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A brief history of the Working-Class Internationals

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORKING-CLASS INTERNATIONALS

The First International

As is well known, there have been three internationals - international organisations of the working class offering leadership to the working class in its struggle for its emancipation.

What is known as the First International was actually known as the International Working Men's Association (IWMA). It was formed in 1864 and lasted as an effective organisation until 1872. Thus its duration was a mere 8 years, although, as will be seen, it achieved a great deal during this time.

The formation of the organisation was suggested at a meeting of the London Trades Council with representatives of French, Polish and German workers that had been set up to organise an international workers' congress. The French proposed that a permanent association should be set up.

At the time, the organisations that joined the IWMA were for the most part very ideologically advanced. The British delegations were predominantly reformist - with English trade unions already very much under the sway of labour-aristocratic elements who had arisen as a result of Britain's emerging imperialism. The French were predominantly Proudhonist, Proudhonism being a petty-bourgeois ideology that opposed political action, strikes or class struggle but claimed that by the formation of consumer co-operatives and the formation of people's banks which would extend free credit, socialism would gradually come of itself. A minority of the French delegates were supporters of Blanqui, who advocated predominantly terrorist methods of struggle to the exclusion of all others. The Germans were predominantly Lassallean, again supporting a form of utopian socialism to the exclusion of the re-

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alities of class struggle. The Spanish, Swiss and Italians were very much influenced by the Anarchism of Bakunin. Into this battleground Marx and Engels devoted themselves body and soul with a view to bringing theoretical clarity to the working-class movement.

The International Working Men's Association was based in London. It was to have an Annual Congress in September every year, the Congress being the supreme body. However, a General Council in London, attended by representatives from the national sections of each country, took decisions between meetings of the Congress. Membership of the International Working Men's Association was individual, but trade unions affiliated to the national sections.

Marx gave a famous Inaugural Address at the first Congress in London in 1864. This was adopted by the General Council and confirmed by the 1866 Congress, which was held in Geneva. This Address laid down the basic programme of the International:

1. The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class themselves - *"the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate"*.
2. Collective ownership of industry and land (the latter being opposed by Proudhon).
3. Support for trade unions and strikes. Yet it was made clear that trade unions should not confine themselves to defending wages and conditions, but should also be turned into organising centres for the working class in its political struggle. Marx said: *"While ... the trade unions are absolutely indispensable in the daily struggle between labour and capital, still more important is their other aspect as instruments for transforming the system of wage-labour and for overthrowing the dictatorship of capital."* Naturally, the IWMA was also able to co-ordinate workers' defensive actions on an international basis. For instance, *"When employers in Britain imported workers from Belgium, Holland and France to break strikes of British workers, the General Council intervened directly with the imported workers to induce them to return, and the Brit-*

ish unions compensated the imported for their loss of time after they had refused to act as scabs. Similarly, when the Paris bronze workers went on strike in 1867, the General Council appealed to British unions for support and more than £1,000 was sent, leading to the victory of the Paris strikers."

4. The International also took a stand on co-operatives. There were great illusions in the co-operative movement among workers' organisations, which was supported not only by the Proudhonists, but also the Lassalleans in Germany and the Owenites in England. Marx pointed out in his Address:

"However excellent in principle, and however useful in practice, cooperative labour, if kept within the narrow circle of the casual efforts of private workmen, will never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries..." This is why the Report adopted by Congress noted:

"The cooperative movement is incompetent, by its own unaided powers, to achieve a transformation of the capitalist order of society ... That is why workers must seize the administrative power, wresting it from the hands of the capitalists and the landlords."

5. The Congress came out in favour of fighting for protective labour legislation, despite the misgivings of those who considered that such reforms are dangerous because they only render capitalism more comfortable.
6. Need for the working class to have its own party. The 1871 Congress, which took place in the Hague, resolved: *"In its fight against the collective forces of the possessing classes, the proletariat can only act as a class by organising its forces into an independent political party working in opposition to all the old parties formed by the possessing classes. Such an organisation of the proletariat as a political party is indispensable in order to achieve the triumph of the social revolution, and above all, to attain its ultimate aim, the abolition of classes."*

7. On the national question, the Congress stressed the need to support oppressed countries struggling against their oppressors - for instance the Irish liberation struggle.
8. On war and peace, the Congress opposed all ruling class wars of subjugation and demanded the abolition of standing armies, to be replaced by people's militias. Marx in his Inaugural Address said:

"If the emancipation of the working classes requires their fraternal concurrence, how are they to fulfil that great mission with a foreign policy in pursuit of criminal designs, playing upon national prejudices, and squandering in piratical wars the people's blood and treasure?"

In practice too the First International struggled against war, specifically the Franco-German war of 1867. As a result Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, leaders of the German Social Democratic Party that had been founded at Eisenach the previous year, voted against war credits in the North German Reichstag - and were subsequently prosecuted for treason.

As a result of the war, the Congress that was scheduled to take place in Paris in 1870 could not take place. On 9 September 1870 the General Council resolved:

"Let the branches of the IWMA in all lands summon the working class to action. If they fail to fulfil this duty, the present disastrous war will merely be the prelude to yet more murderous international conflicts. Everywhere the lords of war, land and capital will triumph anew over the workers."

The Franco-Prussian war led to the collapse of Napoleon, precipitated by insurgency in France unleashed by the war, and the setting up of the republic. The General Council considered that French workers should support the new republic and not attempt to overthrow it, but when under Thiers the new government surrendered besieged Paris to the Germans and sought to disarm the national guard, Paris rose up in revolt. The people of Paris set up the famous Paris Commune on 18 March

1871, which held power for six weeks. The International rallied to the support of the Commune.

After its defeat - drowned by the bourgeoisie in blood - Marx drew from its experience the important lesson for the working class that the task was *"no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to the other, but to smash it"* (Letter to Kugelmann, 17 April 1871).

The defeat of the Commune, however, led to the end of the First International, whose members became subject to persecution. Moreover the International's support of the Commune caused reformist elements to withdraw in protest.

The anarchists had formed in 1868 an 'Alliance' with a mish-mash programme, as part of their offensive against working class organisation which it dubbed 'authoritarian' and 'a dictatorship'. These accusations were totally absurd, as Marx pointed out:

"Who but our enemies have any reason to feel suspicious of the powers of the General Council? Does it possess a bureaucracy? Does it command the services of an armed police force whereby it can force obedience? Is not its authority purely moral?"

As a result of the factional activities of the anarchist 'Alliance', the Congress of 1872, held in the Hague, expelled Bakunin and his main associates from the International. Marx and Engels also moved a resolution to transfer the General Council to America. This resolution was passed, but led to the Blanquists also withdrawing from the International. Effectively, the International was over and it was formally dissolved in 1876 when a Congress was convened in Philadelphia but only one foreign delegate appeared.

