

**POLITICAL DISSENT IN NASCENT COMMUNIST  
SOVIET UNION (1917-1930)**

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**GEORGY S. THOMAS**

**CENTRE FOR SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI - 1100 067  
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जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय  
**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**  
NEW DELHI - 110067

**CENTRE FOR SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES,  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "**POLITICAL DISSENT IN NASCENT COMMUNIST SOVIET UNION (1917- 1930)**", submitted by **Georgy S. Thomas**, in partial fulfilment of the requirements (of 6 credits out of the total requirement of 24 credits), for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**, is his original work and not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

I recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

(Prof. R.R. Sharma)  
Chairman & Supervisor

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*"Perhaps in this world there are many heroes who are capable of bearing all kinds of tortures, physical and moral, which are inflicted on themselves, their wives, their children. I do not know..... My personal observations inform me that the capacities of the human nervous system are limited. Through the GPU, Stalin can trap his victim in an abyss of black despair, humiliation, infamy, in such a manner that he takes upon himself the most monstrous crimes, with the prospect of imminent death or feeble ray of hope for the future as the sole outcome. If indeed, he does not contemplate suicide. Suicide or moral prostration: there is no other choice! but do not forget that in the prisons of the GPU even suicide is often an inaccessible luxury!"*

*-Leon Trotsky, speech addressed to the gathering  
in New York Hippodrome, 9 February 1937*

## INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of the concept of **political** opposition borrows much from its role in modern parliamentary democracies. Since majority rule is in force here, the opposition is formed by a **group** of politicians representing a stand point, different from that of the **Government**. If a legal opposition is to exist, there must be a certain minimum of **democracy** and free speech, protection for all members of Parliament and right which minority groups in parliament also enjoy.

Under Communist Government, the term opposition connotes a totally different meaning. Communist party discipline is far stricter than discipline in democratic political parties, thanks to the principles established by V.I. Lenin, founded on the conspirational habits of pre- Marxist-Russian revolutionary movement. Any breach of these principles is termed deviation and is usually dealt with by purging the deviators. The concept is termed deviationism. It characterises the deviation of individuals or of particular group from the line of political and personal behaviour, through and action, prescribed by the party leadership. just what constitutes a deviation is decided by whichever group at the head of the party is the most powerful at any given time.

In communist terminology deviationism presuppose the existence of an institutionalised and fundamentally inviolable truth from which it is not

permissible to deviate. The postulates of party discipline and "party unity", whose axiomatic validity dates back at least as far the 10th Party Congress ( March 1921), are based on this assumption. The subjugation of the deviationists, their capitulation and their disavowal belong to the conditions of existence of every communist party as long as it acts on the premise that its own opinion is simply identical with the truth. This explains why morally defective and often even criminal qualities are ascribed to all manifestations of deviationism, and why fairness and respect for the opinions of those who think differently are inconceivable in terms of inner party struggle.

### **The Concept of Democratic Centralism**

At a superficial level the communist party's approach towards deviators seems to be at variance with the concept of **democratic centralism**, an undisputed canon for communists word over.

The commonly held interpretation of democratic centralism is that free discussion and criticism by party members of every proposal are part of the decision making process. On the other hand, every resolution passed by a majority is uniformly carried out by all members. This means that minorities which have been outvoted by the majority must abandon their views; they are forbidden to form factions or to agitate for rejected proposals.

But the authoritarian streak in V.I.Lenin was to lay undue stress in one aspect along of the concept, at the cost of the other. Centralism appealed to his conspirational outlook, democracy naturally took a back seat. Under Lenin's influence the communist international<sup>1</sup> defined democratic centralism as follows:

**"The main principles of democratic centralism are the election of the upper body by the lower; the absolute compulsory nature of the decisions of the upper body for the lower; and the existence of an authoritative party centre, as the undisputed directing institution of party life from one congress to another."**

Democratic centralism was then recognised as a fundamental organisational principles by all non communist parties which joined the Comintern.

We thus find that there is not much of a contradiction between the communist party's intolerance of deviation and the Marxist cannon of democratic centralism.

Through this study, the present author would like to take off from the above outlined premises and advance a radically different view: **that the problem of political dissent is inherent in communist Governments.**

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1. Second Congress, 1920.



I would now like to explore this idea a bit further. It was earlier mentioned that the term "**deviationism**" slapped on dissent, presupposes the existence of an inviolable truth from which it is not permissible to deviate. This truth is Marxism- Leninism. Yet any communist Government is bound to confront new situations requiring new policies as well as fresh interpretation of their doctrine. But when a communist party shifts its line, there will always be a group of members who tries to hold on to the earlier position. They are termed as 'deviators'. The label of dissent is thus entirely relative and depends on where the dissenter stands in relation to the official party line. Both Lenin and his successor Stalin, welcomed dissent as an opportunity to rid the party of undesirable or undisciplined elements.

The author has taken a conscious decision to locate the study within the period 1917 to 1930. The October revolution of 1917 was a monumental event in the annals of world history. On November 7 that year, the revolution about which Marxists around the world had dreamt about for decades, was fashioned into reality, by the Bolsheviks in backward, primitive Czarist Russia. On the afternoon of the uprising, Vladimir Lenin, its architect addressed a meeting of the Petrograd soviet and said: "Comrades, the workers and peasants revolution, about the necessity of which the Bolsheviks have always spoken, has been accomplished." Thus in these few simple words, did

he announce the coming into being of the singular event which was to alter the course of world history.

The year 1930 on the other hand, heralds the beginning of an epoch when the nascent communist Republic had overcome its teething problem and had surrendered itself to the will of a single party, nay individual.

Between these two years was unravelled the events which the present author proposes to study by addressing it as a Marxist problematic. Shorn of excessive cliches and verbiage, it is thus stated:

1. **Marxism as it evolved in practice under the leadership of V.I. Lenin, the father of the Russian revolution, established the practice of one-party rule.**
2. **Any breach of Marxist principles is termed as deviation. Both Lenin and his successor Stalin held that dissenters be purged.**
3. **But paradoxically, due to the rigidity of the doctrine, dissent or opposition became inherent in the movement.**

Tracing the evolution of political dissent within the nation down the ages, is a fascinating enterprise. And for an avid student of politics, subjecting dissonance within a monolith like the Soviet Communist party to the rigours of scholarship, has many rewards. To begin with, he learns that no political

ideology, however, well thought of, can claim itself to be universal truth. No two men ever agreed on everything under the sun. And though designed to be a regimented monolith with unquestioning adherence expected of its rank and file, by its every nature, even the Soviet Communist party inherited dissent.

By dissolving the Constituent Assembly (1920) in which they had secured no more than a quarter of the votes, the Bolsheviks squandered their one chance to accommodate political opposition as a legally sanctioned entity. From this first rupture with anything resembling true democracy, all other evils were to follow and the seeds were sown for the eventual disintegration of the Union. The terror machinery installed by Stalin, about which we've earlier quoted Leon Trotsky, also played no mean role in eliminating potential opponents who refused to 'play ball'.

## Chapter I

# **An Outline of the Evolution of Political Opposition Within the Nation State**

### **The English Tradition**

In antiquity and the Middle Ages, the very designation of a party as *statis* or *factio* was an expression of disapproval. There could be no room for an opposition to grow so long as the formation of political parties was viewed with hostility.

It thus comes as no surprise that it was only with the coming of age of the modern parliamentary system in England that an opposition could develop. When the crown in England no longer found itself in conflict with the whole of the Parliament, but was supported by a majority group within Parliament, the minority was forced to organize itself in opposition to them. In this way the opposition became the functional equivalent of Parliament.

One of the first men to work to get the notion of an opposition its practical organisation was Henry St. John Bolingbroke (1658 - 1751). While the government under the Whig leader Sir Robert Walpole pursued a course of

pragmatic policy making with support from majorities of varying composition, held together in part by patronage and corruption, the opposition led by Bolingbroke strove to develop a political theory.<sup>1</sup>

Bolingbroke opposed the Wings not because he wanted similar rights for the Tories, but because he was convinced that Walpole's way of governing in itself ran counter to the spirit of British constitution. Furthermore, Bolingbroke was not hoping to organize what would have been the first political party in the modern sense, but rather to create the last party in English history. A nation loyal to the constitution and rallied around a patriotic King was to make all future factions superfluous.

Bolingbroke's activities were in no way based on any clear notion of alternating governments as a recognised institution. Moreover, discrimination against organised parties was still very strong at the time. Even the Marquess of Halifax, one of the first men in England to devote himself to the theory and practice of party organisation, declared in 1684 that even the best party was "only

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<sup>1</sup> Bolingbroke, H.S. *The Idea of a Patriot King, New ed*, London 1965 p 44.

a sort of conspiracy against the rest of the nation".<sup>2</sup>

Towards the end of the 18th century, the Tories, most of whom were still hostile to the notion of opposition when forced out of office, adopted the attitude of the liberals.

The watershed year was 1834, when the rules of the parliamentary system in England is believed to have been firmly established. The stage was set when William IV dismissed Lord Melbourne against the will of the parliamentary majority, a move which proved to be a mistake since his successor, Sir Robert Peel, failed to gain majority support and Melbourne was returned to office. Nonetheless, the principle of an opposition and of alternating governments was still far from being assured at this point, since there was no two-party system in the period between the great parliamentary reform bill (1831-67).

Instead, the various Prime Ministers formed governments based on varying majority groups and sometimes even on minorities. Things changed in 1867 when the franchise was extended to a more wider section to the population. This reform favoured the growth of lightly organised parties, result was that during the course of many changes of government under Disraeli and Gladstone, the

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<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Works of George Savile, First Marquess of Halifax*. Oxford, 1912, p. 225.

principle of party government came to be established.

Then in the 20th century, it became customary for the defeated parties to form their own "Shadow Cabinets". His Majesty's loyal Opposition became His Majesty's organised opposition. The development was capped by the passage of the Ministers of the Crown Act of 1937, which allotted the leader of the opposition an annual salary.

### **Organised Opposition in Europe**

The first organised opposition in the European continent was set up in France after 1815 by the ultra Royalists, who were dissatisfied with the relatively liberal representative system of Louis XVIII. Like the Tories in England under George II, who collaborated to some extent with the heir to the throne<sup>3</sup>, in order to make certain of their aims the ultras, as they were called, conspired with the comte d' Artois, as they were called conspired with the Comted' the later Charles X. This was the first major occurrence of opposition on the continent.

Fundamentally hostile to the principles of parliamentary majority rule, the ultras did not hesitate to exploit them in order to press their claim to government

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<sup>3</sup> The later George III.

power. They were successful and the King had to yield reluctantly in 1821. Yet since no system of organised parties was set up, it was impossible to make a clear distinction between the groups which supported the government and those which opposed it. During the July Monarchy (1830-48), in particular, it was common place for Prime Ministers to rule with floating majorities. It was not until 1838 that a number of groups first formed an organised opposition called a coalition.

The first opposition in Germany came into being among the liberals in the Fourth German *Landtage*<sup>4</sup>, where they sometimes proclaimed the right of opposition, as did Mathias Fohrenback, for instance, in 1825 in the *Landtage* of Baden. Parliament at large still regarded itself as the opposition. In the German Parliament the *Kammer*,<sup>5</sup> was so impotent in the face of irresponsible governments that the opposition resorted to extremist language becoming all the more radical the less chance it had of influencing government policy.

