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Our comrade Susan Adams died at home on the morning of February 6 after a two-year struggle with cancer. In her 30 years as a communist cadre, Susan served on many of the battle fronts of our international party. There is hardly a section of the International Communist League or an area of our work which did not benefit directly from her political counsel and from her exceptional talents as a teacher and trainer of a new generation of proletarian leaders. She continued to carry out vital work as a member of the leading committees of the Spartacist League/U.S. and the ICL until her death. We salute her memory and share in the pain and loss of her longtime companion and comrade, François, her family and her many comrades and friends around the world.

Like thousands of youth, Susan was propelled into political activism in the mid-1960s by the civil rights movement, the growing opposition to the Vietnam War and the near-revolutionary upheaval in France in May 1968. She vehemently rejected the mysticism and hypocritical moralism of her Catholic background and struggled against the internalized oppression that it caused. While at the University of California in San Diego, she joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and was drawn to the pro-working-class wing led by the left-Stalinist Progressive Labor Party. Susan was won to Trotskyism as she began working with the SL-led Revolutionary Marxist Caucus of SDS in 1970 after moving to the State University of New York in Stony Brook. Having moved back to California, she became a member of the Spartacist League in December 1971. Within months, she was elected organizer of our rapidly growing Bay Area local committee, helping to integrate new recruits from a variety of political tendencies.

When we moved to set up a branch in the "Motor City," Detroit, in early 1973, Susan was chosen to lead it. She proudly described this center of the black industrial working class as the Vyborg of the American proletariat, in reference to the militant proletarian stronghold of Bolshevism in Petrograd on the eve of the Russian Revolution. She was aggressive in ensuring that our Trotskyist propaganda penetrated the combative proletariat in the auto plants, often taking a direct hand in writing, mimeographing and distributing our first leaflets. Susan saw to it that the local carried out a program of intensive Marxist internal education and that the industrial comrades, who were working 50 hours or more on swing shift on the assembly lines, got their share of polemical combat doing campus work.

After little more than a year in Detroit, Susan moved to New York to be the central leader of our national youth

Susan Adams

1948-2001



organization, the Spartacus Youth League. As always, she took on this task with energy and political determination, frequently touring the locals, initiating or directing local and national SYL campaigns, overseeing the publication of a high-level monthly press, *Young Spartacus*, with an emphasis on Marxist education and polemics.

In 1976, as the Spartacist tendency began to gain small footholds in Europe, Susan took on another crucial area of party work, this time for our International Secretariat. Stationed mainly in Paris, she became the central leader of our work in Europe, and Paris became one of three main political centers of our International. Until 1992, Susan was the principal leader of the Ligue Trotskyste de France. She was centrally involved in the debates and discussions undertaken in the LTF and the International to hammer out our strategy and tactics in this international center of ostensible Trotskyism, particularly in response to the resurgence of the popular front in the form of the "Union of the Left" in the late 1970s and early '80s. Determined

to implant the Cannonist understanding of party building and Bolshevik norms of functioning which were largely alien to European cadre, she worked closely with often inexperienced leaderships in the European sections, getting them to seize on opportunities for building the party, to carry through regroupments with leftward-moving elements of opponent organizations and to combat the incessant pressures of French parochialism, British Labourism, resurgent German nationalism and so on.

In July 1994, helping to redirect the work of the ICL in a genuinely new and difficult period signaled by capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, Susan wrote a letter to the International Secretariat:

"The main task of the I.S. is the production of the appropriate, necessary and urgent literary propaganda, quadrilingually and in part pentalingually, i.e., also in Russian, mainly in the *Spartacists*.... Publishing propaganda presumably gives political direction; it creates the scaffolding inside which the sections construct their work, in the spirit that Lenin developed in *What Is To Be Done?*"

When the incipient proletarian political revolution erupted in East Germany in the fall of 1989, Susan of course threw herself into guiding and pushing forward our Trotskyist intervention, playing a major role in building the united-front mobilization we initiated to protest the fascist desecration of a Soviet war memorial, which drew 250,000 people to East Berlin's Treptow Park on 3 January 1990.

In 1992, when the LTF leadership itself succumbed to the same pressures Susan had seen so clearly and fought so well



Spartakist

East Berlin, 14 January 1990: Susan (at left) with Spartakist contingent at demonstration honoring Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg during incipient political revolution.

elsewhere, there was a sharp political fight at an ICL conference. Susan sought to assimilate the political lessons of the fight and only a few months later accepted the difficult assignment of heading up our small ICL station in Moscow, taking up the work of our comrade Martha Phillips who had been murdered at her post there earlier that year. Working in a situation where there was little room for mistakes, our-Moscow group fought to reimplant Bolshevism in the face of the devastation of capitalist counterrevolution and of the retrograde Stalinist-derived chauvinists of the "red-brown" coalition.

Although foreign languages did not come easily, Susan embarked on learning Russian with the same discipline and resolution that she had applied to studying French. The combination of limited party resources and the overwhelmingly negative objective situation in the former Soviet Union ultimately forced us to abandon an organized presence in Mos-

cow. To her last days, Susan would speak fondly of her "Moscow boys," as she called the young members from various countries, among them recent recruits from the former DDR, who had volunteered for this arduous and dangerous assignment and who received their shaping as Leninist cadre under Susan's tutelage.

After nearly 20 years of overseas assignments, Susan returned to the U.S. to work in the central party administration, directing her energies particularly on working with a new layer of youth recruits in New York and nationally. Seeking to capitalize on our very successful anti-Klan mobilization in October 1999, Susan addressed the New York Spartacist branch, of which she was political chairman:

"This demonstration really does put into context the last decade, when there wasn't very much going on. In the last couple of years, there have been many struggles in the party. We have sought to grind off the rust in the party and prepare ourselves for exactly the kind of situation that I think our party responded to very well this month. And now the question is the follow-up. In short, the whole point here is: this is what we live for, this is what we prepare for, and now we're in it and we must take advantage of it in the maximum political way."

During this period she also devoted much of her waning energy to preparing her public presentation on "Women and the French Revolution" and expanding it for publication. Even while homebound in her last few days, she was involved in helping select graphics for the layout. Several of her other projects remain to be completed, including an index for the first bound volume of French-language *Spartacist*.

Susan's beauty and graciousness struck all who met her. She solicited and listened intently to the opinions of the newest youth member no less than those of the most senior party cadre, arguing with them openly when she disagreed. Her intellectual curiosity was intense and many of us fondly remember sharing a book-shopping expedition, a novel, a Shostakovich symphony, an art exhibit or a play with Susan in whatever city of the world we found ourselves. Her critical-mindedness, integrity and revolutionary determination serve as an inspiration to us all as we go forward to realize the task to which she dedicated her life, the reforging of a Trotskyist Fourth International and the achievement of communism worldwide.

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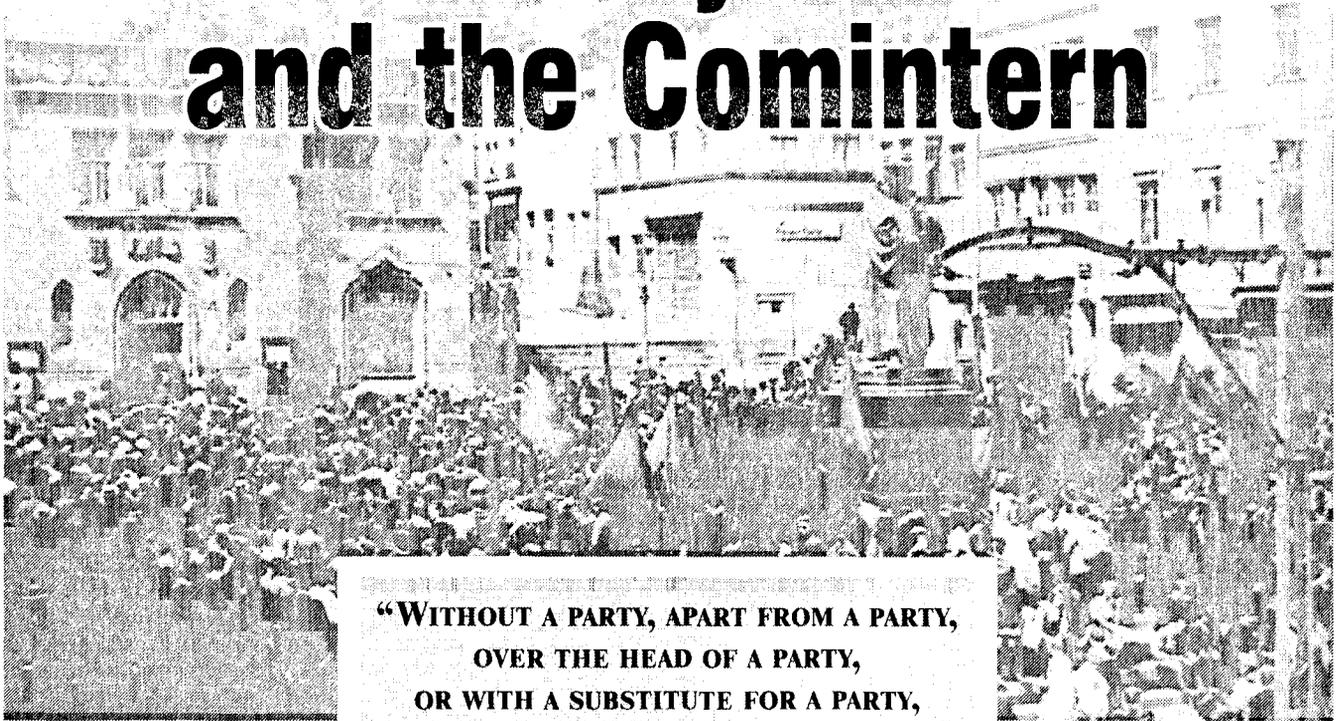
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**“WITHOUT A PARTY, APART FROM A PARTY,
OVER THE HEAD OF A PARTY,
OR WITH A SUBSTITUTE FOR A PARTY,
THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION
CANNOT CONQUER.”**

LEON TROTSKY, *LESSONS OF OCTOBER*

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The aborted German Revolution of 1923 marked a decisive point in the history of the workers movement internationally following the Russian October Revolution of 1917 and the end of the First World War. Though proletarian unrest and upheavals had swept Europe in the aftermath of the war, proletarian state power remained confined to the old tsarist empire (minus Finland, the Baltic states and Poland). The modern industry created by foreign investment in the prewar period in Russia had been devastated by World War I and the bloody civil war which followed; the world's first workers state found itself suspended above a largely rural, peasant economy.

Founding the Third (Communist) International (Comintern, or CI) in 1919 as the necessary instrumentality to achieve world socialist revolution, the Bolsheviks fought with all possible means and determination to spread the revo-

Regional gathering of KPD youth organization in Eisleben, spring 1923. Germany, with its highly organized, pro-socialist working class, offered best opportunity to extend Bolshevik Revolution internationally.

lution to the advanced industrial countries of Europe. In August 1920, having beaten back an invasion by the Polish army under the nationalist Jozef Pilsudski, the Red Army followed the retreating Poles across the border in a bold move to achieve a common border with Germany. Soviet Russia's defeat on the outskirts of Warsaw marked the farthest westward march of Bolshevism.

Germany, with its large, pro-socialist proletariat, appeared to offer the best opportunity to spread the revolution. From the founding of the German Communist Party (KPD), the Bolshevik leadership, beginning with Lenin himself, intervened heavily into the KPD. Lenin was only too aware that the young KPD had broken very late from the Social Democracy and had only partially assimilated Bolshevik politics.

Defeated in the first interimperialist war, Germany was in a state of ongoing political and economic crisis. Beginning with the working-class upheaval that led to the overthrow of Kaiser Wilhelm II in November 1918, the country was continually racked by protests, strikes and semi-insurrectionary risings. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Scheidemann, Ebert and Noske, which supported Germany during

the imperialist slaughter, went on to become the crucial bulwark of the Weimar Republic that replaced the monarchy. The SPD politically disarmed and demobilized the revolutionary proletariat, then aided and abetted the bourgeois counterrevolution in bloody repression.

Providing a crucial left cover for the outright treachery of the SPD was the centrist and highly heterogeneous Independent Socialist Party (USPD), which split from the SPD in April 1917 and initially included the Spartacist group of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. The USPD's right wing, which included Karl Kautsky, Rudolf Hilferding and Eduard Bernstein, were social-pacifists during the war. Kautsky, in particular, was quite skilled in using Marxist rhetoric to mask their firm commitment to *reforming* the bourgeois order. The Spartacists split from the USPD only in December 1918. The USPD split again in October 1920 as two-thirds of its active membership voted to join the Communist International, giving the KPD for the first time a real mass base in the proletariat. But later history would show how incomplete was the KPD's split with Kautsky's centrism on the level of program and theory.

