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Sources of Errors

By G. HIRT

Not only the majority of the French section, but also those who criticise it correctly pose the question inadequately and their method of approach is inadequate. They all consider the struggle around the constitution in an isolated manner, instead of *examining it first of all from the point of view of all its relationships*, its relationship to the entire class struggle in France, from the international as well as the national point of view. In order to define the tactic in the French constitutional struggle in a correct way, we must first pose the following question and answer it: what *strategy* does the French situation impose on us, of course within the framework of proletarian-revolutionary *principles*?

Where is France going today, nationally and internationally?

I. The Perspectives of the French Bourgeoisie

Internationally: The French bourgeoisie lost the war; it can reestablish itself only on the backs of the masses, and cannot even do this today except with the aid of the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie. The latter does in effect offer its assistance—principally in the form of a loan of billions—and demands in exchange the alignment of France in the united front of all the imperialisms against the Soviet Union. The French bourgeoisie is ready to pay this price, because

in the present situation this constitutes the only road for the preservation of its class power and profits at the expense of the French masses.

Nationally: In order to reestablish itself at the expense of the masses, the bourgeoisie *must*, in the last analysis, orient itself toward establishing an open capitalist dictatorship. For in their totality, the gigantic sacrifices which the French bourgeoisie requires for its reestablishment cannot in the long run be imposed on the masses, shattered by the first six years of war, solely by the methods of bourgeois democracy. The objective logic of its struggle pushes the French bourgeoisie in this direction, its directing layer, monopoly capitalism, sees this clearly and deduces capitalist strategy and tactics from it.

We would be at fault if we could see the offensive of the capitalist *coup d'etat* only when it will develop openly, instead of recognizing it in its first steps, and fighting against it immediately, from its very beginnings, clearly, consciously and methodically.

The monopoly capitalist leadership of the French bourgeoisie is conscious first and foremost that it can further its strategical plan only by a *series of tactical stages*. It sees even more clearly that its strategical goal demands a tactical line, and that this line must serve for as long as possible and must assure them victory in the end under the best conditions.

To separate the SFIO from its alliance with the Stalinist party, to isolate the Stalinists, this is the *goal of the first, tactical stage* of the French capitalist class. With the lever of a loan of billions, the bourgeoisie of the USA pushes it in the same direction.

In no case will this process of passing from capitalist dictatorship, hidden by a democratic veil, over to the open form last as long as it did in Germany after the first world war, when this process, after the preparations of 1918-23, dragged on for ten more years. The crisis of the capitalist system has considerably deepened, deepens more and more; a new crisis of world economy is on the way, much greater, much more terrible than that of 1929. Only the completion of the second imperialist world war, not yet ended, only the war of all the imperialisms against the Soviet Union can again increase the capitalist margin of profit to some slight extent. The imperialist bandits of the US and England cannot too long postpone this final scene, their plan is to have it "played" in their behalf primarily by "democratized" Germany and Japan (democratized in the capitalist manner). In no case can they wait twenty-one years as they did from 1918 to 1939. The past six years of the second imperialist world war have only sharpened the crisis of the capitalist system. These factors, inexorably shortening the periods of action for the world bourgeoisie, also push the French bourgeoisie to conduct its offensive within a brief period. *In this sense*, the strategical offensive of the French capitalist class, directed toward the establishment of an open bourgeois dictatorship is a *short term danger*.

II. The Perspective of the French Bureaucracy and Workers' Aristocracy

What strategy is opposed to the strategical offensive of the bourgeoisie by these degenerated and bourgeoisified

layers—of which the CP and the SFIO are the political organizations and the trade union bureaucracy the transmission belt into the CGT? They fear the revolutionary proletariat even more than the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie; the proletarian revolution even more than the capitalist counter-revolution. Because of that, they had the revolutionary workers of the Resistance disarmed. And it is because of that, that they left the essence of the capitalist state apparatus intact, that they allowed the continuation of capitalist property in the basic sectors of production. They simply changed its form. They replaced the property of individual capitalists or groups of individual capitalists with the property of *capitalists as a class*, concentrated and centralized by the bourgeois state, and presented this to the masses as "socialism" or as the "road to socialism." All this was done to keep the masses behind them, to continue to live as parasites on their backs, in order to use the fighting power of the masses to obtain material gains for themselves, thereby continuing their work as agents of the bourgeoisie.

