

THE SEVENTH CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

By HARRY POLLITT

[The following is an abbreviated report of Comrade Pollitt's opening speech to the London District Conference of the Communist Party, to hear a report on the 7th Congress of the Communist International.]

THE most important Congress of the Communist International since the Second World Congress in 1920 has just concluded. In 1920, with the direct participation of comrade Lenin, the fundamental documents and theses which laid down the basis of Communist theory and practice were adopted, upon which were based the formation of the Communist Parties and the Communist International.

The Second Congress undoubtedly represented one of the most important moments in the history of the international Labour movement. But of course, it would not be true to say that in 1920 there existed a single world revolutionary Party that was able to carry out in practice the decisions of that Congress. In no country outside the Soviet Union did there exist a single united Communist Party. In every country other than the Soviet Union the revolutionaries were not only isolated in separate parties and sects, but between them the most bitter factional struggles were proceeding.

The importance of the Second Congress was the conception running through the whole of the documents that a basis must be laid down upon which it would be possible to create in every capitalist country, in every colonial country, a Communist Party, acting and carrying out the decisions of its centre—the Communist International.

The Seventh Congress of the Communist International has proven beyond all doubt that this aim has been established. And in 1935 the essential distinction between 1920 is that in two score of capitalist countries in the capitalist world, firmly united Bolshevik Communist Parties exist, working under the leadership of the Communist International on the basis of a world revolutionary proletarian party. And had this not been the case, the Seventh Congress would not have been able to unfold

the entirely new tactical line in the development of the united front which is now going to be carried forward in every country in the world.

The new basis for united action has been opened with the deliberate perspective of leading the forms of united action in all their manifold directions, towards consciously aiming at bringing about the complete unification of the international working-class movement. The new tactical line of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International has not been determined by any opportunist reasons. It has been determined by the consciousness that the formation and strengthening of the united front is now the main link in the chain towards the successful carrying through of the world revolution. And that conscious aim of the world revolution will not be lost sight of for one moment by any Communist Party in the carrying out of the decisions of the Congress. On the contrary, everything that we do will be more consciously and in a more concrete and political way related to our final aims and final principles than ever before.

What was the first conclusion that was established? The first conclusion which the Congress was able to establish was the final and complete victory of socialism in the Soviet Union. This is not a phrase. It is not something that can be passed over as being nice-sounding. It is a historical fact which has changed the entire international situation. It is a fact which has reversed a situation, where a few years ago the Soviet Union was undoubtedly having to do many things that it did not like to do in order to get contacts with capitalist governments to try and get a breathing space, to a position where the most important Governments are now running after the Soviet Union and seeking its friendship.

It is therefore no little thing. It represents the greatest conquest for the whole working class that has been known in the history of the world. It means that the Soviet Union under the leadership of the Communist Party, is now the strongest, most powerful single country in the world.

Those who cannot see that because of this victory of Socialism there is now opening before the working class of the whole world an entirely new perspective cannot see anything. We cannot merely acknowledge the final and irrevocable victory of socialism in the Soviet Union without being prepared to draw one important political conclusion so far as our duty is concerned, and that is this: at any price and under any circumstances we will defend the Soviet Union, and in time of necessity ensure the victory of its Red Army. Comrades, when we say at any cost, and when we say at any price, we mean precisely what the words imply. If there are comrades in this hall who think that this is going a little too far then please let them enter fully into discussion on that point and we will show at the conclusion of the discussion where they are wrong, from the point of view of politics and from the point of view of building

up any perspective of world revolution. They have not built socialism in Russia only as a result of their own efforts—they have built it as a result of the fighting character of international working-class unity behind the Soviet Union. Not only for the Russian workers and peasants have they built, and gone many ways around in the building, made many concessions and many compromises—they have done things which have made some faint hearts gasp “that the revolution has been sold out.” At the end of it all, there has emerged this great and powerful socialist country that is based on socialist industrialisation, that is based on collective agriculture, that has solved for ever the problem of who was going to conquer whom in Russia—the workers and peasants under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, or the counter-revolutionaries. Because of this, it means there is not a working man or woman in any capitalist country in the world that cannot feel stronger in their fight against their own capitalist governments. In other words, the final victory of socialism in the U.S.S.R. means the strengthening of the workers’ daily struggle against the attacks of capitalism, the menace of fascism and war, and the certainty of the world revolution.

To-day, when we embark upon our new line, we can do so with the certainty that those who have contributed to the hammering out of this line are precisely the same comrades who have taken such a leading part in the hammering out of the successful conquest of socialism in the Soviet Union. Also, the Seventh Congress has laid down the lines for developing the united front on a broader basis than has ever been contemplated before. Let this sink into the minds of the comrades. *If the united front can be built up, then the advance of fascism and war can be prevented.* Is there a comrade here who does not understand that? If we can prevent any further advance of fascism or of the war mongers’ plans, this represents a tremendous victory, not only for the proletariat, but for large sections of the population, who, whilst not with us in our ultimate aims, hate and fear fascism and war.

This new line of extension of the united front is not something which is being born out of the air. One of the things that dominated the minds of those who took part in the Congress when we were discussing and debating the extension of the united front tactics, was the experience gained in the last period in France. France played as equally an important part in the Congress as the Soviet Union.

What are the four main things that we already can learn from France? First, that if united action is developed it can stem the advance of fascism on the one hand and it can compel the leading circles of the French ruling class to come to a Peace Pact with the Soviet Union on the other, and thereby gain a tremendous extension of time in which to build up the forces fighting against fascism and for the preservation of peace.

Secondly, it has brought about the unification of the French Trade Union Movement, and on September 24 or 27 there will take place in France two conferences, one a trade union conference of the revolutionary workers. Since the French Communist Party and French Socialist Party in July, 1934, commenced to work together, this working together has brought the two trade union movements of France closer and this month, complete unification will have been brought about. We have made some concessions in order that in the trade union movement unity can be brought about. Of that there is no question, and we won't for a moment seek to hide we have made concessions, and we will make in this country the same concessions if it will remove anything standing in the way of unification of the mass organisations of the working class.

Thirdly, from our French experience, it is already demonstrated that in the immediate future there is a possibility of the unification of the French Socialist Party and the French Communist Party. This would be an event of international importance, for alongside this we have to note that the success of the united front in France has produced a grave crisis in the ranks of the Second International. The French Socialist Party is the second most powerful section to the British Labour Party, and together with the Socialist Parties of Austria, Spain, Italy and Poland, is now fighting for negotiations with the Communist International with a view to joint action.

Fourthly, and this is for us of great significance in Britain, experiences in France have destroyed the arguments of those in the Labour Party in Britain who say that if you have anything to do with the Communists you will drive away the shop-keepers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and other sections of the middle class, as they think that Communism is synonymous with violence and bloodshed. The experience in France has given the lie to that. There has never been a time in the political history of France when the lower middle classes were so firmly allied with the organised working-class movement of France as they are at the present time. When 800,000 of the Paris population passed the Bastille on July 14, everyone knows that a big proportion of them represented precisely that section of the French population which never thought it would be drawn into such forms of mass political activity. It represented that section of the French population which, if they had been with us in Germany, would have prevented Hitler establishing a social basis previous to his coming to power. For the working-class movement in those countries which are yet known as democratic countries, this is a fact of great importance.

To sum up what is behind this extension of united front activity? First, to try and put a stumbling block, however tiny, however apparently insignificant, to put a stumbling block in the path of the fascists and

war mongers. Secondly, to try and take away from the Labour leaders the remaining arguments they have in this and other countries which they use to oppose the united front. The Congress, therefore, in unfolding this tactic, did it on a broad basis and it is then left to the Communist Parties to apply it in the special conditions of their own countries.

For example, in the report of Dimitrov and the resolution, you will find reference to the fact that under certain circumstances we will take full part and responsibility in a united front Government which may be established. Clearly, such a perspective for Britain would be wrong, and for America it would be wrong ; but for France it may be the key to the next steps that have to be taken in France in order to bring in the whole of the left radicals, socialists, and communists into a United Front Government, not to realise Socialism but so as to impede the advance of fascism and war, and in this way to strengthen the workers' forces in France which are consciously working for the conquest of power.

In Britain it is obvious that we should aim to defeat the National Government at the coming general election and secure a Labour Government elected on the basis of the mass movement of the workers. But we cannot say that in America, because circumstances are different. We cannot say that in Poland, where the general election is now taking place, and where the Polish Communist Party and the Socialist Party have to boycott this election as they are a complete farce and give the people no opportunity of electing whom they want to take part in the so-called Polish Parliament.

What does the Seventh Congress declare as one of its main slogans ? It declares that the main slogan in the sphere of activity against war is the struggle for peace. This destroys—at least we hope it will—the canard that the Communists want war because it brings revolution. The Communists are not interested in fomenting war but are vitally interested in preserving peace. So long as capitalism is in existence war is an ever-present danger. What we have to discuss in this meeting will be how we can prevent war from actually breaking out, and we take the view that we can do this. We take the view that as a result of actions in the past it already has been done.

At the present time there is no honest person in the working-class movement who does not understand that the peace policy of the Soviet Union allied to the general anti-war activity carried out all over the world, have represented the main factors which have already either prevented an imperialist war, or a counter-revolutionary war against the Soviet Union from breaking out.

It has not been done as a result of straight-line politics, it has not been done as a result of thinking that the way towards revolution was a straight

way. It has had to be done by manœuvring, by concessions, by compromises, but the aim has never been lost sight of. Who can forget the line of Fenner Brockway in 1932 when the Soviet Government decided to sell the Chinese Eastern Railway? What was the situation when the Russians decided to sell the railway? The situation was that Japan was ready to go to war, and the Soviet Union was equally keen to prevent war. Japan, from the point of view of its fortifications, its aerodromes, its military railways and forces in Manchuria, was ready to strike, and she said she was ready to strike because she could not get the Chinese Eastern Railway, so the Soviet Government said: "we will sell it to you." The negotiations took a year, and at the end of that year a complete change in the relation of forces had taken place, and Japan to-day can never repeat what she hoped to have carried through in 1932.

Is the world revolution stronger as a result of the Soviet Union now being able to tell Japan where to get off as far as the Far East is concerned, or would it be weaker if Japan had struck and the other powers had gone to her assistance and the revolution put in jeopardy?

The same analogy holds good to-day. Let those remnants of Trotsky here in this country who now attack this conception of the defence of the Soviet Union at any price, ask themselves one plain question. If Lenin, when Trotsky refused to sign the Peace Treaty at Brest-Litovsk and would have allowed the Russian revolution to have gone down in a welter of blood rather than sign this treacherous Peace Treaty with German imperialism, if Lenin had not said we will not only sign that Treaty, but we would sign it if it was worse in order that a breathing space is gained for us to rouse the workers outside and to provide ourselves with opportunities for strengthening our own defences here, the Russian revolution would have been crushed.

The irrevocable victory of socialism in the U.S.S.R. is a result of these tactics of the Russian Bolsheviks, and there is not an honest man or woman in this country who professes to be Socialist who can say to us that at any price and at any cost they are not prepared to defend the Soviet Union, because it is the test of our socialist faith. It may at the moment appear that this possibility is a long way off. But you see, we also have the perspective that whilst at the moment there are certain forces within capitalism which are making for capitalism getting out of the worst phase of the economic crisis, the ordinary forces within capitalism that lead to periodical trade depressions are going to meet the forces that are making for recovery much sooner than is realised. Then there will be a renewed struggle for the world market and renewed attacks on the working class of every capitalist country plus one very important factor, that when the situation arises again, then the defence of the Soviet Union will become the chief paramount consideration for every working man and woman in the capitalist countries. Because

then, more than ever before, will the eyes of the imperialists be turned upon this socialist fatherland, this fortress of the world revolution. Therefore, we of the Communist Party of Great Britain, in line with every section of the Communist International support 100 per cent., and without any reservations everything that the Soviet Union does in its foreign policy, because we understand that this foreign policy is in accord with the interests of the international working class as a whole and is helping it forward to the path of revolution. This brings me to the question of what our line is on Abyssinia.

Those of you who read *Inprecorr** this week will find the resolution on war, and will see that we definitely declared at the Seventh Congress that in a war for national liberation the Communist parties will support in that war their own ruling class in defending the attacked nation. We have Poland and Czechoslovakia in mind. Why? Because if you are prepared to surrender the independence of such countries as I have mentioned to German fascism, you are not only preparing a rod for the backs of the Russian workers, but one for the backs of the working class all over the world. In case any comrades boggle at this "at any price," let me put it even plainer. In any war on the Soviet Union by German Fascism, if it came to a conflict which meant the bloody slaughter of tens of thousands of German workers, that would be justified in the interests of humanity as a whole, because if the Russian revolution goes down, millions of humanity will be slaughtered by the fascists.

To-day, we have to apply our Seventh Congress line to a situation that demands a straight answer. It is a tricky situation, it is a complicated situation, and it is no use pretending that the key to the solution of this situation is as straight as the road to that door, because it is not.

But in this situation there is no place for those who want to take what they describe as a "negative attitude." You have to declare quite clearly where you stand. Where do we stand? The *New Leader* appeals to the opposition in the Communist Party to join up with the I.L.P. against the united front with the Labour Party, the T.U.C., the National Government and, as a member of the T.U.C. said at Sheffield, our united front with the Archbishop of York. Will they please speak here. They will be given every opportunity. We have not made a united front with the National Government. We have not made a united front with the Archbishop of York. We have not made a united front with the Labour Party and the T.U.C., but I tell you, we would be very glad if we could make a united front with the Labour Party and T.U.C. if it was on the basis of our line.

Our line was made clear at the T.U.C. this week. It is true that the comrades' speeches did not get the publicity that they deserve. What

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is our line? Are we supporting an imperialist war? We are not. We are supporting the independence of Abyssinia. Some comrades say that that is what the war in 1914 was called for. The independence of Belgium. The war of 1914 was a purely imperialist conflict. The imperialists are now doing all in their power to grab Abyssinia. There is nothing common in their aims and ours, which seek to use the contradictions that exist in the imperialist camp to put forward proposals to prevent this war. We say that the defence of the Abyssinian people is a slogan which corresponds with the interests of the working class throughout the whole world.

How do we propose that it shall be done? By unity with the National Government? We place the responsibility for the present situation upon the National Government. It was British imperialism which, when Mussolini came to power, re-armed and financed him in exactly the same way as they re-armed and financed Hitler facism when it came to power. It is the National Government which everybody knows has recently concluded the German Naval Agreement with Germany. It is allowing the Bank of England to finance Hitler in order to pay for German re-armament. It is British imperialism and its conquest of the world markets and its system of violence which must be always a provocation to those countries who are continually wanting to expand. We understand this, but let us understand the situation of the Abyssinian people.

Abyssinia is an independent country: it occupies one of the most strategical places in Africa. If Abyssinia is conquered by Italian fascism then that represents a strengthening of fascism throughout the world. If Mussolini decides to make war on Abyssinia, do the comrades here understand that Hitler is not a blind man and will immediately choose that moment for the expansion of German territory? If it is true that peace is indivisible, we must approach the question from that angle. This war would not be localised in Abyssinia for longer than a month. We stand unhesitatingly for the defence of the independence of Abyssinia which is irrevocably bound up with the defence of the Soviet Union. Perhaps Hitler would not have a go at the Soviet Union in the immediate situation, but if he has a go for Austria and Lithuania, this is the pre-requisite to having a further go at the Soviet Union later on. Are we to be blind to every phase of the situation? Of course not. Sanctions which under certain conditions we are supporting, is not the high spot of our policy. We are demanding, and demanded at the Trades Union Congress that the T.U.C. should stigmatise the National Government as the prime responsible factor for the present tense eve of war situation which exists in the world at the present time.

We called upon them to denounce imperialist aims and existing mandates and concessions in Abyssinia. We are for the immediate stopping

of loading and unloading any Italian ships at present in English ports. We are for the prohibition of sending war materials to Italy, for the stopping of further financial loans to Italy, we call for the sending of materials to Abyssinia, for the raising of money to help the Abyssinian people fight for their independence. Do you think that we do not know the National Government has prevented the Abyssinian Government from raising a loan in the City of London, that they prevent the export of arms to Abyssinia? But we also demand the closing of the Suez Canal, and the carrying out of the Covenant of the League of Nations, because we believe that all these measures can prevent Mussolini going to war, and we must utilise the present contradictions in the capitalist world, and force economic and military sanctions if necessary.

The key-note of our drive is that by the adoption of these measures we will prevent this war. Let us look at the process as a whole. That is our line here, it is the line of the comrades in France. But it is not the line of the Italian Communist Party and Socialist Party. What is their line? Their line is transforming this war into a civil war. It is for strikes in the factories, stopping transport of munitions and troops, and for the Italian troops in Africa to desert to the side of the Abyssinian army, and even Sir Walter Citrine at the Trades Union Congress was compelled to declare that if Mussolini declares war, he faces the danger of civil war in Italy.

Don't comrades realise that if we are able to preserve the peace, that it is now going to do two things? First, it is going to strengthen the forces fighting against Mussolini in Italy itself; second, it is going to strengthen the forces in Abyssinia, not only against Italian fascism and imperialism, but against British imperialism and French imperialism.

Do you think the anti-fascist forces to-day are not stronger than they were, and if we can only hold Mussolini back we shall be rendering them a great service. When you can read that in Parma, Leghorn, Palermo, Milan and other places, soldiers have deserted, women are holding demonstrations as the soldiers leave, and that in Cremona for the first time since 1922, they are singing the "Bandiera Rossa," the Italian "Red Flag," it shows the way the anti-fascists movement in Italy is developing.

If we declare that all wars are imperialist wars under capitalism, and do not formulate our policy in relation to every concrete situation and state we must not take part in any circumstances in any war, then we are not only betraying the people of Abyssinia, we are betraying the Italian working class, the interests of working men and women all over the world.

(To be continued.)