

Marxist ideas to turn the tide

Readings and reflections
on revolutionary socialist strategy

Edited by Cathy Nugent

June 2013

ISBN

Phoenix Press

Workers' Liberty
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Riley Road
London, SE1 3DG

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Introduction

The Communist (Third) International (CI) first met in Moscow in March 1919. 52 delegates from 34 organisations — communist parties, left social democratic groupings, revolutionary syndicalism — came together, inspired by the events and politics of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Within a few years the Communist International had, in the words of Albert Glotzer in the opening article, accumulated a “rich and noble history”. It could do this, in large part, because the CI was the collective work of all those — and not just the Russian Marxists — who had opposed the imperialist slaughter of the First World War and fought to reaffirm socialist internationalism; who wanted to end forever the abject confusion of the leaders of the mass, working-class and formally Marxist parties who had backed the war efforts of the rival bourgeoisies.

Many of the readings in this book show how the CI understood how the political culture of Marxist revolutionary socialism, fought for and agonised over since the 1840s, was precious.

The CI was fixed on a clear goal — to help the workers in Europe and elsewhere come to power. The Russian Marxists understood that without the spread of revolution the fragile and embattled Russian workers’ republic could not survive. They had high hopes that the German workers — who first rose against collapsing German capitalism in November 1918 — would succeed.

But by the Third Congress of the CI (in the summer of 1921) the delegates were forced, in Trotsky’s words, “to recognise that capitalism had succeeded in coping with the difficulties arising from the war” and “restored capitalist equilibrium” for a while. Printed here, is a report to the Fourth Congress, in which Trotsky carefully outlines the new “perspectives” on which he based ideas for policies. Some articles here (“The nature of our action programme” and ‘An end to “Apparatus Marxism”’) describe how Trotsky’s method degraded and was almost lost to the post-Trotsky Marxist movement.

The Third and Fourth Congresses developed mature policies and tactics for the Communist Parties. They wanted organising principles which could unite workers and develop the class struggle in the new conditions.

In his review of John Riddell’s recent book of documents from the Fourth Congress, Paul Hampton describes how the CI developed a “holy trinity” for the Marxist programme (transitional demands, the united front and the workers’ government). Two readings (on the united front by Trotsky and on workers’ government by Clara Zetkin) elaborate. And an extract from a 1924 article by Antonio Gramsci gives insight into the Marxist dictum of “the unity of theory and practice”. Already suffering under a fascist regime, the Italian Marxists had a life-and-death struggle to win

workers to an emancipatory politics. Their level of collective political culture had to be radically improved if they were to succeed.

In September 1923 the German Communists failed to act decisively in a renewed revolutionary situation. That story is outside the scope of this book but was a decisive factor in a retreat from, and later disavowal of, revolutionary politics by a faction in the Russian party grouped around Joseph Stalin, Lev Kamenev and — especially influential in the parties of the CI — Grigorii Zinoviev. Alfred Rosmer's article ('The myths of Anti-Trotskyism') shows how the faction used their power in the bureaucracy to manipulate decision-making, victimise oppositional voices and create a false narrative of "orthodoxy" associated with Lenin; Trotsky became "anti-Leninist" and "anti-orthodox".

"Leninism", in this sense, was the creation of the "troika". Recent books by Lars T Lih have shown how far the real Lenin was from the fabricated "ideal". Paul Hampton's review of Lih's *Lenin* details some of his "myth-busting".

How does Workers' Liberty access the CI tradition? Not by regarding the great political achievements of the "first four congresses" as an orthodoxy that is not open to challenge. We study the general approach. We are inspired by and adapt the ideas that remain relevant.

It is now more than thirty years since the collapse of the Stalinist dictatorships in Eastern Europe. Yet we still need to dismantle the corrupted and undemocratic political culture of many would-be revolutionaries, to wrest our history out from under the layers of lies and myth-making. Re-examining old texts and new assessments should help us. The final part of this book looks at ways in which our political group does that.

Cathy Nugent

Because [the Spartacus League] is the voice of warning, of urgency, because it is the socialist conscience of the Revolution, it is hated, persecuted, and defamed by all the open and secret enemies of the Revolution and the proletariat.

Crucify it! shout the capitalists, trembling for their cashboxes.

Crucify it! shout the petty bourgeois, the officers, the anti-Semites, the press lackeys of the bourgeoisie, trembling for their fleshpots under the class rule of the bourgeoisie.

Crucify it! shout the Scheidemanns, who, like Judas Iscariot, have sold the workers to the bourgeoisie and tremble for their pieces of silver.

Crucify it! repeat like an echo the deceived, betrayed, abused strata of the working class and the soldiers who do not know that, by raging against the Spartacus League, they rage against their own flesh and blood.

In their hatred and defamation of the Spartacus League, all the counter-revolutionaries, all enemies of the people, all the antisocialist, ambiguous, obscure, and unclear elements are united. That is proof that the heart of the Revolution beats within the Spartacus League, that the future belongs to it.

The Spartacus League is not a party that wants to rise to power over the mass of workers or through them.

The Spartacus League is only the most conscious, purposeful part of the proletariat, which points the entire broad mass of the working class toward its historical tasks at every step, which represents in each particular stage of the Revolution the ultimate socialist goal, and in all national questions the interests of the proletarian world revolution.

The Spartacus League refuses to participate in governmental power with the lackeys of the bourgeoisie, with the Scheidemann-Eberts, because it sees in such collaboration a betrayal of the fundamentals of socialism, a strengthening of the counter-revolution, and a weakening of the Revolution...

The Spartacus League will never take over governmental power except in response to the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of all of Germany, never except by the proletariat's conscious affirmation of the views, aims, and methods of struggle of the Spartacus League.

The proletarian revolution can reach full clarity and maturity only by stages, step by step, on the Golgotha-path of its own bitter experiences in struggle, through defeats and victories.

The victory of the Spartacus League comes not at the beginning, but at the end of the Revolution: it is identical with the victory of the great million-strong masses of the socialist proletariat.

Proletarian, arise! To the struggle! There is a world to win and a world to defeat. In this final class struggle in world history for the highest aims of humanity, our slogan toward the enemy is: Thumbs on the eyeballs and knee in the chest!

Rosa Luxemburg, from *What does the Spartacus League Want?*

CONTEXT

The heroic period of the Communist International

By Al Glotzer

A review of Leon Trotsky's *The First Five Years of the Communist International* volume one

The rich and noble history of the Communist International, formed in a period of tremendous class struggles, has yet to be written. Trotsky has contributed a considerable amount of material toward that history and a portion of it is now available in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*.

Since the formation of the Comintern in 1919, a new generation of revolutionaries has grown up. It knows little about the travail which attended its birth, the heroic period of its early growth, the tremendous figures — martyrs all — of the world revolutionary movement who directed its destinies, the body of Marxian theory which it developed, and the enormous contribution to strategy and tactics of revolutionary struggle which it gave as a legacy to the movement of today.

The Stalinist era is better known, being still with us. The crippling blows of its revisionism and then outright counterrevolutionary practices are felt with particular severity today in a period of the deepest depression the world revolutionary movement has ever known.

Since the failure of the German revolution of 1923, the proletariat has experienced little else but uninterrupted defeats, the rise of fascism and, finally, the chaos, destruction and mass misery of the Second World War. Some have learned to associate crafty politics, opportunism, bureaucracy, ruthlessness, deception, assassination and counter-revolution with the whole history of the Communist International, unaware that the pre-Stalinist era of the Comintern contains within it the lessons for the future emancipation of the proletariat.

The material in Trotsky's book has an extraordinary value for us in the present historical period [1946, when the review was written]. We have just lived through a second imperialist war and are in the midst of a post-war period of capitalist decay on a world scale. The re-emergence of im-

perialist rivalries occur even before the dead of this war have all been buried. Disequilibrium remains the basic characteristic of present-day economic, social and political life. Thus, all the objective conditions for the revolutionary overthrow of world capitalism are overripe.

The war, as could have been foreseen, was unable to solve any of the problems of imperialism. In this respect, then, the post-war conditions of 1945-46 are approximately identical to the post-war conditions of 1918-19. This similarity in the objective condition of world capitalism between the two postwar periods is, however, of no fundamental importance. It is the dissimilarity in the subjective conditions, between the two periods, namely, the state of the world revolutionary movement, which is of quintessential importance. And on these grounds it is necessary to say the proletariat of the present period, in contrast to 1918-19, finds itself in an unfavourable position. In 1918-19 there was a revolutionary movement on the Continent. The Russian proletariat had taken power. Shortlived Soviet republics existed in Bavaria and Hungary. The first German revolution had begun and the Italian workers were preparing to seize the factories. In all other countries the revolutionary movement was growing swiftly. The formation of the Communist International, as the guide and spirit of the world-wide upsurge of the revolutionary movement was itself a factor of inestimable value for giving the elemental movement organisation and direction. But even then, as we shall see, the weaknesses of the revolutionary party, i. e., of revolutionary leadership, or the absence of such leadership, resulted in the defeat of the proletariat of Europe and the isolation of the Russian Revolution!

To begin with the subjective factor first because in "the epoch of wars and revolutions" it is the decisive factor, one must acknowledge that it does not exist today in any formidable shape or form. Certainly it does not exist in any comparable degree to the movement of 25 years ago. Except for the tiny organisations of the Fourth Internationalist movement, there is nothing on the Continent which resembles the mass revolutionary parties of the first post-war period. Moreover, there is no continuity of leadership or organisation. Add to this, the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the reactionary influence of Stalinism and you have the explanation for the absence of great class battles in Europe, where the decay of capitalism is far deeper than it has ever been before. We shall seek the explanation for this a little further on. But first, to return to the formation of the Communist International.

The Communist International was not an insidious product of the Russian Bolsheviks, as the bourgeois and social democratic critics of the International maintained. The victory of the Russian Revolution coming on the heels of the collapse of the Second International in the war, made it inevitable that the re-emergence of a new world organisation of the proletariat would take place in revolutionary Moscow. How else could it have

happened? The Second International was rent by social chauvinism. The leading parties which dominated the International and controlled its policies were at war with each other, having joined their respective ruling classes in the imperialist conflict. The official organisations of the working class, parties, trade unions, fraternal societies and cooperatives, under the leadership of traitors, merged with the state apparatus of the warring powers and were drenched in the flood-waters of imperialist nationalism. What an inglorious chapter in the history of proletarian struggle! The “socialists” at war with each other! Over what? The imperialist interests of their respective ruling classes! No wonder the bourgeoisie snickered and marveled at its own imagined power.

The collapse of the International made inevitable the formation of a new world body. After the fateful day of August 4, 1914, new organisations, groups, and factions of revolutionary internationalists made themselves heard all over Europe. Under the leadership of the Russian Bolsheviks and the brave revolutionists of the other Continental countries, a new voice was heard in the din of the war: the voice of revolutionary socialist internationalism. Zimmerwald and Kienthal were the first organised expression of the revival of internationalism in the workers movement in the midst of the war. The Russian Revolution then occurred as the mightiest force for the reconstitution of the new, Third International. The victory of the Russian working class was like a fresh breeze on a Europe befouled by imperialism and the treacherous social democratic leadership.

Russia

Given these conditions it was logical that the International be reconstituted on the soil of revolutionary Russia which heralded the new society, the new fraternity of the exploited. With the convening of the founding congress in Moscow on 2 March 1919, the continuity and integrity of the revolutionary socialist thought and practice was saved. Its formation marked a new stage and task for the modern proletariat.

The First International “laid the foundation of the international struggle of the proletariat for Socialism.” It disseminated the scientific principles of socialism developed by Marx and Engels and destroyed for all time the power and influence of utopianism, “true” socialism and anarcho-communism, and gave the coming movement of the proletariat its scientific basis. The First International of Marx and Engels disappeared with the defeat of the Paris Commune and the beginning of a new epoch in the expansion of world capitalism. But it had sown the seed of the future.

In assessing the role of the Second International, one must not lose sight of the fact that it too had a grand history. There was the International of Engels, the elder Liebknecht and of Bebel, just as there was the International of MacDonald, Bernstein, Scheidemann, and Hillquit. Before its collapse in the Great War, the Second International had been a preparatory school of

working class organisation. And Lenin, in an historical appraisal of this body, once wrote:

“When it is stated that the Second International is dead and has suffered shameful bankruptcy, it needs to be properly understood. It signifies death and bankruptcy of opportunism, reformism, petty bourgeois socialism. For the Second International has to its credit a service for all time which no intelligent working man will ever repudiate, and that is — the building up of mass labor organisations, co-operative, trade union and political; the utilisation of bourgeois parliamentarism, and generally all bourgeois democratic institutions, etc.”

The Communist International took over all that was good in the previous history of the Second International, but it gave the new movement a rekindled spirit of internationalism, the lack of which caused the old organisation to founder. The historic place of the Communist International is thus secured by the fact that it became the International of proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, the “International of the deed.”

Trotsky’s book is a summation of this heroic period of the Communist International. It presents one of the most stirring stories of an era of intense class struggle and presents a panorama of revolutionary strategy, purposeful in design, by the most complete revolutionary internationalists the world has ever known. Trotsky contributed an enormous amount of this history himself. The vibrant call of the manifesto of the first congress was his. He wrote the manifesto of the second congress. The main report at the third congress and the theses of that gathering, perhaps the most important in the history of the Comintern, were also his. Between these great documents, there are speeches and articles outlining the strategy of the Comintern which remain living documents to this very day and are invaluable source material to revolutionary Marxist thought.

This volume of Trotsky’s book can be readily divided into two distinct periods: the First and Second Congresses, and the Third Congress. The first two gatherings occur in the post-war revolutionary period; the third in the period following the defeat of the European proletariat in its initial struggles for power. Unavoidably, then, the material which composed the deliberation of these congresses dealt with the problems which arose in the transition from the stage of proletarian offensive to defensive; from the stage of capitalist decomposition to one of relative stabilisation.

The First Congress of the Communist International was held in Moscow on 2 March 1919. It was attended by 51 delegates from 17 countries. The Allied blockade of Russia prevented wider representation. Delegates sent by their respective organisations never arrived in Moscow, but representatives of the most important areas of Europe were present.

As the organising congress of the Communist International, the first meeting had a provisional character. Yet it was to clear away the ideolog-

ical debris of social democracy and its traditions and set the theoretical sights of the new world party. Convening in the midst of the social decay of capitalism and proletarian struggle for state power, the congress naturally reflected the intense revolutionary situation in Europe. If one bears in mind the confusion created by the betrayals of the Second International, it will be easier to understand why the Congress dealt with the following subjects: Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship; the Berne Conference and our Attitude Toward Socialist Tendencies; the World Situation and the Policy of the Entente, and the Manifesto.

Manifesto of the First Congress

The manifesto which Trotsky wrote and presented to the congress clearly delineates the purposes of the new international and the period in which it emerged: Capitalist chaos and disintegration! Mass unrest and a will to struggle on the part of the working masses. Toward the revolutionary seizure of power! No wonder the manifesto is a stirring call to action:

“Our task is to generalise the revolutionary experience of the working class, to purge the movement of the corroding admixture of opportunism and social patriotism, to unify the efforts of all genuinely revolutionary parties of the world proletariat and thereby facilitate and hasten the victory of the Communist revolution throughout the world.”

And it concludes with this ringing challenge:

“Bourgeois world order has been sufficiently lashed by Socialist criticism. The task of the International Communist Party consists in overthrowing this order and erecting in its place the edifice of the socialist order. We summon the working men and women of all countries to unite under the Communist banner which is already the banner of the first great victories.

“WORKERS OF THE WORLD — in the struggle against imperialist barbarism, against monarchy, against the privileged estates, against the bourgeois state and bourgeois property, against all kinds and forms of class or national oppression — UNITE!

“Under the banner of Workers’ Soviets, under the banner of revolutionary struggle for power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, under the banner of the Third International — WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!”

The manifesto of 1919 became a rallying force for the new world organisation of the revolutionary proletariat. Eighteen months later the Second Congress convened. This intervening period was the most revolutionary in the history of Europe. Throughout the continent the Communist International established new sections. Its growth was phenomenal and reflected the turbulent character of the class war that girdled the globe. Thus, the Second Congress concerned itself chiefly with the struggle for power as an immediate prospect.

Clarification of principle became indispensable for the future development of the new movement; a world party engaged in the struggle for power in the name of the only progressive class in society.

As in all periods of revolutionary upswing, the movement attracted dubious elements of every description, organised in their own parties, factions or groups, or unattached. These hybrid elements brought with them an assortment of theoretical and political ideas which ran the gamut from sectarianism to opportunism. The excursion train was a long one and tended to slow the progress of the revolutionary engine at its head. The congress therefore had to return to basic principles: the role of a revolutionary party, shall revolutionaries participate in parliamentary activity?; shall Communists work in reactionary trade unions? On all these questions, the congress rejected the sterile doctrines of sectarianism which could only lead to isolation from the masses. It then adopted conditions for admission into the Communist International, the basic premise of which was the acceptance of the revolutionary doctrines of Marxism.

The continuation of the intensive revolutionary offensive was also reflected in the manifesto of the Second Congress which Trotsky wrote, too. So sure of the future were the leaders of the International, that the manifesto, issued again as a call to action, proclaimed:

“Civil war is on the order of the day throughout the world. Its banner is the Soviet Power ... In different countries the struggle is passing through different stages. But it is the final struggle.”

How nearly true these stirring words were, we can only appreciate in retrospect. The failure of the victory, however, was revealed as a failure of leadership! Only a few years afterward, Trotsky was able to write:

“War did not lead directly to the victory of the proletariat in Western Europe. It is all too obvious today just what was lacking for victory in 1919 and 1920: a revolutionary party was lacking.”

This statement by Trotsky is in apparent contradiction to the reality, the existence of the Communist International. Yet, actually, its formation was belated. Had the Communist International been formed during the war, it is likely that the parties which adhered to it would have passed through their formative, preparatory stages in time. Instead, the First and Second Congresses met in the course of the revolutionary wave and had to carry through the task of clarification and education during the battles itself. Thus, the struggle for power was pursued in the midst of a process of clarification and education in which the advance guard of the proletariat had to discard the ideological trash of social democracy and to learn, for the first time, the theory and practice of revolutionary Marxism, of revolutionary strategy and tactics. Before this process of rearming was nearly completed, the revolutionary wave had passed.

In his *Third International After Lenin*, Trotsky wrote of this period between the second and third congresses, relating specifically to the lack of matu-

rity of the communist parties:

“When we looked forward at that time to an immediate seizure of power by the proletariat, we reckoned that a revolutionary party would mature rapidly in the fire of the civil war. But the two terms did not coincide. The revolutionary wave of the post-war period ebbed before the communist parties grew up and reached maturity in the struggle with the social democracy so as to assume the leadership of the insurrection.”

(Henceforth, in at least four other significantly revolutionary situations, especially in Germany in 1923, the defeats of the proletariat were attributable to a new failure in leadership resulting this time from the degeneration of the Communist International under the aegis of Stalinist revisionism.)

Foundation of Internationalism

But before the Third Congress had convened, the leaders of the Comintern had sufficiently clarified theoretical questions and, above all, established the international character of the movement as its primary manifestation. Reflecting the international character of capitalism (the interdependence of nations, the primacy of the world market, the world division of labor and exchange of goods), the Comintern was not a “sum” of national parties each devoted to their national tasks. “It is,” as Trotsky wrote, “the Communist Party of the international proletariat.” As such it “represents a unified, independent, international organisation, pursuing definite and precisely formulated aims through definitive revolutionary means.”

Corresponding to the imperialist epoch, the proletarian struggle was essentially “international in substance but national in form.” No party can estimate the objective situation in its country, or develop strategy and tactics for its working class, without giving first consideration to the international situation and the condition of the world movement of the proletariat. For a party to do otherwise would result in its degeneration after the manner of the Second International.

These ideas hammered home, the CI arrived at its very important Third Congress. The revolutionary wave, as we have already indicated, had subsided. The proletariat, worn out from years of war and revolutionary struggle, exhibited marked tendencies of fatigue and disillusionment at the failure of their revolutionary parties. The failure of the revolution gave capitalism a new breathing spell and the opportunity to reestablish a measure of economic equilibrium.

The Third Congress, which met mid-year of 1921, was attended by more than 500 delegates from 48 countries. The most important subject before the congress was the report made by Trotsky (in complete agreement with Lenin) on the *World Economic Crisis and the New Tasks of the Communist International*. The main content of this report and the resolution which

formed its basis is already indicated. In summary, Trotsky's report showed the delegates the dialectical relationship between an objectively revolutionary situation and the problem of leadership, the subjective element. He illustrated, by example, how the failure of the revolution gave world capitalism the opportunity for reorganising the chaotic economy and reestablishing a measure of stabilisation. Given the failure of the revolutionary parties, the exhaustion of the proletariat, Trotsky was able to pose for the first time since the end of the war this type of question:

"Does development actually proceed even now in the direction of revolution? Or is it necessary to recognise that capitalism has succeeded in coping with the difficulties arising from the war? And if it has not already restored, is it either restoring or close to restoring capitalist equilibrium upon new post-war foundations?"

The report already indicated the answer in its opening remarks in which Trotsky said:

"Capitalist equilibrium is an extremely complex phenomenon. Capitalism produces this equilibrium, disrupts it, restores it anew in order to disrupt it anew, concurrently extending the limits of its domination... Capitalism thus possesses a dynamic equilibrium, one which is always in the process of either disruption or restoration. But at the same time this equilibrium has a great power of resistance, the best proof of which is that the capitalist world has not toppled to this day."

There follows a mass of evidence indicating how capitalism was gaining strength and confidence, repairing its tottering economy, plugging gaps here and there and reaching the road toward a stabilisation of the system. "The bourgeoisie gains appeasement" said Trotsky. But with this difference: whereas in the period of capitalist growth and expansion, crises were of brief duration and "prosperity" longer lasting, in this period of capitalist decay and decline, the "crises are of a prolonged character while the booms are fleeting, superficial and speculative." Thus the prospects of economic crises and sharp dislocations are ever present. Then Trotsky made clear that even boom and stabilisation did not automatically preclude the prospects of great class struggle. On the contrary, a favourable economic conjuncture can "reassemble the demoralised and devitalised workers who had lost their courage." And then he added, "Such a change (stabilisation) could prove harmful only in the event of a long epoch of prosperity." Denying this prospect, Trotsky contends that the future will offer favourable opportunities for victory. And it did.

The emphasis given to this problem by Trotsky was made necessary by the presence at the congress of an ultra-leftist faction led by Bukharin whose major premise was his own version of the "permanent revolution":

"Since capitalism had exhausted itself, therefore the victory must be gained through an uninterrupted revolutionary offensive."

It was against this pernicious theory of the "uninterrupted revolutionary

offensive" that the big guns of the conference were turned. The report declared that the great task, in view of the changing world situation, was to win the support of the majority of the working class everywhere. "To the Masses," became the slogan of the Congress. But not simply that. "To power through a previous conquest of the masses!" The emphasis laid on this point was to defeat all ultra-leftist and sectarian ideas which arose in the congress. The ultra-leftists proceeded on a single note: this is the period of the decay of capitalism. All the objective conditions for the overthrow of capitalism are ripe. Therefore we must adopt the policy of "continuous revolution." And in this way they overlooked the dynamics of the revolutionary struggle and the fact that "the revolution has its own fluctuations, its own crises and its own favourable conjunctures."

The Third Congress

The Third Congress, however, met at the end of one wave of revolution. It was necessary to reorient the International to a new stage of the struggle. This stage Trotsky summarised in the Third International After Lenin as follows:

"The Third Congress of the Comintern was a milestone demarcating the first and second periods. It set down the fact that the resources of the communist parties, politically as well as organisationally, were not sufficient for the conquest of power.

"It advanced the slogan: 'To the Masses,' that is, to the conquest of power through a previous conquest of the masses, achieved on the basis of the daily life and struggles. For the mass also continues to live its daily life in a revolutionary epoch, even if in a somewhat different manner."

And out of this congress came the tactic of the united front to serve as a means of developing the class struggle and achieving leadership of the masses. How? Through the united front tactic, to fuse the masses "on the basis of transitional demands."

"It is economics that decides," wrote Trotsky, "but only in the last analysis." In other words, it is not merely the decay of capitalism, the "objectively revolutionary situation" which is decisive, but the state of the revolutionary movement, the maturity of the parties, their leadership over the masses, the will to struggle on the part of the proletariat and their confidence in the revolutionary party. And the absence of these conditions, given the defeat of the post-war revolutionary movements, brought about a new political stage in Europe and the decisions of the Third Congress.

Capitalism saved itself, but it was a wounded giant. The healing process left it alive but it was not the youthful, strong, expanding capitalism. The fact was, as Trotsky reported at the Third Congress, that "Europe has been hurled back ... The Balkan countries are completely ruined and have been thrown back into the economic and cultural conditions of barbarism." He speaks of a "regression in economic life." However, all is not lost for the

bourgeoisie so long as the proletariat does not take power.

In 1921, still living under the influence of the post-war revolutionary situation, Trotsky did not believe that capitalism could survive another decade or two. But he did postulate the future, saying:

“If we grant — and let us grant it for the moment — that the working class fails to rise in revolutionary struggle, but allows the bourgeoisie the opportunity to rule the world’s destiny for a long number of years, say, two or three decades, then assuredly some sort of new equilibrium will be reestablished. Europe will be thrown violently into reverse gear. Millions of European workers will die from unemployment and malnutrition. The United States will be compelled to reorient itself on the world market, reconvert its industry, and suffer curtailment for a considerable period. Afterwards, after a new world division of labor is thus established in agony for 15 or 20 or 25 years, a new epoch of capitalist upswing might perhaps ensue.”

How prophetic Trotsky was! A new upswing has not occurred and will likely never occur. But a new period of stabilisation did arrive. The United States did orient itself on the world market and did “suffer curtailment for a considerable period.” This whole course of development continued approximately until the outbreak of the Second World War. For a second time within living memory the imperialist powers went to war to seek a new redivision of the earth.

But whereas in 1914 it was possible to depict the great revolutionary upheavals during and after the war, one could not justifiably make such predictions for the recent war and post-war period. And this was due, not to the absence of favourable objective conditions. This period of capitalism remains a period of “wars and revolutions,” of capitalist decline and disintegration. This past war was far more destructive than the first, far more dislocating in its effects. If Trotsky declared that Europe was “hurled back” after the First World War, what would he have said today! If the Balkan countries lived under “economic and cultural conditions of barbarism” in the 20s, what can one say of Europe today, Europe of the concentration camps, labor camps, forced migrations of peoples; Europe, the economic wasteland. These, then, are the fruits of modern capitalism.

Why did not the proletariat revolt and take power after World War Two? Why no class battles, no revolutionary offensive comparable to 1919 and 1920? The answer is simple: no revolutionary organisation of the working class; no revolutionary parties.

Revolutionary Marxists cannot approach this question sentimentally or emotionally. One must apply the power of Marxist analysis to the world situation in order to understand precisely the conditions under which we live, what the prospects of the class struggle are, and how the revolutionary socialists must orient themselves.

Delusion is the greatest danger to the movement today! The delusion

lies in the failure to recognise that all talk of an immediate successful overthrow of capitalism in this period is criminally disorienting given the absence of the revolutionary organisation of the proletariat, the absence of mass revolutionary parties, the absence of experienced cadres, i.e., leadership, and the absence of a revolutionary international with authority over and the following of the majority of the working class of Europe.

Yet it is upon such leadership and proletarian organisation that the whole future depends. If one does not recognise this task, then the reconstruction of the movement is an impossibility!

Can a small party (not of hundreds, but of thousands) achieve the strategic goal? Perhaps. Says Trotsky:

“And therefore if it is true — and it is true — that under certain conditions even a small party can become the leading organisation not only of the labor movement but also of the workers’ revolution, this can happen only with the proviso that this small party discerns in its smallness not an advantage but the greatest misfortune of which it must be rid as speedily as possible.”

This was said against those who developed putschist concepts and the idea that the revolution is the task of a small minority party whose will is decisive, no matter what the objective conditions and the state of proletarian organisation.

“A purely mechanical conception, of the proletarian revolution,” said Trotsky, “which proceeds solely from the fact that capitalist economy continues to decay — has led certain groups of comrades to construe theories which are false to the core: the false theory of an initiating minority which by its heroism shatters ‘the wall of universal passivity’ among the proletariat. The false theory of uninterrupted offensives conducted by the proletarian vanguard, as a ‘new method’ of struggle; the false theory of partial battles which are waged by applying the methods of armed insurrection.... It is absolutely self-evident that tactical theories of this sort have nothing in common with Marxism ... The economic preconditions for the victory of the working class are at hand. Failing this victory, and moreover unless this victory comes in the more or less near future, all civilisation is menaced with decline and degeneration. But this victory can be gained only by the skilled conduct of battles and, above all, by first conquering the majority of the working class. This is the main lesson of the Third Congress.”

We continue to live in the epoch of “wars and revolutions.” But that does not wholly describe our epoch. It is also the epoch of Stalinist counter-revolution which has burst forth from the failure of the European revolution and the persistent decay of imperialist capitalism. The past twenty years have been years in which the proletariat of Europe and the colonial peoples of Asia have suffered uninterrupted defeats. These defeats have taken a heavy toll, but heaviest has been the destruction of the revolutionary world organisation of the proletariat. Nor is there an end of “favourable

prospects," of "revolutionary objective situations." There is much evidence of the deep dissatisfaction of the masses throughout Europe and the colonial world. There have been many struggles already in Italy, France, Belgium, etc., many more will follow. These struggles have the potentiality of great class battles for power. But all of them pass by so long as the instrument to take advantage of these "favourable objective conditions," i.e., the revolutionary party, synthesised in the revolutionary international, does not exist. It is true, compared to the great movement of the Second International, the revolutionaries during the last war were small in number. But the recuperative powers of the then undefeated working class were yet great. There was in existence a Bolshevik Party. The Russian proletariat had taken power and the working class thereby had a fortress embracing "one-sixth of the earth." Parties were formed in the heat of the battle. The hope of the Russian Revolution was an international unifying force.

How does the present post-war situation, from this point of view, compare to that period? Unfavourably. The only revolutionary socialist force in the world is represented by the Fourth Internationalist movement, small in number and isolated from the masses. It is necessary to recognise this fact, for it is impossible to change this situation, to grow, to become a mass movement by self-deception. If you already believe that you are a mass movement, that you are a force to contend with, and that power is... well, almost yours, then it is impossible for you to do what is indispensably necessary to insure the future: rebuild the world revolutionary socialist movement, rebuild the revolutionary parties in all countries. Without this, the immediate future lies in the hands of capitalist reaction and Stalinism.

The world revolutionary socialist movement suffers from a crisis in leadership and organisation. That is the outstanding feature of this post-war period. It is necessary to repeat this over and over again since the special and fundamental reason for the primacy of this factor lies precisely in the character of our epoch. Again, in *The Third International After Lenin*, Trotsky summarised the problem from the following viewpoint:

"The role of the subjective factor in a period of slow, organic development (of capitalism) can remain quite a subordinate one. Then diverse proverbs of gradualism arise as: 'slow but sure,' and 'one must not kick against the bricks,' and so forth, which epitomise all the tactical wisdom of an organic epoch that abhorred 'leaping over stages.' But as soon as the objective prerequisites have matured, the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is the party. Opportunism which consciously or unconsciously thrives upon the inspiration of the past epoch, always tends to underestimate the role of the subjective factor, that is, the importance of the party and of revolutionary leadership."

However, can the present situation be changed? Can it change quickly? Yes. This social order has known many swift transformations. But that de-

depends on how the Fourth Internationalists recognise the problem and judge the tasks ahead. Trotsky's book is a guide to this epoch, a textbook in strategy and tactics. To absorb its teachings is the first guarantee of success. Unfortunately, the official Fourth Internationalist movement has not yet understood the monumental ideas which Trotsky, in common with the other deceased giants of the Comintern, had developed, It talks of power without a party, of the revolutionary offensive without a movement. It pretends to be what it is not: the leader of the European and American proletariat. It takes for granted what is yet to be accomplished. And all of this is done in the name of Trotsky!

From the *New International*, September 1946

A university of Marxism

By Paul Hampton

*A review of **Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International** by John Riddell (Haymarket 2012).*

Toward the United Front is a tremendous work of scholarship in the tradition of David Riazanov. Its 1,300 pages repay reading — it is a manual for revolutionary socialist strategy, in the words of many of its finest representatives.

The Fourth Congress of the Communist International (Comintern), which took place in Russia in November-December 1922, was perhaps the greatest gathering of Marxists ever to assemble. Present were Lenin, Trotsky, Radek, Zinoviev, Preobrazhensky, Krupskaya, Marchlewski, Bukharin and others from the Russian Communist party. They debated with Zetkin, Gramsci, Rosmer, Serge, Souvarine, Meyer, Nin, Thalheimer, Tresso, Eberlein and Murphy from European Communist parties, Cannon and Swabeck from the US, as well as Asian Marxists such as Katayama Sen, Chen Duxiu, Tan Malaka, Liu Renjing and M N Roy. The clash of ideas was evident throughout, with “left” criticism from Bela Kun, Varga, Bordiga, Fischer and Urbahns. In total, 350 delegates from parties in 61 countries met for a month to hammer out global socialist strategy.

The African-American poet Claude McKay confessed with too much hyperbole that he feared speaking to “such an intellectually developed and critically minded world audience” more than facing a lynch-mob. In his closing speech, Zinoviev said that it was the first time the Comintern had met as “a genuinely international world party” and that the congress was “a great university for us all”. Arguably the Fourth Congress was the most important Comintern meeting, with the greatest relevance to today’s socialists, because it discussed strategy and tactics in circumstances of retreat but before the Comintern itself was ossified and cauterised by Stalinism.

Riddell’s volume contains for the first time in English all the speeches and resolutions from the main proceedings. These texts are particularly important for the Marxist tradition developed by Workers’ Liberty. Our forerunners published translations of parts of the congress record in the 1970s, when the texts were hard to find in English, in an effort to learn from the experiences of these revolutionaries. Reading the volume helps understand why we use terms like transitional demands, the united front and the workers’ government.

