

"Russian Question" Critically Considered

In the Post-Conference Discussion

by Ben Gitlow

1. What is the "Russian question?" It is the question of the policy adopted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for the carrying out in life of the Five-Year Plan. But, since the original plan is undergoing continual changes and modifications, it would be more accurate to state that the "Russian question" concerns the line of policy pursued by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the period of the construction of socialism initiated by the Five-Year Plan.

2. Is the "Russian question" therefore confined only to the policies adopted for carrying out the Five-Year Plan or, as some comrades put it, the Five-Year Plan is the "Russian question?" If the Five-Year Plan is the "Russian question", then how explain the differences between Rykov-Tomsky-Bukharin and Stalin? They all voted, approved and fought for the Five-Year Plan at the fifteenth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Rykov made the main report on the plan. The fact that differences developed on how to proceed to industrialize the Soviet Union, how to collectivize agriculture, what kind of tempo should be adopted, etc., indicates that Rykov, Tomsky, Bukharin had one line on how to proceed with the construction of socialism and Stalin and the majority of the party another line, even tho they claimed the same objectives, namely the fulfillment of the Five-Year Plan and the speediest construction of socialism thru the building up of heavy industry and the collectivization of agriculture.

However, since the consideration of the line involves the period of the construction of socialism initiated by the Five-Year Plan, it cannot be narrowed down just to a consideration of the Five-Year Plan itself. It necessarily involves the consideration of the party line in all its aspects. You cannot create, to suit yourself, pigeon-holes and then proceed to label them. One pigeon-hole contains the party line—it is the Five-Year Plan. But the other pigeon-holes, one labelled the regime, the other the Communist International, etc., have nothing to do with the party line. In other words, they are divorced, separated and have absolutely nothing to do with the line. This way of chopping up, dividing the line into separate entities, is a method of reasoning which leads one to the conclusion that the internal economic policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is independent, for example, of what goes on in the Communist International and in the working class outside of the Soviet Union.

3. Is the "Russian question" only a polemic on the necessity of building up socialism by proving the superiority of heavy industry over small-scale industry and of collectivization over individual peasant agriculture? A number of comrades have actually written articles which imply that the only question at issue is to prove the necessity of building up heavy industry and collectivizing agriculture. I take it for granted that all comrades are convinced that the Soviet Union must, in order to achieve socialism, build up heavy industry and collectivize agriculture as speedily as possible. It is absolutely imperative and necessary that this be done. The question which concerns us in this discussion is how this is being done, what steps have been taken to realize the above objective. In other words, what is the general line of the party to achieve this. For us, it is not a question only of the superiority of large-scale socialized industry over small-scale production or the advantages of collective and gigantic Soviet farms with modern technical means and methods over individual small peasant farms with antiquated methods and equipment. If, as Communists, we will keep in mind that we are discussing the question of party line, that we have not under consideration an agitation or propaganda thesis on heavy against small-scale industry, etc., then we will be able to examine the achievements, errors and mistakes in a constructive Communist manner, then we will be able to determine the correct-

ness or incorrectness of the general line.

It is also to be hoped that our discussion, including the criticisms made, will in a measure help in the correction of errors and the adoption of such policies as will insure the greatest success in the building of socialism and the advancement of the Communist movement in the Soviet Union and thruout the world. Such a discussion, if it is kept free from demagogy and unprincipledness, if it does not degenerate into factionalism, is bound to be beneficial to the Communist movement.

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Our Group And The "Russian Question"

The "Russian question" is of decisive importance to our group. Our position on the "Russian question" determines whether or not our group has a principled justification for existence.

If the "Russian question" is not a fundamental question for our group, if the "Russian question" has nothing to do with the Communist International and in the Communist Party of the U. S. A., if there is no link between the line of the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Russia with its line in the Communist International of which it is the ruling and decisive leadership, then it would be perfectly in order to entertain a motion to table the "Russian question" altogether, not to have a group position on it, to file away in the archives all mo-

tions and resolutions and to forthwith end the discussion as useless and purposeless. No one proposes such a step. The "Russian question" has agitated our group from the very beginning of its organization. It was the "Russian question" and differences on the "Russian question" in the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and in the leadership of the Communist International which brought about the split in the Communist International resulting in the organization of the various Communist Opposition groups, including our own.