The French occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923 provoked a political and economic crisis in which the potential for proletarian revolution was manifest. A clear indication of this was that the SPD—though strengthened by its reunification with Kautsky's rump USPD in 1922—lost control over the mass of the German working class. The principal mechanism through which the Social Democracy chained the proletariat to the bourgeois order was its leadership of the trade unions. Amid the severe economic dislocation and hyperinflation of 1923, the unions were unable to function; they became paralyzed. The workers deserted them as well as the SPD itself in droves. But the KPD leadership failed the test of revolution. Having reined in the revolutionary strivings of the working masses earlier in 1923, it climbed down without a fight on the eve of a planned insurrection in October.

Instead of organizing the struggle for proletarian power, the KPD leadership under Heinrich Brandler operated on the false view that the party's influence would increase in linear fashion. In a revolutionary situation, timing is critical. There are no "impossible" situations for the bourgeoisie; if a revolutionary party does not act, the bourgeoisie *will* regain control. Such was the outcome in 1923 in Germany.

At bottom, the KPD banked on the illusion that the left wing of the Social Democracy could be induced into becoming a "revolutionary" ally. This strategy was codified in the misuse of the "workers government" slogan, which for the KPD had come to mean something other than the dictatorship of the proletariat—increasingly, a coalition government with the SPD on the basis of the bourgeois parliament. This was an opportunist and self-defeating revision of the understanding of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks that a workers government would be achieved by the overthrow of the bourgeois state apparatus and the forging of a new state power founded on workers councils (soviets). The KPD's abuse of the workers government slogan was endorsed by the Comintern under the leadership of Zinoviev, and found its culmination in October 1923 in the entry of the KPD into coalition governments with the SPD in the states of Saxony and Thuringia. In the event, the "red bastions" in Saxony and Thuringia simply melted away when they were challenged by the German army; the KPD's entry into these bourgeois provincial governments was the prelude to the party's calling off an insurrection which the Comintern had prodded it into planning.

The defeat had enormous consequences, and not only in Germany. For the imperialists it meant a stabilization of the bourgeois order. In Soviet Russia, the workers had looked forward expectantly to the German workers revolution; the debacle in October unleashed a wave of disappointment and demoralization that was seized upon by the nascent Soviet bureaucracy to usurp political power from the proletariat in January 1924. Toward the end of that year, Stalin drew his balance sheet on the German events, promulgating the nationalist dogma of building "socialism in one country." As Trotsky stated a few years later: "From 1923 on, the situation changed sharply. We no longer have before us simply defeats of the proletariat, but routs of the policy of the Comintern" (*The Third International After Lenin* [1928]). The default of the Comintern led ultimately to Hitler's accession to power in 1933 without a shot being fired.

As the German events unfolded in 1923, Lenin was already seriously ill. Zinoviev, who then headed the Comintern, vacillated, while Stalin said that the KPD ought to be restrained. It was only in August that Trotsky realized a revolutionary situation existed in Germany, and it was he who demanded that the KPD and Comintern organize a struggle for power. But Trotsky's approach at the time was largely administrative, centered on fixing a date for the insurrection. He approved of the KPD's entry into the governments of Saxony and Thuringia, with the view that this would provide a "drillground" for revolution.

It was not until later that Trotsky grappled with the underlying political reasons for the failure. In a series of writings beginning a few months after the October debacle, Trotsky undertook a critical evaluation of the political problems of the German events, leading to his 1924 work, *The Lessons of October*. Trotsky drew an analogy between the German events and the Russian October, noting that a section of the Bolshevik Party leadership, including Zinoviev and Kamenev, had balked at organizing the seizure of power in 1917. Trotsky detailed the series of fights which Lenin waged after the outbreak of revolution in February 1917 in order to rearm the party. It was only these fights which made the victory in October possible. The fundamental issue in dispute was "whether or not we should struggle for power." Trotsky asserted:

"These two tendencies, in greater or lesser degree, with more or less modification, will more than once manifest themselves during the revolutionary period in every country. If by Bolshevism—and we are stressing here its essential aspect—we understand such training, tempering, and organization of the proletarian vanguard as enables the latter to seize power, arms in hand; and if by social democracy we are to understand the acceptance of reformist oppositional activity within the framework of bourgeois society and an adaptation to its legality—i.e., the actual training of the masses to become imbued with the inviolability of the bourgeois state; then, indeed, it is absolutely clear that even within the Communist Party itself, which does not emerge full-fledged from the crucible of history, the struggle between social democratic tendencies and Bolshevism is bound to reveal itself in its most clear, open, and uncamouflaged form during the immediate revolutionary period when the question of power is posed point-blank."

—Trotsky, *The Lessons of October*

Uncovering the Roots of the 1923 Defeat

The Lessons of October was part of the process through which Trotsky rearmed Marxism against the Stalinist bureaucratic perversion—beginning with the 1923 Russian Opposition and deepening fundamentally with his 1928 critique of Stalin/Bukharin's "Draft Program of the Communist International," the core of *The Third International After Lenin*.

Trotsky, however, deals with the actual events in Germany only in broad outline in *The Lessons of October*. It is no substitute for a concrete analysis of the events, as Trotsky himself later noted:

"They [the Brandlerites] accuse us of not yet having provided a concrete analysis of the situation in Germany in 1923. That is true. I have already many times reminded the German comrades of the necessity to produce such a work.... I formed my picture of the German situation just as I did of the Russian situation in 1905 and 1917. Of course now, after the fact, above all for the sake of the young generation, it is necessary to theoretically reconstruct the situation, facts and figures in hand. The Left Opposition should do this work and it will do it."

—Trotsky, "Principled and Practical Questions Facing the Left Opposition," 5 June 1931 (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1930-31*)

There have been few serious efforts to carry this out, notable among them an exchange between Walter Held and Marc Loris (Jan van Heijenoort) in the American Trotskyist press in 1942-43. The actual architects of the 1923 defeat engaged in massive coverup. Zinoviev blamed it all on KPD leader Brandler, while Brandler and his supporters sought to alibi themselves by claiming there had never been a revolutionary situation. Brandler's alibi was later picked up by historian and Trotsky biographer Isaac Deutscher, and subsequently by the British Labourite journal *Revolutionary History* and every variety of de facto reformist. As for Brandler's factional opponents, the KPD "lefts" organized around Zinoviev's tools, Ruth Fischer and Arkady Maslow, they were just as incapable of charting a revolutionary course in 1923. Fischer's later account in *Stalin and German Communism* (1948) is just as self-serving as (and even more mendacious than) Brandler's.

In an attempt to get to the bottom of the apparent opportunist bulge on Trotsky's part in supporting entry into the Saxon and Thuringian governments, the International Communist League undertook an investigation and discussion of the Germany events. A highlight of this discussion was an educational presentation given in 1999 by a leader of our German section, as well as discussion at two meetings of the ICL International Executive Committee and the publication of two international bulletins which included English translations of documentation from German-language sources.

The sources in the English language for studying the 1923 events are sparse. Documentation in German is much more abundant, but it is no easy task to cull what is useful from mounds of coverup. Often it is what is *not* said that is significant. Thus, a comrade who searched through issues of the KPD newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) for the first six months of 1923 found exactly one reference to socialist revolution—and that was in a resolution of the Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI)—and none to the dictatorship of the proletariat!

Our study of the Germany 1923 events indicated that far from acting as a corrective to the parliamentarist appetites of the KPD leadership, the ECCI under Zinoviev was deeply complicit in its course. The CI-endorsed entry into bourgeois coalition governments with the SPD in Thuringia and Saxony was theoretically prepared by the discussion at the 1922 Fourth Congress of the Communist International, which included such coalition governments as possible variants of a "workers government." The Spartacist tendency has always been critical of the obfuscationist Fourth Congress resolution; from our inception we have insisted that a workers government can be nothing other than the dictatorship of the proletariat. Our recent study showed that the

Fourth Congress resolution was directly inspired by and an implicit codification of the revisionist impulse that would shipwreck the German Revolution.

This article is intended as a *contribution* toward the theoretical reconstruction of the Germany 1923 events which Trotsky pointed out was necessary for the rearming of future generations of revolutionaries. Certainly, with the passage of over 75 years, some of the events are difficult to reconstruct. We think we have uncovered the essentials, but we are under no illusion that we have the whole picture.

The Aborted 1923 German Revolution

In late 1922, the Weimar government failed to make reparation payments to France, in the form of requisitions of coal and other basic commodities, as dictated by the Versailles Treaty of June 1919, which had been designed by the imperialist victors of World War I to strip their defeated rival of its economic and military strength. This prompted the Poincaré government to occupy the Ruhr in January 1923. The German government, then under Chancellor Cuno, adopted a policy of "passive resistance"—civil disobedience toward the French and Belgian occupation authorities. Rightist paramilitary groups, maintained by conservative industrialists both with private funds and government funds siphoned from the army budget, quickly infiltrated the Ruhr. There they carried out provocative, though largely ineffectual, guerrilla warfare against the French troops.

The occupation triggered massive financial chaos in Germany, not only impoverishing the working class but ruining the lower middle classes. Under armed guard, the French bourgeoisie extracted its blood-sucking reparations, crippling the rest of German industry. Inflation took off on a scale that is hard to believe. The value of the German mark depreciated from 48,000 to the U.S. dollar in May to an astronomical 4.6 million in August! From 6 percent in August, unemployment increased dramatically to 23 percent in November.

Hugo Stinnes and other Ruhr industrialists organized a series of protests against the occupation, preaching the necessity for national unity against the French. A de facto national front stretched from the fascists on the right to the SPD. The KPD, while initially quite contradictory, gradually fell into line. The Social Democrats issued statements solidifying with Ruhr businessmen arrested by the French, while SPD propaganda sought to utilize anger over the French occupation to justify the SPD's criminal support to German imperialism in World War I. But it was not lost on the proletariat that Stinnes' appeals for "equal sacrifice" were sheer hypocrisy. The economic malaise was manipulated by the capitalists to attack the unions. The rapid depreciation of the mark made German goods dirt-cheap on the world market and enabled the industrialists to make a killing in profits, while the trade unions were utterly incapable of defending the standard of living of the workers in the face of hyperinflation. The initial intoxication of the workers with "national unity" did not last long.

The Communist International moved quickly to mobilize its European sections to respond to the French provocations in the spirit of proletarian internationalism. A few days prior to the occupation of the Ruhr, a conference of delegates from West European Communist parties meeting in Essen passed a resolution denouncing the Versailles Treaty and the threatened occupation.

In the Ruhr, fraternization with the French troops was an important component in drawing a political line against the

German nationalists (and Social Democrats), and the KPD youth achieved some success in such efforts. The French Communists, working with the Communist Youth International, vigorously campaigned against the occupation; propaganda was distributed to soldiers in both French and Arabic. In one case, French troops tried to protect striking German workers from German cops, and several of the French soldiers were shot. After a massacre by French troops of workers in Essen, *Die Rote Fahne* published a letter of solidarity by French soldiers who were collecting money for the families of the slain workers. The KPD also ran a big solidarity campaign when French miners went on strike.

The CI-initiated campaign stiffened the German party. When Cuno called for a vote of confidence on his "passive resistance" policy in the Reichstag on January 13, the KPD parliamentary fraction demonstrated and voted against him. The KPD issued an appeal titled "Smite Poincaré and Cuno on the Ruhr and on the Spree [Berlin's river]," a principled statement of opposition to both French and German imperialism.

But the KPD did little to organize independent proletarian resistance to the depredations of French imperialism. Strikes and protest actions in the Ruhr, appealing to fellow proletarians in France and especially in the French army of occupation, might well have led in a revolutionary direction and sparked broader international workers' struggle. The KPD was far from such insurrectionary intentions. A manifesto issued by the party's Eighth Congress in late January/early February 1923 revealed that it was already accommodating to the SPD's defense of the Versailles-dictated postwar European capitalist order. The KPD effectively called for a "workers government" to pay the imperialist debt:

"The workers government will propose negotiations to France; it will state honestly and openly what portion of the debts imposed on it by the bourgeoisie the working people can pay. The workers government will appropriate from the capitalists assets as security for the payment of these debts, thus providing a guarantee that its words express an honest intention. In this way the workers government will assist the German workers in bearing the burdens that the bankrupt imperialist bourgeoisie has laid on them, until the French proletariat assists them in breaking the chains of Versailles."

—Manifesto on "The War in the Ruhr and the International Working Class," Eighth Party Congress, 28 January-1 February 1923, *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* [Documents and Materials on the History of the German Workers Movement] Dietz Verlag, 1966

As anger at the French occupying forces heated up, the KPD bent to nationalist pressures, describing Germany as a virtual colony, with France the "main enemy." In February 1923, Brandler's lieutenant Thalheimer claimed that the German bourgeoisie had acquired "an objectively revolutionary role...in spite of itself." Sliding over to a defensist posture toward the German bourgeoisie, Thalheimer asserted, "The defeat of French imperialism in the world war was not a communist aim, its defeat in the war in the Ruhr is a communist aim" (quoted in E.H. Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-1924* [1954]). It fell to internationalist-minded Czech Communists like Neurath and Sommer to refute Thalheimer's patriotic arguments. Writing in the KPD's *Die Internationale* (1 April 1923), Sommer denounced Thalheimer's thesis as "a magnificent flower of national Bolshevism" (quoted in *The Interregnum*), referring to the banner under which some German leftists had earlier advocated a "war of national liberation" together with the German bourgeoisie against the Entente powers. In a 22 September 1920 speech at the Ninth Party



French soldier guards coal during Ruhr occupation. 23 January 1923 *Die Rote Fahne* published KPD statement, "Smite Poincaré and Cuno on the Ruhr and on the Spree," a principled declaration of opposition to both French and German imperialism.



