The Trotskyist School of Falsification

Anarcho

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Most anarchists come across Victor Serge (1889–1947) at some stage, the elitist-individualist anarchist turned elitist-Bolshevik whom Leninists to this day like to invoke as "the best of the anarchists" to get libertarians to join their party ("Victor Serge: The Worst of the Anarchists," ASR no. 61). This work by him and Natalia Sedova Trotsky, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), is a biography of Leon Trotsky and is of note as a good example of what could be termed *The Trotskyist School of Falsification*, to invoke the title of Trotsky's 1937 work *The Stalin School of Falsification.* (171)

Finished in 1946, this was Serge's final work and was initially published under his name as *Vie et mort de Leon Trotsky* five years later before being published in English in 1973 under the joint authorship with Trotsky's widow, Natalia Ivanovna Sedova (1882–1962). As the preface by Serge's son makes clear to the 1973 edition, this is fitting as Serge's text is supplemented by lengthy quotes from Sedova. His son also included as a preface a 1942 piece by Serge entitled "The Old Man" (as Trotsky was called by his followers, as Lenin had previously been called). This edition adds a "Foreword" and "Afterword" by Richard Greeman, alongside two more Serge pieces: "In Memory of Leon Trotsky" and an unpublished manuscript on Trotsky's *Their Morals and Ours*. The last is the only one worth reading and that is available on-line at the Marxist Internet Archive.

While Serge has something of a reputation in Leninist circles as being a critical Marxist with useful insights on the failures of Bolshevism (orthodox Trotskyists are less keen on him for exactly the same reasons), this work – as in the bulk of his writings, bar his self-serving *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* – is an uncritical account of Trotsky and his politics. So why bother to review it? Simply because it repeats positions which are all too common within Leninist circles to this day, positions with little evidence to support them and much to refute them. This would help modern-day radicals to understand the failures of Bolshevism and learn from, rather than repeat, history.

Sadly, we cannot expect Greeman to do this (the closest this work has to an editor). He proclaims in his "Foreword" that this book "is an authentic historical document" which although "clearly written from a Marxist perspective… attempts to be rigorously objective" and "remain[s] the best initiation… to the revolutionary history of the twentieth century" for it is an "authentic, authoritative, accessible revolutionary classic". (vii) As will be shown, it is few of these things as it is hardly objective and makes numerous claims which appear to suggest one thing but which,

by omission, actually mean their opposite – for if the Stalinists mainly utilised invention for their falsehoods, the Trotskyists mainly utilise omission.

Serge, perhaps, could be excused as this was a work written to counteract the lies spewed by the Stalinist regime against someone who he still considered his friend and comrade in spite of Trotsky disowning him in 1937. Exile in Mexico, fearing arrest or worse, would make it hard to fact-check (although his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, written a few years earlier, suffers from fewer errors and omissions) but the problems with the book reflect the standard Trotskyist narrative and so cannot be explained only by these factors. Sadly, the Leninist publishers made no attempt to better inform their readers – presumably because correcting the various mistakes and omissions by means of footnotes would be too at odds with the claims made for the accuracy of the work. Indeed, this work reflects Serge's own criticism of Trotsky's writings made a few years previously:

> "He proceeds from the idea of an ideal Bolshevik, with no flaws or faults and whose history until 1923, that is, until the moment when Trotsky himself… realized that the regime… was suffering from an extremely serious illness, remained irreproachable and unassailable." (305)

With these general points made, we can move on to specifics. The first major omission is that Serge makes no mention of the Mensheviks leading role in the soviets during the 1905 Revolution nor the Bolshevik opposition to them, which went so far as the local Bolsheviks demanding the St. Petersburg soviet to accept their programme or disband. Given the marginalisation of the Soviets under the Bolsheviks after 1917, it is remiss of him not to mention this as their reasoning shows the privileged position the vanguard holds in Leninist ideology:

> "only a strong party along class lines can guide the proletarian political movement and preserve the integrity of its program, rather than a political mixture of this kind, an indeterminate and vacillating political organisation such as the workers council represents and cannot help but represent." (quoted by Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils 1905–1921* [New York: Random House, 1974], 77)

As we will see, the notion that the soviets could not reflect workers' interests because they were elected by the workers will find its logical expression once the party was in power. Serge does not, however, ignore Trotsky's earlier opposition to Lenin's vanguardism:

> "He shows the incompatibility of Jacobinism with socialism, and contended that any 'dictatorship of the proletariat' along such lines would soon degenerate into a 'dictatorship over the proletariat.' Lenin's authoritarianism appalled him. 'But that's dictatorship you're advocating,' he said to him one day. 'There is no other way,' Lenin replied." (15)

However, it would be hard to *not* mention it given how the Stalinists used it as a weapon in the 1920s. Since 1946, this work has been found and even translated into English. Trotsky's comments on "substitutionism" are prophetic:

> "we have a party which *thinks for* the proletariat, which *substitutes itself* politically for it… In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead… to the Party organisation 'substituting' itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee" (*Our Political Tasks* [London: New Park Publications, c.1979], 72, 77)

Yet what is this but a repeat of the anarchist critique of Marxism which noted that the so-called workers' State would empower the party and disempower the working masses? That the internally centralised social-democratic party and trade union likewise marginalise their members and empowers their leaders and officials? As Serge himself notes as regards the October Revolution: "Governmental power was to be concentrated in the hands of the Council of People's Commissars, responsible to the Congress of Soviets and its Central Executive Committee." (67) He does not mention Lenin's *State and Revolution* and its call to merge executive and legislative power in the hands of the soviets, nor does he discuss the blatant violation of this promise by the immediate creation of an executive above the soviets and how this meant their very obvious marginalisation. Likewise, Serge fails to mention Trotsky's defence of ending Army democracy in March 1918 which is so incredulous that it is worth quoting at length:

> "I ask you: has the principle of election been introduced everywhere among you, in the trade unions or in the co-operatives? No. Do you elect your officials, bookkeepers, shop-assistants, and cashiers, do you elect those of your employees who have a strictly defined trade? No. You choose the administration of a trade union from among its most worthy and reliable activists, and to them you entrust the appointment of all the necessary employees and technical specialists. It should be the same in the Army. Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is, a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the *appointment* of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet power." (*How the Revolution Armed: the military writings and speeches of Leon Trotsky* [London: New Park Publications, 1979] 1: 47)

Open *any* Trotskyist paper at *any* time and in *any* country and you will see it rail against union officialdom and how it ignores and clashes with the membership. Likewise, the regime Trotsky played a key role in creating and ruling showed that there were obvious grounds for such fear. Yet Trotsky himself never drew the obvious conclusions, presumably because he eventually concluded – like Serge in 1919 – that Lenin was right and embraced this substitution as an inevitable part of any revolution. This can be seen from *Communism and Terrorism* which Serge fails to discuss in any meaningful manner, indeed distorts by incredulously suggesting that Trotsky's 1920 work was simply a reply to the leading pre-war Marxist Karl Kautsky who "had condemned the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Red terror in the name of Marxism." (92) It was far more than that – it was a full-blown defence of *every* Bolshevik policy, including party dictatorship, one-man management and the militarisation of labour.