But in France, it was recognised right at the beginning of the July Monarchy that the role of the opposition was not merely to criticise, but also to put forward constructive proposals. This possibility was only rarely open to the

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<sup>4</sup> State Parliament.

<sup>5</sup> Lower House.



opposition in Germany before the revolutionary year 1848.

Structural opposition<sup>6</sup> was not represented at all in the German *Landtage* and brought only a small contingent to the revolutionary parliament of 1848.

Even in France, it took the helm for only a short while in 1848-49 and fell in the face of reactionary forces. The end came with Napoleon III's overthrow of the Second Republic. Marx and Engels viewed this as indisputable proof of the political incompetence of the Jacobin opposition.

It was of decisive importance for the more moderate opposition in Germany that the revolutionary movement symbolised by the 1848 Frankfurt Assembly ran aground and that the constitutional struggle of 1862 in Prussia, the strongest of the German states, ended in victory for Bismark. While this made it easier for the national liberals to pursue an opportunistic policy after the foundation of the Reich, it also left behind a vacuum among the forces of the opposition, which was swiftly occupied by the Socialist groups. Thus by the end of the 19th century the Germans had succeeded in organising the strongest Socialist Opposition in Europe.

In those states where liberal opposition leaders came to power for the first

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<sup>6</sup> An opposition which sought to dismantle the present structure and create a new one in its place.

time in 1848, new opposition groups sprang up both in the various parties of the right which had been forced out of government and also in the extremist socialist parties. Even the French ultra royalists, when they took over power in 1821, found that they could be menaced by an opposition on the right.

The last significant structural opposition in Great Britain was the doing of the Jacobites, who refused to accept William of Orange after the "glorious revolution" of 1688.<sup>7</sup> After the new rulers had firmly established themselves, this opposition gradually faded away. In Belgium there were the Orangists, who refused to accept separation from the kingdom of the Netherlands, and in the Kingdom of Italy the clericals, who could not come to terms with the abolition of the Papal states.

Structural opposition arose with the growth of fascist parties in the period after World War I. As time went on, it advocated the overthrow of parliamentary democracy more and more openly and actually succeeded in temporarily establishing itself in the governments of certain countries.

In the second half of the 19th century the socialist parties took over the role of structural opposition in nearly all countries. This happened in the main

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<sup>7</sup> R.A. Dahl (ed) *Political Opposition in Western Democracies*, London 1966 p.102.

after Marx and Engels had stopped recommending co-operation between communists and bourgeois Jacobins. Not until the beginning of the 20th century did the socialist parties begin to accept bourgeois regime.

### **Adoption of new tactics**

As the forces of opposition in Parliament grew stronger, it adopted new tactics in its struggle. Primarily this meant parliamentary obstruction, a tactic favoured in particular by national minorities<sup>8</sup> and by extremist minorities, but also used by conservative veto groups. This new opposition tactic led to parliamentary reforms in many countries : the quorum needed to introduce a motion was enlarged, the rights of the individual members of Parliament were restricted and wider disciplinary sanctions were put at the disposal of the chairman of Parliament. But it is still possible, in the US Senate for instance, where procedural rules are more elastic, to make use of the filibuster to delay the passage of a Bill for as long as its opponents desire.

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<sup>8</sup> For example the Irish members in the House of Commons.

## **Types of Protest Groups**

Protest groups dissatisfied with the status quo can organise in various ways to voice their demands. Some are content to come forward as interest groups which maintain no contact with political parties. Others work closely with parties, eg the trade unions in Britain, Norway, India. The strategy of such disjointed opposition groups depends on a number of factors which can be specified as follows:

- a. The system of government. In a dualistic system, such as the presidential system of the USA or the council system in Switzerland, influence is most successfully exercised through pressure groups. On the other hand in parliamentary systems, especially where there is proportional representation, a dissatisfied group's chances of influencing the government are increased if it co-operates with one of the recognised parties.
- b. The electoral system. Proportional representation decreases the concentration and distinctiveness of the opposition as a political party.
- c. The organisation of Parliament in the so-called debating parliaments, as for instance in Great Britain, where most decisions are taken by the

assembly as a whole, the opposition tries to compete with the ruling party.

In working parliaments, like that in the USA where most legislative business is transacted in committee, it is more customary for the opposition to co-operate with the government.

- d. The party system. Opposition parties are forced to adopt different strategies according to whether they are confronted with a two party or multi-party system.
- e. The degree of fragmentation in a society, which determines the predominant patterns for resolving conflicts. The number of conflicts which can possibly overlap, and the degree to which subsystems are isolated in society, determine how strong the opposition in various political systems will be and what levers it can use.
- f. The economic prosperity of society under a given political system. In periods of prosperity the government can usually maintain its electoral lead over the opposition or the opposition parties.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> R.A.Dahl (ed) *Political Opposition in Western Democracies*, London 1966, pp 348-350.

## Chapter II

### Victorious Bolshevism

#### **The Formation of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party.**

The origin of the Russian Communist party can be traced back to a tiny meeting of nine men who, got together at Minsk in March 1898, and founded the "Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party."<sup>1</sup>

The Congress lasted three days- March 1-3, 1898. It appointed a central committee and decided to form a party organisation. But before anything else could be done, police arrested all the principal participants, so that virtually nothing remained of this initial effort. In the 1890s embryonic Marxist groups made their appearance in Russia, and the year 1895 saw the foundation in Petersburg of a League of Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class. Among the members of this league was a young 25 year-old enthusiast by name Vladimir Ulyanov.<sup>2</sup>

Ulyanov's activities soon resulted in his exile to Siberia. On his release,

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<sup>1</sup> E.H.Carr. *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-23*, London 1964 p.3

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* p.5

he went to Geneva where with a group of friends, and the co-operation of the reigning Marxist theoretician Plekhanov, Ulyanov initiated moves in Geneva to publish a popular weekly named *Iskra*.

By the middle of 1902, *Iskra* was able to lay before its readers a draft party programme which was a blend of the views of the milder and more cautious Plekhanov, and those of the bolder and more uncompromising Ulyanov, who had by then changed his name to Lenin.

Early in 1903, Preparations were made to summon a party Congress to meet in Brussels in July of that year.

### **The Split Into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.**

As a result of the preparatory work done by *Iskra* group, the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party met in July and August 1903 under the chairmanship of Plekhanov; first in Brussels and then in London. It was the real foundation Congress of the Party, but it also saw the famous split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks which widened and deepened until it led to complete formal separation after 1912.<sup>3</sup> The Congress was attended by

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid* p.26

representatives of 25 recognised social democratic organisations, each having 2 votes except the Jewish workers' organisation, the Bund, which had 3.

The most important pieces of business before the Congress were the adoption of a party programme and of statute.

The draft programme submitted to the congress began with the orthodox Marxist argument that the relations of productions have now evolved to a point where bourgeois capitalism has become incompatible with further progress.

The practical and specifically Russian part of the programme related to immediate aims. These fell into three groups- political demands (including universal suffrage, freedom of speech etc.), economic demands of the workers (including the eight - hour day, abolition of child labour etc.) and economic demands of the peasants. The programme ended by demanding the overthrow of autocracy and the calling of a Constituent Assembly freely elected by the whole people. The programme was debated in detail and minor amendments made.

The debate on the party statute ran at once into deep water and eventually paved the way for the split of the party into the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions.

The Mensheviks repudiated Lenin's conception of a narrow elitist party



dominated by professional revolutionaries and instead, advocated formation of a broad organisation to which anyone could belong who subscribed to its official programme and assisted in the work of one of its committee's.

They correctly interpreted Lenin's attempt to control the membership of the major party committees as deliberately designed to give him leadership of the entire movement. They succeeded in defeating him on the organisational issue, but the departure of seven delegates altered the situation to Lenin's advantage. He used the majority to put through his own candidates for the central committee, Lenin termed his opponents as Mensheviks. At first this was a pejorative term, but within a year it had been generally accepted as signifying the faction led by Martov and Akselrod while Lenin and his supporter's came to be known as Bolsheviks.

The political persuasion of the Mensheviks was not characterised by hard and fast doctrine. Broadly speaking, it consisted of attitudes at variance with those of the Bolsheviks on three subjects:

- a. **The organisation of the party**
- b. **The nature of the revolution against autocracy.**



c. Political morality.<sup>4</sup>

The Mensheviks developed their position only gradually and with some oscillation, but from 1906 until 1914, they upheld them more or less consistently.

### The Rift Widens

After the split, the first serious dispute between the opposite factions took place in 1904. During the widespread political unrest in late 1904, the Mensheviks proposed the so called *zemstvo* campaign, the intention of which was that workers should demonstrate for militant action in the matter of democratic reforms outside the meeting halls of the *zemstvo*, the local government assemblies where middle class groups came together. The demonstrators were to avoid in making excessive demands or provoking disorders which might drive the progressive bourgeois to the Right.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks, however, no longer considered the bourgeois as a potentially progressive class.

They therefore repudiated the *zemstvo* campaign and instead called on the proletariat prepare for the decisive battle against the autocracy by means of a

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<sup>4</sup> Marxism, Communism and Western Society, Vol 5 New York 1913, p.405

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national uprising.<sup>5</sup>

A few months later, when the revolution of 1905 had erupted they continued to place primary emphasis on military action by the working class. Additionally, Lenin proclaimed the peasantry to be a revolutionary class and advocated the formation of a "revolutionary - democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry",<sup>6</sup> which was to introduce democracy and supervise the election of a Constituent Assembly. In theory, Lenin still claimed that Russia must undergo a bourgeois phase, but he did not expect the middle class to play a critical role in introducing it.

Menshevik strategy during the 1905 revolution was more complicated as well as less consistent and unified than that of the Bolsheviks. At a conference in April - May 1905, the Mensheviks refused to condemn the idea of an armed uprising but at the same time, maintained that extensive agitational and organisational work was necessary before such action could be contemplated. They also rejected the notion that the RSDRP, "the party of the most extreme revolutionary opposition", should participate in provisional government, which

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid* p. 408

<sup>6</sup> Lenin CW, Vol IX, p. 53

is what Lenin's slogan about a "revolutionary democratic dictatorship" implied. Until the autumn of 1905, most Mensheviks subscribed to the broad strategy formulated by Martov, which was to encourage creation of a network of organs of revolutionary self government throughout Russia in the hope that these would ultimately amass enough strength to launch an assault on the central Government. Thus in their political strategy the Mensheviks were actually ideologically more puristic than the Bolsheviks.

By the end of 1905, however, several Mensheviks like F.I. Dan and A.S. Martynov in St. Petersburg had become so intoxicated by the revolutionary fever in the capital that they advocated policies barely distinguishable from those of the Bolsheviks. At this time activists from the two factions also collaborated widely. But Martov and Akselrod, the chief spokesmen of Menshevism, did not share these extremist views and continued to insist on the bourgeois stage of the revolution. After the government had suppressed the armed uprising in Moscow in December 1905, Dan and Martynov retreated from their militant position and thereafter the Mensheviks were united in renouncing the tactic of armed uprising and in looking upon the middle class with markedly less hostility than the Bolsheviks.

