

# **The Beginnings of the Workers' Movement in Russia**

**By Denis Authier**

## **Draft Translators Introduction**

This is a translation of *Les débuts du mouvement ouvrier en Russie* by Denis Authier. It was first published as the introduction to Authier's French translation of Trotsky's 1903 text *Report of the Siberian Delegation*. [Paris: Spartacus (Second Series, B31 Jan-Feb 1970)].

The original footnotes have been translated as they are except that references to French editions of texts have been replaced with references to English translations where these exist. A number of additional footnotes have been added.

This text had originally been intended as the introduction to a translation of Trotsky's *Our Political Tasks* made by Authier which was to be published by Éditions Belfond, but it was rejected. The publishers note below gives an account of this. That translation was published later in 1970 . (No translators credit was given, only the name of an individual who had revised it).

Both of these texts by Trotsky were translated into English in the 1970s and published by New Park. These translations can be found online :

Report of the Siberian Delegation :

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1903/siberian.htm>

Our Political Tasks

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1904/1904-pt/index.htm>

The English translation of *Our Political Tasks* for some reason omits the last section of Chapter 4 : 'Dictatorship over the Proletariat'.

The author of this text, Denis Authier, was involved with the informal grouping based around the bookshop *La Vieille Taupe* between 1965 and its closure in 1972.

The bookshop and the initial core of the informal grouping were founded by people who had been involved with *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, a revolutionary socialist group which had split from *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in 1963. [See an account of this here - link to Re-collecting our past].

The political conclusions drawn in this text reflect the thinking of this informal grouping. (See for example the texts by 'Jean Barrot' (Gilles Dauvé) and François Martin from this period published in the original edition of *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement*). [links]

When the journal *Invariance* appeared in 1968 it introduced the ideas of Bordiga and the Italian Left to a wider audience, and these had a great influence on the thinking of *La Vieille Taupe*. Traces of this influence can be seen in this text. Authier added his own sub-headings to the different sections of his translation of Trotsky's text. (One or two of these such as « The Bolsheviks "repentant economists" » were clearly intended provocatively). The last section of Trotsky's text was given the sub-heading « Organic Centralism, supercession of Leninist centralism ». This suggested a relationship between Trotsky's views on centralism and the notion of Organic Centralism employed by the Italian Left from the 1920's. (See Authier's account of Trotsky's views in the section *Trotsky, from his arrival in Europe to the publication of Our Political Tasks*).

*Spartacus Editions* which published this present text was founded in the mid 1930s by René Lefevre but had ceased publishing by the end of the 1950s, and by 1968 the remaining stock of titles were no longer being distributed. [A useful list of its titles can be found on the CIRA website

- link]. *La Vieille Taupe* began distributing the old stock and when Lefeuvre began publishing new titles, drawn from across the spectrum of ultra-left politics, *La Vieille Taupe* were initially the trade distributors.

Members of the informal grouping around the bookshop were also involved in the production of a number of the new Spartacus titles. In some cases this meant adding new forwards or afterwords to reprinted titles. In other cases they produced new titles. In the case of this particular text, Authier wrote this introduction and translated the text by Trotsky, two other members of *La Vieille Taupe* also signed the publishers note, and the pamphlet also included two short book reviews by François Martin, yet another member of the grouping.

Denis Authier was involved in the production of at least two other Spartacus titles in 1970 :

Karl Marx, Textes (1842-1847) (Series Two B33, April-May 1970)

Marx-Engels, Textes sur L'Organisation (Series Two B36, Septembre 1970)

La Vieille Taupe saw part of its function as making texts available - but also as drawing out their relevance to the communist movement which it saw as re-emerging after 1968. Invariance also saw part of its task as making available texts from the communist lefts. Authier was the closest of its collaborators from the group around La Vieille Taupe. He was involved with the translations for two books of Bordigas writings :

Développement des rapports de production après la révolution bolchevique [Paris: Éditions de L'Oubli, 1975; re-issued by Spartacus (B134, Octobre-Novembre 1985)]

Russie et révolution dans la théorie marxiste [Paris:

Spartacus (B95, Mai-Juin 1978)]

He translated a number of texts from the German Left and wrote an introduction to them which was published in 1973 as *La Gauche Allemande. Textes 1920-22.*, a co-publication by La Vecchia Talpa (Naples), La Vieille Taupe and Invariance. An expanded edition of this with a revised version of Authier's introduction and a new afterword by Gilles Dauvé has been published as *Ni parlement ni syndicates : les Conseils ouvriers !* [Paris : les nuits rouges, 2003].

Authier also co-wrote *La Gauche Communiste en Allemagne 1918-21* with Gilles Dauvé (writing as Jean Barrot) [Paris : Payot, 1976].

## **Publishers note**

It is unnecessary to stress the importance to the Russian workers' movement of the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903 which saw the split between the « minority » and « majority » (Mensheviks and Bolsheviks). The polemic having been very heated, many delegates immediately wrote reports on the congress. Among the most important we can mention those of Lenin, Martov, Trotsky and Krassikov.

Until now, we have only known Lenin's reports synthesised in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. Today we are publishing Trotsky's report whose historical and political interest, for a less mythicized evaluation of Bolshevism, is obvious.

Over recent years the works of Trotsky have been largely published and his role in the Russian revolutionary movement restored. The gigantic enterprise of the Stalinist falsification of history and of the Russian Revolution has broken down, and this collapse can only accelerate with the crisis of Russian capitalism and the rebirth of oppositional currents. In this context, however, the present publication deserves special mention. For while Stalin attempted, with temporary success, to erase the memory of Trotsky and his role, the current of demystification runs up against a second enterprise of falsification as regards the period from 1903 to 1917 : that of the trotskyist currents themselves, who hide (or are unaware of) everything in the work of Trotsky which might be anti-Leninist. They follow, and add weight to, the example of Trotsky himself, who until the end of his life opposed the republication of his report and *Our Political Tasks*, a contemporaneous text which develops the same themes.

The reappearance of the proletariat on the world stage

hasn't only found expression in a number of events (East Germany 1953, Poland and Hungary 1956, Belgium in the winter of 1960-61, the rioting by the black American proletariat, the workers' riots in Latin America - Santo Domingo, Cordoba, Curaçao, France in 1968, the « hot autumn » in Italy; this list is obviously not exhaustive), but also in the rebirth of critical theory in which the movement seeks, among other things, to re-appropriate its history, from which has arisen a revival of interest in certain old texts, and in apparently new polemics.

Thus an oral translation of *Our Political Tasks* and *Report of the Siberian Delegation* was used in the thinking and work of some comrades. And when Daniel Guerin announced his intention to publish *Our Political Tasks* in a collection of which he is the literary director, published by editions Pierre Belfond, we suggested one of us as a translator. As he had intended, our comrade also wrote a preface. Daniel Guerin opposed its publication for a number of literary and formal reasons (a confused preface, poorly written, insufficiently clarifying an extremely difficult text, etc.), but finished by revealing that he was in an « inextricable situation », since the executor of Trotsky's will was purely and simply opposed to the publication of the preface. We thus learned of the existence of an executor (!) of Trotsky's will (phew !), presumably charged with accomplishing the world revolution and making sure that it is permanent, but in any case armed with the legal power to decree what the workers' movement may or may not know about Trotsky's work (and thus about the history of the Russian workers' movement), and whose moral right to decide what one may think and what it is appropriate to say has been recognised by Daniel Guerin.

Our collaboration with editions Pierre Belfond stopped there and then.

Our interest is in seeing that *Our Political Tasks* appears as

soon as possible. While waiting, we are publishing the rejected preface together with the *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, this juxtaposition constituting neither an artifice nor a makeshift, inasmuch as *Our Political Tasks* is a development of the principal themes of the *Report*, and fits into the same context.

November 1969.

Denis Authier, Pierre Guillaume, Jean-Pierre Carasso.

## **The Beginnings of the Workers' Movement in Russia**

When the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party met in the summer of 1903, an insurrectionary general strike wave was breaking across southern Russia. For ten years the workers' movement had seemed to be a new revolutionary force, that force which would make it possible to achieve what the Russian democratic movement had so long awaited, the overthrow of autocracy.

Up until the period which interests us here, the Russian workers' movement had passed through three closely linked phases. The « economic » period, with which this movement began, primarily occupied the second half of the 1890's : this was a period of struggles for « material » demands; the class struggle took the form of a series of strikes, the most famous of which was that in St Petersburg in 1896. It was *Iskra* which pejoratively characterised this period as « economist », from the name of the ideology which it engendered in the minds of Social-Democrats : « economism ».

« Economism » asserted that for a long time to come the struggles of the workers' movement would still be incapable of going beyond material and « economic » demands. It drew from this the conclusion that the only possible *political* activity for Social Democrats was to take part in the liberal (bourgeois) opposition to tsarism. But in Russia it was quite difficult to separate the economic from the political for very long : any movement, even for the smallest demand, inevitably ran up against the established regime and its police and army. A few years were enough for the Russian proletariat as a whole to experience this, and to become aware that the Government was as immediate an enemy as isolated capitalists. This is what

determined the transition to the second, political, phase of the movement.

This time the opening shots were fired by the student movement. University unrest had begun at the end of the 1890s, with « academic freedom » as its first demand; but Russian students (in general from more modest social origins than their contemporary Western counterparts) became radicalised extremely rapidly and, for the same reasons as the workers, they passed on to direct hostility to absolutism. In February 1899, a student demonstration was very harshly repressed in St Petersburg; a wave of strikes in solidarity then spread across all Russian universities; finally at the start of 1901, the government forced two hundred students, who at a stroke had all been sent down from the University of Kiev, into military service. This event provoked general indignation; in particular, the proletariat took to the streets everywhere to some extent. 1901 was a year of political demonstrations. For the first time the working class openly demonstrated its opposition to tsarism. There were also important peasant uprisings in the South West of Russia and the Ukraine.

