‘The Ideological Foundations of Trotskyism’

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In the literature of Bolshevism, the expression ‘Trotskyism’ is not of recent origin. It only fell out of circulation for a short period, after the progenitor of this system joined the Bolshevik Party. Last year’s discussion in the Russian party has once again made ‘Trotskyism’ a current political term. The international response to the discussion around Trotsky has taken Trotskyism out of its Russian context and transformed it into an international political term. Trotskyism has figured in all intra-party debates of the RKP since the revolution. Every tactical turn taken by the party to determine the political direction of the Soviet state has been preceded by discussions with Trotsky and with Trotskyism. The first was the party discussion about the Brest Peace. Then came the discussion about trade unions and, on the eve of the Twelfth Congress of the RKP, the discussion about the dictatorship over industry. In autumn 1923 and the following winter, the battlefront formed by Trotskyism was clearly expanded. Trotskyism has now gone onto the attack on all fundamental questions of party life: on the question of the role of the party, the centralisation of the party apparatus, and also the attitude of the old groups of leaders towards the party youth. Finally came the problem of ‘The Lessons of October’ and the entire intellectual substance of Bolshevism that was linked to it: Leninism in toto was drawn into the discussion. The burning question in the debate now is whether the Bolshevik Party led the proletariat and the peasantry of Russia to victory on the basis of principles laid out by Lenin or by Trotsky. Indeed, it is even a matter for ‘discussion’ whether the political leader and organiser of the victory was Lenin and the Bolshevik Party at all, or – someone else.

The discussion has opposed Leninism and Trotskyism against each other as entire systems. And while in this debate Lenin no longer features as ‘the professional exploiter of of all that is backward in the Russian labour movement’ (Trotsky’s letter to Chkheidze of 25 February 1913), while Trotsky does not repeat what he once wrote in that same letter about Leninism, namely that ‘the entire edifice of Leninism ... is built on lies and falsification and contains

the poisonous seeds of its own destruction; then Trotsky still wants to plant a poisonous seed, Trotskyism, into Leninism.\(^2\) However, just as the contours of Trotskyism are becoming clearer and contrasting more sharply with the fundamental principles of Leninism in these recurrent discussions, so too the contours and dimensions of the camp that is quarrelling inside the party are changing. This change does not of course redound to Trotskyism. The internal party discussions triggered by Trotsky have been transformed in the course of the previous year into a dispute between Trotsky together with his little group and the party.

Since the victory of the revolution, Trotskyism has developed in the Bolshevik Party along the following lines: discussion within the party; discussion with the party; finally, inevitably, discussion in opposition to the party.

**Does Trotskyism Exist?**

Comrades Brandler and Thalheimer felt a need to dissociate themselves from Trotsky’s last speech. Not really from Trotskyism, about which, as their explanation shows, they know or want to know nothing, but from Trotsky. The Czech Rightists ([Br̄etislav] Hula, [Karel] Kreibich) also dispute the existence of Trotskyism. In their view Trotskyism is an arbitrary construction by Trotsky’s enemies, if not a vain fantasy. They believed that it was even more arbitrary and senseless to counterpose Trotskyism and Leninism, which in their view could be entirely attributed merely to certain personal differences. That was also essentially the position of some of the French Rightists and the approximate fallback position of the Russian opposition.

The main point is not that Trotsky made a front against Lenin and the Bolsheviks for a decade and a half, but that he was alongside Lenin at the time of the October Revolution. The old differences over principle, tactics, and organisation were part of party history, and they would have lost their contemporary political significance in the fullness of time.

The differences that have surfaced in the party since the victory of the revolution (and – we want to add – they always brought Trotsky into conflict with Lenin and the comrades with whom he had built Bolshevism) have no connection with these ‘historical questions’. The ‘episodic’ tactical deviations could not be traced back to any uniform basic principle – and so Trotskyism does not exist. These words just about sum up the international Right’s support

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