## Attempts at Unification Flounder

In April 1906, the IVth (so-called "unification") Congress was convoked in Stockholm for the purpose of healing the split in the party. But real unity was not attained. The two groups remained far apart on several major issues, most of which touched either on the organisational question or on the tactics to be employed during the revolutionary crises.<sup>7</sup> The Stockholm gathering was dominated by the Mensheviks who had succeeded in election 62 delegates as against 46 of their rivals.<sup>8</sup>

The official resolutions reflected the Mensheviks inclination to shun ultra-radical positions. A majority of the delegates even voted to participate in the elections to the Duma, a representative body of limited powers chosen by a restricted electorate.

From the Mensheviks standpoint the Duma could be useful as a tribune from which to publicise radical ideas and as an institution that would inevitably clash with the government, thus intensifying the struggle between the opposition and the autocracy. Many Bolsheviks, however, rejected participation on the grounds

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<sup>7</sup> F.I. Dan *The Origins of Bolshevism*, New York, 1964 p. 49

<sup>8</sup> *ibid* p. 50

that existence of a representative body would mislead people into believing that democracy could be established by peaceful means. Lenin argued that the Constitutional Democratic party (known as the Cadets), the middle class party likely to dominate the Duma, would join with the Tsar and crush the revolutionary movement. However, he did ultimately vote, together with a minority of the Bolsheviks, to participate in the elections.<sup>9</sup>

At the Stockholm Congress, the Mensheviks also endorsed "municipalisation" of the land (ie.its administration by locally elected peasant bodies) as against the Bolshevik proposal of "nationalisation". In addition, the Mensheviks singled out agitation amongst the masses and not preparation for an armed uprising as the basic task of the party. But a new conflict emerged at the Congress that bore little relation to political theory or strategy. It centred on party ethics, an issue which from then on assumed growing importance. Ever since 1903, Menshevik leaders had been appalled by Lenin's ruthlessness and indiscriminate violations of party statutes and common rules of political behaviour.

In 1906 they were shocked even more by the Bolshevik's "partisan

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<sup>9</sup> ibid p. 52

attacks", armed robberies of banks and government institutions for the purpose of procuring funds for the cause. The Mensheviks, supported by a surprisingly large number of Bolsheviks, passed a resolution prohibiting these "expropriations". But the Leninists paid no heed. In September 1908, Martov wrote in exasperation to his friend and Menshevik comrade Pavel Axelrod: "I confess that even nominal involvement with this bandit gang is a mistake".<sup>10</sup> To Martov and his colleagues Bolshevik conduct compromised the entire movement. However much the Mensheviks yearned for revolution, they were not willing to abjure the canons of traditional morality to promote it.

In the meantime the Bolsheviks put their financial gains to effective use. By spending money liberally, they elected a majority of the delegates to the Vth London Congress in 1907. Although "expropriations" were condemned again, a series of Bolshevik resolutions were passed. The period of Menshevik supremacy within Russian Social Democracy had come to an end.

### **The Final Split of the Warring Factions.**

By mid - 1907, the Menshevik organisation in Russia had virtually

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<sup>10</sup> Dmitri, Volkogonov, *Lenin, Life and Legacy*, London 1994 p. 85

disintegrated in the face of the ubiquitous counter-revolution. Many party members were exiled or imprisoned, large number of party workers succumbed to apathy; and several leaders emigrated to the West and tried to reconstitute their forces. In 1908, the Mensheviks abroad founded the *Golos Sotsiat Demokrata*, which became the movement's chief organ.<sup>11</sup> Inside Russia three scattered centers of Menshevism remained. In Georgia, St. Petersburg as well as in the trade unions.

After 1908, a new issue in the war between the factions rose to the fore, "liquidationism". Lenin accused his opponents of favouring the elimination of the underground structure of the party and, indeed, of the party as a whole. There is virtually no evidence to sustain this charge. It is true that the Mensheviks as a group emphasised legal work; but they did not repudiate the idea of an underground organisation. Basically, the controversy over "liquidationism" was another version of the organisational conflict that had raged in 1903 and 1904. The Mensheviks wanted to broaden the membership of the movement as much as possible; the Bolsheviks sought to maintain the party as an elite corps professional revolutionaries.

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<sup>11</sup> Russian Social Democracy : The Menshevik Movement, Stanford, 1968 p. 38.



Nevertheless, between 1907 and 1912 attempts at conciliation continued to be made, but they did not yield a permanent settlement. In 1912, Lenin convened a meeting of his closest followers, who at best represented one-fifth of the membership of the movement, in Prague. After declaring themselves the "Vith conference of the Russian Social - Democratic Labour Party" they expelled the "Menshevik liquidators".<sup>12</sup> The party was now formally split and competition between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks for working class support intensified. Bolshevik militancy tended to appeal to the many peasants who moved to larger cities after the onset of industrial prosperity in 1910. Between 1912 and 1914, the Leninists defeated their rivals in several elections in legal workers organisations, which had previously been centers of Menshevik strength.<sup>13</sup>

Given this improvement in Bolshevik fortunes, Lenin was naturally not interested in ending the rift. During the first half of 1914, the international Socialist Bureau (ISB) tried to reunite the eleven factions in the Russians movement and in July it convoked a meeting of representatives from each. Contending that the differences were not serious enough to justify a schism, the

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid* p. 102

<sup>13</sup> *ibid* p. 104

ISB proposed a set of conditions for reuniting the party which were fair to every group. The Mensheviks as well as eight other factions accepted the recommendations. The Bolsheviks took the lead in rejecting them, an action which the ISB intended to condemn officially at the Congress of the Second (Socialist) International, scheduled to meet in Vienna in August. The outbreak of World War I precluded convocation of the Congress and thus ended the attempts to unify Russian Marxism.

### **Communist Interpretation of Menshevism**

Probably no movement has suffered so much abuse and distortion at the hands of Communist writers as the Menshevik Party. The process of distortion began with Lenin, who harboured a passionate hatred for those Marxists who challenged his principles and tactics and threatened his personal authority. Lenin rarely gave Martov, Akselrod and their colleagues credit for advocating ideas that deserved to be taken seriously. Rather, they were "intrepid opportunists" who had jettisoned their commitment to the revolutionary class struggle and intended to liquidate the illegal party structure. During World War I, he classified them as "social-chauvinists" and "petty-bourgeois democrats using near-socialist

phraseology",<sup>14</sup> and after his seizure of power in 1917 as traitors to the proletarian cause.

On the whole, Soviet historians have echoed Lenin's assessment of the Mensheviks. In the official history of the CPSU, the Mensheviks are always depicted as opportunists who persistently fought against Lenin's revolutionary programme. Historically, they are said to have inherited the mantle of the "economists", the radicals who during the 1890s and early 20th century favoured economic rather than political struggle against the autocracy. They are accused of having regarded the RSDRP as a mere apparatus for propaganda and of having been the Russian counterparts of the West European revisionists.

There are, however, exceptions to the official interpretation. For example, shortly after the 20th Party Congress in 1956, *Voprosy Istorii*, the major historical journal in the then Soviet Union, ran an editorial calling for more sophisticated and truthful studies of Russia's past. The article, written by E.N. Burdzhhalov, the assistant editor, singled out the Mensheviks as a subject especially worthy of reassessment. On another occasion Burdzhhalov urged historians to give an accurate account of the "revolutionary" spirit of Menshevism in the pre-1917 era.

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<sup>14</sup> Lenin CW Vol XXV pp. 385-388.

But in March 1957 the Soviet Government, in a savage attack on *Voprosy Istorii*, accused it of "failing to offer a principled Leninist criticism of the divisive and opportunistic tactics of the Mensheviks" So ended an isolated attempt to give a truthful portrayal of the Mensheviks during the Communist era.

## Chapter III

# An Outline of Dissent Within the Bolshevik Movement

### The Pre-Revolutionary Period

The first serious deviation in the Bolshevik movement following Lenin's organisation of his separate faction called the Bolsheviks within the All-Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDRP) came in the year 1907-09. The cause of the split was whether to participate in the elections to the Duma.

When Lenin decided to do so, he was opposed by two left-wing groups, the *otzovists* or recallists in Moscow and the ultimalists in St. Petersburg. They felt that participation in the Duma meant a betrayal of the revolutionary principle. In 1909 Lenin put an end to the first deviators by purging them from the Bolshevik faction, although they still remained within the looser limits, of the RSDRP as a whole. Between 1912 and 1917 most of them came back to the Bolshevik party, only to contribute again to a new series of deviations within the party's ranks after it had taken power.

After getting rid of the left-wing Bolsheviks in 1909, Lenin had to contend with a growing right-wing deviation the *primirentsy*<sup>1</sup>, who wanted to

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1. Conciliators.

restore unity with the Mensheviks and pursue more gradualist revolutionary tactics. This rightist tendency was broken up by 1912, partly because the Okhrana<sup>2</sup> made a point of arresting the more moderate leaders such as A.I. Rykov and thus encouraging the split between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks.

A third pre-revolutionary deviation, this time towards the left again developed in 1915. A emigre group called the "Left Communists" and led by N.I. Bukharin, G.L. Pyatakov, and F.E. Dzerzhinsky debated with Lenin on the nationality issue. They called for complete proletarian internationalism which would ignore all differences of nationality in Russia, while Lenin set forth a programme of national self-determination as a tactical device to secure the support of minority nationalists<sup>3</sup>.

### **The period from 1917 to 1924**

The February revolution of 1917, by initiating free political life in Russia for the first time, opened the field for a variety of contending viewpoints within the Bolshevik party. A left-wing group in Petrograd led by V.M. Molotov and A.H. Shliapnikov came out for revolutionary opposition to the provisional government and to the continuation of war. A larger group headed by Stalin

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2. Tsarist secret police.

3. Marxism, Communism and Western Society, Vol. VI, New York, 1973, p.473.

and L.B. Kamenev took over the leadership of the party in March 1917, advocating conditional support of provisional government.

At first Lenin's call for the overthrow of the provisional government in his famous "April Thesis" was supported only by the small left wing of the party, though he soon won over many supporters from the centre, among them Stalin, together with some of the pre-revolutionary deviators and many left-wing Mensheviks<sup>4</sup>. The revolutionary line was opposed by a rightist deviation which included Kamenev, Rykov and G.E. Zinoviev. This group resisted all the steps leading up to the October Revolution and Zinoviev and Kamenev even publicly opposed plans to seize power.

From 1918 to 1927 the history of deviation in Soviet Russia consists of a long series of opposition movements from leftists who regarded the practical measures of Lenin's (and later Stalin's) leadership as betrayals of the revolutionary principle.

The first such leftist opposition was prompted by Lenin's decision in January 1918 to make peace with Germany. Lenin was opposed in this by almost all the people who had supported him in 1917, except Stalin and a few others. In contrast, the rightists of 1917 all backed Lenin. The outcome of the Brest-Litovsk controversy was a narrow victory for Lenin.

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4. Trotsky, Radek, Rakovsky, Sokolnikov etc.

Following the ratification of the treaty the Bukharin group formally organised as the faction of "Left Communists" and started their own publications. They now began to attack Lenin's policy in domestic affairs. At the same time the Left-Communists held talks with the Left-Socialist Revolutionaries, who were equally critical of the Brest-Litovsk treaty. The object of these discussions was to remove Lenin as the head of the government, form a new coalition and resume the war. Because of their sense of party loyalty, the Left-Communists backed out of the plan, leaving the Left Socialist Revolutionaries alone to attempt their abortive uprising of July 1918 and then suffer complete suppression.

