

Sept. 14, 1948

Dear [redacted]

Trotskyism begins in 1903 with a contradiction. During the first part of the Congress LT is so ardent an Iskra-ist that he is called "Lenin's truncheon"; during the second part of the Congress he is so ardent a Menshevik that he writes that the trouble with Leninism is not so much "bureaucratic centralism" as "ego centrism". Now this man who seemingly accepted the political resolution but rejected the organizational conclusion was not alone; in the group were included what later became (or rather proved itself to have been) Menshevism and the composites known as the "Marsh", as well as Luxemburgism. This division between political resolution and organizational conclusion is in reality the division between (economism) in the question of the analysis of objective causes and anarchism in the question of the analysis of parties, in the last instance, therefore, of classes. Its presence within the S-D party proved the dictum Marx first elaborated in 1865 when he found that Proudhonism which he had theoretically destroyed turned up as a tendency within the International. The dictum, first separate, then unite, arose when capitalist production showed its tendency to stratify the proletariat; Trotsky, on the other hand, rejects proletarian tendency and hence right of prol. to have party of its own.

(Parenthetically, I wish us to keep in mind the difference that time plays in the development of capitalist production. Marx distinguished between the production of absolute surplus value when the only way to expand s.v. was through lengthening of working day, and the production of relative s.v. when it was possible within the same working day to extract more s.v. through machinery. Piecework system he calls most characteristic of capitalism, but piecework then was really an individual's output; piecework as a system did not originate until WWI and Taylorism in USA; in Russia it came to full bloom first in 1928 and because it was during a period of full stratified production it showed the way in turn to Germany, USA; the way to the complete fragmentation of the individual at the very moment, so to speak, when technology shows that the only way to really unleash productive forces is through unification of the manual and mental laborer.)

1904 the next stage of Trotskyism, reveals the same dichotomy: LT elaborated the thesis of the permanent revolution, and not accidentally the thesis that only the proletariat can make the socialist revolution and must make it in backward Russia goes hand and hand with his rejection of the proletariat to a party of its own, instead of a party of intellectuals fighting for influence over the proletariat, and LT collaborates in that period with the economist Martynov. The dichotomy is more serious now because it is not some one else's (Lenin's) thesis he now votes for while rejecting his organizational conclusion; it is now LT's own thesis which allegedly proclaims the proletariat as the only force to transform society but which, concretely, leads to a rejection of allowing this proletariat to congeal, so to speak, its own consciousness in the form of a party.

1905-1906-1907. He begins 1905 with the Mensheviks, moves closer to the Bolsheviks at the end of the revolution, and ends supporting Luxemburg's thesis on the relation of the proletariat party to the bourgeois parties; but Lenin prevails upon the Luxemburgists to withdraw their thesis so formally LT enters the period of reaction in more or less of an alliance with the Bolsheviks. That then is the period to watch because he never stays long with them.

1908-1912; 1912-1914. Liquidationism so permeates all of Trotskyism that both during the period of reaction and the period of revival start with cries for unity, and end up in liquidationism of the August Bloc which continued

until the outbreak of the World War. To disappear and get reborn with a new revolutionary coating in Zimmerwaldism.

Now if 1905 was the dress rehearsal for 1917, which it was, then the permanent revolution theory should have got life and blood in it and developed to where it could have anticipated the April thesis as well as the Declaration of the Rights of Toilers. But neither happened. In the period between revolutions, the record so far as we have it is purely journalistic, and the three years immediately preceding 1917, see the fruition of his theories in a series of slogans, all of which are wrong: from peace without annexations to US. of Europe, from the August bloc to writing the program at Zimmerwald and rejecting the suggestion that Liebknecht be mentioned in the Call because that would have been "personification" and "particularizing" (Germanizing) the world task. Both the Zimmerwald program of Trotsky's and the Junius pamphlet of Luxemburg's reveal that in reality neither expected the revolution for which Lenin is preparing; they are defending workers' rights and "hard-won gains" and hoping for nothing more than an end to the slaughter and a status quo ante bellum. That, then, is where they reveal their true conception of the proletariat and lack of faith (because of lack of knowledge of the economic movement) in the proletariat to reconstruct society. Note also that, altho LF is ~~supposed~~ supposed to be for socialist revolution while L is only supposed to be for democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, Lenin proposes defeatism and destruction of the capitalist system, while LF proposes US - not socialist US, but just US - of Europe.