Kautsky refused to equate the "dictatorship of the proletariat" with the "dictatorship of the party" as the Bolsheviks did, arguing that socialism had to be democratic to be viable – albeit it, a democracy expressed by typical bourgeois forms rather than by soviets (the left-Menshevik Julius Martov noted in 1919 that the idea "to transplant into the structure of society the forms of *their own* combat organization" is to be found in the Federalist-wing of the First International and "the French syndicalists" and not Marx ["Decomposition or Conquest of the State," *The State and Socialist Revolution* (London: Carl Slienger, 1977), 42]). Serge does not think it useful or wise to quote Trotsky on this and so presents a completely distorted account of the debate and the reality of the Bolshevik regime. Trotsky was more forthcoming:

> "We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organization that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labor into the apparatus of the supremacy of labor. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class." (*Communism and Terrorism: a reply to Karl Kautsky* [Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1961], 109)

Serge does note that Trotsky argued that every previous revolution "had not been able to avoid violence, dictatorship or terror, except for the Paris Commune, on which the French bourgeoisie took such bloody vengeance." (92) Yet neither Trotsky nor Serge notice that all these wars and revolutions were fought to replace one form of minority class rule with another. That the rising bourgeoisie utilised certain tactics and structures against the aristocracy (or Southern slave-owners, in the case of the American Civil War) says nothing about their suitability for use by a majority class at the bottom of the social hierarchy seeking its freedom. Similarly, both conflate and confuse violence with dictatorship and terror, ignoring that violence can be used to break down the barriers to freedom and defend it rather than impose government decrees, that it can be exercised by self-managed working class organisations rather than by the dictatorship of a party.

Greeman makes a similar error when he suggests that "Serge's early reports from Russia were designed to win over his French anarchist comrades to the cause of the Soviets". (282) However, anyone reading this collection (*Revolution in Danger: Writings from Russia 1919–1921* [London: Redwords, 1997]) would know that he was actually seeking to convert his comrades (the communist- and syndicalist-anarchists he had previously dismissed) to the cause of party dictatorship, to the notion that this was an inevitable aspect of *every* revolution. In other words, to win over anarchists to the objective necessity of transforming the Soviets from independent working-class bodies to fig-leaves of party rule.

Given this, it is strange to see Serge proclaim that at the start of 1920, with the apparent end of the Civil War "Soviet democracy was about to be born" (99) but was not because of the Russo-Polish War. No evidence is presented to support this assertion and a lot has to be ignored, such as Lenin's public proclamation on the 31st of July 1919: "Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This

is what we stand for and shall not shift from this position because it is the party that has won, in the course of decades, the position of vanguard of the entire factory and industrial proletariat." (*Collected Works* 29: 535) He also has to ignore his own lament in the 1930s that "the degeneration of Bolshevism" was apparent before this "since at the start of 1919 I was horrified to read an article by Zinoviev… on the monopoly of the party in power." (*The Serge-Trotsky Papers: Correspondence and Other Writings Between Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky* [London: Pluto Press, 1994], 188) As earlier, Serge keeps his horror well-hidden here.

Rather than seek a democratisation of the regime, apparent success in the civil war in early 1920 was taken by the Bolshevik leadership as a sign of the correctness of their policies and so social reconstruction was based on their escalation, not abatement. This meant the necessity for "the dictatorship of the party" was not only practiced but embedded into the party's ideology – as shown, for example, by Zinoviev's speech on the party to the assembled revolutionaries of the world at the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin's *'Left-wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder* and Trotsky's *Communism and Terrorism*.

That Soviet democracy – in the true sense of the term rather than the Bolshevik euphemism for a dictatorship by an internally democratic party – was not on the Bolshevik agenda during this period can be seen from Serge's defence of the crushing of the Kronstadt Rebellion months after the actual final defeat of the Whites in November 1920. The usual Leninist claims are repeated, such as Kronstadt's "citizens had been scattered all over the country… the old leaders were not among those who had remained behind" (107) without any note by the editor that most of the sailors leading the revolt had been in the navy since at least 1917. (Israel Getzler, *Kronstadt 1917–1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 207–8) We also see the revolt denounced because "[f]ormer officers volunteered their services" (107) while Trotsky is praised for seeking their services when forming the Red Army and Navy as "he believed that a great many ex-officers would serve their country honestly and well", (93) opposing the "Military Opposition" on this. Indeed, the ex-General whom the Bolsheviks had proclaimed directed the revolt (Kozlovsky) had been placed in the fortress as a military specialist by Trotsky. Serge also fails to note these services were rejected by the rebels.

As elsewhere (*The Serge-Trotsky Papers*, 18–9), he cannot quite bring himself to list completely or accurately the revolt's programme, stating it was "demanding the re-election of the Soviets, the legalisation of all Soviet parties, the end of rationing, freedom for small traders." (107) In fact, it called for the "equalisation of rations for all workers," (item 9) the "granting to the peasants of freedom of action on their own soil… provided they… do not employ hired labour" (item 11) and "free artisan production which does not employ hired labour" (item 15). Presumably mentioning the real demands would raise questions over the egalitarian regime Serge implies it was rather than one based on unequal rations that Emma Goldman denounced at the time. Likewise, ignoring the point on "hired labour" allows him to assert that introducing the New Economic Policy (NEP) earlier would have ensured the revolt never took place.

Serge suggests that the "original Kronstadt slogan of 'Free elections to the Soviets', had suddenly given way to another: 'Soviets without Bolsheviks.'" (108) Despite being asserted by many Bolsheviks, there is no evidence that this ever happened in Kronstadt or anywhere else. Yet even leading Bolsheviks at times admitted that genuine soviet democracy would have seen few party members freely elected. Aware of this, Serge makes a surreal claim: "Had they succeeded in overthrowing the dictatorship of the proletariat the Kronstadt and peasant rebels would clearly

have opened the door to reaction and the White terror." (108) In short, genuine proletarian soviet democracy would mean "overthrowing the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Needless to say, the matter is different for the Left Opposition within the party. He notes in the 1920s how "the Zinoviev-Kamenev-Stalin triumvirate was determined to have them quashed: the triumvirate knew full well that free speech and free elections [within the party] would sweep them from power" (119) and he denounced how the bureaucrats thought such "[d]emands for democracy had to be stifled at birth". (169) This call for different treatment for party members does not stop him stating "socialism allows of no privileges". (169) Likewise, he does not ask why "the legalisation of all Soviet parties" in 1921 would have opened the door to the counter-revolution but Trotsky's apparently similar call in 1936 when *The Revolution Betrayed* was completed (200) would not.

Serge, as would be expected, recounts the bloody nature of White reaction well. However, while recounting the barbarism of the Whites is a common tactic of those seeking to defend the Bolsheviks, it is beside the point as any revolution would face the possibility of reaction (although it must be stressed Lenin himself admitted in the final days of the revolt that "the enemies around us [are] no longer able to wage their war of intervention" [*Collected Works* 32: 270]). As such, he is correct – as Anton Ciliga noted in 1938 – that a return to the promises of 1917 in 1921 *may* have resulted in a White victory but he fails to note that any revolution may fail. Still, a little honesty would have been nice: if Serge had said "overthrowing the dictatorship of the party" then a debate could be had but suggesting the 1921 regime was somehow a system based on the working class is a mockery of the facts. What is certain is that the *social* revolution had already been defeated by the Bolsheviks and the repression of Kronstadt along with the strike wave which inspired it ensured the success of the bureaucratic reaction.