Later on an even sharper opposition of trade-union officials arose in 1920 under the leadership of Shliapnikov and the feminist Welfare Commissar Aleksandra Kollantoi. This group, the so-called Workers' Opposition, argued for the independence of the trade unions from the communist party organisation and for direct trade - union control of all industry.

With the rise of the Workers' Opposition and a new split between Trotsky and Lenin on the issue of labour and industry, the Communist Party experienced a period of wide-ranging factional dissension from the autumn of 1920 until the 10th Party Congress in March 1921. This was known as the "Trade-Union Controversy"<sup>5</sup>.

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5. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin, Life and Legacy*, London 1994, p.63.



These internal party disputes reached their peak in the open and heated competition between factions for the selection of provincial delegates to the 10th Party Congress. When the Congress convened, however, Leninists had a comfortable majority. Since the Leftists were moreover seriously embarrassed by the Kronstadt revolt, Lenin was able to secure enough support at the congress not only to initiate his cautious New Economic Policy (NEP) but also to suppress the ultra-Left opposition. The congress specifically condemned the Worker's Opposition as a "petty - bourgeois anarcho-syndicalist deviation" and banned organised factions within the party on the grounds that they threatened party unity.

Lenin's illness from May 1922 until his death in January 1924 provided the setting for one of the most serious and consequential episodes of factional controversy within the party leadership. After Lenin's first stroke in May 1922, the majority of the Politburo formed a collective leadership headed by Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin. Their main objective was to prevent Trotsky from succeeding to Lenin's power even though he was second only to Lenin in popularity. When Lenin returned to work briefly in the autumn of 1922, he found much to criticise in the work of the Politburo, particularly its weakness in economic policy and its excessive harshness with regard to the national minorities, especially in Soviet Georgia. It was the latter issue above all which caused Lenin in his "Testament" of December 1922 - January 1923

to recommend the removal of Stalin<sup>6</sup>. Lenin proposed to Trotsky a plan to move against Stalin but suffered his last, totally crippling stroke in March 1923 and was thus prevented from implementing this plan; Trotsky then failed to act.

### **The period after Lenin's death until the fall of Bukharin**

Following Lenin's death on January 21, 1924 the party leadership intensified its call for unify and "iron discipline". At the 13th party congress in May 1924 Trotsky gave up trying to defend himself and conceded: "The party is always right". In the autumn, however, he published *Lessons of October*, a critique of the role played by Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1917 and of their alleged misdirection of German Communists in their abortive revolt of 1923. The party leadership replied with a violent press campaign against "Trotskyism". In the course of these polemics Stalin expounded his new theory of "**Socialism in one country**" counterposed to Trotsky's theory of **permanent revolution**. The episode ended in January 1925 when Trotsky was removed from his position as Commissar for War.

In the middle of 1925 another split occurred in the party leadership, when Zinoviev and Kamenev broke with Stalin and attempted to challenge his

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6. Marxism, Communism and Western Society, Vol. VI, New York, 1973, p.474.

control of the party organisation. At the 14th Party Congress<sup>7</sup> they tried to unseat Stalin, who in turn crushed this "new opposition".

During Zinoviev's struggle with Stalin, Trotsky had done nothing. Zinoviev was his arch-enemy and he may even have thought of supporting Stalin against him. However, by the spring of 1926 the Trotskyists and the Zinovievists were sufficiently fearful of Stalin's power to form a coalition the United Opposition bloc. In 1926 they drew up a declaration - "the platform of thirteen" - to summarise their case against the party leadership<sup>8</sup>.

A crisis in diplomatic relations with Britain, which led to a war scare that began in the spring of 1927 and persisted through the summer, strengthened the hand of the party leadership. It responded to the opposition with increased vehemence, and by August it was threatening to expel the opposition leaders from the party. Soon the central committee expelled Trotsky and Zinoviev from their seats. They responded on the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution by leading the last public demonstration of opposition in Soviet Russia. The demonstration was broken up by the state security Service (GPU), and the opposition leaders - the so-called Trotsky - Zinoviev bloc, were finally expelled from the party. Faced with these sanctions, the opposition collapsed. Zinovev, Kamenev and their personal followers from the 1925 - Leningrad group immediately recanted,

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7. December 1925.

8. Marxism, Communism and Western Society, Vol. VI, New York, 1973, p.475.

and in 1928 they were readmitted to the party. The Trotskyists were turned over to the police for banishment to remote parts of the country. Trotsky himself was sent in January 1928 to Alma Ata in Central Asia, where he remained until Stalin decided to deport him from the country a year later<sup>9</sup>.

After the destruction of the Left opposition, Stalin began to manoeuvre against the men with whom he collectively shared the top party leadership - Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky. His evident strategy was to make them appear deviators by changing his own policies and attacking the old policies of the NEP, to which his rivals still clung. Essentially Stalin borrowed the programme of the now discredited Left opposition. When these questions became critical in the summer of 1928 Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky therefore opposed them all and the so-called "Right opposition" came into being.

Sources of Rightist sympathy were the trade unions, headed by Tomsky, and the Comintern under Bukharin's leadership. In the autumn and winter of 1928-29 the Stalinists moved to undermine the position of the Right opposition by working from the lower echelons of the party apparatus. Open condemnation of the Rightist leaders was gradually extended to the top party groups and finally carried into the public press during the spring and summer of 1929. Tomsky was then removed from the trade unions and Bukharin from the Comintern, while Rykov was replaced as chairman of the Council of Peoples Commissars by Molotov in 1930.

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9.     ibid p.476.

## Chapter - IV

### **The Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly**

#### **Bolshevik support for the Convocation of the Constituent Assembly**

After resolving the crisis in the Bolshevik leadership over coalition with the Mensheviks and the Right Socialist Revolutionaries, the regime had to face a new problem. The Bolsheviks had to decide whether elections to a Constituent Assembly should be allowed. They were faced with the question of coming to terms with an elected body whose composition could be radically different from that of the Soviet.

But the demand for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly has been one of the main planks of the programme of the Russian Social Democratic Labour party since its inception. Since 1905, Lenin had repeatedly referred to this demand as one of the three pillars of Bolshevism. The other two were the nationalization of land and the 8-hour day.

This slogan was put forward even more immediately and urgently between the February and October revolutions. The Bolsheviks pressed constantly for a Constituent Assembly to be called and the delay in doing so was one of the many charges they laid at the door of the provisional government. Again and Again between April and October, Lenin reiterated that the Bolsheviks, and only the Bolsheviks, would ensure its convocation without

delay. They were fighting at the time simultaneously for power for the Soviets and the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. They asserted that unless the Soviets took power the Constituent Assembly would not be convened.

In early April 1917, Lenin set out the Bolshevik attitude to the question of whether the Constituent Assembly should be convened. "Yes" he said, "as soon as possible. But there is only one way to assure its convocation and success, and that is by increasing the number and strength of the Soviets and organizing and arming the working class masses. That is the only guarantee<sup>1</sup>".

On 12-14 (25-27) September he wrote: "Our party alone, an taking power, can secure the constituent Assembly's convocation it will then accuse the other parties of procrastination and will be able to substantiate its accusations<sup>2</sup>".

On 24 September (7 October) the Bolshevik daily *Rabochii Put* accused the Cadets of "secret postponement and sabotage of the Constituent Assembly<sup>3</sup>".

For many months the Bolsheviks had posed the question not of Soviets or Constituent Assembly, but of Soviets *and* Constituent Assembly. In a fiery

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1. V.I. Lenin, *Works*, Vol.24, p.99.

2. *ibid*, Vol.26, p.20.

3. R.P. Browder and A.F. Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government 1917 Documents*, Stanford 1961, Vol.3, p.1695.

speech at the Kerensky convened state council on 7(20) October, Trotsky, leading the Bolshevik faction out of the meeting, said in conclusion: "**Long live an immediate, honest, democratic peace. All land to the people. Long live the Constituent Assembly**"<sup>4</sup>.

On 29 November (12 December), Bukharin, using precedents from English and French history, proposed that once the Constituent Assembly was convoked the Cadets should be expelled from it, and that the Assembly should declare itself a revolutionary convention. Bukharin hoped that in the Assembly, the Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries would command an overwhelming majority, which would give legitimacy to the truncated Assembly.

Trotsky supported Bukharin's plan of action. Stalin argued that Bukharin's tactic would not work. No one suggested the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly.

The fact remains that the Bolsheviks, who campaigned strongly for the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, were completely unprepared for a conflict between the Assembly and the Soviets. At the same time, they were quite clear that the future masters of Russia would be the Soviets, the revolutionary organizations of the proletariat and peasantry. If they did not consider the possibility of conflict between the Constituent Assembly and the

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4. *ibid* p.1129.

Soviet, it was because then it was the provisional government which stood in opposition to both the Soviets and the Constituent Assembly.

### **The Bolsheviks Change Their Stance on the Constituent Assembly**

Immediately after the October revolution, the Bolshevik leadership began to have second thoughts about the Constituent Assembly. While it was true that the demand for the Assembly topped the plank of the Bolsheviks until then, it was equally true that they did not want the Assembly to prove an embarrassment for them.

Lenin had his misgivings about the uncertain prospects of a Bolshevik majority in the elections to the Constituent Assembly. So he sought for the postponement of the elections and initiated moves to lower the voting age to 18 years, revise the electoral list and outlaw the Cadets and Kornilov supporters, all of which he believed would benefit the Bolsheviks.

But the majority of his colleagues were of the view that postponement was unacceptable, especially since the Bolsheviks had often reproached the provisional government with this very crime.

"Nonsense!" objected Lenin. "Deeds are important, not words.

In relation to the provisional government, the Constituent Assembly represented, or might have represented, progress; In relation to the regime of the Soviets, and with the existing



electoral lists, it will inevitably mean retrogression. Why is it inconvenient to postpone it? Will it be convenient if the Constituent Assembly turns out to be composed of a Cadet - Menshevik - Socialist Revolutionary alliance? You are wrong; it's clearly a mistake which can prove very costly. Let us hope that the revolution will not pay for it with its life<sup>5</sup>.

In the event, the Bolsheviks eventually permitted the elections to be held.

### **The Results of the Elections**

The elections to the constituent Assembly took place over a period of the few weeks. One study gives the following results:

#### *The Break-up of Votes*

Socialist Revolutionaries	15,848,004
Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries	1,286,157
Mensheviks	1,364,826
Cadets	1,986,601
bolsheviks	9,844,637
Others	11,356,651
<b>Total<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>41,686,876</b>

For the seats in the Constituent Assembly of 1917, the archives of the October

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5. L. Trotsky, *On Lenin*, London 1971, p.105-6.

6. O.H. Radkey, *The Elections to the Russian Constituent Assembly of 1917*, New York 1947, p.16-17.

Revolution have assembled a list of 707 deputies, divided into the following groupings:

Socialist Revolutionaries	370
Left Socialist Revolutionaries	40
Bolsheviks	175
Mensheviks	16
Popular Socialists	2
Cadets	17
National groups	86
Unknown	1
<b>Total<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>707</b>

The Socialist Revolutionaries achieved a clear majority both of the popular vote and of the seats in the Assembly, a stunning victory which effectively put paid to the ambitions of the Bolsheviks. While the Bolshevik vote was about a quarter of the total, in some areas they predominated. In the two capitals the Bolshevik vote was four times larger than that of the Socialist Revolutionaries. and nearly 16 times larger than that of the Mensheviks.