Ullstein Bilderdienst

Conference in Moscow, Lenin had sharply condemned "national Bolshevism" as a "contrary-to-nature bloc," warning: "If you form a bloc with the German Kornilovists [right-wing militarists], they will dupe you."

On 13 May 1923, a strike wave began in the Ruhr city of Dortmund, a major industrial center. Starting as a strike over wages by miners at one pit, it quickly spread to include probably 300,000 strikers, about half the miners and metal workers in the Ruhr. There were pitched battles with the cops and demonstrations of over 50,000 workers. Workers militias, the so-called Proletarian Hundreds, took over the street markets and shops for the "control commissions," which enforced price cuts.

But the KPD, which had real influence among the proletariat in the area, did nothing for four days! And when it did intervene, it was to counsel the workers not to raise political demands but simply to settle for a wage increase of 52 percent, which was quickly eaten up by the skyrocketing inflation. Reporting on the German situation to a September 21-25 meeting of the Russian, German, French and

Czechoslovakian CPs in Moscow, Brandler literally *bragged* how the KPD had kept the Ruhr strikes within the bounds of economic demands. He claimed that fascistic elements worked in the Proletarian Hundreds with the aim of turning the wage struggles into a struggle for power, supposedly as a provocation to invite repression by the bourgeoisie. While there were some fascists operating in the Ruhr, this was a militant proletarian stronghold. Brandler in effect labeled any worker who wanted to fight for power an agent of reaction.

Just as the proletariat was beginning to break from nationalism, an overt appeal was made to the most backward, out-right fascistic elements. On May 29, in an unvarnished appeal to nationalism, *Die Rote Fahne* published a statement titled "Down With the Government of National Disgrace and Treason Against the People!" In June, at an enlarged ECCI meeting in Moscow, Karl Radek made his notorious speech eulogizing the German fascist Schlageter, who had been executed by the French in the Ruhr. Schlageter had fought against the Bolsheviks in the Baltics and then against the workers in the Ruhr. The KPD's embrace of the "Schlageter line," endorsed by Zinoviev, set off a campaign of appeals to the German nationalists, including joint public meetings and "debates" with the fascists. This campaign undoubtedly had a chilling effect on the initiatives toward fraternization with the French soldiers, though fraternization apparently continued throughout 1923.

The KPD was adapting to both the nationalist right and the Social Democrats. In the universities, KPD leaders fraternized with Nazi students. However, among the proletariat the KPD played the "anti-fascist" card, whose real thrust was to look to the SPD for a bloc against fascism (which is how the entry into the Saxon and Thuringian governments was later motivated).

The "Schlageter line" was eagerly assented to by the KPD "lefts"—indeed, Ruth Fischer was a regular speaker at these "debates," which continued until the Nazis broke them off. At one such meeting Fischer declared, "Whoever cries out against Jewish capital...is already a fighter for his class

[*Klassenkämpfer*], even though he may not know it" (quoted in Werner Angress, *Stillborn Revolution—The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921-1923* [1963]). Despite their shrill denunciations of the party leadership, the Fischer-Maslow "lefts" had no more impulse than Brandler to struggle for power. Both factions were mainly concerned with cli-quist maneuvering to ingratiate themselves with Zinoviev.

Despite the KPD leadership's efforts to pour water on the flames of class struggle, the working masses were breaking by the thousands from the Social Democracy to the KPD. This is attested to in a 1936 account by Arthur Rosenberg, who had been in the KPD in 1923 and was elected to the *Zentrale* (the resident leading body) in 1924 as a supporter of the Fischer group. Rosenberg noted:

"In the course of the year 1923 the power of the SPD steadily decreased. The Party passed through a crisis which was reminiscent of that of 1919. The Independent Trade Unions especially, which had always been the chief support of Social Democracy, were in a state of complete disintegration. The inflation destroyed the value of the Union subscriptions. The Trade Unions could no longer pay their employees properly nor give assistance to their members. The wage-agreements that the Trade Unions were accustomed to conclude with the employers became useless when the devaluation of the currency made any wages paid out a week later worthless. Thus Trade Union work of the old style became unavailing. Millions of German workers would have nothing more to do with the old Trade Union policy and left the Unions. The destruction of the Trade Unions simultaneously caused the ruin of the SPD....

"The KPD had no revolutionary policy either, but at least it criticized the Cuno Government loudly and sharply and pointed to the example of Russia. Hence the masses flocked to it. As late as the end of 1922 the newly united Social Democratic Party comprised the great majority of the German workers. During the next half-year conditions were completely changed. In the summer of 1923 the KPD undoubtedly had the majority of the German proletariat behind it."

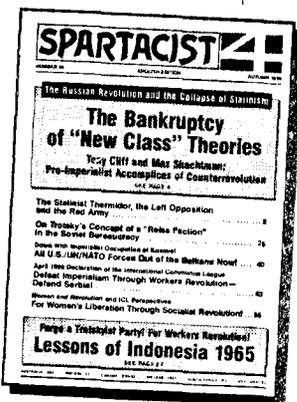
—Arthur Rosenberg, *A History of the German Republic*

Probably the most comprehensive English-language book on this period is Angress' *Stillborn Revolution*. Even Angress, who manifestly does not believe that a workers insurrection was possible in 1923, acknowledges that the KPD was

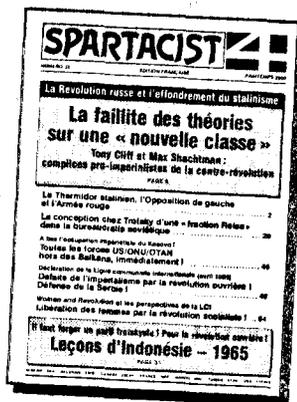
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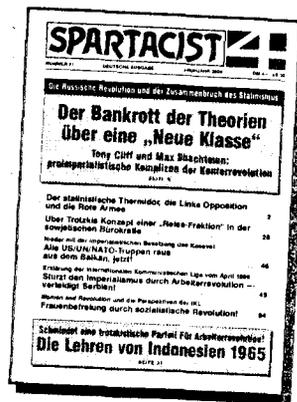
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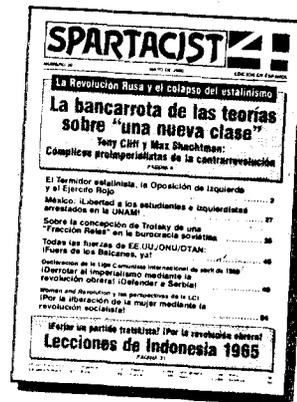
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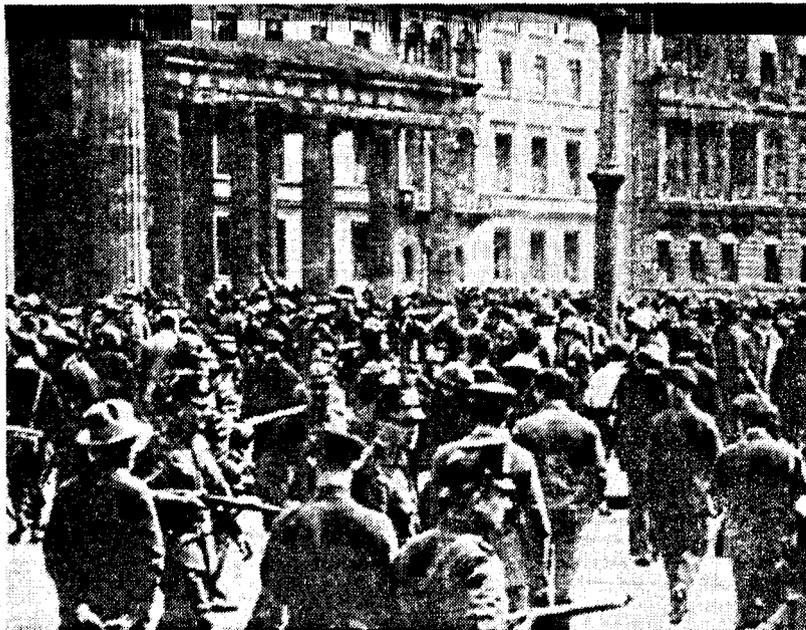


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Police confront demonstrators as general strike begins against Cuno government, Berlin, 11 August 1923. KPD poster from 1923 calls for building workers' defense organizations ("Proletarian Hundreds").

gaining strength and refers to the "diminishing hold which the Social Democratic Party was able to exert on its rank and file."

If ever there was a revolutionary situation, this was it. But while the KPD had several hundred thousand revolutionary-minded workers at the base, the leadership lacked the appetite to mobilize the proletariat to take power. When the situation was at its hottest, Brandler declared in *Die Rote Fahne* (2 August 1923): "We must fight the battles to which we are destined by history, but we must always keep in mind that we are at the moment still the weaker. We cannot as yet offer a general battle, and we must avoid everything which would enable the enemy to beat us piecemeal" (quoted in Angress).

Brandler maintained this position long after the events of 1923. Today this same piece of "wisdom" is the sum and substance of what the British social democrats of *Revolutionary History*, a "non-party" publication supported by a spectrum of pseudo-Trotskyist individuals and groups, have to say about 1923. In an issue of *Revolutionary History* (Spring 1994) devoted to "Germany 1918-23," Mike Jones claimed that Trotsky's fatal mistake in 1923 was that he supposedly "underestimated the hold of the SPD over millions of workers. He underestimated the material strength of reformism, of bourgeois democracy, and so on, amongst the German workers." This, of course, is the time-honored technique of opportunists, who always blame defeats on the "immaturity of the masses," alibiing the misleaders.

With the SPD's hold on the masses weakened, the KPD did little to expose the reformists and press its own political advantage. One of the grossest expressions of this conciliationism came in an article in *Die Rote Fahne* on 21 January 1923, which appealed to the SPD for "Burgfrieden"—civil peace—among the workers. "Burgfrieden" was the call of the *Kaiser* in 1914, demanding that there be no class warfare within Germany as the bourgeoisie went to war against its imperialist rivals! In Saxony, the KPD gave backhanded support to the government of left SPDer Erich Zeigner. When cops shot into a demonstration of workers and unemployed in Leipzig in June, killing several, Brandler refused to do anything about this and instead asked for... a commission of inquiry! Just as pathetically, on the CI side Zinoviev and

Radek demanded that the KPD withdraw support from Zeigner unless...he appointed a new police commissioner. All sides clearly feared a political collision with the SPD "left" leaders who administered Saxony.

From August to October

The government was toppled in August by the "Cuno strike," begun by Berlin printers who refused to print any more money. The KPD-influenced *Betriebsräte*, the factory councils, pushed this into a virtual general strike, over the objections of the trade-union tops. But the party lacked any offensive policy, never going beyond the framework of a militant strike. The strikers had demanded Cuno's resignation. When that happened, the workers streamed back to their jobs, against the wishes of the KPD. The KPD called for a "workers government" but did not call for establishing *organs of dual power* that would serve as a bridge to proletarian rule.

The Cuno government was replaced with Gustav Stresemann's "great coalition," which included four SPD ministers. For Mike Jones and *Revolutionary History*, the Stresemann/SPD coalition put an end to any revolutionary possibilities which "could" have existed earlier in the year. But by no means did Stresemann's government stabilize the situation to the extent Jones would have us believe. Stresemann himself wasn't so confident upon taking office; hence his statement that "we are the last bourgeois parliamentary government." There was still an expectant mood among the German masses in October 1923, as Victor Serge, who worked in Berlin as a Comintern journalist, later testified:

"On the threshold...*Losschlagen!* *Losschlagen* means strike the blow you had been holding back, trigger off action. This word is on everyone's lips, on this side of the barricade. On the other side, too, I think. In Thuringia, outside clandestine meetings where a Communist is due to speak, workers—whom he doesn't know—plant themselves in front of him. A railwayman asks, coming straight to the point: 'When shall we strike? When?'"

"This worker, who has traveled 50 miles by night to ask this question, understands little about matters of tactics and timing: 'My people,' he says, 'have had enough. Be quick about it!'"

