

Resistance Marxist Library

**‘Left-Wing’
Communism:
An Infantile
Disorder**

V. I. Lenin

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Introduction

By Doug Lorimer

I. A popular exposition of Bolshevik strategy & tactics

This work was written by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in April 1920 and published in booklet form in Russian in June 1920, and in English, French and German the following month. The manuscript of the booklet was entitled: “An Attempt to Conduct a Popular Discussion on Marxist Strategy and Tactics”. Copies of it were given to each delegate attending the 2nd Congress of the Communist International held in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) and Moscow between July 19 and August 7, 1920.

In the opening paragraphs of the booklet, Lenin wrote that “it might have seemed that the enormous difference between backward Russia and the advanced countries of Western Europe would lead to the proletarian revolution in the latter countries bearing very little resemblance to ours”. However, the experience of the West European workers’ movement in the two years after the Russian proletariat had won political power on November 7, 1917 (October 25 in the prerevolutionary Russian calendar) had shown, “very definitely that certain fundamental features of our revolution have a significance that is not local, or peculiarly national, or Russian alone, but international”. While there would inevitably be concrete differences, and:

It would also be erroneous to lose sight of the fact that, soon after the victory of the proletarian revolution in at least one of the advanced countries, a sharp change will probably come about: Russia will cease to be the model and will once again become a backward country (in the “soviet” and the socialist sense).

At the present moment in history, however, it is the Russian model that reveals to *all* countries something — and something highly significant — of their near and inevitable future. Advanced workers in all lands have long realised this; more than not, they have grasped it.

Lenin went on to point out that the politically advanced workers in other countries had realised “that the Bolsheviks could not have retained power for two and a half months,

Doug Lorimer was a longtime leader of the Democratic Socialist Party.

let alone two and a half years, without the most rigorous and truly iron discipline in our party, or without the fullest and unreserved support from the entire mass of the working class, that is, from all thinking, honest, devoted and influential elements within it, capable of leading the backward strata or carrying the latter along with them". But many foreign communists, particularly in Western Europe, had little idea *how* the Bolsheviks had built up a centralised, disciplined party of the working-class vanguard and had won the support of the big majority of Russian workers.

"As a current of political thought and as a political party", Lenin wrote, "Bolshevism has existed since 1903. Only the history of Bolshevism during the *entire* period of its existence can satisfactorily explain why it has been able to build up and maintain, under the most difficult conditions, the iron discipline needed for the victory of the proletariat". "*Left-Wing*" *Communism — An Infantile Disorder* was aimed at providing foreign communists with a summary of the Bolsheviks' strategy and tactics and, in the process, countering the views of ultraleft-sectarian currents that were developing in the communist movement at the time, particularly in Germany, Britain and the Netherlands.

II. The origin & development of Bolshevism

Bolshevism had originated out of an ideological struggle within the ranks of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1899-1902 between the adherents of revolutionary Marxism, who were grouped around the journal *Iskra* (the Spark) and an opportunist current known as "Economism", which argued that Russian socialists should confine their activities to helping to promote the spontaneous struggles of the mass of workers — which at that time were limited to struggles over economic conditions — and leave the leadership of the political struggle for democracy in tsarist Russia to the liberal bourgeois opposition.

At the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP, held in London in August 1903, the *Iskrist*s split, with the majority, led by Lenin, supporting the principles and tactics of the old *Iskra*, and the minority, led by Julius Martov, joining forces with the Economists, led by Aleksandr Martynov. Hence the names Bolsheviks and Mensheviks (from the Russian words for majority and minority) arose.

At the end of the congress, the majority elected a new editorial board for *Iskra* (which it was agreed would be the official organ of the party), consisting of Martov, Lenin and Georgy Plekhanov (the acknowledged founder of the Russian Marxist movement and at that time a supporter of the majority). This replaced the previously self-appointed editorial group of Pavel Akselrod, Lenin, Martov, Plekhanov, Aleksandr Potresov and Vera Zasulich. However, Martov boycotted the new editorial board and

pressured Plekhanov into agreeing to defy the congress decision by readmitting the other three back onto the editorial board. When a number of adherents of the Bolsheviks on the party's Central Committee defected to the Mensheviks and refused to condemn Plekhanov and Martov's defiance of the congress decision, Lenin resigned from the editorial board of *Iskra* and set up a new paper, *Vperyod* (Forward), which became the organ of a Bolshevik faction.

In 1904 the dispute between the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions was mainly over organisational questions, over whether the leading bodies of the RSDLP should function in accordance with the rules adopted by the 2nd party congress, or whether these should operate as self-selected cliques, on the basis of personal friendships.

The differences between the two trends took final shape in 1905 with the Mensheviks arguing for socialists to ally themselves with the liberal bourgeoisie and to limit the workers' revolutionary movement to placing the liberals in power. The Bolsheviks, by contrast, argued that the liberal bourgeoisie would betray the democratic interests of the people. The Russian working class, in their view, should seek to win the leadership of the peasant masses to carry the anti-tsarist, anti-landlord democratic revolution through to a revolutionary seizure of power by the working class and the peasantry. Such a victory would open the road to an alliance between the workers and the semi-proletarian section of the peasantry to carry out the socialist revolution against capitalism.

The main practical divergence between the two trends in 1905 was over the fact that the Bolsheviks stood for a boycott by the working class of the sham, advisory parliament (Duma) conceded by the tsarist regime in an effort to defuse the mass revolutionary-democratic movement that had erupted in 1905, while the Mensheviks favoured participation in the elections for this assembly.

In the years of reaction after the 1905-06 revolutionary upsurge, the differences between the factions deepened, with the Mensheviks favouring electoral alliances with the liberal bourgeois Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets) while the Bolsheviks favoured electoral alliances with the peasant-based, petty-bourgeois revolutionary-democratic Trudoviks and the Socialist-Revolutionary Party.

The Bolsheviks also suffered a split of their own when a minority within their ranks advocated abstention from participation in elections to the limited parliament conceded by the tsarist regime.

In 1912, following the decision of the majority of Mensheviks to confine themselves to activities that were legally sanctioned by the tsarist regime (which banned the existence of any workers' organisations that engaged in political activity), the Bolsheviks constituted themselves as a separate party, taking the name Russian Social-Democratic

Labour Party exclusively for themselves.

In April 1917, when Lenin returned from exile to Russia, he proposed that the Bolsheviks rename themselves the Communist Party, reviving the name used by the first Marxist organisation, the Communist League of 1847-52. The name "Social-Democrat", which had been adopted by Marxists in most European countries in the 1880s and 1890s, Lenin argued, had been discredited by the betrayal during World War I by the leaders of the Second International (founded in Paris in 1889) of the revolutionary class-struggle principles of Marxism in favour of opportunist, class-collaborationist policies (supporting the imperialist war aims of the governments of their countries, participation in bourgeois cabinets).

At its 7th congress in March 1918, the new name Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) was adopted. A year later, in March 1919, the Russian Communists took the initiative to launch a new international association of Marxist parties, the Third, or Communist, International (also known as the Comintern).

III. Parliamentary democracy & the proletarian revolution

The founding congress of the Comintern adopted documents that noted that the imperialist world war (1914-18) had confirmed that the capitalist social order had become a fetter on the development of human culture and a new epoch had begun, marked by a general crisis between capitalist relations of production and objectively socialised productive forces, which could only be overcome through proletarian-socialist revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries.

In this context, the reformist orientation of the opportunist leaders of the social-democratic parties and the trade unions played a counterrevolutionary role by seeking to aid the capitalist rulers restabilise their system and to suppress the developing potentially revolutionary movements of the workers against the economic chaos created by the war. To counter the influence of the opportunist labour leaders, a sharp ideological, political and organisational distinction had to be drawn between the revolutionary and reformist currents in the working-class movement, by forging new working-class parties on the basis of a clear revolutionary program.

The main danger confronting such a perspective was the confusion and disorientation introduced among revolutionary-minded workers by those currents that espoused support for proletarian revolutions but refused to break from the reformist practices of the old social-democratic parties. These "centrist" currents, the Bolsheviks warned, could be expected at critical moments in the class struggle to make treacherous compromises with the avowed reformists, as they had done in Germany in January-February 1919 when the centrist Independent Social-Democratic Party

(USPD) led by Karl Kautsky had supported the use by the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) government of Friedrich Ebert, Philip Scheidemann and Gustav Noske of army units commanded by reactionary officers to crush a general strike by the workers of Berlin, massacring an estimated 3000 workers, including the leaders of the new founded Communist Party of Germany, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Already in December 1918, Kautsky had given advance justification for the USPD's treachery when he declared in its paper *Die Freiheit* that: "Law and order are preconditions to accomplishing socialism and the social revolution."¹

Both the reformists and the centrists were seeking to politically confuse the working-class vanguard by counterposing the defence of "democracy in general" (which they identified with the bourgeois parliamentary system of representation based on universal suffrage by atomised voters) against "dictatorship in general" (under which they included both the old autocratic regimes of prewar Europe and the revolutionary proletarian state power of the elected councils of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates in Soviet Russia). In doing so, they obscured the fact that all forms of state power — including the parliamentary form — were *class* dictatorships, i.e., were based upon the naked use of armed force, unrestricted by any laws, by one class (or a temporary alliance of classes) to suppress the resistance to its rule by other classes. Whenever the capitalists felt their rule was threatened by a powerful movement of resistance by the working-class majority, they would abandon the charade of parliamentary elections and the formal equalities of their legal system and rely directly upon military-police repression to crush such resistance.

Parliamentary democracy, the founding congress of the Comintern explained in a resolution on "Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat", was a sham democracy which excluded the working-class majority from any real say in the exercise of state power. It reaffirmed "the idea formulated with the greatest scientific precision by Marx and Engels, namely, that the most democratic bourgeois republic is no more than a machine for the suppression of the working class by the bourgeoisie, for the suppression of the working people by a handful of capitalists"² and that, if the working-class was to conquer political power, it would have to destroy this state machine, including its parliamentary system.

The proletarian dictatorship, it stated, "is similar to the dictatorship of other classes in that it arises out of the need, as every dictatorship does, to forcibly suppress the resistance of the class that is losing its political sway", adding:

The fundamental distinction between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of other classes — landlord dictatorship in the Middle Ages and bourgeois dictatorship in all the civilised capitalist countries — consists in the fact that the

dictatorship of the landowners and bourgeoisie was the forcible suppression of the resistance offered by the vast majority of the population, namely, the working people. In contrast, proletarian dictatorship is the forcible suppression of the resistance of the exploiters, i.e., an insignificant minority of the population, the landowners and capitalists.

It follows that a proletarian dictatorship must inevitably entail not only a change in democratic forms and institutions, general speaking, but precisely such a change as provides an unparalleled extension of the actual enjoyment of democracy by those oppressed by capitalism — the toiling classes.³

The Comintern resolution argued that Marxists should fight to replace the parliamentary system, which excluded the working people from real participation in the exercise of state power and placed this power in the hands of a military-bureaucratic machine made up of unelected, privileged officials tied to the propertied classes, with soviet-type organs of state power, the substance of which was that the “permanent and only foundation of state power ... is the mass-scale organisation of the classes oppressed by capitalism, the workers and the semi-proletarians (peasants who do not exploit the labour of others and regularly resort to the sale of at least a part of their own labour-power)”.⁴

Already, at the time of the founding congress of the Comintern, soviet-type councils of workers' and soldiers' delegates had arisen in Germany during the mass revolt in November 1918 against continuation of the imperialist war. The crucial task of Marxists was to weld the working-class vanguard, the politically advanced workers, into a Bolshevik-type party to win over and lead the working-class majority to take all political power into the hands of these soviet-type bodies and destroy the bourgeois state machine that the reformists and centrists were defending and using to resist the victory of the proletarian revolution.

Within the ranks of those who supported such a perspective, the biggest problem was their inexperience and impatience. This had already led to one costly defeat — in Berlin in January-February 1919 — when the newly founded Communist Party of Germany (KPD) had been drawn into leading a poorly organised attempt at an insurrectionary seizure of power by the militant sections of the Berlin working class.

IV. The German Revolution & the German communists

On October 30, 1918, a spontaneous revolutionary movement, similar to that in Russia in February 1917, had broken out in war-exhausted Germany. Sailors in the German North Sea fleet mutinied and by November 8 the revolt had spread across Germany, with armed workers and soldiers forming elected councils of delegates along similar lines to the Russian soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies, which took *de facto*

control in all the major cities. The following day, Imperial Chancellor Max von Baden announced that Kaiser Wilhelm II had abdicated and appointed as chancellor (prime minister) Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the avowedly pro-war, reformist Social-Democratic Party (SPD).

On November 10 the leaders of the SPD and the centrist Independent Social-Democratic Party (USPD), led by Karl Kautsky, agreed to form a six-member cabinet, which they named the “Council of People’s Representatives” in imitation of the Russian “Council of People’s Commissars”, the name of the cabinet elected by the 2nd Congress of Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies on the day after the Bolshevik insurrection on November 7, 1917. However, the German Council of People’s Representatives, while nominally acknowledging that it was controlled by the USPD dominated Executive Committee elected by the Berlin Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council, acted to preserve the old state machine and the wartime coalition that the SPD had established with the right-wing bourgeois parties. The High Command of the Imperial German Army agreed to acknowledge the authority of the new “socialist” government, while the Ebert government confirmed the authority of the military commanders of the old regime.

The German working people thus confronted the same alternative paths that the Russian workers and peasants had faced in 1917: either to advance toward a proletarian democracy by transferring all power to the armed workers and soldiers and their elected councils, or to suffer a bloody defeat at the hands of reactionary army officers operating under the cover of a bourgeois parliamentary republic headed by sham socialists.

The revolutionary Marxists in Germany, however, were in no position — as the Bolsheviks had been at the beginning of 1917 in Russia — to provide an effective, disciplined alternative revolutionary leadership to the reformists and centrists. Falsely believing that the opportunist leaders of the SPD would be simply swept aside by a spontaneous revolutionary movement of the masses, Rosa Luxemburg and her allies in the revolutionary left-wing of the SPD had failed to build a coherent, centralised organisation of tested Marxist cadres in the years before World War I. They had confined themselves to a purely ideological battle against the reformists and centrists within the SPD. Consequently, when a split occurred in the SPD in January 1917, the centrists were able to take the majority of the rapidly radicalising working-class base of the SPD with them into the USPD, and the revolutionary Marxists, who were known as the Internationale Group, were forced to work as an informally organised public faction within the USPD.

On November 11, 1918, in the midst of the revolutionary uprising of the armed

workers and soldiers against the imperial authorities, the Internationale Group finally constituted itself as a distinct membership organisation and changed its name to the Spartacus League. However, it had only 50 adherents in Berlin. Despite this numerical weakness, the reputation of its leaders — Luxemburg and Liebknecht — enabled the Spartacists to call sizable mobilisations. Thus on December 8, 1918, they called a demonstration to demand that the Ebert government be ousted, all officers be disarmed, a workers' militia be formed and the workers' and soldiers' councils take all power into their hands. The demonstration was attended by 150,000 armed workers and soldiers. This result, however, reinforced the Spartacists' illusions that the revolutionary seizure of power could be achieved by a semi-spontaneous movement through a general strike and mass demonstrations, rather than by a centralised, disciplined armed insurrection consciously supported by the majority of working people headed by a well-trusted party of professionally trained propagandists, agitators and organisers.

It was not until December 29 that the Spartacus League convened a national conference of its supporters and decided to leave the USPD and constitute itself as a new, separate party — the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). During the course of the conference the Spartacists fused with a number of other revolutionary groups, giving the new party a membership of several thousands throughout Germany. But this was a party that lacked political homogeneity and a battle-tested cadre.

Since December 8 the Spartacists had repeatedly made the call, "Down with the government". According to Spartacist leader Klara Zetkin, Luxemburg saw this call as a "propaganda slogan to rally the revolutionary proletariat rather than a tangible object of revolutionary action".⁵ However, large numbers of revolutionary-minded workers interpreted it as an immediate call for an armed uprising, as did the majority of the new members of the KPD. As the Bolshevik representative at the congress, Karl Radek, observed in a report he sent back to Moscow: "The youth in the congress were ready to storm the heavens. They thought that Karl [Liebknecht] and Rosa [Luxemburg] were applying brakes to the movement, and that victory was very close at hand ... Yet the immaturity and inexperience of the German party were shown very clearly there. Its ties to the masses were very weak."⁶

The most controversial question at the KPD's founding congress was over what orientation the party should have to the elections for a constituent (national) assembly called by the Ebert government for January 19, 1919. Previously, Luxemburg had been in favour of calling for a boycott of these parliamentary elections, but once the national congress of workers and soldiers' councils (held December 16-21) had voted overwhelmingly to back them, she argued that the revolutionists should drop their call

for a boycott. Instead, she argued that the KPD had to use the “platform provided by this counterrevolutionary parliament, the election campaign” to “educate, unite, and mobilise the revolutionary masses” to “establish a proletarian dictatorship”.⁷ However, as Radek observed, Liebknecht wavered on the issue and most of the new party members were against participation in the elections:

Liebknecht said: “When I wake up in the morning, I am against taking part in the constituent assembly elections, but by evening I am in favour of it” ... But the party youth were decidedly against it. “We will break it up with machine guns.”⁸

The national assembly elections were held on schedule on January 19, with 85% of the electorate voting — a higher turnout than in prewar national elections. The SPD gained 37.8% of the vote, the USPD gained only 7.8%, with the majority of votes going to right-wing bourgeois parties. This experience did not resolve the differences within the KPD.

At its next congress in October 1919, after the revolutionary movement had ebbed following the severe blow it had suffered in January-February 1919, by a narrow majority the position of boycotting parliamentary elections was rejected. Half of the party’s membership, including all but a few dozen in Berlin, left the KPD and in April 1920 formed a rival organisation, the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD), which affirmed non-participation in parliamentary elections on principle. The KAPD also reaffirmed the KPD founding congress’s position of refusal to work in the existing SPD-led trade unions.

The ultraleft-sectarian positions adopted by the KPD’s founding congress, and enshrined as principles by the KAPD, were held in other newly-formed parties adhering to the Comintern. They were subsequently taken up in Lenin’s booklet and debated at the 2nd Comintern congress, which adopted a resolution presenting the revolutionary Marxist approach to parliament and parliamentary elections (see addendum 1).

V. Marxism & the working-class vanguard

In his polemic against the “left” communists, Lenin located their doctrinaire-sectarian errors in a failure to understand the difference between the methods required to win to the communist movement the class-conscious section of the working class — the “proletariat’s vanguard” — and the methods required to educate, organise and mobilise for the proletarian revolution the broad masses of the working people. In doing so, he sought to convey the lessons of the Bolsheviks’ experience in Russia.

This distinction had been fundamental to Lenin’s whole perspective for building a revolutionary Marxist party in Russia, and had been first articulated in his debate with the opportunist Economist trend that had come to dominate the adherents of the

Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in the late 1890s.

In an article written in 1899 — “A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy” — Lenin explained the origins of the Economist deviation as arising out the turn toward mass agitation after 1894 by the Russian Marxist study circles (which consisted largely of intellectuals and students drawn from aristocratic and bourgeois social backgrounds):

... the spread of their agitation brought the Social-Democrats into contact with the lower, less developed strata of the proletariat; to attract these strata it was necessary for the agitator to be able to adapt himself to the lowest level of understanding, he was taught to put the “demands and interests of the given moment” in the foreground and to push back the broad ideals of socialism and the political struggle [for democracy]. The fragmentary, amateur nature of Social-Democratic work, the extremely weak connections between the study circles in the different cities, between the Russian Social-Democrats and their comrades abroad who possessed a profounder knowledge and a richer revolutionary experience, as well as a wider political horizon, naturally led to a gross exaggeration of this (*absolutely essential*) aspect of Social-Democratic activity, which could bring some individuals to lose sight of the other aspects, especially since with every reverse [i.e., arrests by the tsarist secret police — DL] the most developed workers and intellectuals were wrenched from the ranks of the struggling army, so that sound revolutionary traditions and continuity could not as yet be evolved. It is in this extreme exaggeration of one aspect of Social-Democratic work that we see the chief cause of the sad retreat from the ideals of Russian Social-Democracy [i.e., the Economist deviation — DL].⁹

The Economist trend exaggerated agitation around and involvement in the spontaneous concerns and struggles of the broad mass of workers — which, at that time, were limited to economic struggles with individual employers for immediate improvements of wages and working conditions — into a party-building theory. Their initial position was set out in a manifesto, the *Credo Program* of 1899, which stated:

For the Russian Marxist there is only one course: participation in, that is, assistance to, the economic struggle of the proletariat, and participation in liberal opposition activity.¹⁰

The Economists argued that the Marxists should push forward the workers' spontaneous economic struggles and only engage in the political struggle against the autocratic government by supporting the liberal bourgeois intelligentsia's legal opposition activities. Later, when the broad mass of workers began to spontaneously raise demands for the tsarist government to adopt labour legislation, the Economist trend, continuing its opportunistic course of tail-ending the spontaneous working-class movement, declared that the role of the Marxists was to “lend the economic

struggle a political character”.

In opposition to the Economist trend, Lenin argued in the journal *Iskra* and in his 1902 booklet *What Is To Be Done?* that the economic struggle *already* had a political character, the character of trade union politics (i.e., *reformist-bourgeois* politics), and that the task of Marxists was to bring *revolutionary proletarian* politics into the economic struggle and every other form of mass struggle.

Lenin’s general point was that these Economist positions were rooted in an underestimation of the role of the ideological (conscious) element in building the socialist movement. Inevitably, they minimised the importance of proletarian ideology, of revolutionary-socialist theory, while Lenin emphasised that “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement”.¹¹

Downplaying revolutionary theory inevitably meant adopting a position that the spontaneous workers’ movement could, by itself, develop a proletarian class-consciousness. Consequently, the socialists should, according to the Economists, merely assist the workers’ struggles in their spontaneous development. Lenin dubbed this position “tailist” and insisted that the task of Marxists was to bring revolutionary class-consciousness to the working-class movement “from without”, to “divert” that movement from its “spontaneous trade unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie”.¹² All efforts to belittle this task, to narrow the activities of Marxists to simply generalising the spontaneous struggles of the workers, amounted, according to Lenin, to a surrender of socialism to bourgeois ideology.

Lenin pointed out that, historically, socialist theory was not developed by workers, but by aristocratic and bourgeois intellectuals in the 16th, 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries:

At first socialism and the working-class movement existed separately in all European countries. The workers struggled against capitalism, they organised strikes and unions, while the socialists stood aside from the working-class movement, formulating doctrines criticising the contemporary capitalist bourgeois system of society and demanding its replacement by another system, the higher socialist system. The separation of the working-class movement and socialism gave rise to weakness and underdevelopment in each: the theories of the socialists, unfused with the workers’ struggle, remained nothing more than utopias, good wishes that had no effect on real life; the working-class movement remained petty, fragmented, and did not acquire political significance, it was not enlightened by the advanced science of its time. For this reason we see in all European countries a constantly growing urge to *fuse* socialism with the working-class movement ... When this fusion takes place the class struggle of the workers becomes *the conscious struggle of the proletariat* to emancipate itself from exploitation by the

propertied classes, it is evolved into a higher form of the socialist workers' movement — the *independent working-class [Marxist] party*. By directing socialism towards a fusion with the working-class movement, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels did their greatest service: they created a revolutionary theory that explained the necessity for this fusion and gave socialists the task of organising the class struggle of the proletariat.¹³

Pre-Marxist socialism (utopian socialism) had inevitably remained mere dreams because it did not understand that socialism as a material reality could only be the result of the successful fusion of socialist theory with the working-class movement, a fusion that would culminate in the revolutionary victory of the working class over the capitalist exploiters. The development of scientific socialism (Marxism) pointed out the real historical relationship between socialist theory and the working-class movement. The development of scientific socialism was, in this sense, the first step and indispensable precondition for the fusion of socialist theory and the working-class movement, a fusion embodied in the Marxist vanguard party.

But how was this “fusion” to be accomplished? Did this mean that the Marxist intellectuals should seek to build such a party by orienting in an undifferentiated way to the entire mass of the working class? That was precisely the course of action followed by the Economists. By contrast, Lenin argued that the Marxist intellectuals had to understand that the working class was not a homogeneous undifferentiated mass, but was stratified in its conditions of life and therefore in its potential to be won to Marxist revolutionary politics:

The history of the working-class movement in all countries shows that the better-situated strata of the working class respond to the ideas of socialism more rapidly and more easily. From among these come, in the main, the advanced workers that every working-class movement brings to the fore, those who can win the confidence of the labouring masses, who devote themselves entirely to the education and organisation of the proletariat, who accept socialism consciously, and who even elaborate independent socialist theories. Every viable working-class movement has brought to the fore such working-class leaders, its own Proudhons, Valliants, Weitlings and Bebel's ... who, despite their wretched living conditions, despite the stultifying penal servitude of factory labour, possess so much character and willpower that they study, study, study, and turn themselves into conscious Social-Democrats [i.e., socialists] — “the working-class intelligentsia” ...

After the numerically small stratum of advanced workers comes the broad stratum of average workers. These workers, too, strive ardently for socialism, participate in workers' study circles, read socialist newspapers and books, participate in agitation, and differ from the preceding stratum only in that they cannot become fully independent

leaders of the [socialist] workers' movement ... Such workers, [are] absorbed by *local* practical work and [are] interested mainly in the events of the working-class movement and the immediate problems of agitation ...

Lastly, behind the stratum of average workers comes the mass that constitutes the lower strata of the proletariat. It is quite possible that a socialist newspaper will be completely or well-nigh incomprehensible to them ...¹⁴

Lenin's approach was devoid of romanticism about workers' political understanding (for Lenin, the mass of workers will not even be able understand a socialist newspaper!) or demagogy about the need for socialists to become "just like workers" before they could carry out socialist political work in the working-class movement. Nor did he adopt the "opinion poll" approach of bourgeois sociology to distinguish these three strata within the working class, i.e., determining the average political consciousness of the working class at any given time, and then defining the "advanced workers" as those who have a higher-than-average consciousness and the backward workers as those with a lower-than-average one.

Instead, Lenin's approach was a strictly materialist, i.e., scientific, one. He defined the advanced workers relative to a stable criterion (socialist theory), and not relative to a variable criterion (to the average level of consciousness at any given time in any given country). Lenin insisted upon this frame of reference for all countries at all times, as he indicated by writing about "the advanced workers that *every working-class movement* brings to the fore".

Further, by including as examples of such advanced workers Pierre Proudhon, Eugene Valliant, and Wilhelm Weitling — none of whom were Marxian socialists — Lenin made it clear that by "accept socialism consciously" he did not mean only those workers were "advanced" who accepted Marxian socialism (scientific revolutionary socialism) as their theoretical guide.

Lenin's concern was how to fuse those who understood Marxist revolutionary theory with the practical working-class movement. He therefore singled out for special attention those workers who could play an *advanced role* in this process. To play this role, workers had to have a particular relation to socialist theory; they must, in Lenin's words, "accept socialism consciously". It is precisely these workers that the Marxists had to orient themselves toward, since it was through these workers that Marxist ideas could be carried into the spontaneous working-class movement and this movement won to a revolutionary-socialist perspective. As he explained:

In no political or social movement, in no country has there ever been, or could there ever have been, any other relation between the mass of the given class or people and its numerically few educated representatives than the following: everywhere and at all

times the leaders of a certain class have always been its advanced, most cultivated representatives.¹⁵

Lenin did not ignore the fact that a given workers' movement might have very few advanced workers in a particular period, or that other, different, levels of consciousness in the working class should be ignored by Marxists. He pointed out that socialist work directed toward the lower, less developed strata of the proletariat was "*absolutely essential*", but required "different forms of agitation and propaganda" from those required to win the advanced strata — "pamphlets written in more popular language, oral agitation, and chiefly — leaflets on local events".¹⁶

But while Lenin didn't reduce socialist activity solely to a focus on the advanced workers, he did argue that to *fuse socialism with the working-class movement*, i.e., to build a socialist workers' party, Marxists had to devote special attention to the more advanced strata. In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin wrote:

... our very first and most pressing duty is to help train working-class revolutionaries who will be on the same level *in regard to Party activity* as the revolutionaries from amongst the intellectuals ... Attention, therefore must be devoted *principally* to raising the workers to the level of revolutionaries; it is not at all our task *to descend* to the level of the "working masses" as the Economists wish to do, or to the level of the "average worker", as *Svoboda* desires to do.¹⁷

Lenin's perspective was to build a Marxist vanguard party of professional revolutionaries, an organisation of the "advanced" workers who had been won to the Marxist program for achieving socialism and were trained in such an organisation to be professional revolutionary propagandists, agitators and organisers. Only with such a party could Marxists educate, organise and mobilise the broad masses of the working people — the lower, backward strata — for the proletarian revolution.

But carrying out the latter task required different methods from those needed to win over the working-class vanguard. This was what the "left" communists in Western Europe in 1920 failed to grasp.

VI. Winning over the vanguard & winning over the masses

By contrast with his polemics against the Economist deviation in Russia, where he emphasised the methods needed to win over the working-class vanguard, in his 1920 polemic against the "left" communists Lenin emphasised the methods needed to mobilise the broad masses for the struggle for power:

As long as it was (and inasmuch as it still is) a question of winning the proletariat's vanguard over to the side of communism, priority went and still goes to propaganda work ... But when it is a question of practical action by the masses, of the disposition

if one may so put it, of vast armies, of the alignment of *all* the class forces in a given society for *the final and decisive battle*, then propaganda methods alone, the mere repetition of the truths of “pure” communism are of no avail. In these circumstances, one must not count in thousands, like the propagandist belonging to a small group that has not yet given leadership to the masses; in these circumstances one must count in millions and tens of millions ...

... even the finest vanguards express the class-consciousness, will, passion, and imagination of tens of thousands, whereas in moments of great upsurge and the exertion of all human capacities, revolutions are made by the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes.

Lenin presented the issue in such starkly counterposed terms because he believed that, at least in Germany, the Communists, who now numbered in their ranks some 50,000 workers, had won over, or would very soon win over, the working-class vanguard and that a revolutionary victory was still possible in the very near future if the German Communists could find the correct approach to the revolutionary education of the broad masses of working people. It was only later, in 1921, that economic and political developments showed that the postwar revolutionary situation had ebbed in Germany, and that the Communists had to pursue a combination of tactics aimed at winning over both the bulk of the class-conscious section of the workers, who remained under the political influence of the reformist Social-Democrats, and extending their influence among the politically backward masses.

Nevertheless, the general political points Lenin made in his April 1920 polemic against the “left” communists had relevance for both situations. Indeed, he observed that:

It is not difficult to be a revolutionary when revolution has already broken out and is in spate, when all people are joining the revolution just because they are carried away, because it is the vogue, and sometimes even from careerist motives. After its victory, the proletariat has to make most strenuous efforts, even the most painful, so as to “liberate” itself from such pseudo-revolutionaries. It is far more difficult — and far more precious — to be a revolutionary when the conditions for direct, open, really mass and really revolutionary struggle *do not exist*, to be able to champion the interests of the revolution (by propaganda, agitation and organisation) in non-revolutionary bodies, and quite often in downright reactionary bodies, in a non-revolutionary situation, among the masses who are incapable of immediately appreciating the need for revolutionary methods of action. To be able to seek, find and correctly determine the specific path or the particular turn of events that will *lead* to the real, decisive and

final revolutionary struggle — such is the main objective of communism in Western Europe and in America today.

To do this the communists had to avoid artificially cutting themselves off (out of a desire to maintain the “purity” of their revolutionary doctrine or of a fear of opportunist errors) from the non-revolutionary-minded masses through a doctrinaire refusal to conduct revolutionary political work in “non-revolutionary bodies, and quite often in downright reactionary bodies” such as the reformist-dominated trade unions or bourgeois parliaments.

In contrast to the working-class vanguard who can be won to revolutionary Marxism largely through propaganda work (i.e., through ideological argument and theoretical explanations based upon the history of the working-class movement), Lenin explained that the backward masses could only be won to support a proletarian revolution through revolutionary propaganda based upon the direct political experience of the masses:

The proletarian vanguard has been won over ideologically. That is the main thing. Without this, not even the first step towards victory can be made. But that is still quite a long way from victory. Victory cannot be won with a vanguard alone. To throw only the vanguard into the decisive battle, before the entire class, the broad masses, have taken up a position either of direct support for the vanguard, or at least of sympathetic neutrality towards it and of precluded support for the enemy, would be not merely foolish but criminal. Propaganda and agitation alone are not enough for an entire class, the broad masses of the working people, those oppressed by capital, to take up such a stand. For that, the masses must have their own political experience. Such is the fundamental law of all great revolutions, which has been confirmed with compelling force and vividness, not only in Russia but in Germany as well. To turn resolutely towards communism, it was necessary, not only for the ignorant and often illiterate masses of Russia, but also for the literate and well-educated masses of Germany, to realise from their own bitter experience the absolute impotence and spinelessness, the absolute helplessness and servility to the bourgeoisie, and the utter vileness of the government of the paladins of the Second International.

VII. Mass action & tactical compromises

It is a general law of history that only through collective experiences of struggle, of action, can broad masses begin to free themselves from the domination of ruling class ideology and become receptive to revolutionary ideas. In normal times, ruling class ideology dominates the consciousness of the masses not simply because the rulers have control over the means of ideological production (the church, the schools, the

mass media, etc.), but also because of the normal conditions of life of the labouring classes. In daily life, the masses are fatigued and brutalised through exploitation and the alienation of labour, as well as through a lack of genuine leisure time.

Even when they sympathise with the idea of socialism, as broad masses have in many countries — sympathies reflected in electoral support for parties which proclaim their allegiance to socialism — this does not mean that they are imbued with a revolutionary consciousness. The normal conditions of life of the broad masses, in which they are the passive victims of exploitation and oppression, tend to imbue them with the idea that revolt is impossible and useless, that their enemies are simply too powerful to be defeated.

But in the heat of great mass mobilisations, of collective actions, these feelings of inferiority and powerlessness can suddenly disappear. The masses become conscious of their immense potential power as soon as they act together, collectively and in solidarity. That, of course, is why revolutionary Marxists attach extreme importance to collective action by the oppressed, to building mass actions. It is through mass actions that the oppressed begin to break with the obedient and servile behaviour which has been inculcated into them from birth.

Furthermore, without large-scale mobilisations — strikes, rallies, street demonstrations, etc. — the masses cannot effectively resist attacks by the capitalists and their governments on their living standards and democratic rights. The demoralisation and loss of confidence in their own strength that would follow from passive acceptance of such attacks would be highly damaging to the development of revolutionary consciousness among the masses and their vanguard elements. Thus, organising united action by the working class as a whole or whatever section of it can presently be won to struggle against the attacks of the capitalist rulers is an objective necessity that faces the party as a prerequisite for its future growth.

The revolutionary Marxist party invariably begins as, and in normal times can count in its ranks and among its followers, only a minority of the working class and the oppressed in general, sometimes a numerically insignificant minority in relation to the population as a whole. The majority of the working class and its potential allies — the students, the urban middle classes, the peasantry in those countries where it remains a significant section of the population — do not agree with the party's program and are not prepared to follow its call to action. They are under the influence of pro-capitalist leaderships who fear the potential radicalising effect of mass mobilisations and therefore have no desire to organise mass struggles.

How then can the Marxist vanguard party draw broad masses into collective action, into mass anticapitalist struggles? Lenin explained in his 1920 polemic with the “left”

communists that this would invariably require the Marxist party to make tactical compromises with the leaders of the bourgeois-reformist parties that the masses still looked to for political leadership:

Capitalism would not be capitalism if the proletariat were not surrounded by a large number of exceedingly motley types intermediate between the proletarian and the semi-proletarian (who earns his livelihood in part by the sale of his labour-power), between the semi-proletarian and the small peasant (and petty artisan, handicraft worker and small master in general), between the small peasant and the middle peasant, and so on, and if the proletariat itself were not divided into more developed and less developed strata, if it were not divided according to territorial origin, trade, sometimes according to religion, and so on. From all this follows the necessity, the absolute necessity, for the Communist Party, the vanguard of the proletariat, its class-conscious section, to resort to changes of tack, to conciliation and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small masters. It is entirely a matter of *knowing how* to apply these tactics in order to *raise* — not lower — the *general* level of proletarian class-consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to fight and win.

He reinforced this point by explaining that the Bolsheviks had repeatedly made tactical compromises for limited aims with liberal bourgeois and petty-bourgeois reformist political groups:

Incidentally, it should be noted that the Bolsheviks' victory over the Mensheviks called for the application of tactics of changes of tack, conciliation and compromises, not only before *but also after* the October Revolution of 1917, but the changes of tack and compromises were, of course, such as assisted, boosted and consolidated the Bolsheviks at the expense of the Mensheviks. The petty-bourgeois democrats (including the Mensheviks) inevitably vacillate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between bourgeois democracy and the soviet system, between reformism and revolutionism, between love for the workers and fear of the proletarian dictatorship, etc. The communists' proper tactics should consist in *utilising* these vacillations, not ignoring them; utilising them calls for concessions to elements that are turning towards the proletariat — whenever and in the measure that they turn towards the proletariat — in addition to fighting those who turn towards the bourgeoisie. As a result of the application of the correct tactics, Menshevism began to disintegrate, and has been disintegrating more and more in our country; the stubbornly opportunist leaders are being isolated, and the best of the workers and the best elements among the petty-bourgeois democrats are being brought into our camp.

In another section of his booklet, Lenin declared that “the entire history of Bolshevism,

both before and after the October Revolution, is *full* of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties!” adding that any in-principle rejection of such tactical compromises amounted to a rejection of Marxism, of revolutionary proletarian politics in favour of the sectarian-abstentionist methods of petty-bourgeois intellectualist anarchism:

To carry out a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted and complex than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to renounce in advance any change of tack, or any utilisation of a conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one’s enemies, or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating or conditional allies) — is that not ridiculous in the extreme? ...

The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and by the most thorough, careful, attentive, skillful and *obligatory* use of any, even the smallest, rift between the enemies, any conflict of interests among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries, and also by taking advantage of any, even the smallest, opportunity of winning a mass ally, even though this ally is temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional. Those who do not understand this reveal a failure to understand even the smallest grain of Marxism, of modern scientific socialism *in general*.

This tactical perspective was developed in more detail between the Comintern’s 3rd congress, held June-July 1921, and its 4th congress, held in November 1922, in the form of the specific tactic of the “united front”.

VIII. Mass action & the united-front tactic

The united-front tactic was first put forward by the leadership of the Communist International in January 1922 to orient the communist parties of Europe toward winning over supporters of the reformist leaderships of the mass-based social-democratic parties in the context of an offensive by the capitalist rulers against the living standards of the working class. There was rising sentiment within the working class for united action to resist this offensive. The Comintern leadership proposed that the communist parties in Europe should seek agreements with the reformist leaders for united action in defence of the immediate interests of the working class.

The most succinct statement of the united-front tactic is a report prepared by Leon Trotsky on the situation facing the French Communist Party, adopted by the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) in March 1922. The first part of the report — see addendum 2 — provided a general exposition of the united-front tactic,

expanding on points made in the “Theses on the United Front” adopted by the ECCI in December 1921, which had also been written by Trotsky, and which were later endorsed by the 4th Comintern congress.

The united-front tactic was conceived as a means for mobilising the masses, for winning influence over them, wresting them away from the political and organisational domination of reformist misleaderships, i.e., it was a specific *party-building tactic*.

The fundamental precondition for any common action between reformists and revolutionary Marxists is that the latter retain their own independent organisation and their freedom to put forward their own views, including criticism of their temporary allies. The essence of the united-front tactic is therefore encapsulated in two phrases: “March separately, strike together!” and “Freedom of criticism, unity of action!”

The united-front tactic may or may not involve formal agreements between revolutionary Marxists and the reformist leaders of mass organisations. While such agreements might be necessary in order to draw broad masses into action, Marxists do not make their initiatives for mass action dependent on prior agreement with the reformist-led mass organisations. By themselves, or together with other left organisations or independent activists, Marxists should initiate actions around concrete demands.

Of course, in formulating the demands for such mobilisations and selecting the forms of action, they should seek to broaden involvement in the mobilisation as much as possible by including, where possible, members of the reformist-led mass organisations. This means that Marxists should endeavour to maintain a united-front *approach* to these organisations, even when the chances of achieving any united action with them is slight. In this way Marxists can demonstrate that the lack of unity in struggle is not due to any sectarianism on their part, but to the unwillingness of the reformists to struggle against the ruling class and its policies.

The effectiveness of such an approach, of course, depends on Marxists avoiding a purely formal, declamatory application of the united-front tactic, i.e., calling on the reformist organisations and their supporters to join in a common struggle for demands which are alien to the actual situation and therefore find no response among broader forces. By its very nature, the united-front tactic can only be fruitful in exposing the unwillingness of the reformists to struggle if it is based on a realistic appraisal of the situation — of the immediate, basic interests that are arousing a willingness among the reformists’ mass base to engage in struggle against the capitalist rulers.

Exposing the unwillingness of the reformists to lead a serious struggle in defence of the masses’ immediate, basic interests, however, is only *one*, and not the most important, aspect of the united-front tactic. Simply exposing the reformist leaders of

mass organisations as cowardly and traitorous does not solve the key problem facing the Marxist vanguard party — which is to win the ranks and followers of these mass organisations away from the political influence of the reformists and to bring them under *its* political influence and leadership. That is, the task is not only to break the political hold of the reformists over the masses, but to convince them to put their confidence in the political leadership of the revolutionary Marxists. To do this, Marxists need to be able to demonstrate to the masses, *on the basis of their own political experience*, that the Marxists' program, tactics and leadership are *better* than those of the reformists. The fundamental purpose of the united-front tactic, therefore, is *not* to expose the reformists as unreliable leaders. Rather, its fundamental purpose is to provide the *most favourable conditions* to enable the Marxists to demonstrate that they are *better leaders* than the reformists. This also means that whether or not the united-front tactic is *useful* at any particular time depends upon whether the application of this tactic will, in the given circumstances, *actually assist the Marxist party to bring broader forces under its political influence*.

For Marxists, there can be no tactical blueprints, good for all times and circumstances. Tactics must always be *concrete*, i.e., devised to fit particular situations and relationships of forces. The united-front tactic, like all the tactics employed by Marxists, is aimed at facilitating the creation of a revolutionary vanguard party capable of educating, organising and mobilising the working-class masses to carry out a proletarian revolution and the building of the classless socialist society. ■



Lenin at the Third Congress of the Comintern 1921

I. In What Sense We Can Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution

In the first months after the proletariat in Russia had won political power (October 25 [November 7], 1917), it might have seemed that the enormous difference between backward Russia and the advanced countries of Western Europe would lead to the proletarian revolution in the latter countries bearing very little resemblance to ours. We now possess quite considerable international experience, which shows very definitely that certain fundamental features of our revolution have a significance that is not local, or peculiarly national, or Russian alone, but international. I am not speaking here of international significance in the broad sense of the term: not merely several but all the primary features of our revolution, and many of its secondary features, are of international significance in the meaning of its effect on all countries. I am speaking of it in the narrowest sense of the word, taking international significance to mean the international validity or the historical inevitability of a repetition, on an international scale, of what has taken place in our country. It must be admitted that certain fundamental features of our revolution do possess that significance.

It would, of course, be grossly erroneous to exaggerate this truth and to extend it beyond certain fundamental features of our revolution. It would also be erroneous to lose sight of the fact that, soon after the victory of the proletarian revolution in at least one of the advanced countries, a sharp change will probably come about: Russia will cease to be the model and will once again become a backward country (in the “soviet” and the socialist sense).

At the present moment in history, however, it is the Russian model that reveals to *all* countries something — and something highly significant — of their near and inevitable future. Advanced workers in all lands have long realised this; more often than not, they have grasped it with their revolutionary class instinct rather than realised it. Herein lies the international “significance” (in the narrow sense of the word) of

soviet power, and of the fundamentals of Bolshevik theory and tactics. The “revolutionary” leaders of the Second International, such as Kautsky in Germany and Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler in Austria, have failed to understand this, which is why they have proved to be reactionaries and advocates of the worst kind of opportunism and social treachery. Incidentally, the anonymous pamphlet entitled *The World Revolution (Weltrevolution)*, which appeared in Vienna in 1919 (*Sozialistische Bucherei*, Heft 11; Ignaz Brand), very clearly reveals their entire thinking and their entire range of ideas, or, rather, the full extent of their stupidity, pedantry, baseness and betrayal of working-class interests — and that, moreover, under the guise of “defending” the idea of “world revolution”.

We shall, however, deal with this pamphlet in greater detail some other time. We shall here note only one more point: in bygone days, when he was still a Marxist and not a renegade, Kautsky, dealing with the question as an historian, foresaw the possibility of a situation arising in which the revolutionary spirit of the Russian proletariat would provide a model to Western Europe. This was in 1902, when Kautsky wrote an article for the revolutionary *Iskra*, entitled “The Slavs and Revolution”. Here is what he wrote in the article:

At the present time [in contrast with 1848] it would seem that not only have the Slavs entered the ranks of the revolutionary nations, but that the centre of revolutionary thought and revolutionary action is shifting more and more to the Slavs. The revolutionary centre is shifting from the West to the East. In the first half of the nineteenth century it was located in France, at times in England. In 1848 Germany too joined the ranks of the revolutionary nations ... The new century has begun with events which suggest the idea that we are approaching a further shift of the revolutionary centre, namely, to Russia ... Russia, which has borrowed so much revolutionary initiative from the West, is now perhaps herself ready to serve the West as a source of revolutionary energy. The Russian revolutionary movement that is now flaring up will perhaps prove to be the most potent means of exorcising the spirit of flabby philistinism and coldly calculating politics that is beginning to spread in our midst, and it may cause the fighting spirit and the passionate devotion to our great ideals to flare up again. To Western Europe, Russia has long ceased to be a bulwark of reaction and absolutism. I think the reverse is true today. Western Europe is becoming Russia's bulwark of reaction and absolutism ... The Russian revolutionaries might perhaps have coped with the tsar long ago had they not been compelled at the same time to fight his ally — European capital. Let us hope that this time they will succeed in coping with both enemies, and that the new “Holy Alliance”¹ will collapse more rapidly than its predecessors did.

However the present struggle in Russia may end, the blood and suffering of the martyrs whom, unfortunately, it will produce in too great numbers, will not have been in vain. They will nourish the shoots of social revolution throughout the civilised world and make them grow more luxuriantly and rapidly. In 1848 the Slavs were a killing frost which blighted the flowers of the people's spring. Perhaps they are now destined to be the storm that will break the ice of reaction and irresistibly bring with it a new and happy spring for the nations (Karl Kautsky, "The Slavs and Revolution", *Iskra*, Russian Social-Democratic revolutionary newspaper, No. 18, March 10, 1902).

How well Karl Kautsky wrote 18 years ago! ■

II. An Essential Condition of the Bolsheviks' Success

It is, I think, almost universally realised at present that the Bolsheviks could not have retained power for two and a half months, let alone two and a half years, without the most rigorous and truly iron discipline in our party, or without the fullest and unreserved support from the entire mass of the working class, that is, from all thinking, honest, devoted and influential elements in it, capable of leading the backward strata or carrying the latter along with them.

The dictatorship of the proletariat means a most determined and most ruthless war waged by the new class against a *more powerful enemy*, the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased *tenfold* by their overthrow (even if only in a single country), and whose power lies, not only in the strength of international capital, the strength and durability of their international connections, but also in the *force of habit*, in the strength of *small-scale production*. Unfortunately, small-scale production is still widespread in the world, and small-scale production *engenders* capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale. All these reasons make the dictatorship of the proletariat necessary, and victory over the bourgeoisie is impossible without a long, stubborn and desperate life-and-death struggle which calls for tenacity, discipline, and a single and inflexible will.

I repeat: the experience of the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia has clearly shown even to those who are incapable of thinking or have had no occasion to give thought to the matter that absolute centralisation and rigorous discipline of the proletariat are an essential condition of victory over the bourgeoisie.

This is often dwelt on. However, not nearly enough thought is given to what it means, and under what conditions it is possible. Would it not be better if the salutations addressed to the soviets and the Bolsheviks were *more frequently* accompanied by a *profound analysis* of the reasons *why* the Bolsheviks have been able to build up the discipline needed by the revolutionary proletariat?

As a current of political thought and as a political party, Bolshevism has existed

since 1903. Only the history of Bolshevism during the *entire* period of its existence can satisfactorily explain why it has been able to build up and maintain, under most difficult conditions, the iron discipline needed for the victory of the proletariat.

The first questions to arise are: how is the discipline of the proletariat's revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and — if you wish — merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people — primarily with the proletariat, *but also with the non-proletarian* masses of working people. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, *from their own experience*, that they are correct. Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning. On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.

The fact that, in 1917-20, Bolshevism was able, under unprecedentedly difficult conditions, to build up and successfully maintain the strictest centralisation and iron discipline was due simply to a number of historical peculiarities of Russia.

On the one hand, Bolshevism arose in 1903 on a very firm foundation of Marxist theory. The correctness of this revolutionary theory, and of it alone, has been proved, not only by world experience throughout the 19th century, but especially by the experience of the seekings and vacillations, the errors and disappointments of revolutionary thought in Russia. For about half a century — approximately from the '40s to the '90s of the last century — progressive thought in Russia, oppressed by a most brutal and reactionary tsarism, sought eagerly for a correct revolutionary theory, and followed with the utmost diligence and thoroughness each and every "last word" in this sphere in Europe and America. Russia achieved Marxism — the only correct revolutionary theory — through the *agony* she experienced in the course of half a century of unparalleled torment and sacrifice, of unparalleled revolutionary heroism, incredible energy, devoted searching, study, practical trial, disappointment, verification, and comparison with European experience. Thanks to the political emigration caused by tsarism, revolutionary Russia, in the second half of the 19th century, acquired a

wealth of international links and excellent information on the forms and theories of the world revolutionary movement, such as no other country possessed.

On the other hand, Bolshevism, which had arisen on this granite foundation of theory, went through 15 years of practical history (1903-17) unequalled anywhere in the world in its wealth of experience. During those 15 years, no other country knew anything even approximating to that revolutionary experience, that rapid and varied succession of different forms of the movement — legal and illegal, peaceful and stormy, underground and open, local circles and mass movements, and parliamentary and terrorist forms. In no other country has there been concentrated, in so brief a period, such a wealth of forms, shades, and methods of struggle of *all* classes of modern society, a struggle which, owing to the backwardness of the country and the severity of the tsarist yoke, matured with exceptional rapidity, and assimilated most eagerly and successfully the appropriate “last word” of American and European political experience. ■

III. The Principal Stages in the History of Bolshevism

The years of preparation for revolution (1903-05). The approach of a great storm was sensed everywhere. All classes were in a state of ferment and preparation. Abroad, the press of the political exiles discussed the theoretical aspects of *all* the fundamental problems of the revolution. Representatives of the three main classes, of the three principal political trends — the liberal-bourgeois, the petty-bourgeois-democratic (concealed behind “social-democratic” and “social-revolutionary” labels²) and the proletarian-revolutionary — anticipated and prepared the impending open class struggle by waging a most bitter struggle on issues of program and tactics. *All* the issues on which the masses waged an armed struggle in 1905-07 and 1917-20 can (and should) be studied, in their embryonic form, in the press of the period. Among these three main trends there were, of course, a host of intermediate, transitional or halfhearted forms. It would be more correct to say that those political and ideological trends which were genuinely of a class nature crystallised in the struggle of press organs, parties, factions and groups; the classes were forging the requisite political and ideological weapons for the impending battles.

The years of revolution (1905-07). All classes came out into the open. All programmatic and tactical views were tested by the action of the masses. In its extent and acuteness, the strike struggle had no parallel anywhere in the world. The economic strike developed into a political strike, and the latter into insurrection. The relations between the proletariat, as the leader, and the vacillating and unstable peasantry, as the led, were tested in practice. The soviet form of organisation³ came into being in the spontaneous development of the struggle. The controversies of that period over the significance of the soviets anticipated the great struggle of 1917-20. The alternation of parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle, of the tactics of boycotting parliament and that of participating in parliament, of legal and illegal forms of struggle, and likewise their interrelations and connections — all this was marked by an extraordinary wealth of content. As for teaching the fundamentals of political science

to masses and leaders, to classes and parties alike, each month of this period was equivalent to an entire year of “peaceful” and “constitutional” development. Without the “dress rehearsal” of 1905, the victory of the October Revolution in 1917 would have been impossible.

The years of reaction (1907-10). Tsarism was victorious. All the revolutionary and opposition parties were smashed. Depression, demoralisation, splits, discord, defection, and pornography took the place of politics. There was an ever greater drift towards philosophical idealism; mysticism became the garb of counterrevolutionary sentiments. At the same time, however, it was this great defeat that taught the revolutionary parties and the revolutionary class a real and very useful lesson, a lesson in historical dialectics, a lesson in an understanding of the political struggle, and in the art and science of waging that struggle. It is at moments of need that one learns who one's friends are. Defeated armies learn their lesson.

Victorious tsarism was compelled to speed up the destruction of the remnants of the pre-bourgeois, patriarchal mode of life in Russia. The country's development along bourgeois lines proceeded apace. Illusions that stood outside and above class distinctions, illusions concerning the possibility of avoiding capitalism, were scattered to the winds. The class struggle manifested itself in a quite new and more distinct way.

The revolutionary parties had to complete their education. They were learning how to attack. Now they had to realise that such knowledge must be supplemented with the knowledge of how to retreat in good order. They had to realise — and it is from bitter experience that the revolutionary class learns to realise this — that victory is impossible unless one has learned how to attack and retreat properly. Of all the defeated opposition and revolutionary parties, the Bolsheviks effected the most orderly retreat, with the least loss to their “army”, with its core best preserved, with the least significant splits (in point of depth and incurability), with the least demoralisation, and in the best condition to resume work on the broadest scale and in the most correct and energetic manner. The Bolsheviks achieved this only because they ruthlessly exposed and expelled the revolutionary phrase-mongers, those who did not wish to understand that one had to retreat, that one had to know how to retreat, and that one had absolutely to learn how to work legally in the most reactionary of parliaments, in the most reactionary of trade unions, cooperative and insurance societies and similar organisations.

The years of revival (1910-14). At first progress was incredibly slow, then, following the Lena events of 1912,⁴ it became somewhat more rapid. Overcoming unprecedented difficulties, the Bolsheviks thrust back the Mensheviks, whose role as bourgeois agents in the working-class movement was clearly realised by the entire bourgeoisie after 1905, and whom the bourgeoisie therefore supported in a thousand ways against the

Bolsheviks. But the Bolsheviks would never have succeeded in doing this had they not followed the correct tactics of combining illegal work with the utilisation of “legal opportunities”, which they made a point of doing. In the elections to the arch-reactionary Duma, the Bolsheviks won the full support of the worker curia.⁵

The First Imperialist World War (1914-17). Legal parliamentarianism, with an extremely reactionary “parliament”, rendered most useful service to the Bolsheviks, the party of the revolutionary proletariat. The Bolshevik deputies were exiled to Siberia. All shades of social-imperialism, social-chauvinism, social-patriotism, inconsistent and consistent internationalism, pacifism, and the revolutionary repudiation of pacifist illusions found full expression in the Russian émigré press. The learned fools and the old women of the Second International, who had arrogantly and contemptuously turned up their noses at the abundance of “factions” in the Russian socialist movement and at the bitter struggle they were waging among themselves, were unable — when the war deprived them of their vaunted “legality” in *all* the advanced countries — to organise anything even approximating such a free (illegal) interchange of views and such a free (illegal) evolution of correct views as the Russian revolutionaries did in Switzerland and in a number of other countries. That was why both the avowed social-patriots and the “Kautskyites” of all countries proved to be the worst traitors to the proletariat. One of the principal reasons why Bolshevism was able to achieve victory in 1917-20 was that, since the end of 1914, it has been ruthlessly exposing the baseness and vileness of social-chauvinism and “Kautskyism” (to which Longuetism⁶ in France, the views of the Fabians⁷ and the leaders of the Independent Labour Party⁸ in Britain, of Turati in Italy, etc., correspond), the masses later becoming more and more convinced, from their own experience, of the correctness of the Bolshevik views.

The second revolution in Russia (February to October 1917). Tsarism’s senility and obsolescence had (with the aid of the blows and hardships of a most agonising war) created an incredibly destructive force directed against it. Within a few days Russia was transformed into a democratic bourgeois republic, freer — in war conditions — than any other country in the world. The leaders of the opposition and revolutionary parties began to set up a government, just as is done in the most “strictly parliamentary” republics; the fact that a man had been a leader of an opposition party in parliament — even in a most reactionary parliament — *facilitated* his subsequent role in the revolution.

In a few weeks the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries thoroughly assimilated all the methods and manners, the arguments and sophistries of the European heroes of the Second International, of the ministerialists and other opportunist riffraff. Everything we now read about the Scheidemanns and Noskes, about Kautsky and Hilferding, Renner and Austerlitz, Otto Bauer and Fritz Adler, Turati and Longuet,

about the Fabians and the leaders of the Independent Labour Party of Britain — all this seems to us (and indeed is) a dreary repetition, a reiteration, of an old and familiar refrain. We have already witnessed all this in the instance of the Mensheviks. As history would have it, the opportunists of a backward country became the forerunners of the opportunists in a number of advanced countries.

If the heroes of the Second International have all gone bankrupt and have disgraced themselves over the question of the significance and role of the soviets and soviet rule; if the leaders of the three very important parties which have now left the Second International (namely, the German Independent Social-Democratic Party,⁹ the French Longuetists and the British Independent Labour Party) have disgraced themselves and become entangled in this question in a most “telling” fashion; if they have all shown themselves slaves to the prejudices of petty-bourgeois democracy (fully in the spirit of the petty-bourgeois of 1848 who called themselves “Social-Democrats”) — then we can only say that we have *already* witnessed *all this* in the instance of the Mensheviks. As history would have it, the soviets came into being in Russia in 1905; from February to October 1917 they were turned to a false use by the Mensheviks, who went bankrupt because of their inability to understand the role and significance of the soviets, today the idea of soviet power has emerged *throughout the world* and is spreading among the proletariat of all countries with extraordinary speed. Like our Mensheviks, the old heroes of the Second International are *everywhere* going bankrupt, because they are incapable of understanding the role and significance of the soviets. Experience has proved that, on certain very important questions of the proletarian revolution, *all* countries will inevitably have to do what Russia has done.

Despite views that are today often to be met with in Europe and America, the Bolsheviks began their victorious struggle against the parliamentary and (in fact) bourgeois republic and against the Mensheviks in a very cautious manner, and the preparations they made for it were by no means simple. At the beginning of the period mentioned, we did *not* call for the overthrow of the government but explained that it was impossible to overthrow it *without* first changing the composition and the temper of the soviets. We did not proclaim a boycott of the bourgeois parliament, the Constituent Assembly, but said — and following the April (1917) Conference of our party began to state officially in the name of the party — that a bourgeois republic with a Constituent Assembly would be better than a bourgeois republic without a Constituent Assembly, but that a “workers’ and peasants” republic, a soviet republic, would be better than any bourgeois-democratic, parliamentary republic. Without such thorough, circumspect and long preparations, we could not have achieved victory in October 1917, or have consolidated that victory. ■

IV. The Struggle Against Which Enemies Within the Working-Class Movement Helped Bolshevism Develop, Gain Strength & Become Steeled

First and foremost, the struggle against opportunism which in 1914 definitely developed into social-chauvinism and definitely sided with the bourgeoisie, against the proletariat. Naturally, this was Bolshevism's principal enemy within the working-class movement. It still remains the principal enemy on an international scale. The Bolsheviks have been devoting the greatest attention to this enemy. This aspect of Bolshevik activities is now fairly well known abroad too.

It was, however, different with Bolshevism's other enemy within the working-class movement. Little is known in other countries of the fact that Bolshevism took shape, developed and became steeled in the long years of struggle against *petty-bourgeois revolutionism*, which smacks of anarchism, or borrows something from the latter and, in all essential matters, does not measure up to the conditions and requirements of a consistently proletarian class struggle. Marxist theory has established — and the experience of all European revolutions and revolutionary movements has fully confirmed — that the petty proprietor, the small master (a social type existing on a very extensive and even mass scale in many European countries), who, under capitalism, always suffers oppression and very frequently a most acute and rapid deterioration in his conditions of life, and even ruin, easily goes to revolutionary extremes, but is incapable of perseverance, organisation, discipline and steadfastness. A petty bourgeois driven to frenzy by the horrors of capitalism is a social phenomenon which, like anarchism, is characteristic of all capitalist countries. The instability of such revolutionism, its barrenness, and its tendency to turn rapidly into submission, apathy,

phantasms, and even a frenzied infatuation with one bourgeois fad or another — all this is common knowledge. However, a theoretical or abstract recognition of these truths does not at all rid revolutionary parties of old errors, which always crop up at unexpected occasions, in somewhat new forms, in a hitherto unfamiliar garb or surroundings, in an unusual — a more or less unusual — situation.

Anarchism was not infrequently a kind of penalty for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement. The two monstrosities complemented each other. And if in Russia — despite the more petty-bourgeois composition of her population as compared with the other European countries — anarchism's influence was negligible during the two revolutions (of 1905 and 1917) and the preparations for them, this should no doubt stand partly to the credit of Bolshevism, which has always waged a most ruthless and uncompromising struggle against opportunism. I say "partly", since of still greater importance in weakening anarchism's influence in Russia was the circumstance that in the past (the '70s of the 19th century) it was able to develop inordinately and to reveal its absolute erroneousness, its unfitness to serve the revolutionary class as a guiding theory.

When it came into being in 1903, Bolshevism took over the tradition of a ruthless struggle against petty-bourgeois, semi-anarchist (or diletante-anarchist) revolutionism, a tradition which had always existed in revolutionary Social-Democracy and had become particularly strong in our country during the years 1900-03, when the foundations for a mass party of the revolutionary proletariat were being laid in Russia. Bolshevism took over and carried on the struggle against a party which, more than any other, expressed the tendencies of petty-bourgeois revolutionism, namely, the "Socialist-Revolutionary" Party, and waged that struggle on three main issues. First, that party, which rejected Marxism, stubbornly refused (or, it might be more correct to say: was unable) to understand the need for a strictly objective appraisal of the class forces and their alignment, before taking any political action. Second, this party considered itself particularly "revolutionary", or "left", because of its recognition of individual terrorism, assassination — something that we Marxists emphatically rejected. It was, of course, only on grounds of expediency that we rejected individual terrorism, whereas people who were capable of condemning "on principle" the terror of the Great French Revolution, or, in general, the terror employed by a victorious revolutionary party which is besieged by the bourgeoisie of the whole world, were ridiculed and laughed to scorn by Plekhanov in 1900-03, when he was a Marxist and a revolutionary. Third, the "Socialist-Revolutionaries," thought it very "left" to sneer at the comparatively insignificant opportunist sins of the German Social-Democratic Party, while they themselves imitated the extreme opportunists of that party, for example, on the agrarian

question, or on the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

History, incidentally, has now confirmed on a vast and worldwide scale the opinion we have always advocated, namely, that German *revolutionary* Social-Democracy (note that as far back as 1900-03 Plekhanov demanded Bernstein's expulsion from the party, and in 1913 the Bolsheviks, always continuing this tradition, exposed Legien's baseness, vileness and treachery) *came closest* to being the party the revolutionary proletariat needs in order to achieve victory. Today, in 1920, after all the ignominious failures and crises of the war period and the early postwar years, it can be plainly seen that, of all the Western parties, the German revolutionary Social-Democrats produced the finest leaders, and recovered and gained new strength more rapidly than the others did. This may be seen in the instances both of the Spartacists¹⁰ and the left, proletarian wing of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, which is waging an incessant struggle against the opportunism and spinelessness of the Kautskys, Hilferdings, Ledebours and Crispiens. If we now cast a glance to take in a complete historical period, namely, from the Paris Commune to the first socialist Soviet Republic, we shall find that Marxism's attitude to anarchism in general stands out most definitely and unmistakably. In the final analysis, Marxism proved to be correct, and although the anarchists rightly pointed to the opportunist views on the state prevalent among most of the socialist parties, it must be said, first, that this opportunism was connected with the distortion, and even deliberate suppression, of Marx's views on the state (in my book, *The State and Revolution*, I pointed out that for 36 years, from 1875 to 1911, Bebel withheld a letter by Engels which very clearly, vividly, bluntly and definitively exposed the opportunism of the current Social-Democratic views on the state); second, that the rectification of these opportunist views, and the recognition of soviet power and its superiority to bourgeois parliamentary democracy proceeded most rapidly and extensively among those trends in the socialist parties of Europe and America that were most Marxist.

The struggle that Bolshevism waged against "left" deviations within its own party assumed particularly large proportions on two occasions: in 1908, on the question of whether or not to participate in a most reactionary "parliament" and in the legal workers' societies, which were being restricted by most reactionary laws; and again in 1918 (the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk¹¹), on the question of whether one "compromise" or another was permissible.

In 1908 the "left" Bolsheviks were expelled from our party for stubbornly refusing to understand the necessity of participating in a most reactionary "parliament".¹² The "lefts" — among whom there were many splendid revolutionaries who subsequently were (and still are) commendable members of the Communist Party — based

themselves particularly on the successful experience of the 1905 boycott. When, in August 1905, the tsar proclaimed the convocation of a consultative “parliament”, the Bolsheviks called for its boycott, in the teeth of all the opposition parties and the Mensheviks, and the “parliament” was in fact swept away by the revolution of October 1905. The boycott proved correct at the time, not because non-participation in reactionary parliaments is correct in general, but because we accurately appraised the objective situation, which was leading to the rapid development of the mass strikes first into a political strike, then into a revolutionary strike, and finally into an uprising. Moreover, the struggle centred at that time on the question of whether the convocation of the first representative assembly should be left to the tsar, or an attempt should be made to wrest its convocation from the old regime. When there was not, and could not be, any certainty that the objective situation was of a similar kind, and when there was no certainty of a similar trend and the same rate of development, the boycott was no longer correct.

The Bolsheviks’ boycott of “parliament” in 1905 enriched the revolutionary proletariat with highly valuable political experience and showed that, when legal and illegal, parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle are combined, it is sometimes useful and even essential to reject parliamentary forms. It would, however, be highly erroneous to apply this experience blindly, imitatively and uncritically to *other* conditions and *other* situations. The Bolsheviks’ boycott of the Duma in 1906 was a mistake although a minor and easily remediable one.* The boycott of the Duma in 1907, 1908 and subsequent years was a most serious error and difficult to remedy, because, on the one hand, a very rapid rise of the revolutionary tide and its conversion into an uprising was not to be expected, and, on the other hand, the entire historical situation attendant upon the renovation of the bourgeois monarchy called for legal and illegal activities being combined. Today, when we look back at this fully completed historical period, whose connection with subsequent periods has now become quite clear, it becomes most obvious that in 1908-14 the Bolsheviks *could not have* preserved (let alone strengthened and developed) the core of the revolutionary party of the proletariat, had they not upheld, in a most strenuous struggle, the viewpoint that it was *obligatory* to combine legal and illegal forms of struggle, and that it was *obligatory* to participate even in a most reactionary parliament and in a number of other institutions

* What applies to individuals also applies — with necessary modifications — to politics and parties. It is not he who makes no mistakes that is intelligent. There are no such men, nor can there be. It is he whose errors are not very grave and who is able to rectify them easily and quickly that is intelligent.

hemmed in by reactionary laws (sick benefit societies, etc.).

In 1918 things did not reach a split. At that time the “left” communists formed only a separate group or “faction” within our party, and that not for long.¹³ In the same year, 1918, the most prominent representatives of “left communism”, for example, Comrades Radek and Bukharin, openly acknowledged their error. It had seemed to them that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a compromise with the imperialists, which was inexcusable on principle and harmful to the party of the revolutionary proletariat. It was indeed a compromise with the imperialists, but it was a compromise which, under the circumstances, *had to be made*.

Today, when I hear our tactics in signing the Brest-Litovsk Treaty being attacked by the Socialist-Revolutionaries, for instance, or when I hear Comrade Lansbury say, in a conversation with me, “Our British trade union leaders say that if it was permissible for the Bolsheviks to compromise, it is permissible for them to compromise too”, I usually reply by first of all giving a simple and “popular” example:

Imagine that your car is held up by armed bandits. You hand them over your money, passport, revolver and car. In return you are rid of the pleasant company of the bandits. That is unquestionably a compromise. “*Do ut des*” (I “give” you money, firearms and a car “so that you give” me the opportunity to get away from you with a whole skin). It would, however, be difficult to find a sane man who would declare such a compromise to be “inadmissible on principle”, or who would call the compromiser an accomplice of the bandits (even though the bandits might use the car and the firearms for further robberies). Our compromise with the bandits of German imperialism was just that kind of compromise.

But when, in 1914-18 and then in 1918-20, the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia, the Scheidemannites (and to a large extent the Kautskyites) in Germany, Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler (to say nothing of the Renners and Co.) in Austria, the Renaudels and Longuets and Co. in France, the Fabians, the Independents and the Labourites in Britain entered into *compromises* with the bandits of their own bourgeoisie, and sometimes of the “Allied” bourgeoisie, and *against* the revolutionary proletariat of their own countries, all these gentlemen were actually acting as *accomplices in banditry*.

The conclusion is clear: to reject compromises “on principle”, to reject the permissibility of compromises in general, no matter of what kind, is childishness, which it is difficult even to consider seriously. A political leader who desires to be useful to the revolutionary proletariat must be able to distinguish *concrete* cases of compromises that are inexcusable and are an expression of opportunism and *treachery*; he must direct all the force of criticism, the full intensity of merciless exposure and

relentless war, against *these concrete* compromises, and not allow the past masters of “practical” socialism and the parliamentary Jesuits to dodge and wriggle out of responsibility by means of disquisitions on “compromises in general”. It is in this way that the “leaders” of the British trade unions, as well as of the Fabian society and the “Independent” Labour Party, dodge responsibility *for the treachery they have perpetrated*, for having made *a compromise* that is really tantamount to the worst kind of opportunism, treachery and betrayal.

There are different kinds of compromises. One must be able to analyse the situation and the concrete conditions of each compromise, or of each variety of compromise. One must learn to distinguish between a man who has given up his money and firearms to bandits so as to lessen the evil they can do and to facilitate their capture and execution, and a man who gives his money and firearms to bandits so as to share in the loot. In politics this is by no means always as elementary as it is in this childish simple example. However, anyone who is out to think up for the workers some kind of recipe that will provide them with cut-and-dried solutions for all contingencies, or promises that the policy of the revolutionary proletariat will never come up against difficult or complex situations, is simply a charlatan.

To leave no room for misinterpretation, I shall attempt to outline, if only very briefly, several fundamental rules for the analysis of concrete compromises.

The party which entered into a compromise with the German imperialists by signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had been evolving its internationalism in practice ever since the end of 1914. It was not afraid to call for the defeat of the tsarist monarchy and to condemn “defence of country” in a war between two imperialist robbers. The parliamentary representatives of this party preferred exile in Siberia to taking a road leading to ministerial portfolios in a bourgeois government. The revolution that overthrew tsarism and established a democratic republic put this party to a new and tremendous test — it did not enter into any agreements with its “own” imperialists, but prepared and brought about their overthrow. When it had assumed political power, this party did not leave a vestige of either landed or capitalist ownership. After making public and repudiating the imperialists’ secret treaties, this party proposed peace to *all* nations, and yielded to the violence of the Brest-Litovsk robbers only after the Anglo-French imperialists had torpedoed the conclusion of a peace, and after the Bolsheviks had done everything humanly possible to hasten the revolution in Germany and other countries. The absolute correctness of this compromise, entered into by such a party in such a situation, is becoming ever clearer and more obvious with every day.

The Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia (like all the leaders of

the Second International throughout the world, in 1914-20) began with treachery — by directly or indirectly justifying “defence of country”, i.e., the defence of *their own* predatory bourgeoisie. They continued their treachery by entering into a coalition with the bourgeoisie of *their own* country, and fighting, together with *their own* bourgeoisie, against the revolutionary proletariat of their own country. Their bloc, first with Kerensky and the Cadets,¹⁴ and then with Kolchak and Denikin in Russia — like the bloc of their *confrères* abroad with the bourgeoisie of *their* respective countries — was in fact desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie, against the proletariat. From beginning to end, *their* compromise with the bandits of imperialism meant their becoming *accomplices* in imperialist banditry. ■

V. ‘Left-Wing’ Communism in Germany. The Leaders, the Party, the Class, the Masses

The German Communists we must now speak of call themselves, not “left-wingers” but, if I am not mistaken, an “opposition on principle”. From what follows below it will, however, be seen that they reveal all the symptoms of the “infantile disorder of leftism”.

Published by the “local group in Frankfurt am Main”, a pamphlet reflecting the point of view of this opposition, and entitled *The Split in the Communist Party of Germany (the Spartacus League)* sets forth the substance of this opposition’s views most saliently, and with the utmost clarity and concision. A few quotations will suffice to acquaint the reader with that substance:

The Communist Party is the party of the most determined class struggle ...

Politically, the transitional period [between capitalism and socialism]: is one of the proletarian dictatorship ...

The question arises: who is to exercise this dictatorship: *the Communist Party or the proletarian class?* ... *Fundamentally*, should we strive for a dictatorship of the Communist Party, or for a dictatorship of the proletarian class? (All italics as in the original.)

The author of the pamphlet goes on to accuse the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany of seeking ways of *achieving a coalition with the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany*, and of raising “*the question of recognising, in principle, all political means*” of struggle, including parliamentarianism, with the sole purpose of concealing its actual and main efforts to form a coalition with the Independents. The pamphlet goes on to say:

The opposition have chosen another road. They are of the opinion that the question of the rule of the Communist Party and of the dictatorship of the party is merely one of tactics. In any case, rule by the Communist Party is the ultimate form of any party rule. *Fundamentally*, we must work for the dictatorship of the proletarian class. And all the measures of the party, its organisations, methods of struggle, strategy and tactics

should be directed to that end. Accordingly, all compromise with other parties, all reversion to parliamentary forms of struggle which have become historically and politically obsolete, and any policy of manoeuvring and compromise must be emphatically rejected ... Specifically proletarian methods of revolutionary struggle must be strongly emphasised. New forms of organisation must be created on the widest basis and with the widest scope in order to enlist the most extensive proletarian circles and strata to take part in the revolutionary struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party. A *Workers' Union*, based on factory organisations, should be the rallying point for all revolutionary elements. This should unite all workers who follow the slogan: "Get out of the trade unions!" It is here that the militant proletariat musters its ranks for battle. Recognition of the class struggle, of the soviet system and of the dictatorship should be sufficient for enrolment. All subsequent political education of the fighting masses and their political orientation in the struggle are the task of the Communist Party, which stands outside the Workers' Union ...

Consequently, two Communist parties are now arrayed against each other:

One is a party of leaders, which is out to organise the revolutionary struggle and to direct it from *above*, accepting compromises and parliamentarianism so as to create a situation enabling it to join a coalition government exercising a dictatorship.

The other is a mass party, which expects an upsurge of the revolutionary struggle from *below*, which knows and applies a single method in this struggle — a method which clearly leads to the goal — and rejects all parliamentary and opportunist methods. That single method is the unconditional *overthrow of the bourgeoisie*, so as then to set up the proletarian class dictatorship for the accomplishment of socialism ...

There — the dictatorship of leaders; here — the dictatorship of the masses! That is our slogan.

Such are the main features characterising the views of the opposition in the German Communist Party.

Any Bolshevik who has consciously participated in the development of Bolshevism since 1903 or has closely observed that development will at once say, after reading these arguments, "What old and familiar rubbish! What 'left-wing' childishness!"

But let us examine these arguments a little more closely.

The mere presentation of the question — "dictatorship of the party *or* dictatorship of the class; dictatorship (party) of the leaders, *or* dictatorship (party) of the masses?" — testifies to most incredibly and hopelessly muddled thinking. These people want to *invent* something quite out of the ordinary, and, in their effort to be clever, make themselves ridiculous. It is common knowledge that the masses are divided into classes, that the masses can be contrasted with classes only by contrasting the vast majority in

general, regardless of division according to status in the social system of production, with categories holding a definite status in the social system of production; that as a rule and in most cases — at least in present-day civilised countries — classes are led by political parties; that political parties, as a general rule, are run by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential and experienced members, who are elected to the most responsible positions, and are called leaders. All this is elementary. All this is clear and simple. Why replace this with some kind of rigmarole, some new Volapük?¹⁵ On the one hand, these people seem to have got muddled when they found themselves in a predicament, when the party's abrupt transition from legality to illegality upset the customary, normal and simple relations between leaders, parties and classes. In Germany, as in other European countries, people had become too accustomed to legality, to the free and proper election of "leaders" at regular party congresses, to the convenient method of testing the class composition of parties through parliamentary elections, mass meetings, the press, the sentiments of the trade unions and other associations, etc. When, instead of this customary procedure, it became necessary, because of the stormy development of the revolution and the development of the civil war, to go over rapidly from legality to illegality, to combine the two, and to adopt the "inconvenient" and "undemocratic" methods of selecting, or forming, or preserving "groups of leaders" — people lost their bearings and began to think up some unmitigated nonsense. Certain members of the Communist Party of Holland, who were unlucky enough to be born in a small country with traditions and conditions of highly privileged and highly stable legality, and who had never seen a transition from legality to illegality, probably fell into confusion, lost their heads, and helped create these absurd inventions.

On the other hand, one can see simply a thoughtless and incoherent use of the now "fashionable" terms: "masses" and "leaders". These people have heard and memorised a great many attacks on "leaders", in which the latter have been contrasted with the "masses"; however, they have proved unable to think matters out and gain a clear understanding of what it was all about.

The divergence between "leaders" and "masses" was brought out with particular clarity and sharpness in all countries at the end of the imperialist war and following it. The principal reason for this was explained many times by Marx and Engels between the years 1852 and 1892, from the example of Britain. That country's exclusive position led to the emergence, from the "masses", of a semi-petty-bourgeois, opportunist "labour aristocracy". The leaders of this labour aristocracy were constantly going over to the bourgeoisie, and were directly or indirectly on its pay roll. Marx earned the honour of incurring the hatred of these disreputable persons by openly branding

them as traitors. Present-day (20th-century) imperialism has given a few advanced countries an exceptionally privileged position, which, everywhere in the Second International, has produced a certain type of traitor, opportunist, and social-chauvinist leaders, who champion the interests of their own craft, their own section of the labour aristocracy. The opportunist parties have become separated from the “masses”, i.e., from the broadest strata of the working people, their majority, the lowest-paid workers. The revolutionary proletariat cannot be victorious unless this evil is combated, unless the opportunist, social-traitor leaders are exposed, discredited and expelled. That is the policy the Third International has embarked on.

To go so far, in this connection, as to contrast, *in general*, the dictatorship of the masses with a dictatorship of the leaders is ridiculously absurd, and stupid. What is particularly amusing is that, in fact, instead of the old leaders, who hold generally accepted views on simple matters, *new leaders* are brought forth (under cover of the slogan “Down with the leaders!”), who talk rank stuff and nonsense. Such are Laufenberg, Wolffheim, Horner, Karl Schröder, Friedrich Wendel and Karl Erler,^{*} in Germany. Erler’s attempts to give the question more “profundity” and to proclaim that in general political parties are unnecessary and “bourgeois” are so supremely absurd that one can only shrug one’s shoulders. It all goes to drive home the truth that a minor error can always assume monstrous proportions if it is persisted in, if profound justifications are sought for it, and if it is carried to its logical conclusion.

Repudiation of the party principle and of party discipline — that is what the opposition has *arrived at*. And this is tantamount to completely disarming the proletariat *in the interests of the bourgeoisie*. It all adds up to that petty-bourgeois diffuseness and instability, that incapacity for sustained effort, unity and organised action, which, if encouraged, must inevitably destroy any proletarian revolutionary movement. From the standpoint of communism, repudiation of the party principle means attempting to leap from the eve of capitalism’s collapse (in Germany), not to the lower or the

^{*} Karl Erler, “The Dissolution of the Party”, *Kommunistische Arbeiterzeitung*, Hamburg, February 7, 1920, No. 32: “The working class cannot destroy the bourgeois state without destroying bourgeois democracy, and it cannot destroy bourgeois democracy without destroying parties.” The more muddle-headed of the syndicalists and anarchists in the Latin countries may derive “satisfaction” from the fact that solid Germans, who evidently consider themselves Marxists (by their articles in the above-mentioned paper K. Erler and K. Horner have shown most plainly that they consider themselves sound Marxists, but talk incredible nonsense in a most ridiculous manner and reveal their failure to understand the ABC of Marxism), go to the length of making utterly inept statements. Mere acceptance of Marxism does not save one from errors. We Russians know this especially well, because Marxism has been very often the “fashion” in our country.

intermediate phase of communism, but to the higher. We in Russia (in the third year since the overthrow of the bourgeoisie) are making the first steps in the transition from capitalism to socialism or the lower stage of communism. Classes still remain, and will remain everywhere *for years after* the proletariat's conquest of power. Perhaps in Britain, where there is no peasantry (but where petty proprietors exist), this period may be shorter. The abolition of classes means, not merely ousting the landowners and the capitalists — that is something we accomplished with comparative ease; it also means *abolishing the small commodity producers*, and they *cannot be ousted*, or crushed; we *must learn to live* with them. They can (and must) be transformed and re-educated only by means of very prolonged, slow, and cautious organisational work. They surround the proletariat on every side with a petty-bourgeois atmosphere, which permeates and corrupts the proletariat, and constantly causes among the proletariat relapses into petty-bourgeois spinelessness, disunity, individualism, and alternating moods of exaltation and dejection. The strictest centralisation and discipline are required within the political party of the proletariat in order to counteract this, in order that the *organisational* role of the proletariat (and that is its *principal* role) may be exercised correctly, successfully and victoriously. The dictatorship of the proletariat means a persistent struggle — bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative — against the forces and traditions of the old society. The force of habit in millions and tens of millions is a most formidable force. Without a party of iron that has been tempered in the struggle, a party enjoying the confidence of all honest people in the class in question, a party capable of watching and influencing the mood of the masses, such a struggle cannot be waged successfully. It is a thousand times easier to vanquish the centralised big bourgeoisie than to “vanquish” the millions upon millions of petty proprietors; however, through their ordinary, everyday, imperceptible, elusive and demoralising activities, they produce the *very* results which the bourgeoisie need and which tend to *restore* the bourgeoisie. Whoever brings about even the slightest weakening of the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during its dictatorship), is actually aiding the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

Parallel with the question of the leaders — the party — the class — the masses, we must pose the question of the “reactionary” trade unions. But first I shall take the liberty of making a few concluding remarks based on the experience of our party. There *have always been* attacks on the “dictatorship of leaders” in our party. The first time I heard such attacks, I recall, was in 1895, when, officially, no party yet existed, but a central group was taking shape in St. Petersburg, which was to assume the leadership of the district groups.¹⁶ At the 9th Congress of our party (April 1920), there was a small

opposition, which also spoke against the “dictatorship of leaders”, against the “oligarchy”, and so on. There is therefore nothing surprising, new, or terrible in the “infantile disorder” of “left-wing communism” among the Germans. The ailment involves no danger, and after it the organism even becomes more robust. In our case, on the other hand, the rapid alternation of legal and illegal work, which made it necessary to keep the general staff — the leaders — under cover and cloak them in the greatest secrecy, sometimes gave rise to extremely dangerous consequences. The worst of these was that in 1912 the *agent provocateur* Malinovsky got into the Bolshevik Central Committee. He betrayed scores and scores of the best and most loyal comrades, caused them to be sentenced to penal servitude, and hastened the death of many of them. That he did not cause still greater harm was due to the correct balance between legal and illegal work. As member of the party’s Central Committee and Duma deputy, Malinovsky was forced, in order to gain our confidence, to help us establish legal daily papers, which even under tsarism were able to wage a struggle against the Menshevik opportunism and to spread the fundamentals of Bolshevism in a suitably disguised form. While, with one hand, Malinovsky sent scores and scores of the finest Bolsheviks to penal servitude and death, he was obliged, with the other, to assist in the education of scores and scores of thousands of new Bolsheviks through the medium of the legal press. Those German (and also British, American, French and Italian) comrades who are faced with the task of learning how to conduct revolutionary work within the reactionary trade unions would do well to give serious thought to this fact.*

In many countries, including the most advanced, the bourgeoisie are undoubtedly sending *agents provocateurs* into the communist parties and will continue to do so. A skilful combining of illegal and legal work is one of the ways to combat this danger. ■

* Malinovsky was a prisoner of war in Germany. On his return to Russia when the Bolsheviks were in power he was instantly put on trial and shot by our workers. The Mensheviks attacked us most bitterly for our mistake — the fact that an *agent provocateur* had become a member of the Central Committee of our party. But when, under Kerensky, we demanded the arrest and trial of Rodzyanko, the Chairman of the Duma, because he had known, even before the war, that Malinovsky was an *agent provocateur* and *had not informed* the Trudoviks¹⁷ and the workers in the Duma, neither the Mensheviks nor the Socialist-Revolutionaries in the Kerensky government supported our demand, and Rodzyanko remained at large and made off unhindered to join Denekin.

VI. Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?

The German “lefts” consider that, as far as they are concerned, the reply to this question is an unqualified negative. In their opinion, declamations and angry outcries (such as uttered by K. Horner in a particularly “solid” and particularly stupid manner) against “reactionary” and “counterrevolutionary” trade unions are sufficient “proof” that it is unnecessary and even inexcusable for revolutionaries and communists to work in yellow, social-chauvinist, compromising and counterrevolutionary trade unions of the Legien type.

However firmly the German “lefts” may be convinced of the revolutionism of such tactics, the latter are in fact fundamentally wrong, and contain nothing but empty phrases.

To make this clear, I shall begin with our own experience, in keeping with the general plan of the present pamphlet, which is aimed at applying to Western Europe whatever is universally practicable, significant and relevant in the history and the present-day tactics of Bolshevism.

In Russia today, the connection between leaders, party, class and masses, as well as the attitude of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its party to the trade unions, are concretely as follows: the dictatorship is exercised by the proletariat organised in the soviets; the proletariat is guided by the Communist Party of Bolsheviks, which, according to the figures of the latest party congress (April 1920), has a membership of 611,000. The membership varied greatly both before and after the October Revolution, and used to be much smaller, even in 1918 and 1919. We are apprehensive of an excessive growth of the Party, because careerists and charlatans, who deserve only to be shot, inevitably do all they can to insinuate themselves into the ranks of the ruling party. The last time we opened wide the doors of the party — to workers and peasants only — was when (in the winter of 1919) Yudenich was within a few versts of Petrograd, and Denikin was in Orel (about 350 versts from Moscow), i.e., when the Soviet Republic was in mortal danger, and when adventurers, careerists, charlatans and unreliable

persons generally could not possibly count on making a profitable career (and had more reason to expect the gallows and torture) by joining the Communists. The party, which holds annual congresses (the most recent on the basis of one delegate per 1000 members), is directed by a Central Committee of 19 elected at the congress, while the current work in Moscow has to be carried on by still smaller bodies, known as the Organising Bureau and the Political Bureau, which are elected at plenary meetings of the Central Committee, five members of the Central Committee to each bureau. This, it would appear, is a full-fledged “oligarchy”. No important political or organisational question is decided by any state institution in our republic without the guidance of the party’s Central Committee.

In its work, the party relies directly on the *trade unions*, which, according to the data of the last congress (April 1920), now have a membership of over four million and are formally *non-party*. Actually, all the directing bodies of the vast majority of the unions, and primarily, of course, of the all-Russia general trade union centre or bureau (the All-Russia Central Council of Trade Unions), are made up of Communists and carry out all the directives of the party. Thus, on the whole, we have a formally non-communist, flexible and relatively wide and very powerful proletarian apparatus, by means of which the party is closely linked up with the *class* and the *masses*, and by means of which, under the leadership of the party, the *class dictatorship* is exercised. Without close contacts with the trade unions, and without their energetic support and devoted efforts, not only in economic, but *also in military* affairs, it would of course have been impossible for us to govern the country and to maintain the dictatorship for two and a half months, let alone two and a half years. In practice, these very close contacts naturally call for highly complex and diversified work in the form of propaganda, agitation, timely and frequent conferences, not only with the leading trade union workers, but with influential trade union workers generally; they call for a determined struggle against the Mensheviks, who still have a certain though very small following to whom they teach all kinds of counterrevolutionary machinations, ranging from an ideological defence of (*bourgeois*) democracy and the preaching that the trade unions should be “independent” (independent of proletarian state power!) to sabotage of proletarian discipline, etc., etc.

We consider that contacts with the “masses” through the trade unions are not enough. In the course of our revolution, practical activities have given rise to such institutions as *non-party workers’ and peasants’ conferences*, and we strive by every means to support, develop and extend this institution in order to be able to observe the temper of the masses, come closer to them, meet their requirements, promote the best among them to state posts, etc. Under a recent decree on the transformation of

the People's Commissariat of State Control into the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, non-party conferences of this kind have been empowered to select members of the State Control to carry out various kinds of investigations, etc.

Then, of course, all the work of the party is carried on through the soviets, which embrace the working masses irrespective of occupation. The district congresses of soviets are *democratic* institutions, the like of which even the best of the democratic republics of the bourgeois world have never known; through these congresses (whose proceedings the party endeavours to follow with the closest attention), as well as by continually appointing class-conscious workers to various posts in the rural districts, the proletariat exercises its role of leader of the peasantry, gives effect to the dictatorship of the urban proletariat, wages a systematic struggle against the rich, bourgeois, exploiting and profiteering peasantry, etc.

Such is the general mechanism of the proletarian state power viewed "from above", from the standpoint of the practical implementation of the dictatorship. We hope that the reader will understand why the Russian Bolshevik who has known this mechanism for 25 years and has seen it develop out of small, illegal and underground circles, cannot help regarding all this talk about "from above" or "from below", about the dictatorship of leaders or the dictatorship of the masses, etc., as ridiculous and childish nonsense, something like discussing whether a man's left leg or right arm is of greater use to him.

We cannot but regard as equally ridiculous and childish nonsense the pompous, very learned, and frightfully revolutionary disquisitions of the German lefts to the effect that Communists cannot and should not work in reactionary trade unions, that it is permissible to turn down such work, that it is necessary to withdraw from the trade unions and create a brand-new and immaculate "Workers' Union" invented by very pleasant (and, probably, for the most part very youthful) Communists, etc., etc.

Capitalism inevitably leaves socialism the legacy, on the one hand, of the old trade and craft distinctions among the workers, distinctions evolved in the course of centuries; on the other hand, trade unions, which only very slowly, in the course of years and years, can and will develop into broader industrial unions with less of the craft union about them (embracing entire industries, and not only crafts, trades and occupations), and later proceed, through these industrial unions, to eliminate the division of labour among people, to educate and school people, give them *all-round development and an all-round training*, so that they *are able to do everything*. Communism is advancing and must advance towards that goal, and *will reach* it, but only after very many years. To attempt in practice, today, to anticipate this future result of a fully developed, fully stabilised and constituted, fully comprehensive and mature communism would be like

trying to teach higher mathematics to a child of four.

We can (and must) begin to build socialism, not with abstract human material, or with human material specially prepared by us, but with the human material bequeathed to us by capitalism. True, that is no easy matter, but no other approach to this task is serious enough to warrant discussion.

The trade unions were a tremendous step forward for the working class in the early days of capitalist development, inasmuch as they marked a transition from the workers' disunity and helplessness to the *rudiments* of class organisation. When the *revolutionary party of the proletariat*, the *highest* form of proletarian class organisation, began to take shape (and the party will not merit the name until it learns to weld the leaders into one indivisible whole with the class and the masses) the trade unions inevitably began to reveal *certain* reactionary features, a certain craft narrow-mindedness, a certain tendency to be non-political, a certain inertness, etc. However, the development of the proletariat did not, and could not, proceed anywhere in the world otherwise than through the trade unions, through reciprocal action between them and the party of the working class. The proletariat's conquest of political power is a gigantic step forward for the proletariat as a class, and the party must more than ever and in a new way, not only in the old, educate and guide the trade unions, at the same time bearing in mind that they are and will long remain an indispensable "school of communism" and a preparatory school that trains proletarians to exercise their dictatorship, an indispensable organisation of the workers for the gradual transfer of the management of the whole economic life of the country to the working class (and not to the separate trades), and later to all the working people.

In the sense mentioned above, a *certain* "reactionism" in the trade unions is *inevitable* under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Not to understand this means a complete failure to understand the fundamental conditions of the *transition* from capitalism to socialism. It would be egregious folly to fear *this* "reactionism" or to try to *evade* or leap over it, for it would mean fearing that function of the proletarian vanguard which consists in training, educating, enlightening and drawing into the new life the most backward strata and masses of the working class and the peasantry. On the other hand, it would be a still graver error to postpone the achievement of the dictatorship of the proletariat until a time when there will not be a single worker with a narrow-minded craft outlook, or with craft and craft-union prejudices. The art of politics (and the Communist's correct understanding of his tasks) consists in correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully assume power, when it is able — during and after the seizure of power — to win adequate support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-

proletarian working masses, and when it is able thereafter to maintain, consolidate and extend its rule by educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the working people.

Further. In countries more advanced than Russia, a certain reactionism in the trade unions has been and was bound to be manifested in a far greater measure than in our country. Our Mensheviks found support in the trade unions (and to some extent still do so in a small number of unions), as a result of the latter's craft narrow-mindedness, craft selfishness and opportunism. The Mensheviks of the West have acquired a much firmer footing in the trade unions; there the *craft-union, narrow-minded, selfish, case-hardened, covetous, and petty-bourgeois "labour aristocracy", imperialist-minded, and imperialist-corrupted*, has developed into a much stronger section than in our country. That is incontestable. The struggle against the Gomperses, and against the Jouhaux, Hendersons, Merrheims, Legiens and Co. in Western Europe is much more difficult than the struggle against our Mensheviks, who are an *absolutely homogeneous* social and political type. This struggle must be waged ruthlessly, and it must unfailingly be brought — as we brought it — to a point when all the incorrigible leaders of opportunism and social-chauvinism are completely discredited and driven out of the trade unions. Political power cannot be captured (and the attempt to capture it should not be made) until the struggle has reached a *certain* stage. This "certain stage" will be *different* in different countries and in different circumstances; it can be correctly gauged only by thoughtful, experienced and knowledgeable political leaders of the proletariat in each particular country. (In Russia the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917, a few days after the proletarian revolution of October 25, 1917, were one of the criteria of the success of this struggle. In these elections the Mensheviks were utterly defeated; they received 700,000 votes — 1,400,000 if the vote in Transcaucasia is added — as against 9,000,000 votes polled by the Bolsheviks. See my article, "The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat",* in the *Communist International* No. 7-8.)

We are waging a struggle against the "labour aristocracy" in the name of the masses of the workers and in order to win them over to our side; we are waging the struggle against the opportunist and social-chauvinist leaders in order to win the working class over to our side. It would be absurd to forget this most elementary and most self-evident truth. Yet it is this very absurdity that the German "left" Communists perpetrate when, *because* of the reactionary and counterrevolutionary character of the trade union *top leadership*, they jump to the conclusion that ... we must withdraw

* See V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1965), Vol. 30 — *Ed.*

from the trade unions, refuse to work in them, and create new and *artificial* forms of labour organisation! This is so unpardonable a blunder that it is tantamount to the greatest service Communists could render the bourgeoisie. Like all the opportunist, social-chauvinist, and Kautskyite trade union leaders, our Mensheviks are nothing but “agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement” (as we have always said the Mensheviks are), or “labour lieutenants of the capitalist class”, to use the splendid and profoundly true expression of the followers of Daniel De Leon in America. To refuse to work in the reactionary trade unions means leaving the insufficiently developed or backward masses of workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders, the agents of the bourgeoisie, the labour aristocrats, or “workers who have become completely bourgeois” (cf. Engels’s letter to Marx in 1858 about the British workers).*

This ridiculous “theory” that Communists should not work in reactionary trade unions reveals with the utmost clarity the frivolous attitude of the “left” Communists towards the question of influencing the “masses”, and their misuse of clamour about the “masses”. If you want to help the “masses” and win the sympathy and support of the “masses”, you should not fear difficulties, or pinpricks, chicanery, insults and persecution from the “leaders” (who, being opportunists and social-chauvinists, are in most cases directly or indirectly connected with the bourgeoisie and the police), but must absolutely *work wherever the masses are to be found*. You must be capable of any sacrifice, of overcoming the greatest obstacles, in order to carry on agitation and propaganda systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently in those institutions, societies and associations — even the most reactionary — in which proletarian or semi-proletarian masses are to be found. The trade unions and the workers’ cooperatives (the latter sometimes, at least) are the very organisations in which the masses are to be found. According to figures quoted in the Swedish paper *Folkets Dagblad Politiken* of March 10, 1920, the trade union membership in Great Britain increased from 5,500,000 at the end of 1917 to 6,600,000 at the end of 1918, an increase of 19%. Towards the close of 1919, the membership was estimated at 7,500,000. I have not got the corresponding figures for France and Germany to hand, but absolutely incontestable and generally known facts testify to a rapid rise in the trade union membership in these countries too.

These facts make crystal clear something that is confirmed by thousands of other symptoms, namely, that class-consciousness and the desire for organisation are growing among the proletarian masses, among the rank and file, among the backward elements.

* See K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1975), pp. 102-103

Millions of workers in Great Britain, France and Germany are *for the first time* passing from a complete lack of organisation to the elementary, lowest, simplest, and (to those still thoroughly imbued with bourgeois-democratic prejudices) most easily comprehensible form of organisation, namely, the trade unions; yet the revolutionary but imprudent left Communists stand by, crying out “the masses”, “the masses!” but *refusing to work within the trade unions*, on the pretext that they are “reactionary”, and invent a brand-new, immaculate little “Workers’ Union”, which is guiltless of bourgeois-democratic prejudices and innocent of craft or narrow-minded craft-union sins, a union which, they claim, will be (!) a broad organisation. “Recognition of the soviet system and the dictatorship” will be the *only* (!) condition of membership. (See the passage quoted above.)

It would be hard to imagine any greater ineptitude or greater harm to the revolution than that caused by the “left” revolutionaries! Why, if we in Russia today, after two and a half years of unprecedented victories over the bourgeoisie of Russia and the Entente,¹⁸ were to make “recognition of the dictatorship” a condition of trade union membership, we would be doing a very foolish thing, damaging our influence among the masses, and helping the Mensheviks. The task devolving on Communists is to *convince* the backward elements, to work *among* them, and not to *fence themselves off* from them with artificial and childishly “left” slogans.

There can be no doubt that the Gomperses, the Hendersons, the Jouhaux and the Legiens are very grateful to those “left” revolutionaries who, like the German opposition “on principle” (heaven preserve us from such “principles”!), or like some of the revolutionaries in the American Industrial Workers of the World¹⁹ advocate quitting the reactionary trade unions and refusing to work in them. These men, the “leaders” of opportunism, will no doubt resort to every device of bourgeois diplomacy and to the aid of bourgeois governments, the clergy, the police and the courts, to keep Communists out of the trade unions, oust them by every means, make their work in the trade unions as unpleasant as possible, and insult, bait and persecute them. We must be able to stand up to all this, agree to make any sacrifice, and even — if need be — to resort to various stratagems, artifices and illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, as long as we get into the trade unions, remain in them, and carry on communist work within them at all costs. Under tsarism we had no “legal opportunities” whatsoever until 1905. However, when Zubatov, agent of the secret police, organised Black-Hundred²⁰ workers’ assemblies and workingmen’s societies for the purpose of trapping revolutionaries and combating them, we sent members of our party to these assemblies and into these societies (I personally remember one of them, Comrade Babushkin, a leading St. Petersburg factory worker, shot by order of the tsar’s generals

in 1906). They established contacts with the masses, were able to carry on their agitation, and succeeded in wresting workers from the influence of Zubatov's agents.* Of course, in Western Europe, which is imbued with most deep-rooted legalistic, constitutionalist and bourgeois-democratic prejudices, this is more difficult of achievement. However, it can and must be carried out, and systematically at that.

The Executive Committee of the Third International must, in my opinion, positively condemn, and call upon the next congress of the Communist International to condemn both the policy of refusing to work in reactionary trade unions in general (explaining in detail why such refusal is unwise, and what extreme harm it does to the cause of the proletarian revolution) and, in particular, the line of conduct of some members of the Communist Party of Holland, who — whether directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly, wholly or partly, it does not matter — have supported this erroneous policy. The Third International must break with the tactics of the Second International, it must not evade or play down points at issue, but must pose them in a straightforward fashion. The whole truth has been put squarely to the “Independents” (the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany); the whole truth must likewise be put squarely to the “left” Communists. ■

* The Gomperses, Hendersons, Jouhaux and Legiens are nothing but Zubatovs, differing from our Zubatov only in their European garb and polish, and the civilised, refined and democratically suave manner of conducting their despicable policy.

VII. Should We Participate in Bourgeois Parliaments?

It is with the utmost contempt — and the utmost levity — that the German “left” Communists reply to this question in the negative. Their arguments? In the passage quoted above we read:

All reversion to parliamentary forms of struggle, which have become historically and politically obsolete, must be emphatically rejected ...

This is said with ridiculous pretentiousness, and is patently wrong. “Reversion” to parliamentarianism, forsooth! Perhaps there is already a soviet republic in Germany? It does not look like it! How, then, can one speak of “reversion”? Is this not an empty phrase?

Parliamentarianism has become “historically obsolete”. That is true in the propaganda sense. However, everybody knows that this is still a far cry from overcoming it in *practice*. Capitalism could have been declared — and with full justice — to be “historically obsolete” many decades ago, but that does not at all remove the need for a very long and very persistent struggle *on the basis* of capitalism. Parliamentarianism is “historically obsolete” from the standpoint of *world history*, i.e., the *era* of bourgeois parliamentarianism is over, and the *era* of the proletarian dictatorship has *begun*. That is incontestable. But world history is counted in decades. Ten or 20 years earlier or later makes no difference when measured with the yardstick of world history; from the standpoint of world history it is a trifle that cannot be considered even approximately. But for that very reason, it is a glaring theoretical error to apply the yardstick of world history to practical politics.

Is parliamentarianism “politically obsolete”? That is quite a different matter. If that were true, the position of the “lefts” would be a strong one. But it has to be proved by a most searching analysis, and the “lefts” do not even know how to approach the matter. In the “Theses on Parliamentarianism”, published in the *Bulletin of the Provisional Bureau in Amsterdam of the Communist International* No. 1, February 1920, and obviously expressing the Dutch-left or left-Dutch strivings, the analysis, as we shall see, is also hopelessly poor.

In the first place, contrary to the opinion of such outstanding political leaders as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the German “lefts”, as we know, considered parliamentarianism “politically obsolete” even in January 1919. We know that the “lefts” were mistaken. This fact alone utterly destroys, at a single stroke, the proposition that parliamentarianism is “politically obsolete”. It is for the “lefts” to prove why their error, indisputable at that time, is no longer an error. They do not and cannot produce even a shred of proof. A political party’s attitude towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it fulfils *in practice* its obligations towards its *class* and the *working people*. Frankly acknowledging a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analysing the conditions that have led up to it, and thrashing out the means of its rectification — that is the hallmark of a serious party; that is how it should perform its duties, and how it should educate and train its *class*, and then the *masses*. By failing to fulfil this duty and give the utmost attention and consideration to the study of their patent error, the “lefts” in Germany (and in Holland) have proved that they are not a *party of a class*, but a circle, not a *party of the masses*, but a group of intellectualists and of a few workers who ape the worst features of intellectualism.

Second, in the same pamphlet of the Frankfurt group of “lefts”, which we have already cited in detail, we read:

The millions of workers who still follow the policy of the Centre [the Catholic “Centre” Party] are counterrevolutionary. The rural proletarians provide the legions of counterrevolutionary troops. (Page 3 of the pamphlet.)

Everything goes to show that this statement is far too sweeping and exaggerated. But the basic fact set forth here is incontrovertible, and its acknowledgment by the “lefts” is particularly clear evidence of their mistake. How can one say that “parliamentarianism is politically obsolete”, when “millions” and “legions” of *proletarians* are not only still in favour of parliamentarianism in general, but are downright “counterrevolutionary”!? It is obvious that parliamentarianism in Germany is *not yet* politically obsolete. It is obvious that the “lefts” in Germany have mistaken *their desire*, their politico-ideological attitude, for objective reality. That is a most dangerous mistake for revolutionaries to make. In Russia — where, over a particularly long period and in particularly varied forms, the most brutal and savage yoke of tsarism produced revolutionaries of diverse shades, revolutionaries who displayed amazing devotion, enthusiasm, heroism and will power — in Russia we have observed this mistake of the revolutionaries at very close quarters; we have studied it very attentively and have a first-hand knowledge of it; that is why we can also see it especially clearly in others. Parliamentarianism is of course “politically obsolete” to the Communists in Germany; but — and that is the

whole point — we must *not* regard what is obsolete *to us* as something obsolete *to a class, to the masses*. Here again we find that the “lefts” do not know how to reason, do not know how to act as the party of a *class*, as the party of the *masses*. You must not sink to the level of the masses, to the level of the backward strata of the class. That is incontestable. You must tell them the bitter truth. You are in duty bound to call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices what they are — prejudices. But at the same time you must *soberly* follow the *actual* state of the class-consciousness and preparedness of the entire class (not only of its communist vanguard), and of all the *working people* (not only of their advanced elements).

Even if only a fairly large *minority* of the industrial workers, and not “millions” and “legions”, follow the lead of the Catholic clergy — and a similar minority of rural workers follow the landowners and kulaks (Grossbauern)²¹ — it *undoubtedly* signifies that parliamentarianism in Germany has *not yet* politically outlived itself, that participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle on the parliamentary rostrum is *obligatory* on the party of the revolutionary proletariat *specifically* for the purpose of educating the backward strata of *its own class*, and for the purpose of awakening and enlightening the undeveloped, downtrodden and ignorant rural *masses*. Whilst you lack the strength to do away with bourgeois parliaments and every other type of reactionary institution, you *must* work within them because *it is there* that you will still find workers who are duped by the priests and stultified by the conditions of rural life; otherwise you risk turning into nothing but windbags.

Third, the “left” Communists have a great deal to say in praise of us Bolsheviks. One sometimes feels like telling them to praise us less and to try to get a better knowledge of the Bolsheviks’ tactics. We took part in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, the Russian bourgeois parliament in September-November 1917. Were our tactics correct or not? If not, then this should be clearly stated and proved, for it is necessary in evolving the correct tactics for international communism. If they were correct, then certain conclusions must be drawn. Of course, there can be no question of placing conditions in Russia on a par with conditions in Western Europe. But as regards the particular question of the meaning of the concept that “parliamentarianism has become politically obsolete”, due account should be taken of our experience, for unless concrete experience is taken into account such concepts very easily turn into empty phrases. In September-November 1917, did we, the Russian Bolsheviks, not have *more* right than any Western Communists to consider that parliamentarianism was politically obsolete in Russia? Of course we did, for the point is not whether bourgeois parliaments have existed for a long time or a short time, but how far the masses of the working people are *prepared* (ideologically, politically and practically) to

accept the soviet system and to dissolve the bourgeois-democratic parliament (or allow it to be dissolved). It is an absolutely incontestable and fully established historical fact that, in September-November 1917, the urban working class and the soldiers and peasants of Russia were, because of a number of special conditions, exceptionally well prepared to accept the soviet system and to disband the most democratic of bourgeois parliaments. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks did *not* boycott the Constituent Assembly, but took part in the elections both before *and after* the proletariat conquered political power. That these elections yielded exceedingly valuable (and to the proletariat, highly useful) political results has, I make bold to hope, been proved by me in the above-mentioned article, which analyses in detail the returns of the elections to the Constituent Assembly in Russia.

The conclusion which follows from this is absolutely incontrovertible: it has been proved that, far from causing harm to the revolutionary proletariat, participation in a bourgeois-democratic parliament, even a few weeks before the victory of a soviet republic and even *after* such a victory, actually helps that proletariat to *prove* to the backward masses why such parliaments deserve to be done away with; it *facilitates* their successful dissolution, and *helps* to make bourgeois parliamentarianism “politically obsolete”. To ignore this experience, while at the same time claiming affiliation to the Communist *International*, which must work out its tactics internationally (not as narrow or exclusively national tactics, but as international tactics), means committing a gross error and actually abandoning internationalism in deed, while recognising it in word.

Now let us examine the “Dutch-left” arguments in favour of non-participation in parliaments. The following is the text of Thesis No. 4, the most important of the above-mentioned “Dutch” theses:

When the capitalist system of production has broken down, and society is in a state of revolution, parliamentary action gradually loses importance as compared with the action of the masses themselves. When, in these conditions, parliament becomes the centre and organ of the counter-revolution, whilst, on the other hand, the labouring class builds up the instruments of its power in the soviets, it may even prove necessary to abstain from all and any participation in parliamentary action.

The first sentence is obviously wrong, since action by the masses, a big strike, for instance, is more important than parliamentary activity *at all* times, and not only during a revolution or in a revolutionary situation. This obviously untenable and historically and politically incorrect argument merely shows very clearly that the authors completely ignore both the general European experience (the French experience before the revolutions of 1848 and 1870; the German experience of 1878-90, etc.) and the Russian experience (see above) of the importance of *combining* legal and illegal struggle.

This question is of immense importance both in general and in particular, because in *all* civilised and advanced countries the time is rapidly approaching when such a combination will more and more become —and has already partly become — mandatory on the party of the revolutionary proletariat, inasmuch as civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is maturing and is imminent, and because of savage persecution of the Communists by republican governments and bourgeois governments generally, which resort to any violation of legality (the example of America is edifying enough), etc. The Dutch, and the lefts in general, have utterly failed to understand this highly important question.

The second sentence is, in the first place, historically wrong. We Bolsheviks participated in the most counterrevolutionary parliaments, and experience has shown that this participation was not only useful but indispensable to the party of the revolutionary proletariat, after the first bourgeois revolution in Russia (1905), so as to pave the way for the second bourgeois revolution (February 1917), and then for the socialist revolution (October 1917). In the second place, this sentence is amazingly illogical. If a parliament becomes an organ and a “centre” (in reality it never has been and never can be a “centre”, but that is by the way) of counter-revolution, while the workers are building up the instruments of their power in the form of the soviets, then it follows that the workers must prepare — ideologically, politically and technically — for the struggle of the soviets against parliament, for the dispersal of parliament by the soviets. But it does not at all follow that this dispersal is hindered, or is not facilitated, by the presence of a soviet opposition *within* the counterrevolutionary parliament. In the course of our victorious struggle against Denikin and Kolchak, we never found that the existence of a soviet and proletarian opposition in their camp was immaterial to our victories. We know perfectly well that the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly on January 5, 1918 was not hampered but was actually facilitated by the fact that, within the counterrevolutionary Constituent Assembly which was about to be dispersed, there was a consistent Bolshevik, as well as an inconsistent, Left Socialist-Revolutionary soviet opposition. The authors of the theses are engaged in muddled thinking; they have forgotten the experience of many, if not all, revolutions, which shows the great usefulness, during a revolution, of a *combination* of mass action outside a reactionary parliament with an opposition sympathetic to (or, better still, directly supporting) the revolution within it. The Dutch, and the “lefts” in general, argue in this respect like doctrinaires of the revolution, who have never taken part in a real revolution, have never given thought to the history of revolutions, or have naively mistaken subjective “rejection” of a reactionary institution for its actual destruction by the combined operation of a number of objective factors. The surest way of discrediting and damaging

a new political (and not only political) idea is to reduce it to absurdity on the plea of defending it. For any truth, if “overdone” (as Dietzgen Senior put it), if exaggerated, or if carried beyond the limits of its actual applicability, can be reduced to an absurdity, and is even bound to become an absurdity under these conditions. That is just the kind of disservice the Dutch and German lefts are rendering to the new truth of the soviet form of government being superior to bourgeois-democratic parliaments. Of course, anyone would be in error who voiced the outmoded viewpoint or in general considered it impermissible, in all and any circumstances, to reject participation in bourgeois parliaments. I cannot attempt here to formulate the conditions under which a boycott is useful, since the object of this pamphlet is far more modest, namely, to study Russian experience in connection with certain topical questions of international communist tactics. Russian experience has provided us with one successful and correct instance (1905), and another that was incorrect (1906), of the use of a boycott by the Bolsheviks. Analysing the first case, we see that we succeeded in *preventing* a reactionary government from *convening* a reactionary parliament in a situation in which extra-parliamentary revolutionary mass action (strikes in particular) was developing at great speed, when not a single section of the proletariat and the peasantry could support the reactionary government in any way, and when the revolutionary proletariat was gaining influence over the backward masses through the strike struggle and through the agrarian movement. It is quite obvious that *this* experience is not applicable to present-day European conditions. It is likewise quite obvious — and the foregoing arguments bear this out — that the advocacy, even if with reservations, by the Dutch and the other “lefts” of refusal to participate in parliaments is fundamentally wrong and detrimental to the cause of the revolutionary proletariat.

In Western Europe and America, parliament has become most odious to the revolutionary vanguard of the working class. That cannot be denied. It can readily be understood, for it is difficult to imagine anything more infamous, vile or treacherous than the behaviour of the vast majority of socialist and Social-Democratic parliamentary deputies during and after the war. It would, however, be not only unreasonable but actually criminal to yield to this mood when deciding *how* this generally recognised evil should be fought. In many countries of Western Europe, the revolutionary mood, we might say, is at present a “novelty”, or a “rarity”, which has all too long been vainly and impatiently awaited; perhaps that is why people so easily yield to that mood. Certainly, without a revolutionary mood among the masses, and without conditions facilitating the growth of this mood, revolutionary tactics will never develop into action. In Russia, however, lengthy, painful and sanguinary experience has taught us the truth that revolutionary tactics cannot be built on a revolutionary mood alone. Tactics must be

based on a sober and strictly objective appraisal of *all* the class forces in a particular state (and of the states that surround it, and of all states the world over) as well as of the experience of revolutionary movements. It is very easy to show one's "revolutionary" temper merely by hurling abuse at parliamentary opportunism, or merely by repudiating participation in parliaments; its very ease, however, cannot turn this into a solution of a difficult, a very difficult, problem. It is far more difficult to create a really revolutionary parliamentary group in a European parliament than it was in Russia. That stands to reason. But it is only a particular expression of the general truth that it was easy for Russia, in the specific and historically unique situation of 1917, to *start* the socialist revolution, but it will be more difficult for Russia than for the European countries to *continue* the revolution and bring it to its consummation. I had occasion to point this out already at the beginning of 1918, and our experience of the past two years has entirely confirmed the correctness of this view. Certain specific conditions, viz., (1) the possibility of linking up the soviet revolution with the ending, as a consequence of this revolution, of the imperialist war, which had exhausted the workers and peasants to an incredible degree; (2) the possibility of taking temporary advantage of the mortal conflict between the world's two most powerful groups of imperialist robbers, who were unable to unite against their soviet enemy; (3) the possibility of enduring a comparatively lengthy civil war, partly owing to the enormous size of the country and to the poor means of communication; (4) the existence of such a profound bourgeois-democratic revolutionary movement among the peasantry that the party of the proletariat was able to adopt the revolutionary demands of the peasant party (the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, the majority of whose members were definitely hostile to Bolshevism) and realise them at once, thanks to the conquest of political power by the proletariat — all these specific conditions do not at present exist in Western Europe, and a repetition of such or similar conditions will not occur so easily. Incidentally, apart from a number of other causes, that is why it is more difficult for Western Europe to *start* a socialist revolution than it was for us. To attempt to "circumvent" this difficulty by "skipping" the arduous job of utilising reactionary parliaments for revolutionary purposes is absolutely childish. You want to create a new society, yet you fear the difficulties involved in forming a good parliamentary group made up of convinced, devoted and heroic Communists, in a reactionary parliament! Is that not childish? If Karl Liebknecht in Germany and Z. Höglund in Sweden were able, even without mass support from below, to set examples of the truly revolutionary utilisation of reactionary parliaments, why should a rapidly growing revolutionary mass party, in the midst of the postwar disillusionment and embitterment of the masses, be unable to *forge* a communist group in the worst of parliaments? It is

because, in Western Europe, the backward masses of the workers and — to an even greater degree — of the small peasants are much more imbued with bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices than they were in Russia; because of that, it is *only* from within such institutions as bourgeois parliaments that Communists can (and must) wage a long and persistent struggle, undaunted by any difficulties, to expose, dispel and overcome these prejudices.

The German “lefts” complain of bad “leaders” in their party, give way to despair, and even arrive at a ridiculous “negation” of “leaders”. But in conditions in which it is often necessary to hide “leaders” underground, the *evolution* of good “leaders”, reliable, tested and authoritative, is a very difficult matter; these difficulties *cannot* be successfully overcome without combining legal and illegal work, and *without testing the “leaders”*, among other ways, in parliaments. Criticism — the most keen, ruthless and uncompromising criticism — should be directed, not against parliamentarianism or parliamentary activities, but against those leaders who are unable — and still more against those who are *unwilling* — to utilise parliamentary elections and the parliamentary rostrum in a revolutionary and communist manner. Only such criticism — combined, of course, with the dismissal of incapable leaders and their replacement by capable ones — will constitute useful and fruitful revolutionary work that will simultaneously train the “leaders” to be worthy of the working class and of all working people, and train the masses to be able properly to understand the political situation and the often very complicated and intricate tasks that spring from that situation. ■*

* I have had too little opportunity to acquaint myself with “left-wing” communism in Italy. Comrade Bordiga and his faction of Abstentionist Communists (*Comunista astensionista*) are certainly wrong in advocating non-participation in parliament. But on one point, it seems to me, Comrade Bordiga is right — as far as can be judged from two issues of his paper, *Il Soviet* (Nos. 3 and 4, January 18 and February 1, 1920), from four issues of Comrade Serrati’s excellent periodical, *Comunismo* (Nos. 1-4, October 1-November 30, 1919), and from separate issues of the Italian bourgeois newspapers which I have seen. Comrade Bordiga and his group are right in attacking Turati and his partisans, who remain in a party which has recognised soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and yet continue their former pernicious and opportunist policy as members of parliament. Of course in tolerating this, Comrade Serrati and the entire Italian Socialist Party are making a mistake which threatens to do as much harm and give rise to the same dangers as it did in Hungary, where the Hungarian Turatis sabotaged both the party and the soviet government from within. Such a mistaken, inconsistent, or spineless attitude towards the opportunist parliamentarians gives rise to “left-wing” communism, on the one hand, and to a *certain extent* justifies its existence, on the other. Comrade Serrati is obviously wrong when he accuses Deputy Turati of being “inconsistent” (*Comunismo* No. 3), for it is the Italian Socialist Party itself that is inconsistent in tolerating such opportunist parliamentarians as Turati and Co.

VIII. No Compromises?

In the quotation from the Frankfurt pamphlet, we have seen how emphatically the “lefts” have advanced this slogan. It is sad to see people who no doubt consider themselves Marxists, and want to be Marxists, forget the fundamental truths of Marxism. This is what Engels — who, like Marx, was one of those rarest of authors whose every sentence in every one of their fundamental works contains a remarkably profound content — wrote in 1874, against the manifesto of the 33 Blanquist Communards:²²

“We are Communists” [the Blanquist Communards wrote in their manifesto], “because we want to attain our goal without stopping at intermediate stations, without any compromises, which only postpone the day of victory and prolong the period of slavery.”

The German Communists are Communists because, through all the intermediate stations and all compromises created, not by them but by the course of historical development, they clearly perceive and constantly pursue the final aim — the abolition of classes and the creation of a society in which there will no longer be private ownership of land or of the means of production. The 33 Blanquists are Communists just because they imagine that, merely because *they* want to skip the intermediate stations and compromises, the matter is settled, and if “it begins” in the next few days — which they take for granted — and they take over power, “communism will be introduced” the day after tomorrow. If that is not immediately possible, they are not Communists.

What childish innocence it is to present one’s own impatience as a theoretically convincing argument! (Frederick Engels, “Program of the Blanquist Communards”, from the German Social-Democratic newspaper *Volksstaat*, 1874, No. 73, given in the Russian translation of *Articles, 1871-1875*, Petrograd, 1919, pp. 52-53.)

In the same article, Engels expresses his profound esteem for Vaillant, and speaks of the “unquestionable merit” of the latter (who, like Guesde, was one of the most prominent leaders of international socialism until their betrayal of socialism in August 1914). But Engels does not fail to give a detailed analysis of an obvious error. Of course, to very young and inexperienced revolutionaries, as well as to petty-bourgeois

revolutionaries of even very respectable age and great experience, it seems extremely “dangerous”, incomprehensible and wrong to “permit compromises”. Many sophists (being unusually or excessively “experienced” politicians) reason exactly in the same way as the British leaders of opportunism mentioned by Comrade Lansbury: “If the Bolsheviks are permitted a certain compromise, why should we not be permitted any kind of compromise?” However, proletarians schooled in numerous strikes (to take only this manifestation of the class struggle) usually assimilate in admirable fashion the very profound truth (philosophical, historical, political and psychological) expounded by Engels. Every proletarian has been through strikes and has experienced “compromises” with the hated oppressors and exploiters, when the workers have had to return to work either without having achieved anything or else agreeing to only a partial satisfaction of their demands. Every proletarian — as a result of the conditions of the mass struggle and the acute intensification of class antagonisms he lives among — sees the difference between a compromise enforced by objective conditions (such as lack of strike funds, no outside support, starvation and exhaustion) — a compromise which in no way minimises the revolutionary devotion and readiness to carry on the struggle on the part of the workers who have agreed to such a compromise — and, on the other hand, a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to objective causes their self-interest (strikebreakers also enter into “compromises”!), their cowardice, desire to toady to the capitalists, and readiness to yield to intimidation, sometimes to persuasion, sometimes to sops, and sometimes to flattery from the capitalists. (The history of the British labour movement provides a very large number of instances of such treacherous compromises by British trade union leaders, but, in one form or another, almost all workers in all countries have witnessed the same sort of thing.)

Naturally, there are individual cases of exceptional difficulty and complexity, when the greatest efforts are necessary for a proper assessment of the actual character of this or that “compromise”, just as there are cases of homicide when it is by no means easy to establish whether the homicide was fully justified and even necessary (as, for example, legitimate self-defence), or due to unpardonable negligence, or even to a cunningly executed perfidious plan. Of course, in politics, where it is sometimes a matter of extremely complex relations — national and international — between classes and parties, very many cases will arise that will be much more difficult than the question of a legitimate “compromise” in a strike or a treacherous “compromise” by a strikebreaker, treacherous leader, etc. It would be absurd to formulate a recipe or general rule (“No compromises!”) to suit all cases. One must use one’s own brains and be able to find one’s bearings in each particular instance. It is, in fact, one of the functions of a party organisation and of party leaders worthy of the name, to acquire,

through the prolonged, persistent, variegated and comprehensive efforts of all thinking representatives of a given class,* the knowledge, experience and — in addition to knowledge and experience — the political flair necessary for the speedy and correct solution of complex political problems.

Naive and quite inexperienced people imagine that the permissibility of compromise *in general* is sufficient to obliterate any distinction between opportunism, against which we are waging, and must wage, an unremitting struggle, and revolutionary Marxism, or communism. But if such people do not yet know that in nature and in society *all* distinctions are fluid and up to a certain point conventional, nothing can help them but lengthy training, education, enlightenment, and political and everyday experience. In the practical questions that arise in the politics of any particular or specific historical moment, it is important to single out those which display the principal type of intolerable and treacherous compromises, such as embody an opportunism that is fatal to the revolutionary class, and to exert all efforts to explain them and combat them. During the 1914-18 imperialist war between two groups of equally predatory countries, social-chauvinism was the principal and fundamental type of opportunism, i.e., support of “defence of country”, which in *such* a war was really equivalent to defence of the predatory interests of one’s “own” bourgeoisie. After the war, defence of the robber League of Nations,²³ defence of direct or indirect alliances with the bourgeoisie of one’s own country against the revolutionary proletariat and the “soviet” movement, and defence of bourgeois democracy and bourgeois parliamentarianism against “soviet power” became the principal manifestations of those intolerable and treacherous compromises, whose sum total constituted an opportunism fatal to the revolutionary proletariat and its cause.

“All compromise with other parties ... any policy of manoeuvring and compromise must be emphatically rejected”, the German lefts write in the Frankfurt pamphlet.

It is surprising that, with such views, these lefts do not emphatically condemn Bolshevism! After all, the German lefts cannot but know that the entire history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution, is *full* of instances of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including

* Within every class, even in the conditions prevailing in the most enlightened countries, even within the most advanced class, and even when the circumstances of the moment have aroused all its spiritual forces to an exceptional degree, there always are — and inevitably *will be* as long as classes exist, as long as a classless society has not fully consolidated itself, and has not developed on its own foundations — representatives of the class who do *not* think, and are incapable of thinking, for themselves. Capitalism would not be the oppressor of the masses that it actually is, if things were otherwise.

bourgeois parties!

To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted and complex than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to renounce in advance any change of tack, or any utilisation of a conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one's enemies, or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating or conditional allies) — is that not ridiculous in the extreme? Is it not like making a difficult ascent of an unexplored and hitherto inaccessible mountain and refusing in advance ever to move in zigzags, ever to retrace one's steps, or ever to abandon a course once selected, and to try others? And yet people so immature and inexperienced (if youth were the explanation, it would not be so bad; young people are preordained to talk such nonsense for a certain period) have met with support — whether direct or indirect, open or covert, whole or partial, it does not matter — from some members of the Communist Party of Holland.

After the first socialist revolution of the proletariat, and the overthrow of the bourgeoisie in some country, the proletariat of that country remains *for a long time weaker* than the bourgeoisie, simply because of the latter's extensive international links, and also because of the spontaneous and continuous restoration and regeneration of capitalism and the bourgeoisie by the small commodity producers of the country which has overthrown the bourgeoisie. The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and by the most thorough, careful, attentive, skilful and *obligatory* use of any, even the smallest, rift between the enemies, any conflict of interests among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries, and also by taking advantage of any, even the smallest, opportunity of winning a mass ally, even though this ally is temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional. Those who do not understand this reveal a failure to understand even the smallest grain of Marxism, of modern scientific socialism *in general*. Those who have not proved *in practice*, over a fairly considerable period of time and in fairly varied political situations, their ability to apply this truth in practice have not yet learned to help the revolutionary class in its struggle to emancipate all toiling humanity from the exploiters. And this applies equally to the period *before* and *after* the proletariat has won political power.

Our theory is not a dogma, but a *guide to action*, said Marx and Engels. The greatest blunder, the greatest crime, committed by such “out-and-out” Marxists as Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, etc., is that they have not understood this and have been unable to apply it at crucial moments of the proletarian revolution. “Political activity is not like the pavement of Nevsky Prospekt” (the well-kept, broad and level pavement

of the perfectly straight principal thoroughfare of St. Petersburg), N. G. Chernyshevsky, the great Russian socialist of the pre-Marxist period, used to say. Since Chernyshevsky's time, disregard or forgetfulness of this truth has cost Russian revolutionaries countless sacrifices. We must strive at all costs to *prevent* the left Communists and West-European and American revolutionaries that are devoted to the working class from paying as *dearly* as the backward Russians did to learn this truth.

Prior to the downfall of tsarism, the Russian revolutionary Social-Democrats made repeated use of the services of the bourgeois liberals, i.e., they concluded numerous practical compromises with the latter. In 1901-02, even prior to the appearance of Bolshevism, the old editorial board of *Iskra* (consisting of Plekhanov, Akselrod, Zasulich, Martov, Potresov and myself) concluded (not for long, it is true) a formal political alliance with Struve, the political leader of bourgeois liberalism, while at the same time being able to wage an unremitting and most merciless ideological and political struggle against bourgeois liberalism and against the slightest manifestation of its influence in the working-class movement. The Bolsheviks have always adhered to this policy. Since 1905 they have systematically advocated an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, against the liberal bourgeoisie and tsarism, never, however, refusing to support the bourgeoisie against tsarism (for instance, during second rounds of elections, or during second ballots) and never ceasing their relentless ideological and political struggle against the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the bourgeois-revolutionary peasant party, exposing them as petty-bourgeois democrats who have falsely described themselves as socialists. During the Duma elections of 1907, the Bolsheviks entered briefly into a formal political bloc with the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Between 1903 and 1912, there were periods of several years in which we were formally united with the Mensheviks in a single Social-Democratic Party,²⁴ but we *never stopped* our ideological and political struggle against them as opportunists and vehicles of bourgeois influence on the proletariat. During the war, we concluded certain compromises with the Kautskyites, with the left Mensheviks (Martov), and with a section of the Socialist-Revolutionaries (Chernov and Natanson); we were together with them at Zimmerwald and Kienthal,²⁵ and issued joint manifestos. However, we never ceased and never relaxed our ideological and political struggle against the Kautskyites, Martov and Chernov (when Natanson died in 1919, a "Revolutionary-Communist" Narodnik,²⁶ he was very close to and almost in agreement with us). At the very moment of the October Revolution, we entered into an informal but very important (and very successful) political bloc with the petty-bourgeois peasantry by adopting the *Socialist-Revolutionary* agrarian program *in its entirety*, without a single alteration — i.e., we effected an undeniable compromise in order to prove to the peasants that we wanted,

not to “steamroller” them but to reach agreement with them. At the same time we proposed (and soon after effected) a formal political bloc, including participation in the government, with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, who dissolved this bloc after the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and then, in July 1918, went to the length of armed rebellion, and subsequently of an armed struggle, against us.

It is therefore understandable why the attacks made by the German lefts against the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany for entertaining the idea of a bloc with the Independents (the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany — the Kautskyites) are absolutely inane, in our opinion, and clear proof that the “lefts” are in the *wrong*. In Russia, too, there were right Mensheviks (participants in the Kerensky government), who corresponded to the German Scheidemanns, and left Mensheviks (Martov), corresponding to the German Kautskyites and standing in opposition to the right Mensheviks. A gradual shift of the worker masses from the Mensheviks over to the Bolsheviks was to be clearly seen in 1917. At the 1st All-Russia Congress of Soviets, held in June 1917, we had only 13% of the votes; the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks had a majority. At the 2nd Congress of Soviets (October 25, 1917, old style) we had 51% of the votes. Why is it that in Germany the *same* and absolutely *identical* shift of the workers from right to left did not immediately strengthen the Communists, but first strengthened the midway Independent Party, although the latter never had independent political ideas or an independent policy, but merely wavered between the Scheidemanns and the Communists?

One of the evident reasons was the *erroneous* tactics of the German Communists, who must fearlessly and honestly admit this error and learn to rectify it. The error consisted in their denial of the need to take part in the reactionary bourgeois parliaments and in the reactionary trade unions; the error consisted in numerous manifestations of that “left-wing” infantile disorder which has now come to the surface and will consequently be cured the more thoroughly, the more rapidly and with greater advantage to the organism.

The German Independent Social-Democratic Party is obviously not a homogeneous body. Alongside the old opportunist leaders (Kautsky, Hilferding and apparently, to a considerable extent, Crispian, Ledebour and others) — these have revealed their inability to understand the significance of soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and their inability to lead the proletariat’s revolutionary struggle — there has emerged in this party a left and proletarian wing, which is growing most rapidly. Hundreds of thousands of members of this party (which has, I think, a membership of some three-quarters of a million) are proletarians who are abandoning Scheidemann and are rapidly going over to communism. This proletarian wing has already proposed

— at the Leipzig Congress of the Independents (1919) — immediate and unconditional affiliation to the Third International. To fear a “compromise” with this wing of the party is positively ridiculous. On the contrary, it is the *duty* of Communists to seek *and find* a suitable form of compromise with them, a compromise which, on the one hand, will facilitate and accelerate the necessary complete fusion with this wing and, on the other, will in no way hamper the Communists in their ideological and political struggle against the opportunist right-wing of the Independents. It will probably be no easy matter to devise a suitable form of compromise — but only a charlatan could promise the German workers and the German Communists an “easy” road to victory.

Capitalism would not be capitalism if the proletariat *pur sang* were not surrounded by a large number of exceedingly motley types intermediate between the proletarian and the semi-proletarian (who earns his livelihood in part by the sale of his labour-power), between the semi-proletarian and the small peasant (and petty artisan, handicraft worker and small master in general), between the small peasant and the middle peasant, and so on, and if the proletariat itself were not divided into more developed and less developed strata, if it were not divided according to territorial origin, trade, sometimes according to religion, and so on. From all this follows the necessity, the absolute necessity, for the Communist Party, the vanguard of the proletariat, its class-conscious section, to resort to changes of tack, to conciliation and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small masters. It is entirely a matter of *knowing how* to apply these tactics in order to *raise* — not lower — the *general* level of proletarian class-consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to fight and win. Incidentally, it should be noted that the Bolsheviks’ victory over the Mensheviks called for the application of tactics of changes of tack, conciliation and compromises, not only before *but also after* the October Revolution of 1917, but the changes of tack and compromises were, of course, such as assisted, boosted and consolidated the Bolsheviks at the expense of the Mensheviks. The petty-bourgeois democrats (including the Mensheviks) inevitably vacillate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between bourgeois democracy and the soviet system, between reformism and revolutionism, between love for the workers and fear of the proletarian dictatorship, etc. The Communists’ proper tactics should consist in *utilising* these vacillations, not ignoring them; utilising them calls for concessions to elements that are turning towards the proletariat — whenever and in the measure that they turn towards the proletariat — in addition to fighting those who turn towards the bourgeoisie. As a result of the application of the correct tactics, Menshevism began to disintegrate, and has been disintegrating more and more in our country; the stubbornly opportunist leaders are being isolated, and the best of the workers and the best

elements among the petty-bourgeois democrats are being brought into our camp. This is a lengthy process, and the hasty “decision” — “No compromises, no manoeuvres” — can only prejudice the strengthening of the revolutionary proletariat’s influence and the enlargement of its forces.

Lastly, one of the undoubted errors of the German “lefts” lies in their downright refusal to recognise the Treaty of Versailles.²⁷ The more “weightily” and “pompously”, the more “emphatically” and peremptorily this viewpoint is formulated (by K. Homer, for instance), the less sense it seems to make. It is not enough, under the present conditions of the international proletarian revolution, to repudiate the preposterous absurdities of “National Bolshevism” (Laufenberg and others), which has gone to the length of advocating a bloc with the German bourgeoisie for a war against the Entente. One must realise that it is utterly false tactics to refuse to admit that a soviet Germany (if a German soviet republic were soon to arise) would have to recognise the Treaty of Versailles for a time, and to submit to it. From this it does not follow that the Independents — at a time when the Scheidemanns were in the government, when the Soviet government in Hungary had not yet been overthrown,²⁸ and when it was still possible that a soviet revolution in Vienna would support Soviet Hungary — were right, *under the circumstances*, in putting forward the demand that the Treaty of Versailles should be signed. At that time the Independents tacked and manoeuvred very clumsily, for they more or less accepted responsibility for the Scheidemann traitors, and more or less backslid from advocacy of a ruthless (and most calmly conducted) class war against the Scheidemanns, to advocacy of a “classless” or “above-class” standpoint.

In the present situation, however, the German Communists should obviously not deprive themselves of freedom of action by giving a positive and categorical promise to repudiate the Treaty of Versailles in the event of communism’s victory. That would be absurd. They should say: the Scheidemanns and the Kautskyites have committed a number of acts of treachery hindering (and in part quite ruining) the chances of an alliance with Soviet Russia and Soviet Hungary. We Communists will do all we can to *facilitate and pave the way* for such an alliance. However, we are in no way obligated to repudiate the Treaty of Versailles, come what may, or to do so at once. The possibility of its successful repudiation will depend, not only on the German, but also on the international successes of the soviet movement. The Scheidemanns and the Kautskyites have hampered this movement; we are helping it. That is the gist of the matter; therein lies the fundamental difference. And if our class enemies, the exploiters and their Scheidemann and Kautskyite lackeys, have missed many an opportunity of strengthening both the German and the international soviet movement, of

strengthening both the German and the international soviet revolution, the blame lies with them. The soviet revolution in Germany will strengthen the international soviet movement, which is the strongest bulwark (and the only reliable, invincible and worldwide bulwark) against the Treaty of Versailles and against international imperialism in general. To give absolute, categorical and immediate precedence to liberation from the Treaty of Versailles and to give it *precedence over the question of liberating other countries* oppressed by imperialism, from the yoke of imperialism, is philistine nationalism (worthy of the Kautskys, the Hilferdings, the Otto Bauers and Co.), not revolutionary internationalism. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie in any of the large European countries, including Germany, would be such a gain for the international revolution that, for its sake, one can, and if necessary should, tolerate a *more prolonged existence of the Treaty of Versailles*. If Russia, standing alone, could endure the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk for several months, to the advantage of the revolution, there is nothing impossible in a soviet Germany, allied with Soviet Russia, enduring the existence of the Treaty of Versailles for a longer period, to the advantage of the revolution.

The imperialists of France, Britain, etc., are trying to provoke and ensnare the German Communists: "Say that you will not sign the Treaty of Versailles!" they urge. Like babes, the left Communists fall into the trap laid for them, instead of skilfully manoeuvring against the crafty and, *at present*, stronger enemy, and instead of telling him, "We shall sign the Treaty of Versailles now". It is folly, not revolutionism, to deprive ourselves in advance of any freedom of action, openly to inform an enemy who is at present better armed than we are whether we shall fight him, and when. To accept battle at a time when it is obviously advantageous to the enemy, but not to us, is criminal; political leaders of the revolutionary class are absolutely useless if they are incapable of "changing tack, or offering conciliation and compromise" in order to take evasive action in a patently disadvantageous battle. ■

IX. ‘Left-Wing’ Communism in Great Britain

There is no Communist party in Great Britain as yet, but there is a fresh, broad, powerful and rapidly growing communist movement among the workers, which justifies the best hopes. There are several political parties and organisations (the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party, the South Wales Socialist Society, the Workers’ Socialist Federation), which desire to form a Communist Party and are already negotiating among themselves to this end. In its issue of February 21, 1920, Vol. VI, No. 48, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, weekly organ of the last of the organisations mentioned, carried an article by the editor, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst, entitled “Towards a Communist Party”. The article outlines the progress of the negotiations between the four organisations mentioned, for the formation of a united Communist Party, on the basis of affiliation to the Third International, the recognition of the soviet system instead of parliamentarianism, and the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It appears that one of the greatest obstacles to the immediate formation of a united Communist party is presented by the disagreement on the questions of participation in Parliament and on whether the new Communist party should affiliate to the old, trade unionist, opportunist and social-chauvinist Labour Party, which is mostly made up of trade unions. The Workers’ Socialist Federation and the Socialist Labour Party* are opposed to taking part in parliamentary elections and in Parliament, and they are opposed to affiliation to the Labour Party; in this they disagree with all or with most of the members of the British Socialist Party, which they regard as the “right-wing of the Communist parties” in Great Britain. (Page 5, Sylvia Pankhurst’s article.)

Thus, the main division is the same as in Germany, notwithstanding the enormous difference in the forms in which the disagreements manifest themselves (in Germany the form is far closer to the “Russian” than it is in Great Britain), and in a number of

* I believe this party is opposed to affiliation to the Labour Party but not all its members are opposed to participation in Parliament.

other things. Let us examine the arguments of the "lefts".

On the question of participation in Parliament, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst refers to an article in the same issue, by Comrade Gallacher, who writes in the name of the Scottish Workers' Council in Glasgow.

The above council [he writes] is definitely anti-parliamentarian, and has behind it the left wing of the various political bodies. We represent the revolutionary movement in Scotland, striving continually to build up a revolutionary organisation within the industries [in various branches of production], and a Communist Party, based on social committees, throughout the country. For a considerable time we have been sparring with the official parliamentarians. We have not considered it necessary to declare open warfare on them, and they are *afraid* to open an attack on us.

But this state of affairs cannot long continue. We are winning all along the line.

The rank and file of the ILP in Scotland is becoming more and more disgusted with the thought of Parliament, and the soviets [the Russian word transliterated into English is used] or workers' councils are being supported by almost every branch. This is very serious, of course, for the gentlemen who look to politics for a profession, and they are using any and every means to persuade their members to come back into the parliamentary fold. Revolutionary comrades *must not* [all italics are the author's] give any support to this gang. Our fight here is going to be a difficult one. One of the worst features of it will be the treachery of those whose personal ambition is a more impelling force than their regard for the revolution. Any support given to parliamentarism is simply assisting to put power into the hands of our British Scheidemanns and Noskes. Henderson, Clynes and Co. are hopelessly reactionary. The official ILP is more and more coming under the control of middle-class liberals, who ... have found their "spiritual home" in the camp of Messrs. MacDonald, Snowden and Co. The official ILP is bitterly hostile to the Third International, the rank and file is for it. Any support to the parliamentary opportunists is simply playing into the hands of the former. The BSP doesn't count at all here ... What is wanted here is a sound revolutionary industrial organisation, and a Communist party working along clear, well-defined, scientific lines. If our comrades can assist us in building these, we will take their help gladly; if they cannot, for God's sake let them keep out altogether, lest they betray the revolution by lending their support to the reactionaries, who are so eagerly clamouring for parliamentary "honours" (?) [the query mark is the author's] and who are so anxious to prove that they *can rule* as effectively as the "boss" class politicians themselves.

In my opinion, this letter to the editor expresses excellently the temper and point of view of the young Communists, or of rank-and-file workers who are only just beginning to accept communism. This temper is highly gratifying and valuable; we must learn to

appreciate and support it for, in its absence, it would be hopeless to expect the victory of the proletarian revolution in Great Britain, or in any other country for that matter. People who can give expression to this temper of the masses, and are able to evoke such a temper (which is very often dormant, unconscious and latent) among the masses, should be appreciated and given every assistance. At the same time, we must tell them openly and frankly that a state of mind is *by itself* insufficient for leadership of the masses in a great revolutionary struggle, and that the cause of the revolution may well be harmed by certain errors that people who are most devoted to the cause of the revolution are about to commit, or are committing. Comrade Gallacher's letter undoubtedly reveals the rudiments of *all* the mistakes that are being made by the German "left" Communists and were made by the Russian "left" Bolsheviks in 1908 and 1918.

The writer of the letter is full of a noble and working-class hatred for the bourgeois "class politicians" (a hatred understood and shared, however, not only by proletarians but by all working people, by all *Kleinen Leuten* * to use the German expression). In a representative of the oppressed and exploited masses, this hatred is truly the "beginning of all wisdom", the basis of any socialist and communist movement and of its success. The writer, however, has apparently lost sight of the fact that politics is a science and an art that does not fall from the skies or come gratis, and that, if it wants to overcome the bourgeoisie, the proletariat must train its *own* proletarian "class politicians", of a kind in no way inferior to bourgeois politicians.

The writer of the letter fully realises that only workers' soviets, not parliament, can be the instrument enabling the proletariat to achieve its aims; those who have failed to understand this are, of course, out-and-out reactionaries, even if they are most highly educated people, most experienced politicians, most sincere socialists, most erudite Marxists, and most honest citizens and fathers of families. But the writer of the letter does not even ask — it does not occur to him to ask — whether it is possible to bring about the soviets' victory over parliament without getting pro-soviet politicians *into* parliament, without disintegrating parliamentarianism from *within*, without working within parliament for the success of the soviets in their forthcoming task of dispersing parliament. Yet the writer of the letter expresses the absolutely correct idea that the Communist party in Great Britain must act on *scientific* principles. Science demands, first, that the experience of other countries be taken into account, especially if these other countries, which are also capitalist, are undergoing, or have recently undergone, a very similar experience; second, it demands that account be taken of *all* the forces,

* "Little people" — *Ed.*

groups, parties, classes and masses operating in a given country, and also that policy should not be determined only by the desires and views, by the degree of class-consciousness and the militancy of one group or party alone.

It is true that the Hendersons, the Clyneses, the MacDonalds and the Snowdens are hopelessly reactionary. It is equally true that they want to assume power (though they would prefer a coalition with the bourgeoisie), that they want to “rule” along the old bourgeois lines, and that when they are in power they will certainly behave like the Scheidemanns and Noskes. All that is true. But it does not at all follow that to support them means treachery to the revolution; what does follow is that, in the interests of the revolution, working-class revolutionaries should give these gentlemen a certain amount of parliamentary support. To explain this idea, I shall take two contemporary British political documents: (1) the speech delivered by Prime Minister Lloyd George on March 18, 1920 (as reported in *The Manchester Guardian* of March 19, 1920), and (2) the arguments of a “left” Communist, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst, in the article mentioned above.

In his speech Lloyd George entered into a polemic with Asquith (who had been especially invited to this meeting but declined to attend) and with those Liberals who want, not a coalition with the Conservatives, but closer relations with the Labour Party. (In the above-quoted letter, Comrade Gallacher also points to the fact that Liberals are joining the Independent Labour Party.) Lloyd George argued that a coalition — and a *close* coalition at that — between the Liberals and the Conservatives was essential, otherwise there might be a victory for the Labour Party, which Lloyd George prefers to call “socialist” and which is working for the “common ownership” of the means of production. “It is ... known as communism in France”, the leader of the British bourgeoisie said, putting it popularly for his audience, Liberal MPs who probably never knew it before. In Germany it was called socialism, and in Russia it is called Bolshevism, he went on to say. To Liberals this is unacceptable on principle, Lloyd George explained, because they stand in principle for private property. “Civilisation is in jeopardy”, the speaker declared, and consequently Liberals and Conservatives must unite ...

If you go to the agricultural areas [said Lloyd George] I agree you have the old party divisions as strong as ever. They are removed from the danger. It does not walk their lanes. But when they see it they will be as strong as some of these industrial constituencies are now. Four-fifths of this country is industrial and commercial; hardly one-fifth is agricultural. It is one of the things I have constantly in my mind when I think of the dangers of the future here. In France the population is agricultural, and you have a solid body of opinion which does not move very rapidly, and which is not very easily excited

by revolutionary movements. That is not the case here. This country is more top-heavy than any country in the world, and if it begins to rock, the crash here, for that reason, will be greater than in any land.

From this the reader will see that Mr. Lloyd George is not only a very intelligent man, but one who has also learned a great deal from the Marxists. We too have something to learn from Lloyd George.

Of definite interest is the following episode, which occurred in the course of the discussion after Lloyd George's speech:

Mr. Wallace, MP: I should like to ask what the prime minister considers the effect might be in the industrial constituencies upon the industrial workers, so many of whom are Liberals at the present time and from whom we get so much support. Would not a possible result be to cause an immediate overwhelming accession of strength to the Labour Party from men who at present are our cordial supporters?

The prime minister: I take a totally different view. The fact that Liberals are fighting among themselves undoubtedly drives a very considerable number of Liberals in despair to the Labour Party, where you get a considerable body of Liberals, very able men, whose business it is to discredit the government. The result is undoubtedly to bring a good accession of public sentiment to the Labour Party. It does not go to the Liberals who are outside, it goes to the Labour Party, the by-elections show that.

It may be said, in passing, that this argument shows in particular how muddled even the most intelligent members of the bourgeoisie have become and how they cannot help committing irreparable blunders. That, in fact, is what will bring about the downfall of the bourgeoisie. Our people, however, may commit blunders (provided, of course, that they are not too serious and are rectified in time) and yet in the long run, will prove the victors.

The second political document is the following argument advanced by Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst, a "left" Communist:

Comrade Inkpin [the general secretary of the British Socialist Party] refers to the Labour Party as "the main body of the working-class movement". Another comrade of the British Socialist Party, at the Third International, just held, put the British Socialist Party position more strongly. He said: "We regard the Labour Party as the organised working class."

We do not take this view of the Labour Party. The Labour Party is very large numerically though its membership is to a great extent quiescent and apathetic, consisting of men and women who have joined the trade unions because their workmates are trade unionists, and to share the friendly benefits.

But we recognise that the great size of the Labour Party is also due to the fact that

it is the creation of a school of thought beyond which the majority of the British working class has not yet emerged, though great changes are at work in the mind of the people which will presently alter this state of affairs ...

The British Labour Party, like the social-patriotic organisations of other countries, will, in the natural development of society, inevitably come into power. It is for the Communists to build up the forces that will overthrow the social patriots, and in this country we must not delay or falter in that work.

We must not dissipate our energy in adding to the strength of the Labour Party; its rise to power is inevitable. We must concentrate on making a communist movement that will vanquish it. The Labour Party will soon be forming a government, the revolutionary opposition must make ready to attack it ...

Thus the liberal bourgeoisie are abandoning the historical system of "two parties" (of exploiters), which has been hallowed by centuries of experience and has been extremely advantageous to the exploiters, and consider it necessary for these two parties to join forces against the Labour Party. A number of Liberals are deserting to the Labour Party like rats from a sinking ship. The left Communists believe that the transfer of power to the Labour Party is inevitable and admit that it now has the backing of most workers. From this they draw the strange conclusion which Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst formulates as follows:

The Communist party must not compromise ... The Communist party must keep its doctrine pure, and its independence of reformism inviolate, its mission is to lead the way, without stopping or turning, by the direct road to the communist revolution.

On the contrary, the fact that most British workers still follow the lead of the British Kerenskys or Scheidemanns and have not yet had experience of a government composed of these people — an experience which was necessary in Russia and Germany so as to secure the mass transition of the workers to communism — undoubtedly indicates that the British Communists *should* participate in parliamentary action, that they should, from *within* parliament, help the masses of the workers see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government in practice, and that they should help the Hendersons and Snowdens defeat the united forces of Lloyd George and Churchill. To act otherwise would mean hampering the cause of the revolution, since revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, a change brought about by the political experience of the masses, never by propaganda alone. "To lead the way without compromises, without turning" — this slogan is obviously wrong if it comes from a patently impotent minority of the workers who know (or at all events should know) that given a Henderson and Snowden victory over Lloyd George and Churchill, the majority will soon become disappointed in their

leaders and will begin to support communism (or at all events will adopt an attitude of neutrality, and, in the main, of sympathetic neutrality, towards the Communists). It is as though 10,000 soldiers were to hurl themselves into battle against an enemy force of 50,000, when it would be proper to “halt”, “take evasive action”, or even effect a “compromise” so as to gain time until the arrival of the 100,000 reinforcements that are on their way but cannot go into action immediately. That is intellectualist childishness, not the serious tactics of a revolutionary class.

The fundamental law of revolution, which has been confirmed by all revolutions and especially by all three Russian revolutions in the 20th century, is as follows: for a revolution to take place it is not enough for the exploited and oppressed masses to realise the impossibility of living in the old way, and demand changes; for a revolution to take place it is essential that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. It is only when the “*lower classes*” do not want to live in the old way and the “*upper classes*” cannot carry on in the old way that the revolution can triumph. This truth can be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nationwide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters). It follows that, for a revolution to take place, it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, and politically active workers) should fully realise that revolution is necessary, and that they should be prepared to die for it; second, that the ruling classes should be going through a governmental crisis, which draws even the most backward masses into politics (symptomatic of any genuine revolution is a rapid, tenfold and even hundredfold increase in the size of the working and oppressed masses — hitherto apathetic — who are capable of waging the political struggle), weakens the government, and makes it possible for the revolutionaries to rapidly overthrow it.

Incidentally, as can also be seen from Lloyd George’s speech, both conditions for a successful proletarian revolution are clearly maturing in Great Britain. The errors of the left Communists are particularly dangerous at present, because certain revolutionaries are not displaying a sufficiently thoughtful, sufficiently attentive, sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently shrewd attitude toward each of these conditions. If we are the party of the revolutionary *class*, and not merely a revolutionary group, and if we want the *masses* to follow us (and unless we achieve that, we stand the risk of remaining mere windbags), we must, first, help Henderson or Snowden to beat Lloyd George and Churchill (or, rather, compel the former to beat the latter, because the former are afraid of their victory!); second, we must help the majority of the working class to be convinced by their own experience that we are right, i.e., that the Hendersons and Snowdens are absolutely good for nothing, that they are petty-bourgeois and treacherous by nature, and that their bankruptcy is inevitable; third, we must bring

nearer the moment when, *on the basis* of the disappointment of most of the workers in the Hendersons, it will be possible, with serious chances of success, to overthrow the government of the Hendersons at once; because if the most astute and solid Lloyd George, that big, not petty, bourgeois, is displaying consternation and is more and more weakening himself (and the bourgeoisie as a whole) by his "friction" with Churchill today and with Asquith tomorrow, how much greater will be the consternation of a Henderson government!

I will put it more concretely. In my opinion, the British Communists should unite their four parties and groups (all very weak, and some of them very, weak) into a single Communist party on the basis of the principles of the Third International and of *obligatory* participation in parliament. The Communist party should propose the following "compromise" election agreement to the Hendersons and Snowdens: let us jointly fight against the alliance between Lloyd George and the Conservatives; let us share parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of workers' votes polled for the Labour Party and for the Communist party (not in elections, but in a special ballot), and let us retain *complete freedom* of agitation, propaganda and political activity. Of course, without this latter condition, we cannot agree to a bloc, for that would be treachery; the British Communists must demand and get complete freedom to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (*for 15 years* — 1903-17) the Russian Bolsheviks demanded and got it in respect of the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, i.e., the Mensheviks.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens accept a bloc on these terms, we shall be the gainers, because the number of parliamentary seats is of no importance to us; we are not out for seats. We shall yield on this point (whilst the Hendersons and especially their new friends — or new masters — the Liberals who have joined the Independent Labour Party are most eager to get seats). We shall be the gainers, because we shall carry *our* agitation among the masses at a time when Lloyd George *himself* has "incensed" them, and we shall not only be helping the Labour Party to establish its government sooner, but shall also be helping the masses sooner to understand the communist propaganda that we shall carry on against the Hendersons, without any reticence or omission.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject a bloc with us on these terms, we shall gain still more, for we shall at once have shown the *masses* (note that, even in the purely Menshevik and completely opportunist Independent Labour Party, the *rank and file* are in favour of Soviets) that the Hendersons prefer *their* close relations with the capitalists to the unity of all the workers. We shall immediately gain in the eyes of the *masses*, who, particularly after the brilliant, highly correct and highly useful (to

communism) explanations given by Lloyd George, will be sympathetic to the idea of uniting all the workers against the Lloyd George-Conservative alliance. We shall gain immediately, because we shall have demonstrated to the masses that the Hendersons and the Snowdens are afraid to beat Lloyd George, afraid to assume power alone, and are striving to secure the *secret* support of Lloyd George, who is *openly* extending a hand to the Conservatives, against the Labour Party. It should be noted that in Russia, after the revolution of February 27, 1917 (old style), the Bolsheviks' propaganda against the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries (i.e., the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens) derived benefit precisely from a circumstance of this kind. We said to the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries: assume full power without the bourgeoisie, because you have a majority in the soviets (at the 1st All-Russia Congress of Soviets, in June 1917, the Bolsheviks had only 13% of the votes). But the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens were afraid to assume power without the bourgeoisie, and when the bourgeoisie held up the elections to the Constituent Assembly, knowing full well that the elections would give a majority to the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks* (who formed a close political bloc and in fact represented *only* petty-bourgeois democracy), the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks were unable energetically and consistently to oppose these delays.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject a bloc with the Communists, the latter will immediately gain by winning the sympathy of the masses and discrediting the Hendersons and Snowdens, if, as a result, we do lose a few parliamentary seats, it is a matter of no significance to us. We would put up our candidates in a very few but absolutely safe constituencies, namely, constituencies where our candidatures would not give any seats to the Liberals at the expense of the Labour candidates. We would take part in the election campaign, distribute leaflets agitating for communism, and, in *all* constituencies where we have no candidates, we would urge the electors *to vote for the Labour candidate and against the bourgeois candidate*. Comrades Sylvia Pankhurst and Gallacher are mistaken in thinking that this is a betrayal of communism, or a renunciation of the struggle against the social-traitors. On the contrary, the cause of communist revolution would undoubtedly gain thereby.

At present, British Communists very often find it hard even to approach the

* The results of the November 1917 elections to the Constituent Assembly in Russia, based on returns embracing over 36 million voters, were as follows: the Bolsheviks obtained 25% of the votes; the various parties of the landowners and the bourgeoisie obtained 13%, and the petty-bourgeois-democratic parties, i.e., the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and a number of similar small groups obtained 62%.

masses, and even to get a hearing from them. If I come out as a Communist and call upon them to vote for Henderson and against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing. And I shall be able to explain in a popular manner, not only why the soviets are better than a parliament and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is better than the dictatorship of Churchill (disguised with the signboard of bourgeois "democracy"), but also that, with my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man — that the impending establishment of a government of the Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany.

If the objection is raised that these tactics are too "subtle" or too complex for the masses to understand, that these tactics will split and scatter our forces, will prevent us from concentrating them on soviet revolution, etc., I will reply to the "left objectors: don't ascribe your doctrinairism to the masses! The masses in Russia are no doubt no better educated than the masses in Britain; if anything, they are less so. Yet the masses understood the Bolsheviks, and the fact that, in September 1917, *on the eve* of the soviet revolution, the Bolsheviks put up their candidates for a bourgeois parliament (the Constituent Assembly) and *on the day after* the soviet revolution, in November 1917, took part in the elections to this Constituent Assembly, which they got rid of on January 5, 1918 — this did not hamper the Bolsheviks, but, on the contrary, helped them.

I cannot deal here with the second point of disagreement among the British Communists — the question of affiliation or non-affiliation to the Labour Party. I have too little material at my disposal on this question, which is highly complex because of the unique character of the British Labour Party, whose very structure is so unlike that of the political parties usual in the European continent. It is beyond doubt, however, first, that in this question, too, those who try to deduce the tactics of the revolutionary proletariat from principles such as: "The Communist Party must keep its doctrine pure, and its independence of reformism inviolate; its mission is to lead the way, without stopping or turning, by the direct road to the communist revolution" — will inevitably fall into error. Such principles are merely a repetition of the mistake made by the French Blanquist Communards, who, in 1874, "repudiated" all compromises and all intermediate stages. Second, it is beyond doubt that, in this question too, as always, the task consists in learning to apply the general and basic principles of communism to the *specific relations* between classes and parties, to the *specific features* in the objective development towards communism, which are different in each country and which we must be able to discover, study, and predict.

This, however, should be discussed, not in connection with British communism alone, but in connection with the general conclusions concerning the development of communism in all capitalist countries. We shall now proceed to deal with this subject. ■

X. Several Conclusions

The Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905 revealed a highly original turn in world history: in one of the most backward capitalist countries, the strike movement attained a scope and power unprecedented anywhere in the world. In the *first month* of 1905 *alone*, the number of strikers was 10 times the *annual* average for the previous decade (1895-1904); from January to October 1905, strikes grew all the time and reached enormous proportions. Under the influence of a number of unique historical conditions, backward Russia was the first to show the world, not only the growth, by leaps and bounds, of the independent activity of the oppressed masses in time of revolution (this had occurred in all great revolutions), but also that the significance of the proletariat is infinitely greater than its proportion in the total population; it showed a combination of the economic strike and the political strike, with the latter developing into an armed uprising, and the birth of the soviets, a new form of mass struggle and mass organisation of the classes oppressed by capitalism.

The revolutions of February and October 1917 led to the all-round development of the soviets on a nationwide scale and to their victory in the proletarian socialist revolution. In less than two years, the international character of the soviets, the spread of this form of struggle and organisation to the world working-class movement and the historical mission of the soviets as the grave-digger, heir and successor of bourgeois parliamentarianism and of bourgeois democracy in general, all became clear.

But that is not all. The history of the working-class movement now shows that, in all countries, it is about to go through (and is already going through) a struggle waged by communism — emergent, gaining strength and advancing towards victory — against, primarily, Menshevism, i.e., opportunism and social-chauvinism (the home brand in each particular country), and then as a complement, so to say, left-wing communism. The former struggle has developed in all countries, apparently without any exception, as a duel between the Second International (already virtually dead) and the Third International. The latter struggle is to be seen in Germany, Great Britain, Italy, America (at any rate, a certain *section* of the Industrial Workers of the World and of the anarcho-syndicalist trends uphold the errors of left-wing communism alongside of an

almost universal and almost unreserved acceptance of the soviet system), and in France (the attitude of a section of the former syndicalists towards the political party and parliamentarianism, also alongside of the acceptance of the soviet system); in other words, the struggle is undoubtedly being waged, not only on an international, but even on a worldwide scale.

But while the working-class movement is everywhere going through what is actually the same kind of preparatory school for victory over the bourgeoisie, it is achieving that development in its *own way* in each country. The big and advanced capitalist countries are travelling this road *far more rapidly* than did Bolshevism, to which history granted 15 years to prepare itself for victory, as an organised political trend. In the brief space of a year, the Third International has already scored a decisive victory; it has defeated the yellow, social-chauvinist Second International, which only a few months ago was incomparably stronger than the Third International, seemed stable and powerful, and enjoyed every possible support — direct and indirect, material (Cabinet posts, passports, the press) and ideological — from the world bourgeoisie.

It is now essential that Communists of every country should quite consciously take into account both the fundamental objectives of the struggle against opportunism and “left” doctrinarism, and the *concrete features* which this struggle assumes and must inevitably assume in each country, in conformity with the specific character of its economics, politics, culture, and national composition (Ireland, etc.), its colonies, religious divisions, and so on and so forth. Dissatisfaction with the Second International is felt everywhere and is spreading and growing, both because of its opportunism and because of its inability or incapacity to create a really centralised and really leading centre capable of directing the international tactics of the revolutionary proletariat in its struggle for a world soviet republic. It should be clearly realised that such a leading centre can never be built up on stereotyped, mechanically equated, and identical tactical rules of struggle. As long as national and state distinctions exist among peoples and countries — and these will continue to exist for a very long time to come, even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a worldwide scale — the unity of the international tactics of the communist working-class movement in all countries demands, not the elimination of variety or the suppression of national distinctions (which is a pipe dream at present), but an application of the *fundamental* principles of communism (soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat), which will *correctly modify* these principles in certain *particulars*, correctly adapt and apply them to national and national-state distinctions. To seek out, investigate, predict, and grasp that which is nationally specific and nationally distinctive, in the *concrete manner* in which each country should tackle a *single* international task: victory over opportunism and left

doctrinarism within the working-class movement; the overthrow of the bourgeoisie; the establishment of a soviet republic and a proletarian dictatorship — such is the basic task in the historical period that all the advanced countries (and not they alone) are going through. The chief thing — though, of course, far from everything — the chief thing, has already been achieved: the vanguard of the working class has been won over, has ranged itself on the side of soviet government and against parliamentarianism, on the side of the dictatorship of the proletariat and against bourgeois democracy. All efforts and all attention should now be concentrated on the *next* step, which may seem — and from a certain viewpoint actually is — less fundamental, but, on the other hand, is actually closer to a practical accomplishment of the task. That step is: the search after forms of the *transition* or the *approach* to the proletarian revolution.

The proletarian vanguard has been won over ideologically. That is the main thing. Without this, not even the first step towards victory can be made. But that is still quite a long way from victory. Victory cannot be won with a vanguard alone. To throw only the vanguard into the decisive battle, before the entire class, the broad masses, have taken up a position either of direct support for the vanguard, or at least of sympathetic neutrality towards it and of precluded support for the enemy, would be, not merely foolish but criminal. Propaganda and agitation alone are not enough for an entire class, the broad masses of the working people, those oppressed by capital, to take up such a stand. For that, the masses must have their own political experience. Such is the fundamental law of all great revolutions, which has been confirmed with compelling force and vividness, not only in Russia but in Germany as well. To turn resolutely towards communism, it was necessary, not only for the ignorant and often illiterate masses of Russia, but also for the literate and well-educated masses of Germany, to realise from their own bitter experience the absolute impotence and spinelessness, the absolute helplessness and servility to the bourgeoisie, and the utter vileness of the government of the paladins of the Second International; they had to realise that a dictatorship of the extreme reactionaries (Kornilov in Russia; Kapp and Co. in Germany) is inevitably the only alternative to a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The immediate objective of the class-conscious vanguard of the international working-class movement, i.e., the Communist parties, groups and trends, is to be able to *lead* the broad masses (who are still, for the most part, apathetic, inert, dormant and convention-ridden) to their new position, or, rather, to be able to lead, *not only* their own party but also these masses in their advance and transition to the new position. While the first historical objective (that of winning over the class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat to the side of soviet power and the dictatorship of the working class) could not have been reached without a complete ideological and political victory over

opportunism and social-chauvinism, the second and immediate objective, which consists in being able to lead the *masses* to a new position ensuring the victory of the vanguard in the revolution, cannot be reached without the liquidation of left doctrinarism, and without a full elimination of its errors.

As long as it was (and inasmuch as it still is) a question of winning the proletariat's vanguard over to the side of communism, priority went and still goes to propaganda work; even propaganda circles, with all their parochial limitations, are useful under these conditions, and produce good results. But when it is a question of practical action by the masses, of the disposition, if one may so put it, of vast armies, of the alignment of *all* the class forces in a given society *for the final and decisive battle*, then propagandist methods alone, the mere repetition of the truths of "pure" communism, are of no avail. In these circumstances, one must not count in thousands, like the propagandist belonging to a small group that has not yet given leadership to the masses; in these circumstances one must count in millions and tens of millions. In these circumstances, we must ask ourselves, not only whether we have convinced the vanguard of the revolutionary class, but also whether the historically effective forces of *all* classes — positively of all the classes in a given society, without exception — are arrayed in such a way that the decisive battle is at hand — in such a way that: (1) all the class forces hostile to us have become sufficiently entangled, are sufficiently at loggerheads with each other, have sufficiently weakened themselves in a struggle which is beyond their strength; (2) all the vacillating and unstable, intermediate elements — the petty bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois democrats, as distinct from the bourgeoisie — have sufficiently exposed themselves in the eyes of the people, have sufficiently disgraced themselves through their practical bankruptcy, and (3) among the proletariat, a mass sentiment favouring the most determined, bold and dedicated revolutionary action against the bourgeoisie has emerged and begun to grow vigorously. Then revolution is indeed ripe; then, indeed, if we have correctly gauged all the conditions indicated and summarised above, and if we have chosen the right moment, our victory is assured.

The differences between the Churchills and the Lloyd Georges — with insignificant national distinctions, these political types exist in *all* countries — on the one hand, and between the Hendersons and the Lloyd Georges on the other, are quite minor and unimportant from the standpoint of pure (i.e., abstract) communism, i.e., communism that has not yet matured to the stage of practical political action by the masses. However, from the standpoint of this practical action by the masses, these differences are most important. To take due account of these differences, and to determine the moment when the inevitable conflicts between these "friends", which weaken and enfeeble *all the "friends" taken together*, will have come to a head — that is the concern, the task, of

a Communist who wants to be, not merely a class-conscious and convinced propagandist of ideas, but a practical leader of the *masses* in the revolution. It is necessary to link the strictest devotion to the ideas of communism with the ability to effect all the necessary practical compromises, tacks, conciliatory manoeuvres, zigzags, retreats and so on, in order to speed up the achievement and then loss of political power by the Hendersons (the heroes of the Second International, if we are not to name individual representatives of petty-bourgeois democracy who call themselves socialists); to accelerate their inevitable bankruptcy in practice, which will enlighten the masses in the spirit of our ideas, in the direction of communism; to accelerate the inevitable friction, quarrels, conflicts and complete disintegration among the Hendersons, the Lloyd Georges and the Churchills (the Mensheviks, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Constitutional-Democrats, the monarchists; the Scheidemanns, the bourgeoisie and the Kappists, etc.); to select the proper moment when the discord among these "pillars of sacrosanct private property" is at its height, so that, through a decisive offensive, the proletariat will defeat them all and capture political power.

History as a whole, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more multiform, more lively and ingenious than is imagined by even the best parties, the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes. This can readily be understood, because even the finest of vanguards express the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of thousands, whereas at moments of great upsurge and the exertion of all human capacities, revolutions are made by the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes. Two very important practical conclusions follow from this: first, that in order to accomplish its task the revolutionary class must be able to master *all* forms or aspects of social activity without exception (completing after the capture of political power — sometimes at great risk and with very great danger — what it did not complete before the capture of power); second, that the revolutionary class must be prepared for the most rapid and brusque replacement of one form by another.

One will readily agree that any army which does not train to use all the weapons, all the means and methods of warfare that the enemy possesses, or may possess, is behaving in an unwise or even criminal manner. This applies to politics even more than it does to the art of war. In politics it is even harder to know in advance which methods of struggle will be applicable and to our advantage in certain future conditions. Unless we learn to apply all the methods of struggle, we may suffer grave and sometimes even decisive defeat, if changes beyond our control in the position of the other classes bring to the forefront a form of activity in which we are especially weak. If, however,

we learn to use all the methods of struggle, victory will be certain, because we represent the interests of the really foremost and really revolutionary class, even if circumstances do not permit us to make use of weapons that are most dangerous to the enemy, weapons that deal the swiftest mortal blows. Inexperienced revolutionaries often think that legal methods of struggle are opportunist because, in this field, the bourgeoisie has most frequently deceived and duped the workers (particularly in “peaceful” and non-revolutionary times), while illegal methods of struggle are revolutionary. That, however, is wrong. The truth is that those parties and leaders are opportunists and traitors to the working class that are unable or unwilling (do not say, “I can’t”; say, “I shan’t”) to use illegal methods of struggle in conditions such as those which prevailed, for example, during the imperialist war of 1914-18, when the bourgeoisie of the freest democratic countries most brazenly and brutally deceived the workers, and smothered the truth about the predatory character of the war. But revolutionaries who are incapable of combining illegal forms of struggle with *every* form of legal struggle are poor revolutionaries indeed. It is not difficult to be a revolutionary when revolution has already broken out and is in spate, when all people are joining the revolution just because they are carried away, because it is the vogue, and sometimes even from careerist motives. After its victory, the proletariat has to make most strenuous efforts, even the most painful, so as to “liberate” itself from such pseudo-revolutionaries. It is far more difficult — and far more precious — to be a revolutionary when the conditions for direct, open, really mass and really revolutionary struggle *do not yet exist*, to be able to champion the interests of the revolution (by propaganda, agitation and organisation) in non-revolutionary bodies, and quite often in downright reactionary bodies, in a non-revolutionary situation, among the masses who are incapable of immediately appreciating the need for revolutionary methods of action. To be able to seek, find and correctly determine the specific path or the particular turn of events that will *lead* the masses to the real, decisive and final revolutionary struggle — such is the main objective of communism in Western Europe and in America today.

Britain is an example. We cannot tell — no one can tell in advance — how soon a real proletarian revolution will flare up there, and *what immediate cause* will most serve to rouse, kindle, and impel into the struggle the very wide masses, who are still dormant. Hence, it is our duty to carry on all our preparatory work in such a way as to be “well shod on all four feet” (as the late Plekhanov, when he was a Marxist and revolutionary, was fond of saying). It is possible that the breach will be forced, the ice broken, by a parliamentary crisis, or by a crisis arising from colonial and imperialist contradictions, which are hopelessly entangled and are becoming increasingly painful and acute, or perhaps by some third cause, etc. We are not discussing the kind of

struggle that will *determine* the fate of the proletarian revolution in Great Britain (no Communist has any doubt on that score; for all of us this is a foregone conclusion): what we are discussing is the *immediate cause* that will bring into motion the now dormant proletarian masses, and lead them right up to revolution. Let us not forget that in the French bourgeois republic, for example, in a situation which, from both the international and the national viewpoints, was a hundred times less revolutionary than it is today, such an “unexpected” and “petty” cause as one of the many thousands of fraudulent machinations of the reactionary military caste (the Dreyfus case)²⁹ was enough to bring the people to the brink of civil war!

In Great Britain the Communists should constantly, unremittingly and unswervingly utilise parliamentary elections and all the vicissitudes of the Irish, colonial and world-imperialist policy of the British government, and all other fields, spheres and aspects of public life, and work in all of them in a new way, in a communist way, in the spirit of the Third, not the Second, International. I have neither the time nor the space here to describe the “Russian”, “Bolshevik” methods of participation in parliamentary elections and in the parliamentary struggle; I can, however, assure foreign Communists that they were quite unlike the usual West-European parliamentary campaigns. From this the conclusion is often drawn: “Well, that was in Russia, in our country parliamentarianism is different.” This is a false conclusion. Communists, adherents of the Third International in all countries, exist for the purpose of *changing* — all along the line, in all spheres of life — the old socialist, trade unionist, syndicalist, and parliamentary type of work into a *new* type of work, the communist. In Russia, too, there was always an abundance of opportunism, purely bourgeois sharp practices and capitalist rigging in the elections. In Western Europe and in America, the Communist must learn to create a new, uncustomary, non-opportunist, and non-careerist parliamentarianism; the Communist parties must issue their slogans; true proletarians, with the help of the unorganised and downtrodden poor, should distribute leaflets, canvass workers’ houses and cottages of the rural proletarians and peasants in the remote villages (fortunately there are many times fewer remote villages in Europe than in Russia, and in Britain the number is very small); they should go into the public houses, penetrate into unions, societies and chance gatherings of the common people, and speak to the people, not in learned (or very parliamentary) language, they should not at all strive to “get seats” in parliament, but should everywhere try to get people to think, and draw the masses into the struggle, to take the bourgeoisie at its word and utilise the machinery it has set up, the elections it has appointed, and the appeals it has made to the people; they should try to explain to the people what Bolshevism is, in a way that was never possible (under bourgeois rule) outside of election times (exclusive,

of course, of times of big strikes, when in Russia a *similar* apparatus for widespread popular agitation worked even more intensively). It is very difficult to do this in Western Europe and extremely difficult in America, but it can and must be done, for the objectives of communism cannot be achieved without effort. We must work to accomplish *practical* tasks, ever more varied and ever more closely connected with all branches of social life, *winning* branch after branch, and sphere after sphere *from the bourgeoisie*.

In Great Britain, further, the work of propaganda, agitation and organisation among the armed forces and among the oppressed and underprivileged nationalities in their “*own*” state (Ireland, the colonies) must also be tackled in a new fashion (one that is not socialist, but communist, not reformist, but revolutionary). That is because, in the era of imperialism in general and especially today after a war that was a sore trial to the peoples and has quickly opened their eyes to the truth (i.e., the fact that tens of millions were killed and maimed for the sole purpose of deciding whether the British or the German robbers should plunder the largest number of countries), all these spheres of social life are heavily charged with inflammable material and are creating numerous causes of conflicts, crises and an intensification of the class struggle. We do not and cannot know which spark — of the innumerable sparks that are flying about in all countries as a result of the world economic and political crisis — will kindle the conflagration, in the sense of raising up the masses; we must, therefore, with our new and communist principles, set to work to stir up all and sundry, even the oldest, mustiest and seemingly hopeless spheres, for otherwise we shall not be able to cope with our tasks, shall not be comprehensively prepared, shall not be in possession of all the weapons and shall not prepare ourselves either to gain victory over the bourgeoisie (which arranged all aspects of social life — and has now disarranged them — in its bourgeois fashion), or to bring about the impending communist reorganisation of every sphere of life, following that victory.

Since the proletarian revolution in Russia and its victories on an international scale, expected neither by the bourgeoisie nor the philistines, the entire world has become different, and the bourgeoisie everywhere has become different too. It is terrified of “Bolshevism”, exasperated by it almost to the point of frenzy, and for that very reason it is, on the one hand, precipitating the progress of events and, on the other, concentrating on the forcible suppression of Bolshevism, thereby weakening its own position in a number of other fields. In their tactics the Communists in all the advanced countries must take both these circumstances into account.

When the Russian Cadets and Kerensky began furiously to hound the Bolsheviks — especially since April 1917, and more particularly in June and July 1917 — they

overdid things. Millions of copies of bourgeois papers, clamouring in every key against the Bolsheviks, helped the masses to make an appraisal of Bolshevism, apart from the newspapers, all public life was full of discussions about Bolshevism, as a result of the bourgeoisie's "zeal". Today the millionaires of all countries are behaving on an international scale in a way that deserves our heartiest thanks. They are hounding Bolshevism with the same zeal as Kerensky and Co. did; they, too, are overdoing things and *helping* us just as Kerensky did. When the French bourgeoisie makes Bolshevism the central issue in the elections, and accuses the comparatively moderate or vacillating socialists of being Bolsheviks; when the American bourgeoisie, which has completely lost its head, seizes thousands and thousands of people on suspicion of Bolshevism, creates an atmosphere of panic, and broadcasts stories of Bolshevik plots; when, despite all its wisdom and experience, the British bourgeoisie — the most "solid" in the world — makes incredible blunders, founds richly endowed "anti-Bolshevik societies", creates a special literature on Bolshevism, and recruits an extra number of scientists, agitators and clergymen to combat it, we must salute and thank the capitalists. They are working for us. They are helping us to get the masses interested in the essence and significance of Bolshevism, and they cannot do otherwise, for they have *already* failed to ignore Bolshevism and stifle it.

But at the same time, the bourgeoisie sees practically only one aspect of Bolshevism — insurrection, violence, and terror, it therefore strives to prepare itself for resistance and opposition primarily in *this* field. It is possible that, in certain instances, in certain countries, and for certain brief periods, it will succeed in this. We must reckon with such an eventuality, and we have absolutely nothing to fear if it does succeed. Communism is emerging in positively every sphere of public life; its beginnings are to be seen literally on all sides. The "contagion" (to use the favourite metaphor of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois police, the one mostly to their liking) has very thoroughly penetrated the organism and has completely permeated it. If special efforts are made to block one of the channels, the "contagion" will find another one, sometimes very unexpectedly. Life will assert itself. Let the bourgeoisie rave, work itself into a frenzy, go to extremes, commit follies, take vengeance on the Bolsheviks in advance, and endeavour to kill off (as in India, Hungary, Germany, etc.) more hundreds, thousands, and hundreds of thousands of yesterday's and tomorrow's Bolsheviks. In acting thus, the bourgeoisie is acting as all historically doomed classes have done. Communists should know that, in any case, the future belongs to them; therefore, we can (and must) combine the most intense passion in the great revolutionary struggle, with the coolest and most sober appraisal of the frenzied ravings of the bourgeoisie. The Russian revolution was cruelly defeated in 1905; the Russian Bolsheviks were defeated in July

1917; over 15,000 German Communists were killed as a result of the wily provocation and cunning manoeuvres of Scheidemann and Noske, who were working hand in glove with the bourgeoisie and the monarchist generals; White terror is raging in Finland and Hungary. But in all cases and in all countries, communism is becoming steeled and is growing; its roots are so deep that persecution does not weaken or debilitate it but only strengthens it. Only one thing is lacking to enable us to march forward more confidently and firmly to victory, namely, the universal and thorough awareness of all Communists in all countries of the necessity to display the utmost *flexibility* in their tactics. The communist movement, which is developing magnificently, now lacks, especially in the advanced countries, this awareness and the ability to apply it in practice.

That which happened to such leaders of the Second International, such highly erudite Marxists devoted to socialism as Kautsky, Otto Bauer and others, could (and should) provide a useful lesson. They fully appreciated the need for flexible tactics; they themselves learned Marxist dialectic and taught it to others (and much of what they have done in this field will always remain a valuable contribution to socialist literature); however, *in the application* of this dialectic they committed such an error, or proved to be so *undialectical* in practice, so incapable of taking into account the rapid change of forms and the rapid acquisition of new content by the old forms, that their fate is not much more enviable than that of Hyndman, Guesde and Plekhanov. The principal reason for their bankruptcy was that they were hypnotised by a definite form of growth of the working-class movement and socialism, forgot all about the one-sidedness of that form, were afraid to see the break-up which objective conditions made inevitable, and continued to repeat simple and, at first glance, incontestable axioms that had been learned by rote, like: “three is more than two”. But politics is more like algebra than arithmetic, and still more like higher than elementary mathematics. In reality, all the old form of the socialist movement have acquired a new content, and, consequently, a new symbol, the “minus” sign, has appeared in front of all the figures; our wiseacres, however, have stubbornly continued (and still continue) to persuade themselves and others that “minus three” is more than “minus two”.

We must see to it that Communists do not make a similar mistake, only in the opposite sense, or rather, we must see to it that a *similar mistake*, only made in the opposite sense by the “left” Communists is corrected as soon as possible and eliminated as rapidly and painlessly as possible. It is not only right doctrinairism that is erroneous; left doctrinairism is erroneous too. Of course, the mistake of left doctrinairism in communism is at present a thousand times less dangerous and less significant than that of right doctrinairism (i.e., social-chauvinism and Kautskyism); but, after all, that

is only due to the fact that left communism is a very young trend, is only just coming into being. It is only for this reason that, under certain conditions, the disease can be easily eradicated, and we must set to work with the utmost energy to eradicate it.

The old forms burst asunder, for it turned out that their new content — anti-proletarian and reactionary — had attained an inordinate development. From the standpoint of the development of international communism, our work today has such a durable and powerful content (for soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) that it can *and must* manifest itself in any form, both new and old; it can and must regenerate, conquer and subjugate all forms, not only the new, but also the old — not for the purpose of reconciling itself with the old, but for the purpose of making all and every form — new and old — a weapon for the complete and irrevocable victory of communism.

The Communists must exert every effort to direct the working-class movement and social development in general along the straightest and shortest road to the victory of soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat on a worldwide scale. That is an incontestable truth. But it is enough to take one little step farther — a step that might seem to be in the same direction — and truth turns into error. We have only to say, as the German and British left Communists do, that we recognise only one road, only the direct road, and that we will not permit tacking, conciliatory manoeuvres, or compromising — and it will be a mistake which may cause, and in part has already caused and is causing, very grave prejudices to communism. Right doctrinairism persisted in recognising only the old forms, and became utterly bankrupt, for it did not notice the new content. Left doctrinairism persists in the unconditional repudiation of certain old forms, failing to see that the new content is forcing its way through all and sundry forms, that it is our duty as Communists to master all forms, to learn how, with the maximum rapidity, to supplement one form with another, to substitute one for another, and to adapt our tactics to any such change that does not come from our class or from our efforts.

World revolution has been so powerfully stimulated and accelerated by the horrors, vileness and abominations of the world imperialist war and by the hopelessness of the situation created by it, this revolution is developing in scope and depth with such splendid rapidity, with such a wonderful variety of changing forms, with such an instructive practical refutation of all doctrinairism, that there is every reason to hope for a rapid and complete recovery of the international communist movement from the infantile disorder of “left-wing” communism.

April 27, 1920

Appendix

Before publishing houses in our country — which has been plundered by the imperialists of the whole world in revenge for the proletarian revolution, and which is still being plundered and blockaded by them regardless of all promises they made to their workers — were able to bring out my pamphlet, additional material arrived from abroad. Without claiming to present in my pamphlet anything more than the cursory notes of a publicist, I shall dwell briefly upon a few points.

I. The Split Among the German Communists

The split among the Communists in Germany is an accomplished fact. The “lefts”, or the “opposition on principle”, have formed a separate Communist Workers’ Party, as distinct from the Communist Party. A split also seems imminent in Italy — I say “seems”, as I have only two additional issues (Nos. 7 and 8) of the left newspaper, *Il Soviet*, in which the possibility of and necessity for a split is openly discussed, and mention is also made of a congress of the “Abstentionist” group (or the boycottists, i.e., opponents of participation in parliament), which group is still part of the Italian Socialist Party.

There is reason to fear that the split with the “lefts”, the anti-parliamentarians (in part anti-politicals too, who are opposed to any political party and to work in the trade unions), will become an international phenomenon, like the split with the “Centrists” (i.e., Kautskyites, Longuetists, Independents, etc.). Let that be so. At all events, a split is better than confusion, which hampers the ideological, theoretical and revolutionary growth and maturing of the party, and its harmonious, really organised practical work which actually paves the way for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Let the “lefts” put themselves to a practical test on a national and international scale. Let them try to prepare for (and then implement) the dictatorship of the proletariat, without a rigorously centralised party with iron discipline, without the ability to become masters of every sphere, every branch, and every variety of political and cultural work. Practical experience will soon teach them.

Only, every effort should be made to prevent the split with the “lefts” from impeding

— or to see that it impedes as little as possible — the necessary amalgamation into a single party, inevitable in the near future, of all participants in the working-class movement who sincerely and conscientiously stand for soviet government and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was the exceptional good fortune of the Bolsheviks in Russia to have had 15 years for a systematic and consummated struggle both against the Mensheviks (i.e., the opportunists and “centrists”) and against the “lefts”, long before the masses began direct action for the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Europe and America the same work has now to be done by forced marches, so to say. Certain individuals, especially among unsuccessful aspirants to leadership, may (if they lack proletarian discipline and are not honest towards themselves) persist in their mistakes for a long time; however, when the time is ripe, the masses of the workers will themselves unite easily and rapidly and unite all sincere Communists to form a single party capable of establishing the soviet system and the dictatorship of the proletariat.*

II. The Communists and the Independents in Germany

In this pamphlet I have expressed the opinion that a compromise between the Communists and the left-wing of the Independents is necessary and useful to communism, but will not be easy to bring about. Newspapers which I have subsequently received have confirmed this opinion on both points. No. 32 of *The Red Flag*, organ of the Central Committee, the Communist Party of Germany (*Die Rote Fahne*, Zentralorgan der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands, Spartakusbund, of March

* With regard to the question of future amalgamation of the “left” Communists, the anti-parliamentarians, with the Communists in general, I would make the following additional remarks. In the measure in which I have been able to familiarise myself with the newspapers of the “left” Communists and the Communists in general in Germany, I find that the former have the advantage of being better able than the latter to carry on agitation among the masses. I have repeatedly observed something similar to this in the history of the Bolshevik Party, though on a smaller scale, in individual local organisations, and not on a national scale. For instance, in 1907-08 the “left” Bolsheviks, on certain occasions and in certain places, carried on more successful agitation among the masses than we did. This may partly have been due to the fact that at a revolutionary moment, or at a time when revolutionary recollections are still fresh, it is easier to approach the masses with tactics of sheer negation. This, however, is not an argument to prove the correctness of such tactics. At all events, there is not the least doubt that a Communist *party* that wishes to be the real vanguard, the advanced detachment, of the revolutionary *class*, of the proletariat — and which, in addition wishes to learn to lead the *masses*, not only the proletariat, but also the *non*-proletarian masses of working and exploited people — must know how to conduct propaganda, how to organise, and how to carry on agitation in a manner most simple and comprehensible, most clear and vivid, both to the urban, factory masses and to the rural masses.

26, 1920) published a “statement” by this Central Committee regarding the Kapp-Lüttwitz military *putsch* and on the “socialist government”.¹ This statement is quite correct both in its basic premise and its practical conclusions. The basic premise is that at present there is no “objective basis” for the dictatorship of the proletariat because the “majority of the urban workers” support the Independents. The conclusion is: a promise to be a “loyal opposition” (i.e., renunciation of preparations for a “forcible overthrow”) to a “socialist government if it excludes bourgeois-capitalist parties”.

In the main, this tactic is undoubtedly correct. Yet, even if minor inaccuracies of formulation should not be dwelt on, it is impossible to pass over in silence the fact that a government consisting of social-traitors should not (in an official statement by the Communist Party) be called “socialist”; that one should not speak of the exclusion of “bourgeois-capitalist parties”, when the parties both of the Scheidemanns and of the Kautskys and Crispiens are petty-bourgeois democratic parties; that things should never be written that are contained in § 4 of the statement, which reads:

A state of affairs in which political freedom can be enjoyed without restriction, and bourgeois democracy cannot operate as the dictatorship of capital is, from the viewpoint of the development of the proletarian dictatorship; of the utmost importance in further winning the proletarian masses over to the side of communism ...

Such a state of affairs is impossible. Petty-bourgeois leaders, the German Hendersons (Scheidemanns) and Snowdens (Crispiens), do not and cannot go beyond the bounds of bourgeois democracy, which, in its turn, cannot but be a dictatorship of capital. To achieve the practical results that the Central Committee of the Communist Party had been quite rightly working for, there was no need to write such things, which are wrong in principle and politically harmful. It would have been sufficient to say (if one wished to observe parliamentary amenities): “As long as the majority of the urban workers follow the Independents, we Communists must do nothing to prevent those workers from getting rid of their last philistine-democratic (i.e., ‘bourgeois-capitalist’) illusions by going through the experience of having a government of their ‘own’.” That is sufficient ground for a compromise, which is really necessary and should consist in renouncing, for a certain period, all attempts at the forcible overthrow of a government which enjoys the confidence of a majority of the urban workers. But in everyday mass agitation, in which one is not bound by official parliamentary amenities, one might, of course, add: “Let scoundrels like the Scheidemanns, and philistines like the Kautskys and Crispiens reveal by their deeds how they have been fooled themselves and how they are fooling the workers; their ‘clean’ government will itself do the ‘cleanest’ job of all in ‘cleansing’ the Augean stables of socialism, Social-Democracy and other forms of social treachery.”

The real nature of the present leaders of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (leaders of whom it has been wrongly said that they have already lost all influence, whereas in reality they are even more dangerous to the proletariat than the Hungarian Social-Democrats who styled themselves Communists and promised to “support” the dictatorship of the proletariat) was once again revealed during the German equivalent of the Kornilov revolt, i.e., the Kapp-Lüttwitz *putsch*.^{*} A small but striking illustration is provided by two brief articles — one by Karl Kautsky entitled “Decisive Hours” (“Entscheidende Stunden”) in *Freiheit* (*Freedom*), organ of the Independents, of March 30, 1920, and the other by Arthur Crispian entitled “On the Political Situation” (in the same newspaper, issue of April 14, 1920). These gentlemen are absolutely incapable of thinking and reasoning like revolutionaries. They are snivelling philistine democrats, who become a thousand times more dangerous to the proletariat when they claim to be supporters of soviet government and of the dictatorship of the proletariat because, in fact, whenever a difficult and dangerous situation arises they are sure to commit treachery ... while “sincerely” believing that they are helping the proletariat! Did not the Hungarian Social-Democrats, after rechristening themselves Communists, also want to “help” the proletariat when, because of their cowardice and spinelessness, they considered the position of soviet power in Hungary hopeless and went snivelling to the agents of the Entente capitalists and the Entente hangmen?

III. Turati and Co. in Italy

The issues of the Italian newspaper *Il Soviet* referred to above fully confirm what I have said in the pamphlet about the Italian Socialist Party’s error in tolerating such members and even such a group of parliamentarians in their ranks. It is still further confirmed by an outside observer like the Rome correspondent of *The Manchester Guardian*, organ of the British liberal bourgeoisie, whose interview with Turati is published in its issue of March 12, 1920. The correspondent writes:

Signor Turati’s opinion is that the revolutionary peril is not such as to cause undue anxiety in Italy. The Maximalists are fanning the fire of soviet theories only to keep the masses awake and excited. These theories are, however, merely legendary notions, unripe programmes, incapable of being put to practical use. They are likely only to maintain the working classes in a state of expectation. The very men who use them as

^{*} Incidentally, this has been dealt with in an exceptionally clear, concise, precise and Marxist way in the excellent organ of the Austrian Communist Party, *The Red Banner*, of March 28 and 30, 1920. (*Die Rote Fahne*, Wien, 1920, Nos. 266 and 267; L.L.: “Ein neuer Abschnitt der deutschen Revolution” [“A New Stage of the German Revolution”].)

a lure to dazzle proletarian eyes find themselves compelled to fight a daily battle for the extortion of some often trifling economic advantages so as to delay the moment when the working classes will lose their illusions and faith in their cherished myths. Hence a long string of strikes of all sizes and with all pretexts up to the very latest ones in the mail and railway services — strikes which make the already hard conditions of the country still worse. The country is irritated owing to the difficulties connected with its Adriatic problem, is weighed down by its foreign debt and by its inflated paper circulation, and yet it is still far from realising the necessity of adopting that discipline of work which alone can restore order and prosperity ...

It is clear as daylight that this British correspondent has blurted out the truth, which is probably being concealed and glossed over both by Turati himself, and his bourgeois defenders, accomplices and inspirers in Italy. That truth is that the ideas and political activities of Turati, Treves, Modigliani, Dugoni and Co. are really and precisely of the kind that the British correspondent has described. It is downright social treachery. Just look at this advocacy of order and discipline among the workers, who are wage-slaves toiling to enrich the capitalists! And how familiar to us Russians are all these Menshevik speeches! What a valuable admission it is that the masses are *in favour of soviet government!* How stupid and vulgarly bourgeois is the failure to understand the revolutionary role of strikes which are spreading spontaneously! Indeed, the correspondent of the British bourgeois-liberal newspaper has rendered Turati and Co. a disservice and has excellently confirmed the correctness of the demand by Comrade Bordiga and his friends on *Il Soviet*, who are insisting that the Italian Socialist Party, if it really wants to be *for* the Third International, should drum Turati and Co. out of its ranks and become a Communist Party both in name and in deed.

IV. False Conclusions from Correct Premises

However, Comrade Bordiga and his “left” friends draw from their correct criticism of Turati and Co. the wrong conclusion that any participation in parliament’ is harmful in principle. The Italian “lefts” cannot advance even a shadow of serious argument in support of this view. They simply do not know (or try to forget) the international examples of really revolutionary and communist utilisation of bourgeois parliaments, which has been of unquestionable value in preparing for the proletarian revolution. They simply cannot conceive of any “new” ways of that utilisation, and keep on repeatedly and endlessly vociferating about the “old” non-Bolshevik way.

Herein lies their fundamental error. In *all* fields of activity, and not in the parliamentary sphere alone, communism *must introduce* (and without long and persistent effort it will be *unable* to introduce) something new in principle that will

represent a radical break with the traditions of the Second International (while retaining and developing what was good in the latter).

Let us take, say, journalistic work. Newspapers, pamphlets and leaflets perform the indispensable work of propaganda, agitation and organisation. No mass movement in any country at all civilised can get along without a journalistic apparatus. No outcries against “leaders” or solemn vows to keep the masses uncontaminated by the influence of leaders will relieve us of the necessity of using, for this work, people from a bourgeois-intellectual environment or will rid us of the bourgeois-democratic, “private property” atmosphere and environment in which this work is carried out under capitalism. Even two and a half years after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, after the conquest of political power by the proletariat, we still have this atmosphere around us, this environment of mass (peasant, artisan) bourgeois-democratic private property relations.

Parliamentarianism is one form of activity; journalism is another. The content of both can and should be communist if those engaged in these two spheres are genuine Communists, really members of a proletarian mass party. Yet, in neither sphere — and *in no other sphere of activity* under capitalism and during the period of transition from capitalism to socialism — is it possible to avoid those difficulties which the proletariat must overcome, those special problems which the proletariat must solve so as to use, for its own purposes, the services of people from the ranks of the bourgeoisie, eradicate bourgeois-intellectual prejudices and influences, and weaken the resistance of (and, ultimately, completely transform) the petty-bourgeois environment.

Did we not, before the war of 1914-18, witness in all countries innumerable cases of extreme “left” anarchists, syndicalists and others fulminating against parliamentarianism, deriding bourgeois-vulgarised parliamentary socialists, castigating their careerism, and so on and so forth, and yet themselves pursuing the *same kind of* bourgeois career *through* journalism and *through* work in the syndicates (trade unions)? Is not the example of Jouhaux and Merrheim, to limit oneself to France, typical in this respect?

The childishness of those who “repudiate” participation in parliament consists in their thinking it possible to “solve” the difficult problem of combating bourgeois-democratic influences *within* the working-class movement in such a “simple”, “easy”, allegedly revolutionary manner, whereas they are actually merely running away from their own shadows, only closing their eyes to difficulties and trying to shrug them off with mere words. The most shameless careerism, the bourgeois utilisation of parliamentary seats, glaringly reformist perversion of parliamentary activity, and vulgar

petty-bourgeois conservatism are all unquestionably common and prevalent features engendered everywhere by capitalism, not only outside but also within the working-class movement. But the selfsame capitalism and the bourgeois environment it creates (which disappears very slowly even after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, since the peasantry constantly regenerates the bourgeoisie) give rise to what is essentially the same bourgeois careerism, national chauvinism, petty-bourgeois vulgarity, etc. — merely varying insignificantly in form — in positively every sphere of activity and life.

You think, my dear boycottists and anti-parliamentarians that you are “terribly revolutionary”, but in reality *you are frightened* by the comparatively minor difficulties of the struggle against bourgeois influences within the working-class movement, whereas your victory — i.e., the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the conquest of political power by the proletariat — will create *these very same* difficulties on a still larger, an infinitely larger scale. Like children, you are frightened by a minor difficulty which confronts you today, but you do not understand that tomorrow, and the day after, you will still have to learn, and learn thoroughly, to overcome the selfsame difficulties, only on an immeasurably greater scale.

Under soviet rule, your proletarian party and ours will be invaded by a still larger number of bourgeois intellectuals. They will worm their way into the soviets, the courts, and the administration, since communism cannot be built otherwise than with the aid of the human material created by capitalism, and the bourgeois intellectuals cannot be expelled and destroyed, but must be won over, remoulded, assimilated and re-educated, just as we must — in a protracted struggle waged on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat — re-educate the proletarians themselves, who do not abandon their petty-bourgeois prejudices at one stroke, by a miracle, at the behest of the Virgin Mary, at the behest of a slogan, resolution or decree, but only in the course of a long and difficult mass struggle against mass petty-bourgeois influences. Under soviet rule, these same problems, which the anti-parliamentarians now so proudly, so haughtily, so lightly and so childishly brush aside with a wave of the hand — *these selfsame* problems are arising anew *within* the soviets, within the soviet administration, among the soviet “pleaders” (in Russia we have abolished, and have rightly abolished, the bourgeois legal bar, but it is reviving again under the cover of the “soviet pleaders”). Among soviet engineers, soviet schoolteachers and the privileged, i.e., the most highly skilled and best situated, *workers* at soviet factories, we observe a constant revival of absolutely *all* the negative traits peculiar to bourgeois parliamentarianism, and we are conquering this evil — gradually — only by a tireless, prolonged and persistent struggle based on proletarian organisation and discipline.

Of course, under the rule of the bourgeoisie it is very “difficult” to eradicate bourgeois

habits from our own, i.e., the workers', party; it is "difficult" to expel from the party the familiar parliamentary leaders who have been hopelessly corrupted by bourgeois prejudices; it is "difficult" to subject to proletarian discipline the absolutely essential (even if very limited) number of people coming from the ranks of the bourgeoisie; it is "difficult" to form, in a bourgeois parliament, a communist group fully worthy of the working class; it is "difficult" to ensure that the communist parliamentarians do not engage in bourgeois parliamentary inanities, but concern themselves with the very urgent work of propaganda, agitation and organisation among the masses. All this is "difficult", to be sure; it was difficult in Russia, and it is vastly more difficult in Western Europe and in America, where the bourgeoisie is far stronger, where bourgeois-democratic traditions are stronger, and so on.

Yet all these "difficulties" are mere child's play compared with the *same sort* of problems which, in any event, the proletariat will have most certainly to solve in order to achieve victory, both during the proletarian revolution and after the seizure of power by the proletariat. Compared with *these* truly gigantic problems of re-educating, under the proletarian dictatorship, millions of peasants and small proprietors, hundreds of thousands of office employees, officials and bourgeois intellectuals, of subordinating them all to the proletarian state and to proletarian leadership, of eradicating their bourgeois habits and traditions — compared with these gigantic problems it is childishly easy to create, under the rule of the bourgeoisie, and in a bourgeois parliament, a really communist group of a real proletarian party.

If our "left" and anti-parliamentarian comrades do not learn to overcome even such a small difficulty now, we may safely assert that either they will prove incapable of achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat, and will be unable to subordinate and remould the bourgeois intellectuals and bourgeois institutions on a wide scale, or they will have to *hastily complete their education*, and, by that haste, will do a great deal of harm to the cause of the proletariat, will commit more errors than usual, will manifest more than average weakness and inefficiency, and so on and so forth.

Until the bourgeoisie has been overthrown and, after that, until small-scale economy and small commodity production have entirely disappeared, the bourgeois atmosphere, proprietary habits and petty-bourgeois traditions will hamper proletarian work both outside and within the working-class movement, not only in a single field of activity — the parliamentary — but, inevitably, in every field of social activity, in all cultural and political spheres without exception. The attempt to brush aside, to fence oneself off from *one* of the "unpleasant" problems or difficulties in some one sphere of activity is a profound mistake, which will later most certainly have to be paid for. We must learn how to master every sphere of work and activity without exception, to overcome all

difficulties and eradicate all bourgeois habits, customs and traditions everywhere. Any other way of presenting the question is just trifling, mere childishness.

May 12, 1920

V

In the Russian edition of this book I somewhat incorrectly described the conduct of the Communist Party of Holland as a whole, in the sphere of international revolutionary policy. I therefore avail myself of the present opportunity to publish a letter from our Dutch comrades on this question and to correct the expression “Dutch Tribunists”, which I used in the Russian text, and for which I now substitute the words “certain members of the Communist Party of Holland”.

N. Lenin

Letter from Winjkoop

Moscow, June 30, 1920

Dear Comrade Lenin,

Thanks to your kindness, we members of the Dutch delegation to the 2nd Congress of the Communist International were able to read your “*Left-Wing*” *Communism — An Infantile Disorder* prior to its publication in the European languages. In several places in the book you emphasise your disapproval of the part played by some members of the Communist Party of Holland in international politics.

We feel, nevertheless, that we must protest against your laying the responsibility for their actions on the Communist Party. This is highly inaccurate. Moreover, it is unjust, because these members of the Communist Party of Holland take little or no part in the party’s current activities and are endeavouring, directly or indirectly, to give effect, in the Communist Party of Holland, to opposition slogans against which the party and all its organs have waged, and continue to wage to this day, a most energetic struggle.

Fraternally yours,

D. J. Wijnkoop

(on behalf of the Dutch delegation)

Appendix 1

The Communist Parties & Parliamentarism

1. The new epoch & the new parliamentarism

From the start, from the epoch of the First International, the attitude of the socialist parties to parliamentarism was that bourgeois parliaments should be used for agitational purposes. Participation in parliament was considered as a means of developing class consciousness, i.e., of awakening the hatred of the proletariat for the ruling classes. This attitude has changed, under the influence not of theory, but of the course of political events. As a result of the development of the productive forces and the extension of the arena of capitalist exploitation, capitalism and the parliamentary states acquired a lasting stability.

As a consequence, the parliamentary tactics of the socialist parties adapted themselves to the “organic” legislative work of the bourgeois parliament, and the struggle for reforms within the framework of capitalism became increasingly significant for these parties. The so-called maximum program became a platform for debating the altogether remote “final goal”. In these circumstances parliamentary careerism and corruption flourished and the vital interests of the working class were secretly, and sometimes openly, betrayed.

The attitude of the Third International to parliament is determined not by new theoretical ideas, but by the change in the role of parliament itself. In the preceding historical epoch parliament was an instrument of the developing capitalist system, and as such played a role that was in a certain sense progressive. In the modern conditions of unbridled imperialism parliament has become a weapon of falsehood, deception and violence, a place of enervating chatter. In the face of the devastation, embezzlement, robbery and destruction committed by imperialism, parliamentary reforms which are

These theses were adopted by the Second Congress of the Communist International, held in Moscow, July-August 1920.

wholly lacking in consistency, durability and order lose all practical significance for the working masses.

Parliamentarism, like bourgeois society as a whole, is losing its stability. The transition from an epoch of stability to an epoch of crisis has necessitated the adoption of new tactics by the proletariat in the sphere of parliamentarism. Even in the past period the Russian workers' party (Bolsheviks), for example, developed an essentially revolutionary parliamentarism, the reason being that the political and social equilibrium of Russia was destroyed by the 1905 revolution and the country entered a period of storm and stress.

Those socialists who, while sympathising with communism, point out that their countries are not yet ripe for revolution and refuse to break with the parliamentary opportunists have as their starting-point the conscious or semiconscious assessment of the approaching epoch as one of the relative stability of imperialist society and believe, therefore, that in the struggle for reforms a coalition with Turati and Longuet can have practical results.

The struggle for communism, however, must be based on a theoretical analysis of the character of the present epoch (the culminating point of capitalism, its imperialist self-negation and self-destruction, the uninterrupted spread of civil war etc.). The forms of political relations and groupings can vary from country to country, but their essential nature remains everywhere the same. For us the goal is the direct political and technical preparation of a proletarian uprising to destroy bourgeois power and establish the new power of the proletariat.

At the present time parliament cannot be used by the communists as the arena in which to struggle for reforms and improvements in working-class living standards as was the case at certain times during the past epoch. The focal point of political life has shifted fully and finally beyond the boundaries of parliament. Even so, the bourgeoisie is still forced, by its relations with the working class, and also by the complex relations within the bourgeois class, to push measures sometimes and somehow through parliament. In parliament the various cliques haggle for power, exhibiting their strengths, betraying their weaknesses and compromising themselves etc., etc.

The historical task of the working class is therefore to wrest the parliamentary apparatus from the hands of the ruling classes, breaking and destroying it and replacing it with new organs of proletarian power. At the same time it is very much in the interests of the revolutionary general staff of the working class to have its reconnaissance units in the parliamentary institutions of the bourgeoisie in order to hasten their destruction. The fundamental difference between the tactics of a revolutionary communist who enters parliament and a social-democratic parliamentarian here

emerges clearly. The social-democratic deputies act on the assumption of the relative stability and the indefinite duration of the existing regime. They set themselves the task of achieving reforms at all costs, and are concerned that the masses should value properly each gain as the fruit of socialist parliamentarianism (Turati, Longuet and Co.).

A new tactic is emerging to replace the old and compromising parliamentarianism. It is one of the weapons with which parliamentarianism in general will be destroyed. However, the disgusting traditions of the old parliamentary tactics have driven some revolutionary elements to oppose parliamentarianism on principle (IWW revolutionary syndicalism, KAPD). Taking all these circumstances into consideration the Second Congress of the Third Communist International advances the following theses:

2. Communism, the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the utilisation of bourgeois parliaments

I

1. Parliamentarianism as a state system became a “democratic” form of the rule of the bourgeoisie, which at a certain stage of its development needed a form of popular representation. Although the latter was in reality a weapon of suppression and oppression in the hands of the ruling class, it outwardly appeared to be the organization of the popular will, standing above classes.
2. Parliamentarianism is a definite form of the state. Therefore, it cannot possibly be a form of communist society, which knows neither classes, nor the class struggle, nor any kind of state power.
3. Parliament cannot act as a form of *proletarian* state administration in the transitional period from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie to the dictatorship of the proletariat. At times of acute class struggle, eventually developing into civil war, the proletariat must inevitably build its own state organisation as a *militant* organisation which excludes representatives of the former ruling classes. At this stage any pretence about the existence of a “popular will” reflecting the wishes of the entire population is harmful to the proletariat. The parliamentary separation of power is not necessary, is in fact contrary to the interests of the proletariat. The state form of the proletarian dictatorship is the soviet republic.
4. Bourgeois parliaments are one of the most important apparatuses of the bourgeois state machine and, like the bourgeois state in general, cannot be won over to the side of the proletariat. The task of the proletariat is to shatter the bourgeois state machine, destroying it and its parliamentary institutions, whether republican or

constitutional-monarchical.

5. The same attitude should be taken to the local government institutions of the bourgeoisie which it is theoretically incorrect to differentiate from state organs. Local government institutions are also apparatuses of the bourgeois state mechanism and must be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat and superseded by local soviets of workers' deputies.
6. Consequently, communism rejects parliamentarism as the state form of the future society, or as the form of the class dictatorship of the proletariat. It denies the possibility of parliament being won to the proletarian cause on a long-term basis. It sets itself the task of *destroying* parliamentarism. *It follows from this that bourgeois state institutions can be used only with the object of destroying them.* This is the *one and only* way the question of their utilisation can be posed.

II

7. Every class struggle is a political struggle for, in the final analysis, it is a struggle for power. Any strike that extends over the whole country begins to threaten the bourgeois state and thus acquires a political character. To attempt to overthrow the bourgeoisie and smash its state is to engage in political struggle. The creation of a *proletarian class* apparatus for administration, and suppression of bourgeois resistance — whatever form this apparatus takes — involves the conquest of political power.
8. This means that the question of the political struggle can in no way be reduced to the question of the attitude to be taken towards parliamentarism. Inasmuch as the proletarian class struggles develop from small and partial encounters into a bid to overthrow the whole capitalist system, this is a general question.
9. The most important form of proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie and its state power is, first and foremost, mass action, which is organised and directed by the revolutionary mass organisations of the proletariat (unions, parties, soviets) under the general leadership of a united, disciplined, centralised communist party. Civil war means war and to wage it the proletariat needs its own experienced political officers' corps and its own strong political general staff, capable of leading all the operations in these areas of struggle.
10. The mass struggle is a whole network of activities which increasingly intensify and logically culminate in an insurrection against the capitalist state. As the mass struggle develops into civil war the leading party of the proletariat must, as a general rule, secure each and every legal position, using them as auxiliary centres of its revolutionary work and subordinating them to its plan for the overall campaign of

mass struggle.

11. The platform of bourgeois parliament is one such auxiliary centre. The fact that parliament is a bourgeois state institution is no argument at all against participation in the parliamentary struggle. The communist party enters this institution not to function within it as an integral part of the parliamentary system, but to take action inside parliament that helps to smash the bourgeois state machine and parliament itself (examples are the activity of Liebknecht in Germany and of the Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma, the "Democratic Conference", Kerensky's pre-parliament, the "Constituent Assembly" and the town dumas and, finally, the action of the Bulgarian Communists).
12. Parliamentary activity, which consists mainly of disseminating revolutionary ideas, unmasking class enemies from the parliamentary platform, and furthering the ideological cohesion of the masses, who, especially in the backward areas, still respect parliament and harbour democratic illusions — this activity must be absolutely subordinate to the aims and tasks of the mass struggle outside parliament.

Participation in election campaigns and the utilisation of parliament as a platform for revolutionary ideas is of particular significance for the political conquest of those layers of the working class such as the rural working masses who until now have stood aside from political life and the revolutionary movement.

13. Should the communists receive a majority in the local government institutions, it is their duty to take the following measures:
 - a. Form a revolutionary opposition to fight the bourgeois central authority;
 - b. Aid the poorer sections of the population in every possible way (economic measures, the organisation or attempted organisation of armed workers' militias etc.);
 - c. Expose, at every opportunity, the obstacles which the bourgeois state power places in the way of fundamental social change;
 - d. Launch a determined campaign to spread revolutionary propaganda, even if it leads to conflict with the state power;
 - e. Under certain circumstances, replace the local government bodies with soviets of workers' deputies.

All communist activity in the local government institutions must be seen as a part of the struggle to break up the capitalist system.

14. The election campaign itself must be conducted not as a drive for the maximum number of parliamentary seats, but as a mobilisation of the masses around slogans of proletarian revolution. The election struggle must involve rank-and-file party members and not the party leadership alone; it is essential that all mass actions

(strikes, demonstrations, movements among the armed forces etc.) occurring at the time are taken up in the campaign and that close contact is maintained with them. The mass proletarian organisations should also be drawn into active work around the election.

15. If conducted in line with these theses; and also with the conditions laid down in the special instruction, parliamentary work represents a direct contrast to the dirty political manoeuvring practised by the various social-democratic parties, who enter parliament to support this “democratic” institution or, at best, “to win it over”. The communist party must stand exclusively for the *revolutionary* utilisation of parliament, in the spirit of Karl Liebknecht, Höglund and the Bolsheviks.

III

16. Anti-parliamentarism as a principle, as an absolute and categorical rejection of participation in elections or in revolutionary parliamentary work, is therefore a naive and childish position which does not stand up to criticism. Sometimes this attitude expresses a healthy disgust with the manoeuvring of the parliamentarians, but is nevertheless a failure to recognise the possibilities of revolutionary parliamentarism. This position, is frequently connected with a completely incorrect view of the role of the party — the communist party is seen, not as a militant centralising vanguard of the workers, but as a decentralised system of loosely connected groups.
17. At the same time, a recognition of parliamentary work does not imply absolute acceptance of the need to participate, whatever the circumstances, in all elections and parliamentary sessions. Participation in a particular election or session depends on a whole series of specific conditions. A certain combination of conditions may make withdrawal from parliament essential. The Bolsheviks left the pre-parliament in order to weaken it, undermine it and sharply counterpose to it the St. Petersburg Soviet which was about to take on the leadership of the October revolution. They left the Constituent Assembly on the day of its dissolution, transferring the focal point of political events to the Third Congress of Soviets. Under other circumstances it may be essential to boycott elections and use direct action to remove the whole bourgeois state apparatus and the bourgeois ruling clique. Alternatively, participation in elections, followed by a boycott of parliament, may be necessary etc.
18. So, while accepting as a general rule the need to participate in elections to both national parliaments and the organs of local government, and in the work of these institutions, the communist party has to decide each case separately, evaluating

the specific conditions of the given moment. A boycott of elections or of parliament, or a withdrawal from parliament, are permissible primarily when conditions are ripe for an immediate move to armed struggle for power.

19. The comparative unimportance of this question should always be kept in view. Since the focal point of the struggle for state power lies *outside parliament* the questions of proletarian dictatorship and the *mass* struggle for its realisation are, obviously, immeasurably more important than the question of how to use the parliamentary system.
20. The Communist International therefore emphasises most strongly that it considers any split or attempt to split the communist party solely on this question to be a serious mistake. The Congress also calls on all those who accept the principle of armed struggle for the proletarian dictatorship under the leadership of a centralised party of the revolutionary proletariat, and who exercise an influence on all the mass organisations of the working class, to strive for the unity of all communist elements despite possible differences on the question of how to use bourgeois parliaments.

3. Revolutionary parliamentarianism

In order to guarantee that the revolutionary parliamentary tactic is used correctly, the following points should be observed:

1. The central committee and the communist party as a whole must, during the preparatory stage, i.e., before the parliamentary elections, systematically inspect the quality of the political and organisational abilities of the members of the parliamentary fractions. The central committee of the communist party must be responsible for the work of the communist parliamentary fraction. It must have the unquestionable right to object to any candidate put forward by any organisation if it doubts that the candidate, if elected, would conduct himself/herself in a truly communist manner.

The communist parties must break with the old social-democratic custom of putting forward only so-called "experienced" parliamentarians, mainly lawyers etc. As a rule, they should put forward candidates who are workers. It should not worry them that this sometimes means choosing rank-and-file members who lack any great parliamentary experience. The communist party must be ruthless in relation to those careerist elements who attach themselves to the communist party with the aim of getting into parliament. The central committees of the communist parties must sanction the candidature of people who have proved their loyalty to the working class by their long years of political work.

2. The organisation of the parliamentary fraction after the elections are over must be entirely in the hands of the central committee of the communist party, irrespective of whether the party as a whole is legal or illegal at the time. The central committee must confirm the election of the chairperson and the presidium of the parliamentary fraction. The central committee of the party must have a permanent representative in the parliamentary fraction with the right of veto. The parliamentary fraction must seek prior directives from the central committee on all important political questions. When the communists in parliament are about to launch an important campaign the central committee has the right and duty to appoint or reject the speaker from the fraction, demand from the speaker an outline of the proposed speech or the speech itself for the central committee to read and approve etc. Candidates standing as communists must give official written undertakings that at the first request of the central committee of the party they will resign their seats, so that, whenever necessary, the party can organise a united withdrawal from parliament.
3. In those countries where reformist, semi-reformist and simply careerist elements have already managed to penetrate the communist parliamentary fraction (this has already happened in certain countries), the central committees of the communist parties must undertake a thorough purge of the membership of the fraction, proceeding from the principle that the cause of the working class is better served by a small but genuinely communist fraction than by a large fraction with no consistent communist line.
4. The communist deputies must combine their legal work with illegal work if the central committee so decides. In those countries where the communist deputy enjoys a certain immunity from bourgeois law, this should be used to assist the party's illegal organisational and propaganda work.
5. Communist deputies must subordinate all their parliamentary work to the extra-parliamentary activity of their party. The party and its central committee must see that legislative proposals are regularly introduced, not with the idea that they will be accepted by the bourgeois majority, but for the purpose of propaganda, agitation and organisation.
6. In the event of street demonstrations and other revolutionary activity initiated by the working class, the communist deputy must play a leading and visible role at the head of the proletarian masses.
7. While remaining under the party's control, the communist deputies must use every means at their disposal to maintain contact with the revolutionary workers, peasants and other working people, through the press and in other ways. Under

no circumstances should they behave like social-democratic deputies who strive to build up business connections with their electors. *They must at all times be prepared to undertake propaganda work for the communist organisation.*

8. Communist members of parliament must bear in mind that they are not “legislators” seeking agreement with other legislators, but party agitators sent into the enemy’s camp to carry out party decisions. The communist member of parliament is responsible not to the atomised mass of voters, but to the communist party, whether legal or illegal.
9. The parliamentary speeches the communist deputies make must be in a language that can be understood by every rank-and-file worker and peasant, every laundress and shepherd — the party must be able to issue their speeches as leaflets which can be distributed to the most distant rural corners of the country.
10. Rank-and-file worker-communists must not be afraid to speak in the bourgeois parliaments. Even when workers are new to parliamentary work they must not be intimidated by the so-called experienced parliamentarians. If necessary, the worker-deputies can read their speeches straight from notes. The speeches can then be published in newspapers and leaflets.
11. Communist members of parliament must use the parliamentary platform to expose, not just the bourgeoisie and its avowed followers, but also the social-patriots, the reformists, the indecisive politicians of the “centre” and the other opponents of communism. Likewise, they must use it to spread the ideas of the Third International.
12. Even where the communist party has only one or two people in parliament, the behaviour of its deputies should be a challenge to capitalism. The deputies should remember that they only deserve the name of communist if they show ceaseless hostility to the bourgeois system and its social-patriotic lackeys. ■

Appendix 2

On the United Front

(Material for a Report on the Question of French Communism)

By Leon Trotsky

I. General considerations on the united front

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 program 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.

Drafted by Trotsky for an enlarged plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, February 1922. The text is taken from *Fourth International*, March 1941.

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*¹ and *Le Populaire*.² 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 forever 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, coordinated 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 respective 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 tribune, the trade union bureaus, 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 we 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 halfway 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.

II. Groupings in the French labour movement

10. If we propose to analyse the question of the united front as it applies to France, without leaving the ground of the foregoing theses which flow from the entire policy of the Communist International, then we must ask ourselves: Do we have in France a situation in which the Communists represent, from the standpoint of practical actions, an insignificant magnitude (*quantité négligeable*)? Or do they, on the contrary, encompass the overwhelming majority of organised workers? Or do they perhaps occupy an in-between position? Are they sufficiently strong to make their participation in the mass movement of major importance, but not strong enough to concentrate the undisputed leadership in their own hands?

It is quite incontestable that we have before us precisely the latter case in France.

11. In the party sphere the predominance of the Communists over the reformists is overwhelming. The Communist organisation and the Communist press surpass by far in numbers, richness and vitality the organisation and press of the so-called Socialists.

This overwhelming preponderance, however, far from secures to the French Communist Party the complete and unchallenged leadership of the French proletariat, inasmuch as the latter is still strongly under the influence of anti-political and anti-party tendencies and prejudices, the arena for whose operation is primarily provided by the trade unions.

12. The outstanding peculiarity of the French labour movement consists in this, that the trade unions have long served as an integument or cover for a peculiar anti-parliamentary political party which bears the name of syndicalism. Because, however the revolutionary syndicalists may try to demarcate themselves from politics or from the party, they can never refute the fact that they themselves constitute a political party which seeks to base itself on trade union organisations of the working class. This party has its own positive, revolutionary, proletarian tendencies, but it also has its own extremely negative features, namely, the lack of a genuinely definitive program and a

rounded organisation. The organisation of the trade unions by no means corresponds with the organisation of syndicalism. In the organisational sense, the syndicalists represent amorphous political nuclei, grafted upon the trade unions.

The question is further complicated by the fact that the syndicalists, like all other political groupings in the working class, have split, after the war, into two sections: the reformists who support bourgeois society and are thereby compelled to work hand-in-hand with parliamentary reformists; and the revolutionary section which is seeking ways to overthrow bourgeois society and is thereby, in the person of its best elements, moving toward Communism.

It was just this urge to preserve the unity of the class front which inspired not only the Communists but also the revolutionary syndicalists with the absolutely correct tactic of fighting for the unity of the trade union organisation of the French proletariat. On the other hand, with the instinct of bankrupts who sense that before the eyes of the working masses they cannot, in action, in struggle, meet the competition of the revolutionary wing, Jouhaux, Merrheim, and Co. have taken the path of split. The colossally important struggle now unfolding throughout the entire trade union movement of France, the struggle between the reformists and the revolutionists, is for us at the same time a struggle for the unity of the trade union organisation and the trade union front.

III. The trade union movement & the united front

13. French Communism finds itself in an extremely favourable position precisely with regard to the idea of the united front. In the framework of political organisation, French Communism has succeeded in conquering the majority of the old Socialist Party, whereupon the opportunists added to all their other political credentials the quality of "Dissidents", that is, splitters. Our French party has made use of this in the sense that it has branded the social-reformist organisation with the label of Dissidents (splitters), thus singling out the fact that the reformists are disrupters of unity in action and unity of organisation alike.

14. In the field of the trade union movement, the revolutionary wing and above all the Communists cannot hide either from themselves or their adversaries how profound are the differences between Moscow and Amsterdam³ — differences which are by no means simple shadings within the ranks of the labour movement but a reflection of the profoundest contradiction which is tearing modern society apart, namely, the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. But at the same time the revolutionary wing, i.e., first and foremost the conscious Communist elements, never sponsored, as has been said, the tactic of leaving the trade unions or of splitting the

trade union organisation. Such slogans are characteristic only of sectarian groupings of "localists", of the KAPD, of certain "libertarian" anarchist grouplets in France, which never wielded any influence among broad working masses, which neither aspire nor strive to gain this influence but are content with small churches of their own, each with its rigidly demarcated congregation. The truly revolutionary elements among the French syndicalists have felt instinctively that the French working class can be won on the arena of the trade union movement only by counterposing the revolutionary viewpoint and the revolutionary methods to those of the reformists on the arena of mass action, while preserving at the same time the highest possible degree of unity in action.

15. The system of cells in the trade union organisations adopted by the revolutionary wing signifies nothing else but the most natural form of struggle for ideological influence and for unity of front without disrupting the unity of organisation.

16. Like the reformists of the Socialist Party, the reformists of the trade union movement took the initiative for the split. But it was precisely the experience of the Socialist Party that largely inspired them with the conclusion that time worked in favour of Communism, and that it was possible to counteract the influence of experience and time only by forcing a split. On the part of the ruling CGT (the French Confederation of Labour) clique we see a whole system of measures designed to disorganise the left wing, to deprive it of those rights which the trade union statutes afford it, and, finally, through open expulsion — counter to all statutes and regulations — to formally place it outside the trade union organisation.

On the other hand, we see the revolutionary wing fighting to preserve its rights on the grounds of the democratic norms of workers' organisations and resisting with all its might the split implanted from above by appealing to the rank-and-file for unity of the trade union organisation.

17. Every thinking French worker must be aware that when the Communists comprised one-sixth or one-third of the Socialist Party they did not attempt to split, being absolutely certain that the majority of the party would follow them in the near future. When the reformists found themselves reduced to one-third, they split away, nursing no hopes to again win the majority of the proletarian vanguard.

Every thinking French worker must be aware that when the revolutionary elements were confronted with the problem of the trade union movement, they, still an insignificant minority at the time, decided it in the sense of working in common organisations, being certain that the experience of the struggle in the conditions of the revolutionary epoch would quickly impel the majority of the unionised workers to the side of the revolutionary program. When the reformists, however, perceived the

growth of the revolutionary wing in the trade unions, they — nursing no hopes of coping with it on a competitive basis — resorted immediately to the methods of expulsion and split.

Hence flow conclusions of greatest importance:

First, the full depth of the differences which reflect, as has been said, the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, becomes clarified.

Secondly, the hypocritical “democratism” of the opponents of proletarian dictatorship is being exposed to the very roots, inasmuch as these gentlemen are averse to tolerating methods of democracy, not only in the framework of the state, but also in the framework of workers’ organisations. Whenever the latter turn against them, they either split away themselves, like the Dissidents in the party, or expel others, like the clique of Jouhaux-Dumoulin. It is truly monstrous to suppose that the bourgeoisie would ever agree to permit the struggle against the proletariat to come to a decision within the framework of democracy, when even the agents of the bourgeoisie inside the trade union and political organisations are opposed to solving the questions of the labour movement on the basis of norms of workers’ democracy which they themselves voluntarily adopted.

18. The struggle for the unity of the trade union organisation and trade union action will remain in the future as well one of the most important tasks of the Communist Party — a struggle not only in the sense of constantly striving to unite ever larger numbers of workers around the program and tactics of Communism, but also in the sense that the Communist Party — on the road to the realisation of this goal — both directly and through Communists in the trade unions, strives in action to reduce to a minimum those obstacles which are placed before the workers’ movement by an organisational split.

If in spite of all our efforts to restore unity, the split in the CGT becomes sealed in the immediate future, this would not at all signify that the CGT *Unitaire*⁴ regardless of whether half or more than half of the unionised workers join it in the next period, will conduct its work by simply ignoring the existence of the reformist CGT. Such a policy would render difficult in the extreme — if not exclude altogether — the possibility of coordinated militant actions of the proletariat, and at the same time would make it extremely easy for the reformist CGT to play, in the interests of the bourgeoisie, the role of *La Ligue Civique*⁵ as regards strikes, demonstrations, etc.; and it would simultaneously provide the reformist CGT with a semblance of justification in arguing that the revolutionary CGTU provokes inexpedient public actions and must bear full responsibility for them. It is perfectly self-evident that in all cases where circumstances permit, the revolutionary CGTU will, whenever it deems it necessary to undertake

some campaign, openly address itself to the reformist CGT with specific proposals and demands for a concrete plan of coordinated actions, and bring to bear the pressure of labour's public opinion and expose before this public opinion each hesitating and evasive step of the reformists.

In this way, even in the event that the split of the trade union organisation becomes permanent, the methods of struggle for the united front will preserve all their meaning.

19. We can, therefore, state that in relation to the most important field of the labour movement — the trade unions — the tactic of the united front demands that those methods, by which the struggle against Jouhaux and Co. has already been conducted on our side, be applied more consistently, more persistently and resolutely than ever before.

IV. The political struggle & the united front

20. On the party plane there is, to begin with, a very important difference from the trade unions in this, that the preponderance of the Communist Party over the Socialist, both in point of organisation and the press, is overwhelming. We may consequently assume that the Communist Party, as such, is capable of securing the unity of the political front and that therefore it has no impelling reasons for addressing itself to the organisation of the Dissidents with any sort of proposals for concrete actions. This strictly businesslike and legitimate method of posing the question, on the basis of evaluating the relationship of forces and not on the basis of verbal radicalism, must be appraised on its substantive merits.

21. If we take into account that the Communist Party numbers 130,000 members, while the Socialists number 30,000, then the enormous successes of Communist ideas in France become apparent. However, if we take into account the relation between these figures and the numerical strength of the working class as a whole, together with the existence of reformist trade unions and of anti-Communist tendencies within the revolutionary trade unions, then the question of the hegemony of the Communist Party inside the labour movement will confront us as a very difficult task, still far from solved by our numerical superiority over the Dissidents. The latter may under certain conditions prove to be a much more important counterrevolutionary factor within the working class than might appear, if one were to judge solely from the weakness of their organisation and the insignificant circulation and ideological content of their paper, *Le Populaire*.

22. In order to evaluate a situation, it is necessary to take clear cognisance of how this situation took shape. The transformation of the majority of the old Socialist Party into the Communist Party came as a result of a wave of dissatisfaction and mutiny

engendered in all countries in Europe by the war. The example of the Russian revolution and the slogans of the Third International seemed to point a way out. The bourgeoisie, however, was able to maintain itself throughout 1919-20 and was able, by means of combined measures, to establish on postwar foundations a certain equilibrium, which is being undermined by the most terrible contradictions and which is heading toward vast catastrophes, which meanwhile provides relative stability for the current day and for the period immediately ahead. The Russian revolution, in surmounting the greatest difficulties and obstacles created by world capitalism, has been able to achieve its socialist tasks only gradually, only at the cost of an extraordinary strain upon all its forces. As a result, the initial flood-tide of vague, uncritical, revolutionary moods has been unavoidably superseded by an ebb. Only the most resolute, audacious and youthful section of the world working class has remained under the banner of Communism.

This does not mean naturally that those broad circles of the proletariat who have been disillusioned in their hopes for immediate revolution, for swift radical transformations, etc., have wholly returned to the old prewar positions. No, their dissatisfaction is deeper than ever before, their hatred of the exploiters is fiercer. But at the same time they are politically disoriented, they do not see the paths of struggle, and therefore remain passively expectant — giving rise to the possibility of sharp swings to this or that side, depending on how the situation unfolds.

This big reservoir of the passive and the disoriented can, under a certain combination of circumstances, be widely utilised by the Dissidents against us.

23. In order to support the Communist Party, faith in the revolutionary cause, will to action and loyalty are needed. In order to support the Dissidents, disorientation and passivity are necessary and sufficient. It is perfectly natural for the revolutionary and dynamic section of the working class to effuse from its ranks a much larger proportion of members for the Communist Party than the passive and disoriented section is able to supply to the party of the Dissidents.

The same thing applies to the press. The elements of indifferentism read little. The insignificant circulation and content of *Le Populaire* mirrors the mood of a certain section of the working class. The fact that complete ascendancy of the professional intellectuals over the workers prevails in the party of the Dissidents runs nowise counter to our diagnosis and prognosis. Because the passive and partially disillusioned, partially disoriented worker-masses are an ideal culture medium, especially in France, for political cliques composed of attorneys and journalists, reformist witch-doctors and parliamentary charlatans.

24. If we regard the party organisation as an operating army, and the unorganised

mass of workers as the reserves, and if we grant that our operating army is three to four times stronger than the active army of Dissidents, then, under a certain combination of circumstances, the reserves may prove to be divided between ourselves and the social-reformists in a proportion much less favourable to us.

25. The political atmosphere of France is pervaded with the idea of the "Left Bloc". After a new period of Poincaré-ism⁶ which represents the bourgeoisie's attempt to serve up to the people a warmed-over hash of the illusions of victory, a pacifist reaction may quite likely set in among broad circles of bourgeois society, i.e., first and foremost among the petty bourgeoisie. The hope for universal pacification, for agreement with Soviet Russia, obtaining raw materials and payments from her on advantageous terms, cuts in the burden of militarism, and so on — in brief, the illusory program of democratic pacifism — can become for a while the program of a "Left Bloc", superseding the National Bloc.

From the standpoint of the development of the revolution in France, such a change of regimes will be a step forward only provided the proletariat does not fall prey to any extent to the illusions of petty-bourgeois pacifism.

26. Reformist-Dissidents are the agency of the "Left Bloc" within the working class. Their successes will be the greater, all the less the working class as a whole is seized by the idea and practice of the united front against the bourgeoisie. Layers of workers, disoriented by the war and by the tardiness of the revolution, may venture to support the "Left Bloc" as a lesser evil, in the belief that they do not thereby risk anything at all, or because they see no other road at present.

27. One of the most reliable methods of counteracting inside the working class the moods and ideas of the "Left Bloc", i.e., a bloc between the workers and a certain section of the bourgeoisie against another section of the bourgeoisie, is through promoting persistently and resolutely the idea of a *bloc between all the sections of the working class against the whole bourgeoisie*.

28. In relation to the Dissidents this means that we must not permit them to occupy with impunity an evasive, temporising position on questions relating to the labour movement, and to use platonic declarations of sympathy for the working class as a cover for utilising the patronage of the bourgeois oppressors. In other words, we can and must, in all suitable instances, propose to the Dissidents a specific form of joint aid to strikers, to locked-out workers, unemployed, war invalids, etc., etc., recording before the eyes of the masses their responses to our precise proposals, and in this way driving a wedge between them and certain sections of politically indifferent or semi-indifferent masses on whom the reformists hope to lean for support under certain favourable conditions.

29. This kind of tactic is all the more important in view of the fact that the Dissidents are unquestionably bound up intimately with the reformist CGT and together with the latter constitute the two wings of the bourgeois agency inside the labour movement. We take the offensive both on the trade union and political fields simultaneously against this twofold agency, applying the very same tactical methods.

30. The impeccable and agitationally extremely persuasive logic of our conduct is as follows: “You, the reformists of trade unionism and socialism”, we say to them before the eyes of the masses, “have split the trade unions and the party for the sake of ideas and methods which we consider wrong and criminal. We demand that you at least refrain from placing a spoke in the wheel during the partial and unpostponable concrete tasks of the working-class struggle and that you make possible unity in action. In the given concrete situation we propose such and such a program of struggle.”

31. The indicated method could be similarly employed and not without success in relation to parliamentary and municipal activities. We say to the masses: “The Dissidents, because they do not want the revolution, have split the mass of the workers. It would be insanity to count upon their helping the proletarian revolution. But we are ready, inside and outside the parliament, to enter into certain practical agreements with them, provided they agree, in those cases where one must choose between the known interests of the bourgeoisie and the definite demands of the proletariat, to support the latter in action. The Dissidents can be capable of such actions only if they renounce their ties with the parties of the bourgeoisie that is, the ‘Left Bloc’ and its bourgeois discipline.”

If the Dissidents were capable of accepting these conditions, then their worker-followers would be quickly absorbed by the Communist Party. Just because of this, the Dissidents will not agree to these conditions. In other words, to the clearly and precisely posed question whether they choose a bloc with the bourgeoisie or a bloc with the proletariat — in the concrete and specific conditions of mass struggle — they will be compelled to reply that they prefer a bloc with the bourgeoisie. Such an answer will not pass with impunity among the proletarian reserves on whom they are counting.

V. Internal tasks of the Communist Party

32. The foregoing policy presupposes, naturally, complete organisational independence, ideological clarity and revolutionary firmness of the Communist Party itself.

Thus, for example, it would be impossible to conduct with complete success a policy aimed at making hateful and contemptible the idea of the “Left Bloc” among the working class, if in our own party ranks there are partisans of this “Left Bloc” bold enough openly to defend this projected program of the bourgeoisie. Unconditional

and merciless expulsion in disgrace of those who come out in favour of the idea of the "Left Bloc" is a self-understood duty of the Communist Party. This will cleanse our policy of all elements of equivocation and unclarity; this will attract the attention of advanced workers to the acute character of the issue of the "Left Bloc" and will demonstrate that the Communist Party does not trifle with the questions which imperil the revolutionary unity in action of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

33. Those who seek to use the idea of the united front for agitating in favour of unification with the reformists and Dissidents must be mercilessly ejected from our party, inasmuch as they serve as the agency of the Dissidents in our ranks and are deceiving the workers concerning the reasons for the split and who is really responsible for it. Instead of correctly posing the question of the possibility of this or that coordinated, practical action with the Dissidents, despite their petty-bourgeois and essentially counterrevolutionary character, they are demanding that our own party renounce its Communist program and revolutionary methods. The ejection of such elements, mercilessly and in disgrace, will best demonstrate that the tactic of the workers' united front in no way resembles capitulation to or reconciliation with the reformists. The tactic of the united front demands from the party complete freedom in manoeuvring, flexibility and resoluteness. To make this possible, the party must clearly and specifically declare at every given moment just what its wishes are, just what it is striving for, and it must comment authoritatively, before the eyes of the masses, on its own steps and proposals.

34. Hence flows the complete inadmissibility for individual party members to issue on their own responsibility and risk political publications in which they counterpose their own slogans, methods of action and proposals to the slogans, methods of action and proposals of the party. Under the cover of the Communist Party and consequently also inside that milieu which is influenced by a Communist cover, i.e., in a workers' milieu, they spread from day to day ideas hostile to us, or they sow confusion and skepticism which are even more pernicious than avowedly hostile ideologies. Periodicals of this type, together with their editors, must once and for all be placed outside the party and the entire working-class France must learn about this from articles which mercilessly expose the petty-bourgeois smugglers who operate under a Communist flag.

35. From what has been said, it likewise follows that it is completely inadmissible for the leading party publications to carry side by side with articles defending the basic concepts of Communism, other articles disputing these concepts or denying them. Absolutely impermissible is a continuation of a regime in the party press under which the mass of worker-readers find, in the guise of editorials in leading Communist

periodicals, articles which try to turn us back to positions of tearful pacifism and which propagate among workers a debilitating hostility toward revolutionary violence in the face of the triumphant violence of the bourgeoisie. Under the guise of a struggle against militarism, a struggle is thus being conducted against the ideas of revolution.

If after the experience of the war and all the subsequent events, especially in Russia and Germany, the prejudices of humanitarian pacifism have still survived in the Communist Party; and if the party finds it advisable for the sake of completely liquidating these prejudices to open a discussion on this question, even in that case, the pacifists with their prejudices cannot come forward in such a discussion as an equal force but must be severely condemned by the authoritative voice of the party, in the name of its Central Committee. After the Central Committee decides that the discussion has been exhausted, all attempts to spread the debilitating ideas of Tolstoyanism and other varieties of pacifism must unquestionably bring expulsion from the party.

36. An objection might, however, be raised that so long as the work of cleansing the party of ancient prejudices and of attaining internal cohesion remains uncompleted, it would be dangerous to place the party in situations where it would come into close proximity with reformists and nationalists. But such a point of view is false. Naturally it is undeniable that a transition from broad propagandist activity to direct participation in the mass movement carries with it new difficulties and therefore dangers for the Communist Party. But it is completely wrong to suppose that the party can be prepared for all tests without directly participating in struggles, without directly coming in contact with enemies and adversaries. On the contrary, only in this way can a genuine, non-fictitious internal cleaning and fusing of the party be achieved. It is quite possible that some elements in the party and in the trade union bureaucracy will feel themselves drawn more closely to the reformists, from whom they have accidentally split than toward us. The loss of such camp-followers will not be a liability but an asset, and it will be compensated a hundredfold by the influx of those working men and women who still follow the reformists today. The party will in consequence become more homogeneous, more resolute and more proletarian.

VI. Party tasks in the trade union movement

37. Absolute clarity on the trade union question is a task of first rate importance, surpassing by far all the other tasks before the Communist Party of France.

Naturally the legend spread by the reformists that plans are afoot to subordinate the trade unions organisationally to the party must be unconditionally denounced and exposed. Trade unions embrace workers of different political shadings as well as non-party men, atheists as well as believers, whereas the party unites political cothinkers on

the basis of a definite program. The party has not and cannot have any instrumentalities and methods for subjecting the trade unions to itself from the outside.

The party can gain influence in the life of the trade unions only to the extent that its members work in the trade unions and carry out the party point of view there. The influence of party members in the trade unions naturally depends on their numerical strength and especially on the degree to which they are able to apply party principles correctly, consistently and expediently to the needs of the trade union movement.

The party has the right and the duty to aim to conquer, along the road above outlined, the decisive influence in the trade union organisation. It can achieve this goal only provided the work of the Communists in the trade unions is wholly and exclusively harmonised with the principles of the party and is invariably conducted under its control.

38. The minds of all Communists must therefore be completely purged of reformist prejudices, in accordance with which the party is regarded as a political parliamentary organisation of the proletariat, and nothing more. The Communist Party is the organisation of the proletarian vanguard for the ideological fructification of the labour movement and the assumption of leadership in all spheres — first and foremost in the trade unions. While the trade unions are not subordinate to the party but wholly autonomous organisations, the Communists inside the trade unions, on the other hand, cannot pretend to any kind of autonomy in their trade union activity but must act as the transmitters of their party's program and tactics. To be most severely condemned is the conduct of those Communists who not only fail to fight inside the trade unions for the influence of party ideas but actually counteract such a struggle in the name of a principle of "autonomy" which they apply absolutely falsely. As a matter of fact, they thus pave the way for the decisive influence in the trade unions of individuals, groups and cliques, bound neither by a definite program nor by party organisation, and who utilise the formlessness of ideological groupings and relations in order to keep the organisational apparatus in their own hands and secure the independence of their own clique from any actual control by the workers' vanguard.

While the party, in its activity inside the trade unions, must show the greatest attentiveness and caution toward the nonparty masses and their conscientious and honest representatives; while the party must, on the basis of joint work, systematically and tactically draw closer to the best elements of the trade union movement — including the revolutionary anarchists who are capable of learning — the party can, on the contrary, no longer tolerate in its midst those pseudo-Communists who utilise the status of party membership only in order all the more confidently to promote anti-party influences in the trade unions.

39. The party through its own press, through its own propagandists and its members in the trade unions must submit to constant and systematic criticism the shortcomings of revolutionary syndicalism for solving the basic tasks of the proletariat. The party must tirelessly and persistently criticise the weak theoretical and practical sides of syndicalism, explaining at the same time to its best elements that the only correct road for securing the revolutionary influence on the trade unions and on the labour movement as a whole is the entry of revolutionary syndicalists into the Communist Party: their participation in working out all the basic questions of the movement, in drawing the balance sheet of experience, in defining new tasks, in cleansing the Communist Party itself and strengthening its ties with the working masses.

40. It is absolutely indispensable to take a census of all the members of the French Communist Party in order to determine their social status (workers, civil employees, peasants, intellectuals, etc.); their relations with the trade union movement (do they belong to trade unions — do they participate in meetings of Communist and revolutionary syndicalists? do they carry out at these meetings the decisions of the party on the trade unions? etc.); their attitude toward the party press (what party publications do they read?), and so on.

The census must be so conducted that its chief aspects can be taken into account before the Fourth World Congress convenes.

March 2, 1922

Notes

Introduction

- 1 K. Kautsky, “National Assembly and Council Assembly”, in J. Riddell (ed.), *The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power* (Pathfinder Press: New York, 1986), p. 103
- 2 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1977), Vol. 28, p. 458
- 3 *ibid.*, pp. 464-65
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 465
- 5 Cited in Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Work* (Howard Fertig: New York 1969), p. 323
- 6 K. Radek, “In Berlin”, in J. Riddell (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 163
- 7 Cited in Robert Looker (ed.), *Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings* (Grove Press: New York 1974), pp. 287-88
- 8 K. Radek, *op. cit.*, p. 162
- 9 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 279-280
- 10 Quoted in *ibid.*, Vol. 4. p. 174
- 11 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 369
- 12 *ibid.*, pp. 384-385
- 13 V.I. Lenin, *ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 257
- 14 *ibid.*, pp. 280-282
- 15 *ibid.*, p. 292
- 16 *ibid.*, p. 282
- 17 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 470

‘Left-Wing’ Communism

- 1 The “*Holy Alliance*” was a reactionary association of European monarchs founded in 1815 by Russia, Austria and Prussia to suppress revolutionary movements in Europe and to preserve the rule of the absolutist monarchies of the continent.
- 2 The reference is to the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary parties. The Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs) were a party of petty-bourgeois democrats formed in late 1901 and early 1902. After the February 1917 Revolution the SRs, the Mensheviks and the liberal

bourgeois Constitutional Democrats were the main supporters of the bourgeois-landowner Provisional Government. In late 1917 the SR party split into distinct left and right wings, with the left-wing majority supporting the Bolshevik-led Soviet government until July 1918.

- 3 The soviets (councils) of workers' deputies first appeared between October and November 1905 to give leadership to the economic and political strikes. They were city-wide strike committees consisting of delegates elected from workplaces. They re-emerged during the general strike in February 1917, this time including delegates elected by the peasant-soldiers in their barracks.
- 4 The reference is to the shooting of unarmed workers at the Lena gold fields in Siberia in April 1912. The news of the Lena massacre, in which 250 workers were killed, led to a wave of workers' street demonstrations, meetings and strikes of protest across Russia.
- 5 The *Duma* was the advisory parliament which the tsarist government was forced to convene as a concession to the revolutionary-democratic movement in 1905. Voters elected representatives to electoral colleges, or curiae, based upon social class, which selected the deputies to the Duma. The electoral franchise resulted in the vote of one landowner being equal to two capitalists', 260 workers' and 550 peasants' votes. The franchise was restricted to males over the age of 25. In the Duma elected in 1912 six of the nine deputies elected by the workers' curia were Bolsheviks. They represented the votes of 1,144,000 workers. The Menshevik deputies represented the votes of only 136,000 workers.
- 6 *Longuetism* was a centrist current within the French Socialist Party, headed by Jean Longuet. During World War I they pursued a policy of reconciliation with the pro-war, right-wing leaders of the party. In 1918 the Longuetists declared themselves supporters of the October Revolution in Russia. In December 1920, the Longuetists, along with the avowed reformists, broke away from the French Socialist Party, which had renamed itself the Communist Party, and retained the old party name.
- 7 The *Fabians* were members of the Fabian Society, a British reformist organisation founded in 1884. They denied the necessity of achieving socialism through the class struggle of the proletariat and of proletarian revolution and claimed socialism could be achieved through gradual legislative reforms. In 1900 the Fabian Society affiliated to the Labour Party.
- 8 The *Independent Labour Party* (ILP) was a reformist party founded by leaders of the non-craft-based "new trades unions" in Britain in 1893. The ILP was headed by Ramsay Macdonald and from its inception took a bourgeois-reformist stand. In 1920 it withdrew from the Second International and joined the centrist International Association of Socialist Parties, referred to by Communists as the "Two-and-a-Half International", which reunited with the reformist Second International in 1923.
- 9 The *Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany* (USPD) was a centrist party founded

in April 1917 by the left-wing of the reformist Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Its best known leaders were Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein. When the Communist International was formed in 1919, the USPD withdrew from the Second International. The party split in October 1920, with its left-wing majority joining the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), while the right-wing headed by Kautsky continued to maintain the USPD as a separate party until 1922 when they rejoined the SPD.

- 10 The *Spartacists* were members of the revolutionary Spartacus League founded in 1917 by Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Klara Zetkin and Franz Mehring. At the end of 1918 the Spartacists united with other revolutionary groups to found the Communist Party of Germany.
- 11 The *Treaty of Brest-Litovsk* was a peace treaty between Soviet Russia and the Quadruple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey) signed on March 3, 1918 at Brest-Litovsk, which ended Russia's involvement in World War I. According to the treaty, the Russian government was forced to agree that Russian Poland, the whole of the Baltic area, the Ukraine and part of Belarus (Byelorussia) was to be placed under the control of Germany and Austria-Hungary.
- 12 The reference is to the *otzovists* (from the Russian word "otzova" meaning "recall"), a minority current within the Bolsheviks led by Aleksandr Bogdanov and Anatoly Lunacharsky that formed in 1908 and that demanded the recall of the Social-Democratic deputies from the tsarist Duma and the cessation of any legal political work. A conference of the extended editorial board of the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda*, around which the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party was organised, held in June 1909 voted to expel the leaders of the otzovist group from the Bolshevik faction.
- 13 During the negotiations over the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty, a faction of "Left Communists" formed in the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, headed by Nikolai Bukharin, that opposed signing the treaty and called for a revolutionary war against imperial Germany. Following the calling of the Extraordinary 7th Party Congress by the Bolshevik party's Central Committee on February 22, the "Left Communists" resigned from the Central Committee. From March 5 to March 19, 1918 they issued their own daily paper, *Kommunist*, as the "organ of the St. Petersburg Committee and the St. Petersburg Area Committee of the RSDLP". Publication ceased when the Petrograd City Party Conference of March 20, 1918 repudiated the political line of the paper.
- 14 The *Cadets* were members of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, a liberal-monarchist party formed by bourgeois intellectuals and liberal capitalists in October 1905.
- 15 *Volapük* was an artificial language invented in 1880 by Johann Schleyer.
- 16 The reference is to the League for the Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, organised by Lenin in 1895. The League united about 20 Marxist study circles in St.

- Petersburg and was led by a Central Group, consisting of five members including Lenin.
- 17 The *Trudoviks* were members of a Duma group of petty-bourgeois democrats consisting of peasants and populist intellectuals.
 - 18 The *Entente* was an alliance of imperialist powers (Britain, France and tsarist Russia) formed in 1907 in opposition to the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. Its name was derived from the *Entente cordiale*, a pact between Britain and France signed in 1904. After the October Revolution in 1917, the Entente was joined by the United States and Japan and organised a counterrevolutionary war and economic blockade against Soviet Russia.
 - 19 The *Industrial Workers of the World* (IWW or “Wobblies”) was founded in the US in 1905 as a revolutionary trade union movement, oriented toward organising unskilled and low-paid workers. Its revolutionary internationalist stance during World War I led to severe repression against the organisation. It degenerated into an anarcho-syndicalist sect after the formation of the Communist Party in 1919.
 - 20 The *Black Hundreds* were reactionary monarchist gangs formed by the tsarist police to murder revolutionaries and to carry out anti-Semitic agitation and the organisation of anti-Jewish pogroms.
 - 21 The *kulaks* (from the Russian word for “fist”) were the stratum of rich (or big) peasant farmers that developed after the abolition of serfdom in Russia in 1861. They often acted as the village usurers.
 - 22 The *Blanquists* were a trend in the French socialist movement headed by Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), who believed that the working class would be emancipated from capitalist exploitation and oppression not through its own revolutionary class struggle but through a conspiratorial seizure of political power by a secret organisation of revolutionary intellectuals.
 - 23 The *League of Nations* was an association of sovereign states that functioned between the two world wars. Founded in 1919 at the Paris Peace Conference of the Entente powers its first activity was the organisation of imperialist military intervention and economic blockade against Soviet Russia.
 - 24 In April 1906 the two public factions of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party — the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks — that had formed after the party’s 2nd congress in 1903, were formally unified into a single organisation. At the 6th RSDLP conference held in Prague in January 1912 the Bolsheviks declared their organisation to be the RSDLP, thus formally ending their unity with the Mensheviks.
 - 25 The reference is to the international conferences of antiwar socialists held in *Zimmerwald and Kienthal* (Switzerland) in September 1915 and April 1916 respectively. These conferences were dominated by representatives of centrist currents within the European

socialist movement.

- 26 The *Revolutionary Communists* were a pro-Bolshevik group that broke away from the populist (Narodnik) Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party after the Left SRs' failed anti-Bolshevik armed revolt in July 1918. The Party of Revolutionary Communism fused with the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in September 1920.
- 27 The *Treaty of Versailles* was signed on June 28, 1919 between the victorious Entente powers (Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the USA) and Germany, and formally ended World War I. It imposed harsh reparations upon Germany.
- 28 On March 21, 1919 a "Soviet government" was proclaimed by the Communist Party of Hungary after the Hungarian social-democrats, who dominated the workers' and soldiers' councils that had arisen during the anti-monarchist revolution of October-November 1918, merged their party with the newly-formed Communist Party headed by Bela Kun. The Hungarian Soviet government alienated the support of the peasantry — 60% of the country's population — by turning the large semi-feudal estates into state farms and announcing plans to collectivise small- and medium-sized peasant holdings. It also decreed the immediate nationalisation of all private holdings in industry and commerce, without a transitional phase of workers' control over the capitalist managers, and thus precipitating an investment strike and the collapse of production, leading to widespread urban unemployment and rural unrest. Facing a hostile peasantry and with the workers confused and demoralised, the Soviet government was unable to mount an effective defence against a counterrevolutionary invasion of Czech, Serbian and Romanian mercenaries organised by the League of Nations. It was overthrown on August 1, 1919.
- 29 The reference is to a provocative trial staged in 1894 by the reactionary-monarchist circles of the French army command against Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer of the French General Staff. He was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of espionage and treason. The trial was used to whip up anti-Semitism and to attack the republican regime and democratic freedoms. Under mass pressure, Dreyfus was released in 1899, and later acquitted.

Appendix

- 1 The *Kapp-Lüttwitz military putsch* was organised by reactionary-monarchist officers in the German army and the landowner Wolfgang Kapp. On March 13, 1920 they moved troops into Berlin and deposed the Social-Democratic government, which mounted no resistance. The German workers responded with a general strike, which led to the resignation of the Kapp government and the return to government of the Social-Democrats.

Appendix 1: The Communist Parties & Parliament

- 1 The *First International* (International Working Men's Association) was founded in 1864

and united working-class organisations in a number of European countries. Marx became its central leader. After the defeat of the revolutionary government of the Paris Commune (March-May 1871) it faced severe repression and went into decline; its headquarters was moved to New York City in 1872 and it was dissolved in 1876.

- 2 The *revolutionary syndicalists* refers to the revolutionary left-wing in the French trade union federation, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT). The word syndicalist is derived from the French word *syndicat*, a trade union. The revolutionary syndicalists were a semi-anarchist political current that believed that the trade unions could organise a proletarian revolution through a “general strike to overthrow capitalism”.
- 3 The *Democratic Conference* was held in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) in September 1917 and was an attempt by the reformist petty-bourgeois democratic politicians (Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries) to erect a kind of buffer between the pro-capitalist Provisional Government and the worker-peasant soviets, pending the election and convening of the Constituent Assembly (the parliament that was to draw up a constitution for bourgeois-republican Russia).
- 4 The “*Pre-parliament*” (official name: Council of the Russian Republic) was an advisory body chosen by the Provisional Government in September 1917.

Appendix 2: On the United Front

- 1 *L’Humanité* (Humanity) was founded in 1904 by Jean Jaurès and became the daily paper of the French Socialist Party; in 1921 it became the central organ of the Communist Party of France.
- 2 *Le Populaire* replaced *l’Humanité* as the central organ of the French Socialist Party after 1921.
- 3 The reference is to the Moscow-based Communist International and Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) set up in 1921 to coordinate Communist activity in the trade unions, on the one hand, and the Amsterdam-based, Social-Democratic-dominated International Federation of Trade Unions, revived in July 1919.
- 4 The *CGT Unitaire* was the Communist-led Unitary Confederation of Labour (Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire), formed as a result of a split in the reformist-led CGT trade union federation in 1922.
- 5 *La Ligue Civique* was an anti-labour, strikebreaking employers’ organisation in France.
- 6 *Poincaré-ism* refers to the aggressively nationalist and rabidly anti-Soviet policies of the government of French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré. ■

Glossary

Adler, Friedrich (1879-1960) — Austrian right-wing Social-Democrat; secretary of the Second International 1923-39.

Akselrod, Pavel (1850-1928) — a Menshevik leader. After the February revolution of 1917 he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

Asquith, Herbert Henry (1852-1928) — a leader of the Liberal Party of Britain and British Prime Minister from 1908 to 1916.

Austerlitz, Friedrich (1862-1931) — a leader of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party and editor of its central organ, *Arbeiter Zeitung*.

Babushkin, Ivan (1873-1906) — a worker member of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class; took part in organising the distribution in Russia of the Marxist paper *Iskra*; a leader of the Bolsheviks during the 1905 revolution, he was shot without trial by the tsarist authorities.

Bauer, Otto (1883-1938) — a leader of the right-wing Austrian Social-Democrats and the Second International; chief theorist of so-called Austro-Marxism, which used Marxist terminology to cover the non-Marxist, reformist politics of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party. In 1918-19 Bauer was minister of foreign affairs of the Austrian bourgeois republic; was active in suppressing the revolutionary actions of the Austrian working class.

Bebel, August (1840-1913) — a prominent left-wing German Social-Democrat and a leader of the Second International.

Bernstein, Eduard (1850-1932) — a leader of the extreme opportunist wing of the German Social-democrat Party (SPD) and the Second International; from 1896 an exponent of revising Marxism to accommodate the liberal bourgeois social-reformist practice of the right-wing of the SPD.

Bordiga, Amadeo (b. 1889) — one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party; delegate to the 2nd Congress of the Comintern.

Bukharin, Nikolai (1888-1938) — Bolshevik publicist and economist, member of the RSDLP from 1906 onwards. In 1918 when the Brest Peace was discussed he headed

the group of “Left Communists”; editor of Russian Communist Party central organ *Pravda* 1919-29 and president of the Comintern 1926-29; executed on Stalin’s orders after 1937-38 frame-up trials of Bolshevik leaders.

Chernov, Viktor (1876-1952) — a leader and theoretician of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. In May-August 1917, was agriculture minister in the bourgeois Provisional Government, pursued a policy of brutal repressions against the peasants who were seizing the landed estates. After the October insurrection of 1917, he was one of the organisers of anti-Soviet revolts; emigrated from Russia in 1920.

Chernyshevsky, Nikolai (1828-1889) — Russian revolutionary democrat and utopian socialist, scientist, writer and literary critic.

Churchill, Winston (1874-1965) — British Conservative Party politician. In 1918-21, as war secretary, he was one of the instigators of the imperialist military intervention against Soviet Russia.

Clynes, John Robert (1869-1949) — British Labour Party politician, home secretary in first Labour government in Britain.

Crispien, Arthur (1875-1946) — a leader of the German Social-Democrats, publicist. In 1917-22 he headed the right-wing of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (USPD). In 1920, as a delegate of the USPD, attended the 2nd Congress of the Comintern. Upon his return to Germany, he opposed affiliation with the Comintern.

De Leon, Daniel (1852-1914) — a leader and ideologist of the US Socialist Labour Party in the 1890s; in 1905 he helped to found the Industrial Workers of the World.

Denikin, Anton (1872-1947) — tsarist general; during the Russian Civil War (1918-21) was one of the leaders of the counterrevolutionary White armies, commander-in-chief of the anti-Soviet armed forces in the south of Russia.

Dietzgen, Joseph (1828-1888) — a German tanner and Social-Democrat who independently arrived at dialectical materialism.

Dreyfus, Alfred (1859-1935) — an Jewish officer of the French General Staff who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1894 on a trumped-up charge of high treason. As a result of a broad public movement in France demanding a revision of the Dreyfus case, was pardoned in and reinstated in 1906.

Dugoni, Enrico (1874-1945) — Italian Socialist, sided with the reformist Turati-Treves faction of the Italian Socialist Party.

Engels, Frederick (1820-1895) — cofounder with Karl Marx of the modern socialist workers’ movement, coauthor of the Communist Manifesto (1848), a leader of the revolutionary-democratic movement in Germany in 1848-49, outstanding theorist and populariser of scientific socialism.

Erlor, Karl — pseudonym for Heinrich Laufenberg (1872-1932), a left-wing German

Social-Democrat, founding member of the Communist Party of Germany in January 1919. At the end of 1919, he became one of the organisers of the split away of the “Left-Wing” Communists. A founding leader of the ultraleft Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD) formed in April 1920, he was expelled from the KAPD later that year.

Gallacher, William (1881-1965) — a founding leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Gompers, Samuel (1850-1924) — US trade unionist, one of the founders of the American Federation of Labor. President of the AFL from 1886 to 1924, he was an advocate of class collaboration with the capitalists.

Guesde, Jules (1845-1922) — a veteran of the 1871 Paris Commune and a leader of the left-wing of the French Socialist Party, at the outbreak of the First World War he adopted a social-chauvinist stand and accepted a ministry in the bourgeois government of France.

Henderson, Arthur (1863-1935) a leader of the Labour Party and the British trade union movement; in 1908-10 and 1914-17 was head of the Labour Party in Parliament; during World War I was a Cabinet minister in the British government.

Hermann, Ladislaus (d. 1962) — a member of the Austrian Communist Party in 1919-20.

Hilferding, Rudolf (1877-1941) — an opportunist leader and theoretician of the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) and the Second International; from 1917 a prominent figure in the centrist Independent Social-Democratic Party; rejoined the SPD in 1922.

Höglund, Carl (1884-1956) — a leader of the left-wing of the Swedish Social-Democratic party and from 1921 to 1924 of the Communist Party of Sweden.

Horner, Karl — pseudonym for Anton Pannekoek.

Hyndman, Henry (1842-1921) — a leader of the British socialist movement; cofounder of Social-Democratic Federation (1884) and of British Socialist Party (1911); led a pro-war split away during World War I and was on the extreme right of the Labour Party.

Jouhaux, Léon (1879-1954) — French trade union leader; began as a revolutionary syndicalist; head of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) 1904-40. He became a chauvinist during World War I and played a leading role in founding the reformist Amsterdam International Federation of Trade Unions in 1919.

Kapp, Wolfgang (1858-1922) — representative of the German landlords and imperialist, militarist circles; in March 1920 headed the counterrevolutionary military, monarchist coup d'état.

Kautsky, Karl (1854-1938) — one of the leaders and theoreticians of the German Social Democrats and the Second International; in 1914, when World War I broke out, adopted a pacifist position; chief ideologist of centrism (Kautskyism), an opportunist trend that used Marxist terminology to justify the class-collaborationist reformism of the SPD; founding member of the centrist Independent Social-Democratic Party (USPD) in 1917 and an undersecretary in Germany foreign ministry after November 1918 revolution; rejoined the SPD in 1922.

Kerensky, Aleksandr (1881-1970) — a leading figure in the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party; during World War I he was a rabid social-chauvinist; at the time of the October 1917 Bolshevik insurrection, was president of the Provisional Government; emigrated from Russia in 1918.

Kolchak, Aleksandr (1873-1920) — a tsarist admiral, monarchist, head of the White armies in Siberia and “supreme ruler” of the White forces in 1918-19; tried and executed after his forces were defeated by the Red Army.

Kornilov, Lavr (1870-1918) — a tsarist general, monarchist; Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army in 1917; in August 1917 led unsuccessful counterrevolutionary revolt with the aim of overthrowing the Provisional Government, suppressing the soviets and establishing a military dictatorship; arrested and imprisoned by the Kerensky government, but managed to flee to the Don where he organised and subsequently commanded the Whiteguard “Volunteer Army”; was killed in battle at Yekaterinodar (Krasnodar).

Lansbury, George (1859-1940) — a leader of the British Labour Party.

Legien, Karl (1861-1920) — a German right-wing Social-Democrat and a leader of the German trade unions.

Liebknecht, Karl (1871-1919) — a leading figure in the German and international working-class movement, fought opportunism and militarism; during World War I adopted a revolutionary internationalist stand, and was one of the organisers and leaders of the revolutionary Spartacus League; after November 1918 revolution in Germany, together with Rosa Luxemburg, headed the newly formed Communist Party of Germany; a leader of the Berlin workers’ uprising in January 1919, he was brutally killed by counterrevolutionary officers of the Social-Democratic government.

Lloyd George, David (1863-1945) — British statesman and diplomatist, Liberal Party leader, Prime Minister from 1916 to 1922.

Longuet, Jean (1876-1938) — a prominent figure in the Second International, one of the leaders of the centrist wing in the French Socialist Party.

Lüttwitz, Walter (1859-1942) — German general; in March 1920 was one of the organisers of the Kapp putsch, a counterrevolutionary revolt organised by the German

militarists with the aim of reinstating the monarchy and establishing a military dictatorship in Germany.

Luxemburg, Rosa (1871-1919) — an outstanding figure in the international working-class movement, one of the leaders of the revolutionary left-wing in the Second International; helped initiate Polish Social-Democratic movement; from 1897 onwards actively participated in the German Social-Democratic movement; one of the founders of the Communist Party of Germany; in January 1919 was arrested and murdered by counterrevolutionaries.

MacDonald, James Ramsay (1866-1937) — British politician, one of the founders and leaders of the Independent Labour Party and Labour Party; at outbreak of the First World War adopted a pacifist stand and subsequently openly supported the imperialist bourgeoisie; in 1918-20 attempted to hamper the struggle of the British workers against the anti-Soviet intervention.

Malinovsky, Roman (1876-1918) — a deputy in the Fourth Duma Bolshevik group in 1912-14; in 1917 was exposed as a provocateur and secret agent of the tsarist political police, tried and executed by Soviets in 1918.

Martov, Julius (1873-1923) — a leading Menshevik. After the February 1917 revolution in Russia he led the centrist “Menshevik Internationalist” group; opposed both Bolshevik revolution and anti-Soviet White Guards; led Menshevik legal opposition to Bolshevik government 1918-20; emigrated from Russia in 1920.

Marx, Karl (1818-1883) — cofounder with Frederick Engels of the proletarian-socialist movement; leader of the Communist League 1847-52; coauthor of the *Communist Manifesto*; central leader of the International Working Men’s Association (the First International) 1864-76; author of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*.

Merrheim, Alfonse (1881-1925) — French trade unionist, syndicalist; from 1905 onwards was one of the leaders of the Metalworkers’ Federation and the General Confederation of Labour of France; openly advocated social-chauvinism and reformism.

Modigliani, Vittorio Emmanuele (1872-1947) — reformist leader of the Italian Socialist Party.

Natanson, Mark (1850-1919) — a leader of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party; after the February 1917 revolution helped to organise the Left Social Revolutionary Party; in 1918 opposed Left SR armed revolt against Bolsheviks.

Nicholas II (Romanov) (the Bloody) (1868-1918) — the last Russian Emperor, reigned from 1894 to 1917.

Noske, Gustav (1868-1946) — opportunist leader of the German Social-Democratic Party; in 1919-20 was War Minister; organiser of the slaughter of Berlin workers and

the assassination of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

Pankhurst, Sylvia (1882-1960) — prominent figure in British labour movement; attended 2nd Congress of the Comintern; in 1921 joined the Communist Party of Britain, but soon afterwards was expelled for refusing to submit to party discipline.

Pannekoek, Anton (Horner, Karl) (1873-1960) — a leader of the left-wing of the Dutch Social Democrats and co-founder of the Communist Party of the Netherlands in 1918, part of ultraleft split away in 1921.

Plekhanov, Georgy (1856-1918) — founder of Russian Marxist movement; influential writer on Marxist theory; sided with Mensheviks after 2nd Congress of Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party; open Russian national-chauvinist during World War I; opposed October Revolution.

Potresov, Aleksandr (1869-1934) — a Menshevik leader; social-chauvinist during World War I; emigrated from Russia after October 1917 Revolution.

Radek, Karl (1835-1939) — joined Social-Democracy of Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania 1904; moved to Germany in 1908 and was active in SPD left-wing; expelled from SPD in 1913; joined Russian Bolsheviks 1917; Bolshevik emissary to Germany December 1918; arrested by German authorities 1919, released January 1920; elected to Bolshevik Central Committee 1919; Comintern executive committee member during 1920s.

Renaudel, Pierre (1871-1935) — reformist leader of the French Socialist Party; editor of *l'Humanité* 1914-18; part of right-wing split in 1920 that retained name SP.

Renner, Karl (1870-1950) — prominent opportunist leader and theorist of Austrian Social-Democracy; one of the authors of the petty-bourgeois nationalist theory of “cultural-national autonomy”; Austrian chancellor 1919-20.

Scheidemann, Philipp (1865-1939) — a leader of the right-wing of the German Social-Democrats; member of SPD-led government 1918-19; one of the organisers of the brutal suppression of the German working-class movement in early 1919; German chancellor 1919.

Schröder, Karl (1884-1950) — German left-wing Social-Democrat; joined German Communist Party 1918; expelled in October 1919; took part in founding ultraleftist Communist Workers' Party (KAPD) in 1920 before rejoining reformist SPD.

Serrati, Giacinto Menotti (1871-1926) — prominent figure in the Italian working-class movement, one of the leaders of the Italian Socialist Party; an internationalist during World War I; headed Italian delegation at 2nd Congress of the Comintern; an active member of the Italian Communist Party, which he joined in 1924.

Snowden, Philip (1864-1937) — British reformist politician; Chairman of Independent Labour Party 1903-06 and 1917-20.

Struve, Pyotr (1870-1944) — Russian bourgeois economist and publicist; a representative of the reformist “legal Marxism” current in 1890s; leading member of Constitutional Democratic Party from its inception in 1905; after Bolshevik revolution, a member of the Wrangel counterrevolutionary government.

Treves, Claudio (1868-1933) — a reformist leader of the Italian Socialist Party.

Turati, Filippo (1857-1932) — a founder of the Italian Socialist Party (1892); avowed reformist; opposed Comintern; led right-wing split away from SP in 1922.

Valliant, Edouard (1840-1915) — French socialist; a leader of Paris Commune (1871); member of the General Council of the First International; a founder of the French Socialist Party (1901); a social-chauvinist during World War I.

Wendel, Freidrich (1886-1960) — German left-wing Social-Democrat; joined KPD 1918; founding member of KAPD 1920, later expelled; rejoined reformist SPD.

Winkoop, David (1877-1914) — Dutch left-wing Social Democrat; leader of Dutch CP from 1918-26.

Wolffheim, Fritz — German left-wing Social-Democrat; journalist; joined KPD 1918; expelled 1919; founding member of KAPD 1920, later expelled.

Yudenich, Nikolai (1862-1933) — tsarist general; commander-in-chief of counterrevolutionary North-Western army during Russian Civil War; defeated by Red Army November 1919.

Zasulich, Vera (1849-1919) — founding member of Russian Marxist movement; sided with Mensheviks after 2nd Congress of RSDLP; opposed Bolshevik revolution.

Zubatov, Sergey (1864-1917) — tsarist police official; in 1901-03 organised police-supervised trade unions. ■

One of Lenin's most famous polemical works, 'Left-Wing' Communism - an Infantile Disorder, was written in 1920 on the eve of the 2nd Congress of the Communist International. It tries to explain to communists at home and abroad what was of universal applicability in the experience of the Russian revolutionary struggle.

Alliances with other political forces, work in capitalist parliaments, how to relate to the trade union movement and its reformist misleaders, what compromises are permissible and which are not — these are some of the crucial topics Lenin addresses.

This new edition contains an extensive introduction by Doug Lorimer plus two key appendices: A Comintern document explaining the revolutionary attitude to parliament and an article by Trotsky on the united front.

Resistance books