Radkey analyses the elections thus:

**"The Bolsheviks had the centre of the country, the big cities, the industrial towns, and the garrisons of the rear. They controlled those sections of the navy most strategically located with reference to Moscow and Petrograd, they even commanded a strong following among the peasants of the central, White Russian, and northwestern regions. The**

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7. *ibid*, p.20.

**Socialist Revolutionaries had the black earth zone, the valley of the Volga, and Siberia, in general they were still the peasants party, though serious defections had taken place. Separatist movements had strength in the Ukraine, along the Baltic, between the Volga and the Urals, and in the Transcaucasus. Menshevism was a spent force every where save in the Transcaucasus, where it was entwined with Georgian nationalism<sup>8</sup>.**

### **The Bolsheviks decide to dissolve the Assembly**

The Right Socialist Revolutionaries domination of the Constituent Assembly came as a serious set back to the Bolsheviks. They feared that the Constituent Assembly might emerge as a rival centre of power and make their regime look illegal. But first the Bolsheviks had to explain to their own flock as to how they came to fare poorly in the elections to the Assembly.

Lenin used a number of arguments for this. First, he said elections were held under an obsolete law that gave undue weight to the Right's among the Socialist Revolutionary candidates. Then he advanced another view which he used to his advantage to seek the dissolution of the Assembly. He pointed out that the Socialist Revolutionary party produced united election lists for the Constituent Assembly in the middle of October 1917, but split in November

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8.       ibid, p.38.

Sverdlov's proposal that the Assembly should endorse the declaration was rejected by 237 votes to 136. This sealed the fate of the Assembly. After one day of existence it was dissolved.

Unlike the disagreement among the Bolshevik leadership on the question of coalition government, the decision to dissolve the Constituent Assembly led to little dissension in the party.

On 13(26) December, *Pravda* published Lenin's 'Theses on the Constituent Assembly' in which final form was given to the Bolshevik tactics. Starting from the principle that "Revolutionary Social Democracy has repeatedly emphasized, every since the beginning of the Revolution of 1917, that a Republic of Soviets is a higher form of democracy than usual bourgeois Republic with a Constituent Assembly", Lenin argued that the election results did not correspond with the actual will of the people.

Since the October revolution the masses had moved further to the left, a change not reflected in the Assembly. The civil war then beginning had "finally brought the class struggle to a head, and destroyed every chance of settling in a formally democratic way the very acute problems with which history has confronted the people of Russia". If therefore the Constituent Assembly would not declare that "it unreservedly recognizes Soviet power, the Soviet revolution, and its policy on the question of peace, then the crisis in connection with the Constituent Assembly can be settled only in a,

revolutionary way, by Soviet power adopting the most energetic, speedy, firm and determined revolutionary measures<sup>10</sup>."

Lenin used two arguments to justify the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly. The basic one was that the Constituent Assembly was a bourgeois Parliament and had become the rallying point for the forces of counter revolution; the second, that for a number of contingent reasons (the split - within the SRs, the timing of the elections, etc.) the composition of the Constituent Assembly did not adequately represent the actual balance of forces within the country.

Lenin poured ridicule on the reformist leaders who argued that "the proletariat must first win a majority by means of universal suffrage, then obtain state power, by the vote of that majority, and only after that on the basis of democracy, organise socialism. But we say on the basis of the teachings of Marx and the experience of the Russian revolution that the proletariat must first overthrow the bourgeoisie and win for itself state power, and then use that state power, that is the dictatorship of the proletariat, as an instrument of its class for the purpose of winning the sympathy of the majority of working people<sup>11</sup>".

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10. Lenin, *Works*, Vol.26, pp.379-83.

11. *ibid*, p.263.

## Chapter - V

# The Establishment of the Bolsheviks' Political Monopoly

### Days of Innocence

To begin with. Lenin spoke of the proletariat, the class not the Bolshevik party assuming state power. Thus on 11(24) March 1917, in his *Letters from Afar*, he wrote: "The proletariat must organise and arm *all* the poor, exploited sections of the population in order that they themselves should take the organs of state power directly into their own hands, in order that they themselves should constitute these organs of state power<sup>1</sup>".

He did not visualize one party rule. In *State and Revolution*, the party receives very little attention. There are three references to it, two of which have no direct bearing on the issue of the dictatorship of the proletariat. One of these is an incidental remark concerning the need of the party to engage in the struggle "against religion which stupefies the people<sup>2</sup>" the second, equally incidental, notes that "in revising the programme of our party, we must by all means take the advice of Engels and Marx into consideration, in order to guide the struggle of the working class for emancipation more correctly<sup>3</sup>". The third and most relevant reference reads:

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1. V.I. Lenin, *Works*, Vol.23 pp.325-6.
  2. *ibid*, Vol.25, p.450.
  3. *ibid*, p.440.

**"By educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism, of directing and organizing the new system, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the working and exploited people, in organizing their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie"<sup>4</sup>.**

It is not entirely clear from this passage whether it is the proletariat which is capable of assuming power or the vanguard of the proletariat, i.e., the worker's party which is so designated.

In general, Lenin distinguished clearly between the soviet state and the party; the former was the creation of the working class as a whole and involved the class as a whole in its operation: "Under Socialism..... the mass of the population will rise to taking an independent part, not only in voting and elections, but also in the every day administration of the state<sup>5</sup>".

In Lenin's concept, the Soviet State is the highest expression of the self-activity of the proletariat; the party is that section of the class which is most conscious of the historical role of this self-activity. Because the party and the state are no identical, in the same way as the vanguard and the class are

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4.     ibid, pp.487-8.

5.     ibid, pp.487-8.

not identical, more than one party can contend for influence and power within the framework of the institution of the worker's state.

All revolutionaries took it for granted before the October revolution that more than one worker's party would exist. Thus Trotsky, on being elected President of the Petrograd Soviet on 9(22) September 1917 said:

**"We are all party people, and we shall have to cross swords more than once. But we shall guide the work of the Petersburg Soviet in spirit of justice and complete independence for all fractions; the hand of the presidium will never oppress the minority".**

However, once in power, the Bolsheviks began to display their true colours. When the Socialist Revolutionaries gained absolute majority in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, it triggered off an alarm. The Assembly was dismissed soon after. The Civil war which enveloped the nation gave the Bolsheviks, the perfect opportunity to tighten the screws against other political parties. We will now briefly survey the fortunes of various political parties after the Bolshevik revolution.

## **The Cadets**

With the onset of the civil war, Sovnarkom on 28 November (11 December) 1917 issued a decree banning the Cadet leaders because of their association with the Kornilov - Kaledin White forces. The decree stated that the "leaders



of the Cadet party, the party of the enemy of the people, are to be arrested and handed over to the revolutionary tribunal. Local Soviets are ordered to keep a careful watch on the Cadet party because of its connections with the Kornilov - Kaledin civil war against the revolution<sup>6</sup>."

At a meeting of VTs IK the left Socialist Revolutionaries and Menshevik Internationalists protested against this decree<sup>7</sup>.

At first, the measures the Bolshevik government took against the cadets were seen as merely temporary. thus, Sovnarkom's decree of 27 October (9 November) fanning the cadet press stated:

Those organs of the press will be closed which:

- a) **Call for open opposition or disobedience to the worker's and peasant's government;**
- b) **Sow sedition by slanderous perversion of facts;**
- c) **Encourage deeds of a manifestly criminal character....**

The above regulations are of a temporary nature and will be removed by a special decree just as soon as normal conditions are re-established<sup>8</sup>.

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6. J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1918: Documents and Materials*, New York, 1937, p.359.

7. *ibid*, p.361.

8. *ibid*, p.220.

But the civil war gave the Bolsheviks the perfect cover to execute the agenda of tightening the noose around other political parties.

### **The Socialist Revolutionaries**

The Socialist Revolutionaries were not linked to the Bolsheviks by a common adherence to Marxism. They therefore repudiated the Bolshevik coup d'état without any hesitation and were not prepared to discuss a coalition with the Bolsheviks.

In 1917, they enjoyed considerable popular support. They had made little attempt before November to assert the political authority to which support entitled them, because they believed that no decisive legislative step should be taken until the Constituent Assembly had met. Within a few weeks of the October Revolution they had won a definite majority of the delegates seats in the elections to that Assembly. Yet they failed either at the time or later to exploit what should in normal political conditions have been a position of impregnable strength.

The first reason for this lay in the nature of the support on which they could rely. The millions of peasants who voted for the Socialist Revolutionary lists in November 1917 had never had the chance to acquire political maturity. Hence, while they voted for the Socialist Revolutionaries in November 1917, they began to turn away from them a few months later when the Socialist Revolutionaries began to make demands on them. The Socialist

Revolutionary who promised them land was a friend. The same Socialist Revolutionary, when he endeavored to enlist the peasants aid to fight for a government which he was told would safeguard that land, was as much an enemy as any other government official.

The second reason for the failure of the Socialist Revolutionaries lay in the nature of the party itself. The SRs were in truth less of a political party than a popular national movement. The Socialist Revolutionary saw his mission more in terms of constant readiness to place himself in the forefront of the people's fight for their rights, than in terms of political leadership. One consequence of all this was the total lack of party discipline, or even cohesion.

The decision of the SR deputies to leave the second All Russian Congress of Soviets on 7 November 1917 was immediately followed by repudiation of the Bolshevik coup d'etat. On the day after they issued a proclamation: The seizure of power by one party alone was a 'vile and criminal' betrayal. The only way to save the revolution was to create a new revolutionary government which all the country would recognize<sup>9</sup>. But the immediate efforts which they made towards this end came to nothing.

After a period of conversations at the army field head quarters the Socialist Revolutionary leaders and the army commanders failed to reach agreement on the form which the new government should take. All their hopes

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9. Leonard Schapiro. *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy*, London, 1965, p.150.

were now centred upon the Constituent Assembly, due to meet in January 1918. At their IVth party congress, which met some ten days after the October Revolution, the Socialist Revolutionaries had resolved that they must "muster all their strength around the Constituent Assembly, to join battle against any criminal ademption the supreme will of the people". But they failed in this resolve, and their failure dealt a severe blow to their prestige.

On the eve of the opening day of the Assembly, 18 January 1918, the military committee of the Socialist Revolutionaries could count on two guards regiments, and some armoured troops. These were ready to turn out in armed support of a workers' demonstration which the party had organised for the opening of the Assembly, in order to deter the Bolsheviks from dispersing it. But when the moment came, the SR central committee refused to allow these troops to be called out. When the troops were told of this decision, their indignation was unbounded. In the event the workers paraded without soldiers, and unarmed. There were a hundred casualties from the rifles of the Bolshevik Red Guards. So ended the defence of the Constituent Assembly.

The dispersal of the Constituent Assembly left the Socialist Revolutionaries undecided, distracted and disunited. For a short time they attempted to oppose the Communists by using the rapidly dwindling opportunities of legal opposition. Isolated members of the party continued to find their way into local Soviets and Soviet Congresses.

