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CARR, STALIN AND TROTSKY

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There are several significant political causes dealt with by Carr: the Bolshevik monopoly of power, the unity of party and state, state and party centralisation, the curtailment of free inner-Party debate, the problem of state and party bureaucracy and the use of force in solving the national problems of the Russian Empire. It is only possible to deal with each of these briefly. The Bolshevik monopoly of power did not happen automatically. At the time of the October coup against the provisional government several Bolshevik commissars and the powerful railways union insisted on the formation of a coalition government. But this collapsed in March 1918 when the left social-revolutionary group in the government opposed the Brest-Litovsk treaty. The non-Bolshevik parties were never suppressed as such, but after 1921 their activities were invariably declared counter-revolutionary and they were unable to operate openly. As a result all meaningful political debate tended to be increasingly confined to the Bolshevik party; and when political tensions rose as in 1921 and 1923 the party came to the verge of a split.24

The character of the revolutionary regime with a Bolshevik monopoly of political power led to an increasingly great overlap between party and state. It became more and more difficult to distinguish between party and state: to all intents and purposes they became one.

In this set-up the party came to dominate the state and in any dispute the party was the final arbiter. Disputes in and between state bodies were carried over into the party and became the possible basis of factional struggles in the party. In Carr's words, "It was becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between disloyalty to the party and treason to the state."25 In both spheres — party and state — greater centralisation became the main feature. The Bolsheviks had always had a tradition of secrecy and discipline and the special position of the party, and, perhaps, the political experience of the Russian workers, hardened the process after 1917. The centre of the party shifted from the central committee to the politburo. At the tenth congress in 1921 the central committee acquired the power to expel members of the central committee by a

25 Ibid., p. 212.
two-thirds majority. After the congress the central committee met less often; the three incumbent secretaries were all replaced. At the eleventh congress in March 1922 a new secretariat was elected, this time with a general secretary — Stalin. The centralisation in the party was matched by a similar process in the state. Here the concentration occurred earlier than in the party. Sovnarkom and the executive committee of the Congress of Soviets governed by virtue of an authority derived from the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, but very rapidly Sovnarkom assumed the sovereign position in the state. At the same time a concentration of authority at the centre at the expense of local soviets and congresses of soviets occurred. The net effect of this centralisation was more and more to restrict power struggles to a few people, mainly the politburo, and made it difficult to appeal to a wider audience if the small circle decided against it.

Associated with these features of the political system there was a growing tendency to circumscribe real debate and proscribe political opposition from any quarter. This did not occur at once. Initially, in the immediate post-revolutionary period, there was a period of unfettered discussion and controversy. The rise of strong opposition, particularly the left communists, and the civil war crisis, produced demands for the strictest centralism and the severest discipline, but in 1920 and 1921 further opposition came from the "decembrists" and the "workers' opposition". The result was the decision on unity at the tenth congress which banned factions and groupings. Dissemination of the ideas of the "workers' opposition" was declared to be incompatible with the membership of the Russian Communist Party. Henceforth the criticism of individuals or even of groups would be tolerated, but the opposition must not organise. In 1921 and 1922 disciplinary action became more common.

In August 1921 Lenin just failed to have Shlyapnikov expelled from the party for his oppositional activities. Shlyapnikov was a long-time Bolshevik, a worker by origin, first commissar of labor in the Soviet government and a leader of the "workers' opposition". Early in January 1922 a discussion club formed in Moscow was dissolved on the initiative of the central control commission which had been set up in September 1920, originally as a sort of ombudsman, only to turn into a body to enforce the authority of the party. A mass purge of the membership was undertaken. Most striking of all, perhaps, was the connection which was quickly established between the control commission of the party and the GPU (the political police). Carr notes that the party had established a monopoly of power in the state; now the state had begun to control the party. At the twelfth party congress in 1923 these develop-

26 Ibid., pp. 185-213. 27 Ibid.
ments came under attack; several speakers criticised the growing bureaucracy, particularly the account and distribution section of the central committee, which kept account of the party's manpower and supervised its distribution.

The problem of bureaucracy in the party and the state came to centre around Rabkrin — the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection — whose commissar was Stalin. This department in 1920 had superseded an earlier one of state control. In Lenin's view it was to lead the fight against bureaucracy and corruption in Soviet institutions through workers and peasants elected for short periods by the same constituents who elected the delegates to Soviets. It was to serve as a form of direct democracy. Lenin continued to defend Rabkrin against growing accusation of interfering, inefficiency, incompetence and bureaucracy, until the last few months of his active working life. Among his last articles, however, were two which called for a drastic reform of Rabkrin to overcome its glaring inadequacies.

