

One Step Forward—Three Steps Backward:

THE SEVENTH WORLD CONGRESS OF THE
COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

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THE Seventh Congress of the Communist International marked one of the most far-reaching changes in policy in the entire history of the international labor movement. It abandoned a line of policy by which it had sworn for eight years. It endorsed concepts which it had constantly warred against since its formation. And, this was accomplished without a single dissenting voice, with a unanimity which is at once admirable and damnable; for, one cannot help admiring a political machine which can, at a single stroke, reverse the course of a decade and leave the machine unimpaired, while at the same time condemning it for having stifled all independent thought and having left, not only all decisions, but all thought, in the hands of a small group of people—in the last analysis, in the hands of a single person. Those who are attracted by the “fuehrer” type of movement, who prefer blind devotion to conscious, thoughtful activity, who are satisfied to follow orders regardless of consequences, will find the Communist International a model organization to join. But those who believe that the working class cannot emancipate itself by following the model of fascist organization must categorically continue to reject the Communist International as the instrument for working class emancipation.

Blind rejection of every decision of the Congress as “a new conspiracy against labor” can serve no useful purpose. As the title of this article indicates, on a series of questions, the Congress decisions marked a decided step forward, a step which, ordinarily, would prove very beneficial to the international working class movement. On the whole, it may be said, the entire line made famous during the “third period” was dropped. Furthermore, some of the dogmatic

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concepts held practically since the founding of the Comintern, for instance, that social democracy was the main bulwark of capitalism, were also abandoned.

An enumeration of some of the more important changes in policy, of a constructive character, will suffice to illustrate the thoroughness with which the "third period" has passed into history.

1. The theory of "social fascism" and all the concepts connected with it are abandoned. No longer are socialist parties the main bulwark of capitalism. No longer are they a "wing of fascism". Everywhere there is shown a sudden friendship to the socialist movement, a desire for a united front. Not stopping here, the communists, for the first time since the split, are talking of the need for re-establishing the united political party of the working class through unification of the socialist and communist parties.

2. Arising from the changed attitude to the socialist parties, is a changed attitude toward the united front. No longer is there talk of "united front from below," "against the social democratic leaders." There can be no doubt of the genuine desire on the part of the Communist International for a real united front with the socialist parties.

3. There is also a new estimate of the trade union movement, which is no longer made up of "company unions". Union splitting, dual unionism, and the related disruptive tactics are completely abandoned.

4. Perhaps the most striking change of all is the new appreciation of bourgeois democracy and the dividing line between it and fascism. To understand the full significance of this change, one must remember that for some eight years, the communists in practice made no distinction between the two, often flirted with fascists, ideologically as well as organizationally, and even developed the theory that fascism was a sort of forerunner, or transition, to communism.

5. The Seventh Congress also layed the ghost of "nihilism on the national question," even admitting that the Comintern had committed some blunders on this important matter.

6. After fighting against "exceptionalism" for six hectic

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years, the Comintern finally decided that there was something in it after all, and instructed all of its sections not to transfer policies and tactics from one country to another mechanically.

7. Finally, the individual sections were given (on paper) greater autonomy in the conduct of their internal affairs and in the elaboration of their line of tactics. This is an important concession, even if it remains only on paper, as it recognizes the falseness of the type of centralization which has characterized the Comintern in the past decade.

Regardless of what we must say further about the Seventh Congress and the Comintern as a whole, it would be foolhardy to refuse to recognize the above changes, or to refuse to welcome them as measures which can work out advantageously for the working class. And this is true regardless of the intentions of the Comintern in accomplishing these changes. Objectively, the new tactics of the Comintern may be of great benefit to the worker, and this is the primary consideration. That the Comintern will endeavor to derive factional benefit from its new tactics goes without saying, and of course, to the extent that such benefit might injure the movement as a whole, they ought to be combatted.

But a mere statement of the corrections which have been made is insufficient. It is equally important to see how the corrections have been made, whether the previous course is honestly and frankly recognized as false, and what indications there are that the new tactics will be carried out in practice over an appreciable period of time.

From this examination the Seventh Congress does not emerge with glowing colors. For the new line was adopted without the old one having been declared false. Where an error was acknowledged, it was shunted onto the shoulders of some insignificant "scapegoat".

Let us take as an example the examination of the cause for the fascist victory in Germany. Dimitroff lists five major reasons for this victory:

1. No united anti-fascist proletarian front.
2. No genuine mass struggle against the liquidation of

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the bourgeois-democratic liberties.

3. The failure to fight against the suppression of the Red Front League.

4. No decisive measures against the fascist movement were taken by the Prussian government.

5. Failure to re-establish and extend all forms of social assistance, and the introduction of a moratorium and crisis benefits for the peasants.

