

MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY POLITICS ALONE

By L. TROTZKY

WE have got to soak ourselves thoroughly in this simple idea—"man does not live by politics alone"—and never forget it in our propaganda, written or spoken. Formerly, things were different. The history of our Party before the revolution was one of revolutionary *politics*. Its literature, its organisation—the whole of the Party in fact—was political in the most direct, immediate, and narrow sense of the word. The years of revolutionary transition and of civil war made the political interests and the political tasks still more acute and urgent. During these years the Party succeeded in gathering into its ranks the most active elements in the working classes ; and also the fundamental political teachings of these years are quite clear now in the eyes of the working classes. Simply to repeat them adds nothing to them in the eyes of the workers, and is more likely to weaken their influence than to increase it. Now that we have conquered power and gripped it firmly by civil war, our fundamental duties are changed ; they are to be found within the boundaries of economic and cultural construction ; they have become complicated, fragmentary, and scattered, and, in some ways, more "prosaic." Yet at the same time all our former struggles, with all the efforts and sacrifices that they needed, can only be justified in so far as we succeed in rightly stating and solving these daily inconclusive problems, which can be classed as cultural.

Actually, what is it that the working class has gained by its previous struggles ?

- (1) *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (exercised by the Workers' and Peasants' State and directed by the Communist Party).
- (2) *The Red Army*, the material support of this dictatorship.
- (3) *Nationalisation* of the most important instruments of production, without which the dictatorship of the proletariat would be a meaningless formula.

- (4) *Monopoly of Foreign Trade*, the necessary condition for Socialist construction in a country encircled by capitalist States.

These four factors, definitely secured, form the armour covering all our work. Thanks to this armour, each of our economic or cultural successes—if it is a real success and not merely an apparent one—necessarily becomes a constituent part of the Socialist structure.

What then is our present task? What ought we to learn first? What should our aims be?

We have got to learn to work well, punctually, neatly, economically. We need culture in work, culture in life, culture in our habits. The domination of the exploiters we have overthrown—after a long preparation—by armed insurrection. But there is no lever which can raise at one blow the level of culture. What is needed here is a long process of self-education by the working class and the peasantry.

Of this change in the orientation of our attention and our efforts Lenin has written in an article on “Co-operation.”¹

We are compelled to recognise a radical change in our point of view with regard to Socialism. The radical change is this: formerly we laid emphasis—we were compelled to do so—on the political struggle, on revolution, and on the conquest of power; while now we must lay all our emphasis on peaceful organisation and on “cultural” work. Or rather, I would be prepared to say that we should lay all emphasis on cultural work if we were not compelled to fight for our international position. Putting that aside for the moment, and limiting ourselves to internal economic relations, we can truly say that we now emphasise mainly work that may be described as cultural.

Preoccupation with our international position, then, is the only thing that can distract us now from the work of culture—and that only to a certain extent, as we shall soon see. The most important factor in our international situation is the defence of our State: that is, above all, the Red Army. But here again nine-tenths of our task is cultural: we have to raise the culture of the army, assure its education, teach it to use notebooks, textbooks, and maps, and to develop the habits of cleanliness, punctuality, exactitude, attention, and vigilance. The attempt to create, at the end of the period of civil war, when we were passing to a new epoch of labour,

¹ Printed in *THE LABOUR MONTHLY* for September, 1923.

a "military creed of the proletariat" was a very striking sign of our appreciation of the new tasks before us. It was exactly analogous to the presumptuous attempt to create, in literary laboratories, a "proletarian culture." In this search for the philosopher's stone, despair at our backward position is mingled with a belief in miracles—which is itself a proof of undeveloped mentality. But we have no reason at all for despair, and it is really time for us to give up believing in miracles such as an immediately discoverable "proletarian culture" or "military creed." Covered by the armour of proletarian dictatorship, we have got to extend our daily work of culture, which alone can secure a Socialist fulfilment of the essential conquests of the revolution. Whoever does not see this plays a reactionary part in the thought and activity of the Party.

When Lenin says that our present tasks lie more in the region of culture than in that of politics, it is necessary, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, to pause a moment and consider these terms. In a certain sense politics dominate everything. Even Lenin's advice—to transfer our attention from politics to culture—is *political* advice. When a Workers' Party decides, in one country or another, that it is necessary to put forward in the forefront of its programme demands which are economic and not political, even this decision is political in character. It is quite obvious that the word "politics" is used here in two different senses: first in the wide sense of dialectical materialism, embracing the totality of all the ideas, methods, and dominant systems that give direction to the activities of a community in all the spheres of social life; and then in a narrow and special sense, as applied to one definite side of the activities of a society, closely bound up with the fight for power and contrasting with economic and cultural work, &c. When Lenin wrote that *politics are concentrated economics* he was speaking of politics in general, in the philosophic sense of the word. When Lenin says, "A little less politics, a little more economics," he was taking "politics" in the narrow specialised sense. Both ways of using the word are legitimate in so far as they are customary. The important thing is only that we should understand clearly, each time the word is used, what it is that is meant by it.