Similarly, he fails to note that Lenin's NEP – unlike the Kronstadt programme – reintroduced wage-labour rather than just "freedom for small-scale private enterprise". (108) Even if we ignore the political demands of the rebellion and focus on its far fewer economic ones, Lenin's U-turn of early 1921 in the face of strike waves and rural rebellion would not have met the Kronstadt's demands as it re-introduced private capitalism rather than giving freedom to workers, artisans and peasant farmers to decide what to produce and to sell the product of their own (rather than others) labour. This also means that the Central Committee's rejection of Trotsky's earlier urging of a NEP-like reform in February 1920 would probably not have "spared Russia the painful 1921 crisis and the Kronstadt revolt" (105) as neither crisis was solely economic in character.

Omission also arises with regards the anarchist-influenced Makhnovists in the Ukraine. Serge writes that "the pact [between them and Bolsheviks] was not loyally observed, for the two sides detested each other." (109) True, but the Makhnovists were not the ones to break the pact – nor were they ever likely to, given the balance of forces. Indeed, Serge a few years earlier admitted the truth that, "no sooner had this joint victory [against the Whites] been won", the Makhnovists were "betrayed, arrested, and shot" when "the Bolsheviks authorities… tore up the pledges they themselves had given". (*Memoirs of a Revolutionary* [New York: New Review of Books, 2012], 143–4) The simple fact is that the Bolshevik dictatorship could not tolerate a free socialist soviet regime in its territory as it would be too much of a good example and it is shameful that Serge here seeks, by omission, to suggest both sides were to blame.

The Makhnovists and the Kronstadt rebels, unlike the Bolsheviks, recognised that genuine socialism meant workers management of production – and explicitly rejected wage-labour in its agrarian and "soviet" (i.e., the state as boss) guises. This raises an important point: Serge,

like Trotsky, makes no mention of working class economic power at the point of production. There is a single passing comment on what should be a critical issue to any socialist, noting that in 1917 the Bolsheviks "confined themselves to establishing workers' control, and not workers' ownership, of production and the banks" (104) Yet the Russian word *kontrol* is much closer to "supervision" than "command" or "control," which places Serge's reference to "ownership" into context. Yes, indeed, one of the first acts of the Bolshevik government was to legislate for workers' *supervision* of their bosses but they then systematically worked to stop this developing into workers' control of production itself (Maurice Brinton, "The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, 1917 to 1921: the State and Counter-Revolution," *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* [Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004]). Even this limited reform was replaced in a few months by "[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers." (Lenin, *Collected Works* 27: 316) As Trotsky put it in 1920:

> "It would consequently be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers [i.e., the party], and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered… I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully." (*Communism and Terrorism*, 162–3)

Both seemed oblivious that *capitalist* social relations had been imposed by the state bureaucracy, (state-capitalism). Serge, likewise, confuses "total socialisation" and the "decree [which] nationalised all major industries" (104), again failing to note that nationalisation was the means used to end the workers' management anarchists had long argued was required for *genuine* socialisation. This sole reference to the social relations within production was made in relation to the Left-Communists of early 1918 and it should be noted that these, like other Bolsheviks, defended the dominant role of the party (which took precedence over the soviet democracy they appeared to champion) and socialism as centralised planning (which completely undermined the workers' control they appeared to champion). (Ronald I. Kowalski, *The Bolshevik Party in Conflict: the Left Communist Opposition of 1918* [Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990], 135–7, 186–8) In short, they would have produced a bureaucratic state-capitalism similar to what they had correctly warned Lenin and Trotsky would – did – create. Nikolai Bukharin – who was a leading Left-Communist before returning to orthodoxy later in 1918 – showed in 1914 the roots of the Bolshevik indifference to workers' economic power at the point of production:

> "Why will no one 'venture to maintain' that profit ceases to exist merely because capitalists are addicted to charitable donations? The reason obviously is that such cases are isolated, have no influence at all on the general structure of the social-economic life. They do not destroy the class nature of profit, they do not destroy the category of income, appropriated by the class as a result of its monopoly of the

> means of production. No doubt the case would be different if the capitalists as a class should renounce their profits and expend them in works of public interest. In this entirely impossible case, the category of profits would disappear and the economic structure of society would assume a different aspect from that of capitalist society. The monopolization of the means of production would entirely lose its meaning from the point of view of the private employer, and capitalists as such would cease to exist." (*Economic Theory of the Leisure Class* [New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972], 118)

Yet the capitalists would still exist, would still own the means of production, would still control the labour of their wage-workers, would still control what is done with the workers' product and any surplus value realised – it is still the same economic structure (indeed, competition to accumulate would still exist as the capitalists seek the most public adoration for their civic investments). That they decide to spend the profits extracted from the workers in "works of public interest" (after suitable deductions to keep body and soul together, of course) does not change the mode of production. That Bukharin could suggest otherwise shows the confusion in Marxist ranks on the nature of both capitalism and socialism.

Replace the capitalists with state appointed managers and we have an idealised vision of the Bolshevik regime and the one sought by Trotsky and repeated uncritically by Serge. Still, at least Bukharin saw the danger for a period even if his vision of socialism at this time would not have eliminated them – Trotsky did not ever reach this level of awareness, even temporarily. Thus we see the 1927 Opposition Platform simply repeat Bolshevik orthodoxies, asserting that the "appropriation of surplus value by a workers' state is not, of course, exploitation" while also acknowledging that "we have a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions" and a "swollen and privileged administrative apparatus devours a very considerable part of our surplus value" as well as that "all the data testify that the growth of wages is lagging behind the growth of the productivity of labour". (*The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1926–27)* [New York: Pathfinder, 1980], 347–350)

As a Marxist, Trotsky was meant to know that production and distribution formed a whole and so if there were "bourgeois" norms in the latter then it was because of the bourgeois nature of the former. This means that appropriation of surplus value by a party dictatorship *is* exploitation of workers and expressed by the existence of a privileged apparatus. The Leninist poverty-stricken vision of socialism explains why such obvious (at least to non-Leninists) conclusions could not be drawn by Trotsky (that, and his own position in the regime) as well as such ridiculous comments such as that, under Stalinism, "[s]o long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933–34* [New York: Pathfinder Press, 2003], 125)