Our group could not, as a Communist organization, directly effected by the line of the Russian party leadership, by the attitude and policies of the Stalin regime, ignore the "Russian question" and remain silent. Our group had to take a position.

Since the inception of the group, its position on the "Russian question" has undergone certain changes. First, there was a cautious attitude, a hesitancy to discuss the question because of lack of sufficient information. But our group always maintained a critical attitude up till the retreat on collectivization, Stalin's letter on "Diziness", March 1930, and the first international conference of the Communist Opposition held in Berlin in December 1930.

Our group got its first big shock on the "Russian question" when

Comrade Lovestone, our delegate to the international conference of the Communist Oppositions, returned and, in his report to the membership and to the National Buro, came out in full support of the resolution of the German Opposition on the "Russian question."

This resolution was a full endorsement of the general line of the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and went to extreme in declaring that the Stalin regime was correct, historically necessary and inevitable. The astounding position of Comrade Lovestone on the "Russian question" in favor of this resolution of the German Opposition was violently opposed by a majority of the National Buro. As a result, in the Spring of 1931, the National Buro adopted a resolution on the "Russian question." The resolution was a compromise resolution. It is inconsistent, contradictory and untenable today. The present National Buro of our group has veered far away from this compromise resolution. It approaches more the position of Comrade Lovestone and the German Opposition. Comrade Lovestone has stated repeatedly at membership meetings that he still holds to the views contained in the German Opposition resolution.

We must know what is now the position of the National Buro. Unless we know definitely what is the position of the present, the new National Buro today, not what was the position of the old National Buro almost two years ago, there

can be no adequate discussion of the present Buro's position. The old resolution adopted in the Spring of 1931 does not reflect the position of the present National Buro. In addition, there are many factors in the situation of the Soviet Union today that did not exist or were not apparent at the time the resolution was adopted. Furthermore we have added considerably to our store of information.

If the present National Buro is to lead and guide the discussion, and the membership has every right to expect such leadership from the Buro, then it is high time that the Buro of 1932 stop hiding behind the old Buro and come out openly and boldly with its position.

Our group at the beginning, whenever it had occasion to do so was not afraid to speak out vigorously on the "Russian question." This is clearly evidenced from the pages of the "Revolutionary Age". I will quote from some of the articles and from declarations of the old Buro that agreement with the general line of the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was a later development. An examination of the pages of the "Revolutionary Age" proves definitely that our critical attitude to the line of the Stalin regime has been changed to one of whole hearted approval.

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In The Post Conference Discussion

"HISTORICALLY INEVITABLE AND NECESSARY..."

(Continued from last issue)

During the years 1917-1920, the Russian proletariat could not center its attention on production. Confronted by counter-revolutionary armies on many fronts and by foreign interventionists, the Russian proletariat and peasantry had to struggle for the life of the revolution. During this period there existed "War Communism", equality in consumption. The alliance with the peasantry was maintained on the basis of defending the land which the Soviets gave to the peasant. The victory of the White Guard would have meant the loss of the land by the peasants. That's why the peasantry fought side by side with the worker and supplied the city with food.

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About The N. E. P.

When the enemy forces were defeated on all fronts, it was necessary to reestablish what was destroyed during the years of civil war. It was necessary to start normal functioning of the productive apparatus. It was necessary to produce to satisfy the needs of the population. Then, in 1921, the N. E. P. was introduced. The main features of the N. E. P. are: In view of the shortage of commodities to permit the handicraftsmen to produce and to establish the open market.

To also allow the peasant to bring his surplus to the market.

The alliance of the working class and the poor and the middle peasant to continue on a new level—exchange of city products for agricultural.

Also then there was a strong opposition to the N. E. P. Many leading comrades were afraid that, if this sort of capitalist forms would be permitted, the petty bourgeois waves would wash off the gains of the October Revolution. To which Lenin answered, in the discussion on this subject:

"Because of the general political and economic conditions which have now been established when the proletariat is holding in its hands all the sources of large-scale industry, when there can be no talk whatsoever about denationalization, we are not to be afraid of him (the small capitalist). And when we

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are suffering from almost such a complete lack of products, from the whole pauperization of the population, . . . it is laughable to be afraid that capitalism on the basis of small-scale production is constituting a danger."