—Victor Serge, "A 50 Day Armed Vigil" (February 1924), reprinted in *Witness to the German Revolution* (2000)

In early October, the KPD entered the SPD governments in Saxony and Thuringia as coalition partners, supposedly with the aim of utilizing its ministerial posts to get arms. Naturally, nothing of the sort happened. General Müller, demanding that the Proletarian Hundreds be disbanded, marched on Saxony. Now himself a minister, Brandler pegged the organizing of an uprising to gaining the support of the Social Democrats at a conference of Saxon workers organizations held in Chemnitz on October 21. Brandler put forward a motion for a general strike, which was supposed to be the spark for the insurrection. But when the SPD delegates objected, Brandler simply backed down. And that was the end of the German Revolution, except for some fighting in Hamburg, where several hundred Communists seized a number of police stations and acquitted themselves well before being compelled to retreat.

Who ever heard of Communists organizing a revolution where the Social Democrats were given veto power? Historian Evelyn Anderson noted astutely:

"The Communist position was manifestly absurd. The two policies of accepting responsibility of government, on the one hand, and of preparing for a revolution, on the other, obviously excluded each other. Yet the Communists pursued both at the same time, with the inevitable result of complete failure."

—Evelyn Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil: The Story of the German Working-Class Movement* (1945)

Russia 1917 vs. Germany 1923

Trotsky never based his evaluation of the KPD's fatal vacillations in 1923 on the view that autumn represented the high point for revolution. Autumn was already late. In May 1924 Trotsky wrote:

"True, in the month of October a sharp break occurred in the party's policy. But it was already too late. In the course of 1923 the working masses realized or sensed that the moment of decisive struggle was approaching. However, they did not see the necessary resolution and self-confidence on the side of the Communist Party. And when the latter began its feverish preparations for an uprising, it immediately lost its balance and also its ties with the masses."

—Trotsky, introduction to *The First Five Years of the Communist International*

Within the Russian Political Bureau it had been Lenin's assignment to monitor the German party; Trotsky had responsibility for the French. Lenin suffered a debilitating stroke in March 1923. Trotsky realized Germany had entered a revolutionary situation only in August. The Russian Political Bureau met on the 23rd of that month, with Brandler in attendance, to discuss the perspectives of the German party. Zinoviev was vacillating and equivocal, as was Radek. Stalin, as Trotsky was only to discover some years later, had been urging that the Germans be restrained, writing to Zinoviev and Bukharin: "Of course, the fascists are not asleep, but it is to our interest that they attack first.... In my opinion, the Germans must be curbed and not spurred on" (cited in Maurice Spector's 11 January 1937 introduction to *The Lessons of October*). The PB appointed a standing committee to mobilize support for a German revolution, and initiated a campaign for solidarity that had an electrifying effect on the Red Army and on the Soviet populace more broadly. Scarce grain reserves were accumulated in the cities to be shipped to Germany at the critical moment. But the Political Bureau continued to dither about whether the KPD should set course for an immediate insurrection. Fischer and Maslow were summoned to Moscow and finally in September it was decided that the KPD should set the date for the seizure of power. Brandler was honest about his doubts regarding this

course and his own abilities—he specifically said that he was no Lenin and asked that Trotsky be sent to Germany to lead the revolution. Evidently Brandler was hoping that Trotsky could conjure up soviets and a revolution out of the ground.

German considerations were increasingly becoming subordinate to the vicissitudes of the factional struggle within the Russian party. By this time, Trotsky was being sidelined by the leading troika of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin. But the troika could hardly be seen to oppose proletarian revolution in Germany, and went along with Trotsky in setting the date. Zinoviev also went part way toward meeting Trotsky's demand that Fischer and Maslow be kept in Moscow to dampen the disruptive potential of the German "lefts" during the insurrection (Maslow stayed in Moscow, while Fischer was allowed to return). But the troika could not risk giving Trotsky a chance to lead the German Revolution; they insisted Trotsky's presence was required in Moscow.

Behind Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev stood the burgeoning bureaucratic apparatus of the Russian party and state. In a few months the troika would smash the anti-bureaucratic opposition and seize political power for the bureaucracy at the January 1924 party conference. But in the summer and early fall of 1923 the door was still open for Trotsky to fight for a Comintern intervention that would have made the critical difference in politically arming the KPD to take advantage of the revolutionary opportunity. Unfortunately, Trotsky lacked the political understanding and information as to the KPD's actual practice in Germany. His approach at the time was largely administrative.

What was required in 1923 was a political rearming of the German Communists, akin to what Lenin had carried out in the Bolshevik Party upon his return from Switzerland in April 1917. In the early period following the February Revolution Stalin, Kamenev and other elements of the Bolshevik leadership returning from internal exile had overturned the early decision of the Bureau of the Central Committee and committed the party to a policy of extending critical support to the bourgeois-democratic Provisional Government formed after the abdication of the tsar "in so far as it struggles against reaction or counter-revolution." In his April Theses, Lenin argued strongly against this capitulatory line, opposing any support to the Provisional Government or rapprochement with the social-democratic Mensheviks, and calling for all power to the soviets and for arming the workers. Without this crucial fight, as well as further struggles against those like Kamenev and Zinoviev who flinched at organizing the insurrection, the October Revolution would never have happened.

In particular, Lenin stressed the need for crystal clarity on the nature of the state. Even the most "democratic" bourgeois republic is an instrument for maintaining the rule of a minority of exploiters over the masses of exploited. Socialist revolution means the smashing of the existing state apparatus—whose core is the army, police, courts and prisons—and its replacement with a new one based on organs of proletarian rule, soviets, which would repress the capitalist class, thus constituting the dictatorship of the proletariat. This perspective was realized in the October Revolution, opposed even by left-wing Mensheviks like Martov.

Following the October Revolution, the German left social democrat Karl Kautsky took the Bolsheviks to task for liquidating the Constituent Assembly in his 1918 polemic, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. Kautsky claimed that this bourgeois parliamentary body was a higher form of democracy than the soviets. Lenin, who had been forced to break



Frederick A. Praeger

Karl Kautsky, pre-eminent theoretician of the Social Democracy and later the centrist USPD. The key polemics against Kautsky's anti-Bolshevik revisionism were written not by the German Communists but by Lenin and Trotsky.

off work on *State and Revolution* in order to lead the October Revolution, used the leftover material in his 1918 reply to "the renegade Kautsky." Lenin illustrated that despite Kautsky's "left" pretensions and his professed enthusiasm for soviets, Kautsky's fundamental affinity lay with the Menshevik Martov and his horror at the idea of the soviets as the vehicle for proletarian state power:

"The crux is: should the Soviets aspire to become state organisations...or should the Soviets not strive for this, refrain from taking power into their hands, refrain from becoming state organisations and remain the 'combat organisations' of one 'class' (as Martov expressed it, embellishing by this innocent wish the fact that under Menshevik leadership the Soviets were an instrument for the subjection of the workers to the bourgeoisie)?..."

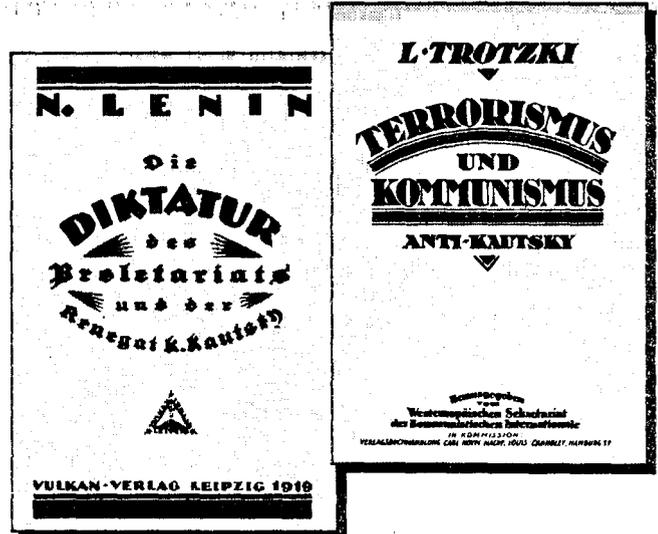
"Thus [for Kautsky], the oppressed class, the vanguard of all the working and exploited people in modern society, must strive toward the 'decisive battles between capital and labour,' but must not touch the machine by means of which capital suppresses labour!—It must not break up that machine!—It must not make use of its all-embracing organisation for suppressing the exploiters!..."

"This is where Kautsky's complete rupture both with Marxism and with socialism becomes obvious. Actually, it is desertion to the camp of the bourgeoisie, who are prepared to concede everything except the transformation of the organisations of the class which they oppress into state organisations."

—Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, October-November 1918 (*Collected Works*, Vol. 28)

This polemic between Lenin and Kautsky over the October Revolution foreshadowed what was about to happen in Germany. When Kaiser Wilhelm was forced to abdicate as a result of the November Revolution of 1918, the working masses set up workers and soldiers councils in an attempt to follow in the path of the proletariat of Russia. The SPD was desperate to liquidate these councils and replace them with the National Assembly, a bourgeois parliament. The newly formed KPD was for all power to the workers and soldiers councils. The Independents, the USPD, led by the likes of Kautsky and Rudolf Hilferding, claimed to be for both the National Assembly and the workers' councils, demanding that the latter be incorporated into the Weimar constitution. The USPD proved of great utility to the SPD in getting the National Assembly accepted, after which it was relatively easy to dismantle the councils.

With no communist organization yet in existence, the working masses radicalized by the war had poured into the



USPD. Although thoroughly reformist in deed, the USPD's Marxist phraseology made it even more dangerous than the SPD, for it served to dupe more advanced workers who saw through the SPD. In the midst of the burgeoning revolution, the Spartakusbund of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht finally quit the USPD and joined with some smaller groups of independent radicals to form the KPD. The failure to break earlier with Kautsky's centrism shipwrecked the 1918 German Revolution. The German Communists never really assimilated the importance of the Bolsheviks' intransigent political split with all varieties of reformism and centrism.

In September 1918, as Kautsky's attacks on the October Revolution went unanswered in Germany, Lenin wrote to the Soviet envoys in West Europe:

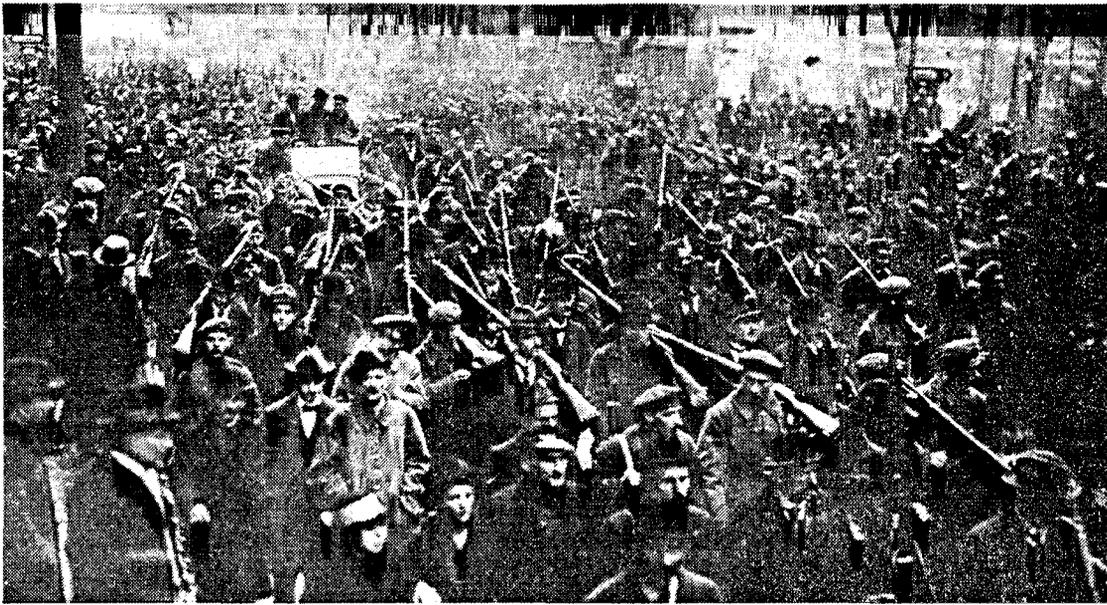
"Kautsky's disgraceful rubbish, childish babble and shallowest opportunism impel me to ask: why do we do nothing to fight the theoretical vulgarisation of Marxism by Kautsky?"

"Can we tolerate that even such people as Mehring and Zetkin keep away from Kautsky more 'morally' (if one may put it so) than theoretically."

—Lenin, "Letter to Y.A. Berzin, V.V. Vorovsky and A.A. Joffe," 20 September 1918 (*Collected Works*, Vol. 35)

Lenin urged the envoys to "have a detailed talk with the Left (Spartacists and others), stimulating them to make a statement of principle, of theory, in the press, that on the question of dictatorship Kautsky is producing philistine Bernsteinism, not Marxism." It was Lenin and Trotsky, and not any of the German leaders, who wrote the main polemics against Kautsky, from Lenin's *The State and Revolution* (1917), *Renegade Kautsky* and "Left-Wing" Communism (1920) to Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism* in 1920 and *Social Democracy and the Wars of Intervention in Russia, 1918-1921* (*Between Red and White*) in 1922.