Such comments should be read recalling the identical position of the Russian worker when Trotsky was in power. Serge does note that Trotsky became "virtual dictator of transport" in 1920 and "saved [it] from paralysis" (105) – at least for a while, as it collapsed in the winter of 1920–1 – before noting that he advocated the militarisation of labour as "a temporary solution" (105) to the economic problems facing the regime. In a sense this is true but only insofar as *anything* associated with the "transition period" was considered "temporary" and would eventually "wither away" – including the dictatorship of the party, the so-called "workers' State," etc. – according to the theory and as "the re-education of the workers" allowed their "organization… on

new foundations, their adaptation to those foundations, and their labor re-education" as well as their "hard work" and "unquestioning discipline". However, Trotsky at the time did *not* see this as temporary in the sense of a tactic utilised due to extreme circumstances as the reader would infer from Serge's comments. Rather, it was "correct from the point of view both of principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power… and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation, and utilisation… the course we have adopted is unquestionably the right one," for it "represents the inevitable method of organising and disciplining of labor-power during the transition from capitalism to Socialism." (Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, 146–7, 135–6, 143) To summarise:

> "[T]he road to Socialism lies through a period of the highest possible intensification of the principle of the State… Just as a lamp, before going out, shoots up in a brilliant flame, so 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… No organisation except the army has ever controlled man with such severe compulsion as does the State organisation of the working class in the most difficult period of transition. It is just for this reason that we speak of the militarisation of labour." (Trotsky, 169–70)

Why principle? Perhaps because Marx and Engels had demanded "[e]stablishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture" in the *Communist Manifesto* along with calls to "centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State"? Still, there was no need to worry: "the worker does not merely bargain with the Soviet State: no, he is subordinated to the Soviet State, under its orders in every direction – for it is *his* State." (Trotsky, 168) Yet he had, as noted above, already admitted that the regime was a party dictatorship and did not ponder whether the vast and powerful state machine this would require could be controlled by it: events showed the anarchist predictions that such a bureaucracy would develop its own class interests was correct.

All this explains Trotsky's repeated calls for "a new political revolution" (239) against Stalin in the 1930s: he considered the economic foundations of the regime "socialist" in spite of it lacking even the most limited forms of workers' control of production. This is unsurprising, for it lacked this when he was at the helm. Similarly, it takes an impressive grasp of dialectics to proclaim a regime in which proletariat were shot for going on strike was in fact one ruled by the proletariat – but then he said the same when *his* Red Army was doing the shooting.

The account of the Opposition years of the 1920s also leaves much to be desired. Serge does not mention that Trotsky's main concern at that time was the right-wing of the party (associated with Buhkarin who, leaving his left-communist days well-behind, had embraced the NEP). He feared it would bolster the peasantry which in turn would lead to a capitalist restoration and considered the possibility of working with Stalin in 1928 to stop this (for some reason Serge does not quote these words of Trotsky: "With Stalin against Bukharin? – Yes. With Bukharin against Stalin? – Never" [quoted by Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888–1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 269]). Stalin was considered the centre and of concern because he was linked with the right, meaning that his growing power base in the bureaucracy was recognised far too late and even then, slowly and in a confused manner. This explains why, when Stalin moved against "the Kulaks" and implemented the Opposition's economic policies of planning and industrialisation he had previously dismissed, most

of it sought reconciliation with the regime. While it is to Trotsky's and Serge's credit that they did not, this bravery should not blind us to their actual politics.

Still, at least Serge in general avoids the selective quoting of most Trotskyists as regards the expression "workers' democracy". As then-Trotskyist Max Eastman noted, Trotsky was in favour of the "programme of democracy within the party – called 'Workers' Democracy' by Lenin." This "was not something new or especially devised… It was part of the essential policy of Lenin for going forward toward the creation of a Communist society – a principle adopted under his leadership at the Tenth Congress of the party, immediately after the cessation of the civil war." (*Since Lenin Died* [New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925], 35) In this way the Opposition can be linked to calls for "workers' democracy" while, in reality, Trotsky in 1923 "demanded a return to Party democracy" (118) and called "for an overall plan and the democratization of the Party". (119) This does not stop him noting that in 1929 "members of the Opposition… expressed support for the new line [on planning and industrialisation], adding a rider about the need for workers' democracy." (173)

Serge does not quote the *New Course* (1923) in his discussion of it (125–6) when Trotsky proclaimed that "[w]e are the only party in the country and, in the period of the dictatorship, it could not be otherwise…. the communist party is obliged to monopolize the direction of political life." (*The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1923–25)* [New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975], 78–9) Nor is it mentioned that the Opposition's 1927 Platform bemoaned that the "growing replacement of the party by its own apparatus is promoted by a 'theory' of Stalin's which denies the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party." As such, "[w]e will fight with all our power against the idea of two parties, because the dictatorship of the proletariat demands as its very core a single proletarian party. It demands a single party." (*The Challenge of the "Left Opposition" (1926–27)*, 395, 441) Serge, however, summarises the matter thusly:

> "Radovsky complained about the indifference of the masses, about the formation of a new privileged social class – the bureaucracy – and about their thirst for power, and went on to describe the present state, not as Lenin had done, as a 'workers' state … with bureaucratic distortions,' but as a bureaucratic state with working-class remains …' The Opposition accordingly called for 'Soviet Reform' and a return to revolutionary measures. They believed that Soviet institutions could be gradually freed from the bureaucratic stranglehold by a return to the secret ballot, first of all within the Party, then in the trade unions and finally in the Soviets, this ensuring that the leadership of all three was elected by a truly democratic poll." (167–8)

Yet the Opposition never referred to the bureaucracy as a class and Trotsky never went beyond calling the regime a "degenerated workers' State" – it was the anarchists who had recognised bureaucracy as a new class long before 1923. Likewise, Serge fails to mention that the Opposition position was that in the unions and soviets workers could freely vote for… party members. As he noted elsewhere, "the greatest reach of boldness of the Left Opposition in the Bolshevik Party was to demand the restoration of inner-Party democracy, and it never dared dispute the theory of single-party government". (*The Serge-Trotsky Papers*, 181) It is a shame that Serge could make it completely and consistently clear what the Opposition stood for and instead makes comments like "Trotsky… had been calling for the democratization of the regime ever since 1923" (239) which, if quoted in isolation, is misleading.

Neither Serge nor Greeman note that this perspective was not limited to "backward" Russia. The first issue of the official American Trotskyist journal made its position clear in Max Shachtman's "Dictatorship of Party or Proletariat? Remarks on a Conception of the AWP ... and Others" (*New International*, July 1934) which refutes the notion that the dictatorship of the party was an alien concept brought into Bolshevism by... Stalin! Shachtman did so by "quotations from Lenin, Trotsky and others so as to establish... the dictatorship of the party is Leninist" rather than "a Stalinist innovation." Indeed, he dismisses the notion of that "a dictatorship *over* the proletariat prevails" in Russia by asking "[w]hat class is dictating over the proletariat? What system of property relations does this class represent and defend, well or ill?" That this rhetoric question was clearly considered unanswerable shows the theoretical weakness of Bolshevism in a stark light.