Finally, another political cause of the differences which led to the struggle at the end of 1923 was the use of force to deal with the national question. Again this was an issue on which Lenin had backed Stalin, as the responsible man, only to become alarmed and, while he lay sick, to call for Stalin's removal from office. Subsequently to the revolution and the civil war Georgia had been a British-sponsored republic under a Menshevik government; early in 1921 the Red Army had invaded Georgia and a Soviet Government had been established. Lenin had been prepared to consider a coalition government, but the chief Mensheviks had fled to Paris. Because of the extremely variegated ethnic character of the whole of Transcaucasia, the Bolsheviks sought to establish a single federal republic on the Russian model. This policy was resisted by the Georgian Bolshevik leaders, but they were overruled by Orjonikhidze; the Georgian party leaders were removed and ordered to Moscow. Eventually at the end of 1922 the invalid-Lenin dictated a memorandum on the issue which censured Orjonikhidze, Dzerzhinsky (who had investigated only to exonerate the central leadership from any misdeeds) and Stalin. Lenin urged Trotsky to speak up on the question at the twelfth Congress. The fact that Trotsky did not respond to Lenin's urging but left Bukharin to take up the cudgels for the Georgians emphasises the importance of the personal element in the causal sequence leading to the factional struggle.

Lenin realised the importance of this element of personal conflict. In his "Letter to the Congress" — a memorandum in which

28 Ibid., pp. 225-228.
he expressed from his sickbed his fears about a personal clash among
the leaders in his absence — he clearly delineated Stalin and Trotsky
as the main protagonists. As part of his proposals to prevent a
split he called for Stalin's demotion from the office of general
secretary and added that although it may be a trifle, from the
point of view of the relations of Stalin and Trotsky it was not a
trifle, "or it is such a trifle as may acquire a decisive significance."30

In the event Lenin's advice was not followed. At one point in his
discussion of the characters of the principal figures Carr sums up
his views on the role of personality in Soviet history in the nineteen-
twenties; they form "a minor part of the story . . . The struggle
between policies and the struggle for power between individual
leaders were both real. But they proceeded independently and on
different planes."31 The crucial aspect was Trotsky's personal isola-
tion in the politburo. He had only become a Bolshevik in July 1917
and he owed his position to his own abilities and to Lenin's recogni-
tion of his unique capacities as a revolutionary and thinker of
brilliance. With Lenin withdrawn from active participation in the
leadership, Trotsky was thrown back on his own resources. Many
"old Bolsheviks" regarded him with suspicion because of his non-
Bolshevik past; some feared his emergence as a Bonaparte; of all
the Bolshevik leaders he seemed the most likely to fill this role.
There were long-standing differences between Trotsky and Zinoviev,
apparently the most likely candidate for the succession. In these
circumstances a triumvirate of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin formed
inside the politburo, Trotsky at first accepted the situation, and he
did nothing at the twelfth congress to force the issues which had
worried Lenin. But to a considerable extent Trotsky's freedom of
action was circumscribed by the resilience of the triumvirate in
following Lenin's injunctions. Stalin's great political skill in meet-
ing Lenin's criticisms played the major part in avoiding an open
breach. However, given Trotsky's personality, the breach had to
come. The immediate cause was the worsening of the scissors
crisis. On October 8 1923, Trotsky addressed a letter to the central
committee in which he indicted the politburo policy on two counts:
a) the radically incorrect and unhealthy regime within the party;
and b) the dissatisfaction of the workers and peasants with the
grievous economic situation, which had been brought about as the
result not only of objective difficulties but because of flagrant
errors of economic policy. This, and the platform of the 46, which
followed a week later, put the fat in the fire.32 From October 1923
until January 1924 an intense debate took place; it ended with the
defeat of the opposition, although the majority had made consider-
able concessions in the process.

30 Ibid., p. 263.
32 Carr, The Interregnum, pp. 105-6.
Two major points remain; both raise the issue of “accident” or “chance” in history. The first is the effect of Lenin’s illness in 1922 and his growing incapacity until in March 1923 he became moribund (he finally died in January 1924); the second, Trotsky’s illness in late October 1923 which kept him from a very active part in the struggle. The first is relevant to the causes of the split; the second has more to do with the outcome. Lenin’s illness is indeed a major point. Referring to the contrary trends in the party, Carr says: “So long as Lenin firmly held the reins, the two forces could be reconciled and run in double harness.”33 To a remarkable degree Lenin expressed in equal measure the opposing tendencies; “western” and “eastern”, intellectual and practical, democratic and centralising. He was equally at home in the party and the state. He had an outstanding political capacity for keeping faith with principle while adapting to necessities. Through all this he maintained the confidence and goodwill of the Bolsheviks of all tendencies. His importance can perhaps best be gauged by the influence he had on Trotsky’s fortunes. Lenin and Trotsky together were irresistible; Trotsky on his own, while often right, could not establish his leadership. Analogous situations give us no help in predicting a different outcome if Lenin had not been incapacitated. All we can say is that this “accident” certainly had a causal effect on the split.