And Dimitroff concludes:

"It was the fault of the Social Democrats of Germany that this was not done, and that is why fascism was able to triumph."

This, it is clear, is the old tune. Where is the culpability of the German communists and of the Comintern itself in all this? How about the communist opposition to the united front? How about the united front with the fascists in the infamous "Red Referendum"? How about the united front with the fascists in the Prussian Landtag to overthrow the Braun-Severing socialist government, making way for Von Papen? How can one take seriously the change in line of the Comintern until it shows a willingness to acknowledge its own crimes, and leave the acknowledgment of the errors of the socialists to the socialists?

Besides, is it likely that the decision with reference to the mechanical carrying over of policies from one country to another will be carried out? Hardly. For the Congress itself immediately aroused the entire movement with a new international fetish—the People's Front. Originating in France because of an extraordinary situation there, it has become the communist cure-all from Bulgaria to New Zealand. It has completely displaced its predecessor, "Class against Class", and is equally absurd. For the application of the tactic of "People's Front" without regard to class relations, to the objective conditions in the country, to the strength of the labor movement, can only result in opportunism and in the liquidation of the independent activity of the working class.

How "revolutionary" this slogan will be in practice can

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readily be judged by the following paragraph from the New York City Election Program of the Communist Party:

"FOR THE PEOPLE'S FRONT AGAINST FASCISM"

"The hour demands the building of the broadest People's Front, uniting workers, farmers, unemployed, professionals, small businessmen, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Socialists, Communists, Democrats, Republicans—a People's Front fighting in the interests of the common people, the working population and poor farmers."

So that mechanical uniformity has not been abandoned. Only another "inspiring" slogan has been substituted for the discredited one.

It might be insisted that this discussion is futile, that all we should be concerned with is whether the new line is right or wrong, not with how it was achieved. Not so! For this method of correcting "errors" prepares the ground for their constant repetition. And in order to judge an organization properly we must know not only what it stands for, *but also how it works*. In this regard, the Seventh Congress made no improvement in the Comintern.

Even with these shortcomings, had the Seventh Congress confined itself to making the above-mentioned corrections in its line, it would on the whole have been a progressive Congress. Unfortunately, it did not stop there. As so frequently is the case, the pendulum made a swing from extreme left to extreme right. Having taken one step forward by revising its line, which had been false in the period preceding the Hitler victory, it took three steps backward with regard to its tactics on the issues arising from the Hitler victory. On the burning question of war, bourgeois democracy and fascism, and coalition governments, the Communist International today stands on the same ground as the extreme right wing of social democracy. And this, at a time when the socialist workers in large numbers had already begun to abandon these positions as having contributed to the defeat of the proletariat in Germany, Austria, and elsewhere!

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The new Comintern position on war is a form of chauvinism, "left" chauvinism. It is a call to support war on the part of countries either allied with the Soviet Union, or fighting against fascist countries or both. It has even been extended to include support in a war to "potential colonies," which of course includes practically the entire world. How jingoistic and anti-working class this policy is may be seen by two diverse examples.

Harry Pollitt, leader of the British communists, has declared that in the event of Poland or Czechoslovakia being involved in war, the communists **"will support in that war their own ruling class"** on the ground that it would be a war for "national liberation". The Dutch communists have adopted the same policy with regard to Holland.

In far-off Sweden a communist leader was asked for the attitude of his party toward military sanctions and the military budget. He replied:

"When we communists go in for sanctions, we are also ready to take the consequences. If the League of Nations applies sanctions for the freedom of Abyssinia, we must support the demand that Sweden also participate, with its military forces, if it is demanded. We will also vote for the budget that will be necessary for this."

The present position of the communists on war is by now so well known, that it is unnecessary to enter into any detailed analysis of it. In adopting this position, the Comintern repudiated its own finest traditions, the justification for its very foundation. Instead of an organ for "world revolution," the Comintern has become an organ to induce the working class to support one side in an imperialist war. The tactic "turn the imperialist war into a civil war" which gave Lenin and the Bolsheviks power in Russia is now being replaced by the tactics of coalition with the bourgeoisie, which eventually paved the way for Hitler in Germany.

The second, in the unholy trinity in the bag of new tactics shown by the Seventh Congress, is the method of combating fascism by supporting—bourgeois democracy.

"The choice is no longer between fascism and communism" declare the communists, "it is between fascism and

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democracy." For this reason they come out for democracy as the means of defeating fascism.