The German Communist leaders could not defeat Kautsky, the pre-eminent prewar leader of German "Marxism," because they had never broken decisively from his conception of the "party of the whole class" and the parliamentarism of the old SPD. The prewar Social Democracy had increasingly accommodated to the autocratic legal structure of the Wilhelminian Reich. One expression of this was the SPD's submission to a law—which remained in effect until 1918—mandating an official police presence at all publicly announced meetings, which included local branch meetings and even party congresses. As documented by Richard Reichard in *Crippled from Birth—German Social Democracy*



Willy Römer

Armed workers occupy Berlin newspaper district, January 1919.

1844-1870 (1969), this meant that the cops could instantly shut down any SPD gathering if they heard something they didn't like.

Marxist revolutionaries fight for the right to carry out their activities legally under capitalism. But to accommodate *a priori* to what the bourgeois state deems "legal" is to give up the struggle for proletarian revolution. Even in the most "democratic" capitalist countries, it required an illegal party organization and press for Marxists to be able to tell the truth about their own imperialist governments during World War I. Yet for the Brandler leadership of the KPD, the Leninist conception of the vanguard party and the whole experience of the Bolsheviks, including the necessity to set up a parallel illegal organization, were not appropriate for "civilized" countries like Germany. The KPD leadership oscillated between the opportunism and parliamentarism of Brandler and the idiot ultimatism of Fischer and Maslow, unable to organize the fight for power and decisively break the hold of the SPD on the working class.

In 1923, the KPD blurred the lines which Lenin had clearly demarcated between a bourgeois state and a workers state. Absent was any call for the building of soviets, or workers councils, that would be the organs of workers rule. Instead, KPD propaganda emphasized the building of a "workers government," which a resolution at the KPD's Eighth Congress in late January and early February 1923 made clear was "neither the dictatorship of the proletariat nor a peaceful parliamentary advance toward one," but an "attempt by the working class, within the framework of and initially employing the instruments of bourgeois democracy, to pursue proletarian politics, based on organs of the proletariat and mass movements of the workers" (*Dokumente und Materialien*). In May, a resolution was cooked up in a meeting with the ECCI, supported by Fischer's "lefts," which was in principle no different, projecting that "the workers government can issue out of the existing democratic institutions."

This was the heart of the problem: the KPD leadership—both wings—expected political power to devolve to them through the mechanism of the *bourgeois* state. What was absent was any concept of seizing power and the need for organs of proletarian rule to serve as a basis for that power. Soviets or some equivalent body would have to replace the

existing state power in a process which would inevitably entail a military conflict.

When the Communists accepted ministerial portfolios in Saxony and Thuringia in October, this only reinforced existing parliamentarist prejudices. If this was indeed already a workers government, then presumably extraparliamentary revolutionary struggle, the formation of workers councils and armed workers militias, would be totally superfluous. The vast majority of workers had no clue that an armed uprising was in the offing. To be sure, no leadership in its right mind would telegraph in advance the date of an insurrection. But in Russia in 1917 the proletariat clearly understood that the Bolshevik program was to take power based on the soviets.

In *The Lessons of October*, Trotsky defended the advice of the CI in 1923 not to call for soviets, but to rely instead on the factory councils. Trotsky argued that the factory councils "had already become in action the rallying centres of the revolutionary masses" and that soviets formed at that stage in the struggle would be organizationally redundant. Moreover, as Trotsky explained in revisiting this question in his 1931 article "Workers Control of Production," after 1917-18 the word "soviet" had become "a synonym for the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, and hence a bugbear on the lips of Social Democracy.... In the eyes of the bourgeois state, especially its fascist guard, the Communists' setting to work creating soviets will be equivalent to a direct declaration of civil war by the proletariat" (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* [1971]).

The *Betriebsräte* (factory councils) were established by the SPD government under a February 1920 law as a substitute for the workers and soldiers councils that had been dismantled. The SPD wanted to keep the factory councils—which were to be elected in all enterprises with more than 50 employees—under the thumb of the union bureaucracy, so they were charged with enforcing the provisions of contracts negotiated by the unions. The month before the legislation was passed, tens of thousands demonstrated against it; the protest was fired on by the Berlin police, who killed 42.

However, in the years that followed the *Betriebsräte* increasingly became the locus of militant struggle. So-called "wildcat" (or unauthorized) conferences of factory councils

took place on a regional and even national level. These were dominated by the KPD, and generally boycotted by the SPD. Our own research on the extent to which the working masses embraced the factory councils is somewhat inconclusive, although there is considerable evidence that they were becoming much more of a factor in 1923. Trotsky's argument for the factory councils as instruments for a proletarian insurrection was a realistic revolutionary perspective in 1923. They were becoming potentially far more representative than simply factory-based organizations: factory councils were linking up with each other and also working with the Proletarian Hundreds and the control commissions that regulated distribution and prices of food, which were particularly widespread in the Ruhr.

The problem is that the KPD did not seek to invest these embryonic forms of proletarian dual power with revolutionary content. Even after the Comintern had prodded the KPD leadership into agreeing to organize an armed uprising, there is no evidence whatsoever that the factory councils were anything beyond militant strike committees. That could have been a starting point—indeed, the Russian soviets originally emerged from strike committees in 1905—but the KPD never sought to imbue the proletariat with the consciousness that it needed to create organs of workers rule. There was nothing along the lines of “All power to the *Betriebsräte*.” Nor were the Proletarian Hundreds conceived of by the KPD leadership as instruments to overthrow and supplant the bourgeois state, but more as adjuncts to that state. In Gelsenkirchen, a city in the Ruhr effectively controlled by the KPD, the Communists asked the local government to assign a police officer to instruct the workers militias! In Saxony, the KPD proposed that the SPD government integrate the workers militia into the police force. Likewise, the KPD strategy toward the control commissions was to try to get them “legalized” by local governments.

The Military Question

As the saying goes: victory has many fathers, defeat is ever an orphan. In *The Lessons of October*, Trotsky observed that had Lenin not been present to drive the Russian Revolution forward to victory, “The official historians would, of course, have explained that an insurrection in October 1917 would have been sheer madness; and they would have furnished the reader with awe-inspiring statistical charts of the Junkers and Cossacks and shock troops and artillery, deployed fan-wise, and army corps arriving from the front.”

Any number of writers, some of a leftist persuasion, claim to prove that revolution was impossible in Germany in 1923. The historian Helmut Gruber, arguing that “the proletarian hundreds were not intended as a match for the army or police but as a counterweight against rightist paramilitary units,” concludes that a “force of 250,000 well-trained and heavily armed men was a match for an uprising even with a broad popular base. In this case, as in others, the Russians obscured the danger by discovering homologues to their October Revolution” (Gruber, *International Communism in the Era of Lenin* [1967]).

Thus, as this tale goes, the German workers were hopelessly outgunned and outmanned; the sober-minded KPD leader Brandler understood this, but allowed himself to be bullied by the Russians, whose mistake was to believe that the experience of the October Revolution was relevant. And if revolution was impossible, then logic dictated that the only alternative was change through parliamentary reform,

to which the mass of the German proletariat was ostensibly reconciled.

Yet the German proletariat was mobilized by the thousands with arms in hand in 1923, ready to take power. The workers had access to tens of thousands of small arms they had buried in the fields after the war, while their militias were composed of front-line World War I veterans who were quite experienced fighters. But the idea that an insurrection required disciplined units of men armed not only with rifles but with machine guns and heavy weapons proved totally beyond the ken of the KPD leadership.

The Reichswehr was an all-volunteer and highly motivated force, with many drawn from the ranks of the Freikorps—later euphemistically renamed “defense associations”—fascistic paramilitary units financed by big industrialists and experienced in counterrevolutionary butchery. The army carefully screened out communists, socialists and Jews and preferred to recruit from rural areas. The army could not be easily split, but its small size—limited to 100,000 men under the terms of the Versailles Treaty—made it little more than a good-sized police force. It would not be adequate to put down a determined national proletarian insurrection.

By 1923 much of the Freikorps had been integrated into the regular army. There were also the “Black Reichswehr”—illegally recruited adjuncts to the army, generally of dubious fighting ability—and the fascist bands. As Trotsky noted, the forces of the fascists were monstrously exaggerated and to a considerable degree existed only on paper, as was demonstrated by the ease with which Hitler’s “Beer Hall Putsch” in Bavaria was dispersed in November. Stalin and Radek had overstated the strength of the fascists as an excuse to avoid organizing an insurrection. This is not to say the fascists were negligible; but neither was this 1931, when Hitler had a hundred thousand stormtroopers.

Insurrectionary Turmoil in the Weimar Republic

The Weimar Republic had brought not some mythical stable parliamentary democracy, but five years of insurrectionary and semi-insurrectionary movements, with sizable clashes between armed workers and the state. In January 1919 and again that spring, there were massive confrontations between insurgent workers and the SPD government,

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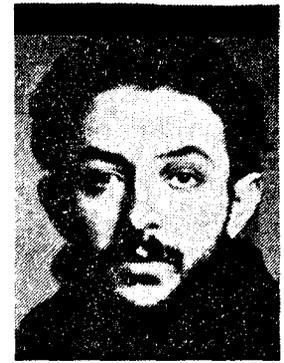
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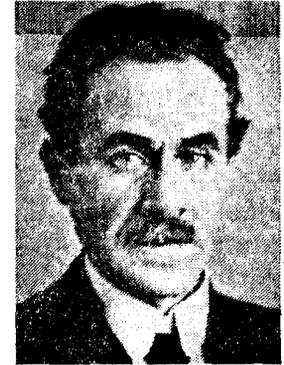
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German revolutionary leadership was beheaded by bourgeois reaction and its SPD bloodhounds in 1919. From left: Rosa Luxemburg agitates against war preparations, 1907; Karl Liebknecht tells Berlin workers, "The main enemy is at home," January 1919; Eugen Leviné (top right); Leo Jogiches.

which acted on behalf of the bourgeoisie to crush the threat of revolution. The USPD played a critical role in the first month following the abdication of the Kaiser, joining the government and thereby helping to lull the proletariat while the counterrevolutionaries regrouped their forces. The workers fought bravely in these early insurgencies, but lacked an authoritative revolutionary party to coordinate struggle on a national level. The government was able to isolate these struggles on a local level and pick them off one by one.

Reichswehr and Freikorps troops occupied Berlin in January 1919 and again in February. A punitive expedition was dispatched to depose the workers and soldiers council in Bremen, where a workers republic had been declared. Then came the turn of central Germany, where government troops occupied one town after another, in many cases after heavy fighting. Many thousands were killed during street battles. When a five-day strike broke out in Berlin on March 3, SPD defense minister Noske issued shoot-to-kill orders to the army, which was equipped with aircraft and artillery. Some 1,200 people were killed. Troops were also sent to Halle that spring to break a general strike. In the Ruhr there were militant strikes in the mines, at their peak embracing three-quarters of the workforce, which raised not only economic demands but called for acceptance of the workers councils, the arming of workers against the Freikorps, and recognition of the Soviet Union. The last major battle in 1919 was the suppression of the Bavarian commune, where a thousand were killed in the fighting and well over a hundred revolutionaries were murdered.

The new Communist Party had little sense of how to operate in a volatile situation where there were rapid surges of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces. Where the Bolsheviks took the necessary step of sending Lenin into hiding during the reactionary July Days in Russia in 1917, when the SPD government unleashed the Freikorps in 1918-19, the KPD did not take sufficient precautions to protect its leadership. Within the first few months of the founding of the KPD,

Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches were all murdered. In June, Eugen Leviné was shot by a firing squad for leading the defense of the Bavarian Soviet Republic.

On 13 March 1920, a general named Von Lüttwitz marched Freikorps troops into Berlin and sought to install a right-wing military government under the Prussian civil servant Kapp. The army officers behind the Kapp Putsch blamed the Social Democrats for the national humiliations of the Versailles Treaty and particularly its provision limiting the size of the army. The SPD government fled Berlin and appealed to the Reichswehr command for intervention. Not surprisingly, the army did nothing to oppose the Kapp Putsch. Finally, the conservative SPD head of the trade unions, Karl Legien, called for a general strike.

The powerful actions of the proletariat completely smashed the attempted putsch. After two days, the Kapp government was powerless, and after two more days it was gone. Legien tried to call the strike off, but the more combative sections of the proletariat were not to be restrained. Workers dug up the weapons they had hidden after the suppression of the 1919 uprisings. Workers militias sprang up, often under the leadership of the USPD lefts or the KPD, and a 50,000-strong "Red Army" was formed in the Ruhr. Highly decentralized and improvised, it was nevertheless capable of dispersing Freikorps brigades and even Reichswehr units. This highlighted the potential of an armed proletariat to equip themselves with weapons and overcome the army. As one writer described it:

"Meanwhile Reichswehr units in the area (largely unreconstructed Free Corps) demonstratively welcomed the new regime; and General von Watter, regional commander in Münster, misjudging the situation, set some of his units in motion toward areas where an insurrectionary spirit was suspected. The armed workers responded aggressively. At the town of Wetter on March 15 a Free Corps detachment was surrounded (largely by workers from Hagen) and, after several hours of battle, forced to surrender. The same night, insurgent forces surrounded another detachment of the same Free Corps in another town, receiving its surrender the next morning.

