

# **How Lenin led to Stalin**

Workers Solidarity Movement

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**FOR THE LENINIST far left the collapse of the USSR has thrown up more questions than it answered. If the Soviet Union really was a 'workers state' why were the workers unwilling to defend it? Why did they in fact welcome the changes?**

What happened to Trotskys "political revolution or bloody counter revolution"? Those Leninist organisations which no longer see the Soviet Union as a workers state do not escape the contradictions either. If Stalin was the source of the problem why do so many Russian workers blame Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders too.

The mythology of "Lenin, creator and sustainer of the Russian revolution" is now dying. With it will go all the Leninist groups for as the Soviet archives are increasingly opened it will become increasingly difficult to defend Lenin's legacy. The Left in the west has dodged and falsified the Lenin debate for 60 years now. Now however there is a proliferation of articles and meetings by the various Trotskyist groups trying to convince workers that Lenin did not lead to Stalin. Unfortunately much of this debate is still based on the slander and falsifications of history that has been symptomatic of Bolshevism since 1918. The key questions of what comprises Stalinism and when did "Stalinism" first come into practice are dodged in favour of rhetoric and historical falsehood.

Stalinism is defined by many features and indeed some of these are more difficult than others to lay at the feet of Lenin. The guiding points of Stalin's foreign policy for instance was the idea of peaceful co-existence with the West while building socialism in the USSR ("socialism in one country"). Lenin is often presented as the opposite extreme, being willing to risk all in the cause of international revolution. This story like many others however is not all it seems. Other points that many would consider characteristic of Stalinism include, the creation of a one party state, no control by the working class of the economy, the dictatorial rule of individuals over the mass of society, the brutal crushing of all workers' action and the use of slander and historical distortion against other left groups.

## **SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY**

The treaty of Brest-Livtosk of 1918, which pulled Russia out of World War I, also surrendered a very large amount of the Ukraine to the Austro-Hungarians. Obviously, there was no potential of continuing a conventional war (especially as the Bolsheviks had used the slogan "peace, bread, land" to win mass support). Yet, the presence of the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine, clearly demonstrated a vast revolutionary potential among the Ukrainian peasants and workers. No attempt was made to supply or sustain those forces which did seek to fight a revolutionary war against the Austro-Hungarians. They were sacrificed in order to gain a respite to build "socialism" in Russia.

The second point worth considering about Lenin's internationalism is his insistence from 1918 onwards, that the task was to build "state capitalism, as "If we introduced state capitalism in approximately 6 months' time we would achieve a great success.."<sup>1</sup> He was also to say "Socialism is nothing but state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people".<sup>2</sup> This calls into question Lenin's concept of socialism.

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<sup>1</sup> V.I. Lenin "Left wing childishness and petty-bourgeois mentality", h

<sup>2</sup> V.I. Lenin "The threatening catastrophe and how to fight it", u

## ONE PARTY STATE

Another key feature many would associate with Stalinism was the creation of a one party state, and the silencing of all opposition currents within the party. Many Trotskyists will still try to tell you that the Bolsheviks encouraged workers to take up and debate the points of the day, both inside and outside the party. The reality is very different for the Bolsheviks rapidly clamped down on the revolutionary forces outside the party, and then on those inside that failed to toe the line .

In April 1918 the Bolshevik secret police (The Cheka) raided 26 Anarchist centres in Moscow. 40 Anarchists were killed or injured and over 500 imprisoned<sup>3</sup>. In May the leading Anarchist publications were closed down<sup>4</sup>. Both of these events occurred before the excuse of the outbreak of the Civil War could be used as a 'justification'. These raids occurred because the Bolsheviks were beginning to lose the arguments about the running of Russian industry.

In 1918 also a faction of the Bolshevik party critical of the party's introduction of 'Talyorism' (the use of piece work and time & motion studies to measure the output of each worker, essentially the science of sweat extraction) around the journal *Kommunist* were forced out of Leningrad when the majority of the Leningrad party conference supported Lenin's demand "that the adherents of *Kommunist* cease their separate organisational existence". [5]

The paper was last published in May, silenced "Not by discussion, persuasion or compromise, but by a high pressure campaign in the Party organisations, backed by a barrage of violent invective in the party press...".<sup>5</sup> So much for encouraging debate!!

A further example of the Bolsheviks 'encouraging debate' was seen in their treatment of the Makhnovist in the Ukraine. This partisan army which fought against both the Ukrainian nationalists and the White generals at one time liberated over 7 million people. It was led by the anarchist Nestor Mhakno and anarchism played the major part in the ideology of the movement. The liberated zone was ran by a democratic soviet of workers and peasants and many collectives were set up.