Marx and Engels were not too sorry to see the First International fade away. Marx wrote to Sorge on 27 September 1873:

"As I view European conditions it is quite useful to let the formal organisation of the International recede into the background for the time

being ... Events and the inevitable development of things will of themselves see to it that the International shall rise again in improved form ... Furthermore it upsets the calculations of the Continental governments that the spectre of the International will fail to be of service to them during the impending reactionary crusade; besides, everywhere the bourgeoisie considers the spectre laid for good".

The Second International

The English Trades Union Congress organised an International Labour Conference in 1888 in London to set up a permanent international 'labour' organisation which would exclude socialist parties. In response to that, Marxist parties called an International Workers' Congress to meet in Paris on 14 July 1889, to found a permanent organisation which would include socialist organisations. 467 delegates from 20 different countries attended. Thus was founded the Second International.

As with the First International, however, there continued to be represented Anarchists who were opposed to the struggle for immediate reforms and electoral struggle - the Anarchists were excluded after 1896 - and the reformism that emanated from the representatives of the imperialist countries, which opposed violent revolution in favour of legal struggle to the exclusion of all else.

The German petty bourgeois intelligentsia in workers' organisations in Germany infiltrated a "*rotten spirit*" of revisionism led by Bernstein, who dressed up British avowedly anti-communist Fabianism in a 'Marxist' garb. The effect was to substitute the struggle for reforms for the struggle for power. In a situation where imperialist plunder made substantial reform actually possible, the resultant effect was blatant class collaboration. The Bernsteinians claimed that class struggle was abating, that classical Marxism was 'out of date' and that one therefore only needed to concentrate on fighting for reforms. Lenin, however, showed that the apparent abatement of class struggle was a dangerous delusion because the contradictions of capitalism were deepening and could not but give rise to revolutionary struggles.

Under the leadership of Kautsky, the International put up a strong fight against Bernsteinianism. There was a full theoretical debate at the Amsterdam Congress in 1904 and in 1905 at Dresden the following resolution was carried by an overwhelming majority:

"The Congress most decisively condemns the Revisionist endeavours to

change our hitherto consistently maintained and victorious tactics based on the class struggle. The Revisionists seek to replace the conquest of political power through the defeat of our opponents by a policy of meeting the existing order of things halfway. The consequences of such Revisionist tactics would be to transform our party from one working for the speediest possible transformation of the existing bourgeois order of society into a socialist order, that is a revolutionary party in the best sense of the word, into a party satisfied with merely reforming bourgeois society."

But despite these strong words, the revisionists were allowed to remain in the Second International, even though they had clearly abandoned its most basic tenets. Kautsky was forever looking for formulas that would paper over the differences between the revisionists and the revolutionaries - for the sake of unity, while Lenin recognised that there was no point in maintaining unity with those who were in fact on the opposing side. The Labour Party from Britain was allowed to join the Second International in 1908 despite the fact that it did not expressly accept proletarian class struggle. The International took the view that it in fact conducted class struggle in practice and therefore admitted it on this basis. India rubber resolutions were constantly being "agreed" that would stretch to accommodate the desires of both the revolutionaries and the opportunists.

The second international and colonial policy

The class collaborationist nature of many of the members of the Second International was already very apparent on the question of colonialism. In theory the Second International was thoroughly opposed to colonialism. However, at the Stuttgart Congress of 1907, someone called Van Kol, supported by Bernstein, denounced what he called the negative anti-colonialism of previous Congresses. The revolutionaries, however, put forward a resolution confirming the anti-colonial position, which was carried by 127 votes to 108. But it is significant that a large minority was able to record its minority position. As Palme Dutt points out in *The International*, p.108-9, "it was significant that the minority view (majority on the Commission), proclaiming that 'Congress does not on principle and for all time reject all colonial policy, which under a so-

cialist regime can fulfil a civilising role', received so large a vote. Even more significant was the line of division. The vote for a 'socialist colonial policy' included the representatives of all the European colonial powers except Russia: that is, the majority in Britain and France; and as a whole, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Holland, also Sweden and Denmark, and South Africa (a party of Whites only). The majority rejecting colonialism included Russia, Japan, the United States, and smaller European countries or those suffering national oppression."

The second international and war

The second international passed any number of resolutions opposing war, but many of its members, believing from the relative comfort in which they lived in imperialist countries that capitalism had "stabilised", did not think war was on the cards. Some even went so far as to interpret the military alliances that various capitalist countries were putting together as alliances that would guarantee peace! Nevertheless the resolutions passed by the second international were unexceptional. In 1907 the resolution passed on this question read as follows:

"If a war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working class and of its parliamentary representatives in the countries involved to exert every effort to prevent the outbreak of war, using the appropriate means, which naturally vary and rise according to the degree of sharpening of the class struggle and of the general political agitation.

"Should war none the less break out, it is their duty to intervene to bring it promptly to an end, and to strive with all their energies to utilise the economic and political crisis brought about by the war in order to stir up politically the masses of the people and hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule."

This resolution was carried unanimously and it was confirmed and adopted anew at the Congresses in Copenhagen in 1910 and Basle in 1912.

When the first world war broke out, however, very many of the parties that had voted no fewer than three times for this resolution nevertheless

backed 'their' bourgeois governments and turned their backs on the commitments they had made to the international. As late as 2 August 1914 a rally took place in Trafalgar Square, London, addressed by various Labour Party worthies, against the war. A Manifesto issued the following day by the British representatives on the International Socialist Bureau (the secretariat of the international) called on the working class to:

"Hold vast demonstrations against war in every industrial centre. Compel those of the governing class and their press who are eager to commit you to cooperate with Russian despotism to keep silence and to respect the decision of the overwhelming majority of the people, who will have neither part nor lot in such infamy".

One day later war was declared, and the Labour Party speakers at the Rally and signatories of the Manifesto backed the British government. Most of the parties from imperialist countries also backed their 'own' governments in this war - the French Socialist Party, the German Social-Democratic Party, the Austrian Social Democratic Party, the Belgian Labour Party, and the Australian and South African parties. Those who held fast to the resolutions against war of the international were the Bolsheviks, the Hungarian Social-Democratic party, the main Bulgarian Social-Democratic Labour Party, the Italian Socialist Party and the Socialist Party of the United States. The corrupting effect of imperialism on the working-class movement was plain and stark.

The crimes of the class collaborationists during the course of the war and later did not stop at siding with their own bourgeoisie for the purpose of waging war. Arthur Henderson of the British Labour Party was among those responsible for the execution of the legendary Irish revolutionary, James Connolly, following the suppression of the Irish Easter uprising of 1916. German social-democrats Scheidemann and Noske murdered the truly revolutionary Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. The Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia joined with Kolchak and Denikin in a vain attempt to overthrow the Soviet regime. These tendencies were the reflection of the labour-aristocratic and/or petty-bourgeois intellectual class nature of the parties in question.