Just as ideological positions which today's Trotskyists proclaim as arising from Russia's "backward" position became imbedded in Trotskyist ideology and practice in the industrialised nations, so developments in the "advanced" nations belied the Trotskyist analysis of Stalinism. The Russian Opposition argued that "bureaucratic machine, made up of thousands of officials, was tending to substitute itself for the Party" (126) and Serge uncritically repeats the assertion that "[b]ureaucracy grew out of poverty and backwardness, and the Revolution would cure these ills by increased production and the revival of democracy within the Party." (140) Yet this was the fate of *every* Marxist party and trade union, as Serge admitted by noting "[w]e need only recall the history of the German Social Democratic movement, which, so great and brave in Babel's time, had become ossified and corrupted by a conservative tradition determined to stifle its revolutionary will." (126) Likewise, Serge – like Trotsky – was well aware that bureaucracies exist in advanced nations (as shown by Trotsky's use of the term Bonapartism, itself a reference to the bureaucracy in France in the 1800s and 1850s) as well as within the Marxist labour movement. Given this, its roots *had* to be wider than just the relative backwardness of Russia and, surely, flowed from the ideological prejudices of Leninism and the organisation forms they favoured – centralised and hierarchical, for "the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy" is to "proceed from the top downward"? (Lenin, *Collected Works* 7: 396–7)

Sadly, neither Serge, Lenin nor Trotsky pondered whether the Marxist fetish for centralisation had anything to do with developments in Russia. Indeed, their opposition to, and hatred of, bureaucracy was as real as their inability to understand its roots or propose organisational structures which did not produce it. They seemed genuinely surprised that placing more and more political, social and economic functions into fewer and fewer hands at the centre produced around it institutions employing more and more people to gather, process and present the information needed for decisions and to implement them – and that these institutions gathered more and more power as a result. Likewise, could not these prejudices for certain organisational structures have actually worsened many of the problems facing the revolution which were subsequently used by Trotkyists to absolve the Bolsheviks and their ideology for the failure of the revolution? For example, trying to create their vision of a centralised socialist economic structure deepened the economic crisis facing the revolution as well as bolstering the numbers, power and privileges of bureaucrats.

Ultimately, Lenin's suggestion in 1917 that "[a]bolishing the bureaucracy at once, everywhere and completely, is out of the question... But to *smash* the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one that will make possible the gradual abolition of all bureaucracy" was, in fact, utopian. (*Collected Works* 25: 430) This inability to understand that the State machine can have class interests of its own is likewise reflected in Trotsky's analysis of

Stalinism, which he eventually described as a form of "Bonapartism." Its origins lying in Marx and Engels, Bonapartism was based on the assumption the State bureaucracy could dominate society because the other classes were too weak to rule — in France in 1851, the working class was not yet able to rule while the capitalists did not have enough strength to. Stalinism, similarly, was possible because the working class was exhausted due to the civil war while the peasantry was unable to rule. As in France, this allowed the bureaucracy to dominate society and, as in France, because the ownership of the means of production remained the same, the previous ruling class remained (the capitalists under Bonaparte, the proletariat under Stalin – at least according to Trotsky).

Yet the capitalist class owned and controlled the means of production under Louis-Napoleon, unlike the proletariat under Lenin and Stalin. Given that the proletariat exercised the same economic power in "socialist" Russia as in capitalist France, the notion it was the "ruling class" in Russia at any time is nonsense. Indeed, the ownership and control by the State imposed by Lenin were the very means by which the bureaucracy secured its position. This obvious point did not stop Serge uncritically repeating Trotsky's position on defending the Stalinist Soviet Union for "the achievements of the October Revolution had not been lost, that the collectivist and planned society of the U.S.S.R. was a great step forward in the history of man." (239) Yet the bureaucracy's power rested *precisely* on these so-called "achievements," on nationalised property – although as it was Lenin who handed the means of production over to the bureaucracy, Trotsky's position can be expected. Significantly and unsurprisingly, soviet democracy, workers' control, land seizures and such key developments generated from below, by the workers and peasants themselves, which inspired anarchists and other socialists across the globe in 1917 – and which modern-day Trotskyists pay lip-service to – were *not* considered as achievements.

Yes, as Greeman notes, "Serge in fact *defended* Marxism against its opponents". (285) That is the root cause of the book's flaws and why his contrast of "the libertarian Serge" and "the authoritarian Trotsky" (282) is false. Surely, if Serge were a libertarian, party dictatorship and one-man management should have raised some concerns? Not so, for the party would be made up of men without "personal ambition" and "devoted to the higher, that is, the international, interests of the working class." (103) How naïve – as if power did not corrupt even the best. So Bolshevik orthodoxy from at least early 1919 was for a regime in which there is democracy within the party but not within the wider society. Does this not recall Lenin's complaint that "[f]reedom in capitalist society always remains about the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave-owners"? (*Collected Works* 25: 465) Does replacing slave-owners (or the propertied class) with party members make a fundamental difference? Does "freedom for the party-members" mean much for the majority subject to their rule? Would this elite be unique in being and remaining benevolent?

We need not deal with speculation as we know the answer – this regime *did* exist after mid-1918 (indeed, becoming party orthodoxy by 1919) and it soon degenerated. Serge admits that by 1921 the party was "swollen by the influx of adventurers… and of reckless and unstable elements. The abuses, the excesses, even the crimes committed at the time, were due much more to them than to the militants, and it was against them that the first great party purge was directed." (110) This meant that "[f]or a time it" was "necessary to maintain the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Old Guard" (125) but this failed, as shown by Trotsky's *New Course*: "the new generation, which had grown up during the Civil War, ought to be given a greater say, and the power of committees and their sectaries diminished." (125) Likewise, Serge notes that during the Civil War the head of

the Cheka "did his best to discipline the local Commissions, many of which had been infiltrated by sadists and criminals." (91) Suffice to say that under the Monarchy in France, a lament often uttered (and mocked by Molière) was "if only the King knew" while in Russia many peasants thought the Tsar was good but isolated by corrupt and self-serving nobles and officials.

Also let us note here how dissidents in Trotskyist parties today regularly lament the bureaucracies that exist within them while Trotsky acknowledged that the Bolshevik party itself had a bureaucracy from the beginning and which Lenin had to fight in 1917. (*Stalin: An Appraisal of the man and his influence* [London: Panther History, 1969] 1: 101–2, 298) As may be expected, Lenin's turn against Stalin because he was, amongst other things, "too rude" (114) is much made of and, as such, exaggerated by Serge. He does not seek to explain how Stalin managed to become a leading member of the party under Lenin and with his patronage: while giving examples of Stalin's incompetence during the Civil War Serge admits that "Lenin had to intervene time and time again" and "showed an undeniable bias in Stalin's favour". (94) Yet he does not ponder how a Stalin could climb the ranks in this allegedly socialist and democratic party – and why one would not again given the same institutional structures and pressures.

So why return to what had previously failed? How can you have a "semi-State" or a State which is "no longer a state in the proper sense of the word" as Lenin proclaimed in 1917 under a party dictatorship or where workers are subjected to one-man management in production?

While Trotsky did combat Stalinism, he could not and did not understand its roots in Bolshevik ideology and the centralised, top-down structures it favoured in both the political and economic realms. Yes, we can say that – at least in theory, practice would have undoubtedly been different – Trotsky's industrialisation plans were less brutal than Stalin's: just as we can say that Athen's slavery was less brutal than Sparta's.