Arrests and forcible expulsions soon reduced the numbers of such delegates to a handful. There were four Socialist Revolutionaries in the Central Executive Committee elected at the IVth Soviet Congress, held between 14 and 18 March 1918. They repudiated from the outset the authority of this executive committee and refused to participate in elections to its presidium. On 14 June 1918, the Central Executive Committee resolved to exclude from its number, the representative from the SR and Mensheviks<sup>10</sup>.

The reasons assigned for this step were two fold. First, that the evidence was conclusive that both the SR and Menshevik leaders were engaged in fomenting uprisings throughout the country; and secondly that "the representation in Soviet organisations of the members of parties openly aiming at the overthrow and discrediting of Soviet power, is entirely inadmissible".

There was some truth in the reason assigned for expulsion of the Socialist Revolutionaries. The peace of Brest-Litovsk had led to a radical change in the policy of their Central Committee on the question of forcible action against the Communists. In April 1918, it resolved that the Soviet Government had "betrayed democracy, Russia, the Revolution, and that it must be and shall be overthrown".

Thus when the Czechoslovak Legion rose in arms against the Bolsheviks in May 1918, it received the wholehearted support of the right SR.

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10. SUR. 1917-1918 No. 44, Art. 536.

When the Czechoslovaks occupied Samara, an SR Committee of members of the Constituent Assembly proclaimed itself the Government of the region. A similar Government was established at Omsk. At Archangel, under Allied protection, a mixed government of Populist Socialists and SRs was set up, headed by the old Narodnik, Peter Tchaikovsky. In the Urals, at the end of July, after its capture by the Czechs and Russian White forces, a coalition government of Cadets, Right SRs and Right Mensheviks was formed. In Ufa, a coalition government of monarchists, Cadets, Right SRs and Right Mensheviks was established under the leadership of Admiral Kolchak.

It was in Ufa that a conference on 8 September reached agreement on the setting up of an All-Russian Provisional Government, and a Directorate of five. However, the collapse of the Directorate resulted in the virtual disintegration of the Socialist Revolutionary party.

Before long the Bolsheviks succeeded in dividing the party. Soon a conference of the SRs in Petrograd (8 February, 1919) renounced armed struggle against the Soviet State.

As a result of this resolution, on 25th February 1919, the Central Executive Committee revoked its decree of expulsion. This legalisation made next to no difference in practice. At the IXth conference of the party, which took place illegally, between 18 and 20 June 1919, the majority in the party condemned those who had capitulated to the Communists.

After the end of the civil war, the Soviet Government decided to continue its persecution of the SR at another front. Many of its leaders were brought on trial, at the end of which some were sentenced to terms of imprisonment, and some to death.

## The Mensheviks

Despite their strong opposition to the Bolshevik government, for some time - i.e. until the armed uprising of the Czechoslovak Legion - the Mensheviks were not much hampered.

The outbreak of the civil war put the Mensheviks in an embarrassing position, since, for all their hostility to the Bolsheviks, they had still less to hope for from a restoration of the old regime.

Thus a meeting of the Central Committee of the Mensheviks in Moscow on 17-21 October 1918 decided to give support if critical to the Soviet Government.

The meeting renounced "all political cooperation with classes hostile to democracy". At the same time, while promising "direct support of the military actions of the Soviet Government against foreign intervention, it demanded "the abrogation of the extra-ordinary organs of police repression and the extra-ordinary tribunals and the cessation of political and economic terror"<sup>11</sup>.

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11. J.V. Stalin, *Works*, Vol. 4 p. 138.

This public declaration by the Mensheviks was followed by a very conciliatory speech by Lenin, declaring that no more was asked of the Mensheviks and SRs than good neighbourly relations: "But we shall not forget there are still "activists" in your party, and for them our methods of struggle will remain the same, for they are friends of the Czechs and until the Czechs are driven out of Russia. you are our enemies too. We reserve state power for ourselves. and for ourselves alone".<sup>12</sup>

In the spring of 1919, the outbreak of Kulak uprisings in a number of provinces and the successful advance of Kolchak, induced the majority of the SRs and Mensheviks to return to their extreme opposition to Bolshevism. Reacting to this, the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks in May 1919 issued a directive concerning the "arrest of all prominent Mensheviks and SRs about whom it was not personally known that they were ready actively to support the Soviet Government in its struggle against Kolchak.

The Mensheviks had earlier on 14th June 1918, been expelled from the All Russian Congress of Soviet's along with the SRs. But on 30th November the same year the Central Executive Committee had repealed it.

But the practical difference this made was small. The 'revolutionary majority' of the local Soviets ignored the decree and the Mensheviks remained as before, subject to arrest by the security authorities. The legalisation, coupled

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12. Lenin, *Works*, Vol. 28, pp.212-3.



with the continued arrest and occasional shootings, seems to have somewhat bewildered Lenin's followers, because he took care to explain it to them at the Eighth Communist Party Congress of 1919. The inconsistent policy of the Communists was provoked, he explained, by the inconsistent policies of the Socialist parties themselves, who could not make up their minds whether to support the Communists or not.

The tolerance, at any rate on paper, was shortlived. As already mentioned, in the spring of 1919 the Communist Central Committee ordered the arrests of all prominent Mensheviks. But the arrests, which in most instances only temporary, did not destroy the party machine.

The final assault on the Mensheviks began during February 1921 on the eve of the Kronstadt rising and continued in the weeks following it, during which the New Economic Policy (NEP) was launched. Some 2,000 were arrested during the first three months of the year, including the whole of their Central Committee. This time the arrested were, for the most part, not released, and the Menshevik organization suffered a blow from which it never recovered. By the middle of the year the Menshevik organization had ceased to exist inside Russia: No decree or other legal enactment had been passed outlawing the party, since its official legalisation in the autumn of 1918. It was destroyed by force and by fraud.

## The Left SRs

After seizing power, the Bolsheviks invited the Left SRs who supported the October revolution to join the Council of people's commissioners. After some hesitation, the Left SR leaders reached an agreement with the Bolsheviks on 18 November (1 December) 1917, as a result of which representatives of the Left SR entered the government. They received seven commissariats as against eleven for the Bolsheviks. The most important was the People's Commissariat of Agriculture.

For three months the Left SRs remained in the government. However, on 19 March 1918 they resigned in protest against the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty. They wanted to tear up the treaty and resume war with Germany. They also disagreed fundamentally with the agrarian policy of the Bolsheviks. They opposed the setting up of 'Committees of Poor Peasants' and the despatch of workers detachments into the country side for the purpose of requisitioning grain. These measures aroused strong opposition not only among the Kulaks, but also among the middle peasants who were the main supporters of the Left SRs.

On 6 July, the Left SRs assassinated count Mirbach, the German Ambassador, in the hope of restarting the war between Russia and Germany, and at the same time launched a revolt against their previous allies in the streets of the capital. The Left SR uprising was ruthlessly suppressed by the Bolsheviks. Its rapid decline followed soon after.

## **The Fate of Other Political Parties**

Three small groups of Socialist Revolutionaries maintained for a few years some degree of independent political existence. One such group was the Union of Socialist Revolutionary Maximalists, which since 1906 had existed as left extremist group within the main party. Before the revolution the Maximalists were particularly active in armed expropriations, which had brought them into close contact with the Bolsheviks. After the October revolution they supported the Bolsheviks but endeavoured to act as a 'ginger group' to keep them on the true left path. They agitated for a 'labouring republic' and advocated socialisation and workers' control in place of the Communist policy of nationalisation and centralised control. They did not in principle object to terror, conceding the necessity for 'inequality of rights and even deprivation of the right to life' in the case of those who refused to work and of 'enemies of the working people'. They also accepted restrictions on the freedom of the press if it became 'harmful to the community'<sup>13</sup>.

It was not long before they split into a pro-Communist majority and an anti-Communist minority. In April 1920, the pro-Communist majority of the party decided to fuse with the communists, while the anti-Communist minority soon thereafter disappeared into prison and exile.

The other two groups, the Revolutionary Communists and the Populist (Narodnik) Communists, came into existence shortly after the Left Socialist

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13. Maksimalist, no.4, 7 October 1918, pp 9-10.

Revolutionary uprising in July 1918. They neither attempted any serious opposition to the Communists, nor attained any political influence. By refraining from any criticism of Communist practices, the Revolutionary Communists purchased a period of free existence. For two years the party enjoyed the privilege of publishing a periodical and of sending its representative to the Soviets without fear of arrest. In 1919 many of the leaders of the party joined the Communists, and there were also defections to the right. In September 1920 the Revolutionary Communists decided to fuse with the Communists<sup>14</sup>.

The Populist Communists only survived for a few months. They decided in November 1918 to cease independent existence and to merge with the Communists.

The much more numerous Anarchists represented a political tendency rather than a political party. The heterogenous groups which went under this name never attempted to form themselves into a single organisation. Between March and November 1917, the Anarchists had been growing in influence and numbers. Many Anarchists worked closely with the Bolsheviks in the preparations for and in the seizure of power. The peace treaty and the growing authoritarianism soon alienated the majority of them.

The Anarchists were the first political opponents of the Communists to be the victims of an organised attack. In April 1918 an armed raid was

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14. V.I. Lenin, *Works* Vol. 23, pp. 582-4.

conducted on their premises in Moscow and some 600 arrested. This was apparently the result of a complaint by Colonel Robins (the unofficial United States representative), whose automobile they had assailed. The alacrity with which the Bolsheviks agreed to take action showed that the raid was not carried out solely to please Colonel Robins<sup>15</sup>.

The raid disorganised, but certainly did not destroy the Anarchist organisation. In contrast to the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks, the Anarchists were never at any time officially outlawed by decree. For the next few years their organisation maintained in spite of frequent arrests, a precarious existence, at times underground, at times openly. At the end of the civil war mass arrests of Anarchists were carried out in Moscow and elsewhere. It was virtually the end of freedom for the Anarchists.

### **Lenin's Approach to Political Opposition**

There is no doubt that during the early years of the revolution, Lenin retained some generosity to political opponents which has long disappeared in Soviet politics. Veterans like Vera Zasulich or Vera Figner could live unmolested. Plekhanov, though for long a severe critic of Lenin and of Bolshevik policy, was buried with dignity when he died in May 1918, and Lenin never failed to stress the importance of his contributions to Marxism. Martov suffered nothing worse than a public rebuke in 1918 for some tactless revelations about Stalin,

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15. U.S. Foreign Relations, Vol. I. p. 497.

and an occasional house search. Until the end of 1918 at any rate, Lenin was making personal efforts through the *Cheka* to curb some of the excesses of its officials.

But the lawlessness of Communist rule was of his own making. Whether without it he and his party could have survived as the sole power is another matter, and of the necessity for such survival at any price he never allowed himself to doubt. While he certainly grew impatient with some of the grosser vulgarities of the terror, he harboured no doubts about the need for terror as a permanent state instrument.

With such an instrument in force, any criticism could be effectively silenced by describing it as an "agitation helping ... the international bourgeoisie", or what was in Communist terminology the same thing: counter-revolution.

