

Chapter VII

THE FUNCTION OF COMMUNIST DICTATORSHIP

The Socialists of the pre-war period read the phrase of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat with the emphasis on *proletariat* rather than on *dictatorship*. Not the change in governmental methods, but the substitution of a new ruling class for the old was considered the essence of the Socialist state.

The term "proletariat," defined by Marx and Engels as "the class of modern laborers, who having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor power in order to live,"¹ was broadly construed to embrace the whole class of wage workers constituting the great bulk of the population in all countries of advanced industrial development. "The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority," asserts the Communist Manifesto.

The proletarian régime thus conceived represents a homogeneous rule, whose political power rests on the solid foundation of numerical and physical pre-

¹ In the annotations to Samuel Moore's translation of the "Communist Manifesto."

ponderance as well as on its intellectual and idealistic appeal.

The Russian revolution in its very inception faced a different, more difficult and contradictory situation. As a political revolution designed to conquer and to hold power it depended upon the lasting support of the majority of the population. As a Socialist revolution it purposed to establish the rule of the proletariat. But the proletariat comprised only a small minority of the people, hence it found itself dependent for the maintenance of its rule upon a permanent alliance with a more numerous, non-proletarian class. Such class was discovered in the "poor peasants," whose economic status was defined as "semi-proletarian." A revolutionary alliance between workers and peasants was made possible by the specific Russian condition of acute peasant land hunger and by a tacit compromise under the terms of which the land was divided among the peasants in individual property, while the industries were taken over by the urban workers in collective ownership. With the accomplishment of the revolution and its two-fold object for the contracting parties the union between the industrial workers and small peasant proprietors rested on a precarious and unstable foundation. It lacked in social homogeneity and economic cohesion. The psychology and intellectual level of the peasant are different from those of the city worker and their material interests are often antagonistic. Unless and until both industry and agriculture are

fully socialized the reciprocal relations of the two classes are those of producer and consumer. It is in the interest of the farmers to obtain the largest possible quantity of manufactured goods for the least possible quantity of food and raw material, and vice versa.

It therefore became necessary to evolve a cementing and unifying force for the two classes in power, and such force was found in the Communist Party.

The Communist Party of Russia plays a unique part in the revolutionary government of the country. Composed of some 600,000 members, including practically all Soviet officials, civil and military, national and local, it constitutes the most conscious, active and reliable organized support of the revolution. To the Communists fall the hardest and most perilous tasks, but in return they are given practically unlimited authority. The power of the Communists grew gradually, almost imperceptibly. To-day it is complete and avowed. The Second Congress of the Communist International (Petrograd-Moscow, July 19-August 7, 1920) frankly proclaimed the superiority of the party over all official governmental organs and institutions.

“The Proletarian Revolution in Russia,” recites the Platform-Resolution adopted by that Congress, “has brought to the foreground the basic form of labor dictatorship, viz., the Soviet. In the nearest future the following division will establish itself: *First, the party*; second, the Soviets; and third, the productive unions. But the work both in the Soviets and in the

revolutionized productive unions *must be invariably and systematically directed by the party of the proletariat, i. e., the Communist Party.*"² (Italics mine.)

And again: "The Communist Party is the *chief* and the *basic* instrument for the liberation of the working class." (Italics mine.)

The superiority thus accorded to the Communist Party was explained and defended by G. Zinovieff in a speech before the same Congress, from which I quote the following excerpts:

*"It is true that sometimes some people like Kautsky say: 'You have in Russia a dictatorship not of the working class, but a dictatorship of a party.' They think that this is a reproach to us. Not at all. We have a dictatorship of the working class, and consequently also a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is simply a function, a sign of the expression of the dictatorship of the working class. Just what is our party? One should not confuse it with other parties that are composed of lawyers. Into our party enter 600,000-700,000 of the best workmen; that is the advanced detachment of the proletariat. And it is clear that the business of

² I quote from a rather strange authority—a pamphlet entitled "The Second Congress of the Communist International as Reported and Interpreted by the Official Newspapers of Soviet Russia," published by the State Department at Washington, D. C. Notwithstanding the "authoritative" character of the publication the reported documents bear intrinsic marks of genuineness.

the working class is being conducted by its best representatives. Thus there is established simultaneously a dictatorship of both proletariat and Communist Party. The right of control over various organizations belongs to the party. That is as it should be in time of proletarian revolution."