As such, it is important to clearly describe the regime Trotsky was aiming for without using the various euphemisms used at the time and selectively quoted subsequently. It would be governed by the dictatorship of an internally democratic but centralised party. A centralised State machine would exist to enforce its decisions, marked by a hierarchy of officials and non-democratic armed forces subservient to the party leadership. Economically, one-man management would implement the decisions of the central planning body while workers could elect whichever party member they preferred as trade union officials. All these institutions as well as the industrialisation of the nation would be funded from the surplus-value extracted from the peasantry and the wage-workers in nationalised industries.

This is hardly socialism let alone a transition to socialism. It would have been a class system in which the bureaucracy exploited the working class and peasantry, a bureaucracy made up of party, army, workplace and State functionaries whose power and privileges would somehow be kept in check by party democracy. Perhaps it would have utilised more of the surplus value extracted from the direct producers for more works of public interest rather than inflating the income of the officialdom and done so more humanely *but it would have still been a class system* – as warned of by anarchists long before 1923.

We need to look beyond persons and rhetoric to institutions and social relationships they created. So we can agree with Serge that the "democratization of the Party and the trade unions, a basic demand of the Opposition, was totally incompatible with Stalin's rigidly totalitarian system of government" (181) but we must add that such demands, even if implemented, would not have produced socialism. No genuine socialist could take the notion of a benevolent dictatorship seriously as the naivety it assumes flies in the face of any serious commitment to materialism or

even common sense. Unsurprisingly, the institutional pressures overwhelmed reform attempts and purges directed towards the corrupt were also used against dissidents, oppositionists or even just the independently minded (Serge, in his unpublished manuscript, notes this inquisitional aspect of Bolshevism: "Disdain of the psychological fact, disdain of the moral fact which is also an objective reality of primary importance. Contempt for different convictions. Contempt of the man who thinks differently" [297]). We should not be too surprised that such techniques were soon taken over by the corrupt themselves to secure their position nor that the bureaucratic methods Lenin and Trotsky used to fight the excesses of bureaucracy would fail.

That power was going to quite a few heads in the higher echelons of the party can be seen when Serge notes that "[i]n 1922, [Stalin's] friends changed the name of Tsarisyn… to Stalingrad. Other leading Bolsheviks expressed their astonishment, but did not bother to oppose this piece of self-aggrandisement which, after all, was a matter of very minor importance." (116) Sadly, the editor fails to note that the city was in fact renamed Stalingrad in April 1925, over two years after Gatchina had been renamed Trotsk in honour of Trotsky (February 1923 to August 1929) and one year after Yelisavetgrad was renamed Zinovievsk after Zinoviev (1924 to 1934). Interestingly, Petrograd was renamed Leningrad only after Lenin's death (five days after, on 26 January 1924). So perhaps the lack of opposition was due to the general "self-aggrandisement" of the other leading Bolsheviks?

That Serge does not mention this is significant insofar as it shows how Stalin gets denounced for activities Trotsky pioneered. Thus Trotsky's opposition to Stakhanovism in *The Revolution Betrayed*, namely that it "divided the working class into the privileged and the hungry: it was the policy of 'divide and rule'" (199), is mentioned but not his 1920 position that "[u]nder Socialist production, piece-work, bonuses, etc., have as their problem to increase the volume of social product, and consequently to raise the general well-being. Those workers who do more for the general interest than others receive the right to a greater quantity of the social product than the lazy, the careless, and the disorganizers… when it rewards some, the Labor State cannot but punish others". (*Communism and Terrorism*, 149)

Similarly with show trials of political enemies. Serge for some reason mentions Trotsky's key role in the Shchastny trial in June 1918 (85–6) which saw the Naval Officer shot for planning to overthrow the regime at some unspecified time in the future by utilising the popularity he had gained saving the Baltic Fleet. Martov – whom Serge praises for his dedication to socialism in contrast to Stalin's dismissal of him (116) – denounced it as a farce, with the accused denied a jury and the right to call witnesses, in his famous article "Down with the Death Penalty!". Recent research shows that Shchastny "was largely or wholly blameless in these matters" and Trotsky had "single-handedly organized an investigation, sham trial, and death sentence on [a] spurious charge". (Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power: The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007], 243)

Likewise, in 1936 Stalinist "restoring" of the officer corps "helped destroy the socialist tradition of the Red Army" (199) yet Trotsky abolishing the armed forces committees and elected officers from above ("the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree." [*How the Revolution Armed* 1: 47]) goes unmentioned. Instead, when discussing its formations, Serge favours platitudes about "maintain[ing] an egalitarian ethos and a sense of comradeship" and "discipline cemented by firm conviction" (85) without mentioning that these were rarely applied in practice although he later writes how during the civil war Trotsky "would continue to inspire and exhort his men" (91) before immedi-

ately quoting him threatening to shot anyone who disobeyed orders. Still, "Trotsky did no more than apply the rules of war adopted by all armies" (91) so no need to be concerned if the Red Army uses the same discipline and structures as the Whites. What possible wider impact could this produce? To quote one authority:

> "The demobilisation of the Red Army of five million [in 1921] played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war." (Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and where is it going?* [London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1937], 90)

Unfortunately this source failed to mention who introduced that regime into the Red Army or why:

> "every class prefers to have in its service those of its members who… have passed through the military school… when a former regimental commissary returns to his trade union, he becomes not a bad organiser" (Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, 173)

Serge, rightly, spends some time on *The Revolution Betrayed* but does not use it to explore its contradictions, selectivity and incredulous analysis. Trotsky is quoted: "Bureaucratic autocracy must give place to Soviet democracy … This assumes a revival of freedom of Soviet parties, beginning with the party of Bolsheviks, and a resurrection of the trade unions." (200) Neither he nor Serge explain why freedom for Soviet parties was essential in 1936 but counter-revolutionary in 1921 when the Kronstadt rebels had demanded it: for Russia was still surrounded by capitalist countries which hated it as well as facing re-armed and belligerent fascist Germany, Italy and Japan rather than States weary and exhausted after the First World War and facing internal revolts of their own.

Yet a close look suggests a solution to the palpable contradiction: "*beginning* with the party of the Bolsheviks." As we have seen, Trotsky – like every leading Bolshevik – had repeatedly asserted that party dictatorship was not only completely compatible with "Soviet Democracy" but that the latter *required* the former. Thus Trotsky's comment simply cannot be taken at face value: rather than a complete introduction of Soviet democracy in the usual meaning of the term, we would see the Trotskyists given freedom *first* but within the context of their party's dictatorship. They would then decide which other parties counted as "Soviet parties" with these later legalised before, eventually, the party dictatorship like the State itself "withered away." We do not have to look at the fate of the Mensheviks under Lenin, like that of the revolution itself, to see the flaws in such a position.