Is the N. E. P. to be considered a permanent institution? NO! To the degree that socialist factories and the socialist sector of agriculture will be able to replace the production of the private sector, to that extent will the private sector be eliminated. Not before! Naturally, the market is to be controlled by the government. The State shall do all in its power to direct the private producers in the cooperatives thru help, thru incentives. But it would be wrong to govern economic relations not based on realities but thru desires expressed in resolutions and decrees. While Lenin was still alive there were evident tendencies which sought to do away with the N.E.P. Comrade Lenin combated these tendencies. In 1923, he came out with an article dealing with this question. He stated:

"Then what kind of a policy could the socialist proletariat execute in the face of such economic realities? To give the petty peasant all the products

he needs, from the production of the large-scale socialist factory in exchange for bread and raw material. This would be the most desirable and most 'correct' policy—we started this. But we cannot supply all products, not by far, and we will not be in a position to do it in the near future, at least not until we will complete the first part of the task of electrifying the country.

"Then what shall we do? Either to try to prohibit, completely close down the development of private, non-government exchange, i.e., bartering, capitalism, which is inevitable while there exist millions of small producers. Such a policy would be foolish and suicidal for the party which would try it. Foolish because it is impossible economically; suicidal, because parties that try such a policy inevitably suffer a blow. We have to admit that some of our Communists have sinned 'in thought, in word and in deed', following precisely this policy. We must try to do away with these mistakes. We must positively do away with them, otherwise it will be very bad."

The question then is: Can the socialist sector produce enough to satisfy the needs? Can it produce enough articles in exchange for agricultural products? Obviously not yet! If that is the case, the State should have encouraged the production of the handicraftsmen which would ease the goods famine. Today while there is a slight increase in the production of light industry, the decrease in production of the private sector is much larger. The result is: Tho in the socialist sector an increase in production is to be noted, the total output in the light industry nationally has decreased.

Again: In order to get agricultural products it is necessary: (1) to give in exchange manufactured goods; (2) in a large measure, under normal conditions (normal crop), the success of grain collections is determined by the amount of goods given in exchange—the same applies to raw materials;

(3) on the other hand, imports of necessary machinery are determined by the amount of agricultural products which can be exported; (4) the increase of productivity of labor is dependent on the degree of supply of food and articles to the workers. In order to be able to produce, the worker must reproduce the invested energy in the process of production thru the consumption of a sufficient amount of food. The 100% yearly turn-over of the factory workers is proof that the supply is not sufficient.

Then it becomes evident, that in building socialism the importance must be attached to all branches of the national economy and not to concentrate on a particular branch. All branches are interdependent. The "jumps" tend to create "gaps" in the national economy itself.

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About Thermidor

A lot has been said about Thermidor. Trotsky accused the Stalin-Bukharin leadership that it was bureaucratic, that the revolution was degenerating, that the leadership was preparing the ground for the restoration of capitalism. What is the position of the Stalin leadership in regards to the position of Comrade Bukharin who fought the sliding of the Stalin leadership towards Trotskyism? A Trotskyite position! Comrade Stalin, speaking at the Moscow Plenum in October 1928, said:

"The victory of the right deviation would mean a tremendous strengthening of the capitalist elements in our country. What does it mean the strengthening of the capitalist elements in our country? It means the weakening of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the increase of the chances of restoration of capitalism. Therefore, the victory of the right deviation in our party would mean the accumulation of conditions, necessary for the restoration of capitalism in our country."

Substitute the name Trotsky for Stalin and you have the Thermidor theory in its full bloom.

The National Committee fails to note these deviations. In that measure it fails to give the proper leadership which is expected of them. It fails to see the political reasons for the present Stalin regime. The disagreements are political and they deserve a political answer. The National Committee must come forth with a new resolution. Comrade Lovestone in the face of all these facts, still claims that the present leadership is "historically inevitable and correct." Is it, Comrade Lovestone?

The present difficult in the Soviet Union give a lot of joy to the bourgeois world. They begin to create sentiment against the Soviet Union.

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THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT, by Jay Lovestone 15c
SOME PLAIN WORDS ON COMMUNIST UNITY, by Ben Gitlow 5c
THE HERITAGE OF THE CIVIL WAR, by Will Herberg 5c
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