The Communist organisation is a political party in the historical or philosophical sense of the word. The other parties are above

all political in that they concern themselves with the (lesser) "politics." The fact that our Party is henceforward concentrating the greater part of its attention on cultural work does not, therefore, mean that its political rôle is diminished. Its historical rôle of (political) leadership is precisely to be found in this calculated switching of attention towards cultural work. It is only after long years of socialist work, crowned by success, within Russia, and of complete security in foreign affairs, that a Party like ours will be able, little by little, to divest itself of its shape as a party, to dissolve itself in the Socialist society. We are still so far from this that it is not worth thinking about it as yet. For the period ahead of us, the Party must keep in their entirety its essential characteristics : unity of thought, centralisation, discipline, and the combative vigour which results from these. But these very qualities of the Communist Party, which are so invaluable, can only be preserved and developed, under present conditions, by the satisfaction of economic and cultural needs and aspirations in the widest, most intelligent, just, and meticulous way possible.

The proletariat is a powerful social unity which, in periods of hard revolutionary fighting for aims which are those of the whole class, comes completely into line. But in this unity we can see an extreme diversity and even a good few incompatibilities—from the illiterate shepherd to the highly skilled mechanic. Without this diversity the Communist task of unification and education would be the simplest thing in the world. One might say that the greater the history of a country, the greater is that of its working class, the richer it is in memories, traditions, habits, old groupings of forces—and the more difficult it is to form from it a revolutionary unity.

Our Russian proletariat has little history or tradition behind it and this certainly facilitated its preparation for revolution in the Red October. But the same fact has since hindered its work of economic construction. Most of our workers lack the simplest habits and abilities of culture (the power to read, to write, to keep healthy, to be punctual). The European worker has had a long time in which to acquire these habits in bourgeois society ; that is why the higher grades of European Labour hold so tightly

to the bourgeois order, to democracy, to the capitalist free Press, and other benefits of this sort. Our backward Russian bourgeoisie has scarcely given anything of this sort to the workers ; that is why the Russian proletariat has more easily broken with the bourgeoisie and overthrown it. But for the same reason it is forced for the most part to win and accumulate only now (*i.e.*, on the basis of the workers' Socialist State) the simplest habits of culture.

The revolutionary armour covering our new society—the dictatorship, the Red Army, nationalisation, and the foreign trade monopoly—gives an objectively Socialist character to all deliberate and conscientious efforts in economics or culture. In bourgeois society the worker was always enriching the bourgeoisie without intending to and without thinking of it—enriching the more as he worked harder. In the Soviet State, the good, conscientious worker, even without thinking of it (if he is non-party or non-political), is doing Socialist work as he increases the resources of the working class. That is the achievement of the October Revolution, and the New Economic Policy has not changed it.

There are a large number of workers, not belonging to any party, who are keen on production and on technical skill and loyal to their factory ; one cannot speak of them as “ politically indifferent ” except in a purely conventional sense. At the gravest and most difficult hours of the revolution they were with us. The vast majority of them were undismayed by the revolution ; they were not deserters, they were not traitors.

During the civil war many of them fought, while others worked their utmost on munitions. From this they passed straightaway to the labours of peace. One has, however, some reason for calling them “ non-political,” because the interest of corporate production or of the family comprises for them, at least in normal times, their whole “ political interest.”

Each one among them wishes to be a good workman, to perfect himself in his trade, to reach a higher degree of accomplishment, as much from a desire to better the conditions of his own home as from a legitimate professional pride. And let us repeat that in so doing each one among them does Socialist work even without knowing it. But we, the Communist Party, are concerned that these

producers should consciously direct their daily, minor, industrial efforts towards the objectives of Socialism.

How can this be achieved ? It is difficult to get in touch with this type of workman along the lines of pure politics. He has heard all we have to say. He is not interested. He thinks in terms of his work-place and he is not too pleased with all that is happening at present at his work-place in the shop, in the factory, in the Trust. These workers want to think things out for themselves, they often have a reserved, "shut-up" attitude ; it is from this class of workers that self-taught inventors come.

We cannot approach them on the political side, or at least we cannot in that way touch them very profoundly, but we can and we must reach them *through production itself and through technical skill*.

Comrade Koltsov (of the group connected with the *Krasnaia-Presnia*, Moscow), a Communist agitator in contact with the masses, has pointed out the lack of Soviet handbooks of instruction and of textbooks intended to be studied without a teacher, dealing with special technical subjects and separate trades. The old stocks of these books are exhausted ; many works are out of date from a political point of view ; they are very often impregnated with the most pernicious spirit of capitalism. The new handbooks are too few in number ; they are difficult to get hold of as they have been published at different times by different publishers, or by different departments, acting without any concerted plan.

Technically, their use is often small as they are too theoretical, too academic ; politically, they are invariably incoherent, as they are usually abbreviated translations. We need new pocket handbooks for the Soviet locksmith, the Soviet turner, the electrical fitter, and for many others. These manuals must be adapted to our actual economic and political conditions ; they must take into account our poverty and our enormous potentialities ; and they should instil into our productive system the most common-sense habits and new methods. They ought to allow, to a certain extent, the Socialist vista to be seen beyond the needs and interests of industrial policy (the standardisation of labour, electrification, the single economic plan).