The watchword of the congress was, in the words of Clara Zetkin, "Clarity, clarity and again clarity!" The sentiment was echoed by the youth leader Richard Schüller, who recalled the old slogan: "First clarity, then majority". Their underlining conception of hegemony was clear: Communist Parties sought to win the majority of the organised labour movement to their ideas as part of a strategy to win the majority of workers to self-liberation. But Communists did not stop at that: the intention was to win the leadership of all struggles against oppression and for democracy; they discussed the role of peasants, women's liberation, anti-imperialism, racism and the national question.

There were a number of areas where the congress refined important Marxist ideas.

Delegates elucidated the meaning of perspectives in terms of the global political-economic situation, the balance of class forces and the conjuncture they found themselves in. From this assessment of reality, in which large and sometimes mass Communist parties had been formed but nowhere outside Russia did they represent more than a minority of workers, they elaborated strategies to win the majority of workers, as well as other oppressed groups.

A further field of development was the Marxist "holy trinity", of the programme (including transitional demands), the united front and the crowning demand for a workers' government. These informed assessments of fascism, of relations with other workers' parties as well as work in the trade unions.

The discussion of the international political situation at the Fourth Congress took place on the same ground as laid down by the Third Comintern Congress in June-July 1921. The basic assessment, made by Leon Trotsky, was that the post-war revolutionary wave had ebbed, capitalism had temporarily stabilised, the working class was on the defensive and the Communist parties were in a minority. At the Fourth Congress, Trotsky expressed it in the following way: "An Italian journalist once asked me how we assess the world situation at present. I gave the following banal answer: 'Capitalism is no longer capable of ruling... The working class is not yet capable of taking power, that is the distinctive feature of our time'."

Karl Radek shared this assessment. He said: "What characterises the world we live in is that although world capitalism has not overcome its crisis, and the question of power is still objectively the core of every question, the broadest masses of the proletariat have lost the belief that they can conquer political power in the foreseeable future." Tersely, he told the congress: "The conquest of power is not on the agenda as an immediate task".

In his report of the Comintern executive committee, Gregorii Zinoviev proposed that "the Fourth Congress merely confirm the theses of Trotsky and Varga at the Third Congress on the economic situation".

There was however some difference of emphasis among the Bolsheviks

about the time-scale of these perspectives. Zinoviev argued that “what we are now experiencing is not one of capitalism’s periodic crises but the crisis of capitalism, its twilight, its disintegration”. The resolution *On the Tactics of the Comintern* stated that “What capitalism is experiencing today is nothing other than its downfall. The collapse of capitalism is inevitable”. However, Trotsky warned that “if the capitalist world lasts another several decades, well, that would be a sentence of death for socialist Russia” and Radek stated that the policies of the Communist International “embrace a perspective for an entire epoch, but must still be cut to the shape of the next immediate period”.

Imperialism

Another aspect of assessing the global capitalist system at the congress was the comments about imperialism.

The Second Congress in 1920 had largely adopted a Leninist analysis of imperialism, dividing the world mostly into oppressor imperial states and oppressed colonies. What was noticeable at the Fourth Congress was the virtual absence of references to Lenin’s views, even though his pamphlet *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* had been published in German and French in 1920 (it was first published in English in 1928).

Instead, most contributions appear to have been influenced by Rosa Luxemburg’s very different theory of imperialism. Willem van Ravesteijn, the main reporter on the “Eastern Question”, made this connection explicit: “Comrades, our unforgettable pioneer and theoretician Rosa Luxemburg provided proof in her greatest and best theoretical work that the process of capital accumulation cannot take place without a surrounding non-capitalist territory, on which it acts destructively. In other words, without older, precapitalist modes of production that it destroys”. He added later: “Because the liberation of the Islamic and other Eastern peoples signifies that their tribute to European capitalism immediately ceases. The accumulation of capital cannot proceed without this tribute”.

Similarly, August Thalheimer quoted Luxemburg and criticised Kautsky, Hilferding and Lenin on imperialism. Even Nikolai Bukharin, who had criticised Luxemburg’s book on imperialism, argued that the growth of capitalism was based “essentially on the bourgeoisie’s colonial policy and the flowering of industry on the European continent was rooted mainly in the exploitation of the colonial peoples”.

Some of these conceptions were also articulated in the supplementary theses at the Second Congress in 1920. The author of those theses was the Indian Communist M N Roy. However at the Fourth Congress he introduced some dissent. He argued: “Imperialism is right now making the attempt to save itself through the development of industry in colonial countries... India... was during the war permitted adequate industrial development... Of course we can raise the objection that this cannot happen,

because it is in imperialism's interests to keep the colonial countries backward in order to absorb all goods produced in the dominant countries. Well and good, but that is a very mechanical way to view the question".

This rebuke is an important counter to dependency-type theories of imperialism that have carried over to today. Capitalism has been able to develop without colonies since World War Two and capitalist development has not been confined to core European and North American states. To deny capitalist development across the globe, or is that many states are not really politically independent, that they remain neo-colonies, both theoretically wrong in the present and also to boost arguments used to justify workers' subordination to nationalist forces.

Fascism

A somewhat underdeveloped assessment was made of the nature of fascism. The discussion was highly prescient. A month before the gathering, Mussolini had organised his march on Rome and had come to power in Italy. Getting to grips with this development was vital for the whole international.

A number of comments at the Fourth Congress indicated that a specific analysis of fascism was still lacking. Amadeo Bordiga, leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), argued that "fascism does not represent any new political doctrine" and that "our analysis leads to the conclusion that fascism has added nothing to the traditional ideology and programme of bourgeois politics". In his opening report, Zinoviev gave unstinting praise to the Italian party despite the defeat it had suffered: "If we were to develop a policy manual for Communist parties, then Italy will provide the most important chapter, the most important example".

However, this line was contested. Two days before the opening session, the German Communist party (KPD) adopted a motion instructing its delegation to urge an international campaign against fascism. Delegates from Germany, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia raised the issue during the congress proceedings. Bukharin argued that "fascism is not merely an organisational form that the bourgeois had in the past; it is a newly discovered form that is adapted to the new movement by drawing in the masses". Similarly, Radek said that the fascists represented bourgeois counter-revolution, were wreckers of workers' organisations who maintained the power of the bourgeoisie. He said: "I believe Mussolini is something different [from other bourgeois politicians]... and his distinctive character is extremely important".

By the time it came to the debate on Italy, Zinoviev had changed his tune and adopted the main points of his adversaries. He criticised the PCI for making "gross errors" such as failing to work with the Arditi del Popolo to form workers' defence guards. Instead he said the united front against fascism was needed. However, Zinoviev still managed to equate social

democracy with fascism, in terms that would be adopted disastrously by Stalin's third period during the rise of Hitler.

Although some progress had been made, it was still a long way from Trotsky's more sophisticated assessment in the early 1930s.

Transitional demands

The first three congresses of the post-Russian revolution Communist International (Comintern) had not elaborated a programme of demands, although they had issued manifestos and declarations.

Previous Marxist programmes had included the Communist Manifesto (1848), the Erfurt Programme (1891), various versions of the Russian Social Democratic programme, and the Spartacus programme (1918). A weakness of previous programmes was elaborating a link between the minimum, immediate demands for reform and the maximum goal of socialism — that is to say, a lack of “transitional” demands.

The debate was particularly important in Germany, where the German communists (the KPD) sought to grapple with its strategic responsibilities. For example, as the Marxist historian Pierre Broué has pointed out, transitional slogans were a favourite idea of KPD leader Heinrich Brandler. In mid-1922, the Comintern executive began to develop a programme for the International. However disagreements emerged about what should be included. At the Third Congress in 1921, the resolution “On Tactics” summed up what became the conception of transitional demands:

“In place of the minimum programme of the reformists and centrists, the Communist International proposes a struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for a system of demands that, in their totality, undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, organise the proletariat, and mark out stages in the struggle for its dictatorship; each of these demands gives expression to the needs of the broadest masses, even if they do not yet consciously set the goal of proletarian dictatorship.”

Although the Fourth Congress did not adopt a formal programme and all sides agreed it was premature to do so, the discussion revealed important differences of interpretation.

The main reporter, Bukharin, disagreed with having tactical issues in the programme. He said: “Questions and slogans like the united front of the workers’ government or the seizure of material assets are slogans founded on a very fluid basis, one of a certain decline in the workers’ movement.” On 18 November he warned: “I will fight against that in every possible way. We will never permit such concepts to be built in to the programme”.

He was opposed by Thalheimer from the German party, who along with Brandler had been utilising transitional demands to build united fronts between the KPD and other workers’ organisations. Thalheimer confessed that he had “a sharp disagreement with Comrade Bukharin... [over] the question of transitional demands, demands for stages, and the minimum

programme". He said that "the specific disagreement between us and the reform-socialists is not the fact that we put demands for reforms, demands for a stage, [but that we have] demands and slogans very tightly [linked] with our principles and goals. This linkage is, of course, no guarantee in itself, any more than having a good map guarantees that I will not lose my way".

The matter was discussed at a meeting of five Russian Communist party central committee members (Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin) on 20 November 1922 which concluded in favour of Thalheimer's proposal. Bukharin was given the unenviable task of moving a resolution at the Congress against the perspective he had himself taken just two days previously. The resolution vindicated the use of transitional slogans and was adopted unanimously. It stated:

"3. The programmes of the national sections must motivate clearly and decisively the need to struggle for transitional demands, with the appropriate proviso that these demands are derived from the specific conditions of place and time;

"4. The overall programme must definitely provide a theoretical framework for all transitional and immediate demands. At the same time, the Fourth Congress strongly condemns efforts to portray as opportunism the inclusion of transitional demands in the programme".

But this conception was never further developed within the Comintern. Although Thalheimer continued to defend transitional demands, Bukharin had had his way by the time of the sixth congress in 1928. The programme adopted at that congress eschewed the transitional approach.

It was Leon Trotsky who rooted out this crucial flaw in the Stalinised Comintern's programme and went on to develop the conception, notably in his *Action Programme for France* (1934) and the *Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (1938). Despite the misuse of transitional demands by many post-Trotsky Trotskyists, it is part of a priceless heritage from the early Comintern which, applied and adapted to current realities, retains its vitality for our politics.

United Front

The united front is one of the most common expressions in the Marxist lexicon today. It concerns the way in which revolutionary socialists work with and alongside reformist workers for action around specific goals.

It is premised on the fact that revolutionaries are in the minority, but can fight for reforms alongside other workers in order to develop the class struggle in a socialist direction.

The Fourth Comintern Congress was the largest meeting to discuss how to implement the united front tactic. However, the idea of the united front did not originate with the Comintern. It was the product of the actual experience of revolutionary workers, particularly in Germany, working out

how to operate in the post-war circumstances.

The once million-strong German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which had once contained all socialist tendencies before 1914, had shattered under pressure from the war. In 1916 the left and centre formed the Independent USPD. After the creation of workers' councils, the SPD and USPD formed a government in November 1918. The Spartacus group around Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches formed the KPD. However, the party was severely repressed and many of its leaders killed.

In November 1920, KPD activists in Stuttgart, notably including Clara Zetkin, decided to launch a campaign for workers' unity in action. They proposed in a local metal workers' union that the union should petition their national leadership and other unions for united action. The Stuttgart metal workers adopted five demands reflecting workers' most urgent needs: reduce prices for necessities of life; produce at full capacity and increase unemployment benefits; reduce taxes paid by workers and raise taxes on the great private fortunes; establish workers' control of supply and distribution of raw materials and foodstuffs; and disarm reactionary gangs and arm the workers. Karl Radek's comment on the initiative: "If I had been in Moscow, the idea would not even have crossed my mind".

On 29 December 1920 the KPD leadership decided to initiate a wider movement for united working class action.

Paul Levi and Radek drafted an open letter, published 8 January 1921. The demands were:

1. United wage struggles to defend all workers and employees.
2. Increased pensions.
3. Reorganisation and increases in unemployment allowances.
4. Government provision of food ration cards at reduced cost.
5. Seizure of housing space for the homeless.
6. Measures to provide food and other necessities under the control of factory councils.
7. Disarmament and dissolution of armed bourgeois detachments and formation of workers' self-defence organisations.
8. Amnesty for political prisoners.
9. Immediate establishment of trade and diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia.

Although the KPD initiative was rebuffed by the SPD and USPD, the idea was further developed at the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921.

The resolution "On Tactics" stated: "At the present moment the most important task of the Communist International is to win a dominant influence over the majority of the working class and involve the more active workers in direct struggle"—a strategy summed up in the slogan, "To the masses".

At the end of November 1921, the Bolshevik Party's political bureau de-

cided to support the extension of the German united-action policy to the Comintern as a whole.

On 4 December 1921, a Comintern executive (ECCI) formally adopted the united front as policy. Riddell argues that the theses bore the mark of Zinoviev's thinking, motivating the united front on the basis of the current conjuncture — "an unusual transitional period" — marked by worsening capitalist economic crisis, a shift to the left among the masses and "a spontaneous striving for unity" among workers. The theses proposed that the Communist parties "strive everywhere to achieve unity... in practical action" and "take the initiative on this question".

A slogan focused on the idea of a "workers' government" [a projected outcome of the united front tactic] was endorsed, although only for Germany. The discussion also included a debate on whether transitional demands should be included in the Comintern programme between Radek (yes) and Bukharin (no).

The new policy continued to provoke debate. And Russian communists continued their discussion at a party conference. Zinoviev and Bukharin presented united front policy as short term and stressed its role in exposing social democratic parties.

Trotsky, however, warned against "fatalistic conceptions" that Europe was experiencing the final run-up to the establishment of workers' rule.

Within the Comintern, the French and Italian parties opposed the united front policy and the Norwegian majority believed it did not apply to their country. In Czechoslovakia and Germany significant minorities resisted the policy.

The Comintern executive did not force member parties to apply the policy. However, through a succession of discussions and experiences in the national sections, acceptance of the united front policy was widened.

At the Fourth Congress, debate focused on how, not whether, to apply it. Zinoviev explained the meaning of the united front in his executive report at the beginning of the congress. He said that "the united front is established by the overall situation of capitalism, by its economic and world political situation, and by the situation inside the workers' movement". The united front tactic was "the most effective means to win this majority of the working class. It must be stated clearly that the united front tactic is no mere episode in our struggle. It is a tactic that will endure for an entire period, perhaps an entire epoch". He added: "We are against reformism, but not against bettering the lives of the working class... We can only organise the working class if we fight for its partial demands".

Radek argued that workers must "unite at least for the struggle for bare existence, for a crust of bread".

Communists should "conduct a struggle around questions that have the greatest immediate relevance to the broad working masses: questions of wages, hours of work, housing, defence against white danger, against the

war danger, and all the issues of working people's daily life... Only by broadening, deepening and heightening these struggles will a struggle for [proletarian] dictatorship arise".

But Bordiga continued to oppose the tactic, arguing that "the danger exists of the united front degenerating into a Communist revisionism".

Edwin Hoernle compared the united front with "a narrow mountain ridge": it is "slippery and the way is narrow". But "when we stay put, merely philosophising as to whether we have reservations or run risks, we do not advance. In order to learn anything at all about applying the united-front tactic, we must take steps".

Radek also explained what it meant in practice. He told the congress that the Communist Party of Great Britain would apply its united front tactic by seeking to affiliate to the Labour Party, and in the next election: "Vote for it and prepare for struggle against it".

Zinoviev warned that the desire for unity had great attractive power in the ranks of the working class because "the working masses need unity as we need the air". However, he warned against an attitude of "the more the better" in any situation, on the wrong demands and without action, which turned unity into a fetish and an idol.

Today, when the number of Marxists is tiny and largely in small groups, it would be aridly sectarian to refuse to work alongside other workers and in specific campaigns where action can be organised around clear but limited goals. The united front is not a trick or a deception: it is an honest attempt to tackle the problem of heterogeneity within the working class. The activity of Marxists is vital to galvanising and directing these struggles, as a lever seeking to transform the wider organised labour movement.

This "minimal" application of the method of the united front applies to the trade union movement, on the political front and in specific campaigns around feminism, climate change, wars and international solidarity.

But we should not deny the ambition of the early Comintern — as long as class-conscious Marxists do not have the support of a majority of workers, the united front is a burning necessity.

Workers' government

Probably the most wide-ranging and rancorous discussion at the Fourth Congress concerned the transitional slogan of a workers' government.

This debate is of exceptional importance to the tradition represented by the AWL, yet outside our ranks it is rarely discussed or propagated at present. Translations of the theses and debates at the Fourth Congress were published by our predecessors in the 1970s, when the original texts were long out of print and hard to obtain. They informed our own discussions about intervening to transform the labour movement from that period onwards.

Riddell has done a first class job in translating the various draft resolu-

tions and speeches, so as to clarify the meaning and importance of the workers' government slogan. He regards the concept of a workers' government as "the awkward child of the early Communist International" but nevertheless an important step forward at the pinnacle of the united front approach. The key question addressed in this debate at the Fourth Congress was: What kind of government should Communists advocate for the achievement of the demands in their united-action programme? As with transitional demands, it was the German experience that loomed largest.

On 13 March 1920 a right-wing military putsch led by Wolfgang Kapp and General von Lüttwitz ousted the government in Berlin. The SPD-led trade unions (ADGB) called for a general strike to defend the republic. By 14 March the strike was solid across the country. Workers formed local strike committees, demonstrated and formed militias. On 17 March the putschists capitulated and fled. The general strike continued as workers demanded a new government and decisive action against the militarist threat. Carl Legien, chair of the ADGB, proposed that the SPD's coalition with bourgeois parties be replaced by a workers' government formed by the SPD, the USPD and the trade unions. The KPD leadership eventually expressed support for this proposal, stating that "formation of a socialist government, free of the slightest bourgeois or capitalist element, would create extremely favourable conditions for vigorous action by the proletarian masses," and promised, subject to certain conditions, to act towards such a government as a "loyal opposition". The USPD refused to participate, which effectively finished the proposal. However, as Broué pointed out, "for the first time in the history of the Communist movement, the problem was posed of a transitional form of government, which breaks from government of the parliamentary kind but is not yet the dictatorship of the proletariat, the conciliar republic".

However, the debate continued to rage, particularly in state elections where the combination of SPD, USPD and KPD votes gave the workers' organisations a majority. The KPD called for a workers' republic based on councils like the Russian soviets. But in 1921 such councils did not exist in Germany or elsewhere. The KPD's leadership and Karl Radek tried to formulate a governmental demand that related to Germany's existing political institutions, while pointing towards the goal of workers' power and came up with the "workers' government".

Riddell argues that when the Fourth Congress opened in November 1922, its leaders used the term in three different ways, which can be summarised as pseudonym, illusion and transition:

- Pseudonym: The International's president, Gregory Zinoviev, as well as ultra-left leaders such as Ruth Fischer and Amadeo Bordiga held that the term "workers' government" referred only to a regime of the type established by the Russian revolution of October 1917, that is, a dictatorship of the proletariat resting on revolutionary workers' councils. This was the

approach taken in the first two drafts of the Fourth Congress resolution on this question. However, delegates of the German party majority convinced the congress to abandon this approach mid-way through its proceedings, and it did not appear in the third draft.

- Illusion: This concept, advanced mainly by Zinoviev, referred to parliamentary-based governments formed by workers' parties but carrying out a basically capitalist agenda. Zinoviev predicted that such a "liberal workers' government" was likely to be formed by the Labour Party in Britain (as indeed it was in 1924). Zinoviev's view was open to the charge that his "workers' government" was a euphemism for a form of bourgeois rule. The changes made in the fourth and final draft of the Fourth Congress resolution did not eliminate Zinoviev's concept, but renamed it as a "illusory workers' government" and strengthened the argument against such a misinterpretation.

- Transition: This concept, advocated by the KPD majority leaders such as Zetkin and by Radek, saw the "workers' government" demand as a component of a transitional programme, a set of demands that "undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, organise the proletariat, and mark out stages in the struggle for its dictatorship" (Third Congress resolution *On Tactics* 1921). Such a government, while possibly constituted by parliamentary means, would rest on the workers' mass movement and take measures to dismantle the bourgeois state. This transitional concept was presented in the later drafts of the Fourth Congress resolution.

The evolution of the debate became clear from the speeches.

In his Report of the Executive Committee, 10 November 1922, Zinoviev was circumspect in his presentation, arguing that the slogan of the workers' government had not been sufficiently clarified and was of "exceptional" and "limited application". He said the slogan was "an application of the dictatorship of the proletariat". At the Comintern executive in June 1922 Zinoviev apparently said: "The workers' government is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is a pseudonym for a soviet government. It is more comfortable for an ordinary worker, and that's why we want to use this formula".

The German communist Ernst Meyer disagreed, reading out Zinoviev's statement from the June executive meeting. Meyer argued that it was important to differentiate between a Social-Democratic and a workers' government. He said: "We have seen Social-Democratic governments in Germany, in Saxony and Thuringia, and earlier also in Gotha, governments that we must support but that have nothing in common with what we understand to be a workers' government". He said that the workers' government "differs fundamentally from a Social-Democratic government, in that it does not merely carry the label of a socialist policy but actually carried out a socialist-communist policy in life". A workers' government will therefore not be parliamentary in character, or will be

parliamentary only in a subordinate sense. It was "not a necessary occurrence, but rather a historical possibility".

Radek's intervention the following day agreed with Meyer. He said: "Comrade Zinoviev said in the Expanded Executive, for us the workers' government is a pseudonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat... In my opinion, this definition is not right." Instead he argued that the workers' government was "one of the possible points of transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat". The German, Norwegian, Czechoslovak workers could take a stand of "no coalition with the bourgeoisie, but rather a coalition with the workers' parties that can secure our eight-hour day, give us a bit more bread, and so on". That could lead to "the establishment of such a workers' government, whether through preliminary struggles or on the basis of a parliamentary combination". It was "nonsense to reject in doctrinaire fashion the possibility of such a situation".

Radek accepted some of Zinoviev's concerns and reservations. The workers' government would be "worthless unless the workers stand behind it, taking up arms and building factory councils that push this government and do not allow it to make compromises with the Right". But if that were done, "the workers' government will be the starting point of a struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat". For example, in Britain, "a parliamentary victory for the Labour Party is quite possible, and then the question will arise, what is this workers' government? Is it nothing more than a new edition of the bourgeois-liberal government".

Radek's approach was transitional, taking the demands from the united front to their logical conclusion. But he did not argue that a workers' government was the only, indeed the necessary or even likely road to power. This he summed up with a rather pithy joke. He told the congress: "It would be entirely wrong to present a picture that the evolution of humanity from ape to people's commissar necessarily passes through a phase of workers' government".

Zinoviev returned to the podium somewhat chastised the next day, with rather sharper formulations. He conceded that the workers' government had nothing at all to do with the word 'pseudonym', and declared that he was "gladly prepared to give way in the quarrel regarding this word". He argued that "every bourgeois government is simultaneously a capitalist government. It is hard to imagine a bourgeois government that is not also a capitalist government. But unfortunately we cannot say the opposite. Not every workers' government is also a socialist government... Even many workers' governments can be bourgeois in terms of their social content".

Instead he set out four different kinds of workers' governments, which "far from exhausts the list of possibilities". First there was a workers' government that, "in terms of its composition, is a liberal workers' government, like that of Australia". Such a liberal workers' government in Britain

"could be the jumping off point for revolutionising the country... At present we Communists vote in Britain for the Labour Party... Why? Because it is objectively a step forward". The second type was a Social-Democratic government. Zinoviev asked delegates to "imagine that the unified SPD in Germany forms a purely 'socialist government'. That will also be a workers' government (in quotation marks, of course). We can conceive of a situation where we would grant such a government a conditional credit, that is, conditional support". A third type was the so-called coalition government, that is, a government composed of Social Democrats, trade union leaders, persons without party affiliation, and perhaps Communists as well. Fourth was "a workers' government that is really a workers' government, that is, a Communist workers' government". Zinoviev regarded this fourth possibility as "indeed a pseudonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat".

But Zinoviev retained some reservations. He noted that "yesterday our friend Radek said that the workers' government is a possible form of transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat. I would like to say that it is a possibility, or to be absolutely precise, this possibility arises only exceptionally... It is probably the least likely path". He warned that "woe betide us if, in our agitation, we permit for one moment the idea to crop up that there will necessarily be a workers' government, that it could come about peacefully, that there is some organically fixed period that could replace the civil war, and so on". The workers' government slogan "remains correct as a way of getting a hearing from the masses... It harbours the same dangers as the united front tactic".

But Radek did not leave the matter there. In his speech on the capitalist offensive three days later, he returned to his critique. He said: "Zinoviev offered an abstract classification of the possible forms of a workers' government. I agree with this attempt at classification... It is important for us here to replace the abstract classification with the question: 'What do the working masses — not just the Communists — think when they talk of a workers' government?'... In Britain, they think of the Labour Party... The idea of a workers' government has the same meaning for the working masses: they think of a government of all workers' parties".

Radek accepted some caveats and acknowledged the nuances between different speakers. He said that "the workers' government is not inevitable, but possible. Or, following Comrade Zinoviev, we can say paradoxically that it is not inevitable but is likely the most improbable road". The question to decide when going to the masses was "whether or not we are prepared to struggle for a workers' coalition government and create the preconditions for it". In his opinion, "in our struggle for the united front, we should say frankly that if the Social Democratic worker masses force their leaders to break with the bourgeoisie, we are ready to take part in a workers' government, provided this government is a vehicle for class

struggle". The workers' government slogan "conceives of the united front as a unified political goal"

Broué argued that Radek's view of the workers' government slogan was based on the experience of the struggles in the West. It took into account that "the West differed from Russia, where the majority of the workers could be won directly to Communism, whilst in the West the workers showed strong allegiances to various parties". Further discussion took place in the commission formulating the resolution, On the Tactics of the Comintern. Edwin Hoernle reported on the last day of the congress, 5 December 1922, that "the most significant amendments concern the section on workers' government". The Commission was "concerned to define and highlight the question of the workers' government as clearly and distinctly as possible".

The resolution stated:

"The Communist International must consider the following possibilities.

I. Illusory workers' governments

1. A liberal workers' government, such as existed in Australia and may exist in Britain in the foreseeable future.

2. A Social-Democratic workers' government (Germany).

II. Genuine workers' governments

3. Government of workers and the poorer peasants. Such a possibility exists in the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, and so on.

4. A workers' government with Communist participation.

5. A genuinely proletarian workers' government, which, in its pure form, can be embodied only in the Communist party".

It also clarified what these meant:

"The only type of government that can be considered a genuine workers' government is one that is determined to take up a resolute struggle at least to achieve the workers' most important immediate demands against the bourgeoisie. That is the only type of workers' government in which Communists can participate.

The first two types, the illusory workers' governments (liberal and Social-Democratic), are not revolutionary governments but can, under certain circumstances, speed up the decomposition of bourgeois power.

The next two types of workers' government (workers' and peasants' government; Social-Democratic-Communist government) do not yet signify the dictatorship of the proletariat and are not even an historically inevitable transitional stage to this dictatorship. Rather, wherever they come into being, they are an important starting point for a struggle for this dictatorship".

Saxony

One important caveat should be noted in relation to the actual experi-

ence of regional workers' government in Germany.

As the Fourth Congress convened, there was a high-level discussion about the possible entry by the Communists into the Saxon government. According to Broué's account (2006: 657), the Social Democrats rejected two points of the Communists' programme, the arming of the workers and the calling of a congress of factory councils in Saxony. The German delegation declared in favour of deleting these two points and forming a socialist-Communist government, with four of the Left voting against. "At that point, the Russians intervened. For an entire evening they argued against Thalheimer and the German majority. Lenin, Trotsky, Radek and Zinoviev were unanimous. There was no question of yielding on this point. It had to be upheld. The Communists had to insist upon the Social Democrats accepting their demands in full, or else they would be politically disarming themselves. The Germans gave in to the pressure."

Overall, while Radek, Zetkin and Meyer's arguments on the workers' government slogan appear insightful and innovative, Zinoviev's position was contradictory and ultimatumist. The latter showed little evidence of grasping the transitional method or indeed the united front. Throughout the debate, the slogans raised were always related to concrete realities and the role of the revolutionary party as active protagonist is assumed. Sadly, the Fourth Congress discussion and particularly the debate in Germany were only just beginning in 1922 and they would be neutered by the rise of Stalinism soon after.

Soon after the congress, Zetkin wrote an article "The Workers' Government" (reproduced here) summing up the importance of these discussions. She wrote: "In easily the majority of countries under capitalist domination, the workers' government appears as the crowning summit of the tactic of the united front, as the propaganda and rallying slogan of the hour". The approach allowed Communist parties to grow and develop their influence within the labour movement, until they were neutered by the rise of Stalinism. But the method was not forgotten: it was renewed and developed by the Left Opposition forces around Trotsky into the 1930s.

The SWP in Britain has long denounced the slogan of a workers' government, even after it revived the language (but not the content) of the united front under the Rees-German leadership. Chris Harman regarded it as a minor tactical slogan which was soft on the nature of the state. Duncan Hallas's book *The Comintern* denounced the workers' government slogan as "clearly wrong in principle" and something that "inevitably shifted the emphasis to the question of parliamentary majorities". Riddell has made the point that the SWP's position probably relied on a misreading of the earlier drafts of the thesis, rather than the final one published in the book. This is too generous: the SWP did not accept the approach of transitional demands, the united front and the workers' government because it never understood the importance of the early Comintern, recoiled from

the post-Trotsky Trotskyist abuse of that tradition, but mainly because of its Stalinoid version of the revolutionary party. The SWP's essentially Second International maxi-mini approach explains why it has been rigid on the question of the Labour Party, why it has only ever run tightly controlled front organisations rather than genuine alliances, and why its work in the unions has largely lacked any alternative strategy to that of the bureaucrats.

The AWL regards the workers' government slogan as a bold tactical compromise. Although conditions today are very different, making propaganda for a workers' government — for example when Labour came to power in 1997 or when the financial crisis broke — makes sense. It also has more agitational purchase in circumstances like present day Greece, where a government of Syriza may be posed.

The demand plays a pivotal role in the transitional programme, linking day-to-day struggles within the present political system to the struggle to disrupt, overthrow and replace that system.

Issues of oppression

The early Communist International's focus was on working-class self-liberation and this was reflected in the time spent on discussions on party building, work to transform the labour movement and on the specifics of class struggle strategy.

But the Bolsheviks had made their reputation as tribunes of the people, taking up any and every matter of injustice and oppression against the tsar. While seeking to win hegemony in the working class, they also sought to gain hegemony for the working class among the exploited and oppressed as a whole. The Comintern debated matters of women's liberation, anti-racism, peasant struggles and anti-imperialism.

The early Comintern took time to discuss women's emancipation.

At the Second Congress in 1920, the German revolutionary Clara Zetkin produced the *Theses for the Communist Women's Movement*, which took a clear stand for women's "full social liberation and full equal rights," but warned of a "gulf between theory and practice". The Comintern established a women's secretariat, which published a monthly magazine, *The Communist Women's International*, and worked with women's committees organised within individual parties. The Comintern was highly critical of "bourgeois feminists" and sought to win women to the working-class movement.

The resolution at the Third Congress in 1921 stated that "there is no special women's question, nor should there be a special women's movement". Communism would be won "not by the united efforts of women of different classes, but by the united struggle of all the exploited".

The Fourth Congress discussion on women was brief and did not raise any significant new theoretical questions. However the speeches explained

how the women section's work was to be developed and integrated with other party work. Zetkin spoke of the need for autonomous organisation, reflecting that "however much Communist work among women must be firmly linked ideologically and organically to the life of each party, we nonetheless need special bodies to carry out this work". She argued that "every man is welcome to take part in the special Communist work carried out among women. That applies to our committees as well as to our entire activity in its various expressions and arenas".

Zetkin approved of the work of women comrades in Italy, who she lauded for having founded groups for "sympathising women". And she argued that it was vital that Communist parties in colonial and semi-colonial countries had to carry out this vital work. Zetkin was refreshingly candid about the challenges faced. She argued: "In the countries of the East, women live and work overwhelmingly under patriarchal and precapitalist forms of social life, bending under prejudices grey with age, oppressed by social institutions, by religion, customs and habits".

The German Communist Hertha Sturm gave a sober assessment of the state of the international's women's work. She told the congress, "we have a certain gauge in the number of women members in the Communist Parties... perhaps ten per cent". She advocated small party schools for women comrades and pointed to an extensive women's press in the International, mentioning *Communist Women's International*; the Dutch *De Voorbode* [*The Herald*]; *Žena* [*Woman*] in Czechoslovakia; *L'Ouvrière* [*Women Worker*] in France; and *Compagna* [*Woman Comrade*] in Italy. Sturm urged delegates to carry out "the decisions of the women's conference last year and the World Congress, women's supplements must be added to all party publications".

Other speakers explained what women's organisations had done in Russia. Sofia Smidovich recalled that in 1917, the *Woman Worker* was published in Petrograd, while a review appeared in Moscow, called *Working Women's Life*. The Russian Communist Party central committee was in 1922 publishing two magazines for women workers. Varsenika Kasparova reminded delegates that women across the globe suffered from "particularly oppressive subjugation". She said the Comintern was about creating an "an intelligentsia of revolutionary women" to fight for women's liberation and socialism.

The Comintern continued the policy of earlier socialists (with Zetkin the most prominent living link), where mass parties included all kinds of sections and sub-organisations, and saw the women's movement as existing with limited organisational autonomy within the party. The Comintern perspective was for mass Communist Parties to build mass Communist women's movements, in competition with bourgeois feminist movements.

Today, in the absence of mass revolutionary parties and with very different women's movements, to proclaim abstractly the need for a communist women's movement would be meaningless. Equally to argue that

there are “no special women questions” is also wrong — specific oppression outside of the capital-labour relationship is incontestable.

A Marxist approach to the women’s movement today is very different compared to the 1920s. Today small Marxist propaganda groups support and intervene in the existing amorphous feminist/women’s movement, arguing for Marxist politics in women’s movement campaigns and to show the class nature of “the women question”. We fight for a women’s movement that is led by class-conscious Marxists, but such a movement would have organisational autonomy from Marxist organisation.

Alongside specific political demands, the main transitional demand for this conception is to fight for a mass working class-based women’s movement, focusing on the need for the women’s movement to orientate to working class women. However the Comintern emphasis on separate women’s committees and fractions within the party (and by extension within labour movement organisations), women’s papers, women’s schools and other measures to create a cadre of Marxist women, retain their full force.

The Fourth Congress held a discussion on black liberation.