## Chapter VI

# The Stalin Purges

### The Aftermath of the XVIIth Party Congress

Although strictly outside the period of our study, we cannot conclude it without referring to the Stalin purges of the mid 1930's. Any study of dissent in Communist Soviet Union cannot but take into consideration the terror machinery instituted by the purges, which crushed dissent, in whatever feeble a form it may have presented itself.

By some estimates more than 40 million Soviet citizens perished during the Stalin purges.

The XVIIth Party Congress of early 1934 was significant in that rumbling of dissent against Stalin came out to the fore for the first time. A considerable number of leading party members formed an illegal bloc<sup>1</sup> at this Congress, and initiated a move to install in his place S.M. Kirov, the popular secretary of the party's Leningrad unit.

The move, however, came a cropper since Kirov himself was opposed to it. Stalin came to know of the move, a development which did not auger well for Kirov, as we shall see later.

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1. Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, New York, 1971, p.156.

The election of the Central Committee was another event which the dissidents sought to turn to their advantage Stalin received fewer votes than any other candidate and managed to get elected only because there were as many candidates as there were seats<sup>2</sup>.

Despite these moves, Stalin came out of the Congress triumphant. He tinkered with the constitution of the Central Committee weeding away people whom he found unsuitable for his game - plan.

Stalin also set his eyes on Kirov, in whom he sensed an adversary in the making<sup>3</sup>. Many like the historian Roy Medvedev argue that he organised the murder of Kirov to achieve two objectives at one stroke.

- i) To eliminate a possible rival.
- ii) To use the murder as a vehicle to carry out the purge of all dissenters within the state.

### **The Assassination of Kirov**

Sergei Kirov was killed by a shot in the back fired by a lone assassin on December 1, 1934 at the Leningrad party headquarters.

The murder in many ways can be described as the crime of the century. Over the next four years, hundreds of Russians, including the most prominent political leaders of the revolution, were shot for direct responsibility for the

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2.     ibid p.156.

3.     Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, London, 1968, p.44.



assassination and literally millions of others went to their deaths for complicity in one or another part of the vast conspiracy which allegedly lay behind it. Kirov's death, in fact, was the keystone of the entire edifice of terror and suffering by which Stalin secured his grip on the Soviet Union.

It is by now clear that Leonid Nikolayev, Kirov's murderer, had received help in arranging the opportunity for his deed, from the highest quarters. Stalin rushed to Leningrad the same evening on hearing the news of Kirov's death. He personally took charge of the investigations, and signed a decree which initiated a wave of repression.

The decree ordained that:

- a) **Investigations against those charged with terrorism should be speeded up.**
- b) **Execution of capital punishment to those given the death penalty is to be expedited.**
- c) **No appeals for clemency will be considered for those given the death penalty.**
- d) **The NKVD's agencies are to execute capital punishment immediately after such sentences are given<sup>4</sup>.**

The decree, which was signed without the politburo's approval, specified that the entire investigation of such cases be concluded in not more

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4. Speech by Z.T. Serdyuk to the XXIInd Party Congress (Pravda, 31 October, 1961).

than 10 days. The trial was to be conducted without defense lawyers. And to top it all the sentence was not to be subject to any kind of review.

### **The Decree Inspires Terror**

Among the first victims of the decree were members of the former Zinovievite opposition. Many of its leaders, including Zinoviev, Evdokimov and Kamenev were soon arrested in Moscow. In January 1935, the first political trial of the former opposition leaders were held.

On trial were the accused G.E. Zinoviev, L.B. Kamenev, G.E. Evdokimov, A.M. Gertik, I.P. Bakaev, A.S.Kuklin, Ia.V. Sharov, B.L. Bravo, S.M. Gessen and ten others.

The trial was unusually brief and probably because investigators had not used third degree methods, they were not able to prove the direct responsibility of the so-called "Moscow Centre" in the assassination of Kirov<sup>5</sup>.

As a result the death sentence was not invoked. Zinoviev was sentenced to ten years in prison, and Kamenev five. The other defendants received similar punishment. At the same time, the NKVD, without any judicial proceedings, held an assembly and sentenced a large group of once prominent party members to prison terms ranging from two to five years. They were accused of belonging to the Leningrad and Moscow "Centres".

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5. Report of the Court Proceedings. Case of the Trotskyite - Zinovievite Terrorist Centre, English ed Moscow, 1936, p.10. (Zinoviev Trial).

On January 18, 1935., a confidential letter from the Central Committee was sent to all party organisations. It demanded rooting out of counter revolutionary nests of enemies of the party and the people. The whole country was soon swept by a tide of mass arrests referred to as the "Kirov flood". Alongwith began the enmasse deportations of former noblemen and their families charged with under ground anti-Soviet activity.

### **The Kirov Murder Examined**

During 1934, Stalin's theory that Zinoviev and his supporters were the orgnaisers of Kirov's assassination seemed plausible<sup>6</sup>.

Zinoviev it seemed, had reasons to harbour grudges against Kirov. He had succeeded the Zinovievite G.E. Evdokimov as leader of the Leningrad party orgnaisation in 1926. It was therefore not surprising that right after the murder, many turned accusing fingers at the former Leningrad opposition.

But the Zinovievite opposition would have gained no political benefit from the murder of the man who was at that time the most popular party leader after Stalin. On the contrary, the character of the investigation directed by Stalin and the chain of subsequent events makes it possible to assume that Kirov was killed with Stalin's knowledge.

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6. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, London 1968, p.44.

## **The Repression of 1935-36**

Political tension in the Soviet Union steadily increased after the trial of the Zinovievites. A campaign for confession and repentance was initiated throughout the party organisation.

During 1935 and the first half of 1936, hundreds were arrested. Most of the arrested had been in the opposition for some time, but some were Communists who had never belonged to any opposition. Many others were at this stage expelled from the party for "lack of vigilance". But these arrests and expulsions as a rule still had a "selective" rather than a mass character. Most of the former oppositionists remained free and even held responsible positions in the commissariats, in publishing, and in educational institutions.

The right to carry weapons was taken away from Communist party members around this time in 1936. Stalin possibly feared some response, but the repression in fact met with no significant opposition. No organised protest was triggered off by the repression, and content, Stalin spend his time preparing his next move.

## **The Trial of the 'United Centre'**

Around August 1936, after working on the accused in the Kirov's murder and extracting confessions from them, the NKVD felt confident enough to announce the beginning of a new trial.

The accused were charged with the creation in 1932 of a "Trotskyite - Zinovievite United Centre". Apart from plotting Kirov's murder they were also charged with making plans to eliminate Stalin, Molotov, Chubar, Postyshev, Kosior and Eikhe.

This time around the accused made no denials. They confessed to all the charges and willingly and smoothly spoke about their roles. Zinoviev said that Stalin was to have been killed during the VIIth Congress of the Comintern, in order to move Communists throughout the world to support Trotsky<sup>7</sup>. Stalin's death would have shaken up the central committee of the CPSU so badly, Zinoviev said that it would have been forced to start negotiations with Trotsky, Kamenev and himself.

But one of the accused, I.M. Smirnov, alleged to be the leader of all the Trotskyites in the Soviet Union, threw a spanner in the works by refuting the charges<sup>8</sup>. His refutation was confronted by other defendants who "exposed" his role in their testimony.

The trial violated the most elementary rules of judicial procedure. No proof of the guilt of the accused was presented to the court. The entire case rested on the depositions and confessions of the accused, who were in the first place deprived of the right to defense counsel.

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7. Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, New York, 1971, p.169.

8. Zinoviev Trial, p.158.

The trial, and the shooting of the accused, triggered a new wave of repression throughout the Soviet Union. Former members of the Trotskyite and Zinovievite opposition were arrested en masse.

Another development which came as an off-shoot of the trial was the unexpected mention by some of the accused about their criminal connections with Bukharin, Rykov, Tomskii, Radek, Pyatakov, Sokolnikov, Serebriakov, Uglanov, Shilapnikov and other former oppositionists who had not yet been arrested<sup>9</sup>.

This was a signal that the heat would be soon on the above mentioned. It was confirmed when the procurator ordered a new investigation into these people.

Radek was soon arrested along with Serebriakov, Sokolnikov, and many others. Tomskii committed suicide. But Bukharin, Rykov and the majority of the former "right" oppositionists were still free at the end of 1936.

On September 10, the procurator Vyshinski published his report discontinuing the case since "the investigation has not established a basis for legal proceedings"<sup>10</sup>. This respite, sanctioned without doubt by Stalin, was only a maneuver designed to buy time to make the best possible preparations for the next stage of repression.

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9. *ibid*, p.68.

10. Letter of an old Bolshevik, Nivolaevsky, p.26.

## **The Trial of the 'Parallel Centre'**

Another big political trial was sprung on the Soviet people in the beginning of 1937. Most of the accused this time around had been prominent Bolsheviks from pre revolutionary days through the October revolution and the civil war.

They were charged with belonging to the so-called "Parallel Centre", of plotting terrorist acts, of espionage, of trying to provoke a war with fascist Germany and Japan and to bring about a Soviet defeat in this war. They were also accused of trying to restore capitalism in the USSR, of promising the Amur and Pacific coast regions to Japan, Byelorussia to Poland, and the Ukraine to Germany.

In order to make amends for the allegations of "shady trial" which cropped up in the Western press during the trial of the "United Centre" some quasi legal measures were introduced into the proceedings for the first time. For instance there were state-appointed defense lawyers, though it is another matter that none of them really tried to defend their clients. Another new development was the invitation by the NKVD of many foreign correspondents, diplomats and observers to the trial<sup>11</sup>. But once again no documents or material evidence was produced.

## **The Trial of the 'Right Trotskyite Centre'**

The fate of the "right" opposition was effectively decided by the testimony of

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11. Some of them like the British Communist R. Palme Dutt went back impressed. See Dutt. *The Internationale* (1964) p.246.

Radek and other accused of the "Parallel Centre". On January 16, 1937, *Izvestia* appeared carrying the name of its Editor-in-chief Bukharin for the last time<sup>12</sup>. Rykov too was removed from his post. But Stalin still kept putting off their arrest, although they were being universally claimed "enemies of the people". Pressure on them was intensified when almost everyday the testimony of other "rightists" who had confessed under torture were delivered to Bukharin's and Rykov's apartments.

The two were finally arrested in February 1937. Then followed more than a year of investigations, setting the stage for the last big trial of the 1930's.

The trial began in March 1938 with an assorted lot of accused. Beside the "rightist" leaders, there were totally apolitical men arbitrarily included into the "rightist" camp by Stalin himself. Alongwith them were formed leftists. So it was called the trial of the "Right - Trotskyite Centre".

Fresh accusations, in addition to the earlier one's were levelled against Bukharin and the other accused. These included murders of Gorky, Kuibyshev, V.R. Menzhinskii, plot to kill Lenin in 1918<sup>13</sup>, and of trying to give away not only the Ukraine. Byelorussia and the Far East, but also central Asia and Transcaucasia.

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12. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, London, 1968, p.163.

13. *ibid*, p.369.



Most of the defendants in the trials of the "Parallel Centre" and the "right - Trotskyite Bloc" were shot. Only a few, like Plentnev, Rakovskii, Bessanov, Radek, Arnold etc. were given prison terms. But they too were subsequently killed, one way or another.

## **Terror Unabated**

By the beginning of 1937, about 20,000 people were jailed or shot to death as a result of the Stalin purges. But this was only to be the beginning.