It only remained to make a synthesis of these first two phases; it wasn't necessary to wait long : 1903 was marked by an enormous wave of insurrectional strikes in the south of Russia which was in the grip of industrial crisis and unemployment. This last phase simultaneously reconciled strikes and demonstrations; it revealed a global revolutionary opposition by the Russian proletariat to all aspects of the existing regime. This was to be generally repeated in 1905 and 1917. It was Rosa Luxemburg who best analysed this movement; it is why we refer to her book : *Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions*, (Spartacus No. 21).

Two fundamental traits characterise the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in Russia (as elsewhere). It

was completely spontaneous. It was within the struggles themselves, and for the purposes of those struggles, that revolutionary organisations were formed. Those organisations formed during previous struggles, which had survived by institutionalising themselves, grew stronger thanks to the movement, but played a conservative role within it. [b1]

[f1] Original Note : In Russia at the start of the century, the opposition between « spontaneity » and « consciousness » became flavour of the month in fashionable revolutionary ideology, just as it is today in France after May 68, and results in the same confusion. It is therefore necessary to add : when we write that the Russian proletariat spontaneously entered into revolutionary struggle (or that the French proletariat in 1968 spontaneously produced a general strike), we are not limiting ourselves to the assertion that it was a « party » without a chief and without any leadership giving it orders; « spontaneous » doesn't just mean « wildcat ». We are taking note of the far more important fact, of which their « wild » character is only an *expression*, that these movements of the proletariat are completely determined, both by the situation which this class occupies within the totality of the social relations that are fundamental to modern society, and also by a specific conjuncture which, during a given period, provides it with the opportunity to intervene on the historical stage. While the condition of the proletariat within capitalism always remains the same so long as wage labour continues to exist, the very cycle of accumulation, and the rise of the productive forces, simultaneously develop the conditions for the socialist revolution and the power of the revolutionary class.

This is what produced the enormous difference between the Russian economic situation at the beginning of the century, and the current worldwide economic situation. So «

spontaneous » , in the sense in which Marx and Luxemburg employ the term, means nothing more than absolutely determined by the whole of social relations. The proletariat is the product of the situation which it occupies within social relations (and above all within the relations of capitalist production). This situation makes it the revolutionary class of bourgeois society, the positive side of the contradiction between capital and wage labour. The proletariat is spontaneously revolutionary, because only the revolutionary act corresponds with what it is. Acting spontaneously means to act in accordance with ones being. Thus, when the proletariat votes, it doesn't act spontaneously : it doesn't accomplish this activity in conformity with its specific being; when a proletarian votes, he does not act as such, but as a citizen, as a member of bourgeois political society. When the proletariat is not revolutionary, it does not exist, and revolutionaries can produce nothing with it; it isn't they, who by playing the peoples educators can create the historic situation in which the proletariat *becomes what it is*, but the very development of modern society. When such a situation appears, revolutionaries of non-working class origin, those who for many reasons, find themselves « confined » within bourgeois society, unite themselves in the proletarian party, which spontaneously forms in order to solve the revolutionary tasks. In the same way, because it has the need to do so, the proletariat as a class acquires a consciousness of itself, that is to say a clear representation of its situation, of its relations with the other classes and of its role. Through its situation within the relations of capitalist production, the working class is the only class that is the bearer, as a class, of socialist consciousness.

Everything else is just ideology, an inverted vision of reality. Lenin (and the Russian Social-Democrats in general) completely distorted the meaning of these concepts (spontaneity, class consciousness, organisation) by opposing the first of them to the other two; we will see

why throughout this preface.

It is absurd to oppose « spontaneous action » and « conscious action », « spontaneity » and « party », or more exactly this is the root of a bourgeois and reactionary conception; that is why it persists despite its philosophical inanity. These oppositions could only make sense if the working class was « spontaneously » unconscious, and if consciousness did not form part of its attributes. This is a theory dear to reactionary thought. We are right to be astonished when Leninism claims to base theory and revolutionary activity on the same theory. In fact, any movement, any working class struggle *spontaneously* tends to become aware of itself and of its direction; « *the proletarian party born spontaneously from the historical soil of modern society* » (Marx).[t1]

It is depressing to have to state that this spontaneous movement presupposes a merciless struggle against everything that obstructs it, and in particular, a ferocious and permanent fight against all versions of this ideology. Those who stupidly answer us : « if the revolutionary movement is spontaneous and inevitable, it is only necessary to wait, there is nothing to be done », reveal to what extent they indeed have nothing to do with this movement. Revolutionaries know that permanent struggle, in various forms, is a spontaneous product of their being, for they can only free themselves from this passion by submitting to it.

[t1] translators note : this is either from a French translation of Marx's letter to Ferdinand Freiligrath of the 29 February 1860 or is a paraphrase of it. It does not exactly correspond to English translations : [MECW, Vol. 41, p. 80]

## **Birth of Workers' Organisations in Russia**

Before the 1890's, a small number of workers' organisations had appeared in an ephemeral way, such as the *North-Russian Workers' Union* and the *South-Russian Workers' Union*, [t1] in which the future Social-Democrats, then populists (Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, Axelrod) had been active members. These organisations disappeared even before the long period of reaction in the 1880s. But before the sudden appearance, beginning in 1895, of new « well-known » organisations (this time Social-Democratic), many groups of workers existed in a more or less precarious way (according to Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, p. 41) [b3]. It was at the start of the second half of the 1890's, with the progressive resurgence of workers' struggles, that proletarian organisations began « mushrooming » (Deutscher p. 44); they would unite later on to form the Social-Democratic Party. What characterised this new period (that is to say, the appearance of the social and political process which led directly to the revolution of 1905, and then that of 1917), was on the one hand the large number of proletarian organisations which appeared spontaneously at local level during local struggles, and on the other hand, the fact that these organisations abandoned populist ideology for Marxism.

The group *Emancipation of Labour*, founded outside Russia in 1883 by the former populists Plekhanov, Zasulich, Axelrod, Deutch, etc., was the first to spread Marxist theory in Russia. At the beginning of the 1890s, Marxist ideas infiltrated the legal press, the government seeing in « legal marxism » only its resolutely anti-populist aspect. One thus saw that the majority of young intellectual revolutionaries professed marxism within the working class organisations they joined. Two things should be noted about the penetration of marxism in Russia; the first is the ambiguous role it assumed there : on the one hand it was

the theory adopted by the Russian proletariat (like that of other countries), on the other hand, for the intelligentsia it was an ideology of modernity, a current of thought which assured it that the development of capitalism in Russia was inevitable and would lead to the overthrow of autocracy and the « Europeanization » of Russia. (Trotsky develops this theory at length in the introduction to *Our Political Tasks* [b4]). The second comment : Marxism, the most concise and developed expression of proletarian theory, which had only appeared on the basis of the first revolutionary struggles of the European proletariat, entered Russia imported by intellectuals who lacked a new ideology, even before the Russian proletariat had appeared. Once the latter had appeared on the scene it adopted it, since it corresponded to its being. But the Russian Social-Democrats only saw the surface appearance of this process (marxism initially adopted by intellectuals who then inculcate the workers with it) and in their eyes this appearance justified Kautsky's aberrations regarding « spontaneity » and « consciousness », which they took up without batting an eyelid.

As for the birth of the workers' organisations and the formation of the Party, here too it is necessary to demolish the customary view which people have of this. Historians, in particular, do not see the real link between the movement and the organisations. They only speak of an organisation when it has been really constituted and institutionalised. Organisations then seem to be autonomous forces which intervene from outside the historic process, which « foment unrest » and determine victory. This is a policeman's view of reality.

In fact historians, cops and other ideologists take up the illusions which organisations create about themselves. If proletarian organisations rather rapidly acquire an inverted view of their relation to the overall movement (in general this dates from the first period of « reflux » following the

period of struggle during which they are born), this is because their real practise also becomes inverted. The organisation is a form and instrument of the class struggle; but struggle now becomes a means of reinforcing and keeping alive the organisation itself. For its members the organisation becomes a reality in itself, with its own goals; it is conceived by its members as an end in itself. It is this inversion which Trotsky in *Our Political Tasks* calls « the fetishism of the organisation »; from the point of view of social practise it hides a perfectly precise reality : the organisation is no longer an instrument of the social forces which created it, but the instrument of other forces, of enemy forces.

The only revolutionary organisations are those which don't impose their whims on reality, but dedicate themselves to the tasks which reality imposes on revolutionaries (and very often, in periods of « calm », these tasks remain at the theoretical level). Any organisation which appears in order to solve the revolutionary tasks of a given period, and which either maintains itself just as it is, or else organises itself according to plans drawn from the thinking of this or that leader, can only be an obstacle at the time of the subsequent movements of the proletariat [b5]. In the meantime, it is likely to fall into the hands of the established regime and may even become the cornerstone of counter-revolutionary enterprises; there are many examples of this from the German Social-Democratic Party to the French Communist Party.

As *Our Political Tasks* shows, on the eve of the 1905 revolution this « fetishised » point of view had become the dominant point of view within the Russian Social-Democratic Party. The refusal of the Bolsheviks (the most alienated fraction from this perspective) either to enter the *soviets*, the spontaneous creation of the Russian proletariat during the 1905 revolution, or to recognise their enormous importance in the analyses they made of this revolution,

stands in exactly the same line.

