MAIN CURRENTS OF MARXISM
ITS RISE, GROWTH, AND DISSOLUTION

by

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by force, and dictatorship was government by force and not by law.

7. Trotsky on dictatorship

Kautsky's next pamphlet, *Terrorism and Communism*, was answered by Trotsky in a work bearing the same title: an English translation appeared in 1921 as *The Defence of Terrorism*. This revealing work is in some ways even more emphatic than Lenin's utterances. Trotsky, who had foreseen in 1903 that Lenin's theory of the party would lead to a one-man tyranny, was completely converted to that theory by 1920. His pamphlet is noteworthy as containing the most general exposition, written when he was in power, of the theory of the state under a proletarian dictatorship, and also the most explicit account of what has come to be called the totalitarian system. True, the pamphlet was written during the civil war and the war with Poland (concerning which Trotsky says with remarkable naivety: 'We hope for the victory, for we have every historical right to it'), but it clearly aspires to be a work of general theory; the many quotations from Trotsky's previous speeches show that he is not merely exaggerating his thesis in the heat of the moment. He presents the general principles of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the same way as Lenin. Bourgeois democracy is a cheat; serious issues in the class war are decided not by votes but by force; in time of revolution the right course is to fight for power and not wait foolishly for a 'majority'; to reject terror is to reject socialism (he who wills the end must will the means); parliamentary systems have had their day— they mainly reflected the interests of the intermediate classes, while in the revolutionary era it is only the proletariat and the bourgeoisie that count; talk of 'equality before the law', civil rights, etc. is, at the present day, nothing but metaphysical claptrap; it was right to disperse the Constituent Assembly, if only because the electoral system was overtaken by the rapid course of events, and the assembly did not represent the people's will; it was right to shoot hostages (à la guerre comme à la guerre); freedom of the Press could not be permitted, as it aided the class enemy and its allies, the Mensheviks and the S.R.s; it was idle to talk about 'truth' and who was right—this was not an academic debate, but a fight to the death; the rights of the individual
were irrelevant nonsense, and 'as for us, we were never concerned with the Kantian-priestly and vegetarian-Quaker prattle about the "sacredness of human life"' (The Defence of Terrorism, p. 60). The Paris Commune had been defeated because of sentimental and humanitarian qualms; in a dictatorship of the proletariat the party must be the highest court of appeal and have the last word in all important matters; 'the revolutionary supremacy of the proletariat presupposes within the proletariat itself the political supremacy of a party, with a clear programme of action and a faultless internal discipline' (ibid., p. 100); 'the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party' (p. 101).

Trotsky, however, answers questions that Lenin evaded or ignored. 'Where is your guarantee, certain wise men ask us, that it is just your party that expresses the interests of historical development? Destroying or driving underground the other parties, you have thereby prevented their political competition with you, and consequently you have deprived yourselves of the possibility of testing your line of action.' Trotsky replies: 'This idea is dictated by a purely liberal conception of the course of the revolution. In a period in which all antagonisms assume an open character, and the political struggle swiftly passes into a civil war, the ruling party has sufficient material standard by which to test its line of action, without the possible circulation of Menshevik papers. Noske crushes the Communists, but they grow. We have suppressed the Mensheviks and the S.R.s—and they have disappeared. This criterion is sufficient for us' (p. 101).

This is one of the most enlightening theoretical formulations of Bolshevism, from which it appears that the 'rightness' of a historical movement or a state is to be judged by whether its use of violence is successful. Noske did not succeed in crushing the German Communists, but Hitler did; it would thus follow from Trotsky's rule that Hitler 'expressed the interests of historical development'. Stalin liquidated the Trotskyists in Russia, and they disappeared—so evidently Stalin, and not Trotsky, stood for historical progress.

From the principle of government by a vanguard it followed, of course, that

the continuous 'independence' of the trade union movement, in the period of the proletarian revolution, is just as much an impossibility
as the policy of coalition. The trade unions become the most important economic organs of the proletariat in power. Thereby they fall under the leadership of the Communist Party. Not only questions of principle in the trade union movement, but serious conflicts of organization within it are decided by the Central Committee of our party ... [The unions] are the organs of production of the Soviet State, and assume responsibility for its fortunes—not opposing themselves to it, but identifying themselves with it. The unions become the organizers of labour discipline. They demand from the workers intensive labour under the most difficult conditions (The Defence of Terrorism, p. 102).

The state is, of course, organized in the interest of the working masses; ‘this, however, does not exclude the element of compulsion in all its forms, both the most gentle and the extremely severe’ (ibid., p. 122). In the new society compulsion will not only not disappear but will play an essential part: ‘The very principle of compulsory labour service is for the Communist quite unquestionable ... The only solution of economic difficulties that is correct from the point of view both of principle and of practice [present author’s italics] is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour-power ... The principle itself of compulsory labour service has just as radically and permanently [present author’s italics] replaced the principle of free hiring as the socialization of the means of production has replaced capitalist property’ (pp. 124-7). Labour must be militarized: ‘we oppose ... capitalist slavery by socially regulated labour on the basis of an economic plan, obligatory for the whole people and consequently compulsory for each worker in the country ... The foundations of the militarization of labour are those forms of State compulsion without which the replacement of capitalist economy by the Socialist will for ever remain an empty sound ... No social organization except the army has ever considered itself justified in subordinating citizens to itself in such a measure, and controlling them by its will on all sides to such a degree, as the State of the proletarian dictatorship considers itself justified in doing, and does’ (pp. 129-30). ‘We can have no way to Socialism except by the authoritative regulation of the economic forces and resources of the country, and the centralized distribution of labour-power in harmony with the general State plan. The Labour State considers itself
empowered to send every worker to the place where his work is necessary' (p. 131). 'The young Socialist State requires trade unions, not for a struggle for better conditions of labour—that is the task of the social and State organization as a whole—but to organize the working class for the ends of production, to educate, discipline, distribute, group, retain certain categories and certain workers at their posts for fixed periods' (p. 132). To sum up, 'the road to Socialism lies through a period of the highest possible intensification of the principle of the State ... The State, before disappearing, assumes the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the most ruthless form of State, which embraces the life of the citizens authoritatively in every direction' (p. 157).

It would be difficult indeed to put the matter more plainly. The state of the proletarian dictatorship is depicted by Trotsky as a huge permanent concentration camp in which the government exercises absolute power over every aspect of the citizens' lives and in particular decides how much work they shall do, of what kind and in what places. Individuals are nothing but labour units. Compulsion is universal, and any organization that is not part of the state must be its enemy, thus the enemy of the proletariat. All this, of course, is in the name of an ideal realm of freedom, the advent of which is expected after an indefinite lapse of historical time. Trotsky, we may say, provided a perfect expression of socialist principles as understood by the Bolsheviks. It should be noted, however, that we are not told clearly what, from the Marxist point of view, is to replace the free hiring of labour—which, according to Marx, is a mark of slavery, as it means that a man has to sell his labour-power on the market, i.e. treat himself as a commodity and be so treated by society. If free hiring is abolished, the only ways of inducing people to work and produce wealth are physical compulsion or moral motivation (enthusiasm for work). The latter was of course much extolled by both Lenin and Trotsky, but they soon found that it was chimerical to rely on it as a permanent source of effort. Only compulsion was left—not capitalist compulsion based on the necessity to earn a living, but sheer physical force, the fear of imprisonment, physical injury, and death.