A US delegate Otto Huiswoud remarked in the ‘Report on the Black Question’ that “the Second International is an International of white workers and the Communist International is an International of the workers of the world”. The verdict appears a little harsh: after all it was the Amsterdam conference in 1904 that one prominent Comintern delegate Katayama Sen from Japan had embraced Georgi Plekhanov from Russia, just as the Russian and Japanese states went to war. The same conference applauded Dadhabhai Naoroji, founder and president of the Indian National Congress and condemned English rule of India.

But Huiswoud was not indulging in exaggeration. In fact Comintern discussions in the early 1920s completely transformed conceptions of anti-racism and black liberation.

James P Cannon recalled how American Communists broke with the socialist and radical tradition, which had no special programme on the black question.

It was considered simply as an economic problem, part of the struggle between the workers and the capitalists. As Eugene Debs, the best of the earlier socialists, put it in the language of the time, “We have nothing special to offer the Negro”.

Cannon wrote: “The American communists in the early days, under the influence and pressure of the Russians in the Comintern, were slowly and painfully learning to change their attitude; to assimilate the new theory of the Negro question as a special question of doubly-exploited second-class citizens, requiring a programme of special demands as part of the overall programme — and to start doing something about it” (*The Russian Revolution and the Black Struggle in the United States*, 1959).

During the Second Congress discussion of the colonial question in 1920, US delegate John Reed passed a note to Lenin, asking if this would be an appropriate occasion to speak on blacks in the US. Lenin's written reply was, "Yes, absolutely necessary." Reed delivered a powerful indictment of racist oppression in the United States.

At the Fourth Congress, a commission chaired by Huiswoud drafted theses on the black question. Another American, the poet Claude McKay, who was not a party member was nevertheless seated as a guest, invited to commission meetings, and asked, along with Huiswoud, to address a plenary session of the congress. The resolution did not break great theoretical ground, but did include the demand for an international conference of black people.

The final draft dropped a clause saying that "work among blacks should be carried out primarily by blacks" and was replaced by a pledge to struggle for full equality and equal political and social rights for black people.

There were other issues of racism discussed. William Earsman from Australia said "the main difficulty we must overcome is the prejudices aroused among white workers by the fear of cheap coloured labour".

Tahar Boudengha from Tunisia denounced the chauvinism of the French party's members in Algeria. He read a resolution adopted by a settler-dominated Communist conference in North Africa, which stated: "The native population of North Africa can only be liberated by the revolution in France. The native masses have been subjugated for centuries in a status of half-slavery. They are fanatical and fatalistic, patient and resigned, oppressed and imbued with religious prejudices. At this time, they still cannot imagine their liberation... It is entirely unnecessary to publish calls to rebellion in our press or distribute Arabic-language leaflets".

The attitude of the Comintern was unequivocally against racist and colonialist attitudes among workers in general and Communists in particular. Trotsky addressed Boudengha's point in his speech on France. He said: "Not for a single hour, not for a single minute, should we tolerate the presence in the party of comrades who think like slave-owners and want [French President] Poincaré to hold the indigenous people under the benevolent rule of capitalist civilisation".

Cannon registered the change of attitude. He wrote: "The influence of Lenin and the Russian Revolution... and then filtered through the activities of the Communist Party in the United States, contributed more than any other influence from any source to the recognition, and more or less general acceptance, of the Negro question as a special problem of American society — a problem which cannot be simply subsumed under the general heading of the conflict between capital and labour, as it was in the pre-communist radical movement".

Anti-imperialist united front

The Fourth Congress adopted a call for an anti-imperialist united front in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, aimed at “the mobilisation of all revolutionary forces” in “an extended, lengthy struggle against world imperialism”.

The expression was new, but the concept of an anti-imperialist united front had been effectively endorsed at the Second Comintern Congress and by the Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku in 1920.

At the Fourth Congress, the need for an anti-imperialist united front was first voiced by the Indian delegate M N Roy, who had been a key participant at the Second Congress, submitting his own theses, with an amended version added to Lenin’s draft after the discussion in the commission. But Roy’s speech, like the congress resolution, was a combination of insight and confusion.

Roy identified some important trends. He observed that “imperialism is right now making the attempt to save itself through the development of industry in colonial countries”. India was permitted during the war “adequate industrial development”. Roy denounced as “mechanical” the idea that capitalist development in the colonies was impossible or would always be constrained by imperialism.

The resolution registered the emergence of a “new workers’ movement in the East” that was “the result of the recent development of indigenous capitalism” and suggested the Communist parties in the colonies and semi-colonies had a dual task of organising “the working and peasant masses for the struggle for their special class interests” as well fighting to lead the “bourgeois democratic revolution, aimed at winning political independence”.

Roy argued that the national-revolutionary struggle in these countries “can achieve ultimate victory only under the leadership of the workers and peasants, that is, of a political party that represents them”. He also recognised that the bourgeoisie in the colonial and semi-colonial countries was not a revolutionary force: “unfortunately arrived too late on the scene, 150 years too late, and is in no way ready to play the role of liberator”.

However Roy also used some loose formulations, which opened a path to the slippage that followed the Fourth Congress, when the increasingly Stalinised Comintern adopted formulas such as the “bloc of four classes” and “workers’ and peasants’ parties” with disastrous results. For example Roy argued that “fundamentally, the national movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries is objectively revolutionary” and that the goal of the anti-imperialist united front was “to organise all available revolutionary forces into a great united front against imperialism”.

Communists should support the liberation battles against colonialism of the plebeians of the colonies, among whom modern working classes were only incipient forces; and (this was the implicit assumption) the po-

litical weight of the workers' state in the USSR and the strong worker-based CPs of Europe could draw these plebeian movements into alliance.

The prototype for Comintern work had been the efforts of Sneevliet in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), where socialists had entered the Sarekat Islam organisation and recruited cadres who formed the Indonesian Communist Party in 1920.

The organisation's delegate Tan Malaka spoke with great passion at the Fourth Congress about this experience, managing to extend his speaking time when told to wind up by replying: "I come from the Indies; I travelled for forty days". He strongly advocated support for pan-Islamic movements. He said: "We have been asked in public meetings: 'Are you a Muslim, yes or no? Do you believe in God, yes or no?' And how did we answer? 'Yes, I said, 'when I stand before God, I am a Muslim, but when I stand before man, I am not a Muslim'... With the Quran in hand, we inflicted a defeat on their leaders". He argued that pan-Islamism had once had "a historical meaning, signifying that Islam must conquer the entire world, sword in hand". But now, "the Holy war lost its significance" and pan-Islamism now meant "the nationalist freedom struggle... the liberation struggle against the different imperialist powers of the world".

Malaka was supported by other delegates, such as Tahar Boudengha from Tunisia, who also denounced the chauvinism of the French party's members in Algeria. The main reporter on the "Eastern Question" resolution, Willem van Ravesteyn, said that "in this world-historic struggle for the political liberation of Islam, the revolutionary proletariat has the duty to devote its full attention and provide all possible moral support". The Islamic peoples "have it in their power to destroy the bridge that sustains British imperialism" and that "the liberation of the Islamic world from every form of European political domination... would lead unavoidably to the fall of Western imperialism".

These discussions all took place before the emergence of political Islam in its modern form (the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928). Given the subsequent history, particularly of the involvement of Islamic parties in the massacre of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965 and of course Islamism in North Africa and elsewhere, it would be ridiculous to transpose these expressions of solidarity in 1922 onto today's conditions and forces. The Second Comintern Congress had taken a sharply critical line towards pan-Islam in Lenin's theses — accommodating to religious political forces was not part of the Comintern approach.

Interestingly, van Ravesteyn referred to the struggle under the British mandate in Palestine in terms that seem very reasonable, acknowledging both national movements despite the overwhelming predominance of Arabs compared to the Jewish population (about 10 to 1) at the time. He said: "The two dominant forces, Jewish and Arab, are both discontented... British rule has not been capable of achieving even a limited degree of

peaceful collaboration between the nationalities in the new Palestine". In spite of the anti-imperialist rhetoric, the complexities of various national questions were not forgotten.

China

Another significant test for the Comintern strategy was China.

Liu Renjing argued that "starting from the principle that that an anti-imperialist united front should be established to drive imperialism out of China, our party decided to achieve a united front with the national-revolutionary Kuomintang Party". He argued that "we can only combat imperialism if we unite our forces — those of the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat", yet went on to suggest "we can gather the masses around us and split the Kuomintang Party".

At the root of the anti-imperialist united front tactic was an assessment, well articulated by Radek. He said: "Comrades, you must understand that in China neither the victory of socialism nor the establishment of a soviet republic is on the agenda. Unfortunately, the question of national unity has now been historically placed on the agenda in China". The task of Communists consisted of "unifying the real forces taking shape in the working class with two goals: first, organising the young working class, and second, establishing a proper relationship between them and the objectively revolutionary bourgeois forces". He urged Chinese members to "Get out of the Confucian scholars' reading rooms and go to the masses!".

Few disputed the tactic of joining the Kuomintang at the time it was propagated in 1922, not even Trotsky. However, by 1925 it had become clear that Chinese workers were engaging in their own class struggles, for which an independent Communist party was necessary. Also the bourgeois forces around the Kuomintang were becoming openly counter-revolutionary. In March 1927 the Kuomintang military forces massacred the Communists in Shanghai.

As Trotsky forewarned, events in China indicated two central limitations of the Fourth Congress conception of the anti-imperialist united front.

First, it was not grounded in the realities of the class structures of many of the most "backward" states — the combined and uneven development of the world economy meant sufficient class differentiation had already taken place in the colonies, causing antagonism between workers and other classes.

Second, the perspective of permanent revolution — in which the organised working class was central to making the bourgeois revolution (including fighting for national independence, a democratic republic and land reform) and in the process preparing itself for making a socialist revolution — was desperately in need of generalisation beyond Russia. That is what Trotsky began to do in the aftermath of the Chinese debacle. In the

process, he abandoned the term “anti-imperialist united front”.

Today, after almost another century of capitalist development, it is difficult to see in what circumstances an alliance between working class forces and bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties in an anti-imperialist united front would be anything other than a snare for workers. The last century is littered with examples where trade unions and socialist (and Communist) parties have subordinated themselves to other forces which have turned out to be Bonapartist or worse. The early Comintern never forgot the watchword of class independence, even as it sought to utilise anti-colonial struggles to the advantage of workers’ movements and Soviet Russia. The anti-imperialist united front, underdeveloped and undertheorised by the early Comintern in very different conditions from today, is best confined to the history books.

Relevance

What is the relevance of the Fourth Congress discussions today, when circumstances in the world and in labour movements are so different?

It would be wrong to take a scriptural approach and mechanically transpose assessments of realities then on to today. Hence the assessment of contemporary imperialism must be recast in the light of a more integrated, uneven and combined global capitalism in the early 21st century. Here the historical context behind slogans such as the anti-imperialist united front need to be understood, because these are the reasons why this particular approach should be rejected. Similarly, there are different political conclusions to draw for our assessment of the modern, more diffuse women’s movement.

However it would also be a mistake to dismiss the early Comintern as merely the work of “dead Russians” or a matter of a bygone age. The early Comintern and particularly the Fourth Congress codified the lessons from the highest level of working class struggle seen so far in history.

Unfinished discussions around transitional demands, the united front and the workers’ government provide fertile lines for struggles today. These lessons are not restricted to the assessment of capitalist decline, but turn on the importance of winning the majority of the working class. They are not restricted only to situations where Marxists have already organised mass parties — after all, how can such parties be built unless the revolutionaries struggle alongside reformist workers and convince them? Nor are they restricted only to pre-revolutionary situations when the fight for power may soon be on the agenda.

Riddell has done a herculean job editing this volume and his previous ones to bring the Comintern to life. But politically he wants to reclaim the workers’ government (or workers’ and farmers’ government) slogan because he believes that Cuba and Nicaragua were originally, and Venezuela and Bolivia are today some species of workers’ government — an idea

Workers' Liberty utterly rejects. Our differences are at the level of analysis, from which different political conclusions follow.

The misuse of transitional demands, the united front and the workers' government by sections of the Marxist left does not destroy their importance.

Riddell, John. 2012. *Toward the United Front*. Haymarket, Chicago

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Conditions for revolution

By Leon Trotsky

A report on the Fourth Congress of the Communist International

Comrades, I wish to say at the very outset that if our aim is not to become confused and not to lose our perspective, then in evaluating the labour movement and its revolutionary possibilities we ought to bear in mind that there exist three major spheres which, although interdependent, differ profoundly from one another. First, there is Europe; second, America; and third, the colonial countries, that is, primarily Asia and Africa. The need of analysing the world labour movement in terms of these three spheres flows from the nature of our revolutionary criteria.

Marxism teaches us that in order for the proletarian revolution to become possible there must be given, schematically speaking, three premises or conditions. The first premise is the conditions of production. Productive technique must have attained such heights as to provide economic gains from the replacement of capitalism by socialism. Secondly, there must be a class interested in effecting this change and sufficiently strong to achieve it, that is, a class numerically large enough and playing a sufficiently important role in economy to introduce this change. The reference here is of course to the working class. And thirdly, this class must be prepared to carry out the revolution. It must have the will to carry it out, and must be sufficiently organized and conscious to be capable of carrying it out. We pass here into the domain of the so-called subjective factors and subjective premises for the proletarian revolution.

If with these three criteria — productive-technological, social-class and subjective-political — we approach the indicated three spheres, then the difference between them becomes strikingly apparent. True enough, we used to view the question of mankind's readiness for socialism from the productive-technological standpoint much more abstractly than we do now. If you consult our old books, even those not yet outdated, you will find in them an absolutely correct estimate that capitalism had already outlived itself 15 or 20, 25 or 30 years ago.

In what sense was this intended? In the sense that 25 years ago and more, the replacement of the capitalist mode of production by socialist methods would have already represented objective gains, that is, mankind could have produced more under socialism than under capitalism. But 25 to 30 years ago this still did not signify that productive forces were no

longer capable of development under capitalism. We know that in all parts of the world, including and especially in Europe which has until comparative recent times played the leading economic and financial role in the world, the productive forces still continued to grow. And we are now able to fix the year up to which they continued to grow in Europe: the year 1913. This means that up to that year capitalism represented not an absolute but a relative hindrance to the development of the productive forces.

In the technological sense, Europe developed with unprecedented speed and power from 1894 to 1913, that is to say, Europe became economically enriched during the 20 years which preceded the imperialist war. Beginning with 1913 — and we can say this positively — the development of capitalism, of its productive forces, came to a halt one year before the outbreak of the war because the productive forces ran up against the limits fixed for them by capitalist property and the capitalist form of appropriation. The market was split up, competition was brought to its intensest pitch, and henceforward capitalist countries could seek to eliminate one another from the market only by mechanical means.

It is not the war that put a stop to the development of productive forces in Europe, but rather the war itself arose from the impossibility of the productive forces to develop further in Europe under the conditions of capitalist management. The year 1913 marks the great turning point in the evolution of European economy. The war acted simply to deepen and sharpen this crisis which stemmed from the fact that further economic development within the conditions of capitalism was absolutely impossible. This applies to Europe as a whole. Consequently, if before 1913 we were conditionally correct in saying that socialism is more advantageous than capitalism, it therefore follows that since 1913 capitalism already signifies a condition of absolute stagnation and disintegration for Europe, while socialism provides the only economic salvation. This renders more precise our views with respect to the first premise for the proletarian revolution.

The second premise is the working class. It must become sufficiently powerful in the economic sense in order to gain power and rebuild society. Does this condition obtain today? After the experience of our Russian Revolution it is no longer possible to raise this issue, inasmuch as the October revolution became possible in our backward country. But we have learned in recent years to evaluate the social power of the proletariat on the world scale in a somewhat new way and much more precisely and concretely. Those naïve, pseudo-Marxist views which demanded that the proletariat comprise 75 or 90 per cent of the population before taking power, these views appear as quite infantile. Even in countries where the peasantry comprises the majority of the population the proletariat can and must find access to the peasantry in order to achieve the conquest of

power. Absolutely alien to us is any sort of reformist opportunism in relation to the peasantry. But at the same time, no less alien to us is dogmatism. The working class in all countries plays a social and economic role sufficiently great to be able to find a road to the peasant masses, to the oppressed nationalities and the colonial peoples, and in this way assure itself of the majority. After the experience of the Russian Revolution this is not a speculation, not a hypothesis, not a deduction, but an incontestable fact.

And, finally, the third requirement: the working class must be ready for the overturn and capable of accomplishing it. The working class not only must be sufficiently powerful for it, but must be conscious of its power and must be able to apply this power. Today we can and must resolve into its elements and render more precise this subjective factor. During the post-war years, we have observed in the political life of Europe that the working class is ready for the overturn, ready in the sense of striving subjectively toward it, ready in terms of its will, moods, self-sacrifices, but still lacking the necessary organisational leadership. Consequently the mood of the class and its organisational consciousness need not always coincide.

Our revolution, thanks to an exceptional combination of historical factors, afforded our backward country the opportunity to effect the transfer of power into the hands of the working class, in a direct alliance with the peasant masses. The role of the party is all too clear to us and, fortunately, it is today already clear to the West European Communist parties. Not to take the role of the party into account is to fall into pseudo-Marxist objectivism which presupposes some sort of purely objective and automatic preparation of the revolution, and thereby postpones the revolution to an indefinite future. Such automatism is alien to us. It is a Menshevik, a Social-Democratic world outlook. We know, we have learned in practice and we are teaching others to comprehend the enormous role of the subjective, the conscious factor that the revolutionary party of the working class represents.

Without our party the 1917 overturn would not, of course, have taken place and the entire fate of our country would have been different. It would have been thrown back to vegetate as a colonial country; it would have been plundered by and divided among the imperialist powers of the world. That this did not happen was guaranteed historically by the arming of the working class with the incomparable sword, our Communist Party. This did not happen in post-war Europe.

Failing socialism, Europe is decaying and disintegrating economically. This is a fact. The working class in Europe no longer continues to grow. Its destiny, its class destiny, corresponds and runs parallel to the development of economy. To the extent that European economy, with inevitable fluctuations, suffers stagnation and even disintegration, to that extent the working class, as a class fails to grow socially, ceases to increase numerically

but suffers from unemployment, from the terrible swellings of the reserve army of labour, etc., etc. The war roused the working class to its feet in the revolutionary sense.

Was the working class, because of its social weight, capable of carrying out the revolution before the war? What did it lack? It lacked the consciousness of its own strength. Its strength grew in Europe automatically, almost imperceptibly, with the growth of industry. The war shook up the working class. Because of this terrible and bloody upheaval, the entire working class in Europe was imbued with revolutionary moods on the very next day after the war ended. Consequently, one of the subjective factors, the desire to change this world, was at hand. What was lacking? The party was lacking, the party capable of leading the working class to victory.

Here is how the events of the revolution unfolded within our own country and abroad. In 1917, in Russia we have: the February-March revolution; and within nine months – October. The revolutionary party guarantees victory to the working class and peasant poor. In 1918 — revolution in Germany, accompanied by changes at the top; the working class tries to forge ahead but is hurled back time and again. The proletarian revolution in Germany does not lead to victory. In 1919, the eruption of the Hungarian proletarian revolution: its base is too narrow and the party too weak. The revolution is crushed in a few months in 1919. By 1920, the situation has already changed and it continues to change more and more sharply.

In France there is a historical date — 1 May 1920. It marks a sharp turn that took place in the relation of forces between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The mood of the French proletariat had been on the whole revolutionary but it took too light a view of victory. It was lulled by that party and those organisations which had matured in the preceding period of peaceful and organic development of capitalism. On May 1, 1920, the French proletariat declared a general strike. This should have been its first major clash with the French bourgeoisie.

Entire bourgeois France trembled. The proletariat which had just emerged from the trenches struck terror into its heart. But the old Socialist Party, the old Social Democrats, who dared not oppose the revolutionary working class and who issued the call for the general strike, at the same time did everything in their power to blow it up; on the other hand, the revolutionary elements, the Communists, were too weak, too scattered and too lacking in experience. The 1 May strike failed. And if you consult the French newspapers for 1920 you will see in the editorials and news stories already a swift and decisive growth of the strength of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie at once sensed its own stability, gathered the state apparatus into its hands and began to pay less and less attention to the demands of the proletariat and the threats of revolution.

In that same year, in August 1920, we experienced an event closer to

home which likewise brought about a change in the relation of forces, not in favour of the revolution. This was our defeat below Warsaw, a defeat which from the international standpoint is most intimately bound up with the fact that in Germany and in Poland at that moment the revolutionary movement was unable to gain victory because there was lacking a strong revolutionary party enjoying the confidence of the majority of the working class.

A month later, in September 1920, we lived through the great movement in Italy. Precisely at that moment in the autumn of 1920 the Italian proletariat reached its highest point of ferment after the war. Mills, plants, railways, mines are seized. The state is disorganised, the bourgeoisie is virtually prostrate, its spine almost broken. It seems that only one more step forward is needed and the Italian working class will conquer power. But at this moment, its party, that same Socialist Party which had emerged from the previous epoch, although formally adhering to the Third International but with its spirit and roots still in the previous epoch, i.e., in the Second International — this party recoils in terror from the seizure of power, from the civil war, leaving the proletariat exposed. An attack is launched upon the proletariat by the most resolute wing of the bourgeoisie in the shape of fascism, in the shape of whatever still remains strong in the police and the army. The proletariat is smashed.

We observe in Italy a still more drastic shift in the relationship of forces. The bourgeoisie said to itself: "So that's the kind of people you are. You urge the proletariat forward but you lack the spirit to take power." And it pushed the fascist detachments to the fore.

Within a few months, by March 1921, we witness the most important recent event in the life of Germany, the celebrated March events. Here we have a lack of correspondence between the class and the party developing from a diametrically opposite direction. In Italy, in September, the working class was eager for battle. The party shied back in terror. In Germany the working class had been eager for battle. It fought in 1918, in the course of 1919 and in the course of 1920. But its efforts and sacrifices were not crowned by victory because it did not have at its head a sufficiently strong, experienced and cohesive party; instead there was another party at its head which saved the bourgeoisie for the second time, after saving it during the war. And now in 1921 the Communist Party of Germany, seeing how the bourgeoisie was consolidating its positions, wanted to make a heroic attempt to cut off the bourgeoisie's road by an offensive, by a blow, and so it rushed ahead. But the working class did not support it. Why not? Because the working class had not yet learned to have confidence in the party. It did not yet fully know this party, while its own experience in the civil war had brought it only defeats in the course of 1919-20.

And so in March 1921 a situation occurred which impelled the Communist International to say: The relations between the parties and the

classes, between the Communist parties and the working classes in all countries of Europe are still not mature for an immediate offensive, for an immediate battle for the conquest of power. It is necessary to proceed with a painstaking education of the Communist ranks in a twofold sense: first, in the sense of fusing them together and tempering them; and second, in the sense of their conquering the confidence of the overwhelming majority of the working class. Such was the slogan advanced by the Third International at a time when the March events in Germany were still fresh.

And then we observed the process, at any rate on the surface, of the strengthening of the bourgeois governments in Europe; we observed the strengthening of the extreme right wing. In France the National Bloc headed by Poincaré still remains in power. But Poincaré is considered in France, that is within the National Bloc, as a "leftist" and looming on the horizon is a new and more reactionary, more imperialist ministry of Tardieu. In England, the government of Lloyd George, this imperialist with his stock of pacifist preachments and proverbs, has been supplanted by the purely conservative, openly imperialist Ministry of Bonar Law. In Germany, the coalition ministry, i.e., one with an admixture of Social Democrats, has been replaced by an openly bourgeois ministry of Kuno; and finally in Italy we see the assumption of power by Mussolini, the open rule of the counter-revolutionary fist.

In the economic field, capitalism is on the offensive against the proletariat. In every country of Europe the workers have to defend, and not always successfully, the scale of wages they had yesterday and the eight-hour working day in those countries where it had been gained legally during or after the last period of the war. Clearly, the revolutionary development, that is, the struggle of the proletariat for power beginning with the year 1917, does not represent a uniform and steadily rising curve.

Victory was possible in 1917 and 1918 but we did not gain it – the ultimate condition was lacking, the powerful Communist Party. The bourgeoisie succeeded in restoring many of its political and military-police positions but not the economic ones, while the proletariat began building its Communist Party brick by brick. In the initial stages this Communist Party tried to make up for lost opportunities by a single audacious leap forward, as in March 1921 in Germany. It burned its fingers. The International issued a warning: "You must conquer the confidence of the majority of the working class before you dare summon the workers to an open revolutionary assault." This was the lesson of the Third Congress. A year and a half later the Fourth World Congress convened.

At the time the Fourth Congress convened, a turning point had not yet been reached – in the sense that the International could say: "Now the hour of open assault has already sounded." The Fourth Congress developed, deepened, verified and rendered more precise the work of the Third Congress, and was convinced that this work was basically correct.

In 1908-09, on a much narrower arena at the time, we lived through in Russia the moment of the lowest decline of the revolutionary wave [from 1905] in the sense of the prevailing moods among the working class – both in the sense of the then triumphant Stolypinism and Rasputinism, as well as in the sense of the disintegration of the advanced ranks of the working class. What remained as illegal nuclei were terribly small in comparison to the working class as a whole. The best elements were in jails, serving hard-labour terms in penitentiaries, or in exile. 1908-09 – this was the lowest point of the revolutionary movement. Then came a gradual upswing. For the last two years and, in part, right now, we are living through a period undoubtedly analogous to 1908 and 1909, i.e., the lowest point in the direct and open revolutionary struggle.

There is still another point of similarity. On June 3, 1907 the counter-revolution gained a victory (Stolypin's coup) on the parliamentary arena almost without meeting any resistance in the country. And toward the end of 1907 another terrible blow descended — the industrial crisis. What influence did this have on the working class? Did it impel the workers to struggle? No. In 1905, in 1906 and the first half of 1907 the working class had already given its energies and its best elements to the open struggle. It suffered defeat, and on the heels of defeat came the commercial-industrial crisis which weakened the productive and economic role of the proletariat, rendering its position even less stable. This crisis weakened it both in the revolutionary and political sense. Only the commercial and industrial upswing which began in 1909-10 and which reassembled the workers in factories and plants, again imbued the workers with confidence, provided a major basis of support for our party and gave the revolution an impulsion forward.

We can draw a certain analogy. In the spring of 1921 a fearsome commercial crisis broke out in America and in Japan after the proletariat had suffered defeats: the defeat in France on May 1, 1920; in Italy, in September 1920, in Germany, throughout 1919 and 1920 and especially in the March days of 1921. But precisely at this moment in the spring of 1921 there ensued the crisis in Japan and in America and in the latter part of 1921 it leaped to Europe. Unemployment grew to unheard of proportions, especially, as you know, in England. The stability of the proletariat's position dropped still lower, after the losses and disillusionments already suffered. And this does not strengthen, but on the contrary in the given conditions of crisis weakens the working class. During the current year and since the end of last year there have been signs of a certain industrial revival. In America it has reached the proportions of a real upswing while in Europe it remains a small uneven ripple. Thus here, too, the first impulse for the revival of an open mass movement came, especially in France, from a certain improvement in the economic conjuncture.

[But] the industrial upswing of 1909 and 1910 in our country and in the

entire pre-war world was a full-blooded, powerful boom which lasted until 1913 and came at a time when the productive forces had not yet run up against the limits of capitalism, giving rise to the greatest imperialist slaughter.

The industrial revival which began at the end of last year denotes only a change in the temperature of the tubercular organism of European economy. European economy is not growing but disintegrating, it remains on the same levels only in a few countries. The richest of European countries, insular England, has a national income at least one-third or one-quarter smaller than before the war. They engaged in war, as you know, in order to conquer markets. They ended by becoming poorer at least by one-fourth or one-third. The improvements this year have been minimal. The decline in the influence of the Social Democracy and the growth of the Communist parties at the expense of the Social Democrats is a sure symptom of this. As is well known, social reformism grew thanks to the fact that the bourgeoisie had the possibility of improving the position of the most highly skilled layers of the working class. In the nature of things, Scheidemann and everything connected with him would have been impossible without this, for after all Scheidemann does not represent simply an ideological tendency, but a tendency that grows out of certain economic and social premises. It represents a labour aristocracy which profits from the fact that capitalism is full-blooded and powerful and has the possibility of improving the condition of at least the upper layers of the working class. That is precisely why we witness in the pre-war years from 1909 to 1913, the most powerful growth of the bureaucracy in the trade unions and in the Social Democracy, and the strongest entrenchment of reformism and nationalism among the top circles of the working class which led to the terrible catastrophe of the Second International at the outbreak of the war.

Now the bourgeoisie has no longer the possibility of fattening up the summits of the working class because it is not able even to feed the entire working class normally, in the capitalist sense of the word, "normal". The lowering of working-class living standards is today the same kind of law as the decline of the European economy. This process started in 1913, the war introduced superficial changes into it: after the war it has become revealed with especial ferocity. The superficial fluctuations of, the economic conjuncture do not alter this fact. This is the first and basic difference between our epoch and the one prior to the war.

But there is a second difference and it is the existence of soviet Russia as a revolutionary factor. There is also a third difference the existence of a centralised International Communist Party.

At the very time when the bourgeoisie is scoring one superficial victory after another over the proletariat, the growth, strengthening and systematic development of the Communist Party is not being retarded but ad-

vances forward. And herein lies the most important and fundamental difference between our epoch and the one from 1905 to 1917.

What I have said relates, as you see, primarily to Europe. It would be incorrect to apply it wholly to America. In America, too, socialism is more advantageous than capitalism; and it would be even more correct to say that especially in America socialism would be more advantageous than capitalism. Were the present-day American productive forces organized along the principles of collectivism a fabulous flowering of economy would ensue.

But in relation to America it would be incorrect to say, as we do say in relation to Europe, that capitalism already represents the cessation of economic development. Europe is rotting, America is thriving. America, while having lost the European market of the previous scope (in addition to exploiting its own rich internal market with a population of 100 million), is seizing and has seized all the more surely the markets of certain European countries — those of Germany and to a considerable measure those of Britain. And we see, in 1921-22, American economy passing through a genuine commercial and industrial upswing at a time when Europe is experiencing only a distant and feeble repercussion of this upswing.

Consequently, the productive forces in America are still developing under capitalism, much more slowly, of course, than they would develop under socialism but developing nevertheless.

The American working class in its economic and social power has, of course fully matured for the conquest of state power, but in its political and organisational traditions it is incomparably further removed from the conquest of power than the European working class. Our power — the power of the Communist International — is still very weak in America. If one were to take the present situation in its further logical development, then I would venture to say that there are far more chances that the proletariat will conquer in Europe before a powerful Communist Party rises and develops in America.

In other words, just as the victory of the revolutionary working class in October 1917 was the premise for the creation of the Communist International and for the growth of the Communist parties in Europe, so, in all probability, the victory of the proletariat in the most important countries of Europe will be the premise for swift revolutionary developments in America. The difference between these two areas lies in this, that in Europe the economy decays and declines with the proletariat no longer growing productively (because there is no room for growth) but awaiting the development of the Communist Party; while in America, which exploits the disintegration of Europe, the economic advancement is still proceeding.

The third sphere is constituted by the colonies. It is self-understood that the colonies — Asia and Africa (I speak of them as a unity), despite the fact that they, like Europe, contain the greatest graduations — the colonies,

if taken independently and isolatedly, are absolutely not ready for the proletarian revolution. If they are taken isolatedly, then capitalism still has a long possibility of economic development in them. But the colonies belong to the metropolitan centres and their fate is intimately bound up with the fate of these European metropolitan centres.

In the colonies we observe the growing national revolutionary movement. Communists represent there only small nuclei implanted among the peasantry. So that in the colonies we have primarily petty-bourgeois and bourgeois national movements. If you were to ask concerning the prospects of the Socialist and Communist development of the colonies then I would say that this question cannot be posed in an isolated manner. Of course, after the victory of the proletariat in Europe, these colonies will become the arena for the cultural, economic and every other kind of influence exercised by Europe, but for this they must first of all play their revolutionary role parallel with the role of European proletariat.

In this connection the European proletariat, particularly that of France and in the first instance that of Britain, are doing far too little. The growth of the influence of socialist and communist ideas, the emancipation of the toiling masses of the colonies, the weakening of the influence of the nationalist parties can be assured not only by and not so much by the role of the native Communist nuclei as by the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of the metropolitan centres for the emancipation of the colonies. Only in this way will the proletariat of the metropolitan centres demonstrate to the colonies that there are two European nations, one the oppressor, the other the friend; only in this way will the proletariat give a further impetus to the colonies which will topple down the structure of imperialism and thereby perform a revolutionary service for the proletarian cause.

If the revolution in Europe is postponed for many decades, it would signify the elimination of Europe generally as a cultural force. As you all know, the philosophy now fashionable in Europe is that of Spengler: the philosophy of the decline of Europe. In its own way this is a correct class premonition on the part of the bourgeoisie. Ignoring the proletariat which will replace the European bourgeoisie and wield power, they talk about Europe's decline. Of course, if this actually happened the inevitable result would be, if not a decline, then a prolonged economic and cultural decay of Europe and then, after a lapse of time, the American revolution would come and take Europe in tow.

But there are no serious grounds for such a prognosis, pessimistic from the standpoint of time intervals. To be sure, speculations concerning time intervals are quite untrustworthy and not always serious, but I want to say that there is no reason for thinking that between the year 1917 — the inception of the new revolutionary epoch in Europe — and the major victories in Western Europe, there must be a lapse of many more years than

passed between our 1905 and our 1917. We do not of course know just how many years will pass between 1917 and the first major, stable victory in Europe. It is not excluded that less than twelve years may pass.

In any case, the greatest advantage today lies in the existence of soviet Russia and of the Communist International, the centralised organisation of the revolutionary vanguard and, intimately linked with this, the systematic organisational strengthening of Communist parties in various countries.

This does not always signify their numerical growth. Naturally in 1919-20, when the first hopes of the proletariat were still fresh, the ranks of the Communist parties were flooded — as is always the case in time of high tide — and the Communist organisations became filled with unstable elements. Some of these elements have now withdrawn, but there has been no cessation of the growth of the party in terms of its becoming tempered, in terms of higher ideological clarity, in terms of international centralisation and ties.