It is necessary, finally, to make some estimate of Carr’s success in writing history along the lines of his ideas on historical causation. At one point Carr says, “given the composition of the party and the turbulent conditions into which it was plunged within a few months of its revolutionary triumph, its evolution was inevitable. In the struggle latent in the term “democratic centralism” — the struggle between the flow of authority from the periphery to the centre and the imposition of discipline by the centre on the periphery, between democracy and efficiency — the second was bound to emerge as the predominant factor.”34 Elsewhere Carr excuses himself for the use of the “naughty” word but he does seem here to be arguing that the course of events was inevitable: they were bound to happen, predetermined by the existence of certain conditions. Generally he seems to argue that certain causes were so overwhelming in Soviet history between 1917 and 1924 that a split was inevitable and the voluntary aspects were of less significance than he suggests in What is History?35 As has already been stated Carr’s endeavours to set out causes are not as neatly executed as would perhaps be expected from the emphasis he puts on the importance of the historian uncovering causes in history. His use of explana-

35 See pp. 2-3.
tion hypothesis is rarely evident; one case is the use of Robert Michels' ideas on the role of oligarchy in explaining the centralisation of power: "All organised political parties — and particularly parties representing the masses, where the rank and file is widely separated from the leaders by the intellectual and technical qualifications required for leadership — have tended, however democratic the principles on which they rest, to develop in the direction of a closed oligarchy of leaders." But such attempts at explicit hypotheses are rare.

It is made explicit at one point that Carr does not rate personality, in the context of the relation of interpretation of causes, of much significance. He acknowledges it plays a part, albeit minor, but it is in tune with his interpretation which is that historical, social and economic causes are the main ones. This is his cognitive and causal orientation to reality. While it is not strongly explicit, it is pretty plain from the marshalling of facts and the framework into which they are placed. In the hierarchy of causes Carr attaches greatest significance to the historical, the social and the economic. The rationality operating behind this is that Carr sees the Bolshevik revolution as part of a world revolution and he is interested in these causes because of their possible general significance.

How far is he successful in relating the causes to each other and ranking the causes, in order of importance and hitting on an "ultimate cause"? Carr certainly suggests a multiplicity of causes but it is not made very clear how he assesses them. The stress is on the historical, social and economic but it is rather difficult to judge which of them is regarded as most important. The essay the "Legacy of History" suggests that he might think the historical causes are of greatest importance: the historic backwardness of Russia, the western-eastern division, the large historic-cultural gulf in society, but one cannot be absolutely sure. He does make a specific reference to the "scissors crisis" — an economic cause — as the immediate cause, but the immediate cause is not the "ultimate" cause.

Carr certainly sticks to his injunction not to indulge in the might-have-beens of history. He does keep pretty closely to what happened and he rarely attempts what Collingwood insists is the essence of history — trying to get at the thought lying behind the events; at least he avoids any imaginative speculations in contrast to Isaac Deutscher, who in his biographies of Stalin and Trotsky (more especially the latter) resorts to this method successfully.37

"Accidents" are not treated as of high importance. Carr doesn't try to make much of Lenin's illness, which had its causes; nor does he attach much significance to its causal sequence and how it affected the sequence which he considers of primary concern. This is in line with his ideas on accident. Carr is reasonably successful in writing history in the way he advocates but his failures emphasise the difficulties of method in history. It is somewhat more difficult in practice to write history according to a model than might be expected from an initial statement of the model.

In fact, the historian writes history as it presents itself to him. If the causes are clearly discernible they are usually made fairly explicit; otherwise the causes may lie hidden within the history itself until, perhaps, a better historian is able to clarify what has hitherto remained obscure. In this respect history is not much different from any other branch of knowledge, although the problems of historical causation have their own individual nature.

PREPARATION OF COMMUNIST PARTY PROGRAM

Strategies for socialism are up for discussion. To one degree or another everyone on the left is concerned to develop a strategy for social change, to find the answers to the complex problems of revolution in modern society.

In this respect a very important issue for the next Congress of the Communist Party, scheduled for June 1970, is the drafting of a new program. The National Committee will present a draft for discussion from its meeting in December.

An outline of theses which serve as a basis for drawing up such a program was produced in May, and views of readers of ALR on all the issues involved, will be welcome.

The outline was published in Tribune of September 24, and copies are available on application to the CPA.

All ideas will be carefully considered in preparing the draft of the program, which will then be open for party and public discussion and debate up till and during the Congress.

Views should be submitted in writing to Laurie Aarons, National Secretary, Communist Party of Australia, 168 Day St., Sydney 2000.