While Zinovieff still palliates and accords equal rank to the "proletariat and Communist Party," the more outspoken Bukharin writes in the Pravda of August 3rd, 1920:

"But if it is clear that revolution is civil war, that it is an armed struggle of the workers with the bourgeoisie, then it is also quite clear that the working class, like a belligerent country, must have a closely united vanguard, with military discipline, with a military staff to direct the struggle, and *all must be subordinate to this staff*. Such a vanguard is the party."

The functions of the Communist Party, as the controlling organ of the Russian revolution are stated in the Platform-Resolution as serving "equally the interests of the economic, the political, and the cultural struggles of the working class as a whole."

The "Theses" submitted to the congress contain a more direct hint of one of the practical uses of the Party:

"The history of the Russian revolution shows us, at a certain moment, the Soviets going against the proletarian party and helping the agents of the bourgeoisie.

* * *

"In order that the Soviets may fulfill their historic mission, the existence of the Communist Party, strong enough not to 'adapt' itself to the Soviets but to exercise on them a decisive influence, to force them not to adapt themselves to the bourgeoisie and official social democracy * * * is necessary."³

The Communist Party is predominantly a party of industrial workers. The practical effects of its hegemony are: (1) within the political partnership of the proletariat and the peasantry to establish the rule of the former. (2) Within the ranks of the proletariat to assure the domination of the Communists.

"The Communist Party is that lever of political organization by means of which the most advanced part of the working class directs the mass of the proletariat and semi-proletariat along the right road."⁴

Thus the dictatorship acting in the name of the whole working-class and all poor peasants in practice resolves itself to the rule of an organization composed of 600,000 industrial workers of one political persuasion.

The exercise of controlling governmental influence by a political party is by no means peculiar to Russia (in fact all modern governments are party governments). But the vital difference between the modern

³ Quoted in Bertrand Russell's "Bolshevism: Practice and Theory," N. Y., 1920, page 73.

⁴ "Platform-Resolution of Second Congress of Communist International."

working-class party in the West and the Communist Party of Russia is that while the former is often practically synonymous with the working class and is always open to all of it, the Communist Party is a close corporation, a class within a class.

*The exclusive character of the party is admitted and justified officially in the following paragraph of the Platform-Resolution of the Communist International.

“So long as the governmental authority has not been conquered by the proletariat, so long as the proletariat has not established its rule once for all and has not guaranteed the working class from the possibility of a bourgeois restoration, so long will the Communist Party have by right in its organized ranks *only the minority of the workmen*. Up to the time of the seizure of governmental authority and *during the period of transition* the Communist Party may, in favorable circumstances, exercise *undivided* ideological and political influence upon all the proletarian and semi-proletarian strata of a population, *but it cannot bring them together in its ranks* in an organized manner. Only after the proletarian dictatorship will have deprived the bourgeois of such powerful weapons of effective influence as the press, the school, the church, the parliament, the administrative apparatus, etc., only after the final defeat of the bourgeois social order will have become evident for everybody (i. e., when there will be no more need of political parties, M. H.), only then

will all or practically all the workers begin to enter the ranks of the Communist Party." (Italics mine.)

In the scheme of the Russian dictatorship of the Proletariat, the Communist Party thus performs the rôle of political guardian of the whole proletariat and the poor peasantry. It is the rule of a minority exercised, it is true, in the name and in the interest of a majority, but it is the minority and not the majority which is permitted to interpret and formulate such interests.

The peculiar functions and composition of the Communist Party and its supreme political rule are thus one of the main characteristics of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in the Russian conception. What are its other distinguishing features?

On this most important point the theoreticians of the Russian revolution are not in complete agreement with each other, nor always consistent with themselves. The preponderating weight of Bolshevik opinion seems to hold that the determining features of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat aside from the controlling influence of the Communist Party are the Soviet as its political organ and form and the "terror" (in the widest significance of the term) as its weapon.

This conception is based on the historical experiences of the Russian revolution. The form and policies of the latter were shaped partly by the specific economic and political conditions which prevailed in Russia after

the war and partly under the pressure of the counter-revolutionary plots of the Russian bourgeoisie and the armed attacks and economic blockade of foreign capitalist powers, which were directed against it not because it was Russian but because it was a *proletarian* revolution.

It is of the utmost importance to the international Socialist movement to ascertain, if possible, to what extent these forms and policies were necessitated by conditions peculiar to Russia and to what extent they are inherent in every régime of proletarian dictatorship.