[t1] translator's note : There were a number of South Russian Workers' Union's. The first was a working class organisation formed in Odessa in 1875 by a student Y. O. Zaslavsky. Membership was « open to workers of every kind who have close relations with the working class and not with the privileged classes ». It lectured, distributed literature, encouraged workers organisation and was involved with two strikes. However it was suppressed in a matter of months and its leading figures imprisoned. A short-lived organisation with the same name was formed by Pavel Axelrod in Kiev in 1879. Between 1880-81 it was revived on a different basis. None of these groups should be confused with the group of the same name which Trotsky was involved with in 1897. See Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* [London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960] pp. 515-24.

The North-Russian Workers' Union was organised in 1878 in St Petersburg though its nucleus had existed since the end of 1876. Its leading figures were Stepan Khalturin a joiner and Victor Obnorsky a mechanic (who had been involved with Zaslavsky's South Russian Workers' Union). It had a membership of over 200, organised strikes and issued proclamations. It was suppressed in 1879. It was linked to and encouraged by the populist group *Zemlya I Volya* of which Plekhanov was a member, and he was actively involved with it. See Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* [London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960] pp. 538-57.

[f3] Original Note : Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, [Oxford: OUP, 1954, paperback edition 1970], p. 20

[f4] Original Note : forthcoming from éditions Belfond.

[f5] Original Note : It is interesting to compare the

Bolshevik conception of the party with the surprisingly contemporary position which Engels expressed on the same subject in 1885 : « *Today the German proletariat no longer needs any official organization, either public or secret. The simple self-evident interconnection of like-minded class comrades suffices, without any rules, boards, resolutions or other tangible forms, to shake the whole German Empire to its foundations. (...) And still more. The international movement of the European and American proletariat has become so much strengthened that not merely its first narrow form – the secret League – but even its second, infinitely wider form – the open International Working Men's Association – has become a fetter for it, and that the simple feeling of solidarity based on the understanding of the identity of class position suffices to create and to hold together one and the same great party of the proletariat among the workers of all countries and tongues. »*

(Engels : *On The History of the Communist League*. [MECW Vol. 26 pp. 312-29])

## Up to the First Congress

It was around 1895 that the Social-Democratic Party began to be formed. In December Lenin, Martov and Potresov « founded » the *Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class* : it gathered together about twenty existing workers' circles; thus the *Union* continued to exist when its leaders were arrested a few days after its foundation. The strikes of 1896, and in a general way the period of the rise of the workers' movement until the turn of the century, strengthened it and produced other workers' organisations : the *Group for the Self-liberation of the Working Class*, the *Workers' Group for the Struggle Against Capital* and the *Workers' Organisation of St Petersburg* initially solely composed of workers. In the spring of 1897 in the South, Trotsky formed a new *South-Russian Workers Union*, the *Union of Nikolayev* (Deutscher, op. cit. pp. 30ff ). Together with the majority of his comrades, he was arrested during the first weeks of 1898; but this did not prevent the local workers' movement from developing. As Deutscher points out (op. cit. p. 20), according to a report of Russian Social Democrats to the Second International, revolutionary groups were extremely active in Odessa in 1896, before Trotsky formed his Union. One could continue this list for a long time; what has been said already is sufficient to underline the fact that at that time there existed a general tendency towards organisation in the Russian proletariat and that this tendency was the result of the multiplication and escalation of workers' struggles. In 1898 the process led to the founding Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party.

The Congress met in Russia itself at Minsk. The nine people who attended it represented the group *Rabochaya Gazeta* (the « workers journal » of Kiev), the *Emancipation of Labour* group, four *Unions of struggle* and the *Bund* (the General Union of Jewish Workers formed throughout the

Empire in 1897). The Bund had an excellent organisation. [b6] It also ensured the material conditions for holding the Congress.

This was an immense task if one bears in mind the police conditions in Russia at that time. The local rank and file organisations of the party took the name « Committees ». The Congress adopted a manifesto, written by Peter Struve, from which Trotsky quotes the principal thesis : *the party [t1] consciously wishes to be and remain the class movement of the organised working masses*. In effect, in Russia there had also begun the long-term international process, with its ups and downs, of constituting the proletariat into a party for socialist revolution and for dictatorship. Lastly, from this Congress onward one of the fundamental features of Russian revolutionary organisations appeared : internal struggle. Plekhanov's *Emancipation of Labour* group, situated abroad, claimed the leadership of the Party (Nettl, op. cit. p. 252), whereas the local organisations wanted to consider it as one element of the Party among the rest, as the first Russian Social-Democratic group. These quarrels would soon give way to a struggle of a far more profound tendency inside the organised Russian movement; this was the opposition between « economists » and « politico's » which characterised what Lenin, in *What is to be Done ?*, called the « third period ».

[t1] translator's note : This is an error. The 1898 Manifesto (an English translation can be found in G. Zinoviev, *History of the Bolshevik Party* [London: New Park, nd]) states that « Social Democracy » not « the party » « consciously wishes to be and remain the class movement of the organised working masses », and this is what Trotsky quotes.

[f6] Original Note : J. P. Nettel, Rosa Luxemburg, Vol. One p. 261.

## **The role of « economism » in the development of the Russian workers movement**

« Economists » was how Lenin, Martov, Plekhanov and the other future « Iskraists » referred to those Social-Democrats and Social-Democratic organisations who were fighting more for immediately possible improvements in the material living conditions of the working class, than for the revolution; this tendency appeared from the very beginnings of the movement; the activity of the *Unions of Struggle*, including Trotsky's and that of Lenin and Martov after their arrest, was « economistic ». The *Credo*, written by a group of « economists » at the end of 1898, was the text in which was proclaimed the fundamental theory of « economism », that taking into account « Russian conditions », the task of Russian Social-Democracy was to help workers in their struggles for demands and, on the political level, to take part in the fight against tsarism on the side of the liberal and radical democrats. Moreover, the *Credo* announced the end of « intransigent marxism ». It was a caricature of the « economist » position. Many « economists » would not have subscribed to it; but as soon as they received this text Lenin, Martov and other exiled Social-Democrats took what they could draw from it; they showed that in its worst aspects the *Credo* was the logical result of an « economist » orientation and reaffirmed that Social-Democrats could and must involve the proletariat in the democratic struggle. It was along the lines of this critique that *Iskra* was created.

Russian « economism » was a variant of a more general current : reformism. It might seem that in putting forward this similarity everything has been said. But in fact Russian « economism » had a specific content, very different from that which reformism possessed at that time in the West. Reformism is the natural product of the situation in which the working class finds itself in a given period, just as the

revolution is the product of a different situation at a different time. In those countries in which the capitalist mode of production had for a long time become dominant, reformism was the product of a state of affairs in which capitalism resolved its internal contradictions without too many shocks, slightly increased the standard of living of the working class and reinforced its political domination, having bloodily crushed the first insurrectionary attempts. This social form which reformed itself could not actually be got around. Things changed after the war, and the German proletariat moved on to revolutionary action against a temporarily weakened capitalism which had placed it in an intolerable material situation.

In Russia, the conditions at that time were entirely different. Capitalism was newly arrived; small independent production still dominated; nine tenths of Russians were peasants; the indispensable condition for socialism : the socialisation of the process of production, had not been achieved, or not sufficiently. The Russian proletariat could only « choose » between : struggling for material advantages, or struggling to overthrow autocracy (which by no means meant making a socialist revolution). But the proletariat, which could not launch a strike without running up against his majesty's Cossacks, was inevitably led from the terrain of economic struggle to that of political struggle. More exactly, any struggle by the Russian proletariat could only *also* be political. « Economism » thus corresponded to the first steps of the workers' movement in Russia, to the short period during which the Russian proletariat had not as a whole run up against the police and the government, and had still not become aware that its first enemy was tsarism itself. « Economism » as a category applicable only to pre-revolutionary Russia, was thus very rapidly superseded by events themselves, the political demonstrations in 1901. It was not the product of isolated intellectuals but was the ideology necessary for the first steps of the Russian workers' movement.

## **« Leninism », the illusory supercession of « economism »**

Unlike « economism », « Leninism », that is, at the beginning of the century, « Iskraism » : which stood for the primacy given to the « political struggle », allied to an ultra centralist conception of organisation and crowned with the Kautskyite theory of bringing class consciousness to the workers « from outside » [b7], was not just a product of the Russian workers movement; it was the ideology of the historic movement which led to the October revolution and to modern Russia; it was the product of the general relations between the classes in Russian society.

On the three points listed above which characterise it, « Leninism » (the theories of *What is to be Done ?*), is the exact opposite of « economism ». To borrow from Trotsky (cf. *Our Political Tasks*, last chapter), Lenin and the « Iskraists » put *minus* and *plus* where the « economists » put *plus* and *minus* [t1] : political struggle, economic struggle; extremely centralised organisation, extremely loose organisation; it is necessary to bring socialist consciousness to the workers, it is necessary to let the workers decide for themselves.

This discussion was obviously located outside of « Marxism » (even though the two parties abundantly bombarded one another with citations from Marx).

