

REVISIONISM AND AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC TRADITIONS

The mistake appears to have had its beginning at the eighth convention of our party in Cleveland, Ohio, in April 1934. The published results of this convention in the pamphlet "The Way Out" shows a separation of theory and practice, growing out of an incorrect appraisal of the revolutionary traditions of 1776 and 1861.

While important similarities in the struggle of 1776 do exist, which are fully applicable to the modern political struggles, and certain "traditions of '76" are carried forward by our party, it was a mistake for us to imply in the published statement of that convention that the "traditions of 1776" were the only traditions we were carrying forward.

While, in theory, we clearly aimed at socialism, which we knew required the dictatorship of the working class; in practice, we were to be modern "Jeffersonians" only fighting for the defense and extension of (capitalist) democracy.

Neglected, or at least omitted, in our 1934 policy was a clear statement of recognition of the very great differences which exist between the capitalist revolution of 1776 — extended to the southern states in 1861—and the modern working class revolution, which as Marxist-Leninists, we must also carry forward new traditions. Traditions which were unknown in Jefferson's day, and which sharply conflict with certain "Jeffersonian traditions."

Hidden by this omission, was the fact that the revolution of 1776 did establish in our country the pre-conditions for the building of the dictatorship of the capitalist class. Which dictatorship was built and now does operate behind the screen of capitalist "democracy."

The implication was made by us that a 1934 translation of the "Declaration of Independence," would, in fact, usher in the dictatorship of the working class, just as in 1776 this same Declaration of Independence had ushered in the dictatorship of Marxism-Leninism.

The tasks of the authors of the Declaration of Independence were ended in 1783 with the victory over England and the successful establishment of the thirteen colonial states as the United States of America. This was freely admitted by Tom Paine in his last "Crisis" article. (No. XIII.)

We do carry forward the traditions of 1776 and 1861 in our day, because we demand freedom for the colonial and semi-colonial peoples. Because we fight to retain and extend what democracy exists

under capitalism. It was for this that Jefferson and Paine fought so well.

For these tasks alone, we ally ourselves with the heroes of 1776. But we do this in order to make it possible and easier for the working class to thus pass on to our new tasks, the higher tasks of establishing socialism in our country—and in the colonial countries as well.

It is for these latter tasks, the establishment of socialism, we must carry forward new traditions under the red banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. In the traditions of Eugene Debs, the heroes of the eight hour day, and the other great leaders of the American working class!

We cannot scientifically carry forward the traditions of 1776 all the way through the class struggles in America, because the class struggle—the need for socialism—did not arise in 1776. No one at that time could possibly have foreseen it, nor could they establish any principles in regard to it.

Our party in adopting these "traditions" in the manner presented—admittedly as a political expedient, made an error of an opportunist nature. But to the extent that it separated our practical thinking from our theory of proletarian revolution, it had the effect of paving the way for the big mistakes that followed at the 10th party convention in 1938, wherein we practically abandoned the basic principle of the Dictatorship of the Working Class. In other words the separation of theory and practice resulted in our having to revise our theory. With the way paved by four years of capitalist "traditions" in our heads, the 1938 errors—big and fundamental as is now obvious—were not discovered by any large number of comrades. Those few who had misgivings could not have realized clearly how serious they were or otherwise they could have been more convincing. Our thinking had become blunted by 1938. We were ideologically disarmed. The still more obvious mistakes of Teheran and after were bound to follow.

Precisely, the mistake of carrying forward the traditions of 1776 to a Socialist America is this: the term, "carry forward," implies that the path from a capitalist America to socialism is a smooth flow of struggle for constantly expanding and extending "democracy." By this it follows that the one runs into the other. Further then, there is no barrier between capitalist "democracy" and socialism. The result of this thinking is that socialism can be led up to and established within the

framework of capitalism.

If all this were true, then there is no need for the dictatorship of the working class. This may be why no one noticed our abandonment of this fundamental in 1938. By that time it seemed such a logical step to take, so necessary in view of our adopted "traditions" since 1934.

Now that Comrade Duclos has aroused us from our slumbers it seems hardly necessary to state that socialism can never arise on a basis of capitalism. That capitalist "democracy" instead builds up economic and legal structures between the working class and political power. That this framework of capitalist relations in society (as we now remember)—must be smashed by the working class in order to establish socialism. It is for this task—the smashing of the capitalist economic and political relations in society—that the dictatorship of the working class is scientifically necessary in our Marxist-Leninist theory.

We can correctly say that Jefferson and Paine would help us, or more precisely, we help them, in defending our democratic institutions, and in the fight to extend democracy to the colonial countries—self determination for the colonial peoples. But how Jefferson and Paine would stand in the modern class struggle would be decided, not by principles of 1776, but by how well these gentlemen had fared under capitalism. How well they had read our Marxist-Leninist literature! At any rate the tasks for which they fought within the borders of our nation, have long since been completed. The tasks which exist today in America can only be solved by the American working class.

In the ideological revamping of our Communist movement our lessons may very well include the clearing up of these "irregularities" from eleven years ago. The lesson is that our work is not sweet, nor easy, nor to be taken with immediate acclaim among the workers. That instead, it is hard work, to be done over and over again to convince the workers that hard as the tasks may be, Marxism-Leninism is the only road which can lead to the solution of the national problems given us by the crisis of capitalism in our country. The louder the clamor and howl sent up by the capitalist class, the more clearly we should set forth our real purposes and theory into the ranks of the workers. It is sweet enough for us to know that we have a scientific and certain way out, and the capitalist have none.

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