## ECHOS OF SPAIN

The Makhnovists entered into treaties with the Bolsheviks three times in order to maintain a stronger united front against the Whites and nationalists. Despite this they were betrayed by the Bolsheviks three times, and the third time they were destroyed after the Bolsheviks arrested and executed all the delegates sent to a joint military council. This was under the instructions of Trotsky! Daniel Guerin's description of Trotsky's dealings with the Makhnovists is instructive "He refused to give arms to Makhno's partisans, failing in his duty of assisting them, and subsequently accused them of betrayal and of allowing themselves to be beaten by white troops. The same procedure was followed 18 years later by the Spanish Stalinists against the anarchist brigades"<sup>6</sup>

The final lid was put on political life outside or inside the party in 1921. The 1921 party congress banned all factions in the communist party itself. Trotsky made a speech denouncing one such

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<sup>3</sup> M. Brinton "The Bolsheviks and workers control" page 38,r

<sup>4</sup> M. Brinton page 38, 5. Brinton, page 39,s

<sup>5</sup> Brinton, page 40,t

<sup>6</sup> D. Guerin "Anarchism", page 101, r

faction, the Workers Opposition as having "placed the workers right to elect representatives above the party. As if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers democracy".<sup>7</sup>

Shortly afterwards the Kronstadt rising was used as an excuse to exile, imprison and execute the last of the anarchists. Long before Lenins death the political legacy now blamed on Stalin had been completed. Dissent had been silenced inside and outside the party. The one party state existed as of 1921. Stalin may have been the first to execute party members on a large scale but with the execution of those revolutionaries outside the party and the silencing of dissidents within it from 1918 the logic for these purges was clearly in place.

## THE WORKING CLASS UNDER LENIN

Another key area is the position of the working class in the Stalinist society. No Trotskyist would disagree that under Stalin workers had no say in the running of their workplaces and suffered atrocious conditions under threat of the state's iron fist. Yet again these conditions came in under Lenin and not Stalin. Immediately after the revolution the Russian workers had attempted to federate the factory committees in order to maximise the distribution of resources. This was blocked, with Bolshevik 'guidance', by the trade unions.

By early 1918 the basis of the limited workers control offered by the Bolsheviks (in reality little more then accounting) became clear when all decisions had to be approved by a higher body of which no more than 50% could be workers. Daniel Guerin describes the Bolshevik control of the elections in the factories "elections to factory committees continued to take place , but a member of the Communist cell read out a list of candidates drawn up in advance and voting was by show of hands in the presence of armed 'Communist' guards. Anyone who declared his opposition to the proposed candidates became subject to wage cuts, etc."<sup>8</sup>

On March 26th 1918 workers control was abolished on the railways in a decree full of ominous phrases stressing "iron labour discipline" and individual management. At least, say the Trotskyists, the railways ran on time. In April Lenin published an article in *Izvestiya* which included the introduction of a card system for measuring each workers productivity. He said "..we must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Talyor system". "Unquestioning submission to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of the labour process...the revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process"<sup>9</sup> Lenin declared in 1918. This came before the civil war broke out and makes nonsense of the claims that the Bolsheviks were trying to maximise workers control until the civil war prevented them from doing so.

With the outbreak of the Civil War things became much worse. In late May it was decreed that no more than 1/3 of the management personnel of industrial enterprises should be elected.<sup>11</sup> A few "highlights" of the following years are worth pointing out. At the ninth party congress in April of 1920 Trotsky made his infamous comments on the militarization of labour "the working class...must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded just like soldiers. Deserters

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<sup>7</sup> Brinton, page 78,i

<sup>8</sup> Guerin,kpage 91,es

<sup>9</sup> Brinton, page 41,

from labour ought to be formed into punitive battalions or put into concentration camps".<sup>10</sup> The congress itself declared "no trade union group should directly intervene in industrial management".<sup>11</sup>

## ONE MAN MANAGEMENT

At the trade union congress that April, Lenin was to boast how in 1918 he had "pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the purpose of carrying out the soviet idea".<sup>12</sup> Trotsky declared that "labour..obligatory for the whole country, compulsory for every worker is the basis of socialism"<sup>13</sup> and that the militarisation of labour was no emergency measure<sup>14</sup>. In *War Communism and Terrorism* published by Trotsky that year he said "The unions should discipline the workers and teach them to place the interests of production above their own needs and demands". It is impossible to distinguish between these policies and the labour policies of Stalin.

## WORKERS REVOLTS

Perhaps the most telling condemnation of the Stalinist regimes came from their crushing of workers' revolts, both the well known ones of East Berlin 1953, Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 and scores of smaller, less known risings. The first such major revolt was to happen at the height of Lenin due to large scale intimidation 1921 at Kronstadt, a naval base and town near Petrograd. The revolt essentially occurred when Kronstadt attempted to democratically elect a Soviet and issued a set of proclamations calling for a return to democratic soviets and freedom of press and speech for left socialist parties".<sup>15</sup>

This won the support of not only the mass of workers and sailors at the base but of the rank and file of the Bolshevik party there as well. Lenins response was brutal. The base was stormed and many of the rebels who failed to escape were executed. Kronstadt had been the driving force for the revolution in 1917 and in 1921 the revolution died with it.