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We finally come to the mature LE, the victorious October, the real dictatorship of the proletariat, in a situation where the revolution was supposed to have "liquidated all differences" - and what does the petty bourgeois Trotsky display now? Precisely what he displayed in 1905: with only the difference that what the intellectuals were to have done for the proletariat then, the state administrators are to do for the proletariat now. And the proletariat itself? Militarization of labor, it is found is not an accident but "the necessary stage in the transition to Communism"! And why? because now we have advanced to the stage where this proletariat has a state which can plan.

Remember plan by 1940

Let us divide this plan which has ended by 1940 in the support of one of the imperialist powers into its various aspects: (1) Objectively, plan came out of the development of the productive forces; Engels mentions it as far back as 1845 as a class the bourgeoisie recognized its necessity with WWI; as a theory, bourgeois theory has recognized that in actuality the minute science is man-made and scientific research is given problems to solve, planning is the result. They haven't stated it as clearly as I state it, but definitely in the period of trust-busting the trust defenders showed it was really technology, and not mere "money madness" that has caused centralization of productive forces. (2) Subjectively, Marxism has said real planning was impossible without workers' management, and it is the tool they alone can use best. There is no in-between. Nevertheless LT has invented an in-between with the bureaucracy's planning badly, but planning. (3) LT has, finally, distorted the history of the plan not only by his insistence that he was first to propose it, but by getting mixed up with the statification of the trade unions, initiative of the workers be damned: (a) The day of the conquest of power there was established, on the one hand, the Supreme Council of National Economy, and on the other hand the Declaration of the Rights of Toilers, which concretized these rights into all sorts of instruments in the hands of the proletariat: t.u., soviets, councils of labor, workers conflict commissions, planning councils in factories, etc, etc. (b) NO one could put this into effect however because the proletariat was the soldiery defending the revolution from the counter-revolution by military means while the economy went its own chaotic way; (c) by the time, 1920, LT spoke on the subject, Lenin had done so with the Electrification plan, only Lenin never failed to add "plus soviet power" and specify that as "tens of

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millions of workers" brought into the administration of the state, the economy, the defence of the revolution. [It is a lie to say Lenin rejected the idea of a National Economic Plan; what he rejected was the conception that this plan would be instituted by the merging of all commissariats, i.e. administratively; the workers "from below" had to do it, and the communist administrators had to put their conceit and bureaucratism in the dustbin of history before capitalism overwhelmed them. Trotsky, on the other hand, was busy lecturing on the fact that there are "good" sides to bureaucratism as well as "bad" sides, and inventing words to make red tape synonymous not with class but with administration. That is the significance of that speech on plan and many others that I did not translate but that everyone is familiar with.

What is significant of LF's glorification of the party beginning, significantly enough, with 1923, is the fact that he accepts it on faith not merely at the very time it is being transformed from a Bolshevik party, but because he has the state at the same time to rely on. Here is what I mean: as late as 1919 he introduces his articles on war and revolution with the apology that as a condition for "mercilessly fighting social-patriotism" it was necessary to have done with "factional insulation", that is all Bolshevik party meant to him! Again, in 1920, in the trade union dispute, which is really a dispute on what is socialism and what is the role of the proletariat, he counterposes the trade unions, as organs of the state, to Lenin's conception of the trade unions as "schools of communism" and dismisses Lenin's view of transmission belt from trade union, socialist, party. He then writes a brochure on "Lessons of October" to show that the Bolshevik Party was (not) a party, the scientific instrument of the proletariat for revolution, until Lenin made it so, while other members of the party actually opposed October. Then comes 1924, Lenin calls him a non-Bolshevik in his testament, Stalin begins bringing out the past, Russia can hold out no longer as the single revolutionary country while the Dawes Plan reconstructs Germany, and suddenly LF announces "The party is always right". This I still have to work out, but it is clear from the way he handled the Fourth, and took sides in the debates in all sections, and especially so in the USA, ending in the very last conversation before his murder, that he did not have a party here either; Cannon did. And the fact that Cannon "gestated" to Trotskyism stems from the fact that the specific type of petty bourgeois ideology Trotskyism represented took root in that country whose labor bureaucrats, the administrators of the bourgeois mode of production, present the revolutionary movement and most oppressed strata of the socialist proletariat with its internal enemy. It took root here in the same indigent manner as pure capitalism took root here. And the economism is on a much higher level for LW-ism combines politics, that is, actual running of production, with trade unionism.