The crisis put an effective end to the second international, which was deserted by all revolutionaries. The parties which continued to oppose war convened a Conference at Zimmerwald in Switzerland, where Lenin ensured that a correct understanding of the war then raging permeated the debate.

"Lenin's analysis cut through [the] confusion. First, it showed the character of the war as an imperialist war, recalling the very precise definition of it already given by the Basle resolution. Second, it clarified the Marxist attitude to wars; the distinction between just and unjust wars; and the judgement of each war concretely, not on the basis of categories of aggressive or defensive wars or allegations who began it, but according to the class waging the war, and the policies and aims of the class waging the war. Third, the plea of 'national defence' was thus exposed as a sophisticated alias for imperialist aims in an imperialist war. This was not a question of indifference of socialists to national independence ... In fact, in the imperialist world war of 1914, while the mass of the people were called on to fight and give their lives in the name of national defence, that is, to save their countries from invasion and subjugation, their rulers were in reality fighting for secret aims to fulfil colonial ambitions and redivide the world..." (Palme Dutt, p. 136-137).

Under Lenin's guidance, the tasks of socialists were held at Zimmerwald to be:

"(1) unconditional refusal to vote for war credits, and immediate withdrawal of all socialists from bourgeois governments; (2) rejection of any agreement with the bourgeoisie and of 'class peace'; (3) establishment of illegal organisations in countries where they did not exist and where work in legal organisations was difficult; (4) support of fraternisation by the soldiers at the front; (5) support for all revolutionary mass actions of the proletariat." (Palme Dutt, *ibid.* p.138).

Nevertheless it was soon apparent that the Zimmerwald organisation was just as effectively stuffed with people who espoused socialism in words but deserted when it came to practice. Their desertion was 'justified' in the name of unity with the social chauvinists for the sake of

maintaining influence over 'good people' who associated themselves with class collaborationist parties as a result of being taken in by their socialist phrasology. As Lenin pointed out, the majority in the Zimmerwald organisation were a bunch of Kautskyite centrists:

"The impassable gulf that separates the Socialists who have remained loyal to the Basle Manifesto and 'responded' to the war by preaching and preparing for the proletarian revolution from the social-chauvinists, who responded to the war by supporting 'their' national bourgeoisie, is clear. It is clear, also, how helpless, naive and hypocritical are the attempts to 'reconcile' or to 'unite' the two trends.

"It is precisely such attempts that are observed in all their wretchedness on the part of the third trend in world Socialism, the so-called 'Centre' or 'Kautskian' trend (named after the most prominent representative of the 'Centre', Karl Kautsky). During the three years of war, this trend has revealed in all countries its utter lack of principle and its helplessness. In Germany, for example, the progress of events compelled the Kautskians to break away from the German Plekhanovs and to form a separate, so-called 'Independent Social-Democratic Party'; and yet this party is afraid of drawing the necessary conclusions, preaches 'unity' with the social-chauvinists on an international scale, continues to deceive the masses of the workers with the hope of restoring this unity in Germany, and hinders the only correct proletarian tactics of revolutionary struggle against 'one's own' government, a struggle which must be waged even in war time, a struggle which may and must change in form, but which cannot be postponed, put off" ("The Stockholm Conference", September 1917, Selected Works, Vol 10, p. 16-17).

The revolutionaries at Zimmerwald formed themselves into a 'Left Zimmerwald' faction, with its own separate organisation in order to fight for the revolutionary position. Lenin, for his part, pressed for the formation of a Third, Communist, International which would be completely cleansed of any class collaborationist influence. The victory of the February and October Revolutions in Russia ensured that a flood of parties were anxious to join it, but Lenin was determined to weed out those who would bring an opportunist influence with them. Therefore he suggested no fewer than 19 conditions of entry - and actually each

condition was several conditions:

1. Everyday propaganda and agitation must bear a genuinely Communist character. All organs of the press belonging to the party must be edited by reliable Communists who have proved their loyalty to the cause of the proletarian revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat must not be discussed simply as if it were a fashionable formula learned by rote; propaganda for it must be carried on in such a way that every rank-and-file working man and working woman, every soldier and peasant, shall see that the necessity for it arises from the vital facts which are systematically reported in our press day after day. In the columns of newspapers, at mass meetings, in the trade unions and co-operative societies - it is necessary systematically and ruthlessly to denounce not only the bourgeoisie but their assistants, the reformists of all shades.
2. Every organisation that wishes to affiliate to the Communist International must in a planned and systematic manner REMOVE from all positions in the working class movement that are at all responsible (in the party organisation, editorial board, trade unions, parliamentary fraction, co-operative societies, municipalities, etc.) reformists and adherents of the 'Centre' and put in their place reliable Communists - and they must not be disturbed by the fact that in some cases it may, at first, be necessary to substitute rank-and-file workers for 'experienced' leaders.
3. In all countries where as a consequence of the prevalence of a state of siege or of emergency laws the Communists are unable to carry on all their work legally, it is absolutely necessary to combine legal with illegal work. In nearly all countries in Europe and America the class struggle is entering the stage of civil war. Under these circumstances, the Communists can have no confidence in bourgeois legality. They must EVERYWHERE create a duplicate illegal apparatus, which, at the decisive moment, could help the Party to perform its duty to the revolution.

4. Persistent and systematic propaganda and agitation must be carried on among the armed forces, and Communist nuclei must be formed in every military unit. Mainly, the Communists will have to carry on this work illegally: but abstention from such work would be equivalent to betrayal of revolutionary duty, and would be incompatible with membership of the Third International.
5. Systematic and planned agitation must be carried on in the rural districts....
6. Every party that wishes to affiliate to the Third International must not only expose avowed social-patriotism, but must also expose the falsehood and hypocrisy of social-pacifism; it must systematically be pointed out to the workers that without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, no international courts of arbitration, no talk about reducing armaments, no 'democratic' reorganisation of the League of Nations will save mankind from new imperialist wars.
7. Parties desiring to affiliate to the Communist International must recognise the necessity of a complete and absolute rupture with reformism and the policy of the 'Centre'; and they must carry on propaganda in favour of this rupture among the broadest circles of party members. Without this it is impossible to pursue consistent Communist policy. ...
8. On the question of colonies and oppressed nationalities, the parties in those countries where the bourgeoisie possesses such colonies and oppresses other nations must have a particularly distinct and clear line. Every party that wishes to affiliate to the Third International must ruthlessly expose the tricks of 'their' imperialists in the colonies; they must support not merely in words but by deeds, every liberation movement in the colonies, demand the expulsion of their imperialists from these colonies, imbue the hearts of the workers of their respective countries with a truly fraternal attitude towards the toiling population of the colonies and of oppressed nationalities, and carry on systematic agitation among the armed

forces of their own country against all oppression of colonial peoples.