For Lenin (as for Kautsky) the proletariat was spontaneously trade-unionist; for the « economists » it would have to remain on this level in Russia for a long period. From this premise Lenin concluded that the task of revolutionary intellectuals was to bring socialist and political consciousness to the proletariat; at that time (before the bourgeois revolution) this meant they had to take political leadership of this class and bring it into the

general struggle against tsarism. « Political struggle » had no other content than anti-feudal struggle, bourgeois struggle. This struggle was necessary, but it had nothing to do with the specific revolutionary movement of the proletariat which is only political inasmuch as it must fight against political power, that is to say, the power of the bourgeois class. It is its adversary which determines the political character of its struggle; in itself, the movement of the proletariat aims at the abolition of politics. The « economists », for their part, declared that it was necessary to wait until the proletariat was revolutionary and that, *for the moment*, the Social-Democrats must on the one hand organise trade-union struggles, and on the other, participate together with the liberal opposition in the fight against absolutism. Thus the tasks of the period which imposed themselves on each of these currents were conceived as (and were) outside the proletariat, whether by declaring that it was necessary to let it act by itself (spontaneism), or by declaring that it was necessary to bring it a leadership which it was incapable of acquiring by itself (interventionism). « Russian conditions » obliged the Social-Democrat to be, in reality, only a revolutionary in the bourgeois sense of the word (but with a « socialist » ideology).

The « problem of organisation » was on the agenda and it was above all upon this that the polemic bore. The « Iskraists » defended « centralism », and, the « economists » defended « autonomism ». The tendency towards centralism was, at the turn of the century, something as spontaneous as the creation of the first Social-Democratic organisations at a local level. Lenin and the *Iskra* group were only its more or less conscious interpreters. That « centralism was in the air » (that is, within the politico-social reality itself), according to Martov's expression, was shown in a particularly clear way by the concomitant and independent appearance of two groups which set as their objective the centralisation of the Social-Democratic

forces : the *Yuzhny Rabochy* group and the *Iskra* group. The history of *Yuzhny Rabochy* (the *Southern Worker*) was, in effect, an attempt to constitute the Party in a centralised manner around the political tasks common to the whole of the Russian proletariat (and formally around a group situated in Russia itself - and not abroad, like the *Iskra* group). One year after the formation of *Yuzhny Rabochy*, a large number of organisations had already gathered around it in the Union of Southern Committees and Organisations of the R.S.D.L.P. [b8] The process came to a halt temporarily in 1902 under the blows of police repression. The centralisation of the R.S.D.L.P could only be formally produced around a group located outside Russia.

[t1] translator's note : This refers to a rhetorical figure employed by Trotsky in the section of *Our Political Tasks entitled 'Dictatorship over the Proletariat'*. This is the final section of the book which is omitted from the English translation. (It's on page 200 of the French translation. [Paris : editions Belfond, 1970]).

« (...) it appears clear enough that one can be against Jacobinism without being Bernsteinist. And, conversely, let us also add, one can be anti-Bernstein from head to toe while being a thousand miles from Marxism. Plekhanov once wrote that our « economists » resembled, like two peas in a pod [In the French translation « Like two drops of water » - translator], the caricatures which Mikhailovsky, Krivenko and their consorts [the Russian 'Legal' Marxists - translator] gave to the marxists. Our centralizing « substitutionists » resemble like two peas in a pod those caricatures of revolutionary Social-Democrats, the Russian theoreticians of « economism », and European « Bernsteinism ». It is entirely inadequate to put « + and - » signs where the opportunists put « - and + » signs in order to grasp all the secrets of revolutionary socialist politics.

To be an adversary of opportunism still in no way means to be a revolutionary Social-Democrat. »

[f7] Original Note : See Karl Kautsky, *Les Trois Sources du Marxism*, and the postfaces *Ideology and Class Struggle* and *The « Renegade » Kautsky and his Disciple « Lenin »* (Cahiers Spartacus, Series A no. 35).

[f8] Original Note : Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party



## **The preparation for the Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. and the workers' movement**

The entire period of the first *Iskra* (the Leninist *Iskra* - thus up to October 1903) was dominated, as regards the activity of the party, by the preparation for the Congress and the fight against « economism », two points which for the « Iskraist » fraction formed a single whole.

During the year preceding the publication of *Iskra* (1900), Lenin and Krupskaya had applied themselves to constituting the material basis for the distribution of the journal in Russia, in other words, to the co-ordination of a network of several dozen « agents » which formed the *Iskra* Organisation in Russia. Most committees adopted the orientation of *Iskra* (of forty delegates to the Second Congress, more than thirty were « Iskraists »), and this was essentially due to the fact that the orientation of *Iskra* was inscribed in the reality of the enlargement and deepening of struggles. In addition to the episode of *Yuzhny Rabochy*, we could mention the abortive attempt of a group of St Petersburg Social-Democrats in 1899 to form the Party in a centralised manner, the texts which Trotsky wrote in Siberia on the need for the centralisation of organisations, etc. Without this general tendency, the most perfect organisation of « agents » could never have done anything, and would probably not even have appeared.

But as Trotsky reports in *Our Political Tasks*, in many places the « ideological struggle » was heated and often ended in the exclusion of the local workers' movement; for, obviously, the « economists » or those alleged to be such (to be labelled within this category it was enough to protest against the « dictatorship of the intelligentsia » and not to agree entirely with the *Iskra* line) were primarily workers. The revolutionary workers had some difficulty in accepting that it was for the intelligentsia to bring them proletarian

class consciousness. At that time, many existing « workers' organisations », in cities like St Petersburg, Kharkov, Odessa, Ekaterinoslav and Voroneje (cf. *Report of the Siberian Delegation*) were either born or increased in size, in conjunction with the committees of the Party, but also claiming to be part of the Social-Democratic Party.

This fact well illustrates the « uncoupling » which had already become apparent between the Social-Democratic Party and the « movement of the organised working masses ». What mattered in this area, was not what *Iskra* wrote, it was the action of the committees in Russia. However, Trotsky (cf. *Our Political Tasks*) describes them as completely absorbed by the internal struggle, distrustful of strike movements (trade-unionist !), and, in general, following the « line of least resistance ». According to Rosa Luxemburg in *Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy* [b9], mass movements started without the control of the Party, and when the committees played a role in them it was in a conservative direction [b10]. It was necessary to wait until the end of 1904 before Trotsky himself grasped the full importance of the strikes in the South during 1903, and drew the conclusion that the revolution would commence with a general strike, an idea that he was alone or nearly alone in holding inside the R.S.D.L.P (Deutscher, *opus cit.*, p. 110). This « uncoupling » led the majority of Social Democrats to ignore the most important event of the revolution of 1905 : the appearance of the « finally discovered form » of the revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *soviets*.

It had taken only a few years (1895-1905) for a split to appear between the logic of the workers' movement and the logic of the first organisations it gave itself. This was reflected in the metaphysical discussions at the Second Congress.

[f9] Original Note : Published in French under the title *Marxisme contre dictature*, Cahiers Spartacus (Series A., No 7).

[f10] Original Note : cf. the strike at Baku in December 1904 described in *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*. Vol. III. April-June 1962. The author of the article 'L'histoire du mouvement révolutionnaire à Bakou', uses a large number of hitherto unknown (or « forgotten ») documents.

## **The Bolshevik-Menshevik Split and the Russian Workers' Movement**

The Second Congress, so long awaited, ended up meeting in July 1903, first in Brussels, then as the delegates were shadowed by tsarist police, in London. It brought together delegates of the *General Union of Jewish Workers* (the Bund), of *Rabochii Dielo* (Workers Cause, a journal edited abroad by the « economists »), of *Yuzhny Rabochy* and a majority of delegates (representing the Russian committees and the « Iskraist » organisation of émigré Social-Democrats : the League) who supported the positions of *Iskra*. It is extremely difficult to give accurate figures : some participants only served in an advisory capacity, others by contrast had one or even two mandated votes (those who are interested are referred to Lenin's scholarly diagram in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*); finally the delegates of the *Bund* and *Rabochii Dielo* did not follow the Congress when it was forced to move itself to London. Before the Congress it seemed that the united « Iskraist » majority was going to crush its adversaries (the « economists » and « bundists ») and take charge of the destiny of the Party. The Congress (including the *Bund*) adopted the programme of the Party as a whole. The « Iskraists » united to recognise *Iskra* as the central organ of the Party (which it had not been officially until then), and to condemn and exclude the Bund which asserted an organisational autonomy and demanded to be recognised as the sole Social-Democratic representative for the Jewish proletariat. It was when the Congress came to the examination of the statutes and to the problems of the elections to the leading bodies that the differences erupted « *like a clap of thunder in a clear blue sky* ».

The first serious differences came to light, behind the scenes, over the problem of the number of people on the editorial board of *Iskra*, and at the Congress itself, over the

first paragraph of the statutes. The « Iskraist » fraction met between each session of the Congress; here Lenin proposed to reduce the number of editors from six to three and thus to exclude three of its founders : Axelrod, Zasulich and Potresov, « for greater efficiency ». This was the personal motive for the split between Axelrod, Zasulich, Potresov, Martov and Trotsky, on the one hand, and Lenin and Plekhanov on the other. Relations became strained, old quarrels that had been thought extinguished re-ignited and it was in this atmosphere that the discussion took place over the statutes.

Before the Congress, Martov and Lenin had noted that they did not entirely agree on the definition of membership of the Party (article one), but they had not looked deeper into the problem, and, in the draft statutes which it prepared, the commission had left both versions : the Congress would decide. Lenin's draft was as follows : « A member of (...) the Party is any person who accepts its programme, supports the Party with material means, and *personally participates in one of its organisations* ». Instead of the highlighted words, Martov proposed « co-operate personally and regularly under the guidance of one of the organisations ». [b11] The important thing is to see that Lenin (and Plekhanov who also supported him over this issue) reduced the party of the proletariat to the institutionalised organisation (which was in conformity with the line of *What is to be Done ?*), while his adversaries stuck to the thesis of the Manifesto of the First Congress : « Social Democracy (...) consciously wishes to be and remain the class movement of the organised working masses ». Axelrod declared, to give a concrete example of his position, that a professor who regarded himself as a Social-Democrat and declared this was indeed a member of the party.