Yours,

(note in ink) ...Very incomplete but will have to do for the time being.
by R

Handwritten notes:
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 with a very...
 and...
 it is...
 (note in ink)

1 3 2 2
October 14, 1948

Dear O:

This is a continuation of the letter of the 5th in elaboration of some thoughts on the kind of party and its relationship to the masses. The two short decades, 1903-1923, comprise a world's history of future as well as of past. I should like to plod along my way by considering the evolutionary conceptions of Luxemburg, Trotsky and Lenin against the background of the actually developing capitalist production. What we must keep in mind in this is that just as the law of value--for those who do not grasp it--meant the law of the market, so the plan--likewise for those who do not understand capitalist prod.--meant "law" of socialism or step to it. Nothing of course could be further from the truth because both law of value and plan mean the domination of dead over living labor, c/v. the capitalist monster over the creative worker. Fascism is the personification of unbridled c; the Spanish revolution is the personification of unfurled v. Not accidentally in both cases the dominant proletariat party is the conduit to the destroyer of the proletariat. Why?

I'll once again review Luxemburg. In 1903 she is against centralism, "bureaucratism", but offers no analysis of Menshevism. In 1906-9 she breaks with Kautsky, but organizes no party of her own. Clearly to Luxemburg the proletariat has remained a unity, despite the fact that the general strike brought about her break with Kautsky. (We'll come back to that later.) In 1912 there is a split in the Polish party, and this completes her break for Bolshevism on the question of self-determination of nations. The climax of that comes later in the question of the Ukraine. On the eve of the war she still tries to unite Men. with Bol.--unity is still the key (just when the breakdown of capitalism will soon reveal the breakdown also of the proletarian organizations. In 1917 she calls the 2nd Int. a stinking corpse and hails Lenin & Trotsky for "storming the heavens", but she keeps her distance from them. Why? It seems to me that just as she did not grasp the significance of Bolshevism--or perhaps because she didn't--she does not recognize the new organization, the proletariat has formed. In retrospect, that in part accounts for her failure to break with Kautsky organizationally. For her 1905 meant general strike--economic action--not Soviet--political action; the organization of the proletariat as rulers outside of the realm of the party.

Let us elaborate. She describes Germany 1918 as "chaos, without plan, without consciousness. The revolution was political only, not economic." You need not to overthrow Scheidemann "but to undermine him". For Russia 1918 she says: "In place of the representative bodies, created by general, popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down soviets as the only true representation of the laboring masses." Evidently to Luxemburg "representative bodies" should represent, not be, the masses. If the masses are to be "represented", then they must submit to elections, and so at specific places and specified times; when masses wish, in burst of revolution, to be represented but to be, creating an unheard of organization--well, that does not conform to form---talk of organized capitalist production organizing us, the revolutionists as well! And finally in the question of the Ukraine she says "it had never formed a nation or govt.!!" Why is Rosa so consistently wrong? (Incidentally if Rosa thinks that a no-nation entity could produce a Gogol, she has no conception of the relationship of literature and genius to the masses. Did you know I was Ukrainian?)