This is a new tactic only for the communists. For if we look to Germany and to a lesser extent to Austria and Spain, we see that this is the tactic which was applied, and which failed. The stating of the alternative "fascism or democracy" seems to imply that fascism is something which is independent of contemporary capitalism, expressing the decadence of capitalism as a system. There is no unbridgeable gap between fascism and bourgeois democracy. They are both children of capitalism. So long as capitalism exists, there is always the possibility of a "growing" into fascism. The permanent elimination of the danger of fascism can be achieved only by the overthrow of capitalism and the beginning of the building of socialism. Therefore, for the period, it is absolutely correct to place the alternative: *Fascism or Socialism*. This does not mean refusal to defend the present democratic liberties, as the communists did in Germany, or to fail to undertake specific measures against the fascist danger. But all this work must fail if it does not have a perspective extending beyond the immediate struggle. That perspective must and can be only the placing of the proletariat into power.

From its new attitude to war and bourgeois democracy, the Comintern logically falls into the third basic error of its present position—*coalition*!

If together with the "democratic" bourgeoisie we are to support war; if together with the democratic bourgeoisie we are to defeat fascism, then does it not logically follow that the best way to accomplish these things is to have control of the government together with the "democratic" bourgeoisie?

Of course, the term "coalition" has been discredited and the communists do not use it. "Government of the anti-fascist people's front" sounds better, but is it any different? What, for instance, were the coalition governments in Germany? They were governments of the socialists and of the democratic bourgeois parties which were opposed to fascism. The governments proposed by the communists will have exactly the same character with the exception that the communists will also

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participate in them. That surely is not a basic difference. What other difference does Dimitroff find?

"While the Social Democratic government is an instrument of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie in the interest of the preservation of capitalist order, a united front government is an instrument of collaboration between the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat and the other anti-fascist parties in the interest of the entire toiling population, a government of struggle against fascism and reaction."

Dimitroff has here stated what his intentions are in establishing a coalition government, nothing more. These same intentions were stated by the German Social Democrats when they entered a coalition. But objectively, no government made up of workers' parties and bourgeois parties can be anything else but "an instrument of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie." For if it were anything else the bourgeoisie would not be in it. The German socialists were at least frank in their recognition of this fact. They recognized a coalition government as an evil, the "lesser of two evils" but an evil nonetheless. The communists try to parade it as a glowing achievement.

Indeed, Dimitroff recognizes the futility of coalition when he declares:

"Final salvation this government cannot bring. It is not in a position to overthrow the class rule of the exploiters and for this reason cannot finally eliminate the danger of fascist counter-revolution.

Amazing? Yes. Why should the revolutionary party assume responsibility for the government which can accomplish nothing for the proletariat. Dimitroff has an answer to this question also. *Transition.* The coalition government will be the transition to Soviet power, to the proletarian dictatorship, to a pure socialist government.

We are sorry we cannot score this discovery as a triumph of originality for Stalin-Dimitroff, for there is nothing original in this idea. It was used more than a decade ago and became the theoretical justification for all coalition governments.

In the "Critique of the Gotha Program", Marx said: "Be-

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tween capitalist and socialist society lies a period of revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. To this there corresponds a political transition period during which the state can be nothing else but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."

The post-war coalitionists did not favor this at all, and as a result interpreted it as follows:

"This sentence we can today vary on the basis of the experiences of the last years as follows: Between the time of the *pure bourgeois* and *pure proletarian* governing democratic states there lies a period of transformation of one into the other. *To this corresponds a period of political transition during which the government will as a rule assume the form of a coalition government.*"

Is this not the same formulation as Dimitroff's? Is this not a more honest revision of Marx? Dimitroff may think he is quoting Lenin. Sorry to disillusion him. *The above is a quotation from—Karl Kautsky!*

What are the prerequisites for the establishment of such a coalition government? Dimitroff carefully lists them:

"Under conditions of political crisis, when the ruling classes are no longer in a condition to cope with the mighty upheaval of the mass anti-fascist movement,

"First, the state apparatus must be sufficiently disorganized and paralyzed. . . .

"Second, the broadest masses of toilers, particularly the mass trade unions, must be in a violent state of revolt against fascism and reaction. . . .

"Third, the differentiation and leftward movement in the ranks of social democracy. . . ."

A very good re-statement of the conditions which, according to Lenin, are prerequisites for a proletarian revolution! And at such a time, the Comintern wants to set up—a coalition government!

If there can be even the slightest justification for the social democratic policy of coalition, it is that it was a policy for a period of capitalist stabilization. But the Comintern proposes this policy for a period of capitalist instability and

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revolutionary discontent.

Considered as a whole, therefore, revolutionary socialists must reject the new line of the Comintern, for it is the new, the objectionable features which are its dominant characteristics. Should we then cease designating the Comintern as a working class movement? Not at all, for there are parties in the Labor and Socialist International which, on the questions, hold the same or similar views. And just as inside the Labor and Socialist International, revolutionary socialism, through discussion and democratic procedure, hopes to win the membership to its position, outside it must carry on a vigorous battle against the position of the Comintern as a menace to the revolutionary movement.

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