9. Every party that desires to affiliate to the Communist International must carry on systematic and persistent Communist work in the trade unions, the co-operative societies and other mass workers' organisations. In the trade unions it is necessary to form Communist nuclei which, by means of prolonged and persistent work, must win the trade unions for the cause of Communism. These nuclei must at every step in their everyday work expose the treachery of the social patriots and the vacillation of the 'Centre'. These Communist nuclei must be entirely subordinated to the party as a whole.
10. The party that is affiliated to the Communist International must wage a persistent struggle against the Amsterdam 'International' of yellow trade unions ...
11. The parties which desire to affiliate to the Third International must overhaul the personnel of their parliamentary fractions, remove the unreliable elements from them, subordinate these fractions, not merely in words but in deeds, to the Central Committee of the party, and call upon every Communist member of parliament to subordinate all his work to the interests of genuine revolutionary propaganda and agitation.
12. Similarly, the periodical and non-periodical press, and all publishing enterprises, must be entirely subordinated to the Central Committee of the party, irrespective of whether the party as a whole is legal or illegal at the given moment ...
13. The parties affiliated to the Communist International must be built up on the principle of democratic centralism. In the present epoch of acute civil war the Communist Party will be able to perform its duty only if it is organised in the most centralised manner, only if iron discipline bordering on military discipline prevails in it, and if its party centre is a powerful organ of authority, enjoying wide powers and the general confidence of the members of the party.

14. The Communist Parties of all countries in which the Communists are carrying on their work legally must periodically purge (re-register) the membership of the party organisations so that the party may be systematically purged of petty-bourgeois elements which inevitably attach themselves to it.
15. Every party that wishes to affiliate to the Communist International must render selflessly devoted assistance to every Soviet Republic in its struggle against counter-revolutionary forces. The Communist Parties must carry on persistent propaganda urging upon the workers to refuse to transport war materials for the enemies of the Soviet republics; and they must carry on legal or illegal propaganda among the armed forces that are sent to strangle the workers' republics, etc.
16. The parties which still adhere to the old Social-Democratic programmes must revise these programmes as speedily as possible and draw up a new Communist programme applicable to the special conditions prevailing in their respective countries in the spirit of the Communist International...
17. All the decisions of the congresses of the Communist International, as well as the decisions of its Executive Committee, are binding upon all parties affiliated to the Communist International... Needless to say, in all their work the Communist International and its Executive Committee must take into account the great diversity of conditions under which the various parties have to fight and operate and they should adopt universally binding decisions only on questions on which such decisions can be adopted.
18. In view of all this, all parties which desire to affiliate to the Communist International must change their name. Every party desiring to affiliate to the Communist International must bear the name: Communist Party of such and such a country (Section of the Third, Communist International). The question of name is not merely a formal question, but one of great political importance. The Communist International has declared resolute war against the whole bourgeois world and against all yellow, Social-Democratic

parties. The difference between the Communist Parties and the old, official 'Social-Democratic' or 'Socialist,' parties, which have betrayed the banner of the working class, must be made absolutely clear to every rank-and-file toiler.

19. After the Second World Congress of the Communist International has concluded its labours, all the parties desiring to affiliate to the Communist International must at the earliest date convene a special congress of their respective parties which shall officially endorse the above-mentioned obligations on behalf of the whole party.

These were the conditions laid down by Lenin in July 1920 for parties desiring to affiliate to the Communist International.

It is clear that he saw the Third International as an organisation that would help workers' parties stick to the interests of the international working class, and support each other in the battles against the class enemy, be they within or without the working-class movement. Like the Communist parties themselves, the International was to play a leadership role in the working-class movement fighting to draw the masses away from the clutches of the opportunists and all other anti-working class tendencies which prey on them.

The Third (Communist) International

As we have seen, Lenin's conditions for admission into the Third International were very stringent. The International, like the Communist Party in any given country, was to be swept clean of opportunism, and each was to fight wholeheartedly to win the working class over to proletarian revolutionary politics.

This did not, however, mean either withdrawal from mass organisations that had a reactionary leadership, nor the absolute refusal to have any dealings with, or make compromises with, the hostile class under any circumstances whatsoever.

In order to convince you that the very same Lenin who demanded the utmost revolutionary purity in the revolutionary party and the revolutionary international, was happy to broker any deal with any reactionary at all if it helped, or might help, advance the cause of the working class, I will quote to you what Lenin had to say on the subject of doing a deal with the French monarchists in 1918. In a letter to American workers he wrote:

"When the German imperialist robbers in February 1918 threw their armies against the defenceless demobilised Russia, which staked its hopes on the international solidarity of the proletariat before the international revolution had completely ripened, I did not hesitate for a moment to come to a certain 'agreement' with the French monarchists. The French Captain Sadoul who sympathised in words with the Bolsheviks, while in deeds a faithful servant of French imperialism, brought the French officer de Lubersac to me. 'I am a monarchist. My only purpose is the defeat of Germany', de Lubersac declared to me. 'That goes without saying' ..., I replied. But this by no means prevented me from coming to an agreement with de Lubersac concerning certain services that French officers, experts in explosives, were ready to render by blowing up railway tracks in order to prevent the advance of German troops against us. This is an example of an 'agreement' of which every class conscious worker will approve. We shook hands with the French monarchist, although we

knew that each of us would readily hang his 'Partner'. But for a time our interests coincided. To throw back the rapacious advancing Germans we made use of the equally rapacious counter interests of the other imperialists thereby serving the interests of the Russian and of the International Socialist Revolution. In this way we served the interests of the working class of Russia and other countries, we strengthened the proletariat and weakened the bourgeoisie of the whole world, we used the justified practice of manoeuvring, necessary in every war, of shifting and waiting for the moment when the rapidly growing proletarian revolution in a number of advanced countries had ripened.

"And despite all the wrathful howling of the sharks of Anglo-French and American imperialism, despite all the calumnies they have showered upon us, ... I would not hesitate a single second to come to the same kind of agreement with German imperialist robbers should an attack upon Russia by Anglo-French troops demand it."

To be in an international organisation composed of only the most advanced elements of the working class, and to be in such a party of the working class, gives you a forum in which you can work out the very best strategies and tactics for your revolution. But there is not a great deal of point in having perfect knowledge of the best possible strategy and the best possible tactics unless you actually put them into practice. To do this involves reaching out to the masses wherever they are to be found, on the one hand, and engaging in the day-to-day struggle for the achievement of progressive objectives in alliance with whoever will genuinely lend at least some weight to your side of the struggle, even where as allies they are far from ideal.

There is no way that Communists can expect mass organisations to be free of wrong thinking. If they were there would be no need for a Communist Party. After all Lenin's fulminations against the labour aristocracy and their treacherous leadership of trade unions, there were those who would have expected Lenin to tell them that under no circumstances should Communists work in these reactionary trade unions. But in 'Left-wing' Communism, an infantile disorder, Lenin thoroughly disabused them of these idiotic views:

"In countries which are more advanced than Russia, a certain amount of reactionariness in the trade unions has been revealed, and was undoubtedly bound to be revealed much more strongly than in our country. ... In the West ... the craft-union, narrow-minded, selfish, hard-hearted, covetous and petty-bourgeois 'labour aristocracy', imperialistically-minded, bribed and corrupted by imperialism, represents a much stronger stratum than in our country. ... Struggle must be waged ruthlessly to the very end ... until all the incorrigible leaders of opportunism and social-chauvinism have been completely discredited and expelled from the trade unions. It is impossible to capture political power (and the attempt to capture it should not be made) until this struggle has reached a certain stage.