The argument was extremely violent, to the surprise of both parties, who felt dominated by a logic stronger than

themselves. Those who would become the Mensheviks accused Lenin of Jacobinism. Lenin accused them of anarchism. The polemic was located on legalistic grounds, they sought the criteria which would make it possible to say that Peter was a member of the Party and that Paul was not, as if there could be any other « criteria » than the real social practise of these individuals; they both wanted « to control » as if the « controllers » themselves did not need to be « controlled ».

We are accustomed to considering this argument as academic. This is indeed how it was judged by the majority of the « rank and file » delegates to the Congress (cf. *Report of the Siberian Delegation*). The split between the organisation and the movement had even become reproduced inside the organisation : the esotericism of this row between leaders was the fatal demonstration of this reality. On the other hand, whether they were conscious of it or not, the two fractions represented two distinct historical movements; each of them called for its own organisational form (see below the analysis of an article by Axelrod).

In the end it was Martov's draft which prevailed, thanks to the support of the « anti-Iskraist » delegates still present. This had little importance : in spite of the attempts at reunification after 1905, the rift between the two parties would always go on getting worse.

[Translator's Note : to make what follows easier to understand it is perhaps worth clarifying the outcome of the split within the *Iskra* faction which developed at the Congress. The fraction which would become the Mensheviks had carried the vote over the definition of Party membership with the support of the remaining « anti-Iskraist » delegates. But the latter had then left and Lenin's group had won the subsequent votes that removed three members of the *Iskra* editorial board, and that appointed a

Party Central Committee, which theoretically controlled this restructured *Iskra*, but in reality was dominated by *Iskra* supporters. This left Lenin's group in control of the leading bodies of the Party. The terms « minority » (Menshevik) and « majority » (Bolshevik), which were adopted by the two parts of the split in the *Iskra* faction, refer to the outcome of these latter votes].

[f11] Original Note : Lenin, Account of the Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. *Complete Works* Vol Seven.

## **Trotsky, from his arrival in Europe to the publication of *Our Political Tasks***

Trotsky doesn't devote more than two pages of *My Life* (at the start of Chapter 13) to his Menshevik period, that is, from August 1903 to August 1904, the period from the end of the Congress to the publication of *Our Political Tasks*. This is readily understandable : as he wrote in the preface to *My Life* « This book is not a dispassionate photograph of my life, however, but a component part of it ». It would be out of the question to expect that in such a book he would exhume his short « Menshevik » period and his violent anti-leninism. But this must be required of anyone who wishes to understand the political context in which he wrote *Our Political Tasks* and *Report of the Siberian Delegation*.

Trotsky, having escaped from Siberia, to which he had been deported for his activity in the *Union of Nikolayev*, arrived in Europe a few months before the Second Congress. He joined in the production of *Iskra* immediately, for in Siberia he had arrived at the same political conclusions. He quickly acquired a certain renown as a speaker and wrote many articles for *Iskra*. Lenin even proposed introducing him as a seventh member of the editorial board, but Plekhanov was opposed to this. (*My Life*, Chapter 12). At the Congress at which he held the mandate of the *Siberian Union* of the R.S.D.L.P, he fought the *Bund* and the « anti-Iskraists » very violently; at the time of the split, he was on the side of the « minority » and became the loudest, but also the most brilliant adversary of Lenin. He had become indignant at the plan to reorganise the editorial board (see above), and about the fractional and « conformist » attitude of the « majority » inside the « Iskraist » fraction. He accused Lenin of wanting to seize the leadership of the Party, there to force his dictatorship on the « repented former economists » (the « majority »).

When in September 1903, the leaders of the « minority » met in conference, it was Trotsky who wrote the resolution confirming the boycott of the central organs of the Party (occupied by the Bolsheviks). Plekhanov ended up by giving way : in the October issue of *Iskra* he published an article, *What is Not to be Done*, which criticised Lenin's « intransigence »; at the same time he demanded that the former members of the editorial board rejoin it : Trotsky followed them and returned to working for *Iskra*, which was now completely Menshevik, since Lenin refused to remain a member of a body « that had not been elected by the Congress ».

At the beginning of 1904 Trotsky published the *Report of the Siberian Delegation*. The pretext for this booklet was the need for the delegate to submit a report on his activity at the Congress to those who had mandated him. But the booklet was above all a defence of the positions and attitudes of the « minority », and an attack on Lenin. This text shows what happened at the Second Congress better than *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, published four months later. The *Report* already contains in embryonic form the ideas which would be developed in *Our Political Tasks* : in particular, the critique of Lenin's « Robespierism » and the idea that the « substitution » of the Party for the class meant in short order the substitution of the organisation for the Party, of the Central Committee for the organisation and finally of the dictator for the Central Committee. In an appendix to this *Report*, Trotsky quotes a text which he had written in Siberia to prove that he was also in favour of « centralism » and against the organisational « dilettantism » of the « economists ». He conceives of centralism as a set of relations within the Party, produced by it in the course of its development; centralism must already be a reality in the Party in order that it can be proclaimed as one of its organisational principles. An « imposed » centralism would only be the

empty antithesis of « dilettantism ». To adopt the expression which he employs in *Our Political Tasks*, Social Democratic centralism is a « European style » and not « Asiatic » centralism : it is not the voluntarist and violent gathering together of scattered and centrifugal forces, but the whole of the organic relations which exist between different forces contributing to the same goal.

Trotsky's first break with the Mensheviks occurred in April 1904. As so often, the political reasons for it were coupled with personal antagonism : the hostility of Plekhanov (who had gone over to the « minority » since October) towards Trotsky. Essentially two political reasons opposed Trotsky to the Mensheviks (or at least to certain of them) : some Mensheviks, among them Plekhanov, reproached Trotsky for being too violent in his attacks on Lenin. An article by Trotsky on the Russian liberals – but which contained a polemic with the Bolsheviks – provoked indignant reactions on the part of some Committees and caused Plekhanov to threaten to resign if Trotsky were not excluded from the editorial board of *Iskra*. After some equivocation, the editorial board preferred Plekhanov to Trotsky.

The other, more fundamental, reason for the break lay in the positions of some Mensheviks (Dan and Zasluch in particular) in respect of the Russian liberal current; Trotsky was vigorously anti-liberal whereas a fraction of the Mensheviks inclined more and more openly towards an alliance with them.

Trotsky abandoned the Menshevik circles at this point and evolved to a median and conciliatory position. This was the position « above the fractions » which he kept to until the Summer of 1917, although he quickly abandoned any hope of reuniting them. The completion of this evolution was marked by an *Open Letter to the Comrades* which Trotsky sent to *Iskra* in September 1904. The preface to *Our Political Tasks*, written in August, represents an

intermediate stage; Trotsky still declares himself to be Menshevik, but insists above all on the need to reunify the Party, calling its aspiration towards this the « organisational death » of the « minority ».

## **The genesis of *Our Political Tasks***

Trotsky devoted himself to the drafting of *Our Political Tasks* from April to August of 1904. The motive for writing it was still the differences inside Russian Social-Democracy, but the author wished to widen the debate and try to discover the underlying causes of what had occurred.

Two principal tendencies had taken shape inside the « minority » on the « question of differences ». (The « majority », by virtue of its nature, did not produce anything essential on the subject; Lenin's *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, with its electoral arithmetic and its poor reasoning, seems to us uninteresting). Certain literary men of the « minority », principally Martov and Plekhanov, mostly applied an « ideological critique » of Lenin's positions; they enjoyed demonstrating the contradiction between Lenin's theories and chosen texts of Marx, they scoffed at the « bureaucratism » of the « majority » and they accused it of Jacobinism. But, from the pen of Martov, for example, « bureaucratism » was above all employed in a « petty-minded » sense : it was made a question of attitude (the rush to obtain positions); moreover he did not use the international term « biourokratizm », but the Russian term « miestnitchestvo ». In the mouths of Martov and Plekhanov, the term « Jacobinism » was mockery rather than the reflection of a profound analysis.

Thus, the following lines taken from an article by Martov *Forwards or Backwards ? By way of a funeral oration* (in *Iskra* No. 67) : « Alas ! Comrade Lenin : the Jacobin who established an indissoluble bond with the proletariat [b12] is quite simply a bourgeois democrat, and the « indissoluble bond » between the « Jacobin » – a concrete historic political figure – and the conscious proletariat is a *nonsense, which reveals all of the destitution of the political thought of our author* ». Trotsky would repeat this

passage nearly word for word (in *Our Political Tasks*) but under the appearance of the « nonsense », he would attempt to discover the class content of « Leninist » ideology.

The same kind of critique (« ideological », even « dogmatic » ) appeared in an article by Plekhanov (*Iskra* No. 70, Summer 1904) which criticised the theories of *What is to be done ?*

To the proposition : class consciousness must be brought to the workers « from outside », Plekhanov opposed the famous passage from *The Holy Family* : « When socialist writers ascribe this world-historic role to the proletariat, it is not at all (...) because they regard the proletarians as *gods*. Rather the contrary. Since in the fully-formed proletariat the abstraction of all humanity, even of the semblance of humanity, is practically complete; since the conditions of life of the proletariat sum up all the conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman form; since man has lost himself in the proletariat, yet at the same time has not only gained theoretical consciousness of that loss, but through urgent, no longer removable, no longer disguisable, absolutely imperative need -- the practical expression of necessity [ pun on Not/Notwendigkeit ] -- is driven directly to revolt against this inhumanity, it follows that the proletariat can and must emancipate itself. But it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions of its own life. It cannot abolish the conditions of its own life without abolishing *all* the inhuman conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own situation. Not in vain does it go through the stern but steeling school of labour. It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do. » [b13]

Plekhanov is astonished that Lenin, who still claims to be a Marxist, dares affirm the opposite, and he wonders where he could really have got his theories (!). His development stops there (as for the most part, does that of Trotsky in *Our Political Tasks*) : Lenin and his ideology appears as an historical misunderstanding.