Through such victories, and by disarming the citizens' guards of the smaller towns, the workers' forces soon acquired a proper arsenal of small arms. The example was followed elsewhere. On March 16 a larger Free Corps unit was badly mauled by a workers' army while trying to march out of the district; two days later, the Westphalian part of the Ruhr was entirely free of Reichswehr troops, all having been disarmed by the workers or withdrawn from the area. There remained troops in the Rhenish part of the Ruhr and a large body of security police in Essen; but when the latter city fell on March 20, after a three-day battle, no regular armed forces were left in the district."

—David Morgan, *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution* (1975)

The upshot of the workers' suppression of the Kapp Putsch was the Bielefeld Accords signed on 24 March 1920 by bourgeois politicians, the unions, the two social-democratic parties, and two representatives from the KPD. These accords included a call on the state to disarm and liquidate the counterrevolutionary bands and to purge civil servants "disloyal" to the republic. The Red Army was to give up its weapons, except for some workers who would supposedly be incorporated into the local police. In exchange, the Reichswehr was supposed to stay out of the Ruhr. But when the workers surrendered their arms, government forces marched into the Ruhr, together with the Freikorps units—which had been dissolved...into the army! A virtual White Terror ensued; throughout Rhineland-Westphalia, working-class neighborhoods were pillaged and burned out and entire families were shot. It was a bloody lesson in what comes from trusting the "neutrality" and "evenhandedness" of the bourgeois state.

Although the KPD later claimed that its two representatives had no mandate to vote for the Bielefeld Accords, KPD propaganda during the early 1920s was saturated with similar appeals to the bourgeois state to outlaw fascist and monarchist groups, purge the civil service of reactionaries, constitute a police force out of "trade-union-organized workers," etc. This was a touching display of confidence in the bourgeois state. The Law for the Protection of the Republic—passed in 1922 after a far-right hit squad assassinated Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, a prominent Jewish politician—was used overwhelmingly against the left. The false conception that the state could somehow be rendered "neutral" by passing "progressive" laws undermined the necessary understanding on the part of the working class that it must take its

defense into its own hands and that the state would have to be overthrown by the armed proletariat itself.

The March Action and the "Theory of the Offensive"

By the time the March Action erupted in 1921, the KPD had become a mass party. In October 1920, the USPD had split at its Halle Congress over acceptance of the Comintern's famous 21 Conditions, which were designed to draw a sharp line against the centrists and specifically called for the exclusion of Kautsky and Hilferding. Speaking against affiliation were Hilferding and Martov; answering Hilferding was Zinoviev, whose impassioned four-hour speech won the day. Brandler, notably, *opposed* the USPD split. The left wing of the USPD, about two-thirds of the active membership, fused with the KPD to form the United Communist Party (VKPD), though the party reverted to the name KPD after several months.

In March 1921, strikes, stop-work meetings and plant occupations rolled across the Mansfeld coal fields in central Germany in response to police provocations in the mines, and the miners flocked to the banners of the VKPD. On March 16 the Social Democrats Hörsing, governor of Saxony, and Severing, Prussian minister of the interior, sent troops and police to suppress the workers. What was in order were defensive tactics, which if successful might permit the proletariat to then go onto the offensive. But the VKPD leadership replied to the government's provocation with a call for armed resistance. In some areas, the workers heeded the call and fought heroically, but even then the fighting was sporadic and by no means generalized. Elsewhere, the call went unanswered. A call for a general strike a week later was similarly unsuccessful, leading to physical fights in many places between a Communist minority and workers under the influence of the Social Democrats.

The VKPD eventually called off the action. Casualties were heavy and thousands were arrested. In *Stillborn Revolution*, Angress estimates that the VKPD probably lost half its membership, and according to official party figures it never fully recouped these losses, even with rapid recruitment in 1923. Most importantly, its trade-union base was significantly weakened.

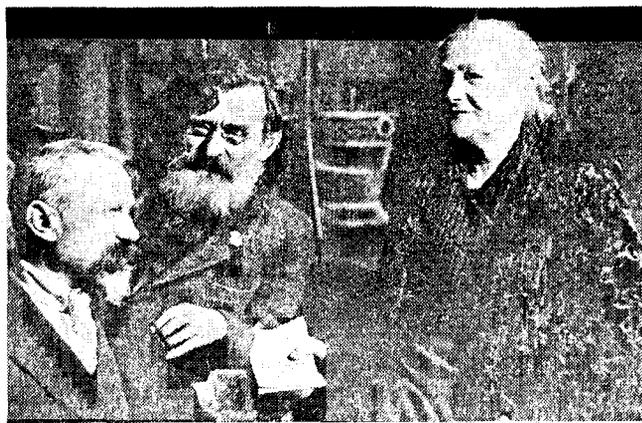


Bundesarchiv



Der Spiegel

Skyrocketing inflation was brutal attack on living standards of workers and petty bourgeoisie. Housewives wait in line to buy food (left); sign outside store says, "22,000 Mark rent is not affordable. Total liquidation! We accept any offer whatsoever."



Dietz Verlag

Some leaders of International Red Aid, Comintern's international defense organization, at CI Fourth Congress in 1922: (from left) Julian Marchlewski, Felix Kon, Clara Zetkin.

At the time of the March Action the KPD was headed by Ernst Meyer, who had replaced Paul Levi in February. Levi, a brilliant but opportunist dilettante, had resigned as VKPD chairman after the *Zentrale* refused to endorse his actions at a January conference of the Italian Socialist Party. While adhering to the Comintern, the Italian leadership under Serrati had refused to accept the twenty-first condition of membership—the need for a break with the reformists. Levi had stood with Serrati. Now, in his pamphlet *Our Road: Against Putschism* (3 April 1921), Levi slanderously asserted that the March Action was a “putsch.” In fact, the workers in Mansfeld had responded en masse to a clear provocation by the SPD cop Hörsing. While many of Levi's other criticisms of the March Action were correct, he went *public* with his attacks on the VKPD leaders—going so far as to compare them with Hitler's crony General Ludendorff—at a time when the party was under fire from the class enemy. Showing no sense of solidarity with the party, as Lenin noted, Levi “tore the party to pieces” (Clara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* [1934]). For this cowardly and spiteful act of indiscipline, Levi was rightly expelled from the party. For a period he had his own organization, but it was only a brief way station en route to returning to the SPD via the USPD.

Just prior to the March Action, the Comintern had sent Hungarian Communist Béla Kun to Germany. Only two years earlier, Kun's disastrous liquidation of the Hungarian Communists into a common party with the social democrats had helped doom the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Now Kun was a prominent advocate of the “theory of the offensive,” insisting that a Communist party must be always on the offensive against the bourgeoisie. This so-called theory was upheld by the VKPD leadership of Meyer, Brandler and Thalheimer and by the “lefts” like Fischer and Maslow.

The Russian Politburo was split down the middle in the discussion on the March Action. This occasion marked a growing political rapprochement between Lenin and Trotsky following the deep rift that had developed between them over the trade-union dispute at the 1921 Tenth Party Congress. They won over Kamenev, thereby gaining the majority on the Politburo. Zinoviev and Bukharin (then a candidate member of the PB) supported the March Action, as did Karl Radek, the CI representative to Germany. For a period of time, the two sides met in separate caucuses, indicating a pre-factional situation.

Eventually the Russian delegation to the 1921 Third Comintern Congress reached agreement on a compromise motion. At the Congress Lenin and Trotsky defeated attempts by the German lefts and others to water down the motion by amendments aimed at gutting the resolution of any criticism of the March Action. The central slogan of the Third Congress was “To power through a previous conquest of the masses!” It marked a recognition that the political and organizational resources of the Communist parties were not yet sufficient for an immediate conquest of power. Lenin devoted much time and attention to the Organizational Resolution, which sought to distill the essence of how the Bolshevik Party functioned and to convey it to the young parties of the CI. Lenin was particularly concerned that these points be grasped by the German party, insisting that the report be written in German and that a German comrade be assigned to make the presentation at the Congress.

An interesting account of this period, which exposes the absurdity of the claims made later that to obtain arms the KPD had to enter the Saxon government, is contained in *From White Cross to Red Flag, the Autobiography of Max Hoelz: Waiter, Soldier, Revolutionary Leader* (1930). A self-taught worker, Hoelz organized a Red Army in the Vogtland area bordering Czechoslovakia during the Kapp Putsch and established an army of 2,500 partisans in central Germany during the March Action. Albeit on a small scale, Hoelz and his militia boldly armed themselves by disarming cops and soldiers and requisitioning munitions from local factories. Hoelz was an impulsive, primitive communist who generally did not wait for instructions before acting, but a smart leadership would have sought to utilize him for his obvious talents as a military leader.

After the March Action, Hoelz was sentenced to life imprisonment, serving seven years before being released under the terms of an amnesty act. Campaigning for his freedom, the Comintern saluted Hoelz in a 25 June 1921 resolution as a “brave fighter in revolt against the capitalist system,” while noting: “Max Hoelz did not act wisely. White terror can only be broken by the mass proletarian uprising, which alone guarantees the victory of the class. But his action sprang from his dedication to the proletarian cause and his hatred of the bourgeoisie.”

At his trial, Hoelz turned the tables on his accusers, saying that the real defendant was bourgeois society. Hoelz had become a pacifist after four years in the army during the war, but his experiences quickly convinced him that you couldn't change anything through words or empty appeals to the bourgeoisie for justice. He had of course resorted to force, he said, but that was nothing compared to the wanton and gratuitous orgy of violence carried out by the perpetrators of the White Terror. The cruelties exacted by the bourgeoisie would harden the workers and make them less soft-headed. Hoelz scoffed at the prosecutor's claim that change could come through elections, asserting: “What happened in 1918 in Germany was no revolution! I recognize only two revolutions: the French and the Russian” (*Hölz' Anklagerede gegen die bürgerliche Gesellschaft* [Hoelz's Prosecution Speech against Bourgeois Society] [1921]).

Brandler was tried a couple of weeks before Hoelz. The contrast was striking: with reprehensible cowardice and lack of solidarity, Brandler denied having anything to do with calls for an armed uprising and sought to save his own skin by pinning the blame for violence on Hoelz and members of the ultraleft Communist Workers Party (KAPD). Brandler

assured the prosecutor that workers rule was compatible with the bourgeois constitution: "I say: the dictatorship of the proletariat is possible even under the German constitution!" He added, "Since 1918 the possibility of determining the fate of Germany through armed uprisings has increasingly diminished." Dissociating himself completely from other targets of state repression, Brandler told the court: "In the KAPD, many think that this prolonged method of seizing power can be achieved through sabotage and individual terror. We expelled them from the party in 1919" (*Der Hochverratsprozess gegen Heinrich Brandler vor dem ausserordentlichen Gericht am 6. Juni 1921 in Berlin* [The High Treason Trial of Heinrich Brandler before the Special Court on 6 June 1921 in Berlin] [1921]).

This is illuminating as to the mindset of the KPD leadership after the March Action. Having burned their fingers, yesterday's enthusiasts for the "permanent offensive" like Brandler, Thalheimer and Meyer now genuflected before bourgeois legalism and respectability. At an August 1923 meeting of the Russian Politburo, Trotsky said trenchantly of the German leadership: "What they have over there is the mindset of a whipped dog after the experience of the failure of its March [Action]" (Recording of discussion "On the International Situation" at the 21 August 1923 session of the Politburo of the CC of the RKP(b), *Istochnik*, May 1995 [our translation]).

In 1919 and 1920 there was no mass communist party that could take advantage of the revolutionary opportunities. In 1921 the Communists mistook a very powerful, but sectionally limited, outburst of class struggle for an insurrectionary situation. But the generalized radicalization precipitated by the Ruhr occupation and a mass Communist Party presented a pre-eminent opportunity to struggle for power. As Anderson noted:

"In 1923 a situation had developed in Germany in which 'anything was possible.' In 1923 the people—and by no means only the industrial working class—had become insurrectionist and the time had really come for that 'offensive strategy' which two years previously had failed so miserably. The situation had changed decidedly.

"But the Communist Party, too, had changed. Unluckily its change had worked in exactly the opposite direction. For fear of repeating the 'ultra-left' mistakes of 1921, the Communists had reversed their policy so thoroughly that they were quite incapable of taking action when the time for action came at last."

