

## **The State and the Socialist Revolution** **By J. Martov. (International Review, New York.)**

This pamphlet consists of a number of essays written during the years 1919-23 by the Russian Marxist, Martov

### **Who was Martov?**

“Integer”, the translator, gives a detailed account of Martov in his Foreword. He was a Russian Marxist who accepted neither the point of view of the Bolsheviks, nor that of the Mensheviks, but was very well known in Russia for his writings both before and during the revolutionary days. He was “one of the founders and collaborators on the *Iskra*, the publication around which the Russian Social Democracy developed”. After 1917 he opposed the infliction of capital punishment on workers who thought differently from the Bolsheviks, and he demanded trial by jury for political prisoners. Because he persisted in examining critically the policy of the Bolsheviks, he was driven into exile, where he died, poverty-stricken and a victim of tuberculosis.

Martov’s writings are of particular interest to the working class, for therein he carefully examines the content and lays bare the meaning of the Russian Revolution. In addition, he covers such important questions as “Marx and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat” and “The Commune of 1871”.

It is worthy of note that Martov, possibly ignorant of the S. P. G. B., arrived at conclusions on a large number of subjects which coincide with the views of the Socialist Party of Great Britain expressed in THE SOCIALIST STANDARD in the early years of Bolshevik rule.

### **Martov on “Soviets for All Countries”**

After 1917, the Bolsheviks and their followers in other countries announced to the world that a new weapon, a new political form, had at long last been discovered which would enable the working class everywhere to win its emancipation. This “perfect” political form was, of course, the Soviet. Time and place were of no importance. All that was necessary was for the different peoples to make use of Soviets and each and every one of them would achieve Socialism. Soviets, the Bolsheviks claimed, would be equally efficacious in backward countries like Russia, Bulgaria and Hungary, and in highly industrialised countries like England and the United States. “Soviets are the perfect form of State. They are the magic wand by which all inequalities, all misery, may be suppressed” (p. 14).

Martov ridiculed the Bolsheviks for their belief that revolutions were ready to break out everywhere, for their belief that workers and peasants, by embracing Soviets (a word merely meaning Council), could establish Socialism. He held the Marxian view that no political form can enable Socialism to be won, unless the material conditions are ripe for such a change, unless capitalism has reached a high degree of development. Says Martov: “No less than mystic is the concept of a political form that, by virtue of its particular character, can surmount all economic social and national conditions” (p. 15).

Marx’s view on the impossibility of peasant communities passing directly to Socialism without passing through the intermediary stage of capitalism, can be found

in his preface to the first edition of *Capital*. There Marx says: “And even when a society has got upon the right road for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement . . . It can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development.”

It can easily be seen, therefore, how little the Bolsheviks understood the teachings of Marx (whose apostles they claim to be), and how badly they followed the advice he had to give.

### **Reality has shattered all these illusions**

To-day, we hear little of Soviets. The reality of experience has taught that they are not “a magic wand”.

Reality, too, shattered many of the Bolsheviks’ early illusions. In his essay on “Dictatorship of the Minority”, Martov shows how the Bolsheviks were forced by conditions of the time to change their tactics and ideas.

In 1917, Lenin urged that the Russian workers would shatter the old bureaucratic and oppressive features of the State, once they had gained political power. He wrote of “the substitution of a universal popular militia for the police”, of the “electiveness and recall at any moment of all functionaries and commanding ranks”, of “workers’ control in its primitive sense, direct participation of the people at the courts” (p. 17). Indeed, Lenin claimed that the triumph of the Bolsheviks would bring to the Russian workers a more real democracy than that found in capitalist countries with the parliamentary system.

This soon proved to be an idle dream. (And yet, perhaps, it was not so “idle”, since such talk helped Lenin and his clique to gain support and power.) In any case, the programme above outlined was soon abandoned. It was found impossible to put it into effect in face of the backward condition of industry and agriculture, and of the peasant outlook. Already in 1919, Martov could observe that the machinery of State in Russia was being strengthened, and that the apparatus for repression was being improved and extended. Martov sums up the matter in these words:

“Reality has cruelly shattered all these illusions. The ‘Soviet State’ has not established in any instance electiveness and recall of public officials and the commanding staff. It has not suppressed the professional police . . . It has not done away with social hierarchy in production . . . On the contrary, in proportion to its evolution, the Soviet State shows a tendency in the opposite direction. It shows a tendency toward the utmost possible strengthening of the principles of hierarchy and compulsion. *It shows a tendency toward the development of a more specialised apparatus of repression than before . . . It shows a tendency toward the total freedom of the executive organisms from the tutelage of the electors*” (p. 18. Our emphasis).