This growth is undeniable and finds its expression both in the fact that the Fourth World Congress made a start toward the drafting of an international programme — for the first time in the history of the proletariat — as well as in the fact that the Fourth Congress in electing the Executive Committee created for the first time a centralist organ not on federalistic principles, not on the basis of delegated representatives from various parties, but as a body elected by the Fourth Congress itself. And this Executive Committee has been entrusted with the destinies of the Communist International until the next congress.

The Communist International is confronted after the Fourth Congress with two intimately interrelated tasks. The first task is to continue the struggle against the centrist tendencies which express the repeated and persistent attempts of the bourgeoisie through the medium of its left wing to utilise the protracted character of the revolutionary development by sinking its own roots inside the Communist International. The second [task] is the struggle for influence over the overwhelming majority of the working class.

These two problems were raised very sharply at the Third Congress.

Following the events of 1920, our Italian party split. By the summer of 1921 the Italian centre, the so-called Maximalists headed by Serrati, were no longer present at our congress (the Third) and they were declared expelled from the international. Despite the triumph of the counter-revolution in Italy as in Europe generally, we observe precisely in Italy, where Communism has suffered its worst defeat, not disintegration, not a recoil from, but on the contrary, a new impulsion toward the Communist International. The Maximalists led by Serrati whom we had expelled (and correctly so, for conduct that was truly treacherous), these Maximalists, having split with the reformists during the September 1920 movement,

began knocking at the doors of the International on the eve of the Fourth Congress. What does this signify? It signifies a new revolutionary impulsion to the left on the part of a section of the proletarian vanguard.

There were many indications that the French centrists would repeat the course of the Italian Maximalists, that is, split with us. We would of course have been reconciled, even to such an outcome in the knowledge that the left wing would have in the end gained the upper hand. However, the French centrists, with Cachin and Frossard at the head, have learned something from the experience of the Italian Maximalists who arrived in Moscow with heads bowed in repentance after having split with Moscow. You should all acquaint yourselves with the resolution on the French party adopted by the Fourth Congress. These resolutions are in their own way quite draconic, especially if one takes into account the morals and customs of France and of its old — Socialist Party. A demand for a complete break with all the institutions of the bourgeoisie is something that seems self-evident to us. But in France where hundreds upon hundreds of Communist Party members belonged to Masonic lodges, bourgeois — democratic Leagues for the Defence of the Rights of Man, etc., etc. — there the demand for a complete break with the bourgeoisie, for the expulsion of all Freemasons and the like represents a complete overturn in the party's life.

At the congress we adopted a demand to the French party that nine-tenths of the candidates for all electoral posts, the parliament, the municipal councils, the cantonal councils, etc., be selected from among workers and peasants directly from the workbench or the plough. In a country where entire legions of intellectuals, lawyers, careerists flock to the gates of various parties whenever they sniff the scent of a mandate, and all the more so a prospect of power, etc., those acquainted with the existing conditions in the French party will understand that a demand for advancing workers and peasants represents the greatest possible upheaval in the life of the French party. The left wing which is approximately as strong numerically as the centre was in favour of this. The centre vacillated a great deal.

We understood that this issue was a very touchy one and that our Moscow boots had stepped on a very sensitive corn and we awaited how Paris would react to the prodding of Moscow: The latest telegrams testify that a break with Moscow was attempted. Morizet is named as the initiator of this attempt. He paid us a visit in Moscow and then wrote a very sympathetic book. Morizet together with Soutif — both members of the Central Committee — proposed to split and to proclaim the formation of an independent party without waiting for the return of the French delegation [to the Fourth Congress] from Moscow. But there was such great pressure from the ranks, the readiness of the rank and file to accept the decisions of the Fourth Congress was so clear and manifest, that they were forced to beat a retreat. And while they abstained — only abstained — the

incumbent Central Committee consisting entirely of centrists, with not a single left winger on it and perhaps without any general enthusiasm among all the members of the Central Committee, nevertheless voted to submit to the Moscow decisions.

This fact may appear secondary from the standpoint of world perspectives. But if we had followed the life of the French working class and its Communist vanguard from day to day then all of us would have said that only now, only after the Fourth Congress, has French Communism turned the helm in such a way as will guarantee it a swift progress in conquering the confidence of the broad working masses of France.

This is all the more true because there is not another working class in this world that has been deceived so often, so shamelessly and vilely as the French working class. Since the end of the eighteenth century it has been duped during all the revolutions by the bourgeoisie in all its colourations. Among all the parties of the Second International, the French Socialists of the pre-war and war epochs elaborated the most refined technique and virtuosity of treachery. And this is why the French working class with its superb revolutionary temperament inevitably reacted with the greatest mistrust even toward the new Communist Party.

What we need is for our Communist Party to come before the working class and demonstrate in action that it is not a party like other parties but the revolutionary organisation of the working class; that there is no room in its ranks for careerists, Freemasons, democrats and grafters.

Another question likewise in connection with France was posed very sharply —the question of the united front. As you know, the slogan of the united front arises from two causes.

In the first place, we Communists are still a minority in France, in Germany, in every country of Europe with the exception of Bulgaria and perhaps Czechoslovakia we influence and control less than one-half of the proletariat. Concurrently, the revolutionary development has started to lag; the proletariat wants to live and fight but finds itself split.

It is under these conditions that the Communists must conquer the confidence of this working class. On what basis? On the basis of the struggle in its full scope. On the basis of current day-to-day struggles, on the basis of every demand, at every strike, at every demonstration. The Communist must be in the forefront. The Communist must conquer the confidence of those who still do not trust him today. The French Communists, especially the centrists who, under the pressure of the Dissidents, that is, of the French Socialists, had tolerated Freemasons in their ranks and rejected the tactic of the united front, have proposed to apply the tactic of the united front in connection with the demand for political amnesty.

When Frossard, Secretary of the French party, proposed in the name of the Communists to the Dissidents, i.e., Socialists, patriots, reformists, that they engage in joint action in order to obtain amnesty for worker-revolu-

tionists clapped in jail during the war or in the post-war period leaders of the Dissidents immediately replied in a way that is typical and instructive in the highest degree. The Dissidents said: "You Communists have turned to us and consequently you thereby acknowledge that we are not betrayers of the working class. But we want time to think your offer over; and see whether or not you are hiding a brickbat in your sleeves; or are perchance preparing to discredit us." I gather from the papers that in The Hague, Comrade Radek wrote reportedly a very impolite article about Vandervelde and Scheidemann and at the same time offered the local Social Democrats and followers of Amsterdam a united front against militarism and the war danger.

Knowing the irascible temper of Comrade Radek I am ready to allow that his article was not very polite. But the reaction of Messrs. Amsterdamists was quite typical: "See here," they said, "this means one of two things. Either you must admit that we are not traitors in view of your proposing a united front to us or we shall become firmly convinced that you are hiding not only disrespectful articles, but brickbats, and something worse in your sleeves."

...These people are incapable of struggle, incapable of defending the interests of the proletariat. And we address ourselves to their army, that is, those workers who still follow and trust them and say to them: "We are proposing to your leaders a certain way of fighting jointly with us for the eight-hour working day, for political amnesty, and against wage cuts. What is our brickbat? Why this, that if you Amsterdamists and Social Democrats expose yourselves in this struggle as cowards and traitors, a section of your workers will come over to us. But if contrary to expectations you turn out to be revolutionary tigers and lions, then so much the better for you. Try it."

This is the content of our bait. Our trap is simple. It is so simple. but at the same time it is unassailable. It is impossible to squirm away from it. It does not matter whether [they agree or refuse] to discuss for fear of revealing that [they are] no good. In either case [they] remain no good, and can't remedy the situation. In other words, the slogan of the united front which is already playing an enormous role in all European countries in educating the working masses about the Communists and posing before the workers who do not yet trust the Communists the following proposition:

"You do not believe in revolutionary methods and in the dictatorship. Very well. But we Communists propose to you and your organisation that we fight side by side to gain those demands which you are advancing today."

This is an unassailable argument. It educates the masses about the Communists and shows them that the Communist organisation is the best for partial struggles as well. I repeat that we have gained major successes in

this struggle. And alongside the growing internal cohesion of the Communist parties we observe the growth of their political influence and their increased ability to manoeuvre, really manoeuvre. This is something that they have especially lacked.

From the united front flows the slogan of a workers' government. The Fourth Congress submitted it to a thorough discussion and once again confirmed it as the central political slogan for the next period. What does the struggle for a workers' government signify? We Communists of course know that a genuine workers' government in Europe will be established after the proletariat overthrows the bourgeoisie together with its democratic machinery and installs the proletarian dictatorship under the leadership of the Communist Party. But in order to bring this about it is necessary for the European proletariat in its majority to support the Communist Party.

But this does not obtain as yet and so our Communist parties say on, every appropriate occasion:

"Socialist workers, syndicalist workers, anarchists and non-party workers! Wages are being slashed; less and less remains of the eight-hour working day; the cost of living is soaring. Such things would not be if all the workers despite their differences were able to unite and install their own workers' government."

And the slogan of a workers' government thus becomes a wedge driven by the Communists between the working class and all other classes: and inasmuch as the top circles of the Social Democracy, the reformists, are tied up with the bourgeoisie, this wedge will act more and more to tear away, and it is already beginning to tear away the left wing of Social-Democratic workers from their leaders. Under certain conditions the slogan of a workers' government can become a reality in Europe. That is to say, a moment may arrive when the Communists together with the left elements of the Social Democracy will set up a workers' government in a way similar to ours in Russia when we created a workers' and peasants' government together with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Such a phase would constitute a transition to the proletarian dictatorship, the full and completed one. But right now the significance of the slogan of a workers' government lies not so much in the manner and conditions of its realisation in life as in the fact that at the present time this slogan opposes the working class as a whole politically to all other classes, i.e., to all the groupings of the bourgeois political world.

At the Fourth Congress we were confronted concretely with the question of a workers' government with respect to Saxony. There the Social Democrats together with the Communists comprise a majority as against the bourgeoisie in the Saxon Landtag. I believe there are 40 Social-Democratic deputies and 10 Communist deputies while the total bourgeois bloc numbers less than 50. And so the Social Democrats proposed to the Com-

munists the joint formation of a workers' government in Saxony. There were some doubts and vacillations on this issue in our German party. The question was reviewed here in Moscow and a decision was reached to reject the proposal. What do the German Social Democrats really want? What were they aiming at with this proposal? You all know that the German republic is headed by a Social Democrat, Ebert. Under Ebert is a bourgeois ministry, called to power by Ebert. But in Saxony, one of the most highly proletarianised sections of Germany, it is proposed to institute a coalition labour ministry of Social Democrats and Communists. The result would be: a genuine bourgeois government in Germany, over the country as a whole, while in the Landtag of one of the sections of Germany there would be acting as a lightning rod, a coalition Social-Democratic and Communist government.

In the Comintern we gave the following answer: if you, our German Communist comrades, are of the opinion that a revolution is possible in the next few months in Germany, then we would advise you to participate in Saxony in a coalition government and to utilise your ministerial posts in Saxony for the furthering of political and organisational tasks and for transforming Saxony in a certain sense into a Communist drillground so as to have a revolutionary stronghold already reinforced in a period of preparation for the approaching outbreak of the revolution. But this would be possible only if the pressure of the revolution were already making itself felt, only if it were already at hand. In that case it would imply only the seizure of a single position in Germany which you are destined to capture as a whole. But at the present time you will of course play in Saxony the role of an appendage, an impotent appendage because the Saxon government itself is impotent before Berlin, and Berlin is — a bourgeois government. The Communist Party of Germany was in complete accord with this decision and the negotiations were broken off. The proposal of the Social Democrats to the Communists — much weaker than the Social Democrats and hounded by these Social Democrats — to share power with them in Saxony is of course a trap. But in this trap was expressed the pressure of the working masses for unity. This pressure has been evoked by us; and this pressure, insofar as it operates to tear the working class away from the bourgeoisie, will in the last analysis work in our favour.

Comrades, I said that there is a tide of concentrated reaction now sweeping over Europe and her governmental upper stories; the victory of the Tories in England; Poincaré's national bloc with a prospect of Tardieu in France; in Germany which is still called a Socialist Republic today (it was thus hastily labelled in November 1918), there is a purely bourgeois government; and finally in Italy there is the assumption of power by Mussolini.

Mussolini is a lesson being given to Europe with regard to democracy, its principles and its methods. In some respects this lesson is analogous

— from the opposite extreme, of course — to the one which we gave Europe in the beginning of 1918 by dispersing the Constituent Assembly. Mussolini is a lesson to Europe that is instructive in the highest degree.

Italy is an old cultured country, with democratic traditions, with universal suffrage, etc., etc. When the proletariat frightened the bourgeoisie to death but proved unable, owing to the treachery of its own party, to deal it the death blow, the bourgeoisie set in motion all of its most active elements, headed by Mussolini, a renegade from socialism and the proletariat. A private party army was mobilized and it was equipped from one end of the country to the other with funds allegedly drawn from mysterious sources but which come principally from governmental resources, partly from the secret Italian funds, and to a considerable measure from French subsidies to Mussolini. Under the aegis of democracy the storm-troop organisation of the counter-revolution was organized and in the course of two years it conducted assaults upon workers' districts and threw a ring of its troops around Rome. The bourgeoisie hesitated because it was not sure that Mussolini was capable of coping with the situation. But when Mussolini proved his ability, they all bowed before him.

The speech made by Mussolini in the Italian parliament ought to be posted and placarded in all the workers' institutions and houses in Western Europe. What he said amounts to the following: "I could chase all of you out of here and turn this (parliament) into a camp for my Fascists. But I don't need to do it because you will lick my boots away." And they all answered, "Hear! hear!" And the Italian democrats thereupon requested to know: "Which boot is it your pleasure that we begin with — the right or the left?"

Comrades, this is a lesson of exceptional importance to the European working class which in its top layers is corroded by its traditions, by bourgeois democracy, by the deliberate hypnosis of legality.

I have said that the centralised Communist organisation of the Comintern and the existence of the soviet republic constitute the greatest conquests of the European and world working class in this epoch of the deathbed triumphs of the European bourgeoisie, in this epoch of a break in the rising curve of the revolution. The gist of the matter is not that we, Russia, conduct internationalist propaganda. It of course happens that Russian comrades like Radek and Lozovsky, for example, manage, to our surprise, to reach The Hague, and there write disrespectful articles, and arouse the ire of pacifists of both sexes, etc., etc. This, comrades, is of course very valuable and very gratifying, but it is still of secondary importance.

Nor is the gist of the matter in the fact that we in Moscow extend hospitality to the congresses of the Comintern. It is of course a good thing, but our propaganda does not consist in welcoming our comrades from Italy, Germany and elsewhere and assigning them rooms in the Lux Hotel (poorly heated, of course, inasmuch as we have not yet learned to operate

heating systems efficiently). The gist lies in the very existence of the soviet republic. We have become accustomed to this fact. The entire world working class appears, in a certain sense, to have become accustomed to it. On the other side, the bourgeoisie, too, makes a pretence to a certain extent of having grown accustomed. But in order to understand the significance for the revolution of the existence of the soviet republic, let us imagine for a moment that this Republic no longer exists. With Mussolini in Italy, Poincaré in France, Bonar Law in England, a bourgeois government in Germany, the downfall of the soviet republic would signify the postponement of the European and world revolution for decades; it would signify the genuine decay of European culture. Socialism would then arise perhaps from America, from Japan, from Asia. But instead of speculating in terms of decades, what we are striving for is to bring this issue to its consummation in the next few years. For this there is the greatest and most ample opportunity.

Once it establishes a correct relationship with the peasantry, what is the proletariat — of even so backward a country as ours? We have already seen what it is with our own eyes, and our All-Union Soviet Congress, now convening in Moscow, is demonstrating just what is signified by the power of the proletariat, encircled and blockaded by the whole world, but nevertheless leading the peasantry behind it. The European and world working class draws its strength and energy from this source, from soviet Russia. We hold the power. In our country the means of production are nationalised. This is a great trump card in the hands of the toiling masses of Russia and at the same time this is a pledge of an accelerated development of the revolution in Europe.

Should (working-class) America lag behind we shall nevertheless gain the upper hand. During the imperialist war the American bourgeoisie warmed its hands at the European bonfire. But, comrades, once the revolutionary conflagration starts sweeping Europe the American bourgeoisie will not be able to maintain itself long. It is nowhere written that the European proletariat must keep waiting until the American proletariat learns not to succumb to the lies of its triply depraved bourgeoisie. Nowhere is this written. At the present time the American bourgeoisie is deliberately keeping Europe in a condition of decay. Glutted with European blood and gold the American bourgeoisie issues orders to the whole world, sends plenipotentiaries to conferences who are bound by no commitments. These emissaries say nothing but render their own decisions, and from time to time they plant their American foot on the table and the diplomats of the European countries cannot fail to note that this foot is shod in an excellent American boot. And with this boot America dictates her own laws to Europe. The European bourgeoisie, not only of Germany and France but also Britain, begs on its hind legs before the American bourgeoisie which drained Europe in wartime by its support, by its loans, by its gold, and

which now keeps Europe in the throes of death-agony. The American bourgeoisie will be repaid by the European proletariat. And this vengeance shall come the sooner, all the firmer our soviet successes are.

What does the working class of Britain dread? What does the German working class dread? Hungry Europe survived for three war years and in the post-war years on American grain. The American bourgeoisie naturally threatens openly that in the event of new revolutionary convulsions in Europe it will starve the continent by a grain blockade just as Britain and France once threw an industrial blockade around soviet Russia. This is a very important matter in the calculations of the European working class and above all of the German workers. And we, soviet Russia, must say — and prepare this in action — that the European proletarian revolution will eat grain supplied by soviet Russia.

And these words, comrade peasants, are not hollow syllables, not empty phrases. The fate of all Europe depends upon the solution of this question. Two courses are possible: either the European proletariat remains terrorised by the American boot, or the European proletariat is backed by the Russian workers and peasants, and thus assured of grain during the difficult days and months of revolution. That is why each economic success in agriculture is a revolutionary deed. And that is why every peasant in soviet Russia — even those who do not know for sure just where Germany, France, or Britain are located on the map — who seeks to grow his crops, who tries to start things rolling again, to help the city and the industry — this peasant is today a better aid to the world, in the first instance, the European, revolution than are all of us old and experienced propagandists put together.

This, comrades, applies with equal force to our industry. Miserable indeed would be the revolutionary party of Europe that said to itself — no Communist would ever say it — "I shall bide my time until the soviet republic shows me just how the condition of the working class can be improved under socialism." No one has the right to bide his time; everybody has the duty to fight side by side with us. But, on the other hand, it is incontestable that each of our economic successes, to the extent that it simultaneously enables us to improve the condition of the working class in Russia while the condition of the working class in Europe is dropping lower rung by rung — yes, it is incontestable that each economic success of ours is the weightiest of arguments, the weightiest propaganda in favour of accelerating — the proletarian revolution in Europe. Power is in our hands; the means of production are in our hands. We hold the frontiers. This, too, is no minor circumstance.

That same American billionaire with his first-class boots could buy up all of our Russia with his billions were our frontiers left open to him. That is why the monopoly of foreign trade is just as much our inalienable revolutionary conquest as is the nationalisation of the means of production.

That is why the working class and the peasants of Russia will not permit any violation of the monopoly of foreign trade no matter how much pressure is exerted upon us from all the five continents of this globe still under the capitalist yoke. These are our trumps. Only with a correct organization of production can we preserve them, multiply them and not waste them. From this standpoint, comrades, there must be no self-deception concerning the difficulties of our tasks. This is what we said at the Fourth Congress which took up our New Economic Policy as a special point on its agenda, in connection with the world perspectives. We have listed our big trump cards: state power, transport, the primary means of production in industry, natural resources, nationalisation of land, taxes in kind which flow from this nationalised land, and the monopoly of foreign trade. These are first-class trumps. But if one does not know how to use them, it is possible to lose with even better trumps. Comrades, we must learn. We must learn how to organise industry correctly, for this correct organisation still lies ahead and not behind us. It is our tomorrow and not our yesterday, nor even today.

We are making efforts to stabilise our currency. This was also taken up at the Fourth Congress. Such efforts are indispensable and, naturally, the greater our relative successes in this field, all the easier will be our administrative labours in industry. But we all understand only too clearly that all efforts in the field of finances unaccompanied by genuine material successes in the field of industry must remain mere child's play. The foundation is our industry; the soviet state rests upon this foundation, thrives with it and secures from it the assurance of the future victories of the working class.

Finally, there is one more trump, one more machine, one other organisation that is likewise in our hands. We talked about it more than once at the Fourth Congress. It is our party. From the general analysis it follows that, on the European scale, we are living through a period of recession in the direct revolutionary struggle, and simultaneously through a period of educational work and strengthening of the Communist Party. The development has assumed a retarded and protracted character. This means that we must wait longer for the assistance of the European and, later, of the world proletariat; this means that our party is destined for a long span of time, perhaps for several years, to remain the vanguard of the world revolution.

This is a very great honour. But it is also a great responsibility, a very great burden. We would prefer to have alongside us soviet republics in Germany, Poland and other countries. Our responsibility then would have been less and the difficulties of our position would not have been so great. Our party has old cadres with pre-revolutionary, underground tempering, but they are in the minority. We have in our party hundreds of thousands who in terms of human class material are in no way inferior to the old

timers. These hundreds of thousands who poured into our ranks after the revolution possess the advantage of youth but are handicapped by a lesser experience. Comrade Lenin told me (I did not happen to read it myself) that some physician, either a Czech or a German, has written that the Communist Party of Russia consists of a few thousand oldsters and the rest, youth. The conditions of the NEP, he thinks, will tend to reshape our party, and if the old generations — a few thousand strong — depart from activity, the party will be imperceptibly transformed by the elements of the NEP, the elements of capitalism. Here, as you see, is a subtle political and psychological calculation. This calculation is of course false to the core. But at the same time it demands of our party that it give itself an accounting of the protracted character of the revolutionary development and of the difficulties of our position; and that our party double and triple its efforts for the education of its new generations, for attracting the youth and for raising the qualifications of the party mass. In the present conditions this is a life-and-death question for us.

Comrades, I want to refer to still another episode — a very major episode for all of us — and that is the illness of Vladimir Ilyich. Most of you here have not had the opportunity of following the European press. There have been many wild campaigns abroad concerning us and against us, but I do not recall — not even in the days of Kerensky when we were hounded as German spies — such a concentrated campaign of malevolence, of viciousness, and fiendish speculation as the current campaign around the illness of Comrade Lenin. Our enemies of course hoped for the worst outcome, the worst possible personal outcome. At the same time they said that our party is beheaded, split into warring groups, falling apart, and that an opportunity is opening up for their laying hands on Russia. The White Guard scum has talked about it openly, of course. The diplomats, the capitalists of Europe, have hinted about it, understanding each other with half-phrases.

Comrades, in this way they, against their own will and wishes. showed, on the one hand, that they have been able in their own way to appraise the significance of Comrade Lenin to our party and to the revolution; and, on the other hand that they neither know character nor understand — all the worse for them — the nature of our party. It is superfluous for me to talk before the Communist fraction of the soviet congress about the significance of Comrade Lenin to the movement in our country and in the world. But there is, Comrades, a kind of bond that is not only physical but spiritual, an internal, indissoluble bond between the party and the individual who expresses it best, the most fully, and in a way that a genius does. And this has found its expression in the fact that when Comrade Lenin was torn from his work by illness, the party awaited, with tense expectation, news and bulletins of Comrade Lenin's condition, but at the same time not a single muscle in our party trembled, there was not a single vacilla-

tion, not a hint of the possibility of internal struggle, and all the less so of split. When Comrade Lenin withdrew from work by order of his physicians, the party understood that now a double and treble responsibility had fallen upon every rank-and-file member; and the party waited in unanimity and with closed ranks for the leader's return.

Not so long ago I was engaged in conversation by a foreign bourgeois politician who said to me: "I get around a good deal in your party circles and in soviet circles. Of course, there are personal and group conflicts among you but one must give you your due. Whenever the external world, or an external danger, or general tasks are involved, you always straighten out your front." The last part of his declaration about our straightening out our front gratified me, but the first part, I admit, annoyed me somewhat. To the extent that in such a big party as ours, with such colossal tasks as ours, and under the greatest conceivable difficulties, and with the old timers unquestionably wearing out (as is in the nature of things) — to the extent that some internal dangers could arise in our party, there is not and cannot be any remedy against them other than the raising of the qualification of the entire party and the strengthening of its public opinion so that each member in each post feels the increased pressure of this party public opinion.

These are the conclusions we draw from the overall international situation. The hour of the European revolution will not perhaps strike tomorrow. Weeks and months will pass, maybe several years, and we shall still remain the only workers'-peasants' state in the world. In Italy Mussolini has triumphed. Are we guaranteed against the victory of German Mussolinis in Germany? Not at all. And it is wholly possible that a much more reactionary ministry than Poincaré's will come to power in France. Before squatting down on its hind legs and pushing its Kerensky to the fore, the bourgeoisie is still quite capable of advancing its last Stolypins, Plehves, Sipyagins. This will be the prologue to the European revolution, provided we are able to maintain ourselves, provided the soviet state remains standing, and, consequently, provided above all that our party is able to maintain itself to the end. We shall perhaps have to pass through more than one year of this preparatory economic, political and other kinds of work.

Therefore we must draw closer to our mass reserves. More youth around our party and within it! Raise its qualifications to the maximum! Given this condition of complete cohesion and with the raising of our party's qualifications, with the transfer of experience from the old to the new generation, no matter what storms — these heralds of the final proletarian victory — may break over our heads, we shall stand firm in our knowledge that the soviet frontier is the trench beyond which the counter-revolution cannot pass. This trench is manned by us, by the vanguard of soviet Russia, by the Communist Party, and we shall preserve this trench inviolate and impregnable until that day when the European revolution arrives, and

over the whole of Europe there shall wave the banner of the soviet republic of the United States of Europe, the threshold to the World Socialist Republic.

IDEAS

The united front

By Leon Trotsky

Drafted for a Communist International discussion on French communism, March 1922

1. The task of the Communist Party is to lead the proletarian revolution. In order to summon the proletariat for the direct conquest of power and to achieve it the Communist Party must base itself on the overwhelming majority of the working class.

So long as it does not hold this majority, the party must fight to win it.

The party can achieve this only by remaining an absolutely independent organisation with a clear programme and strict internal discipline. That is the reason why the party was bound to break ideologically and organisationally with the reformists and the centrists who do not strive for the proletarian revolution, who possess neither the capacity nor the desire to prepare the masses for revolution, and who by their entire conduct thwart this work.

Any members of the Communist Party who bemoan the split with the centrists in the name of “unity of forces” or “unity of front” thereby demonstrate that they do not understand the ABC of Communism and that they themselves happen to be in the Communist Party only by accident.

2. After assuring itself of the complete independence and ideological homogeneity of its ranks, the Communist Party fights for influence over the majority of the working class. This struggle can be accelerated or retarded depending upon objective circumstances and the expediency of the tactics employed.

But it is perfectly self-evident that the class life of the proletariat is not suspended during this period preparatory to the revolution. Clashes with industrialists, with the bourgeoisie, with the state power, on the initiative of one side or the other, run their due course.

In these clashes — insofar as they involve the vital interests of the entire working class, or its majority, or this or that section — the working masses sense the need of unity in action, of unity in resisting the onslaught of capitalism or unity in taking the offensive against it. Any party which mechanically counterposes itself to this need of the working class for unity in action will unfailingly be condemned in the minds of the workers.

Consequently the question of the united front is not at all, either in point of origin or substance, a question of the reciprocal relations between the Communist parliamentary fraction and that of the Socialists, or between the Central Committee of the two parties, or between *l'Humanité* and *Le Populaire*. The problem of the united front — despite the fact that a split is inevitable in this epoch between the various political organisations basing themselves on the working class — grows out of the urgent need to secure for the working class the possibility of a united front in the struggle against capitalism.

For those who do not understand this task, the party is only a propaganda society and not an organisation for mass action.

3. In cases where the Communist Party still remains an organisation of a numerically insignificant minority, the question of its conduct on the mass-struggle front does not assume a decisive practical and organisational significance. In such conditions, mass actions remain under the leadership of the old organisations which by reason of their still powerful traditions continue to play the decisive role.

Similarly the problem of the united front does not arise in countries where — as in Bulgaria, for example — the Communist Party is the sole leading organisation of the toiling masses.

But wherever the Communist Party already constitutes a big, organised, political force, but not the decisive magnitude: wherever the party embraces organisationally, let us say, one-fourth, one-third, or even a larger proportion of the organised proletarian vanguard, it is confronted with the question of the united front in all its acuteness.

If the party embraces one-third or one-half of the proletarian vanguard, then the remaining half or two-thirds are organised by the reformists or centrists. It is perfectly obvious, however, that even those workers who still support the reformists and the centrists are vitally interested in maintaining the highest material standards of living and the greatest possible freedom for struggle. We must consequently so devise our tactic as to prevent the Communist Party, which will on the morrow embrace the entire three-thirds of the working class, from turning into — and all the more so, from actually being — an organisational obstacle in the way of the current struggle of the proletariat.

Still more, the party must assume the initiative in securing unity in these current struggles. Only in this way will the party draw closer to those two-thirds who do not as yet follow its leadership, who do not as yet trust the party because they do not understand it. Only in this way can the party win them over.

4. If the Communist Party had not broken drastically and irrevocably with the Social Democrats, it would not have become the party of the proletarian revolution. It could not have taken the first serious steps on the road to revolution. It would have for ever remained a parliamentary

safety-valve attached to the bourgeois state.

Whoever does not understand this, does not know the first letter of the ABC of Communism.

If the Communist Party did not seek for organisational avenues to the end that at every given moment joint, co-ordinated action between the Communist and the non-Communist (including the Social-Democratic) working masses were made possible, it would have thereby laid bare its own incapacity to win over — on the basis of mass action — the majority of the working class. It would degenerate into a Communist propaganda society but never develop into a party for the conquest of power.

It is not enough to possess the sword, one must give it an edge. It is not enough to give the sword an edge, one must know how to wield it.

After separating the Communists from the reformists it is not enough to fuse the Communists together by means of organisational discipline, it is necessary that this organisation should learn how to guide all the collective activities of the proletariat in all spheres of its living struggle.

This is the second letter of the alphabet of Communism.

5. Does the united front extend only to the working masses or does it also include the opportunist leaders?

The very posing of this question is a product of misunderstanding.

If we were able simply to unite the working masses around our own banner or around our practical immediate slogans, and skip over reformist organisations, whether party or trade union, that would of course be the best thing in the world. But then the very question of the united front would not exist in its present form.

The question arises from this, that certain very important sections of the working class belong to reformist organisations or support them. Their present experience is still insufficient to enable them to break with the reformist organisations and join us. It may be precisely after engaging in those mass activities, which are on the order of the day, that a major change will take place in this connection. That is just what we are striving for. But that is not how matters stand at present. Today the organised portion of the working class is broken up into three formations.

One of them, the Communist, strives toward the social revolution and precisely because of this supports concurrently every movement, however partial, of the toilers against the exploiters and against the bourgeois state.

Another grouping, the reformist, strives toward conciliation with the bourgeoisie. But in order not to lose their influence over the workers reformists are compelled, against the innermost desires of their own leaders, to support the partial movements of the exploited against the exploiters.

Finally, there is a third grouping, the centrist, which constantly vacillates between the other two, and which has no independent significance.

The circumstances thus make wholly possible joint action on a whole number of vital issues between the workers united in these three respec-

tive organisations and the unorganised masses adhering to them.

The Communists, as has been said, must not oppose such actions but on the contrary must also assume the initiative for them, precisely for the reason that the greater is the mass drawn into the movement, the higher its self-confidence rises, all the more self-confident will that mass movement be and all the more resolutely will it be capable of marching forward, however modest may be the initial slogans of struggle. And this means that the growth of the mass aspects of the movement tends to radicalise it, and creates much more favourable conditions for the slogans, methods of struggle, and, in general, the leading role of the Communist Party.

The reformists dread the revolutionary potential of the mass movement; their beloved arena is the parliamentary tribunal, the trade-union bureaux, the arbitration boards, the ministerial antechambers.

On the contrary, we are, apart from all other considerations, interested in dragging the reformists from their asylums and placing them alongside ourselves before the eyes of the struggling masses. With a correct tactic we stand only to gain from this. A Communist who doubts or fears this resembles a swimmer who has approved the theses on the best method of swimming but dares not plunge into the water.

6. Unity of front consequently presupposes our readiness, within certain limits and on specific issues, to correlate in practice our actions with those of reformist organisations, to the extent to which the latter still express today the will of important sections of the embattled proletariat.

But, after all, didn't we split with them? Yes, because disagree with them on fundamental questions of the working-class movement.

And yet we seek agreement with them? Yes, in all those cases where the masses that follow them are ready to engage in joint struggle together with the masses that follow us and when they, the reformists, are to a lesser or greater degree compelled to become an instrument of this struggle.

But won't they say that after splitting with them we still need them? Yes, their blabbermouths may say this. Here and there somebody in our own ranks may take fright at it. But as regards the broad working masses — even those who do not follow us and who do not as yet understand our goals but who do see two or three labour organisations leading a parallel existence — these masses will draw from our conduct this conclusion, that despite the split we are doing everything in our power to facilitate unity in action for the masses.

7. A policy aimed to secure the united front does not of course contain automatic guarantees that unity in action will actually be attained in all instances. On the contrary, in many cases and perhaps even the majority of cases, organisational agreements will be only half-attained or perhaps not at all. But it is necessary that the struggling masses should always be given the opportunity of convincing themselves that the non-achievement of unity in action was not due to our formalistic irreconcilability but to the

lack of real will to struggle on the part of the reformists.

In entering into agreements with other organisations, we naturally obligate ourselves to a certain discipline in action. But this discipline cannot be absolute in character. In the event that the reformists begin putting brakes on the struggle to the obvious detriment of the movement and act counter to the situation and the moods of the masses, we as an independent organisation always reserve the right to lead the struggle to the end, and this without our temporary semi-allies.

This, may give rise to a new sharpening of the struggle between us and the reformists. But it will no longer involve a simple repetition of one and the same set of ideas within a shut-in circle but will signify — provided our tactic is correct — the extension of our influence over new, fresh groups of the proletariat.

