

views of others. The latter definition would have important implications for further Soviet political development. Iaroslavskii wanted to stamp out criticism of the cc's line, but applied a stricter definition of "bloc" than Sol'ts. Although the CCC in 1926 did not settle on a definition for "bloc", such a definition would continue to evolve and would be central to the unfolding of the Great Terror. In 1926, Shliapnikov and Medvedev refused to acknowledge membership in a bloc, as they would again refuse to do in 1935-1937. In 1937, however, the same fatal results applied to those who resisted demonization of themselves and their views as well as to those who submitted to it.

The "Bolshevik Leninist" Opposition and the Working Class, 1928-1929

Aleksei Gusev

The end of the 1920s has gone down in Soviet history as the time of the "great break". In the economy, this break denoted the end of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the move to "complete collectivization" of agriculture and forced industrialization. In politics, it signified that the regime of Stalin's personal power was firmly established and that the transformation of the ruling Communist Party into a docile instrument of this regime had been completed. In social, or class, terms, these events meant the consolidation of the party-state bureaucracy's total domination of all spheres of social life. The result was the formation of a system the essence of which then remained practically unchanged for more than six decades.

This great social shift, which turned NEP Russia into the land of Stalinist "socialism", naturally could not take place without a sharpening of social and political conflict, to which three main social forces were party: the bureaucracy, the small proprietors, and the workers. In order to implement the strategy of the "great break", the bureaucracy had to subject the working people of both town and countryside to the imperatives of "primitive accumulation" of state capital and, consequently, deprive them of the possibility of defending their interests from the state. In doing so, the bureaucracy's first aim was to prevent any political articulation of spontaneous social protest. In other words, the regime needed above all to destroy those political groups that could have become mouthpieces of social discontent.

The communist leadership's primary political enemy at the end of the 1920s was the left communist opposition that had taken shape within the ruling party itself. Its largest wing was the "Bolshevik Leninists" headed by Trotsky; a smaller but more radical contingent, the "Decists" (Democratic Centralists), was led by Timofei Sapronov and Vladimir Smirnov. In 1927-1928, about 8,000 oppositionists were expelled by decision of the fifteenth party congress, and their leaders exiled. Both opposition groups

then went underground, becoming in essence independent political organizations with their own centres and networks of local cells.

This separation from the ruling party, which coincided with the crisis of NEP and the start of the "great break", brought about fundamental changes in the make-up of the communist opposition and the character of its activity. A significant group of its old cadres, not wanting to break with the Communist party and interpreting the leadership's new course as the fulfilment of their main demands (acceleration of industrialization, struggle with the kulaks), argued for reconciliation with the party's "general line" and an end to "fractional" activity. The underground, on the other hand, was made up of "irreconcilable" elements, who did not see industrialization and collectivization as ends in themselves: for them, questions of "workers' democracy" and the position of the working people in the "proletarian state" had much greater significance. And it was precisely these questions that came to the forefront of the opposition groups' activity in 1928-1929.

In these years, Soviet workers' living conditions were consistently deteriorating, and their rights being consistently eroded. At the end of 1927, a reform of the wage scale was implemented, and many skills and qualifications were thereby administratively downgraded and wages cut.¹ At the same time a general review of output norms and piece rates was undertaken, with the norms being raised and the rates reduced. A party directive laid down that norms should be based on "the maximum technically possible" output, which meant intensification of labour to its limits without any material compensation.² Similar aims were served by the introduction of the seven-hour day in various branches of industry. This measure, widely proclaimed by party bodies as a great victory for the working people, in reality brought a sharp increase in the physical burden placed on workers: those who tended three lathes would be given four or five instead, and night shifts were introduced. Price increases, in spite of more acute food shortages; the increase in rents implemented in 1928; and the retention of

a portion of workers' wages in a state fund for "industrial loans": all these measures amounted to cuts in real wages.

At the beginning of 1928, in the course of negotiations on collective agreements, the Politburo issued a directive that norms and piece rates should not be fixed for the whole year, but be reviewed in the course of "day-to-day work".³ Thus, the industry management bodies were given the right to cut workers' wages whenever they saw fit. The collective agreements, the import of which had already been significantly undermined by compulsory state arbitration, finally lost any meaning and became empty formalities. At the same time, the drive for labour intensification continued, without any corresponding increase in wages. A target was set of raising labour productivity by 17.5 per cent in the financial year 1928-1929, while a 5 per cent limit was imposed on increases in nominal wages in the same period. Overexertion in pursuit of the new, higher norms caused exhaustion and illness among workers.⁴

The party-state's policies naturally gave rise to worker protests, which took the form of both active and passive resistance. In January 1929, *Pravda* (the newspaper of the party's Central Committee (CC)) noted in a leading article that a "fall-off in labour discipline" at the factories had become a "mass phenomenon" in which whole layers of the working class were involved; it also complained that the workers did not understand the "aims of socialist rationalization".⁵ Such calls to strengthen labour discipline were answered by workers (in anonymous notes handed in at mass meetings): "We, the working class, will observe discipline in production when we are not being put under pressure by some other class, that is - management, or, in other words, the Communist Party."⁶

Large quantities of reports of growing dissent among workers were sent to the centre from local party bodies. The party's Vyborg, Leningrad, district committee, for example, noted: "As a result of their deteriorating mood, workers are displaying a critical attitude to industrial management bodies, trade unions, and co-operatives [...], accompanied by pessimism,

1. Workers were assigned by category to one of seventeen different tariff bands, which were used to set wage levels. Under the reform, many workers were unilaterally - without negotiation - placed in lower tariff bands.