"But we wage the struggle against the 'labour aristocracy' in the name of the masses of the workers in order to attract the working class to our side. To forget this most elementary and self-evident truth would be stupid. But the German 'Left' Communists are guilty of just this stupidity when, because of the reactionary and counter-revolutionary character of the heads of the trade unions, they jump to the conclusion that ... it is necessary to leave the trade unions!! To refuse to work in them!! To create new, artificial forms of labour organisations!! This is an unpardonable blunder equivalent to the greatest service the Communists could render the bourgeoisie." (Selected Works, Vol. 10, p. 92).

United front tactics

In view of this, one can see that the function of the International, like that of the Communist Parties in the various different countries, is to act as a General Staff developing the strategy and tactics that are likely to lead to success in the battlefield, while at the same time training the working class masses to understand their own class interests so that they can play the best possible role in the struggle for their own emancipation.

Repeatedly the Congresses of the Comintern spelt out the desirability of building united fronts of struggle on specific questions:

"The attempts of the Second International to represent the united front as the organisational fusion of all 'workers' parties' must of course be deci-

sively rebutted... The most important thing in the united front tactic is and remains the agitational and organisational rallying of the working masses. Its true realisation can come only 'from below', from the depths of the working masses themselves. Communists, however, must not refuse in certain circumstances to negotiate with the leaders of the hostile workers' parties, but the masses must be kept fully and constantly informed of the course of these negotiations. Nor must the communist parties' freedom to agitate be circumscribed in any way during these negotiations with the leaders.

"It is obvious that the united front tactic is to be applied in different ways in different countries, according to the actual conditions prevailing there." (Theses on Tactics, adopted by the 4th Comintern Congress).

In the light of the above some communists claim that the Communist International made an error in leading an ideological offensive against social democracy under the slogan 'class against class' adopted by the 6th Congress in 1928, and that it was wrong of the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI in July 1929 to say that social democracy had in certain countries taken on the character of "social fascism", on the basis this violated the principle of building united fronts on various issues with social democracy, the better to spread the ideas of revolution.

Was it correct to characterise social democracy in certain countries as social fascism? If we remind ourselves of certain of their activities as related by Palme Dutt in *The Internationale* (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1964) we can see straight away that the characterisation was entirely justified:

"The Hungarian Social-Democratic Party signed an official secret treaty on December 22, 1921, with the White Guard dictatorship pledging co-operation and support of 'the Magyar standpoint' in return for legality, and thereafter served as an agency for passing on to the police reports of activities or of names of members of the illegal Communist Party. The Chairman of the Belgian Labour Party, De Man (who in 1928 in a stirring address 'Beyond Marxism' had called for 'the substitution of the sentiment of justice as the basis of socialism in place of class interest' and had proclaimed 'Marxism is dead! Long live socialism!') was later, after

the invasion of Belgium, found to have been a Nazi agent; his last act in 1940 was to dissolve the Labour Party. Varjonen of Finland was a member of the fascist 'Brotherhood in Arms' during the Second World War, preached a march of conquest and rapine 'as far as the Urals', repeatedly visited Hitler Germany, and after the armistice became the Secretary of the Finnish Social-Democratic Party. The Braun-Severing Prussian Social-Democratic Government boasted in an official memorandum in 1932 that it had 'caused more deaths on the Left than on the Right'" (page 210).

It cannot therefore be incorrect to characterise social democracy as social fascism in these circumstances, and it must be remembered that it is an absolute duty of those working with the masses thoroughly to expose the opportunist elements that have been influencing them.

Palme Dutt, however, no doubt under the influence of Khrushchevite revisionism by the time he came to write *The Internationale*, says the ECCI was wrong on this question, not because the social democrats were not social fascists, but because "*It gave an easy handle for the enemies of communism to spread wilful misunderstanding ... and to imply that it was meant to designate the millions of rank-and-file members of the social democratic parties. Thereby the social-democratic workers were antagonised at the very moment when it was most important to dispel their prejudices and hostility and win their cooperation* (ibid. p. 211)."

In response to that it must be noted:

1. The ECCI did not give a directive to the effect that any communist encountering a rank and file member of a social-democratic party should scream 'social-fascist' in his face;
2. One cannot recoil from exposing the truth just because some section of the masses does not much like it. When the masses are steeped in the ideology and culture of the bourgeoisie via the relentless propaganda of the bourgeois media and education system, the truth expressed by communists is often found at first to be jarring and offensive. The masses, however need to be helped to seize that truth so that through understanding it they will fight more effectively and

steadfastly in pursuit of their own class interests. Anybody who tells us we must conceal the truth in case it puts people off is objectively calling for the retardation of the working class movement. It must be added that those who insist on repeating perfectly true statements over and over again at moments when they have no relevance to the task in hand, thereby making these true statements appear doctrinaire and ridiculous are actually hindering the seizure of truth by the masses in their own way - a way in which Trotskyists are particularly adept - would that it were they alone!

3. Opportunist leaders under attack ALWAYS try to present the attack as being directed at their followers, and their followers, who obviously trust them, tend to believe them, at least at first, and initially to be 'put off' the attackers. To say it is the fault of the attackers, however, that the social-democratic workers are 'put off' is tantamount to saying it is a mistake to attack social democracy - a viewpoint that Palme Dutt's Party - the Communist Party of Great Britain - had, under the influence of Khrushchevite revisionism, certainly adopted by 1964. This amounts to leaving the masses in the clutches of social democracy and doing nothing to expose social democracy and win the masses for communism. Ultimately it means in a revolutionary situation leaving the masses prey to fascism. So clearly, whatever the difficulties of exposing social democracy, they must be faced - and faced in an intelligent manner. Ultimately, with persistence and tact, the masses can be won over because the communists are expressing their class interests.
4. At the very same 1928 Congress at which the Communist International is supposed to have erred by putting forward the 'leftist' slogan of class against class, the Congress also drew the urgent attention of the working class to the danger of fascism and war and to the need to organise the masses of workers, from every possible organisation, against them.