Socialist ideas and conclusions ought to be an integral part of the practical theory in these books and should never

assume the guise of agitation dissociated from the subject matter. The demand for such books is enormous. It is caused by the need for skilled manual labour and the desire of the workers themselves to become more skilful. It is accentuated by the interruption, during the imperialist and civil wars, of all high-grade industrial training. The task before us is the most fruitful and the most important possible.

Let us not deceive ourselves by supposing that it is easy to create a series of manuals of this kind. The experienced workman, even if highly skilled, does not know how to write books. Technical writers often lack practical experience ; moreover, the number among them with a Socialist view-point is very small.

Nevertheless, this task can be accomplished, not by routine methods, but on the contrary with new methods, by combining. In order to write a handbook it is necessary to form a group, of three for example, consisting of a professional writer, with technical knowledge of the subject and acquainted as much as possible with the state of our industry or able to study it ; of a highly skilled workman interested in production and with an inventive turn of mind ; and of a Marxist writer with some technical industrial knowledge. Proceeding thus, or on similar lines, we must create a model library of industrial technique ; of course, well produced, of a convenient size, at a moderate price. This library would have a double rôle : it would contribute to the perfecting of skilled labour and in consequence of the Socialist edifice, and it would help us to get in touch with a valuable group of producers in the Socialist economy in its wider sense, and, therefore, valuable to the Communist Party.

It is evident that the task is not limited to a series of manuals. We have lingered over this example because we think it is a striking example of a new method of working, corresponding to the new objectives of the present time. A diversity of methods can and should be employed to win the non-political producers. We need scientific and technical periodicals, and special ones for each industry, issued weekly or monthly ; we need scientific and technical societies designed to attract the worker of whom we are speaking. A good half of our trade union press ought to be intended for him. But the most convincing political argument in the eyes

of the class of worker we are trying to get hold of will be furnished by *every practical success in production, by every real improvement in the conditions of the factory and workshop, and by every deliberate effort made by the Party in this direction.*

The political philosophy of this productive worker may be expressed—although it is only rarely that he himself gives it expression—in formulæ of this sort :—

“ The revolution, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, that is all clear and definite : we do not need the bourgeoisie or their agents the Mensheviks. The liberty of the Press is not of much importance. All this is not the point. *But how are we going to get on with production?* You, the Communists, have set yourselves out to direct it. Your aims, your projects, are good, excellent, we know ; it is not worth while repeating all this to us. We have heard you before on this ; we agree, we support you—but how are you going to get there in practice ? We put up with the crimes of the bourgeoisie and we can well be patient with the mistakes of the revolution. But not patient for ever, all the same . . . ”

The man who speaks in this way may be an old turner, a scrupulous worker, or a locksmith, or a foundryman—attentive to what he is doing, not an enthusiast in politics, but rather passive, yet reflective and critical. He is often a little sceptical, but always faithful to his class. This is a real work—and one of the best. Our Party in its present work has got to think of him.

This orientation towards the sound workman does not clash with another of the foremost tasks of our Party : to win over the younger generation of workers. For the younger generation is growing up on the basis that our solution of the main problems gives to it. *The younger generation ought before all to be a generation of sound workers, highly skilled and keen on their work.* It ought to grow up in the knowledge that its productive labour is also a work of Socialism. For this reason the orientation of our efforts towards the sound, skilful, and conscientious worker is also the direction we must take in educating the youth of the working class. Without it the advance towards Socialism will be impossible.

ZERO HOUR IN GERMANY

By C. M. ROEBUCK

§ 1.—*The Treachery of the Social-Democracy*

AT the time of writing (October 15) it is not yet clear whether, as reported, a dozen members of the German Social Democratic Reichstag group actually refused to vote for the Emergency Powers Bill, in spite of the threat of expulsion from the Party. If it is true, their names will one day be written in letters of gold on the walls of the palace which houses the German Workers' Government—side by side with the names, if not of Ruhle, who first voted against the war credits in 1914, at least of Haase and Ledebour, the first who broke party discipline the next year.

For the crisis with which the German workers are faced is one as pregnant with meaning for the whole of world history as the crisis at the outbreak of the late imperialist war. The granting of practically unlimited power, for an indefinite period, to the bourgeois government of the Reich to-day is as important an act as the conferring of plenipotentiary power to wage war, by the voting of the war credits, was in the days when the German mark still bore a terrestrial and not an astronomical value. Then, as now, the fate of the whole bourgeois machinery of government was trembling in the balance ; now, as then, the proletariat is in an active, fighting mood, prepared to strike heavy blows in defence of its vital interests. And for the Social Democratic Party, a party which claims to voice the demands of the workers, obediently to lead the workers up to the altar, that they may literally immolate themselves and their families, by the sacrifice of their blood infusing new life into the worn-out and corrupted system of capitalist society, is as gross and cowardly an act of treachery in 1923 as it was in 1914.

Of course, treachery, as in 1914, is fast bound up with hypocrisy. Just as then the Social Democracy made the " sacrifice " of its " principles " only for the sake of the sacred cause of national unity, so to-day it sold its honour " only " when another sacred