2. Information department of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), "O khode i itogakh kampanii po zakliucheniui kollektivnykh dogovorov", Sep. 1928, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow [Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, hereafter RGASPI], fond 17, opis' 32, delo 154, list 9.

3. Politburo decision of 19 Jan. 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 669, l. 18.

4. Information subdepartment of the organization and distribution department of the Moscow committee of the VKP(b), "O nastroeniakh rabochikh", Apr. 1929, Central Archive of Social Movements of Moscow [Tsentral'nyi arkhiv obshchestvennykh dvizhenii goroda Moskvy, hereafter TSAODM], f. 3, op. 11, d. 737, l. 27.

5. *Pravda*, 31 Jan. 1929.

6. Information subdepartment of the organization and distribution department of the Moscow committee of the VKP(b), "O politicheskikh nastroeniakh rabochikh i sluzhashchikh", May-Jun. 1929, TSAODM, f. 3, op. 11, d. 737, l. 27.

by passive protest (expressed in absences from mass meetings and indifference to workers' organizations [i.e., trade unions and factory committees]), and in some places by active protest, in the form of *italianki* [strikes in which the workers attended their workplaces but did not start work or slowed it down to virtually nil].⁷ In fact the "fall-off of labour discipline" and the growth of a mood of protest among workers were accompanied in many places by strikes, of which the OGPU⁸ counted a total of 1,569 in 1928–1929.⁹ Although most of these actions occurred spontaneously, a tendency towards workers' self-organization was also evident: in a whole series of cases, strikes were preceded by preparatory activity. Strikers tried to join up with those at other enterprises and even to co-ordinate their activities across industrial sectors. On 8 July 1929, for example, the OGPU arrested participants in an illegal meeting of railway workers.¹⁰

The protests against the intensified exploitation, wage cuts, increase in consumer goods prices, and shortage of products led some workers to political conclusions that could not fail to cause anxiety in the party-state bodies. A secret report by the party CC's Information Department recorded accusations against the state's power including, "you make us work like at Ford, but you pay like in China [...] everything that we won before has been taken away", "just wait until the workers grab those who deserve it by the throat", and so forth.¹¹ In the Ivanovo industrial region north-east of Moscow, party officials noted the spread of "anti-Soviet" moods among workers, expressed in a particular way: "The Communists can't pilot the ship of state. They're driving the country to ruin with their policy. The revolution has come to naught. It's time to overthrow the Bolshevik regime."¹²

Thus, when the communist opposition turned its attention to the "worker question" – which had not figured among its main priorities pre-

viously¹³ – this was under conditions which ensured that anti-government agitation on wages, working conditions, and the regime in the factories would get a hearing among the working class. Whereas the opposition had up until 1927 preferred to present its case to the party leadership, primarily on "big political issues" and only within party fora, now it decided to turn directly to that class in whose interests it declared itself to be acting. At the time of the fifteenth party congress in December 1927, opposition leaflets had already appeared in Moscow factories, in which the "wholesale review of output norms and indiscriminate cutting of piece rates" were subject to sharp criticism, and demands were raised for an end to the "arbitrary power of the foremen and industrial managers".¹⁴

In the autumn of 1928, the opposition published an eighteen-point platform devoted especially to the "worker question". "Throughout the whole NEP period, Soviet workers' interests have never before been subject to the sort of frenzied attack mounted this year by the trade union, party, and industrial bureaucracy", the Bolshevik Leninists wrote. The oppositionists urged a decisive struggle against the state's attempt to scrap collective agreements and thereby "openly sanction the abolition of workers' rights". They demanded that wages be raised in strict correspondence with increases in labour productivity and not be allowed to fall behind it. The platform proposed to include in collective agreements a clause on wage increases in the coming year that would compensate for the increase in consumer goods prices (10 per cent), and raise wages by an additional 5 per cent. "The opposition categorically rejects the bureaucrats' objection that there are no funds from which to pay for an increase in workers' wages", the platform stated. "Funds can be raised by means of decisive cuts in the bloated apparatus of the soviets, trade unions, and party, and by a corresponding redirection of public funds."¹⁵ The oppositionists declared that

7. Cited in Cherniaev, *Piterskie rabochie*, p. 23.

8. The acronym by which the Soviet security service was known from 1922 to 1934. It was also referred to by its previous name, the Cheka, or earlier acronym, the GPU.