Again, on page 55, Martov tells us how things developed after 1917. “In Russia the evolution of the ‘Soviet State’ has already created a new and complicated State machine, based on the ‘administration of persons’ as against the ‘administration of things’ based on the opposition of . . . The functionary (official) to the citizen. THESE ANTAGONISMS ARE IN NO WAY DIFFERENT FROM THE ANTAGONISMS THAT CHARACTERISE THE CAPITALIST STATE” (Our

emphasis).

Naturally, Martov, like the S. P. G. B., held the view that the form of State in Russia was not as advanced as the “democratic parliamentary” found in Western Europe. Whilst ridiculing the democracy of the more highly developed capitalist countries, the Bolsheviks did not fail to make use of the features of repression existing in those countries” (p, 19).

To put the whole matter briefly, after the Russian upheaval of 1917, as before it, the State Power continued to be in the hands of a minority, though it was a different minority (p. 19).

### **What was the historic role of the Bolsheviks?**

In his *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, Engels showed that after the proletariat has gained political power for the purpose of introducing Socialism, the State would become unnecessary, and die out. “*State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of the processes of production*” (Our emphasis).

If the conclusions of Engels given above contain the truth, the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks was not followed by the introduction of Socialism. Or why the continued development and strengthening of the Russian State Power?

What DID the capture of political power by the Bolsheviks mean. Briefly stated, it meant this. The Bolsheviks became the instruments for the furthering of a capitalist revolution in Russia.

After a life-time of experience of working-class movements, Engels, in his preface to *The Class Struggle in France*, wrote: “The time has passed for revolutions accomplished through the sudden seizure of power by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses . . . As soon as the situation calls for the total transformation of the social order, the masses must participate in it directly, and they must have an understanding of what is at stake and what must be won. This is what the history of the last half-century has taught us” (Quoted by Martov, pp. 57-8).

Both Engels and Marx knew from experience that before there could be a Socialist revolution, capitalism must have reached a high stage of development for “no social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room within it have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society” (Marx’s *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*).

The Bolsheviks, however, thought it possible for an active minority, representing the vague aspirations of the workers, to gain political power before the capitalist revolution itself had been completed. (See Martov, pp. 58-60.) What would happen if such a minority gained a political victory over the capitalist classes?

Marx himself answers this question in clear-cut terms in his article, “Moralising Criticism”. Briefly stated, his answer is the following: In those circumstances, the

minority become merely the tools of the capitalist class, which has not been virile enough to gain or hold power. Such a minority finds itself in the position of having to develop and run capitalism for a class unable, at the time, to do it successfully itself. Hence, let it be remembered, in running capitalism, the minority will be compelled to use its power to keep the working class in its slave position. Says Marx: "*its victory will only be a point in the process of the bourgeois (capitalist) revolution itself*, and will serve the cause of the latter by aiding its further development. This happened in 1794, and will happen again as long as the march, the movement, of history will not have elaborated the material factors that will create the *necessity* of putting an end to the bourgeois methods of production and, as a consequence, to the political domination of the bourgeoisie" (p. 59, Martov's emphasis).

Hence, we see the real content and meaning of the Russian Revolution. It was "only a point in the process of the capitalist revolution itself". The Bolsheviks, finding Russia in a very backward condition, were obliged to do what had not been done previously, i.e. develop capitalism. The Bolsheviks performed the task of setting Russian capitalism on its feet and helping it through a very stormy period. "For the proletariat can score a victory over the capitalists — and not for the capitalists — only when the march of history will have elaborated the NECESSITY (not merely the objective POSSIBILITY) of putting an end to the capitalist methods of production" (p. 59).

We had hoped to include in this article reference to two other essays by Martov; first, "Metaphysical Materialism and Dialectical Materialism", and secondly, "Marx and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat", but, owing to lack of space, we must leave them for a future issue.

Enough, however, has been said to show that we consider *The State and the Socialist Revolution* worthy of careful study. Like the books by Gide and Yvon, reviewed already in THE SOCIALIST STANDARD, Martov's appears to add further proof of the correctness of the attitude taken up by the S. P. G. B. anent the Russian Revolution.

We recommend it to all workers. We are confident that, if widely read, it will dispel many of those illusions which have been hindering the growth of a solid Socialist movement during the last twenty years.

(*The State and the Socialist revolution* is obtainable from the Literature Secretary, 42 Great Dover Street, London, S. E. 1. Post free, 1s. 1d.)