Of course the petty bourgeoisie of the bureaucracy and the workers' aristocracy want to keep their "share of (capitalist) power," their "share of the (capitalist) pot." They seek, then, to maintain their *petty-bourgeois* position by *petty-bourgeois* methods. It is primarily as a function of this that this petty-bourgeois layer conducts the struggle about the constitution. Without doubt the capitalist and democratic constitution which was passed in the Constituent and put to a vote on May 5, was on the whole, in comparison to the (democratic-bourgeois) constitution of 1875, a step forward (principally by the elimination of the Senate and the prerogatives of the president). Insofar as decisions which are only scraps of paper can in general have any effectiveness, the bourgeois-democratic constitution of May 1946 opposed stronger obstacles than the constitution of 1875 to the offensive of the French bourgeoisie, which was preparing to discard bourgeois democracy and establish an open bourgeois dictatorship.

For the CP, the French offspring of Stalino-Russian nationalism, it was above all a question of amassing the strongest possible obstacles (on paper), by this way (petty-bourgeois-democratic), against an alignment of capitalist France in the front of all the imperialisms against the Soviet Union.

The bureaucrats and degenerated worker aristocrats are incapable of understanding that the final victory of the capitalist counter-revolution cannot possibly be halted by a policy of coalition, by a national front, by a "popular" front, by collaboration with the bourgeoisie or with its parties, by a policy contained within the narrow national framework, in short, by a reformist policy. Otherwise they would have to stop being what they are from the class point of view: petty-bourgeois. Even the decisive experiences in Germany, Austria, Spain, and France (1936-39) change nothing, for the policies of these layers are a result of these petty-bourgeois interests. And these interests permit only this petty-bourgeois policy to the bureaucracy and to the workers' aristocracy as a "mass," although it goes against all the teachings of theory and all the experiences of history.

III. The Perspectives of the French

Working Class

The French proletariat must fight against the alignment of France in a common front with all the imperialisms against the Soviet Union. The French proletariat must fight against the counter-revolutionary economic and political offensive that the French bourgeoisie is conducting against its vital interests, against raising its standard of living and against the political liberties of the masses. Every French worker understands that and is strongly aware of it. But the great mass of workers does not yet understand the development of the class struggle in France in its entirety, the masses are not yet conscious of the goal which they must set for their struggle, of the road on which they must conduct it, of the methods of struggle and the only goal which can bring them out of the abyss. The masses do not as yet see their class goal and the road which leads to it, because they are not yet conscious from the class point of view. The tactics of a proletarian revolutionist should help them to attain, at all costs, consciousness of their class interests, of their fundamental interests, and lead them into action. They still believe the phrases of the bureaucracy and the workers' aristocracy; they still continue to fight under the leadership of the CP, the SFIO, and the trade union bureaucracy.

It is for this reason that the proletarian party should have shown the French masses the *central point* of the struggle about the constitution! This means that it had to explain to them the *role of this partial struggle in its general strategic relations*, and all this as a function of the present class struggle in France. It had to explain to them why the bourgeoisie was against the constitution; had to show them that the struggle against this constitution was for the French bourgeoisie a means of introducing the first turn, the first tactical stage of its counter-revolutionary strategic offensive, the goal of which was to separate the SFIO from the CP; to isolate the Stalino-Russian party. The revolutionary party must make the masses understand that even though this constitution sets up stronger (bourgeois-democratic-paper) guarantees against capitalist revolution through the use of democratic petty-bourgeois means, the counter-revolution can be averted and beaten solely and exclusively by a democratic-proletarian, revolutionary-proletarian policy, strategy, and tactic.