9. Extrapolated from reports in "Sovershenno sekretno", vols VI and VII.

10. Information department of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), "O khode koldogovornoii kampanii", 17 Dec. 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 32, d. 154, ll. 71–72; information subdepartment of the organization and distribution department of the Moscow committee of the VKP(b), "O nastroeniakh rabochikh i sluzhashchikh", Jul. 1929, TSAODM, f. 3, op. 11, d. 737, l. 12; Cherniaev, *Piterskie rabochie*, p. 380.

11. Information department of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), "O khode i itogakh kampanii po zakliucheniiu kollektivnykh dogovorov", Sep. 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 32, d. 154, l. 25.

12. Cited in Rossman, *Worker Resistance Under Stalin*, p. 115.

13. In 1928, Karl Radek admitted that previously the opposition had experienced "indecision about raising the worker question, indecision about turning to the factories. [...] Our indecision was caused partly by our reluctance to break with Zinovievists, but also partly by our own vacillation and failure to understand the situation": "Nado dodumat' do kontsa. (Iz pis'ma k odnomu moskovskomu tovarishchu)", RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 24, l. 2.

14. "Oдно iz nashikh raznoglasii v rabochem voprose. O blizhaishiei kampanii perezakliucheniiia koldogovorov", 1927, TSAODM, f. 3, op. 11, d. 440, ll. 72–80; information department of the VKP(b), "O khode koldogovornoii kampanii", 17 Dec. 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 32, d. 154, l. 72; f. 326, op. 1, d. 133, l. 44.

15. Leaflet entitled "Tovarishchi rabochie!", Nov. 1928, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 133, ll. 43, 46; see also leaflet entitled "Ko vsem chlenam partii, ko vsem rabochim", Dec. 1928, f. 17, op. 71, d. 106, l. 1.

the ruling bureaucracy, while "economizing" on workers, was lavishing money on itself: "The expenditure on the party apparatus is 120 million rubles, and on the trade union apparatus 250-300 million. [...] By promoting genuine activism by the masses, these outgoings can be reduced many times over. Party and trade union work must be rooted in the masses, not among paid officials. [...] The OGPU apparatus costs more than 100 million rubles. [...] That part of it that is used against the opposition, and to 'observe' workers and the unemployed, should be done away with."¹⁶

In their proclamations, articles, and speeches at factory meetings and underground gatherings, the Bolshevik Leninists argued that the increase in administrative and economic pressure on working people stemmed from the ruling bureaucracy's desire to make them pay for the consequences of an economic crisis caused by the political leadership. While the living standards of industrial workers and lower categories of clerical staff fell, that could not be said of the privileged groups. For example, in the autumn of 1928 a significant increase in rents was applied to those with low incomes, while it almost completely bypassed those with high earnings.¹⁷ At the same time, the Politburo ordered a 20 per cent increase in the salaries of party members who held senior positions.¹⁸ "How completely they must be beholden to the interests of the bureaucratic apparatus, and alien to workers' interests, to take such decisions!" concluded the bulletin of the Bolshevik Leninists' Moscow organization.¹⁹

The oppositionists' shift to active agitation in the factories, their sharp criticism of the government's social and economic policies, and their denunciations of bureaucratic privilege and inequality all served to strengthen their position among workers. If workers had previously been indifferent to the internal party conflicts, considering that these did not affect them, they now began to express sympathy with the opposition. In secret reports on the mood in the factories, party organizations noted statements by workers such as: "the opposition was right to say that [the government] are putting the squeeze on workers"; "they've expelled [from the party] all those who stood up for the working class"; and "the GPU has sent Trotsky and the other oppositionists to Siberia. [...] It reminds you of the old times. They did it under [Tsar] Nicholas [II], they do just the same

16. *Biulleten' oppositsii* (Moscow), Sep. 1928, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 133, l. 25.

17. *Ibid.*, l. 26.

18. Resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), "O partmaksimume", RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 705, ll. 3-4.

19. *Biulleten' oppositsii* (Moscow), Oct. 1928, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 133, l. 26.

under Stalin, so that they can keep the working class under pressure."²⁰ In October 1928 a worker from Ivanovo-Voznesensk wrote to an oppositionist acquaintance, who had been exiled: "Now I understand that what you said was absolutely right. Your words – when you said that there is no bread, that they are rationing it, that there are queues for everything and shortages everywhere – have come true. It's bad. Workers are being boxed in, made to do the work of three. Now I'm cursing, because I was blind then, and couldn't see, didn't realize, that you were telling us the truth. And we couldn't defend you, we couldn't understand."²¹ There were many non-party workers who collaborated with the oppositionists in distributing proclamations, and who helped them to hide from OGPU agents. The party's Moscow committee received reports of workers' resistance to the confiscation of opposition leaflets.²²