Her failure to grasp the economic content of the revolution stems from her failure "to see" the monopolization of capital and thus falling prey to the glitter of imperialism, and thus her theory of accumulation has her bound and gagged. Every time she wishes to move as a revolutionist, we must do violence to her theory. She drags the proletariat onto the historic stage in order to destroy capitalism "long before" capitalism has run out of breath in the non-capitalist lands. "Long before" is written on the eve of 1914.

when the irreversible break-down of European society from the law of motion of capitalism and the actions of the proletariat. She continues to demand "spontaneity" from the undifferentiated proletarian mass when the organization of the proletariat shows her where power should lie. (I naturally do not mean that she would have been victorious--how can any one guarantee that--but she would have left a legacy for the future revolution other than her martyrdom.) Finally she declares: "The victory of the Spartakusbund stands not at the beginning but at the end of the revolution / It is identical with the victory of the millions of masses of the socialist proletariat."

I underlined the expressions, "at the end of the revolution", and "identical" because it seems to signify that so vicious is the stranglehold of cap. org. that we evidently think that in a socialist society, not man, but the Party, will fully develop. That is why for all the seeming oppositeness of her spontaneity and LT's Plan, they are in actuality similar (is there such a word?). When the objective situation demanded organization, she opposed it-- Lenin's party to her was nothing but a bureaucratic contraption. When the objective situation shows that the German Social Democrats were not merely betraying the proletariat but was attempting to organize it as capitalism's economic arm, i.e., as its lifeless slave, she rejects proletariat's "spontaneously" creating the Shop Stewards movement, and lets it die because it does not conform to form.

That, not her martyrdom, is, to me, the great historic tragedy of Luxemburgism. If only we could learn lessons of the party and its relation to the mass movement from this stranglehold that cap. org. had even on this sterling, brilliant, courageous revolutionary "eagle"! It is not only that she built no Bolshevik party, so to speak, ahead of 1914, but that when the proletariat was smashing German society in 1917-1919--and had power enough left over for 1920* and 1923--she did not lead the proletariat to smash the organizations that held it in a very real death-grapple.

Now Trotsky, though he starts organizationally as Luxemburg in 1903, rejecting Lenin's "bureaucratism", he does in 1905 see not only the general strike but the soviet a well. He not only does not reject soviets, he becomes the people tribune. What utter nonsense to say Trotsky lacked organizational know-how, which Lenin and Stalin had; if there is anything that the organizer of the Red Army did not lack, it was organizational ability. The failure to organize a party, or even a caucus, was not organizational; it was the highest sort of political and philosophic conception. So phenomenal was his organizing ability that Lenin gave him a blank check with which to face the armed counter-revolution as he pleased. But the methods of fighting the counter-revolution (though here too I believe there are somewhat different conceptions of army structure that I have never unfortunately looked into) are not those of reconstructing society. It seems superfluous to ask: what was his method, for the quick and easy answer is: militarisation. But that is too quick and too easy. Militarisation is only the highest form of politics--the political method of embracing the trade unions so firmly as nearly to choke them stemmed from the Plan which should not wait till every peasant and every peasant woman understands", and the Plan, in turn, came from the mode of production which, on a world scale, had reached a stage where if the irreversibility of the breakdown of European society was not to reach its tentacles into Asia and America, planning had to be resorted to to control the floodtide of proletarian revolutions. Lenin "rejects" the plan because either the proletariat "to a man" will do it, or the state machine, whether in proletarian or capitalist hands, will travel in a direction "god only knows where"--it was the barbarism of fascism we were to see a decade after the defeat of 1923.

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is only, with your recent letters, which are absolutely magnificent, that we are developing not only out of the past but for the future. You have opened a door to the understanding of "vanguardism" which has stayed shut too long. We must develop this unhindered...

I must stop now and run down to see the Yugoslav consul (what a role for me!) to see whether he will help with publicity on 3-cornered debate (the Stalinist will probably back out) on Yugoslavia-Cominform rift. But before I close I wish to say that in rethinking LT's "Lessons of October" (as soon as my books come I shall reread it) I have decided it is, in large part, nothing more than telling tales out of school. The lessons of October reside not in the fact that Zinoviev-Kamenev wanted out, nor Stalin was "really" with them in conception, nor even in fact that Lenin got them all to toe the line BUT IN THE FACT THAT LENIN COULD SAY I WILL GO TO THE SAILORS AND KNOW THAT THEY WOULD "HEARSTAND". Bolshevism was the subjective answer to the objective needs of breakdown and reconstruction.

Yours,

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