That they have neglected to do this is the *fundamental error common* to both the majority of the French section as well as their critics. But starting off from the same inadequate basis, making use of the same inadequate method (an isolated and abstract estimate of the constitutional struggle, in a word: *a doctrinaire approach to this question*) these three opinions nevertheless contain important *differences*.

a) According to the opinion of the *majority*, the referendum was transformed, from the moment the bourgeois MRP refused to support the constitution, into a "test of strength between the *bourgeois parties* and the *workers' parties*," that is to say, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. A fundamental mistake with serious consequences. The social-democratic, Stalinist, and labor parties call themselves workers' parties, but they are not! They are

petty-bourgeois parties: parties of the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisified workers' aristocracy who live as political parasites on the fighting strength of the masses whom they exploit for the petty-bourgeois interests of the degenerated layer. In this way these parties, by the results of their policy, are always in the last analysis serving the cause of the bourgeoisie. Insofar as the CP, the SFIO, and the trade union bureaucracy are concerned, this struggle about the constitution was, and is, only *a struggle between the bourgeoisified workers' aristocracy - bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie*. Of course the workers are participating in this struggle, but, for the moment, not under the banner of their class interests nor for their own class interests, but as a tail of the bureaucracy and the workers' aristocracy, and for the petty-bourgeois interests of these people.

The serious opportunist error of the majority, which simply issued the slogan "Yes" on the constitution, was caused by the failure to recognize the petty-bourgeois class character of the CP and the SFIO. Similarly, this majority issued the slogan, "For an SP-CP-CGT Government," without tying this transitional slogan to necessary and indispensable revolutionary propagandistic criticism, showing, in general, an opportunistic lack of clarity, if not a fundamentally opportunistic position). Even more significant is their agitation for capitalist nationalization without opposing to it the central transitional slogan of workers' control of production, and, without tying the two slogans together by revolutionary criticism and propaganda.

b) In opposition to this, the *minority* of the French section offered the correct slogan—correct in relation to the proximity of the danger of boycott—of writing-in on blank ballots the inscription "For a Workers' and Peasants' Government" (it would have been clearer: For a Workers' and Small Peasants' Government) by which, apparently, indispensable revolutionary propaganda and criticism were implied. The minority furnished the proof that one can in exceptional cases find a correct position, even by starting from an inadequate hypothesis, even by working with an inadequate method, when one is guided by a revolutionary instinct. But the minority must not be content with having taken a position in this way, because it presents dangers for the future. We must always start off from correct, concrete conditions, always start off from correct evaluations of the concrete general situation and its perspectives, and we must base our strategy and tactics upon these: in this way we show the masses not only the correct path in the present situation, but we also illuminate the road ahead, we thus facilitate the struggle to come, we already prepare for it today—only in this way do we *effectively* fulfill the *leading* role of the party. The minority must improve the inadequate explanation of its correct tactical slogan.

c) The weakness of the *third* opinion consisted in the fact that it was content to take an *exclusively* negative position, something that must be avoided at any cost. If it had also taken a positive position, it would have naturally indicated the role that the struggle round the constitution played in the framework of the general concrete struggle, and it would also naturally have found that the strategic task before which we find ourselves in the *present* conditions in France is none other than this: *Against the opening of-*

jeunesse of the bourgeois coup d'etat, we call for defense of the vital interests of the masses and improvement of their living conditions, defense of bourgeois democracy, and all of this consistently tied to revolutionary criticism of bourgeois democracy, tied to consistent preparation for the revolutionary counter-offensive of the masses against the bourgeoisie.

It was precisely Comrade Trotsky who elaborated with the greatest clarity the necessary revolutionary tactic having this as objective during the long years of struggle against the national "socialist" offensive up to the year 1933. He did it above all against those who, in an honest but doctrinaire way, were content to reject bourgeois democracy in principle *only in words*, and to preach the rule of proletarian democracy; the masses could in no case be mobilized for the revolution by such methods.

It is completely correct that we reject capitalist democracy in principle. But in order effectively to *realize* this principled rejection, it is imperative that we do not lose sight of the fact that our conditions of *fundamental* struggle (that is to say, our general tasks of the struggle) are never *in reality* given in themselves and for themselves, but are always posed in indissoluble relation with the concrete conditions and tasks of the struggle on each occasion, and consequently they must be resolved *solely* in the light of the living whole relationship of the given general situation, at the given moment, *solely in these concrete total relations*, in order that they may in this way be resolved in a correct way, in a revolutionary way. Any other method is doctrinaire, any other method merely plays with principles in words, however honest the intentions. It does not realize principles in *living practice* but does realize—even when the intentions are honest—the exact *contrary*. The most important of these concrete conditions of struggle is, today, the concrete height of consciousness, the exact depth of consciousness of the masses. In the conditions of the present concrete struggle in France, the only road, the "rejection in principle" of the capitalist and democratic constitution and of bourgeois democracy in general, did not consist in practice simply of words but of the following things:

1) We must act in such a way that we do not sacrifice this small advantage (on paper) of the May 1946 constitution, which in the consciousness of the masses had the illusory appearance of a real and immense advantage, but together with them we ought to defend it; but at the same time we should, secondly, have patiently explained to the masses by revolutionary criticism the fundamental inadequacies of every bourgeois democracy, and above all the fundamental impossibility of defeating the offensive of the capitalist coup d'etat, of defeating the counter-revolution of the bourgeoisie from the point of view of capitalist democracy in the epoch of the growing decadence of capitalism; and all this we should have.

2) Tied to constant revolutionary propaganda and organization for the democratic-proletarian revolution, for the establishment of the rule of the proletarian democracy of the workers, white-collar workers, petty functionaries, small peasants, petty-bourgeoisie, of this immense popular majority under the leadership of the working class, that is to say, for the government of workers and small peasants.

Solely in this manner would we have mobilized the masses in the given concrete conditions along the road of "rejection in principle of bourgeois democracy," by revolutionary action, for the revolutionary struggle for victory, for the final realization of the rule of proletarian democracy.

We know that the struggle for stipulations on paper of the best bourgeois-democratic constitution (on paper) has only a secondary importance. But the *masses* do not know it yet. They continue to give this struggle an immense scope because of their illusions. *To take as a point of departure* this secondary struggle meant to take as a point of departure the present low level of consciousness of the masses and meant the beginning of a progressive clarification of this consciousness, this will to struggle, this struggle of the masses, by means of our revolutionary tactic, by the masses' own experience, to raise them, to develop them and temper them in the direction of the democratic-proletarian revolution.

If examination of the general situation and its perspectives had shown that the offensive of the capitalist *coup d'etat* was only a long-term danger, then the revolutionary tactical line drawn above would have been altogether in place. In reality this danger is beginning to define itself for the *near* future. Against this danger we should have employed the boycott tactic in a suitable way tied to revolutionary criticism and propaganda about a government of workers and small peasants (even the internal situation of the party required this tactic).

At present all periods are not only in general shorter, but the tempo is, in general, more rapid than in the phase of the twenty years 1918-19 to 1938-39; at present violent changes are not only much more probable and more violent than formerly, but, above all, we are *obliged to start off from the worst variant*. At present the French bourgeoisie possesses not only its capitalist state apparatus, counter-revolutionary to the core, but, thanks to the passivity of the CP, the SFIO and the trade union bureaucracy, it already possesses today a *well-trained army for the coup d'etat*, composed of some hundreds of thousands of men in the form of French occupation troops in South Germany and Austria. As soon as the French bourgeoisie considers the time ripe, it will push the button through the intermediary of its de Gaulle (with the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie behind it) and this nationalist and chauvinist army will march on Paris against the French proletariat.

If our estimate of the danger as a short-term one is correct, it is possible that the masses will not understand our tactic for the moment—all the better and the more quickly will they understand us as soon as future events confirm our foresight, our warning; all the easier will it be for us to give an impetus to the masses in time to meet the capitalist *coup d'etat* offensive with a revolutionary counter-offensive.

So much for our position on May 5.

We do not know what the constitution that the masses will be called upon to vote on next time will be like. The Stalinist Party has in advance announced an immense retreat: it is for a constitution that will correspond to the wishes of "the entire people," that is to say, to those of the French bourgeoisie also! . . . We can only decide our tactic for the second referendum when we see first how this second

constitution is presented—if Russian chauvinist interests, that is to say, the power and parasitic interests of the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy are satisfied, the French Stalinist offspring will be ready to jump backwards far beyond the constitution of 1875,—and second, and above all, until we can examine concretely, if during this time, the general situation is transformed in a decisive way by a sharp international and national turn. This is not probable in view of the brief period, but it cannot be totally excluded. However the situation will present itself, we will in any case, find the correct tactic more easily if right now we examine and clarify by a *correct method*, what revolutionary tactic was necessary and appropriate for May 5.

May 24, 1946