At the end of 1903 in an article which appeared in the form of « columns » in Nos 56 and 57 of *Iskra*, Axelrod had tried to pursue an analysis of the differences to its conclusion, that is, to the point of revealing their class character. Its title was *The Unification of Russian Social-Democracy and its Tasks*. Trotsky often refers to it in *Our Political Tasks*.

Axelrod employs as an epigram a passage from the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire particularly adapted to what had happened and what would happen in Russia [b14]. The article is structured in three principal movements which overlap one another : the analysis of the conditions under which Russian Social-Democracy was born and developed; its two-fold tasks and the two tendencies which necessarily appeared within it; lastly a series of anticipations about what a Bolshevik victory would be like. The goal of Social-Democracy is as elsewhere the socialist revolution; but since the bourgeois revolution has not been made in Russia, in order to achieve its goal Social-Democracy is objectively forced to employ means which lead it in the opposite direction (the democratic struggle which culminates in the bourgeois revolution against tsarism). The means have every chance of being stronger than the goal itself; the socialist objective which Social-Democracy sets itself more and more tends to be only a « subjective » aspiration, an ideology; « spontaneity » (the needs of the struggle under « Russian conditions ») pushes Social-Democracy on the road towards a struggle that has nothing specifically socialist about it. This determines the appearance within the Party of two tendencies which both claim to be the representative and the leadership of the

proletarian movement; a minority tendency « which resists », which doesn't allow itself to be dragged onto the slippery slope of the democratic struggle, and makes a point of remaining on solely proletarian positions; and a tendency which, not seeing the danger, itself plays the role which the bourgeoisie does not play in Russia, that places itself at the head of the democratic movement and that ends up by making the struggle of the proletariat a lever for the bourgeois revolution. These are the two tendencies which, according to Axelrod, separated at the Congress; and it was no accident that the confrontation related to the statutes : the organisational form which a movement gives itself is absolutely essential. The radical-bourgeois current finds its ideal in the organisational forms of the revolutionary bourgeoisie (Jacobinsm) [b15]; its party must contain professional revolutionaries and be outside the proletariat itself. Whether its members are conscious of it or not, such a party is constructed for a seizure of power, in the blanquist fashion, in the near future. The Mensheviks, by contrast, hope that the bourgeois revolution will not be made by the Party which claims to represent the proletariat, and stick to the forms of organisation of Western social-democracy. They want the Party to actually become an integral part of the proletariat, they do not glorify, and in any case do not want to institutionalise, what the conditions of struggle in Russia have imposed : an organisation formed almost exclusively of *déclassée* intellectuals and of workers abstracted from their class. [b16]

It was only by starting from this analysis that Axelrod succeeded in foreseeing the direction in which the Bolsheviks would lead the Party and to prophesy its outcome :

« All the radical elements of the intelligentsia unite under the flag of Social-Democracy, group themselves around its central organisation, support it

with all their means and furnish it with an ever greater contingent of professional revolutionaries, that is, of the only individuals who can enter this completely separate organisation (see the draft of paragraph 1 of the Statutes written by Lenin). On the other hand, the working masses, to a far greater extent than today, will follow the instructions of this organisation and are ready to obey it [Axelrod then quotes, to support his hypothesis, the statutes which were given to a Committee of the R.S.D.L.P]. What would that mean ? What would the social and political meaning be if this hypothesis were realised ? Those who are not afraid to call a spade a spade can easily answer this question. We would have a political revolutionary organisation of the democratic bourgeoisie, leading the working masses of Russia like an army to combat. And to complete the terrible irony, history would perhaps even place at the head of this organisation, not a simple Social-Democrat, but an absolutely « orthodox » Marxist (by origin).

« Marx wrote of the French Revolution : « And in the austere classical traditions of the Roman Republic the bourgeois gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions, that they needed to conceal from themselves the bourgeois-limited content of their struggles » Why would history not play us the same turn by draping us in the ideal costume of the « traditional » revolutionary Social-Democracy in order to conceal from ourselves the « limited bourgeois content » of our movement ? ».

There only remained to draw from the already extremely advanced bureaucratisation of the R.S.D.L.P. the « forecast » that, in post-revolutionary Russia, the development of capitalism would perhaps initially be managed by the workers, then by a bureaucracy; but Axelrod did not do this.

Trotsky refers to this article many times. In fact, many passages of *Our Political Tasks* are only developments of it, in particular the only chapter which has been widely known until now (cited by Duetscher in *The Prophet Armed*, end of Chapter 3). *Our Political Tasks* was thus a product of Russian Social-Democratic thought of the time, and the only thing which distinguished Trotsky from most of his Party comrades (Mensheviks and Bolsheviks alike) was the announcement of the imminence of the revolution, and his revolutionary fervour (especially notable in comparison to the Mensheviks). But including Russian Social-Democratic thought in this book did not achieve a clear view of things; a Russian Marx was impossible under the conditions of Russia at that time. The period and the country above all needed ideology, not theory. Thus theory only existed in the Social-Democrat party in a diffuse way; elements of theory can be found in the work of Lenin, in the work of the Mensheviks and above all, after 1905, in the work of Trotsky, but they remained drowned in illusions. The things which characterise Russian Social-Democratic thought rather well (and Bolshevism in particular), are its complete error on the question of organisation and of class consciousness; and on the other hand the virtual non-existence of any interest in those problems touching on the revolutionary transformation of capitalist social relations. In this, they were men of their time, but not of ours. Equally, for us it is not a question of « rehabilitating » the Mensheviks instead of the Bolsheviks. The majority of the Mensheviks sank into the reformism of the Second International and into hopeless collaboration with the Russian bourgeoisie; the Bolsheviks, for their part, accomplished the tasks which the Russian bourgeoisie was incapable of completing successfully. It is simply a matter of showing that within the Russian Social-Democratic Party, and, in particular, in the work of Axelrod and Trotsky, could be found elements of a theory of the Russian Revolution.

*Our Political Tasks* has a great many points in common with Rosa Luxemburg's article *Organisational Questions of Russian Social-Democracy* [b17]. In their struggle against the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks called to their aid the great names of international socialism, in particular Kautsky and Luxemburg. Kautsky saw things from afar and from on high, and condemned the Bolsheviks without knowing anything more of their positions than what the Mensheviks told him. Luxemburg, on the contrary, knew about the fundamental features of the Russian revolutionary movement. She had read Lenin's principal works, which was obviously the minimum condition for a valid critique. Thus her article, which appeared in July 1904 in both *Iskra* and *Neue Zeit*, the central organ of German Social-Democracy, carried more weight.

It did a lot for the cause of the Mensheviks in Russia. This is why Lenin made a response which each will appreciate in his own way and which Luxemburg characterized as « prattle » [b18].

[f12] Original Note : Martov is scoffing at Lenin's famous definition : « A Jacobin who wholly identifies himself with the *organization* of the proletariat – a proletariat *conscious* of its class interest – is a *revolutionary Social-Democrat*. » Lenin, *One step forward...* section q. "The new *Iskra*. Opportunism in Questions of Organisation". Para 10.

[f13] Original Note : Marx & Engels, *The Holy Family* - Chapter IV "Critical Criticism" As the Tranquillity of Knowledge, Or "Critical Criticism" As Herr Edgar. 4) Proudhon. Critical Comment No. 2. [MECW Vol. 4] pp 34-38. The Leninists reassure themselves that this text is prior to the « epistemological break ». As everyone knows, the « epistemological break », together with a certain number of concepts, some of which don't lack shrewdness, is the last innovation in order to save Leninism, devised by the *last*

thinker of the French Communist Party.

[f14] Original Note : *18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Pauvert edition pp. 224. [translator's note : beyond the fact this is from the latter part of Chapter One it is not clear what it is that Axelrod cited, unless this is a reference to the Marx quotation from the same source two paragraphs below this].

[f15] Original Note : Lenin always asserted his admiration for the organisation of the populist party *Zemlya I Volya* (see for example in *What is to be done ?* the section « Conspiratorial » Organisation and « Democratism »).

[f16] Original Note : This and the fact that Bolshevism contained nothing proletarian except for the ideology reflected (obviously back to front) in Lenin's fundamental theory : that class consciousness must be brought to the workers from outside. It is indeed necessary to « educate » the proletariat when, whatever one thinks and says, one causes it to make a revolution which only ends up by perpetuating its own exploitation.

The various present-day ideologues of bolshevism have ended up in such a theoretical degeneration that, at best, they can only see our assertion as a moral critique. Even at this derisory level they are still mistaken : we retain as much admiration for Lenin and Trotsky as we have contempt for their epigones. In fact, we limit ourselves to describing reality. 1 : the Russian revolution, through the destruction of the former political and social relations, only perpetuated the exploitation of the proletariat, developed wage-labour and permitted the development of capital; 2 : Lenin and Trotsky were the authentic leaders of this ambiguous revolution. We simply reaffirm, with Marx and Engels, who aimed at the voluntarists and moralists, that consciousness does not make history, that, if these were the men who made it, they did not do so « freely » but

within the limits of their epoch, and that if these men always acted by setting certain goals for themselves, it was not those goals which they attained in general but others which reality imposed (see *Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy* by Engels, in which this point of view is brilliantly set out; equally see K. Marx, *Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality*, [MECW, Vol. 6 pp. 312-340]

[f17] Original Note : Trotsky reports in *My Life* (beginning of Chapter 16) that he had had contact with Rosa Luxemburg in 1904.