The tide of repression swelled throughout the years 1937 and 1938, carrying away the basic core of party leadership.

The central committee was the first party organ to be targeted. By 1939, 110 of the 139 members and candidate members elected at the XVIIth Party Congress in 1934 had been arrested<sup>14</sup>. The central government and its economic agencies were decimated. Many members of the U.S.S.R. Central Executive Committee and most of the commissars of the U.S.S.R. and R.S.F.S.R. were arrested and shot. Stalin sanctioned the arrests of many former personal friends, and also the relatives of his first wife Ekaterina Svanidze, and of his second wife, Nadezhda Allilneva, who committed suicide in November 1932<sup>15</sup>.

The repression also enveloped all the autonomous Republics of the union. The gigantic meat grinder consumed hundreds of party and government

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14. Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, New York, 1971, p.192.

15. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, London, 1968, p.67.

officials in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Ossetia and Checheno-Ingushetia.

The scale of Stalinist terror was mind boggling. In 1936-39 on the most cautious estimates, four to five million people were subjected to terror. In 1937-38 there were days when upto a thousand people were shot in Moscow alone.

## Conclusion

In the preceding six chapters, an attempt has been made to come to grips with the question of political dissent in the erstwhile Soviet Union from 1917 to the 1930s.

As we have seen, dissent in the form of opposition groups or factions existed in the Communist Party right from the time of its conception as the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party.

An argument has been advanced in the introduction that dissent is inherent in the Communist Party. The belief in the inviolable truth of Marxism - Leninism inculcates in its adherents a belief in the correctness of their policy towards particular issues. But when the party shifts its line, there will always be members of clinging onto their earlier beliefs. Traditionally in the Communist Party, such dissenters have been termed as 'deviationists'.

A classic example of this can be drawn from Stalin's assault on the Right opposition led by Bukharin, Rykov etc. during the late 1920s.

Having vanquished the Trotskyite Left Opposition, Stalin adopted several of their programmes like rapid industrialisation and collectivisation. This, as he had anticipated, found him at odds with his hitherto rightist allies who were supporters of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Since the rightists remained steadfast in their views, it enabled Stalin to brand them as

'deviationists' from the party line in order to crush them. Both Bukharin and Rykov lost their lives after the trial of the 'Right-Trotskyist Centre'<sup>1</sup>.

## **Evolution of Bolshevik Approach to Dissent**

While dissent had always been inherent in the Communist Party, we have noticed a perceptible change in the approach of the party leadership over the years to dissenters both within the organisation and outside it.

In the pre-revolutionary days, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had learnt to exist side-by-side within the same umbrella organisation<sup>2</sup>. Before the revolution and after, despite its close-knit nature, the party was prepared to welcome even Menshevik defectors into its ranks. Trotsky, whose independent platform was more closer to the Mensheviks than the Bolsheviks, made his entry into Lenin's party only very late<sup>3</sup>, and brought large numbers of his own followers and left-wing Mensheviks along with him to join the ranks of the Bolsheviks.

Subsequent events show that Trotsky's role in the October revolution was second only to that of Lenin.

The party leadership was also prepared to readmit within its ranks dissenters like Zinoviev and Kamenev who went public with their opposition

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1. Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, New York, 1971, p.175.

2. Leonard Schapiro, *Origin of Communist Autocracy*, London, 1965, p.163.

3. Robert V. Daniels, *Red October*, London, 1967, p.35.

to the October revolution. Lenin went further in his "last testament" when he asked that the 'October episode' should not be held against them personally<sup>4</sup>.

But once in power, as we have seen, the Bolsheviks steadily grew intolerant of opposition from outside the party. Temporary measures imposed against political parties during the Civil War soon acquired a permanent nature. One by one all the opposition parties were either banned or forced out of existence. Even the Constituent Assembly, elections to which was a longstanding Bolshevik demand, was dissolved once it became apparent that it wouldn't kow-tow to Bolshevik dictats.

Lenin's intolerance to opposition outside was extended by Stalin to dissenters within the Bolshevik ranks. He was soon to give short shift to all forms of legality and destroy opponents, both real and perceived, at his whim. Millions perished in his purges.

### **The Views of Rosa Luxemburg on One-Party Rule**

Can democracy survive under one-party monopoly? This question was posed clearly and prophetically by the celebrated Communist Rosa Luxemburg in her pamphlet *The Russian Revolution*, written during September - October 1918 while she was incarcerated in Breslau prison.

She wrote that the "protetarian dictatorship must be the work of the class and not of a little leading minority in the name of the classes, it must

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4. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, London, 1968, p.536.

proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of people"<sup>5</sup>.

What will be the result of limiting freedom to one party, or one trend? Luxemburg asks, a question pertinent to our study, and goes on to answer.

**"Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party, is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively, freedom for the one who thinks differently. All that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when freedom becomes a special privilege"**<sup>6</sup>.

Rosa Luxemburg goes on to describe the effect on society of one-party monopoly. **"With the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the Soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule"**<sup>7</sup>.

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5. M.A. Waters (ed) Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, London, 1962, p. 389.

6. *ibid*, p.390.

7. *ibid*, p.391.

One must remember that these words were written by an enthusiastic supporter of the October revolution and the Bolsheviks.

### **The Leninist - Stalinist Dichotomy**

One of the well-used lines of defence in explaining away the Bolsheviks' intolerance of dissent is to blame it on Stalinism. Implicit in this argument is the contention that Stalinism and the ruthless terror machinery it denoted was a perversion of Leninism. Defenders of Leninism advocate the notion that Stalin was an usurper who corrupted Leninist doctrines and ran aground his ideals.

But a closer examination reveals that Lenin himself was no democrat. In Feliks Chuyev's *140 Conversations With Molotov*, the former Soviet Premier who was a high level participant in both Lenin's and Stalin's regime, says that right after the February 1917 revolution, "all the Bolsheviks spoke of the democratic revolution, and the idea of immediate Socialist revolution was simply sprung on them by Lenin, when he returned to Russia in April 1917".

Lenin's rule upto 1921 saw a vigorous attempt to destroy the rural opposition to his policies, eventually fought to a standstill by the peasantry. The interlude of NEP was intended by Lenin as much as anyone to be merely a breather between rounds in the class struggle, and many like Molotov believed he would have proceeded even more quickly to collectivisation than Stalin did.

Molotov adds: "They say that Lenin would have carried out collectivization without so many victims. But how could it have been carried

out otherwise?" Lenin's fascination for terror had been noted. He had once written of the "real, nation-wide terror, which reinvigorates the country and through which the Great French Revolution achieved glory". And this was in marked distinction to Engels' view that the Jacobin Terror consisted of "useless cruelties"<sup>8</sup>. Molotov recalls that Lenin was "sterner" than Stalin and often decided on "extreme measures", while "rebuking Stalin for softness and liberalism".

### **The Bolshevik Intolerance to Dissent**

Stalin may have indeed been an "usurper", but it was Lenin's party which made the usurpation possible. And if his lust for terror caused untold misery, other Bolsheviks were equally committed to dictatorship.

Trotsky, regarded by many as the natural successor of Lenin, strongly shared his views on dictatorship and believed in crushing the opposition. Even the mild mannered Bukharin<sup>9</sup>, 'the darling of the party', sported an extravagant fascination for the terror machine *cheka*.

The truth remains that democracy and respect for dissent are incompatible with Communism.

Millions in the Soviet Union were forced to swallow Leninism - Stalinism but it was forced down their throats by terror. They may have breathed in the totalitarian poison, but it was because they had no other choice.

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8. Frederik Engels, Letters to Marx, Sept. 4, 1870.

9. Robert Conquest - The Great Terror, p.545.



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## **List of Abbreviations**

Comintern	=	Kommunisticheskii Internatsional (Communist International)
NKVD	=	Narodnyi Kommissariat Vnutrennykh Del (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs)
NEP	=	Novaya Ekonomicheskaya Politika (New Economic Policy)
OGPU	=	Obedinennoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie (Unified State Political Administration)
Sovnarkom	=	Sovet Narodnykh Kommissarov (Council of People's Commisars)
VTsIK	=	Vseyuznyi Tsentralnyi Ispolnitelnyi Komitet (All Russian Central Executive Committee)

## Chronology of Events in the Rise and Fall of Communism

- 1848      *The Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published in German.
- 1864      Marx founds the International Working Man's Association.
- 1867      Marx's *Das Kapital*, first volume (second, 1885; third, 1894).
- 1905      Revolution in Russia, following "Bloody Sunday" massacre in St Petersburg.
- 1917      February Revolution in Russia; October Revolution, establishing Bolsheviks in power under Lenin.
- 1918-20      Civil war in Russia
- 1919      "Red Terror" of Communist regime under Bela Kun in Hungary, March-July.
- 1921      Chinese Communist Party founded in Shanghai.
- 1921-28      Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) for economic reconstruction of USSR.
- 1922      Formation of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).
- 1924      Death of Lenin; Stalin emerges as leader of USSR.
- 1925      "Socialism in one country" affirmed at 14th Party Conference in USSR.
- 1929      Trotsky forced into permanent exile from the USSR; start of Stalin's forced collectivization of peasants.
- 1934-35      "Long March" of Communists in China, with Mao Zedong emerging as leader.
- 1934-39      Reign of terror under Stalin: mass purges, and executions, "show trials".

- 1939           Naxi-Soviet Pact.
- 1940           Assassination of Trotsky in Mexico.
- 1945           Yalta Conference establishes Soviet dominance in Central and Eastern Europe.
- 1948           Communist coup in Czechoslovakia; Yugoslavia expelled from Soviet bloc.
- 1949           People's Republic of China established.
- 1950-53       Korean War
- 1953           Discovery of "doctro's plot" against Stalin announced; death of Stalin.
- 1956           "One Hundred Flowers" movement in China; Krushchev's "secret speech" at the 20th Party Congress denouncing Stalin's "cult of personality" and revealing some of him crimes; Soviet invasion of Hungary to suppress anti-Communist uprising; workers' riots in Poznan, Poland.
- 1958           "Great Leap Forward" in Mao's China
- 1959           Fidel Castro assumes power in Cuba
- 1959-75       Vietnam War
- 1962           Cuban missile crisis; publication in the Soviet Union of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.
- 1964           Brezhnev replaces Khrushchev as first secretary of the CPSU.
- 1966-69       China's "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution".
- 1968           "Prague Spring" in Czechoslovakia under Dubcek; ended by Soviet invasion.
- 1971           China admitted to the United Nations; Richard Nixon's vist begins Sino-US rapprochment.

- 1975            Khmer Rouge establish regime in Cambodia.
- 1976            Death of Mao Zedong, "Gang of Four" arrested; rise of Deng Xiaoping.
- 1979            Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.
- 1980            Formation of Solidarity in Poland.
- 1983-88        China's "modernization drive" under Deng Xiaoping.
- 1985            Mikhail Gorbachev becomes general secretary of the CPSU.
- 1988            Gorbachev elected President of the USSR.
- 1989            Tiananmen Square massacre  
Revolutions throughout Eastern Europe: regimes of East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania collapse; Hungarian Communist Party dissolves itself.
- 1990            The "leading role" of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union abolished.
- 1991            Failure of attempted coup against Gorbachev; Disintegration of the Soviet Union.