—*Hammer or Anvil*

The Origins of the "Workers Government" Slogan

The KPD's blurring of the line between the dictatorship of the proletariat and a parliamentary coalition of workers parties stretched back at least to the time of the Kapp Putsch, described by Lenin as "the German equivalent of the Kornilov revolt," the attempted military overthrow of Kerensky's Provisional Government in Russia in August 1917. The Bolsheviks made a military bloc with Kerensky's forces, but opposed any political support to the government. Following Kornilov's repulse, Lenin, as he had before the July Days, challenged the parties of petty-bourgeois democracy, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, to break from their liberal bloc partners and take power on the basis of their majority in the soviets. Lenin explained:

"The compromise would amount to the following: the Bolsheviks, without making any claim to participate in the government (which is impossible for the internationalists unless a dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasants has been realised), would refrain from demanding the immediate transfer of power to the proletariat and the poor peasants and from employing revolutionary methods of fighting for this demand!"

—Lenin, "On Compromises," September 1917
(*Collected Works*, Vol. 25)

Lenin's point was this: since the Bolsheviks were then a minority of the proletariat, they would forswear revolutionary violence to overthrow a government formed solely of the reformist parties. But Lenin did not imply that such a government was a workers government, nor did he offer to give it political support, much less join it.

The Bolshevik tactic of a military bloc but no political support was also indicated in response to the Kapp Putsch. However, the KPD initially refused to join the general strike

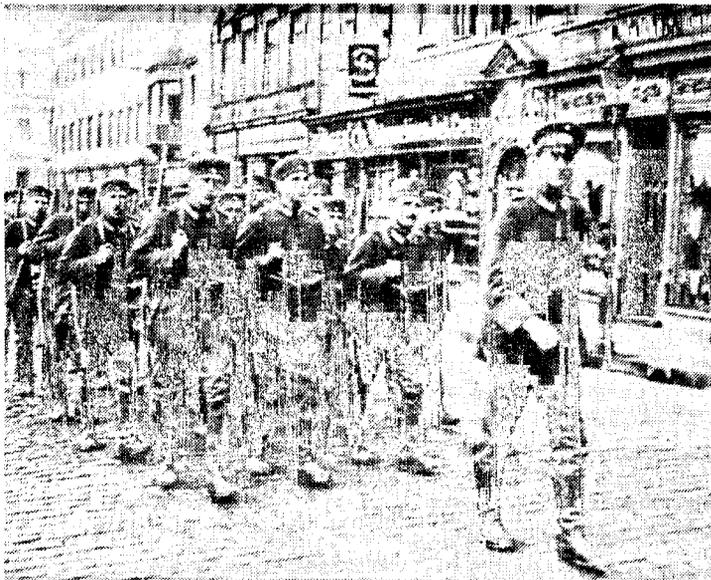
Peter Giersich



Max Hoelz, audacious organizer of numerous small-scale proletarian military actions during 1919-21. Armed workers move into battle in the Ruhr after Kapp Putsch, Dortmund, April 1920 (right).

Robert Sennecke





Der Spiegel



Militärverlag der DDR

Reichswehr sent into Freiberg in Saxony to put down proletarian unrest, 1923 (left). Workers' barricades in Hamburg during 1923 uprising.

against the putsch and when it reversed its sectarian line a day later, it flipped to an opportunist posture toward the reformists. Thus, when Legien proposed a government based on the ADGB trade-union federation, the SPD and USPD after the putsch collapsed, the KPD announced that it would be a "loyal opposition" to such a "socialist government" if it excluded "bourgeois-capitalist parties." It asserted:

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

Citing this passage in an appendix to "*Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder* (April-May 1920), Lenin stated that the "loyal opposition" tactic was in the main correct, explaining it as "a compromise, which is really necessary and should consist in renouncing, for a certain period, all attempts at the forcible overthrow of a government which enjoys the confidence of a majority of the urban workers." But Lenin also noted:

"It is impossible to pass over in silence the fact that a government consisting of social-traitors should not (in an official statement by the Communist Party) be called 'socialist'; that one should not speak of the exclusion of 'bourgeois-capitalist parties,' when the parties both of the Scheidemanns and of the Kautskys and Crispiens are petty-bourgeois-democratic parties."

Lenin insisted that it was thoroughly wrong to pretend that reformist swindlers like the leaders of the SPD and USPD could "go beyond the bounds of bourgeois democracy, which, in its turn, cannot but be a dictatorship of capital."

This lesson was never absorbed by the KPD leaders. The Legien proposal was in any case scotched because of opposition from the USPD's left wing (which was already drawing close to the KPD). But it is evident that the KPD leadership's idea of the "loyal opposition" tactic differed from Lenin's and was more akin to Stalin and Kamenev's line in March 1917 of political support to the bourgeois Provisional Government "in so far as it struggles against reaction or counter-revolution."

When USPD leader Ernst Däumig (who later joined the

KPD) denounced Legien's proposal at a March 23 mass meeting of the Berlin factory councils, rejecting cooperation with the "compromised right-wing" SPD, it was Wilhelm Pieck, a leader of the KPD, who spoke and rebuked Däumig *from the right*:

"The present situation is not ripe enough for a council republic, but it is for a purely workers' government. As revolutionary workers, a purely workers' government is exceedingly desirable. But it can only be a transitional phenomenon.... The USPD has rejected the workers' government, and has thereby failed to protect the interests of the working class at a politically advantageous moment."

—quoted in Arthur Rosenberg, "The Kapp Putsch and the Working Class" (excerpted and translated by Mike Jones from *Geschichte der Weimarer Republik* [History of the Weimar Republic] [1961])

Clearly, as early as the spring of 1920 at least some KPD leaders viewed a social-democratic parliamentary government as a halfway house to workers rule.

Following the fusion with the left wing of the USPD, the VKPD found itself holding the balance of power between the SPD and USPD, on the one hand, and the right-wing bourgeois parties on the other, in regional parliaments (*Landtags*) in Saxony and Thuringia. After the November 1920 elections to the Saxon *Landtag*, the KPD decided to support the formation of an SPD/USPD government and voted for the budget, which of course included funding for the police, the courts and the prisons. The budget vote constituted a vote of *political confidence* in this capitalist government.

"*Left-Wing Communism* has been willfully misinterpreted and misused over the years by fake leftists to justify opportunist maneuvering. But in this work as well as in his intervention in the Third Congress discussion on the united front, Lenin sought to imbue the young Communist parties of the West with the understanding that the conquest of power had to be prepared through a patient and methodical struggle to win the proletariat to the program of communism, including through the use of intelligent tactics aimed at exposing the social-democratic misleaders.

In spite of Lenin's sharp criticism of the KPD in "*Left-Wing Communism*," in November 1921 *Die Rote Fahne* published "Theses on the Relationship to Socialist Governments."

The theses asserted that such "socialist governments" were the "immediate result" of mass proletarian struggles "at a stage when the proletariat lacks the consciousness and power to establish its dictatorship." The KPD promised to facilitate such governments and "defend them against bourgeois rightists, just as it actively defends the bourgeois republic against the monarchy." This statement of "lesser evilism" blurs any distinction between a *military bloc* with bourgeois democrats against right-wing reactionaries and *political support* to bourgeois democrats in the form of the Social Democracy. The theses did stop short of advocating KPD entry into a regional government. But there was an inexorable logic posed here: If one could support a capitalist government from the outside, then why not join it in order to "push it to the left"? It didn't take long before debates on exactly this issue broke out within the KPD.

The Comintern, notably Zinoviev and Radek, played a role in this, not only approving the decisions of the KPD but actively driving forward such a perspective. In a 10 November 1921 letter expressing "serious reservations" about the KPD theses, Radek explicitly laid open the possibility of entering an SPD government:

"The Communist Party can join any government with the will to struggle seriously with capitalism.... The Communist Party is not an opponent in principle of participation in a workers government. It stands for a soviet government, but in no way does this specify how the working class will achieve one. It is just as likely that a soviet government will be won by force in a revolution against a bourgeois government as that it can arise in the unfolding struggle of the working class in defense of a democratically attained socialist government that honestly defends the working class against capital."

—cited by Arnold Reisberg, *An den Quellen der Einheitsfrontpolitik: Der Kampf der KPD um die Aktionseinheit in Deutschland 1921-1922* [At the Sources of United-Front Politics: The KPD's Fight for Unity in Action in Germany 1921-1922] (1971)

The thrust of this was duly incorporated in KPD statements. An 8 December 1921 circular asserted that "The KPD must say to the workers that it is willing to facilitate, by all parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means, the coming into being of a socialist workers government, and that it is also willing to join such a government if it has a guarantee that this government will represent the interests and demands of the working class in the fight against the bourgeoisie, will seize material assets, prosecute the Kapp criminals, free the revolutionary workers from prison, etc." (Political Circular No. 12, 8 December 1921).



Europäische Verlagsanstalt



SED-Parteiarchiv

KPD factional antagonists: Heinrich Brandler, Ruth Fischer. Neither Rights nor "Lefts" had perspective of struggling for proletarian state power.

The same month a CI resolution, later appended to the "Theses on Comintern Tactics" adopted at the CI's Fourth Congress in 1922, endorsed a KPD decision to "support a homogeneous workers government that is inclined to take up with some degree of seriousness the struggle against the power of the capitalists" (*Protokoll des Vierten Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale [1923] reprinted by Karl Liebknecht Verlag [1972]). In January 1922, the ECCI advised the KPD to publicly declare its willingness to enter a "workers government of struggle against the bourgeoisie" (Reisberg). The change in terminology from "socialist workers government" to "workers government" was aimed at leaving open the possibility of bringing in the Catholic trade unions!

The KPD couched its opportunist policy toward SPD/USPD governments as an application of "united-front tactics." But the real issue here was that the KPD leaders were not prepared to take power through leading the proletariat to smash the bourgeois state and replace it with organs of workers power. The KPD leaders (as well as Zinoviev/Radek) saw the reformist and centrist leaders not as obstacles—the last line of defense of the disintegrating capitalist order—but as potential (if vacillating) revolutionary allies. Their policy was, in essence, "Make the SPD lefts fight!" This is reflected in an article by August Kleine (Guralski), a Comintern representative to the KPD who was known as a "Zinoviev man":

"Overcoming the right wing of the SPD and USPD; the strengthening of their left wing and control of the socialist government by the organized working class are the prerequisite for the struggle of the masses for vital reforms.

"These are simultaneously the preconditions that we pose for our entry into the socialist government. *But carrying out these demands means the creation of a workers government.*"

— "Der Kampf um die Arbeiterregierung" [The Fight for a Workers Government] *Die Internationale*, 27 June 1922

Such views did not go unchallenged inside the KPD. One example was Martha Heller, a correspondent from Kiel, who was quoted as follows in an article by the right-wing KPD leader Paul Böttcher:

"Suddenly everything we hitherto held to be the common beliefs of all Communists has disappeared. Revolution, mass struggle to smash the bourgeoisie's apparatus of economic and political power is magicked away, and we obtain the class government of the proletariat simply by casting votes, by accepting ministerial posts."

— "Falsche Schlussfolgerungen: Eine Replik zur sächsischen Frage" [Wrong Conclusions: A Response on the Saxony Question] *Die Internationale*, 18 June 1922

In the summer and fall of 1922, a major debate raged within the KPD over the Saxon *Landtag*, where the KPD held the balance of power. In July, the *Zentrale* took a position to vote for the provincial budget. The *Zentrale* subsequently reversed its position when the SPD refused to pass a face-saving amnesty bill, but the KPD's parliamentary fraction dragged its feet. It wasn't until late August that the SPD provincial government was brought down.

But even as the KPD voted to bring down the government, it looked to new elections scheduled for November to potentially increase the number of KPD deputies and create "the possibility of expanding the basis of the government through the entry of the Communist Party into the government." The KPD drafted a proposal laying out "ten conditions" for entry into a "workers government" with the SPD, which later became the basis for negotiations. The results of the

November elections were 10 deputies for the KPD, 42 for the SPD, and 45 for the right-wing parties. Shortly thereafter, the SPD sent a letter to the KPD inviting it to "join the government, while recognizing the Reich and State constitutions" (Reisberg, citing *Vorwärts* No. 535, 11 November 1922). This proposal precipitated a split in the KPD leadership; the issue was then thrown into the lap of the Comintern at the 1922 Fourth Congress.

Where the sharp differences within the German party had been openly fought out at the Third Congress, this was not the case in 1922. In the interim, Lenin had suffered his first stroke, and the main Comintern operatives in Germany became Radek and Zinoviev, much to the detriment of the KPD. Lenin's ill health prevented him from playing more than a limited role at the Fourth Congress. There was no agenda point to address the dispute over Saxony and the KPD's parliamentary tactics more generally. These matters were only referred to obliquely in the Congress sessions.

The question of entry into the regional *Landtag* was taken up at a consultation between German and Russian delegates (which apparently included Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek). According to the East German historian Arnold Reisberg, documentary reports on the conversation have not been preserved. From the memoirs of some of the participants and from what came out in the wash following the October 1923 debacle, it seems evident, however, that the Russian delegation spiked the proposal favored by the majority of the KPD leadership to enter the Saxon government. A 5 April 1924 letter by Zinoviev to Clara Zetkin notes that the Russian comrades were unanimously opposed to the entry. Similar statements were made by Zinoviev and others at the January 1924 ECCI post-mortem on the German events. However, we do not know the political parameters of the Russian intervention, though it undoubtedly saved the KPD from overtly crossing the class line at that time. The meeting was never reported into the Fourth Congress. There was never a real discussion inside the KPD (or CI) to correct the ominous parliamentarist bulge of the German party, and the KPD went into the critical events of 1923 politically disarmed.