There are other commonly accepted characteristics of Stalinism. One more that is worth looking at is the way Stalinist organisations have used slander as a weapon against other left groups. Another is the way that Stalin re-wrote history. Yet again this is something which was a deep strain within Leninism. Mharko for example went from being hailed by the Bolshevik newspapers as the "Nemesis of the whites"<sup>16</sup> to being described as a Kulak and a bandit .

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<sup>10</sup> Brinton, page 61, o

<sup>11</sup> Brinton, page 63, f

<sup>12</sup> Brinton, page 65,

<sup>13</sup> 1981 for politic a,

<sup>14</sup> I. Deutscher, "The Prophet Armed" pages 500-07,

<sup>15</sup> Ida Mett,"The Kronstadt Uprising", page 38,

<sup>16</sup> A. Berkman, "Nestor Makhno", page 25, 19. quoted by Voline "The Unknown Revolution", page 572,

## SLANDERS

Modern day Trotskyists are happy to repeat this sort of slander along with describing Mharkno as an anti-Semite. Yet the Jewish historian M. Tchernikover says "It is undeniable that, of all the armies, including the Red Army, the Makhnovists behaved best with regard to the civilian population in general and the Jewish population in particular."<sup>17</sup>

The leadership of the Makhnovists contained Jews and for those who wished to organise in this manner there were specific Jewish detachments. The part the Makhnovists played in defeating the whites has been written out of history by every Trotskyist historian, some other historians however consider they played a far more decisive role than the Red Army in defeating Wrangel<sup>17</sup>.

Kronstadt provides another example of how Lenin and Trotsky used slander against their political opponents. Both attempted to paint the revolt as being organised and led by the whites. Pravda on March 3rd, 1921 described it as "A new White plot...expected and undoubtedly prepared by the French counter-revolution". Lenin in his report to the 10th Party Congress on March 8th said "White generals, you all know it, played a great part in this. This is fully proved".<sup>18</sup>

Yet even Isaac Deutscher, Trotsky's biographer said in the Prophet armed "The Bolsheviks denounced the men of Kronstadt as counter-revolutionary mutineers, led by a White general. The denunciation appears to have been groundless"<sup>19</sup>.

## RE-WRITING HISTORY

Some modern day Trotskyists repeat such slander others like Brian Pearce (historian of the Socialist Labour League in Britain) try to deny it ever occurred "No pretence was made that the Kronstadt mutineers were White Guards"<sup>20</sup>In actual fact the only czarist general in the fort had been put there as commander by Trotsky some months earlier! Lets leave the last words on this to the workers of Kronstadt "Comrades, don't allow yourself to be misled. In Kronstadt, power is in the hands of the sailors, the red soldiers and of the revolutionary workers"<sup>21</sup>

There is irony in the fact that these tactics of slander and re-writing history as perfected by the Bolsheviks under Lenin were later to be used with such effect against the Trotskyists. Trotsky and his followers were to be denounced as "Fascists" and agents of international imperialism. They were to be written and air-brushed out of the history of the revolution. Yet to-day his followers, the last surviving Leninists use the same tactics against their political opponents.

The intention of this article is to provoke a much needed debate on the Irish left about the nature of Leninism and where the Russian revolution went bad. The collapse of the eastern European context makes it all the more urgent that this debate goes beyond trotting out the same old lies. If Leninism lies at the heart of Stalinism then those organisations that follow Lenin's teaching stand to make the same mistakes again. Anybody in a Leninist organisation who does not take this debate seriously is every bit as blind and misled as all those communist party members who thought the Soviet Union was a socialist country until the day it collapsed.

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<sup>17</sup> P. Berland, "Mharkno", Le Temps, 28 Aug, 1934,

<sup>18</sup> Lenin, Selected Works, vol IX, p. 98,

<sup>19</sup> Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, page 511.

<sup>20</sup> Labour Review, vol V, No. 3.

<sup>21</sup> I. Mett, page 51.

**Quotes and Misquotes:** The problem when writing an article covering this period of history is where you select your quotations from. Both Lenin and Trotsky changed their positions many times in this period. Many Leninists for example try to show Lenin's opposition to Stalinism by quoting from *State and Revolution* (1917). This is little more than deception as Lenin made no attempt to put the program outlined in this pamphlet into practice. In any case it still contains his curious conception of Workers control. I have only used quotes from the October revolution to 1921 and in every case these quotes are either statements of policy, or what should be policy at the time. As socialists are aware governments in opposition may well say "Health cuts hurt the old, the sick and the handicapped". It is however in power that you see their real program exposed.



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