8. It is possible to see in this policy a rapprochement with the reformists only from the standpoint of a journalist who believes that he rids himself of reformism by ritualistically criticising it without ever leaving his editorial office but who is fearful of clashing with the reformists before the eyes of the working masses and giving the latter an opportunity to appraise the Communist and the reformist on the equal plane of the mass struggle. Behind this seeming revolutionary fear of “rapprochement” there really lurks a political passivity which seeks to perpetuate an order of things wherein the Communists and reformists each retain their own rigidly demarcated spheres of influence, their own audiences at meetings, their own press, and all this together creates an illusion of serious political struggle.

9. We broke with the reformists and centrists in order to obtain complete freedom in criticising perfidy, betrayal, indecision and the half-way spirit in the labour movement. For this reason any sort of organisational agreement which restricts our freedom of criticism and agitation is absolutely unacceptable to us. We participate in a united front but do not for a single moment become dissolved in it. We function in the united front as an independent detachment. It is precisely in the course of struggle that broad masses must learn from experience that we fight better than the others, that we see more clearly than the others, that we are more audacious and resolute. In this way, we shall bring closer the hour of the united revolutionary front under the undisputed Communist leadership.

The workers' government

By Clara Zetkin

One of the most important questions the forthcoming Fourth Congress of the Communist International will have to examine and decide on is indisputably that of the Workers' Government. It has been thrown up by the demand for the proletarian United Front, the irrefutable necessity and paramount significance of which becomes increasingly clear in the face of the ever sharper and broader offensive of the world bourgeoisie. The slogan of the workers' government develops organically out of the struggle in which the masses of working women and men have to defend their bare existence, even their life itself against the insatiable hunger of the exploiting capitalists.

The black misery of this historic hour calls out shockingly and angrily for this struggle. If it is to be waged successfully, to push ever broader in its scope and ever higher in its goal, it needs the exploited masses to create their own organs of labour and struggle, which must overcome fragmentation and tearing themselves apart so as to come together as a united and decisive force.

Factory councils, control committees, action committees etc. will come into being. Only: the effect of such committees will keep within the most modest boundaries. Worse still, their effectiveness will be gradually crippled, the councils and committees themselves will be strangled if governmental power remains in the hands of the exploiting minority. Also the ecstatic fans of "democracy" and of the "working community", of "moderate, reasonable" workers' leaders and "understanding, well meaning" representatives of the bourgeoisie in the government, will learn this lesson through bitter experience.

It is and remains true: either the bourgeoisie has control of the government and uses governmental power in its own class interests or, on the other hand, the workers govern and likewise use the government in their class interest i.e. against the profiteering bourgeoisie. A "fair balance" does not exist. The rule of all such coalition governments between bourgeois and workers' parties has manifestly proved this. Whether it is a "grand" or "narrow" coalition, with more or less sharp lines drawn to its right or left can, of course, weaken or sharpen this fundamental fact. But it changes nothing in its essence, its basic nugget of truth, particularly in these times when the collapse of capitalism opens up ever more deeply the conflicts of classes and makes the struggle between them sharper and more bitter.

Workers' leaders occupying a few government posts in no way means

the same as the conquest of political power by the proletariat. It can mean pocket money for individuals or hand outs for the class but always remains as the bourgeoisie's goal a means to corrupt and deceive the proletariat.

Only a government that consists entirely of representatives of the workers' parties and organisations (including workers by brain) deserves the name of workers' government. For such a government can only arise as the fruit of strong, class conscious movements and struggles in which the exploited majority confronts the exploiting minority and the existence of such a government expresses a growth in the power of the proletariat. This alone, held to and defended by all available means, is the sure basis for a workers' government that demonstrate its right to exist in that it thoroughly and energetically follows a policy the theme of which is the well being of the producers and not the profits of the rich who take for themselves what others produce.

For sure: the workers' government means a growth in the political power of the proletariat but it is still in no way to be put on the same level as the conquest of political and state power by the proletariat and the establishment of its dictatorship. For the proletariat to be able to claim political power and use it fully in the service of its liberation requires the smashing of the bourgeois state and its apparatus of power. The bourgeois state machinery corresponds by definition to the purposes of power for the exploiting and possessing classes. It is unfit for the proletariat's goals of liberation. Its character does not change because another class takes over the apparatus and leaves it functioning.

The proletariat must create in the system of councils a state that expresses its class power and class rule through the necessary organs.

In contrast, the workers' government does not destroy the bourgeois state and it would be a dangerous self-deception if the workers convinced themselves or let themselves be convinced that the workers' government makes it possible to "hollow out" the bourgeois state from within. Just as the power of the bourgeoisie in the economy cannot be hollowed out, so it cannot happen in the state. In both spheres their power must be overcome, smashed, and that can only be achieved by the force of the proletariat and not by the cleverness of the cleverest government. The workers' government is the attempt to force the bourgeois state within its essential historic limitations to serve the historic interests of the proletariat.

The slogan of the workers' government thus connects to the illusions that the broadest masses of the proletariat and particularly the newly proletarianised layers have about the nature and value of the bourgeois democratic state. It is a political slogan of the transitional period from capitalism to socialism, communism and reflects two things: firstly, how unclear and unfinished is the knowledge of the majority of the proletariat about the nature of bourgeois society, its state and the conditions of its

own liberation; and secondly, that a shift in the relation of forces between the bourgeoisie and proletariat to the latter's advantage has begun but not yet reached its end. The corresponding new relationship is unstable and changeable because the unripeness of proletarian consciousness hinders the complete and uninhibited unfolding of the power of the working class in revolutionary struggle.

It is clear that a situation that is characterised by these two factors is full of difficulties and dangers for the individual sections of the Communist International and thus for the world proletariat that it has been called upon to lead. Can, indeed must not the slogan of the workers' government cause confusion in the camp of the Communists, shake their certainty as to their goal and path, cause a wrong application of our forces and thus their squandering, lessening our ability to lead the masses of the dispossessed along the right path? Can, indeed must not the old bourgeois reformist illusions whose total destruction is the task of Communists win new support and emerge stronger through use of this slogan? Won't all this hold up the process of clarification and self-awareness of the proletariat, which is the precondition for it setting its entire strength to conquer political power and setting up its own dictatorship to destroy an exploiting and enslaving capitalism?

Deciding these questions has huge consequences, heavy with responsibility. The nub of the question is not the support of a Communist Party for a workers' government, but rather the entry of Communists into the government itself and thus the taking of responsibility for its policies.

According to the circumstances, answering all these questions positively — and thus rejecting the workers' government — can split the Communists from the masses of workers, can shake and temporarily stifle their growing trust that we always and everywhere stand with them and storm forwards with them when it is right to struggle against a grasping capitalism and its power. If we throw out the workers' government, bourgeois and reformist quacks will tell the workers that we are not serious with all the demands we raise in order to alleviate the most burning daily needs of the exploited and oppressed and that we refuse to create the force that would be in a position to carry them through. If the Communist International answers doubting questions unequivocally in the negative and propagates the slogan of the workers' government, it is not excluded that some section falls prey to the danger of paying for the creation of a workers' government with the surrender of important party principles and the essential conditions for a strong, class conscious, proletarian policy; and covers up with its name and reputation a policy of cowardice and treachery aimed at "saving" a workers' government. Such a policy would not just compromise the party but communism itself.

So it is understandable that our International did not reach unanimous agreement when the Executive rounded off the slogan "For the proletar-

ian united front!" with "For a workers' government!" This conclusion drawn from the defensive struggle against the grand offensive of the capitalists was strongly disputed by many. Naturally enough, in particular by those comrades who also reject the proletarian united front or give lip service to it as a bitter necessity but in their hearts hope its practice will go to the Devil and seek to avoid and limit it as much as possible, tortured by fears of being "derailed into an opportunist swamp". The reasons opponents of the workers' government call on are largely the same ones that they drew out of these fears and used to fight against the proletarian united front, referring to the "special situation" in their Communist Party, in their country. They have been expressed in the last issues of this journal and need not be repeated.

Heavier artillery than these typical reasons can be brought to bear against the workers' government. It is the very bad experience that the proletariat of different countries has gone through with so-called workers' governments. In Australia a workers' government came into being on the basis of the shifting sands of a Parliamentary combination which was right. Then instead of raising and solidifying the class power of the workers, it constrained and weakened it, not just by legal chains but also through confusing and dulling proletarian class consciousness. It honoured the proletariat with courts of arbitration and conciliation boards, which made wage struggles and strikes virtually impossible — or at least significantly harder — and thus handed the workers over to exploitation bound hand and foot. Generally the policy of the workers' government meant soup kitchens for the workers and nutritious meals for the bourgeoisie. It paid for being tolerated with its total subordination to the bourgeoisie.

In truth, the deeds of the workers' governments in Brunswick, Thuringen and Saxony where majority Social Democrats and Independents had and have the rudder of state in their hands, are no more worthy of praise — on the contrary! The policies of these workers' governments was and is a shocking example of what a workers' government should not be. They are only workers' governments by name, having only the superficial characteristic of being made up of representatives of the two German reformist parties. Their politics defines them as bourgeois to the core. From refusing far-reaching measures to fight the mass misery at the cost of big business, merchants, profiteers and usurers, to blocking the Saxon parliament against workers' demonstrations, violent repression of strikers in Brunswick, the use of the "Technische Nothilfe" (an organisation of scabs backed by the Reich) against striking agricultural workers in Thuringen and the refusal of the right to strike to civil servants — based on Groener and Wirth. And all that in a situation that is objectively revolutionary and screams for the most forceful standing up for the interests of the proletariat in every respect.

The traces terrify us! [What we have seen terrifies us but it is not the full picture.] A Communist Party would commit suicide if it strolled along the comfortable and well-worn paths of the revolution-shy reformist workers' parties and their statesman-like squirts and into workers' governments and "pure" social democratic governments. Yet looking more closely, the weaknesses, stupidities and crimes of such workers' governments as known up till now in no way necessarily speaks against a workers' government in the Communist conception, which can be born out of a forward movement and the struggle of large masses of the proletariat and must live and act in a close alliance with the forward movement and struggle of these masses. They only confirm that the reformist workers' parties have until now shown themselves totally incapable of pursuing a working class policy in the grand style. In the present historical hour, a real working class politics must be revolutionary politics, the sharpest policy of struggle against the bourgeoisie aimed at strengthening the power of the proletariat. The second rank Scheidemanns and Dittmanns [leaders of the majority and Independent Social Democracy] have shown that — as the Italian proverb puts it — "the habit does not make a monk". Yet the workers' government is not a fixed, fossilised concept that dominates political life. It can rather be a component of the most lively political life if it is and remains the unfalsified expression of historic proletarian class life, the expression of a self-moving and developing awareness and will to power of the proletariat. To fight for a workers' government and, if the conditions are right, entering it, participation in it can be a duty, a necessity for Communist Parties.

The preceding experiences shed some light on what is significant for the disputed question. There are different types of workers' government ranging from a coalition of true workers' parties with bourgeois reform parties through to a "pure" social democratic coalition. But not any kind of workers' government can serve even as a propaganda and rallying slogan of the Communists, let alone as a goal of struggle. Decisive for the position of Communists towards a workers' government is not party political composition but its implemented policies. The policies of a workers' government will however ultimately be defined by the activity or passivity of the proletarian masses, through the ripeness of their awareness and will and correspondingly their use of power.

The proletariat gets the type of workers' government it is prepared to tolerate.

So we see ahistorical, mechanical thinking that only bases its judgement on external forms and schematic formulas when, in the name of communist principles, the position on the workers' government is made to depend on whether it is the product of revolutionary mass struggle or is the fruit of a parliamentary combination. However strongly we hope for the first option, we should not overlook that a parliamentary line-up can also

encourage advancing mass movement and mass activity. For sure: only an indirect and weaker impact, but still an impact on working class life. In England, for example, there is the imminent possibility of a workers' government one day coming to power by parliamentary means without great shocks or revolutionary struggles. Only a real transformation in the consciousness and position of power of the proletariat must have preceded the parliamentary consequence. This transformation presses towards consistent working class politics, which cannot be carried out without sharp confrontation with the bourgeoisie. So it appears that in England serious, revolutionary mass movements will not prepare the way for a workers' government but instead by its accompaniment and protector.

The slogan of our Executive "For the workers' government!" contains as its final, unavoidable consequence the entry of Communists into a workers' government, working together and sharing responsibility with non-Communist workers' parties and organisations. It cannot be denied that even taking an active position for bringing about a workers' government, but much more participation in it, can increase the danger for Communists of becoming prisoners of a banal opportunism and selling out the Communist fundamentals of our politics for short-lived, day-to-day successes. Only: the danger of walking into an opportunist swamp adheres not merely to entry into a workers' government but much more to any activity that goes outside a sect-like prayer circle, one that should remain small for the sake of purity.

The maternal concern to avoid dangers leads to a self-sufficient quietism, to an unsullied passivity through which a Communist Party isolates itself from the masses, loses its living historic content and falls prey to fossilisation. For the essence, the task of Communist Parties is themselves to develop the highest political, revolutionary activity and through this, through their own activity to bring about the development of the highest activity of the proletarian masses, like a steel drawing the igniting sparks from a piece of flint. It is quite uncommunist to give up work and struggle because of unavoidable dangers. What it comes down to is dealing with the dangers. The inherent dangers of the situation — falling by means of the practice of a workers' government into a busy, unfruitful opportunism — are best worked against (alongside the strong ideological and organisational unity of the Communist Party and its strict discipline) by pursuing the strongest goal oriented activity and most intimate organic link to the proletarian masses.

Just as ahistorical as the refusal of the workers' government out of fear of opportunism is the conception that the workers' government must under all circumstances be a transitional stage between the bourgeois state and the workers' state, an unavoidable and not unpleasant "substitute" for the dictatorship of the proletariat. A workers' government certainly can but in no way must be a transitional stage to proletarian class power.

The history of the Russian Revolution proves it. With the tremendous sharpening of class conflict in the developed capitalist world and the growing acuteness of class struggles, there can develop a relatively fast shift in the relation of forces between bourgeoisie and proletariat that can lead directly to the latter conquering power and instituting its dictatorship. Further, it is also excluded that the World Congress of the Communist International proclaims the workers' government as a fundamental goal and object of struggle that must be fought for in all circumstances. Workers' government as "replacement for the dictatorship" is a laughable conception that out of smart-arsedness ignores that one cannot put new wine in old bottles. The historic content of the dictatorship of the proletariat must blow apart the bourgeois class state, even a bourgeois democratic one.

In easily the majority of countries under capitalist domination, the Workers' Government appears as the crowning summit of the tactic of the United Front, as the propaganda and rallying slogan of the hour. The concrete conditions of in each of these states will decide how and under what defining conditions then slogan can become a goal of struggle. One can conceive of situations, contexts, in which Communist Parties must fight for and enter a workers' government even under very difficult circumstances. The conditions for this will be diverse and different. They cannot all be specified in ground rules beforehand. Yet, as ever, certain factors must be decisive: the cleanliness of the face the Communists present; the independence of Communist policy; strong links with the masses; an orientation towards deepening and accelerating the process of becoming aware in the working class and thus the growth of its power. Of course, it is a pre-condition for the radical policy of a true workers' government that it supports itself on the organised power of the workers, armed for struggle, outside Parliament. Where the practice of the proletarian United Front pushes towards the Workers' Government, it can — if correctly conceived and implemented, be a step forwards towards the dictatorship of the proletariat. Whether that will be the case will be decided not just by the given conditions but also the understanding and will of the Communist Parties, which become an acting will and understanding of the masses. Let us put it to the test, let us act!

First published in *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, December 1922. Text taken from: Clara Zetkin, *Zur Theorie und Taktik der Arbeiterbewegung*, (Reclam Verlag, Leipzig, 1974). Translated by Bruce Robinson.

What kind of party?

By Antonio Gramsci

The fascist period is often compared to that of the War. Well: one of the weaknesses of the Socialist Party was the fact that during the War it did not attend to the nucleus of 20 or 25,000 socialists who remained faithful; that it did not consider them as the organising element for the great masses who would flood in after the Armistice. It thus occurred that in 1919-20 this nucleus was submerged by the wave of new elements; and the organisational practice, the experience, which had been won by the working class in the blackest and hardest years were submerged with it. **We would be criminals if we fell into the same error.**

Each of the present members of the party, because of the selection process which has taken place, and because of the strength of sacrifice which has been shown, must be personally dear to us. He must be helped by the central leadership to improve himself, and to draw from the experience undergone all the lessons and all the implications which it contains. In this sense *L'Ordine Nuovo* aims to carry out a special function in the general framework of the party's activity.

It is, therefore, necessary to organise the agreement which has already been demonstrated. This is the special task of the old friends of *L'Ordine Nuovo*. We have said that it will be necessary to collect 50,000 lire in the next six months, the sum necessary to guarantee the review's independent existence. To this end, it is necessary to form a movement of 500 comrades, each of whom will seriously aim to collect 100 lire over the next six months among his friends and acquaintances. We will keep a detailed list of all those elements who are willing to collaborate in our activity: they will be as it were our trustees. The collection of subscriptions can be made up as follows: 1. ordinary subscriptions, whether amounting to a few soldi or to many lire; 2. supporting subscriptions; 3. dues to meet the initial expenses of a correspondence course for party organisers and propagandists: these dues must not be less than 10 lire, and will give the right to have a number of lessons determined by the overall cost of printing and postage.

We think that through this system, we will be able to recreate an apparatus to replace that which existed in 1919-20 under the democratic regime, by means of which *L'Ordine Nuovo* kept itself in close contact with the masses in the factories and workers' clubs. The correspondence course must become the first phase of a movement to create small party schools, designed to create organisers and propagandists who are Bolsheviks and not maximalists: who in other words have brains as well as lungs and a

throat. We will therefore maintain constant contact by letter with the best comrades — to inform them about the experiments which have been made in this field in Russia and other countries; to orient them; to advise them on books to read and methods to apply. We believe that in particular the comrades in exile should do a lot of work of this kind. Wherever there exists a group of ten comrades in a foreign country, a party school should be created. The older and more skilled elements should be the instructors in these schools. They should bring the younger comrades to share in their experience, and thus contribute to raising the political level of the mass of members.

Certainly, it is not with these pedagogic methods that the great historical problem of the spiritual emancipation of the working class can be resolved. But it is not some utopian resolution of this problem which we are aiming to achieve. Our task is limited to the party, made up as it is of elements who have already — simply by the fact of having joined the party — shown that they have reached a considerable level of spiritual emancipation. Our task is to improve our cadres; to make them capable of confronting the forthcoming struggles.

In practice these struggles, moreover, will present themselves in the following terms. The working class, made prudent by bloody reaction, will for a certain time generally distrust the revolutionary elements. It will want to see them engaged in practical work, and will want to test their seriousness and competence. On this terrain too, we must render ourselves able to defeat the reformists, who are undoubtedly the party which today has the best and most numerous cadres. If we do not seek to achieve this, we will never take many steps forward.

The old friends of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, especially those who worked in Turin in the years 1919-20, understand very well the full importance of this problem. For they remember how, in Turin, we succeeded in eliminating the reformists from their organisational positions only *pari passu* as worker comrades capable of practical work and not just of shouting “Long live the revolution”, were formed from the factory council movement. They also recall how in 1921 it was not possible to seize certain important positions, such as Alessandria, Biella and Vercelli, from the opportunists, because we did not have organising elements who were up to the job. Our majorities in those centres melted away, as a result of our organisational weakness. By contrast in certain centres, Venice for example, one capable comrade was enough to give us the majority, after a zealous work of propaganda and organisation of factory and trade-union cells.

Experience in all countries has shown the following truth: that the most favourable situations can be reversed as a result of the weakness of the cadres of the revolutionary party. Slogans only serve to impel the broad masses into movement and to give them a general orientation. But woe betide the party responsible if it has not thought about organising them in

practice; about creating a structure which will discipline them and make them permanently strong. The occupation of the factories taught us many things in this respect.

To help the party schools in their work, we propose to publish a whole series of pamphlets and a number of books. Among the pamphlets, let us mention: 1. elementary expositions of Marxism; 2. an explanation of the workers' and peasants' government slogan applied to Italy; 3. a propagandist's manual, containing the most essential data concerning Italian economic and political life, the Italian political parties, etc. — in other words, the indispensable materials for simple propaganda to be carried out through collective reading of the bourgeois press. We would like to publish an Italian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, with comrade Ryazanov's notes: taken together, these notes are a complete exposition in popular form of our doctrines. We would also like to publish an anthology of historical materialism, in other words a collection of the most significant passages from Marx and Engels, to give a general picture of the works of these our two great teachers.

The results so far achieved authorise us to hope that it will be possible to continue confidently and successfully. To work then! Our best comrades must become convinced that what is involved is a political statement, a demonstration of the vitality and capacity for development of our movement, and hence an anti-fascist and revolutionary demonstration.

From *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 1 and 15 April 1924.

RETREAT

The myths of anti-Trotskyism

By Alfred Rosmer

How did the 1923 debate [in Russia] arise? Was it in an arbitrary and artificial manner because it suited a comrade who spoke with great authority to stir up a real upheaval in the party? By no means. The debate was provoked by two causes which were profound and all too visible: the economic situation in the country (the condition of the workers and peasants), and the state of the party.

The economic situation was serious, and was causing acute discontent among both workers and peasants. Workers received their wages weeks and even months late, in a currency which was losing its value every day. There were strikes, and even strikes led by communists, by party members. The peasants could not buy anything because of the ridiculous ratio between the price of grain and that of manufactured objects. According to a sound Leninist method, Trotsky characterised this crisis by a striking image, that of the scissors whose blades are opened as wide as possible and which at all costs must be brought closer together. Thereafter everyone had this image before his eyes; all attention was constantly directed to this vital problem, and all wills exerted themselves in trying to solve it.

Trotsky indicated his solutions: the concentration of industry for a better organisation of factories and higher output, and a state plan to replace chaos with order and method.

Within the party, the trouble lay in the extreme passivity of the members, and in the worrying bureaucratic development which resulted from this.

These are unquestioned and unquestionable facts.

A picture of the Russian CP in 1923

The passivity reigning among the members and throughout the party bodies was such that one of the seasoned leaders of the party denounced it in these terms at the general meeting of one of the largest branches in Moscow.

Comrades, it seems to me to be indispensable to draw a concrete picture of

the concerns perturbing our party. There is no point speaking here of a priori premises, of differentiation, etc., etc.: we must clearly pose the question of the origin of what is tormenting the body of our party and of the source of the discontent of the bulk of non-party workers, a discontent which we must all take into account, from the Central Committee to the bureaux of the party cells: a countless number of faults have provoked a certain state of semi-crisis within our party, a state which is obvious above all as a result of the economic crisis which our country is currently passing through; these faults can all be classified under specific headings.

What is the root of the problem? Observe the life of a party cell, and, to begin with, the mechanics of how it works, for each cell has its own. To judge by the Moscow organisation, cell secretaries are normally appointed by district committees, and note that the districts don't even try to get their candidates accepted by these cells, but simply appoint such and such a comrade. Generally votes are taken according to a method accepted once and for all. The meeting is asked: "Who is against?" and as people are more or less afraid to declare themselves opposed, the appointed candidate becomes elected secretary of the committee of the group. If we were to do a survey to establish how many times the voting has consisted of the questions "Who is for" and "Who is against?" we should observe without difficulty that among us, in most cases, the elections of party officials are purely passive, because not only does the voting take place without prior discussion, but also according to the formula "Who is against?"; and since one is not well looked upon if one speaks against the "hierarchy" the affair is settled automatically.

Now let's speak of our party meetings; how are they conducted? I have myself spoken more than once in numerous meetings in Moscow and I know how so-called debate is practised in our party organisations: elections for the chairing of the meeting. One of the members from the district committee presents their list and asks: "Who is against?" Nobody is against, of course, and the matter is settled. The same comrade then declares the bureau unanimously elected. After that comes the agenda; same procedure. In the course of recent years I can only remember isolated and extremely rare cases where the party meetings added new points to the agenda. In general the meeting finishes with the reading of a resolution prepared in advance, which is adopted as the rules require. The chair again asks: "Who is against?" and nobody is against. The resolution is adopted unanimously. This is how our party organisations normally function. So how can we fail to understand those of our most active elements when they express their dissatisfaction about this question, for they cannot be happy with such a way of operating.

Very often the lower layers of our organisations even put up the barrier: "No discussion", "Who is against?", etc, and this system reduces the internal life of the party to nothing. It goes without saying that the result is a great wave of discontent. I have quoted a few examples taken from our internal cells; the same thing can be observed in somewhat modified forms in all the other

sections of the party hierarchy.

Who spoke these words? Was Trotsky or some other member of the opposition? No, it was Bukharin.

The remedy is an unremitting struggle against the pernicious bureaucracy which is atrophying the party and pushing it into decline; it is the establishment of democracy in the party which will restore life and activity in all the party bodies, from top to bottom, and will enable the party to remain equal to its enormous task. That is what Trotsky is pointing to. Is anyone in disagreement? Nobody. Quite the contrary; they are arguing about who said it first. Everyone claims to have discovered it before Trotsky, and everybody is talking about the need for a radical change, a "New Course" — to use Trotsky's term — a new orientation. I could give 10 typical quotations. A single one will suffice. It is taken from Pravda's reply and is formulated as follows:

We don't know a single member of the Central Committee who, in the course of the discussions, did not declare himself in agreement with the critique of the "old orientation", a critique which the Central Committee resolution contains first and foremost. Trotsky could not name a single member of the CC who spoke in favour of the "old orientation".

On 5 December, the Central Committee voted unanimously for a resolution embodying the new course.

The debate should therefore have stopped at this point. Nonetheless, it was to resume with new enthusiasm and in the form of a violent polemic after the publication of a letter from Trotsky (written on 8 December, but which appeared in Pravda only on 11 December). Why? That is the question we have asked here, and to which we can find no reply. We did indeed believe that our comrade had not written his letter lightly, without serious reasons. But we could not discover these reasons. A comrade who is well known in the workers' movement, and who led the fight for the opposition in a Moscow branch, has explained them to me.

The bureaucratic apparatus of the party, defeated and censured, was obliged to accept the Central Committee resolution. But it was already contemplating revenge. It immediately went out into the Moscow party branches and, taking on the job of publicising the CC resolution itself, it clearly showed its determination, not to implement it, but to burn it. Trotsky, informed of this sabotage which was endangering all the gains made in the debate and the "New Course" itself, decided to denounce it without delay. Being sick, he could not visit the branches. He wrote a letter which he demanded should be published in *Pravda*. Immediately the debate moved onto a completely new path.

Trotsky showed in his letter how and in what circumstances the old generation could degenerate. The old guard of the party, or more precisely the troika, took this suggestion of the danger of degeneration as a reference aimed at itself. Wounded, it lost its coolness and all sense of proportion.

From this point on, it completely abandoned the object of the debate, although this was of capital importance, and launched into a bitter polemic against Trotsky who, out of action due to illness, had to stand by impotently and watch the “monstrous distortion” of what he thought and what he had written, and found himself prevented from bringing the debate back to its proper ground. Everything was discussed: factions, relations between old and young, and even a so-called plot to arrest Lenin.

The bureaucrats were saved, and the “New Course” was buried.

The scissors

The debate on the economic crisis took a less harsh turn. Just as the remedy for the crisis of the party proposed by Trotsky was accepted by the Central Committee in its entirety, so those he proposed to overcome the economic crisis did not find any opponents. Everybody recognised the need to concentrate industry and draw up a general plan for production. Once these principles had been accepted, it remained only to undertake their practical application urgently. It did not seem that there was any cause there for violent controversy.

So why did the debate drag on and on? Because while it was not possible to make a frontal attack on the essential principles of the necessary improvement of production, it was very possible to obstruct their application. Some did it by local demagoguery; others by idleness, by inertia, or by routine. Now Trotsky wanted to achieve something. He was an embarrassment to them all. Hence the furious attacks against him and, as always when bad causes are being defended, the radical distortion of his thought and his proposals.

It is well known how this first phase of the debate ended. The opposition was, to begin with, very strong, and it controlled Moscow; it was undermined and then progressively weakened as the debate shifted away from the questions which had given rise to it and on to others which had been artificially raised and pushed to the fore. The International was mobilised. The recalcitrant branches, which refused to declare themselves blindly on key questions of which they knew little or nothing, had their meetings disrupted. Emissaries from Zinoviev were given this responsibility. By shouting very loudly “Down with factionalism!”, they manufactured factions. It was a golden age for narrow-minded and vulgar careerists who poisoned the working-class movement in the postwar period, and thus had the possibility of pushing themselves into the front ranks.

The Russian party, at its Thirteenth Congress, condemned the opposition as Menshevik, petit-bourgeois, counter-revolutionary, etc. The Communist International did the same at its Fifth Congress. There was no longer any mention of the original problem, of the observations on which, at the outset, everyone had been in agreement. Lenin’s death, which occurred in the thick of the debate, enabled them to be shoved into the back-

ground. The disappearance of the unchallenged leader of the revolution had brought the party 200,000 new members, workers. There was no longer any need to be concerned about the apparatus. In the economic sphere it had been possible, by means of short-term solutions, to achieve a temporary abatement of the crisis which was consolidated by monetary reform, with the main result a relative stabilisation of the cost of living. But a quotation will suffice to show that the problem of production remains entirely unresolved to this very day. It is, moreover, only too clear that a short-sighted policy will not enable it to be resolved.

The general situation has, in fact, just been characterised as follows by Rykov in his report to the Sixth Congress of the Trade Unions of the USSR in Moscow:

Our industry cannot at present satisfy the peasant market. There is a shortage of commodities. The remedy must be an expansion of industrial production. This may be insufficient, because of the weakness of our resources. Therefore this year, as last year, we may have to use part of our gold currency reserves for purchases abroad. Last year, we bought cotton. Other purchases will have to be made this year. Finally, if industry does not develop fast enough, we can envisage for a certain period the introduction of some foreign goods. This question is under consideration.

This brief summary includes all the essential facts, and allows us to discover the origin of the crisis, to follow its development, and to draw out the characteristics of the two groups which formed. The one group, out of laziness, demagoguery and routinism — for there is already a very dangerous governmental routine — advocates and defends superficial, short-term solutions which will be valid for a week or a month. To supplement their inadequacy, they will resort to the usual means at the disposal of any government. The others want to attack the problem frontally, following Lenin's example. They are proposing radical measures, asking that they should be considered, and that they should be discussed with the intention of applying the decisions taken, and are calling on the entire party to put them into practice and to explain them to the workers and peasants, seeking above all to convince, and resorting to constraint only when persuasion has failed. That is also the example left by Lenin.

Behind all the noise of the debate, two concepts were coming into conflict. And if the workers were immediately sympathetic to the opposition, it is because they felt that the opposition expressed their aspirations to active participation in Soviet life.

Trotsky, for his part, has always been deeply aware of the need for serious achievements in the sphere of production. He faced up to the fundamental problems of the revolution. He concerned himself with the individual, family and social life of men, women and children.

It is an extraordinary thing that it is precisely for this that he is criticised. It is claimed that it is too early, that the time has not yet come for such

achievements to be planned for, that the revolution above all must still think about its defence, and devote all its strength to it.

Those who speak like this, who do not understand that the best way of defending the revolution is to consolidate it, and to ensure that its base becomes every day broader and more solid, are party people wrapped up in politics in the narrow meaning of the word. The party naturally plays a major role, especially in Russia, but for the revolution to survive, the trade unions must also exist and be capable of carrying out their functions, and the soviets likewise. Otherwise a dangerous distortion will erupt inside the party itself, which will no longer have any real life, and will fall into the passive state described by Bukharin, and finally find itself reduced to being nothing more than its own apparatus.

A few years ago, when these questions could be discussed in the International, when the respective roles of the party, the unions and the soviets were considered, we generally came to the conclusion that the party seemed to be the most temporary organism, and that it was either the soviets or the unions which would take the dominant role in building a communist society.

With Lenin, who was so attentive to reality and to revolutionary necessities, a balance was established between these different forces.

Now the party people have come out on top, and their day-to-day policies have triumphed. They concoct congresses and unanimous decisions with great skill. Anyone who resists is immediately discredited as being right-wing, Menshevik, petit-bourgeois, (objectively) counter-revolutionary, etc. But where, in all this, is communism?

October

Beaten at his party congress, beaten at the congress of the Comintern Trotsky nonetheless continued his work in the Political Bureau, in the Council of Labour and Defence, and in his Commissariat of War, carrying out his responsibilities with the high conscientiousness which characterises him, and nonetheless finding time to prepare and deliver, to various congresses and meetings, substantial speeches on the international situation and on various domestic questions.

Never had his authority been greater. There was even something exceptional and moving in the welcome he received as soon as he appeared at a meeting. It seemed as if the workers, obliged to condemn him by the party machine, were insisting on affirming loud and clear that they still considered him as their guide. The delegates to the congress of the Comintern were somewhat surprised by the demonstrative testimonies of loyalty which emphasised a serious fact: the divorce between the party leadership and the rank and file. The French [delegation], embarrassed and disturbed in their "Bolshevik" zeal, went to ask Stalin for an explanation.

Trotsky submitted to the party's decision. He had not admitted his errors — as *L'Humanité* claimed, dishonestly, as though by chance — since he had not committed any. He considered the debate closed, and it can easily be understood that he had no desire to reopen it. After his defeat, the opposition had been decimated, and its most representative figures were dispersed to the four corners of Russia and of the world. Nobody had any interest in reopening the discussion, and Trotsky less than anyone else. Moreover, it could be rightly thought that the facts would prevail, and that they would do the job of modifying the absurd positions adopted in the course of the debate.

But *The Lessons of October* appeared, and genuine fury was unleashed by the troika. The book was a collection of studies and previously published articles by Trotsky, and was hence all material that was already known. Even the notorious introduction merely took up ideas already expressed by Trotsky in the party press without having given rise to any scandal.

In fact, if Trotsky had completely ceased hostilities, it was not the same as far as his opponents were concerned. They had pursued their campaign methodically and by use of insinuation. First of all, there had been a pamphlet by Kanachikov entitled *History of a Deviation*. When this was mentioned to the Russian comrades, they said in embarrassment: "Don't talk about it. It was a mistake. We're going to withdraw it from sale". At that very moment, it was being reprinted. Then a special journal was set up to prove that Trotsky had never been a communist. They noted in great detail all his disagreements with Lenin, and all the words that Lenin had been able to write against him since 1903. The two men had also been in agreement at times, in particular at decisive moments; of these no more mention was made.

