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The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet ...
By Leonard Schapiro

The crux of the problem was the certainty that in any free election throughout Russia the majority of the votes would go to the anti-bolshevik Socialist Revolutionaries. The left wing of this party only became a separate entity after 19 November when its first congress met, less than a week before the date fixed for the elections to the Constituent Assembly. The lists of candidates for the elections had been prepared some time before the party had split. Moreover, such indications as there are do not suggest that the new Left Socialist Revolu-

(“The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State First Phase 1917–1922”, Leonard Schapiro, 1954, p. 81)

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Schapiro's family settled in Britain. Here the young Leonard went first to St. Paul's school, then to University College, London, where he read law. He never returned to Russia. In 1932 he was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn, and practised on the London and Western circuits. With the outbreak of war, his fluency in Russian,

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LEONARD BERTRAM SCHAPIRO (1908–1983)

AN INTELLECTUAL MEMOIR

By Peter Reddaway

Fellow
Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

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Trotsky and the Russian Revolution
By Geoffrey Swain

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Constituent Assembly: Long promised by the Provisional Government, the elections to the Constituent Assembly took place on 12 November 1917. This gave 52.3 per cent of the votes to the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and 23.6 per cent to the Bolsheviks. However, the allocation of Socialist Revolutionary Party candidates took place before the split in the SR Party and the formation in late October of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries as a separate party. The victory of the Left SRs at the Extraordinary Congress of Peasant Soviets and the Second Congress of Peasant Soviets, both held in November, suggested that they would have secured a large number of seats if able to stand in the Constituent Assembly elections. The Bolshevik–Left Socialist Revolutionary Coalition Government requested that the Constituent Assembly should recognise what it termed the ‘right of recall’ and allow local soviets to call by-elections where the local SR deputy was not felt to represent the popular will. When the Constituent Assembly met on 5 January 1918 it refused point blank to agree to this, and so was forcibly dissolved.

(Trotsky and the Russian Revolution, Routledge, Geoffrey Swain, 2014, p. XIV)

Full article: Introduction

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Geoffrey Swain’s interest in Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe more generally originated from the period of his career in the 1980s when he was a report writer for the BBC’s Monitoring Service at Caversham. During those years there were two dominant stories

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MEMORANDUM

ON

TWO TENDENCIES IN THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT.

THE Bolsheviks can no longer be considered a political party. Originally forming the Left wing of the Social Democratic party, the Bolsheviks have now for the most part ceased to be Socialists, with the exception of the leaders. To the majority of those who call themselves Bolsheviks, Bolshevism is simply nothing but an excuse for plunder and robbery. The course of events at every stage of the Bolshevik régime shows that the real power has been coming more and more into the hands of adventurers whose one desire is to enrich themselves and maintain themselves in power.

This process became clearly marked as far back as last summer. It then became known that the Central Government, controlled by Lenin, was finding it increasingly difficult to control the Extraordinary Commission under Peters. The Extraordinary Commission was entrusted with the task of combating counter-revolution, speculation, and sabotage, which, literally interpreted, meant that it could get anybody out of the way who was inconvenient. After the attempt on Lenin's life at the end of August the Extraordinary Commission indulged in a wild orgy of bloodshed, to which Lenin, on his recovery, immediately tried to put a stop. There seems little doubt that Lenin's influence helped to keep the terror less savage in Moscow than it was in Petrograd, where Zinoviev was able to give free play to his passions.

This is, therefore, one point on which Lenin is more moderate than the extreme Bolshevik leaders, such as Trotski and Zinoviev. At the same time it must be remembered that, though Lenin was opposed to the wholesale executions, he was equally in favour of crushing the *bourgeoisie* by other methods hardly less brutal, viz. by confiscating the whole of their property and by imprisoning them on the slightest pretext if they refused to work for the Bolshevik Government.

Recently, however, the cleavage between Lenin's party on the one hand, and the party led by Trotski and Zinoviev on the other, has taken a different form. The cleavage is both on international and on internal policy.

As regards international policy, Lenin holds the view that the best way to secure world revolution is to compromise with the victorious Allies and to make concessions which would lead to the abandonment of intervention. It is for this reason, probably, that he authorised Litvinov to sound the Allies from Stockholm and to communicate with President Wilson. Litvinov has always belonged to the moderate wing, and is essentially one of Lenin's personal followers. Following Litvinov's proposals came the Prinkipo proposal. According to private information from Stockholm, which was probably an expression of Litvinov's views, the Prinkipo proposal would have the effect of strengthening the moderates represented by Lenin as against the extremists led by Trotski. No details are available about the debates that took place in Moscow before the answer to the Prinkipo proposal was telegraphed to the Allies, but Chicherin's answer would seem to be the expression of Lenin's views.

Lenin's disagreement with Trotski is not fundamental; it hinges almost entirely on the question of tactics. The difference now is almost exactly the same as at the time of Brest-Litovsk. At that time Lenin favoured compromise and a "respite" while Trotski and others favoured violence, refusing to sign peace at all. Trotski now advocates world revolution by means of aggression, *i.e.*, by means of the Red Army carrying the revolution into other countries. It is not that Lenin has changed his views. His desire for the world revolution and the class war is just as strong as Trotski's, but he thinks he can now succeed better by diplomacy and peaceful penetration than by open war. To the outsider, knowing Lenin's great intellectual powers, and remembering his skill in dealing with the Germans, it cannot but appear that

Lenin's policy, if successful, would be far more dangerous to the stability of Europe than Trotski's.

Closely linked up with Lenin's international policy is his present internal policy. Here again he differs from Trotski. It has recently been announced by the Bolshevik wireless that several Mensheviks have accepted the Bolshevik régime, and that their paper "Vperyod" ("Forward") has again been allowed to appear in Moscow. (In this connection it is interesting to note that in Petrograd, where Zinoviev is Dictator, not even Maxim Gorki's "Novaya Zhizn" has had permission to reappear.) At the same time several social revolutionary members of the Constituent Assembly from Ufa have come to Moscow and entered into relations with the Bolsheviks. Though their terms were not fully accepted by the Bolsheviks they have agreed to compromise, and these so-called Social Revolutionary leaders appear to have accepted the conditions offered them. It is stated, though there has been no confirmation of this, that Chernov was due in Moscow on the 3rd February—with the exception of Chernov no other well-known names have been quoted as having come to terms with the Bolshevik Government.

Already a good deal of use has been made of the above facts by the Socialist press abroad to show that the Bolshevik Government is now becoming more moderate and that it is receiving more widespread support. Those, however, whether Englishmen, Frenchmen, Italians, or Russians, who have lately left Petrograd and Moscow are unanimous in saying that these political manœuvres have not made the slightest impression in Russia. They are solely intended for propaganda abroad. The hatred felt by the overwhelming majority of the population—by workmen and peasants as well as by the *bourgeoisie*—cannot be in the very least affected by political agreements between certain more or less obscure party leaders, when such agreements effect no improvement in the conditions of life. The Bolsheviks are hoping by these devices to keep up their credit among Socialists in Western Europe who, without knowing the real conditions in Russia and the real state of feeling of all classes of the population, are still arguing in terms of Western European Socialism.

February 14, 1919.