The CC's journal, *Bolshevik*, asserted that at the factories the opposition were "not only unable to carry their resolutions at a single mass meeting, but also unable to get even a handful of votes in their favour."²³ But the reality was quite different. In a secret report on the results of the collective agreement campaign of 1927-1928, the CC information department noted: "At several workplaces [the opposition] were successful, mobilizing a significant group of workers. In some cases they took the lead at factory mass meetings, where their representatives took the chair (Kauchuk [rubber goods] factory [in Moscow]). There were instances in which meetings accepted the oppositionists' resolutions and those proposed by the party cell were defeated."²⁴ During a campaign to renew the collective agreements this happened again. Workers at a number of factories and individual workshops once more – and in some cases unanimously – voted for

20. Information department of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), "O khode i itogakh kampanii po zakliucheniiu kollektivnykh dogovorov", Sep. 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 32, d. 154, l. 25; information subdepartment of the organization and distribution department of the Moscow committee of the VKP(b), "O nastroeniakh bespartiiinykh rabochikh v sviazi s resheniiami XV parts'ezda", TSAODM, f. 3, op. 11, d. 440, l. 38; summary of notes handed in at meetings of the unemployed for the period Dec. 1927-Apr. 1928, *ibid.*, l. 88.

21. *Biulleten' oppositsii* (Moscow), Oct. 1928, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 133, l. 40.

22. Information subdepartment of the organization and distribution department of the Moscow committee of the VKP(b), "Otdel'nye nastroeniia sredi rabochikh", 22 Sep. 1928, TSAODM, f. 3, op. 11, d. 658, l. 146.

23. *Bolshevik*, 1928, No. 5, p. 60.

24. Information department of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), "O khode i itogakh kampanii po zakliucheniiu kollektivnykh dogovorov", Sep. 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 32, d. 154, l. 25.

opposition resolutions directed against the policy of industrial management and the government. The CC information department reported, for example: "At a general mass meeting of workers at [Moscow garment factory] Moskvoshvei, party members who spoke up against the oppositionists were denied the floor, with shouts of 'Enough lies!' The meeting voted for an addendum to the collective agreement that had been proposed by the oppositionists."²⁵ The OGPU reported to the Politburo that, at a series of workplaces, groups of employees who came into conflict with the management expressed support "for the general line of the opposition", seeing it as "the only defender of the workers".²⁶

Once the oppositionists started systematic work among the industrial proletariat, they found that their propaganda evoked a considerable response. "There are broad possibilities for us in the working class, despite the fear and repression", the Bolshevik Leninists' all-Russian centre stated in an information report in April 1929. "We have not yet drawn in all those who can be involved." The same document said that there were almost no supporters of the Stalinist policy among workers, while on the other hand there were strong "left-wing" and "right-wing" moods. It also mentioned organized groups with "foggy ideology" whose members were being convinced to co-operate with the opposition. In view of its lack of propagandists, funds, and literature, the underground opposition leadership asked its comrades living in exile to prepare popular pamphlets for workers and material for reading groups.²⁷

The success of the opposition's activity around the "worker question" gave it the opportunity to organize significant numbers of working people. By leading the spontaneous workers' movement under conditions of a deep social crisis, peasant uprisings, worries about food shortages in the cities, and general dissatisfaction with the ruling regime, the Bolshevik Leninists, who in 1928-1929 had maintained a fairly wide network of underground cells, could have become a serious political force. But the masses could have been mobilized only on the basis of a concrete platform with clear indica-

25. Information department of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), "O khode koldogovornoï kampanii", 17 Dec. 1928, *ibid.*, ll. 72-73.

26. "Sovershenno sekretno", vol. v: p. 665.

27. All-Union Centre of Bolshevik Leninists, "Informatsionnaia svodka", 25 Apr. 1929, Central Archive of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, Moscow [Tsentrāl'nyi arkhiv federal'noi sluzhby bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi federatsii, hereafter TSA FSB RF], f. 2, op. 7, d. 350, ll. 235-237.

tions of how it could be realized. The Bolshevik Leninists' main weakness was their lack of any clear and convincing programme of action.

While advancing once again the demand for the expansion of "workers' democracy" in the party, trade unions, and soviets, the oppositionists failed to explain how this might be achieved, given that, as they themselves admitted, the bureaucracy exercised complete domination over all these institutions and came down heavily on any manifestation of independent initiative. The calls for democratization of public life and proposals for its implementation made in the Bolshevik Leninists' main document, their platform for the fifteenth congress, were thus addressed to that same bureaucracy. An analogous situation prevailed with regard to their agitation on the "worker question": having exposed the administrative and economic pressure on the working class and presented a list of measures to improve its situation, the opposition limited itself to general calls for struggle against attacks on workers' rights, without specifying the methods that might be used. People reading the opposition's leaflets, and sharing the critical views expressed in them, could well have concluded that only one activity was required of them: support for the opposition's representatives at mass meetings and the insertion of amendments into collective agreements and other resolutions. And yet even if factory meetings passed resolutions drafted by the oppositionists, or made protests against the government's social and economic policies, this could not produce any practical results, since the real power was concentrated in another sphere entirely: in the hands of the party and state bodies, the factory managements, and the OGPU.

Workers recognized this fact and had no illusions about the effectiveness of participating in various types of official meetings. The "surveys of the political situation in the USSR", drawn up each month by the OGPU for the Soviet leadership, continuously referred to workers' "passive attitude" to these meetings, which were often abandoned due to poor attendance. One comment recorded was: "What's the point in us going to these meetings and sounding off? Things won't be done our way, in any case."²⁸ Many workers viewed the tactics of the opposition, who put great faith in these meetings, in a similar light. In the information report of the Bolshevik Leninists' All-Union Centre, it was noted: "Among workers who sympathize with us, there is often a mood of: 'You're good people, but it's

28. "Sovershenno sekretno", vol. vi: p. 610.

pointless putting yourselves about this way. You won't be able to do anything."²⁹

The opposition leaders explained this paradox – the underground opposition's reliance on legal and exclusively reformist methods of working-class struggle – in terms of the "proletarian character" of the Soviet state. Trotsky admitted: "A worker, proceeding from his life experience, could well come to the conclusion that power is already out of the hands of the working class, that the 'triangle'³⁰ holds sway in the workplace, that criticism is banned, that the apparatus is all-powerful in the party, and that behind the back of Soviet organizations the bureaucrats give the orders, and so on."³¹ Such conclusions, in Trotsky's opinion, would be mistaken – for the power had only slipped from the hands of the working class "to some extent: a very limited extent, very far from a decisive extent."³² Trotsky did not allow for a minute that the functions of a ruling class could pass to the party-state bureaucracy: this was not provided for in his schematic conception of class struggle with its strict dichotomy "proletariat/bourgeoisie". If the power did not belong to private proprietors, he reasoned, this meant that it belonged to the working class. The Trotskyist opposition leaders were not troubled by the obvious contradiction between the well-established fact that the working population had no rights and their own assertions that "proletarian dictatorship" had been preserved in the USSR. For them, the key to the question of the class character of the regime was the concentration of the means of production in the hands of the state and the existence of a monopoly of foreign trade.³³

From the conception of the Soviet state's "proletarian character" flowed the conviction that workers had to fight for their rights and interests only within the framework of official structures, which needed not to be rejected or destroyed but to be changed from within. The Trotskyist leaders were frightened by the prospect of workers' protests growing into open political confrontation with the state power and the ruling party. In a letter of May 1928, Trotsky emphasized that workers' reactions to the bureau-

cratic policy of the state leadership might "surpass the boundaries beyond which we consider them forbidden, i.e., the boundaries of the Bolshevik party and the proletarian dictatorship". Under these conditions, he argued, the opposition's duty would be to come to the party's aid by resisting such tendencies among the working class in the most decisive manner.³⁴

The Bolshevik Leninist leaders, apprehensive of a radicalization of the workers' movement so excessive as to undermine the Communist party regime – which seemed to them to be the only form that the proletarian dictatorship could take – viewed tactics of working-class struggle, such as strike action, with great caution. They admitted the possibility, in the most extreme circumstances, of strikes with economic demands, but categorically opposed political strikes directed against the "workers'" state. The opposition's principled position on this issue was formulated by Mikhail Okudzhava, Vasilii Kossior, and Khristian Rakovskii in this way: "The opposition's duty is to channel the demands of the working class into trade union and party legality, and to draw the class away from methods of struggle such as, for example, strikes, which damage industry and the state and, consequently, workers themselves."³⁵

The Trotskyist leaders categorically rejected the perspective of organizing discontented workers in a new political party in opposition to the Communist party. Equally, they were alarmed by any manifestation of dissatisfaction with the system of one-party rule. In the spring of 1928, in a letter to Lev Sosnovskii about a dispute over pay cuts at an industrial enterprise in Kremenchug, eastern Ukraine, an oppositionist from the town wrote: "Various unhealthy tendencies have been awoken in connection with the dispute. For example, when a campaign was launched against the opposition, [...] rumours began to spread that the opposition would organize a new party. And workers responded: 'OK, let them organize it and then we will see which party really stands for the working class. Because this [Communist] party is certainly not taking our side.' Such disagreeable chords can be heard among workers fairly often."³⁶ Indeed, the manifestation of such moods, "disagreeable" for the Trotskyists, was not unusual; similar expressions of opinion, approving the idea of forming an opposition

29. All Union Centre of Bolshevik Leninists, "Informatsionnaia svodka", 25 Apr. 1929, TSA FSB RF, f. 2, op. 7, d. 350, ll. 236.

30. The "triangle" was the name given to the informal management body that existed at every workplace, comprising the director, the chairman of the factory (trade union) committee, and the secretary of the party cell. Usually, the three acted and spoke in complete unanimity.

31. L.D. Trotsky, "Na novom etape", Dec. 1927, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 369, l. 1.

32. Trotsky, *Pis'ma iz ssylki*, p. 225.

33. *Biulleten' oppozitsii (bol'shevikov-lenintsev)*, 1929, No. 5, pp. 10–11.

34. Quotation from letter from V. Smirnov to T. Khorechko, 6 Oct. 1928, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 112, l. 226; statement by L.D. Trotsky to the sixth congress of the Comintern, 12 Jul. 1928, f. 325, op. 1, d. 175, l. 8.

35. *Biulleten' oppozitsii (bol'shevikov-lenintsev)*, 1929, No. 6, p. 3. See also letter from L. Sosnovskii to Abramskii, 5 Oct. 1928, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 112, ll. 317–320.

36. Fel'shtinskii, "Razgrom levoi oppozitsii v SSSR", p. 281.

workers' party, were also noted by party bodies in Moscow.³⁷ But, in spite of the fact that the opposition had itself actually become an independent political organization, the Bolshevik Leninists continued to regard themselves as a "fraction of the Communist party", to count on their imminent return to a somehow "reformed" ruling party, and to reject firmly the "bourgeois" idea of multi-partyism.

This strictly reformist orientation was not shaken even by recognition of workers' negative attitudes to the party cells. Thus, in a letter to one of his comrades in exile, Sosnovskii explained that the party workplace organizations were distrusted and in no way regarded as a vanguard. "On the contrary, a communist, in the non-party worker's eyes, is either the boss or the boss's henchman." Sosnovskii described an incident, at the time of the fifteenth party congress, when he was approached by a non-party worker, sympathetic to the opposition, who was held in high regard in the workforce at the big Moscow factory where he worked. This worker asked the advice of Sosnovskii and other oppositionists about the invitation he had received to join the party during the mass "October enrolment". The worker put the following question: "If he joined the party now, then he would risk losing the trust of the worker masses, for those masses look at those who join up these days and think: 'So they've got bored of being at the lathe, they'd rather walk around with a briefcase.' Would it be any use to the opposition, if he joined the party and lost the trust of the working masses?" The oppositionists answered in the positive – and, according to Sosnovskii, were absolutely right to do so, since the opposition's overall approach was to work only through party structures.³⁸

This stance also underpinned the opposition leaders' ambiguous attitude to doing political work outside the party. On the one hand, they considered it necessary to win support among non-party workers but, on the other, they warned leaders of underground opposition groups about prioritizing this task – although at the same time they admitted that such efforts were more productive than attempts to influence party cells.³⁹ The very concept of "workers' democracy", under whose banner the communist opposition

37. Information subdepartment of the organization and distribution department of the Moscow committee of the VKP(b), "O nastroeniakh bespartiiinykh rabochikh v sviazi s resheniiami XV parts'ezda", TSAODM, f. 3, op. 11, d. 440, l. 38.

38. Letter from L. Sosnovskii to Abramskii, 5 Oct. 1928, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 112, ll. 317–318.

39. "Pis'mo k tovarishcham rabochim-kommunistam", Mar. 1929, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 146, ll. 3–4.

appealed to the working people, was itself quite ambiguous and ill defined. Trotsky openly declared that it did not mean the return of "all rights" to the working people, as that would signify the restoration of bourgeois democracy, i.e., capitalism. He considered democracy acceptable only if it did not breach the "systematization of all social relations" within the framework of the Communist party dictatorship. The freedom of workers' organizations under "their own state" was, according to Trotsky, unnecessary and even harmful.⁴⁰ In other words, workers were called upon not to fight for liberation from the dictatorship that ruled over them, but only for the replacement of bad dictators with good ones.

In the strategy of Bolshevik Leninism, workers' struggles were assigned the role of an auxiliary lever of influence on the party, aimed at reforming it. But in light of the party's transformation, by the end of the 1920s, into a vertically organized structure of the bureaucratic state apparatus, totally subordinate to a small group of leaders, hopes of its "self-reform" were completely utopian. Equally naïve was the opposition's reliance on legal forms of struggle: under conditions in which totalitarianism was taking shape and all social organizations being turned into adjuncts of the state, channelling workers' struggles "into legality" – that is, constraining them within the framework of bureaucratized official structures – could only mean wittingly taking them to defeat. The opposition's fear of standing out against the party-state system as a whole fenced in its activists, disoriented its potential supporters, and blocked the effective development of its struggle.

A section of the Bolshevik Leninists recognized the problems caused by the ambiguous and contradictory character of the opposition programme and tactics as early as the second half of 1928. This came about not least because new people with fresh ideas were joining the underground opposition groups. In the spring of 1929 the leadership of the Trotskyist underground noted: "For the past year we have experienced a significant inflow of party members, who previously had no connection with us and even fought against us. A significant part of the opposition's work should be shifted on to these comrades' shoulders, since there are already very few remaining of the old cadres who were expelled [from the party]."⁴¹ The new underground activists were mostly workers, attracted to the opposition by its actions in workplaces where before the fifteenth congress its cells had

40. *Biulleten' oppozitsii (bol'shevikov-lenintsev)*, 1929, No. 5, pp. 12–13.

41. All Union Centre of Bolshevik Leninists, "Informatsionnaia svodka", 25 Apr. 1929, TSA FSB RF, f. 2, op. 7, d. 35, ll. 236–237.

been weak or non-existent.⁴² Among those who had been expelled from the party for opposition activity in late 1927 and early 1928, 46.9 per cent had been blue-collar workers, compared to peasants, who constituted 8.8 per cent, and white-collar workers (*sluzhashchie*), who were 39.7 per cent.⁴³ But by 1929 the situation had changed: workers from industrial enterprises now comprised the overwhelming majority of the Bolshevik Leninists in Moscow.⁴⁴ A similar tendency is evident in 1929 in Chel'iabinsk in the southern Urals from a list of people arrested for membership of a "Trotskyist group": 90 per cent were blue-collar workers.⁴⁵

Representatives of this younger generation of oppositionists – people who had rallied to the opposition during a wave of working-class unrest – expressed, with growing clarity, doubts about Trotsky's political ideas and their theoretical basis. In September 1928 Karl Radek, who both continued a wide-ranging correspondence with those in exile and received information from those "at liberty" – and was therefore well aware of the political moods in opposition circles – noted in a letter that a "significant section of workers and youth" in the opposition ranks found the refusal of the Bolshevik Leninist leaders to consider founding a new party as an alternative to the Communist party difficult to understand.⁴⁶

In the underground groups of Bolshevik Leninists and the exile colonies, an intensive process of reconsideration of the movement's theory and practice began. As a result of the discussion, the oppositionists in the village of Kolpashevo, in Tomsk province, western Siberia, for example, came to the conclusion that the Soviet state had a non-proletarian character.⁴⁷ The majority in the exile colony at Achinsk, in Krasnoïarsk province, southern Siberia, called on the opposition to abandon its hopes for the reform of the party-state apparatus that was hostile to the working class, and to take

42. "Svodka oppozitsionnogo tsentra o deiatel'nosti oppozitsii za iul'-oktiabr' 1928 g.", RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 133, ll. 60–62.

43. E. Iaroslavskii, "Soobshchenie ob oppozitsii na plenum TsKK VKP(b)", Apr. 1928, RGASPI, f. 89, op. 3, d. 88, ll. 14–15.

44. Lists of oppositionists, identified by staff members of the Institute of Marx-Engels-Lenin in the archives of the Institute and of the Moscow committee of the VKP(b), 1937, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 71, d. 117, ll. 199–229, 248–249.

45. List of persons having been part of a group of Trotskyites in Cheliabinsk, 1929, Documentation Centre for the Modern History of Chel'iabinsk oblast' [Tsentr dokumentatsii noveishei istorii Cheliabinskoi oblasti, TSDNICH], f. 75, op. 1, d. 562, ll. 75–85.

46. Letter from K. Radek to the colony of exiles in Kolpashevo, Sep. 1928, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 79, l. 2.

47. Letter from M. Golodets to K. Radek, 31 Mar. 1929, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 100, l. 21.

a stand for its destruction and replacement by the "self-active organization of the popular masses". In the exile colony in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, a group coalesced that called for the opposition to reorient mainly towards the working-class strike movement; they characterized Trotsky's position on strikes as "betrayal of the working class".⁴⁸

The radicalization of the Siberian and Central Asian exile colonies – which were constantly replenished by fresh waves of arrests – directly reflected the political evolution of those "at liberty". The new exiles were predominantly young workers, who, in contrast to the veteran oppositionists, were not inclined to consider the party-state power as "their own". One "moderate" Trotskyist wrote in the spring of 1929: "The new people arriving in exile fill me with horror. These are people, in no way linked to the Communist Party, who had some incidental involvement with the Komsomol [Young Communist League], who rejoice in every failure of Soviet power – absolutely anti-Soviet elements."⁴⁹

Radek, in a letter to his exiled comrade Eleazar Solntsev, with reference to the "layer of workers supporting the opposition", wrote: "We fought for the reform of the party. They don't give a damn about the party."⁵⁰ In direct contradiction to the opposition leaders, the Bolshevik Leninists' more radical wing did not want to continue to confine the struggle to propaganda for internal party reform, and advocated more active conflict with the regime. At the end of 1929 a group of activists of the Moscow Bolshevik Leninist underground circulated a document in which they rejected the thesis of the "working-class" essence of the Soviet state and – in opposition to the (Trotskyist) reformism that "had failed the test" – called for Soviet workers to liberate themselves by revolutionary means.⁵¹

There is further evidence of the mood of the "radicals" in a letter of 6 July 1929 from Radek to the oppositionist Mariia Sakhnovskaia. Radek described a conversation he had had, in Tomsk in March of the same year, with a Moscow worker who had been sent into exile:

To my question, "What attitude should the opposition take to possible bread riots in the towns?", I received the answer: "The opposition should lead

48. Letter from L. Brut to K. Radek, spring 1929, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 98, l. 71; letter from A. Akopov to K. Radek, spring 1929, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 123, l. 9.