The ground was well prepared and when *The Lessons of October* appeared, they seized the unexpected opportunity frenetically. They could not have imagined such a splendid excuse!

Trotsky had edited his book and written his introduction with the sole concern of drawing out the lessons of the Russian October for communists in all countries. At the time of the Fifth Congress of the Comintern, during an interview with Spanish comrades, he had already dealt with this subject. In his view, since the war, revolution had come knocking at the door in three countries: Russia in 1917, Italy in September 1920, and Germany in 1923. This made one victory and two defeats. Why? It was a problem, the greatest of all, which must be studied seriously. He also spoke that evening about American imperialism, not merely in order to note its increased strength, but to show the weak points where it could be wounded, and to draw out in detail a practical task for the Spanish comrades: liaison with communists speaking the same language in South America, where the United States was in process of establishing its influence.

In writing his introduction, he knew very well that he would offend the

Russian comrades who did not share his evaluation of the situation in Germany, while agreeing with him on domestic questions. He was therefore disarming himself in advance in the face of the troika. That should suffice to show that there was no trace of calculation or manoeuvring in the publication of his book.

He was the first to be astounded by the furious attack that was unleashed. Admittedly, the account of the events which led to the Russian October scarcely showed Kamenev and Zinoviev in a favourable light. But is that any reason to abandon study of this period? And did they treat Trotsky tactfully when, in order to attack him immoderately, they had first monstrously falsified his thought, words and writings?

But once again the opportunity was too good; it was what Zinoviev had hoped for, and he grabbed it and decided to clinch his victory. On this ground, Trotsky would be isolated, and could be destroyed. The first debate paled into insignificance alongside that which was going to begin, in which, moreover, Zinoviev and his friends would be the only ones to speak. Trotsky gave the reasons for his silence in the letter which we publish below. They now said what they had hitherto not dared to say. In the field of military organisation, he seemed to be untouchable. He had always been presented as the man who had saved Petrograd from Yudenich, and who had raised, equipped and trained the victorious Red Army. Now all this was dismissed as mythical. The victories against Kolchak, Denikin, Yudenich, etc, had apparently been won, not by him, but against him. It was Stalin who said so. It was Gussiev who wrote it, in a pamphlet secretly prepared months before, and served up at the appropriate moment.

These characteristics suffice to indicate the fury of the attack. As far as the position of Zinoviev and Kamenev was concerned, it was Bukharin who took on the job of justifying it. He did so in an anonymous and embarrassed reply in *Pravda*, which understandably he was not keen to sign. It was only, he claimed, a secondary disagreement lasting a few days, and, moreover, the comrades had recognised their mistake. And he entitled his reply "How Not to Write the History of October". If he had been the only historian of October, we should have a very poor history. Does he think we are so ignorant? Enough documents have already been published for us to be quite certain about the nature and duration of this disagreement. There were others, which he knows about and which we know about too. And he knows very well that Lenin always said that this disagreement was no accident.

As for the way in which Kamenev has recognised his error of 1917, our position is confirmed by the statement he made four years later, at the time of the adoption of the NEP by the party, when he said: "Well, weren't we right in October?"

Lenin and Trotsky

In accordance with the usual tactic, the debate was shifted onto different ground, that of the disagreements between Lenin and Trotsky.

But even if the former controversies are recalled, it merely brings out the fact that they did not prevent the two men from working together and collaborating closely throughout the period of the revolution. This collaboration is not spoken of however, it is more relevant than what can be discovered in trawling through the archives.

It is well known what importance Lenin attached to the national question. He brought it to the fore as early as the Second Congress of the Comintern. In 1923, various events had put this question on the agenda of the Russian Communist Party. Out of action due to illness, Lenin was nonetheless following the debate closely. Fearing that he would be unable to intervene himself, he thought about who could replace him. To whom did he turn? To Trotsky. He did so in the following terms:

5 March 1921

Dear Comrade Trotsky,

It is my earnest request that you should undertake the defence of the Georgian case in the party CC. This case is now under "prosecution" by Stalin and Dzerzhinsk, and I cannot rely on their impartiality. Quite to the contrary. I would feel at ease if you agreed to undertake its defence.

I am reproducing this document because it is in the public domain. There are others. All indicate the absolute confidence shown by Lenin in Trotsky and the agreement between the two men on all essential current questions. Moreover, is it not a fact known by everyone in Russia that Lenin, prevented from working by ill-health, insisted that Trotsky should take his place on the Council of People's Commissars and in the Council of Labour and Defence.

Revolutionary prospects and revision of Leninism

The question of revolutionary prospects is not a new one. Obviously it was constantly on the agenda of the International. Trotsky often dealt with it at the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Comintern, when he was appointed to report back by the Russian party, and then, more recently, in various speeches and writings,

Those who wish to know Trotsky's thought before they criticise it can take the trouble to read these texts — they have almost all been published in French; they will be struck by two things. First of all, there is an absolute continuity in the point of view. What Trotsky said in 1924 is what he said in 1921, in 1922, in full agreement with Lenin. Then they can grasp in action the way in which his thought is being distorted, on this point as on others. If there has been a revision of Leninism, they will see who is doing the revising.

The Third Congress of the Comintern met just after the insurrection of

March 1921 in Germany. At the time, in relation to this insurrection, there existed in various sections of the International a strong tendency in favour of the tactic of the offensive at any price. Lenin and Trotsky considered this tactic extremely dangerous for the labour movement in all countries, with the sole result that leading communist parties would be periodically massacred and decimated. They were instructed by the Russian party to oppose it exhaustively at the congress. After debate, they had their position adopted: the so-called tactic of the offensive was definitively rejected.

Returning to this question in the course of a debate during the Fourth Congress, Trotsky expressed himself as follows:

I welcome the opportunity... to oppose — most resolutely the mechanical, fatalistic and non-Marxist conception of revolutionary development which continues, despite the truly salutary work of the Third World Congress, to find a haven in the minds of some people, obviously convinced that they are of the Left.

At the Third World Congress, we were told that the economic crisis would endure without interruption and get worse until the proletariat seized power. This mechanistic outlook was at the bottom of the revolutionary optimism of some of those “of the Left”. When we explained that cyclical ups and downs are inevitable in the world economy, and that it is necessary to foresee them and take them into account tactically, these comrades imagined that we were engaged in a revision of well-nigh the entire programme and tactic of the International. In reality, we were engaged only in a “revision” of certain prejudices.

The practical consequence of this evaluation was as follows:

For us the bourgeoisie is not a stone dropping into an abyss, but a living historical force which struggles, manoeuvres, advances now on its right flank, now on its left. And only provided we learn to grasp politically all the means and methods of bourgeois society so as each time to react to them without hesitation or delay, shall we succeed in bringing closer that moment when we can, with a single confident stroke, actually hurl the bourgeoisie into the abyss.

At this time — November 1922 — Trotsky foresaw the coming to power of the Labour Party in Britain and the “Left Bloc” in France. It seems that his opponents resent the fact that he foresaw exactly what was to happen in these two countries, and to attack him they assert that he stated that this reformist era would last for a long time. Nowhere is what he said on the subject:

In power, Clynes or Caillaux-Blum or Turati would not be able to pursue a policy essentially different from the policy of Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Poincaré or even Mussolini. But when they come to power the position of the bourgeoisie will be rendered even more difficult, even more inextricable than it is today. Their complete political bankruptcy — provided, naturally, we pursue correct tactics, that is, revolutionary, resolute and at the same time flexible tac-

tics — can become laid utterly bare in a very brief span of time. In a ruined and completely disorganised capitalist Europe after the illusions of war and victory, the pacifist illusions and the reformist hopes can come only as the ephemeral illusions of the death agony of the bourgeoisie.

The same debate is beginning again today, but with the key difference in the outcome that now it is the “ultra-lefts” who are coming out on top, those “ultra-lefts” who were defeated at the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Comintern and who were more roughly treated by Lenin than by anyone else.

Trotsky persists in the method which consists of analysing the situation precisely and in detail, of determining the various trends working within the bourgeoisie, and of taking account of the facts so as to be in a position to elaborate the appropriate tactic for the struggle.

Now the two major facts dominating the present situation are the failure of October 1923 in Germany, and the massive development of American imperialism and a change in its policy of remaining an observer with regard to Europe.

For the ultra-lefts, these facts are unimportant. To take note of them implies that one no longer believes in the Revolution. It is enough to ignore them and to proceed by unsupported assertions. A revolutionary wave has been broken in Germany: so we must say that we are closer than ever to the Revolution. As for American imperialism, it is a harmless apparition which will soon vanish of its own accord. Everything that is not communist is fascist. The practical conclusion from these maunderings is that there is no other tactic but the putsch. All forms of positive, fruitful work which prepare the working class for the struggle and arm it solidly against the bourgeoisie are sabotaged, for example, the action taken to achieve trade union unity. This self-styled Leninism is the most vulgar, clownish parody of Leninism. It is a simplified communism, for the use of unsophisticated robots. And even if that is not the conscious intention, it can lead to nothing other than a putsch.

The leadership of the Comintern seems to be aware of this danger. It wants to put on the brakes. But it is too late. It has been outflanked by the “ultra-lefts” which it was responsible for putting in the leadership of its own sections. And the language it speaks is not always very different from theirs.

So who, on this key point, has revised Leninism? Who has provoked a brutal split in the tactic of the International? Who disowned the position taken by Lenin and Trotsky at the Third and Fourth Congresses? Who destroyed the fruitful work of these congresses?

One of the most notorious “ultra-lefts”, Bela Kun, was so roughly treated by Lenin at the Third Congress that it was believed that his role in the International was finished. He was definitively discredited. Now not only did he reappear at the Fifth Congress, but the leadership of the Comintern

went so far as to give him the job of explaining what is Leninism, and producing propaganda for it!

Before closing this section on revolutionary prospects, I want to give a short extract from a speech Sokolnikov has just delivered in Moscow on this subject. Sokolnikov is an opponent of Trotsky. He spoke as follows:

When studying the present situation in Europe, it must be said that in the countries of Central Europe there has been a lull, which means an undoubted setback for the possibility of the proletariat seizing power. Until now, as a result of the antagonism prevailing between Germany on the one hand and France on the other, the situation was such in Central Europe, that it appeared that power could pass immediately into the hands of the proletariat. Now that there has been a temporary agreement between France and Germany, not only has the latter country's currency been stabilised, but also its entire economic situation, which has been followed by a certain industrial recovery. Wages are rising and workers, weary of the struggle, are repeating: "We shall wait and see what we get from the Dawes Plan; perhaps we shall eat bread with butter on it, whereas hitherto we have eaten only crusts." Thus there has been a certain relaxation of tension in Central Europe; the differences between Germany and France have been temporarily assuaged, and as a result the hopes of a revolution in Germany are on the retreat.

If Sokolnikov were a member of the French Communist Party, it is certain that as soon as he had spoken those words he would have been expelled as Menshevik, a defeatist, a right-winger etc.

As soon as you abandon the territory of hysterical demagoguery, you speak as Trotsky does. But the conditions in which you do so deprive this belated agreement of any value. Only incoherence remains.

The attitude of the counter-revolution to the crisis

It is said that Trotsky, by his attitude, is providing ammunition for the bourgeoisie against the Russian Revolution; the counter-revolution is making common cause with him. That is stated in the resolution of the Central Committee.

As soon as a crisis breaks out in Soviet Russia, it is clear that the bourgeoisie is rejoicing. Not having succeeded by armed intervention, it can expect deliverance only from internal struggles which will weaken and then endanger the revolution.

Hitherto, it has always been disappointed, because Soviet Russia has emerged from debates and crises stronger and more united. If today its hope persists, it is solely because the crisis is continuing, and because it is resulting in a division and dispersal of forces. Now the revolution cannot allow itself the luxury of squandering its forces. It will only triumph for as long as it succeeds in pulling them together. That is what we tried to say, in a resolution, early in 1924, and if there had been an International it would have said the same thing. Those who didn't want to use such lan-

guage, and who, on the contrary, demanded that the International should endorse the division of forces, are entirely responsible for the present situation. It is their policies which are reviving, and maintaining, among the counter-revolutionary forces, the hope which they had lost.

Two European journals among the most dogged and persevering enemies of Soviet Russia, express this attitude very well. The *Morning Post* writes in its editorial of 20 January: "In the best interests of European civilisation it is, perhaps, a satisfaction to learn at last definitely that the triumvirate has won.

It does not side with Trotsky, but with the troika against Trotsky in "the interests of European civilisation".

The *Daily Mail* notes with joy on the same date, that "Trotsky's summary ejection from the office of Soviet War Commissar shows that if 'dog does not eat dog', Bolshevik devours Bolshevik".

But what is much more serious than the bourgeoisie's estimate of our disputes, about which it can understand nothing, is the fact that reformist newspapers can write that in Soviet Russia, in order to increase production, it has been necessary to introduce piece-work, that coal is piling up on the ground at the pit-heads, that it is necessary to buy wheat abroad when it had been hoped to export it, that the number of unemployed is substantial, that the murders of party representatives by peasants are increasing in number, and that finally it has just been decided, in order to balance the budget, to re-establish the vodka monopoly — as in the days of Tsarism.

That is what can disturb workers. That is what puts a dangerous weapon in the hands of the reformists, and it is insane to believe that it is enough to deny these facts in order to suppress the danger which they represent.

Neither Trotskyism nor Trotskyists

Trotskyism was invented against Trotsky, in order to fight him. His opponents have drawn up a detailed list of all the controversies which took place between Lenin and him since 1903. In vain, Trotsky replies that all that has been settled, has only an historical interest, and that it caused no problems for collaboration after 1917. It cuts no ice, Long articles are devoted to the theory of Permanent Revolution, and it continues to be asserted that Trotsky underestimates the role of the peasantry. The first point only interests those who have spare time and an interest in historical research. The second, however, is so immediately relevant that there certainly be an opportunity to return to it. Stalin has just drawn attention to its seriousness, by defending the political concessions made to the peasantry, against criticisms emanating from working class quarters. The peasants are irritated by an unbearable and stupid bureaucratism, and they want to be able to buy the manufactured items which they need. In the last resort, we are thus brought back to the problem of production, and to

the struggle against the bureaucrats in the apparatus whose “official optimism makes you feel sick”, to quote Stalin’s words. It therefore seems difficult to make Trotsky responsible for this state of affairs.

We decided to give our journal the double hallmark “Communist Syndicalist”. At a time when the conceptions which were at the very foundation of the International have been called into question, it is a good thing to make one’s position clear.

We are not Trotskyists, since there is no such thing as “Trotskyism”, and I am quite sure that our “Communist Syndicalist” position will not please Trotsky, and that he will criticise it severely.

We are not pessimists about the Russian Revolution and its propagation throughout the world. Even if the revolutionary upsurge has slowed down for a time in Europe, the influence of Soviet Russia in the East remains enormous and is increasing, and this significant fact continues to have ever more consequences.

But when our Russian comrades offer us nothing — us to whom they have given and taught so much — but a reminder of their old outdated polemics, plus the monopoly of vodka; at a time when a new offensive led by British imperialism is unleashed against Soviet Russia, they find nothing more urgent to do than to divide their forces and tear themselves to pieces; when, in the International, they want nothing but instruments to be manipulated, then we are alarmed. And there is no need to be a Trotskyist to think that such policies are a crime against the revolution.

From *La Révolution prolétarienne*, February 1925

Lenin the dreamer

By Paul Hampton

A review of *Lenin* (Critical Lives) by Lars T Lih (Reaktion)

"The dreamer himself sees in his dream a great and sacred truth; and he works, works conscientiously and with full strength, for his dream to stop being just a dream. His whole life is arranged according to one guiding idea and it is filled with the most strenuous activity. He is happy, despite deprivations and unpleasantness, despite the jeers of unbelievers and despite the difficulties of struggling with deeply rooted ways of thought." Dmitri Pisarev

Lars T Lih's excellent short biography of Lenin is a welcome addition to the serious socialist literature on classical Marxist history. Although it contains some nuggets from the archives and some references to interesting but lesser known contemporary sources, the book's chief merits are its strongly contextual interpretation of Lenin's life and its readable style.

When Oliver Cromwell insisted that his portrait should include "warts and all", Lih comments that most recent studies of Lenin seem to be based on the methodology of "nothing but warts". We've all seen the stereotypical image of Lenin: the bloodthirsty monster of the liberal, anarchist and conservative imagination. Pessimistic, voluntaristic, elitist, conspiratorial. Lenin who like Chernyshevsky's Rakhmetov was sure to have slept on a bed of nails to toughen himself up. A man fuelled by ambition and desire for supremacy, whose self-assurance was so great that it either repelled people or forced them to submit to him. On this view, Lenin was perpetually "worried about the workers", hence his alleged conception of an elite, centralised party raised above the masses.

Lih demolishes this view, preferring to understand Lenin as a product of the broad European socialist movement of his time, who had to work out his politics in the terrible conditions of tsarist Russia. The Lenin that emerges is deeply committed to working class self-emancipation and a rightful heir to the revolutionary socialism of Marx and Engels.

Vladimir Ulyanov becomes Lenin

Lenin's origins are now well known. He was born Vladimir Ulyanov in 1870 in Simbirsk on the Volga river. His father was a teacher and school inspector who set up village schools to advance learning. On his mother's side, Vladimir's great-grandfather Moishe had grown up on a Jewish shtetl, but was later baptised and took the name Dmitri. His grandfather

received noble or gentry status as result of his work as a doctor. In the early 1930s, his sister Anna discovered the family's Jewish origins and personally asked Stalin to publicise the fact as a way of combating anti-semitism. Stalin refused and the facts only became established in the glasnost era and after.

However the critical turning point in his youth was the hanging of his older brother Alexander in May 1887 for participating in a plot to assassinate the Tsar. The apocryphal anecdote of his sister Maria is that when Vladimir heard the news of his brother's unsuccessful attempt at terror, he said through clenched teeth, "No, we won't go that way — that's not the way we must go". The expression highlights where Vladimir found the personal motivation to "find another way" to revolution, in contrast to the methods of most of the populist and terrorist left, and how he came to Marxism.

Vladimir went to Kazan University in the autumn of that year to study law. However he soon got into student politics and was expelled organising a disruptive student demonstration. It was from 1888 that he began to participate in illegal Social Democratic circles and to read Marx. As Lih puts it: "Vladimir's search in the years following his brother's execution led him to the conclusion that a stripped-down, bare-bones version of the Social Democratic strategy could be applied even under tsarism".

Vladimir Ulyanov became Lenin after his arrest after agitating among the St Petersburg workers in 1895. He had made his name as an energetic activist (*praktik*), a "propagandising intellectual" among the "purposive" (class conscious) workers. He was exiled to Siberia for three years, where he completed his study of the Russian social formation and began to develop his ideas on party organisation. But as Lih shows, these were grounded in the Marxist orthodoxy of the time.

Lenin's assessment

Lenin ground out an assessment of Russia during the last decade of the nineteenth century, which laid the foundation for his politics for the rest of his life. Lih shows how Lenin's appreciation of the capitalist transformation of Russia during that period was central to his political conclusions. Behind the dry statistical tables of land ownership and employment "was the creation of new fighters who were both willing and able to wrest political freedom from the grip of the absolutist tsarist government".

Capitalist development meant that "the exploitation of working people in Russia is everywhere capitalist in nature" and it created new classes out of the Russian people. First and foremost were the urban factory workers, the class leaders who were "the sole and natural representative of Russia's labouring and exploited population and [therefore] capable of raising the banner of worker emancipation" (*Friends of the People*, 1894). Second there were the rural workers, who would be class followers in Lenin's scenario.

These workers would then lead the peasants and the village poor in the great struggle against Tsarism.

As Lenin summed it up in 1894: "When its advanced representatives have mastered the ideas of scientific socialism, the idea of the historical role of the Russian worker, when these ideas become widespread, and when stable organisations are formed among the worker to transform the workers' present sporadic economic war into conscious class struggle — then the Russian *worker* rising at the head of all the democratic elements, will overthrow absolutism and lead the *Russian proletariat* (side by side with the proletariat of *all countries* along the straight road of open political struggle to *the victorious communist revolution*" (LCW 1 p.300).

Heroic class leadership

Lih argues that the central organising idea concept of Lenin's life was heroic class leadership. This meant two things. First, it meant working class leadership of the Russian revolution. On this view, the industrial, waged working class would be the leader (*vozhd*) of Russian people (*narod*) in the revolution against tsarism. Despite the overwhelming majority of the peasants, it was the place given to workers in this scenario that marked out Lenin's politics. Second, the romantic idea of leadership within the working class, whereby Lenin sought to inspire the rank and file activist — the *praktik* — with an exalted idea of what their own leadership could accomplish. Together, this party-led, class movement encompassing the whole people would sweep away tsarism and detonate workers revolution across Europe (and latter the globe).

Lih sums up the heroic scenario in one sentence: "The Russian proletariat carries out its world historic mission by becoming the *vozhd* of the *narod*, leading a revolution that overthrows the tsar and institutes political freedom, thus preparing the ground for an eventual proletarian *vlast* [sovereign power] that will bring about socialism". As he points out this was actually "Marx's grand idea", that "only as *vozhd* of all the labourers will the working class achieve victory".

Lih quotes a comment by Zinoviev in his *History of the Bolshevik Party* (1924) that is particularly apposite: "The advocates of Economism did not acknowledge the hegemonic role of the proletariat. They would say: 'So what, in your opinion, is the working class, a Messiah?' To this we answered and answer now: Messiah and messianism are not our language and we do not like such words; but we accept the concept that is contained in them: yes, the working class is in a certain sense a Messiah and its role is a messianic one, for this is the class which will liberate the whole world.

"The workers have nothing to lose but their chains; they do not have property; they sell their labour, and this is the only class which has an interest in reconstructing the world along new lines and is capable of leading the peasantry against the bourgeoisie. We avoid semi-mystical terms

like Messiah and messianism and prefer the scientific one: the hegemonic proletariat”.

SPD —the textbook a la Kautsky

Lih argues forcefully in this book and in his previous work, particularly *Lenin Rediscovered*, that Lenin was largely applying the strategy of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) to Russian conditions. In particular he took the writings of the SPD’s principal theorist Karl Kautsky as his textbook. This is not an original thesis — it was well established in Moira Donald’s book, *Marxism and Revolution: Karl Kautsky and the Russian Marxists, 1900-1924*. But I think Lih rightly indicates how the SPD model is found in the DNA of what became Leninism. Kautsky may well deserve the epitaph of “the father of Russian Marxism”, though Lih perhaps unfairly downplays Plekhanov’s role in this enterprise as well.

The SPD strategy of party-led class leadership was applied to Russia in the following way: “In the first episode the Social Democratic party is founded and becomes accepted as leader of the proletariat. This episode is summarised by Kautsky’s foundational formula about ‘the merger of socialism and the worker movement’. In the central episode the proletariat leads the narod in a crusade to overthrow the tsar, ‘the shame and curse of Russia’. In the final episode party and proletariat move toward the climax of the drama, socialist revolution itself”. The strength of Lih’s approach is his recognition that much of Lenin’s heroic scenario was not unique to him, but reflected much more widely held socialist viewpoints at the time.

Lih has shown in his book *Lenin Rediscovered* that Lenin’s drive for an all-Russian newspaper and an organised, professional, “conspiratorial” apparatus to distribute it was effectively applying the lessons of German social democracy during its own period of illegality. Lenin’s ideas on *konspiratsiia* (the art of not getting arrested) and professional revolutionaries (i.e. a specialised, skilled worker in an efficient organisation) was about making Social Democratic agitation effective in conditions of repression. Lih regards this — again rightly — as entirely consistent with the heroic scenario of working class leadership and self-emancipation. The professional revolutionary was, in the words of Victor Chernov, “a roving apostle of socialism, a knight who punishes evil-doers... his lifestyle is *konspiratsiia*, his sport is a contest with the police in cleverness and elusiveness. He glories in his escapes from prison”. No wonder Lenin became the idol of the *praktiki*, since he appreciated their difficulties and articulated a way to overcome them, while providing “a romantic self-image of leaders who were capable of inspiring boundless confidence”.

Lenin comes out of this interpretation as an incorrigible optimist about working-class organisation. He believed that the workers were eager to fight and continually outstripping the capacity of the Social Democrats to provide the requisite knowledge and organisation. He is admonishing the

revolutionaries, urging them to rise to the task and providing the means of the newspaper to create the scaffolding for a genuine workers party. This is not substitutionism or socialism from above. It is about building a workers' movement under conditions of illegality. The perspective was vindicated by the role workers played in the 1905 revolution and the way the Social Democrats adapted their organisational forms in the short period of freedom that the revolution entailed.

Dog days

Lih writes a breezy narrative of the period between the defeat of the 1905 revolution and the victory on 1917. He does not dwell too heavily on the period of skloki — “the insupportably petty and demeaning infighting that sucked up the time and energy of the émigrés”. He illustrates the point with a joke from the time. Some police officers escorting Bolsheviks and Mensheviks to prison wanted to go for a drink. They decided they could safely leave the prisoners without supervision, since rather than take the opportunity to escape they would spend the whole time arguing with each other. No doubt some differences were overblown. However they were not insignificant, as the events of 1917 would demonstrate.

Lenin may have faced the war in 1914 in relative isolation both within Russia and internationally, but he did not lose sight of the heroic scenario. Arrested in Krakow at the outbreak of war and released only with the intervention of the Austrian Social Democrats, he went to Bern in Switzerland, where he picked up the banner of international socialism that the German and other social democrats had abandoned for their own governments.

Lih does not believe that the shock of betrayal in 1914 caused Lenin to reject much of what he had previously considered Marxist orthodoxy. According to Lenin himself it was not he who had changed but the others. “Lenin presented himself not as a bold innovator or a fearless rethinker but as someone faithful to the old verities. His ferocious anger with socialist leaders was because they had reneged on their own word.”

Thus Lenin hated Kautsky because he loved Kautsky's books. Lih regards Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* as “another work that is to an extent a defence of Kautsky-then against the apostasy of Kautsky-now”. This is absolutely right and should make the “anti-imperialist” left rethink their blandishments. The AWL has long recognised the connection, which is why Kautsky's *Socialism and Colonial Policy* (1907) was republished in *Workers' Liberty* a decade ago.

1917 and after

Lenin's heroic scenario was played out after some modifications in 1917. “Ultimately the success of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917 was based on the success of the message they sent to workers, soldiers and peasants.

This message can be conveyed in three words and punctuation mark: "Take the power!" The Bolsheviks insisted that 'the nature of the class that holds the *vlast* [the sovereign power] decides everything' – and they meant everything. 'Smash the state' was not anarchism but "smash the bourgeois state and replace it with a strong and effective proletarian state. The bourgeois state is smashed when (a) it cannot be used to repress the revolution and (b) it is thoroughly democratised". Lih suggests that in 1917 the socialist revolution was justified by the fact that a substantial majority of the workers in St Petersburg and Moscow (and other cities) wanted to take power.

Yet Lih does not shy away from the regime created after the October revolution. He states that the paradox of Lenin is that a central commitment of the heroic scenario was to political freedom, yet he founded a regime in which many freedoms of speeches, assembly, association etc. were "conspicuously absent".

Lih quotes the infamous 11 August 1918 telegram in which Lenin calls the Penza communists to "Hang (it must be hanging so that the *narod* sees) no fewer than one hundred notorious kulaks, rich people, blood-suckers". However he points to the context — the starvation of the cities and the fact that armed peasants were withholding grain and challenging the workers' state power. In fact the rebellion was quelled the following day when 13 ringleaders were shot for the killings of state representatives. Lih goes as far as to state that Lenin's insistence that the people see the hangings was consistent with his inspiring class leadership, because the people would see the workers' state really taking on the kulaks.

Lih also tackles another myth — that among the Bolsheviks in 1920 there was some sort of mass hallucination that Russia was on the eve of full communism. Instead he argues that Lenin and others began the painful process of rethinking because things really were not turning out as they thought they would (in particular the absence of European revolutions on which their scenario depended). In the vivid phrase of eyewitness Arthur Ransome, the Bolsheviks had "illusion after illusion scraped from them by the pumice-stone of experience".

Lenin by this time was a very sick man. He had been shot and wounded in August 1918. His health deteriorated from overwork and he suffered from nerves, headaches and insomnia. He believed revolutionaries burned out by around the age of fifty and apparently asked Stalin for cyanide pills after his first stroke in 1922. Nevertheless in his final articles, he sought with assistance of others such as Trotsky to work out a way for the battered, broken, degenerated workers' state to hold out. He sought to enlist the middle peasantry to the socialist cause and to advance Russian industry through electrification. He railed against the "soviet bureaucrat" and sought to raise the educational and cultural level of the workers. Lenin compared the Bolsheviks to barbarians who had conquered a higher civil-

isation. It was a desperate race to decide who would destroy whom. And Lih is also clear about the “radical discontinuity” between Lenin and what came next under Stalin.

The fight for clarity

What is the verdict on Lenin? For Lih rightly “the real essence of Bolshevism was inspired and inspiring class leadership”. From this Lenin’s actions in politics followed. As Bukharin wrote in 1917 “[Lenin] is a genuine *vozhd* of the revolution, following out his own logic to the end, scourging any half-heartedness, any refusal to draw conclusions”

Lenin was above all devoted to working class self-emancipation. His writing was dedicated to understanding the conditions under which such self-emancipation was possible. This fight for clarity in socialist aims and methods was captured by Olgin in 1919: “Lenin does not reply to an opponent. He vivisects him. He is as keen as the edge of a razor. His mind works with an amazing acuteness. He notices every flaw in the line of argument he disagrees with, and he draws the most absurd conclusions from, premises unacceptable to him. At the same time he is derisive. He ridicules his opponent. He castigates him. He makes you feel that his victim is an *ignoramus*, a fool, a presumptuous nonentity. You are swept by the power of his logic. You are overwhelmed by his intellectual passion”.

Hence Lenin’s ferocity in debate. For Lenin, a philistine was anyone who failed to share his exalted sense of historical events and the overriding importance of working class leadership. As Lenin put it in a letter to Inessa Armand (18 December 1916): “There it is, my fate. One fighting campaign after another — against political stupidities, philistinism, opportunism and so forth. It has been going on since 1893. And so has the hatred of the philistines on account of it. But still, I would not exchange this fate for ‘peace’ with the philistines” (*LCW* 35).

Lenin is ours. The Lenin who understood the potential of the working class. The Lenin who sought inspired class leadership of the whole people, both in Russia and internationally. The Lenin who developed worker-cadres who could work miracles in leading their sisters and brothers. The Lenin who fought for clarity against the philistines who attacked or undermined the class emancipatory project. The great virtue of Lih’s book is that we see Lenin in this light. Lenin is an inspiration for those who share his dreams and fight the latter-day philistines.

INSPIRATION

The nature of our action programme

The section from the 1977 “manifesto” of the International-Communist League (forerunner of AWL) which explained our idea of transitional demands and transitional programme.

A socialist programme of action is neither an option nor an arbitrarily chosen weapon for a party with the politics and the goals of the I-CL. Its nature sums up the essential content of our politics — proletarian self-liberation.

It expresses the most advanced lessons of the attempts by the proletariat between 1848 and 1919 to hammer out a political practice which linked the goal of socialist revolution with the day to day organic struggle imposed on the working class by capitalism.

In the epoch of social democracy, before the great international labour movement collapsed into national fragments at the feet of the warring bourgeoisies in 1914, socialists operated with a minimum programme and a maximum programme.

The maximum programme was the millennium, the unseen goal in the far distance, the subject of abstract propaganda, holiday speeches and moral uplift; the theoretical property of an elite within the loose parties of social democracy. The minimum programme consisted of limited practical goals and the immediate aims of the everyday struggle of the working class.

What was the link between the two? The party and the trade unions, being built in the struggles and through propaganda. (A sect like IS today provides a minuscule historical fossil for students of the tragedy of the Second International and its methods).

Capitalism was advancing organically; so was the labour movement. The “right” Social Democrats saw the process continuing indefinitely until capitalism became transformed by its own evolution, of which the evolution of the labour movement was part. “The movement is everything, the goal nothing”, said their theoretician Eduard Bernstein. The mainstream Left believed evolution involved qualitative breaks and leaps, and that the evolutionary process would have to culminate in a revolutionary prole-

tarian seizure of power.

Both failed to link the daily class struggle with the goal of socialism. For the right, accommodating to capitalism and moulding what it could of the labour movement accordingly, this separation made sense, and their rigorous thinkers attempted to make theoretical sense of it. For the left, the separation led to sterile “maximalism” and hollow “orthodoxy” (Kautsky).

In practice, control and hegemony was left in the hands of those whose practice corresponded accurately to the minimum/maximum model; in turn, this overweening reality of the labour movement led the “orthodox” left to accommodate to the right. Ultimately, having won one hollow verbal victory after another in debate, they capitulated to the Right in practice.

Central to both wings of mainstream Social Democracy, for differing reasons but with the same consequences, was the same failure. They failed to see in the creative self-controlling activity of the working class — including workers who were initially, at the beginning of struggle in which they could learn, formally backward politically — the central force for socialism.

Left and right had in common a bureaucratic, elitist conception of socialism. Their operational image of the relationship of the revolutionary party to the revolutionary class was one of pedagogic teacher to passive pupil, or self-substituting bureaucratic instrument to inert mass.

Rosa Luxemburg, first, in company with the orthodox “left”, exposed the relapse to utopian socialism implicit in Bernsteinian “revisionism” and also the relapse to the substance of utopia-building within capitalism involved in reformist practice.

She then, by 1910, came to understand the empty futility of the political victories of the “orthodox” and the practical impotence of those, like Kautsky, who accommodated to the dominant forces in the Second International. She learned from the tremendous self-mobilisations of, especially, the working class in the Tsarist empire during the 1905-7 Revolution, and came to see the reality of European Social Democracy clearly.

The Russian Bolsheviks did not see the nature of the European “left” until it capitulated to the openly chauvinist right in 1914 — but they did, right through, relate to the central truth of Marxist socialism which the tremendous combativity and creativity of the Russian working class kept before their eyes.

They had the advantage over Luxemburg and her small circle in Germany of not over-reacting to a bureaucratised, routinised, essentially elitist party, which they could only see a future for by looking to the explosive latent creative power of the working class to correct it “when the time came”. The Bolsheviks built a revolutionary party which was uniquely sensitive to the creativity of the working class, in tune with the central and

irreplaceable chord of Marxist socialism; which learned from the working class, absorbed the lessons of its struggles, synthesised them with the experiences of the international struggle, and codified them scientifically — thus educating a stable cadre.

