is just as much an impossibility as the policy of coalition. The trade unions become the most important organs of the proletariat in power. Thereby they fall under the leadership of the Communist Party. Not only questions of principle in the trade union movement, but serious conflicts of organisation within it, are decided by the Central Committee of our Party".(10)

---

(9) Ibid, p. 161.
(10) Ibid, p. 110.

This was written by Trotsky, in answer to Kautsky's criticism of the anti-democratic nature of Bolshevik power. The point is that Trotsky certainly had no reason to exaggerate the extent of the Party's grip over the trade unions.

But despite these weaknesses and despite a certain confusion, the Workers' Opposition posed the real problem: "who should manage production in the workers' state?" And it gave the right answer: "the collective organisations of the workers". What the Party leadership wanted and had already imposed - and on this point there was no disagreement between Lenin and Trotsky - was a hierarchy directed from above. We know that it was this conception that prevailed. And we know what this "victory" led to.

8. ON "ENDS" AND "MEANS"

The struggle between the Workers' Opposition and the Bolshevik Party leadership epitomises the contradictory elements which have coexisted in Marxism in general and in its Russian incarnation in particular.

For the last time in the history of the Marxist movement, the Workers' Opposition called out for an activity of the masses themselves, showed confidence in the creative capabilities of the proletariat, and a deep conviction that the socialist revolution would herald a genuinely new period in human history, in which the ideas of the preceding period would become valueless and in which the social structure would have to be rebuilt from the roots up. The proposals of the Opposition constitute an attempt to embody these ideas in a political programme dealing with the fundamentally important field of production.

The victory of the Leninist outlook represents the victory of the other element in Marxism, which had for a long time - even in Marx himself - become the dominant element in socialist thought and practice. In all Lenin's speeches and articles of this period, there is a constantly recurring idea, almost like an obsession. It is the idea that Russia had to learn from the advanced capitalist countries; that there were not a hundred and one different ways of developing production and the productivity of labour, if one wanted to emerge from backwardness and chaos; that it was necessary to adopt capitalist methods of rationalisation of production, capitalist managerial methods, and capitalist incentives at work. All these, for Lenin, were no more than "means", which could be freely placed at the service of a fundamentally opposite historical aim, the construction of socialism.

Similarly, Trotsky, when discussing militarism, was able to separate the Army, its structure and its methods, from the social system that it served. Trotsky said substantially that what was wrong

with bourgeois militarism and the bourgeois army, was that it served the bourgeoisie. If it were not for this, there would be no cause for criticism. The sole difference, he said, lay in the question: "who is in power?" (11) In the same way, the dictatorship of the proletariat was not expressed by the "form in which economic enterprises are administered".(12)

The idea that the same means cannot be made to serve different ends, that there is an intrinsic relationship between the instruments used and the results obtained, that neither the factory nor the army are simple "means" or "instruments" but social structures in which two fundamental aspects of human relationships (production and violence) are organised, that what can be observed in them is an essential expression of the social relations characterising a period - these ideas, originally obvious to marxists, were completely "forgotten". Production had to be developed by using methods and structures which 'had proved themselves'. That the main "proof" of these methods had been the development of capitalism as a social system, and that what a factory produces is not only cloth and steel, but proletariat and capital, were facts that were utterly ignored.

This 'forgetfulness' obviously conceals something else. At the time, of course, there was a desperate concern to raise production and to re-establish an economy that was collapsing. But this concern does not necessarily dictate the choice of "means". If it seemed obvious to the Bolshevik leaders that the only efficient methods were capitalist ones, it was because they were imbued with the conviction that capitalism was the only efficient and rational system of production. They certainly wished to abolish private property and the anarchy of the market, but not the type of organisation that capitalism had achieved at the point of production. They wished to change the economy, and the pattern of ownership, and the distribution of wealth, but not the relations between men at work or the nature of work itself.

At a deeper level still, their philosophy was a philosophy that demanded above all the development of the productive forces. In this case they were faithful disciples of Marx - or, at least, of a certain aspect of Marx, which became predominant in his later works. The development of the productive forces was seen by the Bolsheviks, if not as the ultimate goal, at any rate as the essential means, in the sense that everything else would follow as a by-product, and had to be subordinated to it. Man as well? Of course! "As a general rule, man strives to avoid labour . . . man is a fairly lazy animal". (13) To fight this indolence, all methods of proven efficiency had to be brought into operation: compulsory labour - whose nature

---

(11) Ibid, p. 172.
(12) Ibid, p. 162.
(13) Ibid, p. 135.

apparently changed completely if it was imposed by a "Socialist dictatorship"(14) - and technical and financial methods. "Under capitalism, the system of piece work and of grading, the application of the Taylor system, etc., have as their object to increase the exploitation of the workers by the squeezing out of surplus value. Under Socialist production, piece work, bonuses, etc., have as their problem to increase the volume of social product, and consequently to raise the general well-being. Those workers who do more for the general interests than others receive the right to a greater quantity of the social product than the lazy, the careless, and the disorganisers".(15) This isn't Stalin speaking (in 1939). It is Trotsky (in 1919).

The Socialist reorganisation of production during the first period after a revolution is indeed difficult to conceive without some 'compulsion to work', such as 'those who don't work, don't eat'. Certain indices of work will probably have to be established, to guarantee some equality of the effort provided between different sections of the population and between different workshops and factories. But all Trotsky's sophistries about the fact that "free labour" has never existed in history (and will only exist under complete communism) should not make anyone forget the crucial questions. Who establishes these norms? Who decides and administers the 'compulsion to work'? Is it done by collective organisations, formed by the workers themselves? Or is this task undertaken by a special social group, whose function is to manage the work of others?

'To manage the work of others'. Is not this the beginning and the end of the whole cycle of exploitation? The 'need' for a special social category to manage the work of others in production (and the activity of others in politics and in society), and the need for a leadership separated from the factories, and the need for a party managing the state, were all proclaimed and zealously worked for by the Bolshevik Party, from the very first days of its accession to power. We know that the Bolshevik Party achieved its ends. In so far as ideas play a role in historical development, and, in the final analysis, their role is enormous, Bolshevik ideology (and some aspects of the Marxist ideology underlying it) were decisive factors in the development of the Russian bureaucracy.

---

(14) Ibid., p. 149
(15) Ibid., p. 147

Published by 'Solidarity', c/o H. Russell, 53A Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent.