
Are the Communists Ready?

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November 1917 to March 1923 — five years of struggle, five years of suffering, five years of hope! And the revolution is still confined to Russia. There were moments of despair for the Russian people during these long five years. But the star of hope never ceased its promising glimmer, the hope never left them even for a moment that the workers of other lands would follow the example set by their Russian brothers; that they would dethrone their capitalists; that they would relieve the seemingly unbearable burden of the starvation blockade and the murderous foreign invasion. And the millions of hopeful proletarian rebels in other lands were no less confident, no less eager in the expectation of the great cataclysm.

A wave of patriotic paroxysm swept away the leadership of a proletarian revolution in the mad year of 1914. The Second International was broken to pieces. And when, after four years of mad murder, after the glorious example set by the workers and peasants of Russia, the masses of other European countries began to awake, there was revolutionary verve, there was the spirit of self-sacrifice — but there was no revolutionary leadership. The elements of such leadership had been minorities, mostly hopeless minorities at the beginning of the madness of 1914. Persecuted by the social patriotic majorities of their own parties, prosecuted by the civil and military authorities of “their” countries, they could not well organize during the four years of the bloody bedlam of war. Thus the revolutionary uprisings of the European masses during 1918 and 1919 were drowned in

the blood of the victims of Noskeism for lack of leadership. That the task of the hour had become to give leadership to the rebellious masses became clear to the revolutionary Socialists the world over. Thus in March 1919, the Third, the Communist International, was born.

All Europe was still in turmoil. The masses were in motion. The world revolution seemed to be so near! The First and Second Congresses of the Third International were held under a constellation of revolutionary strife and revolutionary hope. But although completely bankrupt and tottering, capitalism was not destined to fall at the first onrush of the forces of tomorrow. Capitalism, in its fall down the precipice, caught hold of a protruding rock, the lack of preparedness of the workers, and gained a breathing spell. The masses lost some of their revolutionary confidence and had become inactive.

In this atmosphere the Third World Congress met. Capitalism and its social-patriotic henchmen indulged in festive orgies of words about the defeat of the Communist International. But that body, in Congress assembled, took stock of the political situation. It saw one-half of Europe bankrupt. It saw the other half frantically trying to avert bankruptcy by inflating vain expectations of payment from the bankrupt half. And before this mess it saw capitalism standing utterly helpless. The treaty of Sevres was scrapped; the treaty of Versailles was a monstrous abortion, destined to die an early death, if needs be under the convulsions of another ghastly war. And all the

means that capitalism could muster to save itself from the agonies of death were endless conferences of the same old men who had first prescribed medicines which were poisons.

Who dares to speak of the defeat of the Communist International in the face of the great truth into which a seeming paradox had been elevated by history? “The *greatest enemy of capitalism is capitalism itself!*” Profit — the motive power which had made capitalism so great a force in the development of the productive forces of mankind — now threatens the safety of the old order. The objective forces for the establishment of a new order are ripe. The great task now is to prepare the subjective forces, the proletariat. The task at the birth of the Communist International was to *give leadership to the revolting masses*; now the task is to *give revolting masses to the leadership* — hence the slogan: *To the masses!* This slogan furnished the dominating principle of every decision of the Third World Congress. But the congress saw great dangers that beset the Communists on the road to the masses. The dangers were contained in the unreal radicalism within Communists, a radicalism which is always willing to sacrifice opportunities for the sake of mistaken principles. “Combat this tendency,” was the keynote of that congress.

Fifteen months passed between the Third and Fourth World Congress. The latter convened for work on November 9th in the new palace of the Kremlin, in Moscow, and closed its sessions on December 5th. Wonderful Kremlin! It had seen the gorgeous splendor of the *boyars* of old; it had sheltered Napoleon as conqueror within its walls; it had witnessed the birth of the Communist International; it is at present the pivot of the proletarian world revolution.

The fifth anniversary of the Russian revolution dominated the atmosphere of the congress. Five years of revolution and nearly four years of the Communist International. Did the revolution succeed? Has the International made good? Its enemies say no; the revolution has betrayed the

principles, and the Communist International is a failure. The answer that the congress gives to these questions is the political achievement of that gathering.

The Fourth World Congress was in the main introspective and retrospective. No new analysis of the political situation was necessary. The history of the fifteen months since the Third World Congress was one continuous proof of the accuracy of the analysis if that congress. The offensive of capitalism has become more marked since. Warned by the fate of its Russian brother, world capitalism has organized the counter revolution before the revolution. But this display of strength is not sustained by healthy vigor, but is the fruit of fear and desperation. The world war and its aftermath mark the crisis of capitalism. The masses of the proletariat must be organized for the defense. All forces of history hasten the day when this defensive will be turned into the great offensive which will loose the grip of capitalism on the protruding rock and will start it again on its final plunge into oblivion.

The task of the communists is clear. “Go to the masses!” Unite the defensive skirmishes of groups of workers into united mass struggles of the whole proletariat. Create a “*United Front of Labor.*” Not tactical maneuvers, but strenuous efforts must be made to unite the masses of workers in common action. Irrespective of their political differences they must be united for the solution of their immediate problems. The apathy and inactivity of the masses must be overcome. But one danger must be overcome. It is the danger that the revolutionists may succumb to a tendency of adapting themselves to that spirit of the masses. *A Communist must never allow opportunities to pass unused for the sake of mistaken principles; but he must also never sacrifice even one iota of his principles for the sake of mistaken opportunities.* The Communists must be the germ of fermentation that permeates the subjective forces of the proletarian revolution, the working masses, and develop

them to an understanding and prepares them for the execution of their great task.