In the course of the Third International's existence, there was an extremely complicated world situation, with changing ruling class tactics for controlling the working masses - tactics which, moreover, differed in different parts of the world at any given time. The principal feature of

this period was that it was one of capitalist instability throughout the world. The belligerents had been damaged by the First World War and were finding it quite hard to get back to normal, notwithstanding the enthusiastic assistance they received from social-democracy. Moreover, not only had the First World War not solved the problem of redistribution of colonies between the various imperialist states, so that the newly-arrived imperialist powers had in no way been able to satisfy their need to partake of a greater share of the spoils, but in addition they were saddled with heavy war reparations to pay. Since the cause of war was not extinguished, the threat of a new war hung over the world. In addition, despite a short rally towards the end of the 1920's, the bourgeois economy was in permanent crisis, which the bourgeoisie of various imperialist countries tried to push on to the shoulders of the working class by lowering wages, etc. The depth of the crisis of overproduction which was engulfing the world was not generally understood, except among the communists. A high share price, such as we have at present (2002) (even after the heavy falls of recent months), encouraged a feel-good factor that resolutely closed its eyes to the lack of substance behind the prices. President Hoover even made a speech to the effect that *"the outlook for the world today is for the greatest era of expansion in history"*. That was on 27 July 1928. The following year stock markets crashed all over the world and a depression ensued that only the outbreak of the second world war brought to an end.

The various imperialist powers knew that there had to be war, for none of those in possession of colonies were disposed to give them up to rivals. Inter-imperialist war was, however, dangerous to their class interests, as the first world war had shown, as it had been the basis of the creation of the Soviet Union, and the working class had also given a good account of itself in Germany and Hungary even though they had not been able in the end to hang on to their gains. The diplomacy of the imperialist powers in possession of colonies was to try to direct the warmongering of German imperialism against socialism - let the Germans colonise the Soviet Union, overthrow communism, then all the imperialists could be happy.

From the point of view of the working class, however, the Soviet Union was its bastion, its headquarters. It could not but be extremely harmful for the working class movement of every country in the world, as well as

the world's national liberation movements, if it were to lose the Soviet Union.

In these circumstances, to frustrate imperialism's plans it was essential for communists to rally everybody possible against war, and against the tool the imperialists were using to prepare for that war - Hitlerite fascism.

German imperialism needed to resort to fascism, i.e., naked terror, to control the masses precisely because it had relatively little (compared to its imperialist competitors) by way of superprofits with which to distribute largesse among the working class. Whatever it did distribute was not enough to enable German social democracy to guarantee control over a German population suffering considerable economic hardships. As Palme Dutt points out in *Internationale* (p.196), Fascism *"arose in countries racked by intense class contradictions, where there was a potential revolutionary situation, but where there was not yet a sufficiently developed revolutionary working class leadership to be able to carry through a victorious socialist revolution; where the social-democratic leadership was able to maintain its hold on the majority or the working class to come to the rescue of capitalism and bar the road to the revolution, but in the face of increasing working class discontent; and where the discredited capitalist regime was able in consequence to utilise a motley array of demagogues, mouthing radical-sounding, chauvinist and racist slogans, and in fact financed by big capital, in order to mobilise a reactionary 'mass movement' of the most miscellaneous disillusioned and frustrated elements, mainly from the middle strata, but also from backward sections of the workers, to make war on the organised working-class movement and thus prepare the way for the establishment of the terrorist dictatorship of the most aggressive and reactionary sections of big capital."*

The Enlarged Executive of the Communist International in July 1923 similarly gave an preliminary analysis of the character of fascism - a phenomenon first observed in Italy in the aftermath of the first world war, where the bourgeoisie organised a gangster offensive against working class organisations in response to a wave of workers' occupations of factories that was first sold out by reformist social democrats. This is what the Enlarged Executive had to say:

"Fascism is a characteristic phenomenon of decay, a reflection of the progressive dissolution of capitalist economy and of the disintegration of the bourgeois state.

"Its strongest root is the fact that the imperialist war and the disruption of the capitalist economy which the war intensified and accelerated meant, for the broad strata of the petty and middle bourgeoisie, small peasants and the 'intelligentsia', in contrast to the hopes they cherished, the destruction of their former condition of life and especially their former security. The vague expectation which many in these social strata had of a radical social improvement, to be brought about by reformist socialism, have also been disappointed. The betrayal of the revolution by the reformist party and trade union leaders ... has led them to despair of socialism itself. The weakness of will, the fear of struggle shown by the way in which the overwhelming majority of the proletariat outside Soviet Russia tolerates this treachery, and under capitalist whips drudges to consolidate its own exploitation and enslavement, has robbed these small and middle bourgeois, as well as the intellectuals, brought into a state of ferment, of their belief in the working class as the mighty agent of a radical social transformation. They have been joined by many proletarian elements who, looking for and demanding action, feel dissatisfied with the behaviour of all political parties. Fascism also attracts the disappointed and declassed, the rootless in every social stratum, particularly ex-officers who have lost their occupation since the end of the war...

"The old allegedly non-political apparatus of the bourgeois state no longer guarantees the bourgeoisie adequate security. They have set about creating special class-struggle troops against the proletariat. Fascism provides these troops".

To prevent the working class fighting back against this terror and oppression, every kind of bourgeois-democratic freedom to organise, strike, meet, etc. is taken away so that any attempt to organise can be used as an excuse for violent suppression, thus - or so the bourgeoisie hope - nipping working-class resistance in the bud.

Both war and democratic rights are issues on which it is possible to mo-

bilise broad masses of workers, for these are things that threaten every civilised standard. Hence it is right to form united fronts to mobilise the working class on these issues. Of course, communists explain to the masses at all times the real causes of the war, and who it is who is depriving them and conducting terror against them and why. They will constantly be making it clear to workers that only through the dictatorship of the proletariat will they be able properly to suppress the warmongers and their oppressors.

In the particular circumstances of Germany, the social-democrats, having helped the fascists take over the government by accepting the supposed legitimacy of their rigged election (fatally flawed by widespread intimidation and fraud) and refusing to take action against the "elected representatives of the people", then found that they too became the victims of fascist terror. In these circumstances it is certainly correct to call on social democrats to join the united front against fascism and even to moderate one's public criticism of them in order to give them every opportunity to fight against imperialism for once now that they have been rejected as its handmaidens. The fact that social democracy refused to cooperate with the communists accounts for the victory of fascism in Germany. Nobody, however, can say that the communists should never have approached them.

If, and to the extent that, social democracy successfully is drawn into an intense anti-imperialist struggle - as happened for instance in Korea - one can expect that in the course of struggle it will become apparent that there is no *raison d'être* for the continued existence of a separate social-democratic party. In these circumstances it should be possible to merge the social-democratic party into the communist party. The labour aristocracy and petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, once they have lost the privileges that welds them to class collaboration with the bourgeoisie, are at the end of the day paid wage workers whose real class interests coincide with those of the mass of the working class, even if they constituted bribed strata in the past.