That this is the likeliest interpretation can be seen by Trotsky's swift return to defending party dictatorship after the book was finished, proclaiming in 1937 that the "revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is… an objective necessity… The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution" (*Writings of Leon Trotsky 1936–37* [New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978], 513–4) Thus the call for "Soviet Democracy" in *The Revolution Betrayed* does not exclude also having a party dictatorship:

> "Those who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat." (Trotsky, 495)

Yet Serge suggests that "[t]owards the U.S.S.R., [Trotsky] adhered strictly to the views of the 1917 Revolution and of the 1923 Opposition. In March 1933, he was still calling for 'Soviet reform', 'an honest Party regime' and 'Soviet democracy'". (198) Yet the latter was *not* his position in 1923, nor was that the same as in 1917 – unless Serge is using the term in the restricted manner so beloved of Trotskyists at the time and endlessly quoted out of context since. This comment does, though, point to a central paradox in the Opposition plan to reform the party, namely the assumption that the majority of the rank-and-file members would have supported Trotsky rather than, say, Stalin. Serge bemoans that 240,000 workers were allowed to join the party in 1924 as "the new recruits were just so many servile tools" for the "rigid and anxious bureaucracy." (128) Presumably the Opposition would have had to win power in spite of this influx and then reform the party from above, purging those whom it considered as depleting the purity of the party. This would mean that amongst the first acts of "the democratization of the regime" would have been a *reduction* in the number of people allowed a meaningful vote.

As noted, this book includes different pieces by Serge written earlier in the 1940s. This produces some interesting contradictions. Serge writes in 1942 how Trotsky "was authoritarian, because in our time of barbaric struggles thought turned into action must of necessity become authoritarian. When power was within his reach in 1924 and 1925, he refused to seize it because he felt a socialist regime could not be run by decree." (4) Yet in 1946 he notes how Lenin had stated how Trotsky, like Stalin, "was attracted to administrative solutions. What he undoubtedly meant was that Trotsky tended to resolve problems by directions from above." (113) Yet the most significant contradictions lie in the only really interesting piece in the book, the previously unpublished manuscript by Serge in response to Trotsky's *Their Morals and Ours*. It may be true, as Greeman says, that Serge choosing "not to publish this devastating critique of Trotsky's authoritarian mentality is a tribute to his affection and loyalty to the Old Man, surrounded as he was on all sides by critics and enemies" (289) but it was a disservice to the cause of socialism which cannot refuse to critically evaluate anything, particularly failures. Ultimately, most of the revolutionary left suffers from "affection and loyalty" to an idealised vision of Bolshevism which actively hinders the future development of socialism as a liberatory movement.

This does not stop Serge being right in arguing that "[w]e must renounce despicable methods of polemic and strive to convince, and in order to do this, make ourselves understood" (300) and that there should "be some morality in a polemic between socialists." (301) However, this must go beyond the deliberate lying or ignorance we see in, say, the typical Leninist attack on anarchism – actually discovering what your opponents argue must be the first step. It must also exclude lying by omission, which Serge does so often. Yet he also indulged in the very methods he attacked Trotsky for:

> "If one wanted to consider the possibility of a Spanish revolution one had to take the Spanish workers as they really were into account, and the reality was that the immense majority of the Spanish workers remained attached to the anarchist tradition, one that was confused and poor in ideas, but ardent and rich in sentiments and memories, since it dates to the period of Bakunin ... Marxist thought was, and often still

> is, hateful in the eyes of many Spanish workers, who are incapable of distinguishing between Stalinism and Bolshevism due to their lack of historical understanding and method." (303)

Apparently forgetting he wrote this, he then goes on to suggest that "[i]nsult cannot replace argument"! (305) Yet the "confused and poor in ideas" anarchists who "lack… historical understanding and method" were able to see Stalinism for what it was – a state-capitalist dictatorship – and provide a clear account of how its roots lay in the socio-economic-political regime created by Lenin and Trotsky. Indeed, Serge belatedly recognised that "Stalin and the bureaucratic leadership were able to put to use the gears of power that were forged before their arrival in power" (305) – why seeing this in 1920 rather than in 1940 makes you "confused" is left unexplored.

If "poor in ideas" means not being able to proclaim the possibility and need for a benevolent party dictatorship, then we happily embrace the poverty of our philosophy. We do not need to utilise euphemisms nor exclude key events in our analysis. We did not need the benefit of hindsight to see the root causes of Stalinism – presumably "lack of historical understanding and method" is simply words invoked to avoid acknowledging Bakunin's and Kropotkin's predictive power on the fate of Marxism? We have long seen that certain structures and tactics may be fine for minority classes (as they bolster their social position and power) but counter-productive for majority classes seeking their liberation – an awareness that Serge gropes towards in this previously unpublished manuscript:

> "Who wants the end wants the means, it being understood that every end requires the appropriate means. It is obvious that in order to build a vast totalitarian prison one must employ means other than those needed to build a workers' democracy… But is it possible to consider founding a republic of free workers by establishing the *Cheka*, I mean an extraordinary commission judging in secret based on case files, outside of any control other than that of the government…? Like work tools, shouldn't institutions be adapted to the ends pursued?… During civil wars, in power, during discussions, in organizing, revolutionaries and socialists must rigorously forbid themselves certain behavior that in some regards is effective and at times even easy, under pain of ceasing to be socialists and revolutionaries. All of the old methods of social struggle aren't good, since they all don't lead to our goal. We are only the strongest if we attain a higher degree of consciousness than our adversaries" (304)

In this he simply repeats the revolutionary anarchist critique of Marxism first articulated by Bakunin and then expanded upon by the likes of Kropotkin, Malatesta and Goldman, that Marxism "is based upon an extraordinary misunderstanding. It seems to be taken for granted that Capitalism and the workers' movement both have the same end in view. If this were so, they might perhaps use the same means; but as the capitalist is out to perfect his system of exploitation and government, whilst the worker is out for emancipation and liberty, naturally the same means cannot be employed for both purposes." (George Barrett, *Our Masters are Helpless: The Essays of George Barrett* [London: Freedom Press, 2019], 57) Neither the structures of class systems nor the principles they are based upon (such as centralisation, hierarchy, etc.) can be utilised to create socialism – if they are used, they create new class systems in place of the old. That

Serge seems unaware of this may be due to him never having been a revolutionary class struggle anarchist (and, no, being a member of the CNT for a few months does *not* count).

So the anarchist critique of Marxism was confirmed by the reality of the Bolshevik regime. This shows that Serge's suggestion that the libertarian break with Bolshevism was due to CNT delegates to the Communist International seeing "almost all the Russian anarchists in prison" regardless of whether they fought "the Soviet regime weapon in hand" (303) or not is false. The myopia is perhaps unsurprising given the Opposition's analysis of Stalinism but the CNT delegates (like most syndicalists) also saw the repression of strikes and independent unions, the lack of economic power in the workplace, the charade of "soviet democracy" under a party dictatorship as well as the repression of the left-wing opposition (including, but not limited to, libertarians). Serge's notion that anarchist opposition to Bolshevism was premised on simply repression of the anarchist movement is him judging others by Trotskyist standards: the anarchist critique was based on a *class* analysis of the regime, on the fate of the working class and whether the foundations of a socialist society were being created. It was never about it not being an ideal society nor that anarchists were in prison.