[f18] Original Note : This response entitled *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (response to Luxemburg) will appear in the same Editions Belfond collection as *Our Political Tasks*. See also J. P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, [Oxford: OUP, 1966] p. 293.

## **Trotsky the « Bolshevik-Leninist » and *Our Political Tasks***

Trotsky doesn't breathe a word about this booklet in *My Life*; he was opposed all of his life to the translation or republication of *Our Political Tasks* and of the *Report of the Siberian Delegation*. Having become from the end of the 1920s the intransigent apostle of « Bolshevism-Leninism », Trotsky could not reveal to his public these works devoted to an acerbic and often pertinent critique of the theories and « practices » of Lenin. However, he can be seen, at the end of his life, bringing *Our Political Tasks* out of obscurity and declaring that he had always adhered to some of the theories expressed in it : Trotsky evokes the period which followed the Second Congress and analyses the important part played in the Party by the « committeemen » ; from this he then comes to the text : « In the pamphlet, "Our Political Problems" written by me in 1904, which contains *not a little* [authors note : our emphasis] that is immature and erroneous in my criticism of Lenin, there are, however, pages which present a fairly accurate characterisation of the cast of thought of the "committeemen" of those days, who "have foregone the need to rely upon on the workers after they had found support in the 'principles' of centralism". The struggle Lenin was obliged to wage the following year at the Congress [b19] against the high and mighty "committeemen" completely confirmed the justice of my criticism. » (...) « The idea of making a fetish of the political machine was not only alien but repugnant to his nature. At the Congress he spotted the caste tendency [b20] of the committeemen at once and opened an impassioned fight against it. » (...) But, continues Trotsky, victory remained with the comitteemen who proclaimed that workers could not enter the Party committees. (*Stalin*) [b21] Thus Trotsky establishes a certain « bridge » between the Bolshevik Party and the « bureaucratic degeneration of the U.S.S.R ».

[f19] Original Note : The Third Congress, in 1905, was solely Bolshevik; there was only a single worker among the delegates (see *Recollections of Lenin* by Krupskaya, quoted by Souvarine in *Stalin*). [Boris Souvarine, *Stalin, A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* [London: Secker and Warburg, ] p. 71.

[f20] Original Note : According to Trotsky, it is a bureaucratic caste which at the present time holds *political* power in the U.S.S.R., whereas within society the revolution had supposedly achieved the « basis of socialism » nationalisation, collectivisation, the State monopoly of foreign trade, etc... By affirming that present day Russian society is supposedly a kind of intermediary between capitalism and socialism, otherwise known as the « first phase of socialist society », which Russia has not left over the last fifty years, Trotskyism rejoins traditional reformism which thinks that socialism can be reached by successive stages. Socialism (which Marx instead called the first phase of communism) is only « empirically (...) possible as the act of the dominant peoples 'all at once' and simultaneously ». [t1] If the revolution remains limited to one sector, the survival of market relations inside and outside this sector fatally (and at best) maintains the capitalist mode of production there. And « one would fall down again in the old shit » (*German Ideology*). [t2] Every page of *Capital* is a description and explanation of the social system currently existing in Russia. Trotskyism, in passing this off as the « beginning of socialism » plays the role of the left-wing ideology of this system. And in affirming that the transition to real socialism can be achieved in Russia merely through a political revolution, it reveals its true nature : the ideology of a fraction of the Russian bureaucracy that has been ousted by another.

[t1] and [t2] translator's note : Both these quotations are from Marx, Engels, Hess, *The German Ideology*. Authier

appears to be using the French translation published by Editions Sociales [Paris: 1968] p. 65.

I have directly translated the second quotation [t2] from the French since Authier has substituted the word « merde » for « gadoue » (manure) in the Ed. Sociales translation. Both are rather more expressive than the decorous standard English translation : « all the old filthy business would necessarily be restored » [MECW, Vol. 5 p. 49]

[f21] Original Note : Trotsky, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence*, [London: Hollis and Carter, 1947] p. 62.

[translator's note : The Third Congress of the Bolshevik R.S.D.L.P didn't say that workers couldn't enter the committee's : an attempt by Lenin to pass a resolution requiring the Party Committee's to contain a majority of workers (where they were to act as a counterweight to the influence of 'theoreticians' and 'literaries') was defeated. Also against his wishes a resolution was passed placing the editorial board of the party paper in exile (Lenin's power base) under the control of the Central Committee in Russia. Lenin diagnosed « an illness in the party ». In 1940 Trotsky wrote « That illness was the high-handedness of the political machine, the beginning of bureaucracy ». (ibid.)]

## Trotsky's « Reversal »

Why did Trotsky choose to become with the Bolsheviks the leader of a movement, which in 1904 he had characterised as « radical bourgeois » ? To put it more clearly, how was it that Trotsky made himself an agent (with others) of a historic movement which led to the generalisation of capitalist exploitation in Russia. The « solution » is to be found in the theory of the « permanent revolution » and the specific historic movement which this theory explains.

The theory of the « permanent revolution » which Trotsky brilliantly outlined in *Results and Prospects* in 1906 [b22], showed that as the Russian bourgeoisie was too weak to carry through the bourgeois revolution (and this for historical reasons which he sets out in this book), it is the proletariat which will make it, supported by, and leading, the revolutionary peasantry; but (it is at this point the ideology starts), proletarian power will not be content with the gains of the bourgeois revolution and will try as soon as possible to move on to the proletarian revolution itself, and to socialism. For this, after the seizure of power in Russia itself, the revolution must spread as fast as possible to the advanced capitalist countries; Trotsky who still kept to the Marxist conception of socialism [b23] knew that it could only be achieved on an international scale (see *The German Ideology*, end of the chapter on « History ») and that a revolution which was limited to Russia would be unable to go beyond capitalism.

It is only this aspect, the internationalisation of the revolutionary process, which people retain from the theory of the « permanent revolution »; it is not secondary but, abstracted from its context (in the way the Stalinists see it), it becomes reduced to the nonsense of exporting the revolution, a theory which Trotsky never defended. The internationalisation of the revolution was the indispensable

condition for the possibility of the « permanent revolution » in Russia. But the theory of internationalisation is by no means the theory of the « permanent revolution ».

The first part of this theory was verified, and Lenin was won over to it in 1917, when he declared, contrary to the opinions of his partisans, that the proletariat, with the Bolshevik Party at its head, had to prepare to seize power. The internationalisation of the revolution did not happen; the process stopped in Russia at the level of state capitalism, and the Russian proletariat very rapidly lost any power.

The theory of Trotsky (and of Parvus [23bis] as he always acknowledged) partly explains the nature of the movement in which he took part, and equally explains *why* he took part in it : the idea of the « permanent revolution » assured him that the action he undertook would lead to socialism in the short term, and not to the survival of capitalism. The theory of the « permanent revolution » represents something ambiguous : in its first part, it is a scientific theory of the historic movement which led to the revolution of 1917. And Trotsky and Parvus' merit was to have been the first to formulate the theory of this movement (Axelrod who we have referred to, only remained at the stage of hypothesis), at a time in which its actors clung to illusory schemas. Lenin thought that given the weakness of the bourgeoisie the revolution would institute a « democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants », that is, that the workers and peasants would seize power in order to liquidate the vestiges of feudalism and absolutism (the bourgeois revolution). It was only in his April Theses in 1917 that Lenin spoke about the bourgeois revolution « growing over » [t1] into the proletarian revolution. For their part, the Mensheviks, stuck to the so called « classical » schema (shared by the whole Party before 1905, including by Trotsky in *Our Political Tasks*) : First the bourgeoisie would make its

revolution, helped among other classes, by the proletariat, and would achieve the political emancipation of Russia; after which, within the framework of the « future free Russia », the proletariat would be able to go on to the struggle for the socialist revolution.

But, through its second and third points (the transition to the socialist revolution in Russia through the internationalisation of the revolutionary process), the « theory of the permanent revolution » played the role of ideology for Trotsky and the Russian revolutionaries who adopted it : it enabled them to conceal from themselves the « limited bourgeois character » of their movement, and it made it possible for this movement to become the leadership which it could not find in the bourgeoisie itself.

The theory of the « permanent revolution» outlived Trotsky and the Russian revolution. It is this theory which, better than any other, appears to explain the revolutions which have occurred since then in those countries where capitalism was barely developed and the bourgeoisie unable to carry out the bourgeois revolution (which was coupled in these countries with a struggle for national liberation). This theory explains why « national liberation » can only be carried out by a « class bloc » within which the proletariat (in every case, that is to say, the Party which claims to represent it) must have the leading role. In fact, here too, the Party (the cornerstone of this « class bloc ») seizes power while primarily basing itself on the peasant movement; then it establishes the only social system that is possible (despite all the pretended « cultural revolutions ») : capitalism, managed by a bureaucracy of which the Party is the original core, and the leader. Here again, the two-fold merit of the « theory of the permanent revolution » is both to appear to explain what occurs, and to mask it. This, among other things, has earned Trotsky his current celebrity.

[f22] Original Note : *Results and Prospects*. [Publication details]

[f23] Original Note : He abandoned it during the second half of his life. See note 20.