Nevertheless, it is not always and everywhere that the question of overthrowing bourgeois rule can be put on the order of the day. The Third International has been criticised in some quarters for apparently abandon-

ing the path of "with all their energies to utilise the economic and political crisis brought about by the war in order to stir up politically the masses of the people and hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule." This does not mean, however, as many people erroneously believe, that one calls for an uprising against the bourgeoisie when there is no revolutionary situation, the masses are not prepared and there is not the slightest chance of success. The first world war and the chaos of its aftermath created in many countries a revolutionary situation which it was the duty of working class leaders to turn to the maximum advantage of the working class by pressing for the seizure of power. But by the mid 1920s the situation was very different. JR Campbell in *Soviet Policy and its Critics* (London, Victor Gollancz Ltd - Left Book Club - 1939) draws the distinction that has to be made between the time the Third International was first set up and the situation in 1939 when he was writing:

"In this period [the first world war and its aftermath] the tactic of the capitalist class was to rally all the reactionary elements of society round the slogan of democracy, to use this slogan against the advancing Socialist revolution, to buy off the working class with concessions that did not undermine the fundamental basis of the capitalist system, and to gather their forces for the counter-offensive. In these tactics the capitalist class were helped by Right-Wing Socialism which saw, or pretended to see, in the new democratic rights that had been won, the means of advancing peacefully to Socialism. It was under such conditions that Communists sought as part of their effort to lead the people forward to a higher order of democracy - Soviet Democracy - to reveal the class essence of parliamentary democracy.

"Clearly there is a much different situation in the world today. In Germany the Labour movement has been driven underground, and workers and petty middle class alike are squeezed to the limit of endurance in order to provide resources for the insatiable Fascist war-machine. ...

"In these circumstances the working class is not in the position in which it was in Central Europe in 1919 - to put the question of the seizure of power on the order of the day. This does not mean that power is a long way off, but it does mean that the issues which must be fought out in order to lead up to the seizure of power are different from those of 1917-

1920. In 1917, the Bolsheviks put forward the slogan of peace, whose concrete application was the ending of the European war on the basis of no annexations, and no indemnities, through the seizure of power by the working class. Today we put forward the slogan of peace, which means concretely the creation of a bloc of Socialist and democratic Governments which will force Fascism to keep the peace, and enable us to prepare the forces for Socialist advance.

"In 1917-1920 capitalism was defending parliamentary democracy against the drive of the Socialist revolution, seeking to establish Soviet Democracy. Today, capitalism, in order to maintain itself, is seeking to undermine and destroy parliamentary democracy and to dissolve the organisations of the working class. To defend democracy in 1919-1920 was to defend capitalism against the revolution. To defend democracy in 1938 is to frustrate the capitalist attack on the working class, and is the starting point of any working class advance to power" (pages 137-138).

Furthermore: "When in 1919 German reaction defended bourgeois democracy from Socialist revolution it was a crime of Social Democracy to co-operate with German reaction. But when in 1937 the most reactionary, chauvinistic and war-making sections of monopoly capitalism are attacking bourgeois democracy, whom are they attacking? They are attacking the democratic rights of the working class, they are seeking to break up the mass organisations of the workers, to massacre tens of thousands of local leaders, to imprison hundreds of thousands in concentration camps" (page 323).

"Yet ... people tell us that for the working class to unite its forces, and to seek an understanding with those middle sections of society which, while not Socialist or Communist, are prepared to resist the capitalist attack on democracy - is nothing more nor less than class co-operation. It is class co-operation to struggle to prevent the middle class falling under capitalist influence; it is class co-operation to seek to isolate the monopoly capitalists who are driving to Fascism. The Spanish civil war is a wicked example of class co-operation.

"These arguments are backed by a lot of pseudo-scientific arguments about Fascism being the product of monopoly capitalism in decay and

that therefore it can only be finally defeated by the workers' revolution. All of which is true but irrelevant.

"Unemployment is a product of capitalism, but we do not therefore abandon the struggle for a higher scale of benefits; wage cuts are a product of capitalism, but no Socialist argues that the worker should accept wage cuts. Faced with an attack on wages and unemployed relief, we do not merely go about with propaganda shouting that capitalism is the cause of all the trouble.

"We organise the mass struggle for wages and relief, and in the course of the struggle we explain how capitalism is the enemy and must be got rid of before unemployment can be ended and attacks on wages stopped.

"So with Fascism. We have to organise the fight to defend democracy in all its aspects, and in the course of the struggle to defend democracy we will succeed in demonstrating that the capitalist system is the enemy of democracy" (ibid. p. 326-7).

Many communists find handling the question of social democracy and its bourgeois influence on the working class extremely difficult. They would do well to remember that if this ideology reflects the position of a bribed and corrupt section of the working class, very little basis remains for it once this bribery and corruption is withdrawn. At this time strenuous efforts need to be made - without of course sacrificing principle - to heal the split in the working class and unite it for the advancement of its class interests.

Palme Dutt also moans that the Communist International made a "serious tactical error" in instructing the German communists to support the Nazi demand for a referendum calling for the resignation of Germany's social-democratic Braun-Severing government (the one which boasted of having killed more lefts than rights). Why this should have been a serious tactical error is not spelt out, but what is certain is that Palme Dutt is trying to convince us that it was wrong for the communists to try to seize the initiative away from the fascists who were capitalising on mass disillusionment with social democracy, which the masses equated with socialism. Palme Dutt considers it would have been better

to leave the social democrats alone on the principle it is better to have a bourgeois-democratic government than a fascist one. This particular social-democratic government, however, was positively a recruiting sergeant for the fascists. Preserving this government could only have marginally delayed the setting up of a fascist government - it would not have prevented it. Only if the working class was organised to resist fascism could a fascist government have been prevented from coming into power. And this organisation against fascism German social democracy worked tirelessly to prevent.

Dimitrov in *The United Front* (International Publishers, New York, 1938) spells out the culpability of the social democrats for the rise of fascism in Germany, which Palme Dutt in 1964 tried to blame on the Communist International:

"Was the victory of fascism inevitable in Germany? No, the German working class could have prevented it.

"But in order to do so, it should have achieved a united anti-fascist proletarian front, and forced the Social-Democratic leaders to put a stop to their campaign against the communists and to accept the repeated proposals of the Communist Party for united action against fascism.

"When fascism was on the offensive and the bourgeois-democratic liberties were being progressively abolished by the bourgeoisie, it should not have contented itself with the verbal resolutions of the Social-Democrats, but should have replied by a genuine mass struggle, which would have made the fulfilment of the fascist plans of the German bourgeoisie more difficult.

"It should not have allowed the prohibition of the League of Red Front Fighters by the government of Braun and Severing, and should have established fighting contact between the League and the Reichsbanner [a Social-Democratic semi-military mass organisation] with its nearly one million members, and have compelled Braun and Severing to arm both these organisations in order to resist and smash the fascist bands.

"It should have compelled the Social-Democratic leaders who headed

the Prussian government to adopt measures of defence against fascism, arrest the fascist leaders, close down their press, confiscate their material resources and the resources of the capitalists who were financing the fascist movement, dissolve the fascist organisations, deprive them of their weapons and so forth.