Did the Russian revolution succeed? Was the Communist International a failure? The Communist international has shown so many sincere efforts in self criticism that its answers to these questions deserve honest consideration.

The Second International has betrayed Socialism and the working class. It has torn apart the united front of the working class *against* capitalism and has created a united front of the workers *with* capitalism. And today it is apparent to all that it is not the inherent vigor of capitalism itself which still sustains its order but the forces of the deserters from the camp of the working class. That the seemingly less compromised elements of the 2-1/2 International now seek unity with the deserters merely proves that they, too, have been of the same caliber, although they have hesitated so long to show their acquiescence in the betrayal by an open alliance with Noske-Stinnes, Renaudel-Poincarè and Henderson-Lloyd-George.

The working class has only one rallying point in its struggle against capitalism — the Communist International. Either this is true, or Gompers is correct when he proceeds on the theory that the interests of capital and labor are identical. There is no other alternative. The communists, being Marxians, know there is no such identity of interests. They know there are only irreconcilable antagonism, continuous conflict, and, finally, the inevitable struggle for power, the revolution. Thus with the world revolution before them, the Communist International as its instrument with them, and five years of experience of the Russian evolution behind them they proceeded with deliberation in congress.

The psychological climax of the congress was undoubtedly Lenin's speech on five years of revolution. The political climax of the gathering, however, was Trotsky's speech on the same subject. The quintessence of the experience of five years of revolution in Russia is this: the theory and practice of

Marxism must be harmonized. The theory must not be mutilated to suit the practice, nor must the practice be distorted to suit a theory. Both must be harmonized, otherwise there is something wrong with the Marxian quality of either one of them. *We must learn — learn — learn.*

A revolutionist must learn first of all to operate with known quantities and must cease to speculate in unknown ones. Operating with known quantities we will find that economic expediency and political necessity do not always coincide. But political necessities take the precedent. The whole problem of revolution is primarily a political problem. The political power in the hands of the proletariat is the absolutely necessary prerequisite of a transition of capitalist economy into a communist one.

To further this economic transition a certain step may be expedient — but the political necessity of retaining power may dictate quite another step. Political necessity may dictate to undo a step today that was made only yesterday in consideration of economic expediency. Though such a politically necessary step may not be a direct measure for the transition, nay, apparently even undo such a measure, still, without the politically necessary step there will be no transition at all. To see in such a seeming zigzag of policy any revolutionary inconsistency proves that one has not yet learned to confine ones reckoning to know quantities only. A new society, after all, cannot be built betwixt night and dawn.

The experience of five years of revolution in Russia has taught its lessons not only to the communists but also to their enemies. Capitalism always underestimated the dangers of the revolution by underestimating the powers of the working class. After the accession to power by the workers in Russia all their enemies, including the friends of the old order in Russia, expected the downfall of the Soviet regime hourly. The November Revolution was regarded as an adventure in which it was only a matter of a short time for the adven-

turers to find out that they had bitten off a considerably larger bit than they could chew. It took days and weeks until the capitalist world in general and the Russian capitalists in particular realized that the Bolsheviks had not only no intentions of dropping the reins of power but, on the contrary, were bent upon using it for the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. Then the bourgeoisie began to organize open resistance, counter revolution, civil war, on a large scale. The Soviets in order to weaken the bourgeoisie in its struggle against them, were then driven to further measures of expropriation as a matter of political necessity, measure which could not be justified from the standpoint of political expediency. At the victorious conclusion of the civil war the Soviets could institute the New Economic Policy — NEP (as it is called in Russia) — thus rearranging things nearer to the basis of political expediency.

Russian experience has impressed capitalism the world over with the seriousness of the claims of the proletariat to political domination. So they marshal all the forces at their disposal to keep in power. They organize a complete counter revolution even before a complete revolution has occurred — as in Italy. They are determined to block the proletariat on its road to power.

The Communist parties everywhere must rise to the occasion and meet it with revolutionary strategy, which neutralizes, paralyzes and fights the forces of the bourgeoisie, and at the same time recruits all the forces of the working class for the final battle. That battle once won the enemy will have exhausted all its reserves and will leave more elbow room to the revolutionary proletariat for its creative work than the Russian workers had. But, after all, the proletariat of Russia has succeeded in

its revolution. It has won the most important battle of the revolution by retaining power in a struggle against a world of enemies.

And the Communist International? The allied capitalist countries of yesterday are enemies today; with their hands at the levers of the most perfect machinery of production the German workers are starving; the war against militarism has just ended, and yet the workers of France are oppressed by the burden of as powerful a military machine as the world has ever seen; German imperialist plans in the east were defeated; yet today we see English and French imperialism struggling for the oil fields of Mosul; Italian “democracy” dangles on the points of the Fascist bayonets; discontent and unrest everywhere; in a word: Capitalism at the end of its rope — utterly bankrupt.

There is only one force that can save mankind out of this chaos — the working class. **A UNITED FRONT OF LABOR** in the defense against capitalist aggression; a **WORKERS’ GOVERNMENT**, as against the economically and politically bankrupt capitalist governments; a Communist International at the head of the struggling masses. Surely, the Third, the Communist International is a success. Never were truer words spoken about the Communist International than Zinoviev’s closing words at the congress:

“LET THE TYRANTS, THE BOURGEOISIE AND THEIR WHITE AND YELLOW INTERNATIONALS TREMBLE: *THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US!*”

Truly, the Communist International is ready for its great task. It will prove its readiness when the masses rise to deal tottering capitalism its fatal blow. It will prove its readiness no less in the preparation of the masses for that great rising.

Transcribed by Mitch Abidor.

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