[f23bis] Original Note : Parvus : the pseudonym of A. L. Helfand, a Russian Jew who settled in Germany; economist and journalist; collaborated in *Neue Zeit* the central organ of German Social-Democracy (and of the entire Second International) and *Iskra*. Was located at the extreme-left of German Social-Democracy; took part from the start in the struggle against reformism. Himself edited a journal *Aus der Weltpolitik* in which in 1895 he forecast the Russo-Japanese war and the revolution which would develop out of it in Russia. One of the few theorists of the period who was able to produce analyses on a world level in books such as *The World Economy and the Agricultural Crisis*. As regards the Russian Party, Parvus adopted an attitude « above the fractions » like Trotsky at the point that the two men entered into collaboration (Autumn 1904). Parvus published a long series of articles in *Iskra* entitled War and Revolution, in which he analysed the balance of power on the world level, and concluded : « The worldwide process of capitalist development leads to a *political upheaval* in Russia. This in its turn must have its impact on the political development of all capitalist countries » (1905). At the same time he began to outline the *theory of the permanent revolution* (which Trotsky would take over and develop in *Results and Prospects*, 1906) : the proletariat is the only class in Russia which will be able to accomplish the bourgeois revolution; but the proletariat, once it is the master of political power, will not be able, because of what it is, to remain satisfied with this stage and a period of « permanent revolution » will be established : the bourgeois revolution will go beyond itself in a few years in socialised revolution, and this entire process will be done under the

leadership of the proletariat. It was to this global analysis that Parvus [translators note : I think this should say 'Trotsky' not 'Parvus' [t2] ] joined his critique of the organisational conceptions and political methods of Lenin (*Our Differences*, 1905). Parvus even foresaw his own evolution (he finished up as a political advisor to Ebert, leader of counter-revolutionary German Social-Democracy and President of the Weimar Republic), in envisaging the destiny of Social-Democracy in general : « One must reach the paradoxical conclusion that the most decisive subjective factor of historical development is not political wisdom, but political stupidity... History has often led by the nose those who have thought that they could keep her in check... One can imagine such a turn of events that the Social-Democratic Party will bear the political guilt for the survival of the capitalist order » (Based on Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, [Oxford: OUP, 1954, paperback edition 1970], p. 99 ff. The two quotes are both on page 104).

[t2] translator's note : this looks like a slip of the pen. *Our Differences* was an article written by Trotsky (It is reprinted in his book *1905*).

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1905/ch25.htm> ).

[t1] translator's note : *Growing over*. The french term « transcroissance » is a neologism coined to translate a term of Lenin's which has subsequently entered political currency.

« (...) I proceeded precisely from the bourgeois-democratic character of the revolution and arrived at the conclusion that the profundity of the agrarian crisis could raise the proletariat of backward Russia to power. Yes, this was precisely the idea I defended on the eve of the 1905 Revolution. This was precisely the idea that was expressed by the very designation of the revolution as a 'permanent', that is, an uninterrupted one, a revolution passing over directly from the bourgeois stage into the socialist. To

express the same idea Lenin later used the excellent expression of the bourgeois revolution growing over into the socialist. The conception of 'growing over' was counterposed by Stalin, after the event (in 1924), to the permanent revolution, which he presented as a direct leap from the realm of autocracy into the realm of socialism. This ill-starred 'theoretician' did not even bother to ponder the question: What meaning can there be to the permanency of the revolution, that is, its uninterrupted development, if all that is involved is a mere leap? »

Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, Introduction to the First Russian Edition.

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1931-tpv/prre.htm>

## **The Leninists and the Proletarian Revolution.**

Why are these texts being published now, and only now ? It is obviously not a question of rediscovery. We have seen that Trotsky had not forgotten this work. It was also pointed out by some other authors : Deutscher makes a long paraphrase of it [i.e. : *Our Political Tasks* - trans] at the end of the third chapter of *The Prophet Armed*. This text is also cited by Souvarine in *Stalin, A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*; after evoking the critique which Rosa Luxemburg made of Lenin, he writes : « But the most violent, if not the most effective blows, were dealt by Trotsky in the pamphlet, *Our Political Tasks*, in which he described Lenin as « head of the reactionary wing of our Party » and the « dull caricature of the tragic intransigence of Jacobinism » ». [t1]

The most extensive quotations from *Our Political Tasks* and *Report of the Siberian Delegation* that we are aware of are in *The Totalitarian Party*, an article by K. Papaïannou published in the July-August 1966 issue of the journal *Le Contrat Social*.

It was reading this article which prompted us to translate and publish these texts in French. Without the student movement and the general strike of May 1968 (which have created the necessary « market »), this project would not have been achieved so rapidly. And, to conclude, it is this situation which it is necessary to briefly underline.

The May movement gave a more or less artificial life to a certain number of bygone revolutionary currents and, among them, « left-wing anti-leninism ». The weakness of the revolutionary movement is expressed in this inability to « supersede the past ». It « refurbishes » 1848, the Commune, 1917, Barcelona and even the « Popular Front ». It seems however to have created a new form : the

Action Committees. But the gathering together of revolutionaries in small groups is characteristic of those periods in which the revolutionary movement only exists in an embryonic state. In short, the Action Committees were very often only the « mass organizations » of the different small groups of « vanguards ». Only a minority of the Action Committees, escaping from any other « leadership » than the direction of their will, were able to represent something positive. This positivity was limited to their very existence as a new revolutionary form; it did not touch their action, which was only a tougher trade unionism than the official trade unionism.

So a revolutionary *form* has appeared but not its content. Only the dominant ideology could take for the revolution of the modern age something which was often only a parody of it.

In parody, all kinds of characters have a role to play, and this explains the importance taken on by the debris of another era : the Stalinists of all sorts (Communist Party, the pro-chinese, etc) remaking the « Popular Front », the trotskyists calling for a « workers united front » (that is, for an electoral coalition of seemingly working-class organizations, parties and trade unions), the various « spontaneists », « workerists » and « ultra-leftists » making propaganda for the self-management of capitalist misery by the workers. All of this was and still is capped by the debates on the « problem of organization » in which everyone recites a role learned fifty or more years ago. *Our Political Tasks* and *Report of the Siberian Delegation* will add one more role to the repertoire and make it possible to accelerate the natural decomposition of « Leninism ».

Today « Leninism » has taken refuge in the student groupscules : this is actually to reverse the formula in *What is to be done ?*, « left to their own strength, non-proletarian revolutionaries can only rise to a Leninist

consciousness ». The same reason which results in the working class being the only spontaneously revolutionary class, that is, its situation within current social relations, results in students only being spontaneously capable of a formal revolutionism. At best they can only be the bearers of empty revolutionary aspirations. This expresses itself in the theatricality and pompous verbosity of the student assemblies. The alleged « student revolution » has led to nothing and collapsed with the end of the general strike which, alone, had created the situation in which this « revolution » could subsist. The student movement was not the « detonator », but the « ticket of entry » [b24] to a new revolution that has barely commenced. In the situation of May, the proletariat overall remained reformist, and this explains why it could continue to be « manoeuvred » by the forces of the old world. The appearance of a revolutionary fringe as a tiny minority within the proletariat is the only important event of May; alone, it assures us that a new revolutionary process has indeed begun.

The problems which this revolution will have to solve will be different from those which were posed in May; these will be, firstly, the military and political problems of insurrection and the immediate « physical » crushing of the reactionary forces; secondly, the problems of the destruction at its roots (*market* relations) of the capitalist economy and of all ECONOMY; and the problems raised by the re-appropriation by society of the process of production, that is already socialised, but always in the hands of a minority class, and always imprisoned within the framework of individual exchange.

The « problem of organisation » is only an empty expression and it is only posed by those who are preoccupied by the organisation of organisation. When revolutionary tasks are posed (and this was not the case in May), the revolutionary forces, engendered by the society which they must destroy, organise themselves

spontaneously to solve them.

The organisation which a revolutionary movement gives itself, as with its programme and its goal, is determined by the concrete situation of the period, and the forms which it gives itself evolve as the conditions of the combat change. A revolutionary movement always corresponds simultaneously to the society which it is going to suppress and to that which it is going to establish. Bolshevism was a product of the *particular* conditions of Czarist Russia, and the characteristic features of « Soviet » Russia already existed in the organisation of the Party which would actually be carried to the heart of the revolutionary process; when one has shown that, one has completed the theoretical critique of « Leninism », and of the grotesque pretension of the epigones to seek in the work of Lenin-Trotsky the theory of the revolution which is coming. This must necessarily go through the critique of Leninism-Trotskyism (amongst other things), in order to arrive at an adequate view of what it is and what its tasks are, and in order to succeed. And incidentally, tearing down the faded finery of the brilliant leaders who always wrap themselves in Lenin and Trotsky, will restore to the latter their real greatness as revolutionary militants.

(July 1969)

[t1] translator's note : Boris Souvarine, *Stalin, A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* [London: Secker and Warburg, ] p. 64.

[f24] Original Note : Marx Quote

[f24] «Le nom sous lequel une révolution s'introduit n'est jamais celui qu'elle portera sur ses bannières le jour du triomphe. Pour s'assurer des chances de succès, les mouvements révolutionnaires sont forcés, dans la société moderne, d'emprunter leurs couleurs, dès l'abord, aux éléments du peuple qui, tout en s'opposant au gouvernement existant, vivent en totale harmonie avec la société existante. En un mot, les révolutions doivent obtenir leur billet d'entrée pour la scène officielle des mains des classes dirigeantes elles-mêmes. (Karl Marx, New York Tribune, 27-7-1857).