49. Letter from I. Karpel' to K. Radek, spring 1929, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 149, l. 5.

50. Letter from K. Radek to E. Solntsev, 8 Aug. 1929, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 68, l. 5a.

51. "K organizatsionnoi postanovke voprosa. Chto dal'she?", Dec. 1929, TSA FSB RF, f. 2, op. 7, d. 353, ll. 97–102.

them." To the question, "Under what slogans?", the answer: "Down with this government!" To the question, "And what about the attitude to the peasant movement?", I was told, "We must support it." And when I shouted, "You're prepared to throw out a workers' government!", another Moscow worker, who had come to visit me during his holidays, intoned thoughtfully: "There's the snag. There's no way that that's a workers' government." A chasm literally opened up in front of me. These arguments by two worker oppositionists – neither selected by me, one a simple, politically inexperienced person, the other with a standard political education – can't have been made by coincidence. Three days after this conversation I met a Moscow student oppositionist on the street; he was on his way to his place of exile. He defined the opposition's aims in exactly the same way.⁵²

However, the underground groups of Bolshevik Leninists did not succeed in making the transition to such decisive action. As early as the autumn of 1928, the Communist party Politburo, concerned at the level of opposition agitation in the workplaces, took the decision to speed up its efforts to extirpate the underground groups. In a letter to all provincial and republican party committees, the CC secretary, Viacheslav Molotov, referred to "new attempts to revitalize" the opposition, and emphasized: "Underground anti-party and anti-Soviet groups, especially those that introduce demoralization into the working class, must be subject to the most decisive measures of revolutionary repression."⁵³ The GPU, having received corresponding instructions, unleashed their whole arsenal of repressive methods: a massive wave of searches of the homes of those suspected of sympathy with the opposition; surveillance; the deployment of *agents provocateurs*. The number of arrests rose sharply. And although in some workplaces the workers tried to obstruct the arrest of the Bolshevik Leninists, or demanded their release,⁵⁴ the series of operations against the underground opposition undertaken by the Chekists in 1929 led to its almost complete annihilation.

52. Letter from K. Radek to M. Sakhnovskaia, 6 Jul. 1929, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 65, l. 16.

53. "Vsem kraikomam, oblastkomam, TsK natskompartii, gubkomam VKP(b)", 24 Sep. 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 706, l. 11.

54. *Biulleten' oppozitsii* (Moscow), Sep. 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 133, l. 29; 10 Oct. 1928, l. 37; "Informatsionnoe pis'mo oppozitsionnogo tsentra", Mar. 1929, l. 97; information subdepartment of the organization and distribution department of the Moscow committee of the VKP(b), "O nastroeniakh rabochikh i sluzhashchikh", Jul. 1929, TSAODM, f. 3, op. 11, d. 737, l. 25.

Khristian Rakovskii, in a letter that compared the situation of the Soviet opposition with the conditions under which the political opponents of tsarist autocracy had worked, noted: "The Bolshevik, trade unionist, or worker pursued by the old regime could fall back on various guarantees against its arbitrary power: in the first place legal ones, and in the second place everyday phenomena in the private capitalist economy. Those put out of one factory or other workplace on account of their political beliefs could go and find work at another. But now a Bolshevik or non-party worker accused of having an independent caste of mind, under conditions of a socialist economy in which the tendency for leadership misuse of power is present, faces the most unenviable fate."⁵⁵ In 1928–1929 the Bolshevik Leninists faced an enemy much more formidable than the one the Bolsheviks had had to deal with before the revolution. The authoritarian tsarist regime had been replaced by a totalitarian state that aimed at unlimited control over all spheres of social life. All guarantees for dissidents, be they "legal" or "everyday", had been done away with.

In the struggle of the communist opposition of the 1920s, Soviet history witnessed the last attempt at organized political resistance to the onset of totalitarianism. This struggle took place under conditions in which social contradictions were sharpening; in particular, there was an antagonism between the working class and the state, which sought to turn workers into objects of super-exploitation, deprived of any rights whatsoever. The drawing together of the opposition with active sections of the working class, on the basis of agitation on questions of vital everyday importance for workers, opened up the possibility of unity between the opposition's struggle and the spontaneous class protests. But the Bolshevik Leninists were not able to take full advantage of this possibility. The "tops" of the opposition, who were historically linked to the ruling bureaucracy, could not completely break with it. And the younger generation of oppositionists – who in principle were ready to take the side of the working class against the "workers' state" – were not allowed the time to complete the break in practice.

55. Letter from Kh. Rakovskii to E. Preobrazhenskii, 14 May 1928, RGASPI, f. 326, op. 1, d. 135, l. 5.