The communist movement, reorganising itself during and immediately after World War One, resolved to have done with the minimum/ maximum division, with its inescapable consignment of the masses to passivity vis-a-vis the struggle for socialism, which the leaders would talk of and History would take care of.

The central thread of their revolutionary conceptions was summed up in the idea of Soviets (workers' councils) — at the same time the broadest, most responsive, most democratic and most effective means for the immediate struggle against capitalism, and the essential organs of the revolutionary proletarian regime. (Significantly, the first notion of a transitional programme is expressed in Trotsky's analysis of the 1905 Russian Revolution — the revolution that first produced Soviets).

Resolved to mobilise the working class to fight immediately for socialism, the communist movement elaborated the conception of a transitional programme — to link the everyday struggle of the working class with the goal of socialist revolution; to focus every struggle so as to rouse working class masses and direct those masses against the pillars of capitalist society.

Luxemburg, at the foundation of the Communist Party of Germany in 1919 (shortly before her assassination) and the Communist International at the 3rd and 4th Congresses began to elaborate such a concept.

The Communist Parties attempted to root themselves in the immediate working class struggles and relate those struggles to an overall struggle for socialism. They began to bring 'socialist' propaganda down from the cloudy skies and harness it to the hard daily grind of working class struggle.

The full socialist programme was broken down into a linked chain, each link of which might successively be grasped, and the movement hauled forward, dependent on the degree of mobilisation, intensity of struggles, and the relationship of forces.

Everyday demands, as on wages, were expressed not within the framework of acceptance of a capitalism that the socialists believed to be maturing towards some optimum time for ripeness, when it would fall. They were expressed against capitalism, so as to challenge capitalist prerogatives and the assumptions of capitalist society on a day-to-day basis.

This transitional programme, in the hands of a party organised for immediate war on capitalism and neglecting at the same time neither general propaganda nor the most "minimalist" concerns — that was the weapon that the communists armed themselves with (though the Comintern never actually formalised a transitional programme).

It summed up the pillars of the bitter post-1914 knowledge on which Marxist socialism reconstructed itself — War on capitalism, not coexistence with capitalism waiting to inherit its legacy either peacefully or with a little bit of last-minute force. Mobilisation and involvement of the broadest layers of the working class in immediate conflict with capitalism, a break with elitism, propagandism, and evolutionism. The integration of the various fronts of the class struggle, ideological, political, economic, into one strategic drive.

The conception of a transitional programme and transitional demands was the product of the great Marxist renaissance and lessons drawn from the terrible collapse in 1914.

Certainly it was part of a world view that saw the struggle for socialism as immediate. But the conception itself, the criticism of the theory and practice of the Second International out of which it came, was a major conquest in understanding the relationship of the daily struggles of the working class to the struggle for socialism, even if the possibility of struggle for socialism were not quite immediate. The Communist International seriously began to discuss transitional demands at about the same time as it accepted that capitalism had survived the post-World-War-One earthquake and reached temporary stabilisation.

Above all the conception of a transitional programme represented a break with the elitist, bureaucratic, evolutionary socialism to which its central core, mass mobilisation in class struggle, is the very antithesis.

Nominal adherence to the method of transitional demands of the Communist International or of the “Transitional Programme” written by Trotsky in 1938 is no guarantee against Second-Internationalist conceptions. There are no such guarantees. Within nominal adherence, there has been a general reversion in the Trotskyist movement to the level of the Second International. One can even find “Trotskyists” for whom transitional demands are clever devices to manipulate the working class, to con them into socialism; others for whom they are only lists of measures to demand of this or that government; others, again, for whom they are merely propaganda formulas for the literary “exposure” of the reformists; some, indeed, for whom they are semi-religious talismans.

But in history the idea of transitional demands summed up the break with the evolutionary, bureaucratic, elitist conception of socialism. That is what it means for the International-Communist League.

What is an “Action Programme”

By Sean Matgamna

If you attempt to work up a document of answers, slogans, action projects, either you are guided by “inspiration”, pet ideas, or some other arbitrary and subjective approach; or you attempt rigorously to draw practical conclusions from a Marxist analysis of reality and general codifications summing up the experience of the working class so far, focused on the situation facing the British working class.

Your Action Programme will be preceded and accompanied by general propaganda and in depth expositions of the various parts of the Action Programme — otherwise the cadres of the organisation themselves will not understand, or not adequately understand, the Action Programme or some of its sections.

When the 1938 *Transitional Programme* was produced, a whole background of socialist culture, inside the ranks of the Fourth International and even to a degree on its periphery, could be assumed. The massive debate and the hammering out of such slogans as on the workers’ government by the early Communist International was still living and recent memory (at most 15 to 17 years back) for many of the cadre. Many of the early documents were in their possession or easily available. For example, in the *Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, Trotsky’s exposition of the workers’ government slogan feels no more need of additional warnings of the dangers discussed by the Communist International than to add a summary of the mis-use of the slogan by the Stalinists.

Today, massive lacunae exist in Marxist analysis of society, amounting to a major crisis of Marxism. The weakness of our draft Manifesto in explanation of the condition of capitalism is one illustration of this. Moreover, the general cultural level of the revolutionary movement has been thrown backward massively, to such an extent that perhaps most of the current “Trotskyist” groups could learn valuable positive lessons from the left in the Second International!

Many of the basic concepts used in drafting the Action Programmes of the 30s have lost most of their meaning, or never had any, for the present-day left. Some of them (“Workers’ Control”, “Nationalisation”, “Workers’ Government”) have been given a reformist/utopian character in their current usage. The very conception of socialism itself needs to be restated — for it has simply been perverted into a repulsive elitist “statism” by the dominant sections of the British left.

Many, or most, of the demands essential to an Action Programme have been made into fetish-objects, outside of and above rational judgment and critical and concrete assessment by the “orthodox” Trotskyist sects, be-

cause they are part of the *Transitional Programme*. And even the more flexible “Trotskyists” [Fourth International, UK group Socialist Resistance] who don’t parade the *Transitional Programme* in ritual procession as Catholics parade statues of Jesus on the feast of Corpus Christi, keep it as an ancestral heirloom in a place of reverence, not quite sure what to do with it, but given to taking chunks of its verbiage to buttress some political monstrosity, whether it be the International Marxist Group’s [forerunner of Socialist Resistance] recent mis-use of the idea of the Socialist United States of Europe. to gain their entry into the ranks of working class chauvinism on the Common Market, or their earlier mis-use of the slogan of workers’ control. They are like barbarians who appropriate stones from a once imposing building whose structure has been shattered, to construct hovels for themselves.

And, after the fetishists and their political first cousins, the vandals who believe their hovels are holy because stones from the *Transitional Programme* cathedral are visibly part of them, come — naturally — the negative fetishists, International Socialism [SWP today].

For them too the *Transitional Programme* and the method of the *Transitional Programme* are outside of rational consideration. Irrational rejection is their attitude, with fear as superstitious as the reverence of the Workers Revolutionary Party. They reject in all conditions slogans like the Sliding Scale of Wages, and are entirely confined to the minimum / maximum conception of a programme. The proof of the negative-fetish character of IS’s attitude to the *Transitional Programme* is that in all their writings and comments, despite all their pretence of cool rationality, they have never rationally assessed the origins, significance, elements, and remaining validity of the 1938 draft. All we have is the true assertion that the demands and slogans in the *Transitional Programme* were presented in the 1938 document in a setting of brief analysis and all-pervading recognition of chronic capitalist crisis — and, taking off from that, Tony Cliff allowed himself (at the Skegness, rally. 1971) to regale an audience, half of which had never heard of the *Transitional Programme*, with the idea that if you take it seriously you wind up like Posadas, believing in flying saucers [Juan Posadas was an Argentine Trotskyist who claimed that flying saucers proved the existence of advanced, therefore socialist, societies on other planets].

For all these reasons, explanations, re-statement (as on state capitalism versus socialism) and detailed expositions with reference to the history of the slogan (as on the workers’ government) are essential.

“The significance of the programme is the significance of the party” said Trotsky, discussing the *Transitional Programme* of 1938. For the I-CL [forerunner of AWL] this type of manifesto signifies an attempt to start a process of educating and developing the organisation’s cadres in the politics of the *Transitional Programme*. The Action Programme element, the slo-

gans and responses, are tools in the hands of the cadres — it is vital that the cadres understand the use, the limits, and relation to the other tools, of each demand. For we do not present or serve up even a much more simple Action Programme in toto: the organisation uses its judgment to decide how to swivel the various elements in the programme so as best to use them in any concrete situation.

Given that framework, there is no reason why we cannot valuably produce a simplified short pamphlet for wider circulation called *Action Programme*, summarising some elements from the Manifesto and backed up by the Manifesto and other material. But just to present an “Action Programme”, with minimal explanation, would be a bare collection of slogans drawn together mainly from the *Transitional Programme*. It would be a literary exercise in collation, of not much value.

Alfred Rosmer, in Lenin’s Moscow, reports the comment a communist militant made when Lenin’s pamphlet *Left Wing Communism* appeared around the time of the Second World Congress of the Communist International in 1920. He said, “It is a dangerous book”, meaning that people would take from it only recipes and licence for artful dodges and “flexibility” of a type altogether different from that which Lenin was trying to teach the ultra-lefts. He was right, of course.

The *Transitional Programme* of Leon Trotsky is also a “dangerous book” in the epoch when almost the whole political culture of which it was a sort of distillation or “abstract”, designed for a specific purpose, has disappeared. The specific character of the *Transitional Programme* and even more of the *Action Programme for France* — lean, honed—down, unintentionally creating an illusion of literary-scientific self-sufficiency, though Trotsky disclaimed anything like that — bears witness to the fact that Trotsky was preparing levers to insert into the labour movement, where a lot could be taken as common ground and the task of the Trotskyist cadres was one of re-orienting the existing movement for action.

It also relates to an immediate situation where the labour movement “switches points” and fights back — or is crushed in the relatively short term. We can operate with no such assumptions. The cadres of so-called “Trotskyism” have largely forgotten or are ignorant of much that the 1938 Trotskyists could take for granted in the mass labour movement they related to in the 1930s (or, at least, did take largely for granted, on pain of otherwise renouncing all hope of re-orienting the movement in time for the coming showdown). Moreover, we operate in a situation of simmering, rather than crushing, crisis.

The *Transitional Programme’s* slogans have too often been abused, misunderstood, applied in opposition to the spirit of the method of the *Transitional Programme* — by the French OCI (sect organised by Pierre Lambert) for example, with their “workers’ government” without reference to the state, class mobilisation, or programme in any sense of the word. The same

in Ireland where former associates of Workers' Fight apply what they understand as the *Transitional Programme* approach to the 26-County Labour Party — and effectively if unintentionally support the coalition government!

In the Middle Ages physicians worked from anatomical textbooks by Galen which they inherited from the ancient world. In a period when it was deemed degrading for such people to do manual work, the doctor would sit in the operating room on a high stool, with Galen's book open, giving directions to minions and apprentices who actually carried out the operations. Eventually the textbook was discovered to deal not with the anatomy of men and women, but of monkeys! If our former comrades in the League for a Workers' Republic were to go and study the discussion and documents that produced the slogan and demands in the slim pamphlet they fetishise, they would have to understand that they bear the same sort of relation to Trotsky and the early Comintern and Fourth International as the medieval physicians did to Galen.

How do we use a Manifesto or Action Programme? One of the central theoretical insights of the old Workers' Fight group [older forerunner of AWL] from its study of the history and problems of the Fourth International was on what a programme is and is not. It is not a blueprint, a fixed document, nor even codifications from experience distilled into directives for action. It is all of these things, but more — a living, fluid inter-relation of these with conjunctural analyses and, above all, concrete assessments and responses on the part of the revolutionary organisation. It is a living thing, not a document. It can only live and develop in and through the practice of the revolutionary party — "The significance of the programme is the significance of the party".

Its revolutionary validity or otherwise is determined not only by whether its theoretical bedrock and basic analysis is sound, but by the other more immediate, more conjunctural factors — that is, all that is specific to the reactions, concrete analysis, and practice of the party. This is where revolutionary Marxism divides from even the best and most useful academic blueprint-making.

Not to understand this is to be open to serious errors — the error of seeing "a document" as "the programme" in itself (the beginning of the process of fetishisation); the error of believing a programme can have revolutionary life apart from the revolutionary party and the working class. (It can have a sort of life, the basic codifications that is, but more like suspended animation, with the risk of "Galenisation" if too long divorced from the practice of a revolutionary organisation or if allowed to flake off from the revivifying struggle for its development as the party develops).

An I-CL Manifesto will be of use to the degree that the I-CL is of use in reacting to and anticipating events — and also in responding creatively to new situations and gaps in the document, of which they were are bound

to be some that we will not detect. Central here is a Marxist detachment and critical spirit. Even if every member of the I-CL agrees with every phrase in the final draft — then especially there can be no fetishisation, no Bordigist complacency about our own products. In 1930 Trotsky acidly replied to the Bordigists who claimed they had “not departed from” their programme of 1925, which in 1925 Trotsky had approved, by pointing out that the purpose of a programme is not “not to be departed from”, but to be used and developed and supplemented as new situations arise. The same comment would do for the present-day “Trotskyists” who claim “not to depart from the *Transitional Programme*”.

An article from the preparatory discussion for drafting the manifesto of the I-CL (forerunner of AWL), 1976

How to make left unity

The political situation makes a strong case for left unity. Since 2008 global capitalism has been lurching through a long depression, with some countries in outright slump, and no end in sight. Millions of workers have lost their jobs or their homes.

In 2008 even governments like George W Bush's in the USA felt obliged to impose large measures of "socialism" to avert chaos. It was socialism for the rich. Banks and insurance companies were nationalised, but left to bankers to run, on the same old criteria of private profit.

Vast sums of public money and credit were poured into the financial system to "socialise losses", and governments have organised things since then to "privatise gains" yielded by the patches and flurries of economic recovery.

The economic tumult makes visible to all the need for social regulation of economic life; and also visible to all, the fact that the present system is regulated only in the interests of the wealthy.

The workings of capitalism itself are providing ample evidence why we need a different social regulation of economic life — a democratic social regulation exercised through public ownership of the main concentrations of productive wealth, workers' control, and a thoroughgoing, flexible, responsive democracy in government.

But to go from evidence to conclusions requires argument. Argument in the teeth of the consensus which has dominated political life for the last two decades or more. Argument in defiance of the daily barrage from the mass media. And the argument requires people to argue it: socialists.

There are several thousand socialists and class-struggle anarchists active in Britain, quite a few in influential positions in trade unions. And yet advocacy for socialism is only a thin bleat in political life, often drowned out by the noise surrounding it.

Too much of our energy is absorbed in duplicated efforts, in unnecessary conflict, and in tawdry schemes and fronts which are supposed to provide short-cuts to socialism but in fact mostly serve competition between groups.

This problem cannot be resolved by a flabby search for consensus — that is, by the left trying to find a few points we agree on and leaving all else aside. The whittled-down consensus policy will probably not be socialist in any coherent way. The Left Unity project launched by Andrew Burgin and Kate Hudson, and backed by Ken Loach, so far sets its basis only as being "against austerity and war", and the TUSC electoral front run by the Socialist Party and the SWP says little more to explain the "socialist"

label in its name than that it is against cuts, against British troops being in Afghanistan, and for trade unions.

There are real differences between the different groupings on the left, about real and important issues. For the labour movement to be able to win socialism, we will need to thrash out those issues and develop a coherent strategy.

We need a framework which allows unity in action where we agree, and honest and serious debate where we disagree. The best way would be to establish a transitional organisation.

This would be a coalition of organisations and individuals, organised both nationally and in each locality, which worked together on advocating the main ideas of socialism, working-class struggle, democracy, and welfare provision; in support of working-class struggles; and in such campaigns as it could agree on (against bedroom tax? against cuts?), while also giving space to debate differences.

It would have a newspaper, a website, and leaflets, based on the ideas its components agreed on, but would allow for debates in the newspaper and website, and for groupings within it to publish their own journals and websites.

It would deliberately allow its components to continue their own special activities — some in the Labour Party, and some not; some in this campaign, some in that — but also provide for debate on those choices.

It would seek links and practical political collaboration with anarchist and left libertarian groupings and individuals.

It would be “transitional”; it would recognise the aim of deepening the cooperation, and discussing through the differences, sufficiently to cohere into a fully-united, fully-coordinated party. In a fully-united party there would still be space for minorities to express themselves, including publicly; but there would be enough coherence for the party to have a defined, majority-agreed, adequately-discussed policy on every major question.

That coherence would be impossible in the initial coalition. But many differences on the left today appear fixed and rigid in large part because there is no dialogue about them, only an occasional exchange of curses between hostile groups when we meet. Real discussion between activists engaged in joint work, and seeing the benefits of cooperation, could budge many of those differences.

Not all groupings would agree to join the initial coalition or “transitional” organisation. Not all who engaged in the “transitional” organisation would stay with it. But the cooperation and debate would be valuable even if they failed entirely in creating a fully-united party.

The British left has one great example of unity in its history, the bringing-together of at least five major groupings previously at odds with each other, and many individuals and smaller groups, to form the then-revolutionary Communist Party in the early 1920s.

Not all the would-be revolutionary socialists joined the CP. It was at first a ramshackle organisation, quite different in tone and trend from one area to another. Significant numbers dropped away as it became fully unified. But then, for a while, until Stalinism killed it, it united almost all revolutionary socialists in coherent action, achieving much more with only a few thousand members than much bigger groups have at other times.

Other attempts in history “failed”, but after having made contributions. The First International in which Karl Marx was active in 1864-72 had its central organisation in Britain, and here it was a composite of socialistic or anarchistic exiles from other European countries; British socialist trends like the Owenites and O’Brienites; and cautious trade unionists, some of whom later became outright Liberals.

Between 1893 and 1897 William Morris and others made a drive to unite all socialists in Britain — the SDF, the ILP, the Fabians, and smaller groups. There were joint manifestos and meetings, and much local cooperation, for a while.

Between about 2000 and 2003 the Socialist Alliance brought together almost all the revolutionary socialist groups, and a fair number of unaligned people. The effort was too narrowly focused on electoral activity, and prevented from getting very far on cooperation in other activity by the SWP, which dominated it excessively and eventually broke it up. But for a while, in many areas at least, there was real cooperation and real dialogue.

Just in the last 10 years, there have been eight or nine left unity projects which have got as far as organising meetings, conferences, websites, and yielded almost no result. All of them, however, were based on unviable schemes of one sort or another — to unite just by finding some points of agreement and sidelining all other issues, or to unite by rallying to a pre-defined project, usually electoral, of one group or another.

No miracle will result just from proposing a good formula for unity. But it is the first step. We invite all other groupings and individuals on the left to discuss our proposal.

Originally from *Solidarity* 284, 1 May 2013

Further reading

Left unity in the 1890s: bit.ly/lu1890s

Socialist Alliance: bit.ly/end-sa

The United States of Europe

By Liam McNulty and Paul Hampton

The economic crisis has rocked the European Union (EU). In Britain, the Tories want a referendum on links with the EU, stoking up nationalism. Early socialist debates about the United States of Europe help us orientate in today's conditions.

Origins

The term 'United States of Europe' has its origins in bourgeois democratic thought in the nineteenth century, probably from the French Revolution onwards. Some of the more far-sighted thinkers envisaged an alternative way in which the European continent could be organised. The Italian republican Giuseppe Mazzini, for instance, saw a United States of Europe as the logical continuation of Italian unification. For the League of Peace and Freedom, a pacifist organisation Victor Hugo, Giuseppe Garibaldi and John Stuart Mill were involved with, a United States of Europe was a way of preventing wars.

Marx and Engels had their own view of conflict between nations. In the Communist Manifesto in 1848, they anticipated that "in place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency," capitalism would lead to "intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations." Engels linked the growth of the workers movement and the increasing influence of Social-Democratic parties to the prospects for maintaining peace. When asked if he anticipated a United States of Europe in 1893, he replied: "Certainly. Everything is making in that direction. Our ideas are spreading in every European country." (*Daily Chronicle* June 1893)

Kautsky

The sharpening of inter-power competition ultimately led to the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914. It was in response to the increasing threat of war that the German Social-Democrat Karl Kautsky discussed the possibility of a United States of Europe.

Kautsky argued in *War and Peace* (1911) that while international agreements to limit armaments and resolve disputes could temporarily lessen the war danger, they could not prevent capitalism's competitive antagonisms creating conditions which would eventually dissolve this short-term unity.

However, “the States of European civilisation in a confederation with a universal trade policy, a federal Parliament, a federal Government and a federal arm — the establishment of the United States of Europe”, he argued, “would possess such overwhelming power that, without any war, they could compel all other nations, so far as these did not willingly do so, to join them, to disband their armies and give up their fleet.” This would create the possibility of “an era of eternal peace.”

Such a confederation of European states would not come about voluntarily. It would be the begrudging response of European governments to the threat of workers' revolution, either again the crippling tax burden of armaments or against the destructive impact of a war. Nevertheless, it was seen by Kautsky has an advanced stage of capitalist development; not something which must wait for the socialist revolution.

Luxemburg

Kautsky's thesis provoked a rebuke from Rosa Luxemburg, who argued in *Peace Utopias* (1911) that it was utopian to expect “an era of peace and retrenchment of militarism in the present social order.” She accused Kautsky of “projecting making”, of hatching detailed schemes as if to prove the practicality of his ideas, much in the way that nineteenth century utopian socialists created intricate blueprints of what their proposed societies would look like.

It was not Marxist, argued Luxemburg, to start with the political form of a union of European states without analysing its economic underpinning. She denied that Europe at this time was an economic unit because of violent antagonisms between European nations, and the ties between European and non-European states due to the industrial economies' requirement for raw materials and foodstuffs. Hence, argued Luxemburg, the “‘United States of Europe’ is an idea which runs directly counter both economically and politically to the course of development, and which takes absolutely no account of the events of the last quarter of a century.”

More damningly, Luxemburg insisted that every time bourgeois politicians have raised the idea of European unity it has been as an imperialist project directed against the “yellow peril” or the “inferior races”. “The solution of the European union within the capitalist social order,” she argued, “can objectively, in the economic sense, mean only a tariff war with America, and in the political sense only a colonial race war.”

First World War

At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the majority of socialist parties discarded notions of a united Europe, supporting their own governments in the orgy of slaughter that unfolded. Revolutionary socialists such Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky had to craft their slogans about peace in Europe in the context of isolation, repression and war — including

against leaders such as Kautsky who they had previously looked to for ideological clarity.

In this disorientating situation, many revolutionary socialists continued to advocate the United States of Europe slogan as part of their answer to the war. Leon Trotsky wrote a pamphlet, *War and the International* (1914), which summed up this position. His slogans included: "The right to every nation to self-determination. The United States of Europe — without monarchies, without standing armies, without ruling feudal castes, without secret diplomacy".

Lenin's position was not as absolute as either Trotsky's support for the slogan, nor Luxemburg's total opposition to it. Lenin initially supported the slogan "a republican United States of Europe". Its formation, he wrote in *The War and Russian Social-Democracy* (1914), "should be the immediate political slogan of Europe's Social-Democrats. In contrast with the bourgeoisie, which is ready to "promise" anything in order to draw the proletariat into the mainstream of chauvinism, the Social-Democrats will explain that this slogan is absolutely false and meaningless without the revolutionary overthrow of the German, the Austrian and the Russian monarchies." In other words, Lenin was giving the slogan a revolutionary-democratic character - part of the democratic minimum programme to be achieved through revolutionary working-class means.

At this point, the discussion was primarily political and some appeared to interpret the slogan not as part of Marxists' democratic programme but, rather, to describe the political form that a federation would take after the socialist revolution. Though Bukharin, for instance, defended the slogan, he wrote in his *Theses on the Tasks and Tactics of the Proletariat* (1915) that in "reply to the imperialist unification of the countries from above, the proletariat must advance the slogan of a socialist unification of countries from below — republican United States of Europe — as a political-juridical formulation of the socialist overturn." This was to give it a rather different meaning to Lenin's 1914 formulation.

The slogan was attacked by Hermann Gorter and others from the "left". Their argument was that under imperialism, democracy and democratic demands are impossible to achieve, therefore, a United States of Europe is also impossible. They thought that not only was it impossible owing to the conflict of interest between the interests of European capitalist powers but that if it was somehow constituted it would be as an alliance for the purpose of attacking the USA.

Lenin responded, correctly, that on "the basis of [this] reasoning it would be necessary to discard a whole series of points from our minimum programme as being impossible under imperialism. While it is true that genuine democracy can be realised only under socialism, we still do not discard these points."

Lenin's second thoughts

Yet, by 1915 Lenin was having second thoughts. The Berne Bolshevik conference in early 1915 voted for the slogan, but Lenin began to question his earlier support for it. He continued to argue that democratic demands, far from in any way weakening the struggle for socialism, in fact, serve to “draw new sections of the petty bourgeoisie and the semi-proletarian masses into the socialist struggle.” “Political revolutions are inevitable in the course of the socialist revolution, which should not be regarded as a single act, but as a period of turbulent political and economic upheavals, the most intense class struggle, civil war, revolutions, and counter-revolutions.”

However, in a departure from his previous position, Lenin concluded that: “From the standpoint of the economic conditions of imperialism — i.e., the export of capital and the division of the world by the “advanced” and “civilised” colonial powers — a United States of Europe, under capitalism, is either impossible or reactionary.”

This article, *On the Slogan for a United States of Europe* (1915), is often quoted by Stalinists to give a Leninist gloss to their nationalistic anti-working-class policy in favour of unilateral withdrawal from the European Union. This is especially convenient as Lenin's polemic was aimed, in part, against Leon Trotsky.

It is true that Lenin and Trotsky disagreed on this question in 1915. Not only are conditions in Europe wholly different today than they were in 1915 but the Stalinist method substitutes formalistic quotation-mongering for understanding Lenin's method and his revolutionary internationalism.

Trotsky

Trotsky's main point of departure, following Parvus, was that World War One had been caused by a contradiction between the growth of the productive forces of the economy and the fact that economic development had up until now been organised by and within the bounds of nation-states. “Imperialism,” argued Trotsky in *Imperialism and the National Idea* (1915), “represents the capitalist-predatory expression of a progressive tendency of economic development: to construct the human economy on a world scale, having emancipated it from the constraining fetters of the nation and the state.”

Central to Trotsky's vision of socialism was the freeing of the modern forces of production from the fetters of national tariff barriers, and counterposing a rational and humane means of organising society to the imperialist butchery of the capitalist's “solutions” to the problem. It is only socialism, he wrote, “that emancipates the world economy from national fetters, thus emancipating national culture from the grip of economic competition between nations — only socialism provides a way out of the contradictions that have broken out before us as a terrible threat to the whole

of human culture.”

Trotsky was hostile to and denounced as reactionary any programme which sought to force economic development back within national limits. He wrote in *The Nation and the Economy* (1915), “It would truly be a miserable petty-bourgeois utopianism...to think that the fate of development in Europe and the entire world will finally be secured if the state map of Europe is brought into correspondence with the map of nationality, and if Europe is split into more or less complete nation-state cells ignoring geographic conditions and economic ties.”

Recognising that the struggle for national unification was a crucial element of bourgeois-democratic movements in the nineteenth century, Trotsky noted that “in the previous epoch, France and Germany approximated the form of a national state [but] this in no way prevented either their colonial policy or their current plans to move the border to the Rhine or the Somme.”

Beneath the moves towards national unification lies capitalism’s impulse for constant expansion. Consequently, if “at a certain stage of development, the national idea is the banner of struggle against feudal-particularistic barbarism or foreign military coercion, later, by creating a self-sufficing psychology of national egoism, it becomes itself an instrument for the capitalist enslavement of weaker nations and an indispensable instrument of imperialist barbarism.”

“The task,” argued Trotsky, “is to combine the claims to autonomy on the part of nations with the centralising requirements of economic development.” Here he was developing his earlier analysis of the Balkan states, in which he argued that a Balkan Federation would be the framework in which the national aspirations of the Serbs of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia proper and Herzegovina could be realised vis-a-vis Tsarism and European imperialism. In Europe as a whole, then:

“The national community, arising from the needs of cultural development, will not only not be destroyed by this but, to the contrary, it is only on the basis of a republican federation of the leading countries that it will be able to find its full completion. The necessary conditions for this presuppose emancipation of the limits of the nation from those of the economy and vice versa. The economy will be organised in the broad arena of a European United States as the core of a worldwide organisation. The political form can only be a republican federation, within whose flexible and elastic bounds every nation will be able to develop its cultural forces with the greatest freedom.”

Therefore, “recognition of every nation’s right to self-determination must be supplemented by the slogan of a democratic federation of all the leading nations, by the slogan of a United States of Europe.”

The consistent thread running through Trotsky’s analysis in this period is that there are objective economic reasons why capitalism is over-spilling

the limitations of the nation-state. This expansion is, in grand historical terms, undertaking a progressive task because it creates the possibilities for increasing humans' control over nature and exploiting the division of labour necessary to achieve socialism. The extent to which it is progressive, however, is determined by the degree to which the growth of the workers' movement is able to guarantee "the further development of the productive forces by way of freeing them from an imperialist blind alley within the broad arena of socialism" (*Imperialism and the National Idea*).

Nowhere in Trotsky can you find arguments for "national development" of the sort often put forward by proponents of the Euro-exit. Arguments for building on European integration apply, argues Trotsky, if the plans of German imperialism to unify Europe under the Kaiser were realised. What, asked Trotsky in *The Programme for Peace* (1916), would the programme of the working-class movement be in this case?

"Would it be the dissolution of the forced European coalition and the return of all peoples under the roof of isolated national states? Or the restoration of tariffs, 'national' coinage, 'national' social legislation, and so forth? Certainly not. The programme of the European revolutionary movement would then be: The destruction of the compulsory anti-democratic form of the coalition, with the preservation and furtherance of its foundations, in the form of complete annihilation of tariff barriers, the unification of legislation, above all of labour laws, etc. In other words, the slogan of the United States of Europe — without monarchy and standing armies — would under the foregoing circumstances become the unifying and guiding slogan of the European revolution."

This method of posing the question has a bearing on what we say about the EU today. Marxists do not "endorse" the spread of capitalism, and help workers to fight the capitalists every step of the way, we recognise how it creates the possibility of socialism. As Trotsky did not give political support to European unification under German imperialism, we do not take political responsibility for the way in which the European bourgeoisie has unified Europe in its own incomplete and increasingly destructive way.

We recognise, however, that European integration provides the terrain on which the European workers' movement can link up to fight the bosses, and for the levelling up of democratic and social rights. To the capitalist European Union we pose not "national sovereignty" or "national development" but the Socialist United States of Europe.

The Communist International

Trotsky continued to raise the slogan as Commissar for Foreign Affairs in the Soviet government and in the Communist International. We can learn a lot about how the slogan of the United States of Europe was used as a transitional demand from the early Communist International debates.

Political and economic divisions after the war blocked the way to eco-

conomic recovery and the general development of culture in Europe. French imperialism wished to keep Germany on its knees, while the USA looked on, hoping that a weak Europe would pave the way to its dominance as a world power.

In June 1923, several months after the French had invaded the Ruhr region of Germany to extract reparations, Trotsky wrote a discussion article *Is the Slogan "The United States of Europe" a Timely One?* from the standpoint of "finding a way out of the present European impasse. We have to offer a solution," he argued, "to the workers and peasants of torn and ruined Europe..."

Trotsky used the slogan of "The United States of Europe" as a transitional slogan. A system of transitional demands, argued Trotsky in 1938, act as a "bridge... stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

For immediate struggles of the working-class over issues such as wages, working hours and self-defence against the far-right, Communists proposed a "united front" to bridge the split between Communist and Social-Democratic workers and develop the class struggle in a socialist direction.

In some situations, such as in Germany in 1920 when a right-wing military putsch toppled the government in Berlin and the Social Democratic trade unions called for a general strike, the immediate tasks of the workers' movement may even extend to forming a workers' government of all working-class parties.

To the united front on the level of day-to-day class struggle, and the workers' government slogan on a national political level, Trotsky added the United States of Europe to the system of transitional demands as a Europe-wide slogan for the workers' movement, as a "transitional slogan, indicating a way out, a prospect of salvation, and furnishing at the same time a revolutionary impulse for the toiling masses."

Trotsky wrote that: "In connection with the slogan of 'a workers' and peasants' government', the time is appropriate, in my opinion, for issuing the slogan of 'The United States of Europe'. Only by coupling these two slogans shall we get a definite systematic and progressive response to the most burning problems of European development."

"The peoples of Europe," he argued, "must regard Europe as a field for a unified and increasingly planned economic life...Without this supplementary slogan the fundamental problems of Europe must remain suspended in mid-air."

The slogan was used by the Communist International until 1926, then was dropped as Stalinism took hold. The omission of the slogan ahead of the Sixth Congress in 1928 provided the starting point for Trotsky's important work, *The Draft Programme of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals*.

In this critique, Trotsky sought to rebut Stalin's charges that the slogan of a United States of Europe was inadmissible in principle and that Lenin's 1915 argument that capitalism develops unevenly meant that socialism could possibly be achieved in a single country. In doing so, he downplays the differences between himself and Lenin, arguing that he raised the slogan "exclusively as a prospective state form of the proletarian dictatorship in Europe."

Trotsky, however, at the time saw even the capitalist unification of Europe, if it was at all possible, in a more positive light than Lenin did. Moreover, in equating the slogan with that of the workers' government in 1923, Trotsky is admitting the possibility of a federation of European states as a bridge towards the proletarian dictatorship in Europe.

Nevertheless, Trotsky is right to insist that "the conception of the building of socialism in one country is a social-patriotic conception" and is thus totally incompatible with Lenin's revolutionary internationalism. Lenin polemicised against those, such as the Mensheviks, who argued that because socialism must be international therefore socialists should wait for revolution on an international scale. This is very different from the Stalinist's bureaucracy's policy of proclaiming 'socialism in one country' and sabotaging revolution elsewhere.