Serge states that Stalin could "make use of… the mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to finally cast the latter aside and establish a bloody dictatorship over the proletariat" (305) but forgets that Lenin and Trotsky had already created a "dictatorship over the proletariat". That Stalin's regime was more bloody that Trotsky's should not blind us to the situation of the working class under both. Given this, the steadily growth in research on the pre-Civil War period, with its working-class disillusionment and discontent with the Bolsheviks and its complaints over the regime's growing arbitrary and unresponsive nature – along with the rising dictatorial tendencies in response – must be acknowledged and addressed by the editors of works like this. Similarly, there is no comment on working class protest under the Bolsheviks before, during and after the civil war which research is also bringing to light. The Trotskyist notion that party dictatorship was needed due to the working class being "atomised" or "declassed" during the civil war is hard to defend once this is known (unless we use the term "declassed" as a euphemism – as per the circular vanguardist logic of Lenin – for "disagree with the party"). Section H.6 of *An Anarchist FAQ* attempts to summarise this research and shows how we are ill-served by repetition of excuses which were dubious (and challenged) at the time and now have traction only within Leninist circles due that very repetition.

Serge, in passing, notes that during the October Revolution "Lenin's and Trotsky's personal authority had no foundation other than their prestige among the masses." (75) They soon realised that this was not viable and soon started to create a new State machine, utilising elements of the previous one as well as new ones (such as the political police, the Cheka). He also asserts that "the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' aimed at the broadest possible democracy for the workers" (75) while justifying – when not ignoring – the Bolsheviks eliminating it. We can, perhaps, accept Serge's listing of the official number of delegates to the Fifth Congress of Soviets held on 4th July 1918 (87) as he did not arrive in Russian until January 1919 and so may have been unaware of its packing by the Bolsheviks and subsequent denial of the Left-SR's majority but we do now and it behoves an editor to note such things, particularly as it relates to the subsequent Left-SR revolt and the consolidation of the Bolshevik monopoly of power. (Rabinowitch, 287–90) Likewise, there is no editorial comment on the Bolshevik disbanding of regional soviets in the spring of 1918 (Vladimir N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987], 126–160) nor the packing of the

Petrograd Soviet to secure a Bolshevik majority making the long-postponed workplace elections of early June 1918 irrelevant. (Rabinowitch, 248–52)

For Serge, the rise of the Opposition meant "it seemed as if real freedom was in the air" (119) but, of course, just for those who count – the party members. For those outwith that august and select body, their situation was hardly improved by watching a dispute between their rulers for, as Serge has to admit, the Opposition "refused to appeal to workers and intellectuals who were not affiliated to the Party, because it believed that counterrevolutionary attitude, whether conscious or not, were still rife amongst them." (140) Little wonder, as noted, its demands were limited to democracy within the party and allowing those who did the work the option of voting for a party member rather than having one imposed upon them.

So we much remember that the repression of dissidents outwith the party started under Lenin and Trotsky would have continued for the Opposition simply bemoaned that the Stalinists were applying these techniques within the vanguard itself. Nor should we forget that before the late 1930s Serge publicly proclaimed authoritarianism and dictatorship are inevitable aspects of every revolution while, he claimed, privately worrying about their inevitable consequences. The few and belated public comments as regards the Cheka and such like, always made in the context of defending Lenin's regime, may have caused the orthodox Trotskyists to disown him (after quoting his own words back to him) but these are nowhere near getting to the root of the problem nor comparable to the analysis offered by the likes of Emma Goldman.

Given all that has been discussed, it is incredulous to read Greeman proclaim that "Trotsky held true to his revolutionary socialist principles" (viii) and praise "his struggle against Stalin's bureaucratic takeover of the Soviets". (viii) Does advocating party dictatorship and one-man management equate to holding true to "revolutionary socialist principles"? Does he really think that the soviets had any meaningful role in Russian life after – to be generous – July 1918? At best it could be said Trotsky struggled against Stalin's takeover of an already bureaucratic party and State but the notion he seized power from the Soviets is as delusional as the notion Trotsky advocated genuine Soviet democracy in the 1920s – or the 1930s, for that matter.

In this, though, Greeman repeats Serge who claims that his "only concern has been historical accuracy" which suggests that Trotsky's key role in creating and defending party dictatorship and state capitalism are simply "omitted [as] facts of minor importance". (7) His suggestion that Serge and Trotsky "both wished to be as objective as possible" (288) is hard to accept for the reasons indicated. While Serge may bemoan the "cavalier treatment of facts and documents" (171) by the Stalinists against Trotsky, this book suffers from the same problem, albeit not to the same level. Sadly, given the positive reviewers this book received from Leninist journals we can accept that this "passionate, authentic and accessible little book [will be used] to educate their members and spread Trotskyist ideas" (289) for precisely that reason.

In short, Greeman seems unaware that it was not only Stalin and Mao "who held power and built totalitarian empires on the ruins of genuine popular revolution" (viii) unless, of course, he subscribes to Serge's misleading difference without a distinction between totalitarian and dictatorial. As such, it is incredulous to read him quoting a French novelist who published Serge in the 60s and 70s:

> "Serge's work is indispensable to anyone who doesn't want to die an idiot from an overdose of the 'politically correct' revisions of history with which we have been constantly bombarded in recent times." (viii)

Sadly, Serge's work – as with almost all Leninist accounts of the Bolshevik party and regime – is such a "politically correct" revision of history. For the true believer this is irrelevant: what matters is that the Bolsheviks successfully seized and held onto power. Luckily for them, their notion of socialism ensures that they cannot see that the Bolsheviks also killed the socialist potential of this revolution in the process. Anarchists, however, cannot be as superficial.

Today, as for many decades, Leninists are less open about these matters. Now, rather than proclaim the "objective necessity" and "Leninist principle" of party dictatorship they limit themselves to simply suggesting the Bolsheviks had no choice due to civil war, isolation and other "objective factors." Ignoring the awkward fact that they also argue that every socialist revolution would experience similar factors, what is significant is that serious socialists proclaim that a benevolent dictatorship can exist while, simultaneously, arguing that socialism has to be democratic to be socialist! What is it? If the former, then a non-democratic form of socialism *is* possible. If the latter, then the Bolshevik regime cannot be defended as socialist. That they defend the regime suggests that, when push comes to shove, then they too will violate what they claim is the fundamental principle of their ideology and impose party dictatorship.

Any genuine socialist alternative will need to combat Lenin's self-proclaimed "proletarian Jacobinism" (15) in more effective manner than Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky did for, as Daniel Guérin noted on many occasions, Marx and Engels themselves were, at best, ambiguous about the Jacobins and, at worse, ignored their bourgeois role to point to them as an example of follow. Anarchists, in contrast, have recognised the bourgeois nature of Jacobinism from the start, with Kropotkin wondering "how it is possible that the socialists of the second half of the nineteenth century adopted the ideal of the *Jacobin State* when this ideal had been designed from the viewpoint of the bourgeois, in direct opposition to the egalitarian and communist tendencies of the people which had arisen during the Revolution?" (*Modern Science and Anarchy* [Edinburgh/Chico: AK Press, 2018], 366) The question now is how is this still possible at the start of the 21st century?

Works like Serge cannot help us to do this and simply help ensure that this failed revolution, along with the ideology which helped destroy it, clings on in the left, continuing to damage the labour and socialist movements. Until the left rejects Bolshevism and its underlying assumptions and prejudices, socialism will remain marginal – and rightly so.

Anarcho
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