"Furthermore, it should have secured the re-establishment and extension of all forms of social assistance and the introduction of a moratorium and crisis benefits for the peasants - who were being ruined under the influence of crises - by taxing the banks and the trusts, in this way securing for itself the support of the working peasants. It was the fault of the Social-Democrats of Germany that this was not done, and this is why fascism was able to triumph" (p. 20-21).

If errors were made in Germany in the fight against fascism, they were not made by the Communist International but by the German Party itself, for, as Dimitrov says:

"Our comrades in Germany for a long time failed to reckon with the wounded national sentiments and the indignation of the masses against the Versailles Treaty; they treated as of little account the waverings of the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie; they were late in drawing up their programme of social and national emancipation, and when they did put it forward they were unable to adapt it to the concrete demands of the level of the masses. ... " (p. 24).

If people carry out a correct policy and thereby end up in failure, it is no evidence whatever that the policy was wrong. If ordinary followers of social democracy were not won over to communism in sufficient numbers this was partly due to sectarianism among the German communists:

"Self-satisfied sectarianism will not and cannot understand that the leadership of the working class by the Communist Party does not come of itself. The leading role of the Communist Party in the struggles of the working class must be won. For this purpose it is necessary, not to rant about the leading role of the Communists, but to merit and win the confidence of the working masses by everyday mass work and correct policy. This will be possible only if in our political work we Communists seri-

ously take into account the actual level of the class consciousness of the masses, the degree to which they have become revolutionised, if we soberly appraise the actual situation, not on the basis of our wishes but on the basis of the actual state of affairs. Patiently, step by step, we must make it easier for the broad masses to come over to the Communist position. We ought never to forget the words of Lenin, who warns us as strongly as possible: '... this is the whole point - we must not regard that which is obsolete for us as obsolete for the class, as obsolete for the masses'.

"Is it not a fact, comrades, that there are still not a few such doctrinaire elements left in our ranks who at all times and places sense nothing but danger in the policy of the united front? For such comrades the whole united front is one unrelieved peril. But this sectarian 'stickling for principle' is nothing but political helplessness in the face of the difficulties of directly leading the struggle of the masses.

"Sectarianism finds expression particularly in overestimating the revolutionisation of the masses, in overestimating the speed at which they are abandoning the positions of reformism, and in attempting to leap over difficult stages and the complicated tasks of the movement. In practice, methods of leading the masses have frequently been replaced by the methods of leading a narrow party group. The strength of the traditional connection between the masses and their organisations and leaders was underestimated, and when the masses did not break off these connections immediately, the attitude taken toward them was just as harsh as that adopted toward their reactionary leaders. Tactics and slogans have tended to become stereo-typed for all countries, the special features of the actual situation in each individual country being left out of account. The necessity of stubborn struggle in the very midst of the masses themselves to win their confidence has been ignored, the struggle for the partial demands of the workers and work in the reformist trade unions and fascist mass organisations have been neglected. The policy of the united front has frequently been replaced by bare appeals and abstract propaganda" (p.84-85).

To the extent that sectarianism hinders the mobilisation of the masses this also causes a tendency to try to create an instant 'mass following' by

merging to some extent with social democracy:

"While fighting most resolutely to overcome and exterminate the last remnants of self-satisfied sectarianism, we must increase in every way our vigilance toward Right opportunism and the struggle against it and against every one of its concrete manifestations, bearing in mind that the danger of Right opportunism will increase in proportion as the wide united front develops. Already there are tendencies to reduce the role of the Communist Party in the ranks of the united front and to effect a reconciliation with Social-Democratic ideology. Nor must the fact be lost sight of that the tactics of the united front are a method of clearly convincing the Social-Democratic workers of the correctness of Communist policy and the incorrectness of the reformist policy, and that they are not a reconciliation with Social-Democratic ideology and practice. A successful struggle to establish the united front imperatively demands constant struggle in our ranks against tendencies to depreciate the role of the Party, against legalist illusions, against reliance on spontaneity and automatism, both in liquidating fascism and in conducting the united front against the slightest vacillation at the moment of decisive action" (p. 86).

We must not underestimate this danger, because to the extent that communists try to make themselves popular by merging with social democracy they are creating conditions for the victory of fascism should the bourgeoisie decide that the time has once again come to resort to naked terrorism as the only means of maintaining its control of the exploited and oppressed classes.

To sum up:

When the masses of the workers are in thrall to social democracy (either taken in by it absolutely, or passive in the face of its attacks on the working class), Lenin and the Communist International made it quite clear that it is ESSENTIAL to wage an unremitting day-to-day struggle against social-democracy and its representatives in the working class movement.

This struggle does NOT preclude alliances, deals and united fronts of every kind. On the contrary, it often demands them.

Communists MUST, however, be left free to act as the general staff of the working class. The party must be free to develop strategy and tactics on a communist basis. It CANNOT dissolve itself, or in any way cease to perform its role as the brain of the working class movement for the sake of unity.

The dissolution of the Comintern

The Comintern was dissolved in 1943 by common consent of all participating parties. The official reason given was that the parties were all sufficiently mature to conduct their own affairs without the need for an International. It is likely, however, that the real reason was a concession to Anglo-American imperialism for the sake of maintaining the alliance against fascism during the second world war. Failure to maintain that alliance would have made the task of preserving the Soviet Union exceptionally hard - perhaps impossible. If anybody has doubts as to the wisdom of making any such concession, they have only to look at the dire state of the people of the former Soviet Union and the aggression unleashed by imperialism all over the world to be convinced of the importance of fighting to preserve the Soviet Union as long as was humanly possible. It is, however, unlikely that preservation of the Comintern could have hindered the triumph of revisionism after Stalin died. Only a staunchly Marxist-Leninist CPSU, with all its prestige and influence, could have done that. As soon as the CPSU stepped on to the revisionist road, all the worst features of the various European Communist Parties were unbottled and overwhelmed the revolutionary spirit that the Comintern had embodied. Should we be concerned to restore the Comintern today? Without the unifying influence of a party such as the CPSU of Lenin and Stalin, it is unlikely that national communist organisations would be prepared to submit to the discipline of an international. Nevertheless there is much that various national communist organisations can learn from each other, but for the moment it is likely that the best way of securing this is by voluntary co-operation.

The Stalin Society

The aim of the Stalin Society is to defend Stalin and his work on the basis of fact and to refute capitalist, revisionist, opportunist and Trotskyist propaganda directed against him.

The activity of the Society includes (a) the study of and research upon his writings and actions; (b) the translation of material on these subjects into and from other languages; (c) the publication of material relating to such study and research; (d) the celebration and commemoration of important occasions in Stalin's life; (e) the establishment of contact with other groups and individuals with a view to taking a common stand on issues and the joint organisation of future activities; (f) the establishment of contact with similar societies and groups abroad with a view to mutual benefit from experience and collaboration.

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