In *Disarmament and the United States of Europe* (4 October 1929), Trotsky located a tendency towards increased American power which would pressure European states towards integration while at the same time diminishing their share of the world market. It was in this context that he analysed French Prime Minister Briand's advocacy of greater European integration and the need for the Communist International to "counterpose the slogan of the Soviet United States of Europe to the pacifist concoctions of the European imperialists."

Trotsky argued that this analysis of the inter-connectedness of Europe's economic problems and, from it, the grounds for the United States of Europe, slogan contradicted the idea that socialism could be built in one country. Hence the Stalinist opposition to it. "The formula Soviet United States of Europe," wrote Trotsky, "is precisely the political expression of the idea that socialism is impossible in one country. Socialism cannot of course attain its full development even in the limits of a single continent. The Socialist United States of Europe represents the historical slogan which is a stage on the road to the world socialist federation."

The Fourth International and After

The slogan appeared regularly in Trotsky's programmatic writings in the 1930s as the world approached the plunge into war. It flowed from Trotsky's consistent analysis of the whole post-1914 epoch. In *War and the Fourth International* (June 10, 1934) Trotsky wrote that "slogan of the United States of Europe is a slogan not only for the salvation of the Balkan and

Danubian peoples but for the salvation of the peoples of Germany and France as well”, and *A Programme of Action for France* (June 1934) stated forcefully that: “Throughout the aged European continent, divided, militarized, bloodstained, threatened with total destruction by a new war, we raise the only banner of liberation, that of the Workers’ and Peasants’ United States of Europe, the fraternal Federation of Soviet States!”

After the Second World War, the Fourth International republished some of Trotsky’s article on the United States of Europe, arguing that his approach was “all the more instructive in view of the fact that in the period ahead, with the termination of the war in Europe, the task of the continent’s unification is once again imperiously posed, and the road is once again opening up for a progressive solution through the proletarian revolution” (*Fourth International* May 1945).

The ideas behind the United States of Europe remained the orthodoxy in the Trotskyist movement until the 1960s, when many on the left flipped over to nationalism in response to the European Economic Community (EEC, forerunner of the European Union [EU]). In the 1960s, all the Trotskyist groups initially refused to join the Stalinist Communist Party and the Tribune left of the Labour Party in opposing the EEC, arguing that European working class unity was decisive: “In or out, the class fight goes on!”

The International Socialists (IS) were the last to jump on the anti-EEC campaign bandwagon, rejecting it as late as their Easter 1971 conference. Yet two months later, Tony Cliff argued that the arguments used against opposing European unity were sound, but that “tactics contradict principles” and the IS would do best not to be isolated. After this, as Sean Matgamna explained in *The Trotskyist Tendency* and IS, the Cliff organisation opportunistically adapted itself to the prevailing left-nationalist Stalinist common sense in the labour movement. Within weeks, *Socialist Worker* was making anti-European unity propaganda.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty’s forerunners continued to argue in favour of European workers’ unity in the face of the labour movement’s embrace of nationalism. We demanded a special conference and for this we were expelled from the IS in December 1971. As we wrote at the time: “Politically, the expulsion indicates a qualitatively bureaucratic hardening of IS” (Workers’ Fight, 14 January 1972).

Conclusion

From these earlier debates in our tradition, we draw a number of conclusions. We should base ourselves on the real and progressive trends towards European economic and political integration. Since the Second World War, largely under US sponsorship and partly due to the dynamics of the Cold War, Europe has been partially unified. Because of the series of defeats suffered by the working-class movement, we do not have a So-

cialist United States of Europe but a capitalist, quasi-democratic and highly bureaucratised European Union.

We have no trust in, nor do we support, the limited, incomplete and stunted efforts of the bourgeoisie to integrate. The outworkings of the capitalist crisis are now threatening to tear Europe apart, as the European bourgeoisie, through the EU, insists on imposing socially-destructive austerity on the working-class. But the working-class has nothing to gain from the EU splitting up. The process of European integration is reversible only by regression into economic and social chaos, the 'Balkanisation' of the continent into antagonistic nations and alliances, and perhaps even war.

The capitalist crisis transcends national barriers and requires an international solution. To start, we counterpose our own programme of working-class internationalism both to the undemocratic and bureaucratic EU and to those wishing for a return to competing national capitalisms. We fight for European workers' unity, for levelling up of the best social provisions, wages and conditions, for democratisation of the European institutions and the expropriation of the banks and high finance. We fight to rebuild the European workers' movement and for a Workers' United States of Europe.

The Congress of the Peoples of the East

By Martyn Hudson

In July and August of 1920 the second congress of the Communist International, elevated by the success of the October revolution, issued a summons to “the enslaved popular masses of Persia, Armenia and Turkey” to attend, in the first week of September, a “Congress of the Peoples of the East” at Baku in Azerbaijan. It was held at a decisive moment in the Russian civil war 1,891 delegates attended of whom 1,273 were Communist Party activists from a variety of nations and 613 were non-Party delegates from almost every minority of the east including Kalmucks, Koreans, Uzbeks, Indians, Chechens and others.

This would have been a passing moment in the descent of a libertarian revolution into Stalinist despotism and terror and what amounted to the enslavement of the “peoples of the east” if it were not for the critical resonance of a set of themes explicated almost accidentally by the Congress and on the whole, now forgotten. These themes not only exemplify the clear “orientalist” discourse of the Bolsheviks during that period but raise significant questions about the relationship between “ethnicism” and communalism and contemporary projects of social justice and solidarity which we would do well to consider if we think at all about the question of racial justice and social liberation.

Congress against Empire

Taking place over the course of seven days, the Congress itself was a social experiment initiated by Grigorii Zinoviev, at that time a leading light in the revolution but one who would find himself in opposition to the embryonic Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia [after 1925]. An astutely political demagogue, Zinoviev initiated the Congress for one critical reason: to spur what he considered the undifferentiated mass of 800 million peasants to rise up against British imperialism and save the revolution in Russia itself from imperialist intervention.

Through communalism, ethnicism and the multiple faith programmes of the east the Congress would lever the masses into an uprising against the empire of “Capital”. The Party delegates were under no illusions that the eastern peasantry would rise against capital and empire to save the Bolsheviks, but the latter would use the Congress in order to join in a united

front the universalist revolutionary doctrines of the Bolsheviks with the communalistic, ethnic and economic grievances of the peasantry.

The Bolshevik call to disaffected elements throughout the east recalled the call to pilgrimage of the Muezzin. As Zinoviev wrote in his summons — “Spare no effort to ensure that as many as possible may be present on 1 September in Baku. Formerly you travelled across deserts to reach the holy places — now make your way over mountains and rivers, through forests and deserts, to meet each other and discuss how to free yourselves from the chains of servitude, so as to unite in fraternal alliance, so as to live a life based on equality, freedom and brotherhood.”¹ Many followed the summons, smuggling themselves illegally across borders in order for many of them to examine what resources the Bolsheviks would offer in their multiple resistance across the east against their own masters.

Interspersed with the singing and playing of the Internationale, the opening speeches of the Congress issued calls appealing for the east to rise against Capital, against the reactionary dictatorship in Armenia and against the Menshevik regime in Georgia. Central to the focus of the Congress was the idea that the European proletariat had insights into the nature of Capital and Empire that were not available to the “peoples of the east” and that the latter were to be simply a physical force in an historical process that would demolish British rule in India. There was no clear understanding of the real forces of historical development present in those peoples and the complexities of their relationships with their own ruling elites. The eastern peoples’ own more localised grievances against the ruling strata — their own “Emirs, Sultans and Pashas” — would initiate their uprisings against Capital, rather than a universalistic understanding of historical necessity only given to the Leninist faction of the Bolsheviks.² They would have to play catch-up with soviet power as their peasantry would in time be guided into proletarianisation by their mentors in the western European proletariat. How could they, argued Lenin, not be enthralled by the idea of socialism — that combination of soviet power plus electrification?

This was the moment in which the east would enter history for the first time and the eastern peoples would no longer be a reactionary, barbaric mass of “non-historic peoples” outside of the main development of human history. Marx himself had referred to “rural idiocy” and the fact that the eastern peoples could not represent themselves and must be represented. There is even a telling referral in the stenographic documentation of the Congress to the “ocean of concepts called the East”³ as if the east had no reality or location outside of the European discursive construction of it as a fearsome barbarism, or a place of squalor, luxury or oriental despotism.

The Congress had an algebraic method for understanding the historical forces at work in the east, counterposing the three Bs of German imperialism and its rail network — Berlin, Byzantium, Baghdad — against the

three Cs of British imperialism and its network — Cape Town, Cairo, Calcutta. In reality the true aim of the Congress was not simply the emancipation of the east from its erstwhile masters but the instigation of a two Ps project — a vast rail network and nascent soviet empire from Petersburg to the Persian Gulf. The frustration of hopes of revolution in the west was to be to some extent mitigated by victory against British India and the severing of the Cape Town to Calcutta imperial connection.

The party milieu and social composition of the Congress was largely shaped on the one hand by Zinoviev, his programme, and his choice of delegate but also primarily of who could actually get to the congress. The founder of the Indian Communist Party MN Roy refused to attend on the basis that he thought the whole affair was a “circus” instigated by Zinoviev’s ego.

Certainly the subsequent fate of the Congress personnel is highly instructive. For all of the talk of liberty against capital and for human emancipation, many of the non-party delegates from the east would find themselves tied up in “autonomous republics” of the Soviet Union which were nothing more than ethnicist prison houses or enclaves with no autonomy. Stalin had taken a dim view of the Congress, and after the bureaucracy consolidated itself took any talk of ethnic emancipation as a personal slight.

Zinoviev was executed by the regime in the late 1930s. Karl Radek defected to the Trotskyist opposition and then capitulated back to the rising Stalinist bureaucracy. That did not save him, and he was executed during the purges. John Reed, objecting to the high-handed treatment of the non-party delegates and horrified at the elision of the demands of the revolution with that of Islamic “holy war” against infidels propagated by Zinoviev contracted typhus on his way to the Congress and died in October. Abani Mukherji, protégé of M N Roy, was so horrified at the concessions offered to what he considered to be backward and profoundly reactionary communalist programmes became very clear that he considered the nationalist policies of many ethnic and faith groups to be embryonically fascist. He tried to live a quiet life within the rising Stalinist bureaucracy but again was executed in the purges.

One of the most telling stories is that of Sultan Galiev. Galiev was a Tatar who had come early to the Bolsheviks and was convinced of their historic mission to secure a political relationship with the peoples of the east. He became the representative, within the Bolshevik party, of strands representing Islam and Islamic politics in the east. He fought in the Civil War against the White armies and became instrumental as an aide of Stalin as he secured the power of the bureaucracy and the elimination of legality and political liberty. In many ways it was Sultan Galiev who exemplified the idea that Marxism could have an “Islamic face” and for the rest of his life tried, largely unsuccessfully, to combine Islamic ideas of social justice,

with nationalism and Bolshevism. At the congress itself he had argued for a process of “de-fanaticisation” of Islam and a covenant to be reached between “European” socialism and the traditional ties of loyalty and faith of the east. His loyalty to Stalin didn’t help him in the end and he was executed in a Moscow prison in 1940. The charge was Islamic nationalism.

Constructing the holy war

The idea of the peculiarities and exceptionalism of the east is nowhere better exemplified than in that idea of “holy war”.⁴

In some accounts of the Congress the disdain of party delegates towards non-party delegates lay in a fear of the backwardness of the latter, a discursive retreat to ideas about barbarism — a barbarism from the east that had threatened civilized Europe time and time again. One way of defusing that barbarism was for it to become subjected the programme of the European proletariat and that the Islamic idea of “holy war: could be hegemonised and made safe. As the Congress noted “our enemies will say that we are appealing to the memory of Genghis Khan and to the memory of the great conquering Caliphs of Islam”.⁵ And it is clear that they were. By trying to secure the legacy of Islam specifically and other eastern faiths more generally, and their multiple histories of discontent, the Congress would politically validate their own project in the eyes of the peoples of the east. Expressed in localised diction and the idiosyncratic peculiarities of eastern faiths and cultures the universalist programme of the Bolsheviks would be politically secured. And more, the undifferentiated peasantries of the east would enter the real terrain of history and secure for themselves (with Soviet electrification) the status of a civilised proletariat. In effect the east did not rise with the Bolsheviks; and as the Soviet dictatorship emerged it used what Lenin had described as “oppressed nationalities” as proxies in their “Great Game” with rival imperial powers and did not in any way aid their political emancipation. Quite the reverse.

The subsequent success of Stalinised movements in Indochina and China did little to aid the social liberation of the eastern peoples and quite clearly reasserted the control of the one-party state and often the dictatorship of ethnic cliques against other oppressed minorities. The struggle for social emancipation amongst the Indian working class often took place in spite of the wrecking operations of Soviet imperialism and in fact probably the only genuine attempt in the east, in Ceylon, to reconcile human liberatory politics with the rights of minorities in a meaningful way went down to a terrible defeat. Trotsky’s horror at the extinction of the Chinese revolution would be decisive for his own understanding of the rising Stalinist bureaucracy and its relationship to national “liberation”.

Indigenous class politics and the peoples of the east

Subsequent projects to understand the relationship between proletarian

discourse and the question of the east such as that of Subaltern Studies and the work of Gayatri Spivak, Tim Brennan and others have uncovered complex relationships around class formation, migration and culture but can only with serious reservations be understood as even tendentially linked to the failure of the Congress of the Peoples of the East. Indian writers such as Dilip Bose, SG Sardesai and Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya have contributed work on combining Marxist categories of emancipation with historical Indian and Eastern culture but largely within a framework of Maoist understanding of the eastern question or thoroughly Stalinised ones – attempting to explicate in ancient texts such as the Bhagava Gita the sources of a specifically Indian Marxism and a route to emancipation by way of the ancient past. At the same time the emergent working-class formations of the Indian subcontinent have historically overturned the original Marxist notion of an undeveloped or forcibly underdeveloped east which makes the Congress itself look even more anachronistic in retrospect.

Certainly understanding any process of race and class recomposition during the immediate period shaped by the Congress would have to discard the idea that a peasantry, however diffuse and fragmented, can be subsumed within new class forces based around collective ownership (formally existing in the autonomous ethnic republics) and industrialisation and forcible collectivisation. In the regions that were not subsumed by soviet power the same questions of transformation were also raised but within those territories in which capital had retained control. The work of Dipesh Chakrabarty has been instrumental in thinking about some of the key themes of identity and ideology in the class transformation of peasant to proletariat in his work on the Bengali working class from 1890-1940 in which he examines the social identities of resistance on behalf of jute mill workers and raises that issue of elision or confrontation between Indian peasant and Indian worker identities and how far the project of resistance can be a common project on behalf of classes representing profoundly different epochal forces.

Chakrabarty argues that working class culture in Bengal inherited pre-capitalist cultures and forms of resistance to Capital, and that this resistance had very little to do with what were thought of as purely proletarian relationships and ideologies. But also that Capital itself had within itself elevated, transformed, replicated and perpetuated earlier forms of authority. This was “a capitalism that subsumes precapitalist relationships. Under certain conditions, the most feudal system of authority can survive at the heart of the most modern of factories”.⁶ The terrain of struggle was one in which the new proletarians and the new forms of Capital fought each other with essentially pre-modern devices and one in which older identities and allegiances were central. Resistance to Capital through localised and archaic social networks is rooted not in universalism or democ-

racy, however imperfectly implemented, but in the resistances and resources of the past and of the dead.⁷ As Chakrabarty notes;

The question is this: can we bypass all these dilemmas in third world countries like India and build democratic, communitarian institutions on the basis of non-individualistic, but hierarchical and illiberal, precapitalist bonds that have survived and sometimes resisted – or even flourished under – the onslaught of capital. I have written my book on the assumption that in countries such as ours, several contradictory struggles have to fuse into one. The struggle to be a ‘citizen’ must be part of the struggle to be a ‘comrade’. We have to fight for ‘equality’ at the same time as we criticize and transcend the bourgeois version of it. Giving up these battles means embracing an illiberal, authoritarian, hierarchical social order in the name of socialism.⁸

The defiance of authority and capital has to begin from the subjectivity of the oppressed class themselves, and rather than seeing it as an undifferentiated mass we must understand the complexities of conflicting forces and heritages.⁹ Over recent years this has led Chakrabarty to abandon a universalist discourse of human emancipation and embrace the localised, microscopic, and molecular relationships of cultural and ethnic nationalism — the very processes that Sultan Galiev felt could be the resources of hope to challenge Capital and Empire in the east and which were counterposed to the importation of proletarian power from the west.

In many ways it is that search for an indigenous, nationalist socialism and an abandonment of the universalist pretensions of orthodox Marxism (combined with an admiration for despotic bureaucracies) that led in the late twentieth century to the advent of year zero campaigns (specifically the Khmer Rouge) — campaigns which in the name of an authentic, indigenous socialism wished to wipe away any concept of the “west” from the identities and heritages of its people, and often through genocide. Yet it is true that the discursive construction of the east as barbarism was one of the reasons for the collapse of the proletarian programme in large parts of the non-European world — it was opportunistic and had little to offer of substance to actually existing oppressed minorities. Bolshevik discourse, and particularly what was seen as its cosmopolitanism, was perceived not just as unsavoury but as paralleling and supplementing the kinds of orientalist discourse already present in Imperial interventions in the east — specifically that of Britain in India and France in Indochina.

The Bolshevik tactics expressed at the Congress of dividing the Emir and the peasant and using the eastern masses as leverage were suspected of importing secularism and there was a clearer understanding of the contradiction between Islamist and Marxist revolutionary theory which would most clearly manifest itself later in the work of Ali Shariati and Sayyed Qutb. As Chakrabarty has indicated, the reason why traditional cultures persisted into the empire of Capital and were elevated into new social struggles as the primary mode of resistance was not because of some

kind of historical reversion but because it was both effective and meaningful in terms of the social identities of the workers and because classically proletarian forms of struggle were often neither. For Bolshevism after the Congress, the rise of Islamic nationalism and Islamism amongst traditional communities were perceived as a failure to make a workers' revolution much in the same way as fascism would be later perceived by the left opposition as a punishment for failing the revolutionary test in the west in the early 1920s.

But the implications of the Congress are wider than simply an elaboration of its failure. The failure of the Congress itself did lie in the political incompatibility of the party and the non-party elements and the basic dishonesty on both sides about their political programmes and how far they could be brought together. There was the failure on behalf of the Bolsheviks to overcome the orientalist idea of an undifferentiated dark mass of the east, and an unwillingness of the masses of the east to act as the janissaries of a revolution which was not seen as meaningfully theirs.

But over and above this the Congress still creatively resonates because it poses questions that still need answers — about the relationship between multiple and competing social struggles both across vast territories and internally to local communities. About the relationship between the genetics and cultural metrics of race and its implication for class politics in contemporary Europe, Eurasia and Asia —and specifically a Britain where the east is configured as perhaps the central fracture line of class and which was built as a metropolis both by and against the peoples of the east. The east is often the locus by which the west has understood itself and the west has often inscribed itself across the east. This was the unintended and unforeseen consequence of migration and capital development and the fragmentation of identities so central to capital have persisted in their complex historical trajectories. As Sivanandan has noted "Of course, the self is fragmenting, breaking up. But when in Capital's memory was it never so? Capital fragments the self as it fragments society, divides the self as it divides labour."¹¹

The consequence of the expansion of Capital and its labour has been the hybridity and expansion of the whole concept of cultural identity and the destruction of its enclaves, both in psychology and in territory. Jeremy Seabrook has pointed to the possible destinations of that migrant "up-rooted humanity"¹². This is the central problem of the Congress: how can self-definition and self-determination of individuals and communities raise the question of self-destination as a common destination of a universal oppressed humanity? The international question of solidarity is central to this — self-determination and class struggle as weapons against Stalinist despotism and the constant reinventions and crises of global capitalism.

Addressing those questions about cultural identity and class and re-

asserting the centrality of identity and history to the contemporary social struggle for social justice means taking the global aspect of migration and politics seriously. It also means that any attempts to subvert, subdue, opportunistically co-opt, or divert communities for either ethnicism and communalism, or imperial projects perpetuating a notion of themselves as progressive, have to be challenged. The multiple identities of the earth have to be class-fractured and challenged by new forms of sexuality and politics, its enclaves shattered, its fake autonomous republics razed. But politics has to be based on coalitions of struggle and networks of solidarity that pose the centrality of class to race and race to class, reminiscent of but more successful than the resolutions from the Congress in those seven days in Baku in 1920. It is in that dialectic that the liberation of the peoples of the east, wherever they are, might somehow be posed.

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An end to “Apparatus Marxism”

By Sean Matgamna

Watching the accelerating political and moral degeneration of the Stalinised “Communist International” in the mid-1930s, Leon Trotsky entitled one of his commentaries “Is There No End To The Fall?” Had he been forced to observe the contemporary “revolutionary left” during the Balkans war of April-May 1999 he might have addressed the same incredulous and bitter question to a large proportion of those who name themselves “Trotskyists”.

By way of campaigning “against the war”, NATO’s war, and “against imperialism”, that is against the NATO powers only, many “Trotskyists” actively sided with the primitive Serb imperialism of Slobodan Milosevic and tried to whip up an “anti-war movement” in support of those engaged in war to kill or drive out the 90% of the population of Serbia’s colony, Kosova that is Albanian.

Some did this because they had not quite got rid of the idea that the “socialist” Milosevic regime, the most Stalinist of all the successor regimes in the former Stalinist states, was somehow “still” progressive. These ranged from the surviving Stalinist churches and chapels to the New Left Review. Others — the SWP — simply thought that a big anti-war movement on any basis would rouse young people to action and thus help build up the forces of the left. Yet others were one-sided pacifists, or old style Neanderthal anti-Germans. They spent the war re-enacting a foolish parody of the sort of Stalinist antics that over decades destroyed independent working class politics.

The state of the British left at the start of the 21st century is most horribly depicted in its antics and in the arguments it used to build a pro-Milosevic “stop the war” movement in April-June 1999. That is the main subject of the following article: the techniques of political deception and self-deception.

What Is ‘Apparatus Marxism’?- I

“Now it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself

to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. The point is that the process is reversible." George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*

"Borodin... is characterised in the novel as a 'man of action', as a living incarnation of Bolshevism on the soil of China. Nothing is further from the truth! [Borodin was no old Bolshevik]... Borodin, appeared as the consummate representative of that state and party bureaucracy which recognised the revolution only after its victory... People of this type assimilate without difficulty the gestures and intonations of professional revolutionists. Many of them by their protective colouring not only deceive others but also themselves. The audacious inflexibility of the Bolshevik is most usually metamorphosed with them into the cynicism of the functionary ready for anything. Ah! To have a mandate from the Central Committee! This sacrosanct safeguard Borodin always had in his pocket..." Trotsky, discussing André Malraux's novel about the 1925-7 Chinese Revolution, *The Conquerors*.

The Comintern functionary whom Trotsky discusses here, using Andre Malraux's fictionalised Borodin as an example, was a "revolutionary" James Bond figure — a "superman" raised above the organic processes of the labour movement and the working class, and above mundane restraints and moralities. In the service of "the cause" he could say and do anything — so long as his superiors approved. As Stalinism progressed in the Comintern, there was literally nothing such people, and the working-class organisations they controlled and poisoned, would not for an advantage say and do. There was nothing that had been unthinkable to old socialists and communists that they did not in fact do.

They could ally with fascists to break socialist strikes, suppress the proletarian revolution in Spain, become rabid chauvinists for their own countries (so long as that might serve the USSR), turn into anti-semites... Nothing was forbidden to them. Nothing was sacred, and nothing taboo. Any means to an end.

Old agitational and propagandist techniques of manipulation were brought to new levels of perfection by the Stalinist rulers and their agents and allies across the world. Politics, history and, they thought, "History", were freed from the primitive slavery to facts. Politics that were virtually fact-free and virtually truth-free became possible on a mass scale. Great political campaigns could now be lied into existence. To be sure, this was not something unknown before Stalinism; but the Stalinists, beginning with their lies about what the Soviet Union was, made it an all-embracing permanent way of political life.

Truth did not exist, only "class truth", which meant "party truth", which

meant Russian bureaucratic truth... Consistency was a vice of lesser, unemancipated mortals. You could say and do anything. Logic? Anything was logical so long as you got the "context" right and understood the "historical process". It was all a matter of "perspectives". Dialectics, comrade!

At different times Trotsky described this condition as "syphilis" and "leprosy". In the summaries of the proper revolutionary communist approach which he wrote in the 1930s, the demand to "be true, in little things as in big ones" is always central. The fact that such a "demand" had to be made and that it was made only by a tiny pariah minority, as incapable of imposing the necessary norms of behaviour as they were incapable of doing what they knew had to be done to defend the working class, was one measure of how far the "Marxist" movement had fallen, how deeply it had regressed, and how much had to be done to restore its health.

The "revolutionary superman" today is typically a "Trotskyist" builder of "the revolutionary party". One of the things trade union supporters of Workers' Liberty in Britain have to contend with — in the civil service union for example where the "revolutionary" left has had a presence for many years — is that many good trade unionists, honest, rational people, have come to hate the "revolutionary left" as liars, manipulators, people who place themselves outside the norms of reasonable political, moral and intellectual interaction. To a serious degree they do not have a common language with people who do not share their methods and habits of thought, or their special view of themselves and their "party".

II

Trotsky himself commented more than once that the small groups of Trotskyists had sometimes absorbed too much "Comintern venom" into themselves. After Trotsky's death, not at once, but over many years, and not uniformly, organisation to organisation, but more in some "orthodox" Trotskyist organisations than others, a kitsch-Trotskyist political culture developed that replicated much that Trotsky had called leprosy and syphilis in the Comintern.

Its core was the development of the idea of a "revolutionary arty" into a fetish, into something prised loose from both the social and historical context and the political content which gives it its Marxist meaning. For Marxists, the party and the class, though there is an unbreakable link between them, are not the same thing. "The Communists... have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole," as the Communist Manifesto puts it. The programme Leon Trotsky wrote for his movement in 1938 insisted that it was a cardinal rule for Marxists to "be guided", not by the interests of "the party", but "by the logic of the class struggle". And there is at any given moment an objective truth that cannot be dismissed if it is inconvenient to "the party".

In post-Trotsky "kitsch Trotskyism", the tendency over decades is for

“the party” and what is considered to be good for “the party” to become the all-defining supreme good — to become what the USSR was to the Comintern and its Borodins. There are more limits than the Comintern functionaries had, but not too many limits. There are very few things people calling themselves Trotskyists have not done for organisational advantage. Much of the time, for many of the “orthodox” Trotskyist groups, everything — perceptions of reality, “perspectives”, truth, consistency, principle — is up for “construing” and reinterpretation in the light of perceived party interest. Their “Marxism” is “Apparatus Marxism”: it exists to rationalise what the party apparatus thinks it best to do.

Central to this pattern, of course, was the radical falsity of many of the axial ideas of the “orthodox” Trotskyist groups — on the USSR, for example, or on the “world revolution”, of which the USSR’s existence was both manifestation and pledge for its presently on-going “immanent” character; and on the linked idea that capitalism was perennially in a state of imminent 1930s level collapse. The survival and mutation of such ideas — the USSR is “in transition to socialism”, capitalism faces immediate catastrophe — were themselves often shaped by organisational considerations.

Their “Marxist” ideas had become dogmas glaringly at odds with reality; to hold those ideas you needed a special way of construing the world; and thinking about it became a work of special pleading for the fixed dogmas, of rationalising to arrive at conclusions already set and inviolable. If “Marxism” is reduced to such a role, then there is no logical or psychological barrier against “Marxism” being used to rationalise whatever seems to “make sense” for the party on a day to day basis.

The German pre-World War One Social-Democrat, Eduard Bernstein, who proposed to shed the socialist goal of the Marxist labour movement and substitute for it a series of reforms of capitalism, notoriously summed up his viewpoint thus: “The movement is everything, the goal nothing.” The kitsch-Trotskyists in their fetishistic commitment to creating an instrument, the “Revolutionary Party”, that could make the socialist revolution, stumbled into a grim parody of Bernstein’s notorious dictum: the party, short of the socialist revolution itself, is everything; all other things, including the actually existing working class, count for little and often for nothing. An obituary of Tony Cliff, one of the most seemingly successful proponents of the “Party First” approach in WL64-5 discussed this phenomenon.

[Cliff’s] “was a refined, sophisticated variant of the approach developed by such orthodox Trotskyist tendencies as those of Healy and Lambert.

“These two, on the face of it, seem to be very different from Cliff. Not so. Gerry Healy came to dominate British Trotskyism from the late 40s, and Pierre Lambert much of French Trotskyism from about the same period, because in the 1940s and 50s the world posed big political and theoretical problems to the old-style Trotskyists, and most of the political leaders of

the movement collapsed in demoralisation, confusion or perplexity. The Healys and Lamberts came to the fore because they cared about the ideas, and assessed them, only as crude working tools that did or did not help build the organisation. They could propose what to do on the basis of short term calculation without any political or intellectual qualms.

“The Trotskyists in Trotsky’s time had drawn confidence, despite the gap between their tiny numbers and their very large perspectives, from the idea that ‘the programme creates the party’. What might be called the ‘organisation-first’ schools of neo-Trotskyism turned this upside down. For them the old formula came very much to mean: arrange a programme and lesser postures, that will assist the organisation to grow. After he asserted his political independence in the early 60s, Healy’s politics were blatantly cut, and frequently ‘re-cut’, to fit his organisational needs and calculations. So were and are those of the Lambert groupings...

“Not ‘the programme creates the party’ but ‘the needs of the party create and recreate the programme’. Not the unity of theory and practice in the proper sense that theory, which is continually enriched by experience, guides practice, but in the sense — Tony Cliff’s sense — that ‘theory’ is at the service of practice, catering to the organisation’s needs.

“The very literary and ‘theoretical’ Cliff, on one side, and Healy and Lambert on the other, had a common conception of the relationship of theory, principle and politics to the revolutionary organisation...”

III

This approach led to the creation of a special sort of Marxism — “Apparatus Marxism” — the neo-Trotskyist version of which is really, all qualifications granted, a dialect of the old Stalinist Comintern “Marxism”. It is the predominant revolutionary “Marxism”.

Today Marxism has retreated deeper into academia — though there is a lot less even of that than there used to be — or, in a ridiculous parody of what Marxism was to the Stalinist organisations, into the cloistered seclusion of one or other “revolutionary party”, where it exists to grind out rationalisation and apologia to justify the decisions of the “party” apparatus: “Marxism” with its eyes put out, chained to the millwheel — “Apparatus Marxism”.

Apparatus Marxism is a peculiarly rancid species of pseudo-academic “Marxism” from which everything “objective”, disinterested, spontaneous and creative is banished. Creativity is incompatible with the prime function of “Apparatus Marxism”: rationalising. Creativity and, so to speak, spontaneity is the prerogative of the all-shaping, suck-it-and-see empirical citizens who staff the “Party” apparatus. Everything is thereby turned on its head. The history of the “Orthodox Trotskyist”, or Cannonite, organisations is a story shaped by this conception of the relationship of Marxism to “the revolutionary party” — as a handmaiden of the apparatus. So, too,

is the story of the the British SWP. “Party building” calculations determine the “line” and “Marxism” consists in “bending the stick” to justify it.

Lenin rightly argued that revolutionary theory without revolutionary practice is sterile and that revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory is blind. “Apparatus Marxism” is both blind and sterile because it is not and cannot be a guide to practice. It exists to rationalise a practice that is in fact guided by something else — usually, the perceived advantage of the organisation. For Marxists, the unity of theory and practice means that practice is guided by theory, a theory constantly replenished by experience. In “Apparatus Marxism”, the proper relationship of theory to practice and of practice to theory is inverted.

Our predominant Marxist culture is largely made up of the various “Apparatus Marxisms”, protected, as behind high tariff walls, by the “party” regimes they serve. Demurrers or questionings of cloistered certainties are inimical to that culture. This segmented “Marxism” stands in the way of Marxist self-renewal. The kitsch-Trotskyist conception of the “revolutionary party” — which in fact is a conception closer to that of the Stalinists than to either Lenin’s or Trotsky’s conception — makes revolutionary Marxism impossible. It makes the cornerstone of revolutionary Marxism — as distinct from Academic Marxism and its gelded first cousin, “Apparatus Marxism” — the unity of theory and practice, Marxism as a guide to action, an impossibility.

Apparatus Marxism is self-righteous: it serves “the Party”, which for now “is” “the Revolution”, or, so to speak, its “Vicar on Earth”; it has few scruples, and recognises only those aspects of reality that serve its needs. Its progenitor is neither Marx nor Engels nor Lenin, but, ultimately, Stalin.

One reason why it thrives, even among anti-Stalinists, in our conditions, which are unfavourable to serious Marxism, is precisely its simple, uncomplicated, easily graspable logic and rationale. It is the way to “build the party”, “catch the mood”. You don’t need background, study, work; and there aren’t any very difficult or unanswerable questions — just three or four basic ideas and a willingness to listen to the Central Committee, or whomever it is that can “come up with a line” that lets “the party” have something plausible to say. This approach is much simpler and far easier than “full Monty” Marxism, for which reality cannot always be construed to fit what is best for “party-building”. The contemporary kitsch-Trotskyist superhero embodies “Apparatus Marxism”. From his collection of “Trotskyist” formulas, “lines” and rationalisation, he selects what will best advance the organisation — the “Revolutionary Party” which represents socialism — whatever it says or does. The kitsch-Trotskyist superhero has no time for Engels’ comment in a letter to the German socialist Conrad Schmidt:

“The materialist conception of history has a lot of dangerous friends nowadays who use it as an excuse for not studying history. Just as Marx

commenting on the French 'Marxists' of the late [1870s used to say: 'All I know is that I am not a Marxist'...

"In general, the word 'materialist' serves many of the younger writers in Germany as a mere phrase with which anything and everything is labelled without further study, that is, they stick on this label and then consider the question disposed of. But our conception of history is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction after the Hegelian manner. All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different formations must be examined in detail before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-law, aesthetic, philosophic, religious, etc. views corresponding to them...

"You who have really done something, must have noticed yourself how few of the young literary men who attach themselves to the Party take the trouble to study economics, the history of trade, of industry, of agriculture, of the social formations... The self-conceit of the journalist must therefore accomplish everything and the result looks like it..." — the self-conceit of the "party-building" "Apparatus Marxist".

From *Workers' Liberty* Vol 2/1 September 2001.