The 1922 Fourth Comintern Congress

The beheading of the German party leadership in 1919 brought its every weakness to the fore. The KPD tended to polarize between staid, plodding parliamentarists like Meyer, Zetkin, Brandler and Thalheimer on the one hand and petty-bourgeois demagogues like Fischer and Maslow on the other. Zetkin's recollections of Lenin from this period are particularly interesting, since her memoirs (unlike those of the mendacious Ruth Fischer) do not purport to have Lenin agreeing with her about everything. According to Zetkin, Lenin had little use for the Fischers and Maslows: "Such 'leftists' are like the Bourbons. They have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. As far as I can see, there is behind the 'left' criticism of the mistakes in carrying out the united front tactics, the desire to do away with those tactics altogether." He told Zetkin that he considered Fischer to be a "personal accident, politically unstable and uncertain." But if such people got a hearing from revolutionary workers inside the KPD, said Lenin, it was the fault of the party leadership:

"But I tell you frankly that I am just as little impressed by your 'Center' which does not understand, which hasn't the energy to have done with such petty demagogues. Surely it is an easy thing to replace such people, to withdraw the revolutionary-minded workers from them and educate them politically. Just because they are revolutionary-minded workers,

while radicals of the type in question are at bottom the worst sort of opportunists."

—Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (1934)

In Lenin's one speech to the Fourth Congress, he emphasized the importance of the Third Congress Organizational Resolution. He worried that the resolution was "too Russian," by which he did *not* mean (as has often been misrepresented) that it was irrelevant to West Europe but rather that it was difficult for the young Communist parties to grasp. He urged that they "study in the special sense, in order that they may really understand the organization, structure, method and content of revolutionary work." Lenin believed that the Communist parties—the German party in particular—had not yet assimilated the Bolshevik revolutionary experience. Tragically, he was proven right.

The "Workers Governments" Discussion

The discussion at the Fourth Congress on the "workers government" slogan took place mainly under Zinoviev's ECCI report. Neither Lenin nor Trotsky were at the session. In his opening presentation, Zinoviev reasserted his statement at an expanded ECCI plenum several months earlier that the workers government was simply a popular designation for the dictatorship of the proletariat. But when he was challenged by Radek and Ernst Meyer, Zinoviev retreated. The ensuing codification in the "Comintern Theses on Tactics" is deliberately obfuscationist and at times self-contradictory, incorporating different political thrusts. The theses recognize *five* possible varieties of "workers governments," grouped in two categories:

"I. Ostensible Workers Governments:

- "(1) *Liberal* workers government, such as existed in Australia and is also possible in the near future in England.
- "(2) *Social-democratic* workers government (Germany).

"II. Genuine Workers Governments

- "(3) Government of the workers and poorer peasants. Such a possibility exists in the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, etc.
- "(4) Workers government with participation of Communists.
- "(5) Genuine revolutionary proletarian workers government, which, in its pure form, can be embodied only through the Communist Party."

—*Protokoll des Vierten Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*

(This is our translation from the German. The English-language *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* [Ink Links, 1980] is not reliable; here, for example, it omits the classification of workers governments into two categories.)

The schema of a sliding scale of "workers governments" ranging from the not-so-good to the very-good-indeed was taken by the KPD leadership as an endorsement of its conciliation of and submissiveness to the left Social Democrats. The theses also state that "The Communists must under certain circumstances declare their willingness to form a workers government with non-Communist workers parties and workers' organizations. However, they may do so only if there are guarantees that the workers government will really wage a struggle against the bourgeoisie."

Zinoviev tried to delimit the conditions in which the workers government could be realized: "It can only be adopted in those countries where the relationships of power render its adoption opportune, where the problem of power, the problem of government, both on the parliamentary and on the extra-parliamentary field, has come to the front." But in situations where the question of power is being raised on the streets—i.e., a prerevolutionary situation—the most fatal mistake is to



Inter-Verso

German delegation is received by Zinoviev in Moscow, 1924. Banner reads, "Five Years of the Proletarian General Staff of the World Revolution, 1919-1924." Karl Radek (right) eulogized fascist Schlageter, executed by French occupation authorities, kicking off campaign of KPD appeals to German nationalists.

Der Spiegel



confuse the workers as to the class nature of the state.

What delegates were really concerned about was whether the Communists could join a coalition government with the Social Democracy. In that regard, Zinoviev asserted:

"A third type is the so-called Coalition government; that is, a government in which Social-Democrats, Trade Union leaders, and even perhaps Communists, take part. One can imagine such a possibility. Such a government is not yet the dictatorship of the proletariat, but it is perhaps a starting point for the dictatorship. When all goes right, we can kick one social-democrat after another out of the government until the power is in the hands of the Communists. This is a historical possibility."

—*Fourth Congress of the Communist International, Abridged Report of Meetings Held at Petrograd and Moscow, Nov. 7-Dec. 3, 1922* (London, CPGB, undated)

This nonsense is a gross denial of the lessons of the October Revolution. Zinoviev's whole conception assumes that the other side—the social democrats and the bourgeoisie—are incapable of thinking. In practice, things worked out quite differently in Germany a year later, as they were bound to. As soon as the KPD announced its coalition with the SPD in October 1923, the Reich government took immediate steps to suppress it militarily. Correspondingly, the idea that there exists a halfway house between the dictatorship of the proletariat and that of the bourgeoisie constitutes a revision of the Marxist-Leninist understanding of the state. The working class cannot simply "take hold" of the existing state machinery and run it in its own class interests. The bourgeois state must be overthrown through workers revolution and a new state—the dictatorship of the proletariat—must be erected in its place.

It did not take the German developments in October 1923 to demonstrate the dangers of coalition with the social democrats; the Comintern already had experienced several such disastrous experiments. In Finland in 1918, a pro-Bolshevik minority in the social-democratic party proclaimed a dictatorship of the proletariat before even forming its own Communist organization. What ensued was a massive bloodbath of the Finnish proletariat by General Mannerheim's forces in league with German imperialism. In the spring of 1919, soviet republics were proclaimed in Hungary and Bavaria. The Hungarian Soviet Republic was formed on the basis of a reunification of Béla Kun's small Communist forces with the Social Democracy. In Bavaria, the government included

the Independents and even a section of the SPD, some of whose ministers then organized a punitive expedition to crush the revolutionary government. Eugen Leviné heroically led the defense against the reactionary onslaught. But both the Bavarian and Hungarian Soviet Republics were soon drowned in blood.

Much of the Fourth Congress discussion suffered from trying to base programmatic generalizations on historical speculations. But tactics are concrete, and depend on particular circumstances. Two Polish delegates, Marchlewski and Domski (a Polish "left" who was aligned with Ruth Fischer) spoke particularly well on this point. Marchlewski said:

"I would like to speak a few words on the slogan of the Workers' Government. I believe there has been too much philosophical speculation on the matter. ("Very true," from the German benches.) The criticism of this slogan is directed on three lines—the Workers' Government is either a Scheidemann Government or a coalition government of the Communists with the social traitors. It finds support either in Parliament or in the Factory Councils. It is either the expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat, or it is not. I believe that philosophical speculation is out of place—for we have practical historical experience. What did the Bolsheviks do in 1917 before they conquered power? They demanded 'All Power to the Soviets.' What did this mean at that time? It meant giving power to the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries who were in the majority in the Soviets. It meant at that time a Workers' Government in which social traitors participated, and which was directed against the dictatorship of the proletariat. But this slogan was a good weapon of agitation in the hands of the Bolsheviks."

Domski observed:

"Comrade Radek has solaced me in private conversation that such a government is not contemplated for Poland (Comrade Radek: I never said that). Oh, then Poland will also have to bear the punishment of this sort of government. It is thus an international problem. Comrade Radek says that the workers' government is not a necessity but a possibility, and it were folly to reject such possibilities. The question is whether if we inscribe all the possibilities on our banner we try to accelerate the realization of these possibilities. I believe that it is quite possible that at the eleventh hour a so-called workers' government should come which would not be a proletarian dictatorship. But I believe when such a government comes, it will be the resultant of various forces such as our struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, the struggle of the social-democrats against it and so forth. Is it proper to build our plans on such an assumption? I think not, because I believe that we should insist on our struggle for the proletarian dictatorship."

—*Fourth Congress Abridged Report*

As the old Comintern saying went, the German party was the biggest, but the Polish party was the best.

Trotsky Drew the Lessons

In a December 1922 report on the Fourth Congress, Trotsky made the following analogy in introducing the Saxony question:

"Under certain conditions the slogan of a workers' government can become a reality in Europe. That is to say, a moment may arrive when the Communists together with the left elements of the Social Democracy will set up a workers' government in a way similar to ours in Russia when we created a workers' and peasants' government together with the Left Social-Revolutionaries. Such a phase would constitute a transition to the proletarian dictatorship, the full and completed one."

—*The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Volume II

This analogy is totally inappropriate. The Left Social Revolutionaries entered the government *after the proletarian seizure of power* and on the basis of soviet power, whereas in Germany the question concerned a regional bourgeois parliament in a capitalist state! Trotsky explained that the CI had opposed the KPD entering the Saxon *Landtag* at that time. But he added:

"In the Comintern we gave the following answer: If you, our German Communist comrades, are of the opinion that a revolution is possible in the next few months in Germany, then we would advise you to participate in Saxony in a coalition government and to utilize your ministerial posts in Saxony for the furthering of political and organizational tasks and for transforming Saxony in a certain sense into a Communist drill-ground so as to have a revolutionary stronghold already reinforced in a period of preparation for the approaching outbreak of the revolution."

Trotsky's "drillground" conception assumed that the major battalions of the German proletariat were ready to break *decisively* from the bourgeois order and embark on the course of insurrection under Communist leadership. In other words, he assumed exactly what still had to be forged, tested and tempered. When the KPD did enter the governments in Saxony and Thuringia the following October, Trotsky defended this in several speeches, including a 19 October report to the All-Russian Union of Metal Workers and another two days later to the Conference of Political Workers in the Red Army and the Red Navy (*The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky, How the Revolution Armed*, Vol. V [New Park Publications, 1981]). Trotsky may not have been aware of the degree to which the KPD had sunk into parliamentarism, but the tactic he defended could only have reinforced such appetites.

Trotsky began to evaluate the reasons for the defeat almost immediately. Though the German events did not figure as a central issue in the fight of the 1923 Opposition, Trotsky made a preliminary statement in a December article:

"If the Communist Party had abruptly changed the pace of its work and had profited by the five or six months that history accorded it for direct political, organizational, technical preparation for the seizure of power, the outcome of the events could have been quite different.... Here a new orientation was needed, a new tone, a new way of approaching the masses, a new interpretation and application of the united front...."

"If the party surrendered its exceptional positions without resistance, the main reason is that it proved unable to free itself, at the beginning of the new phase (May-July 1923), from the automatism of its preceding policy, established as if it was meant for years to come, and to put forward squarely in its agitation, action, organization, and tactics the problem of taking power."

—Trotsky, "Tradition and Revolutionary Policy" (December 1923, later published as part of *The New Course*)

Trotsky drew a parallel between the routinism of the KPD leadership and the conservatism of the newly crystallizing bureaucratic stratum in the Soviet Union. Stigmatized as a "new boy" because of his more recent adherence to the Bolshevik Party, Trotsky ridiculed the "old Bolsheviks" (like Kamenev) who stood on the ground of what Lenin called the "antiquated" formula of the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" in order to oppose Lenin's April Theses in 1917.

Trotsky's re-evaluation of the German events led him to an implicit self-criticism of his earlier, administrative stress on the need to set a date for the insurrection. In June 1924, he wrote that "a sharp tactical turn was needed" from the moment of the occupation of the Ruhr:

"The question of setting a date for the uprising can have significance only in this connection and with this perspective. Insurrection is an art. An art presumes a clear aim, a precise plan, and consequently a schedule.

"The most important thing, however, was this: to ensure *in good time* the decisive tactical turn toward the seizure of power. And this was not done. This was the chief and fatal omission. From this followed the basic contradiction. On the one hand, the party expected a revolution, while on the other hand, because it had burned its fingers in the March events, it avoided, until the last months of 1923, the very idea of organizing a revolution, i.e., preparing an insurrection."

—Trotsky, "Through What Stage Are We Passing?", 21 June 1924 (*Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1923-25*)

The importance of such a turn and the necessity to politically combat and overcome the conservative, Menshevik resistance in the party to this turn is developed most fully in *The Lessons of October*.

Where Trotsky tried to address the root cause of the German defeat, for Zinoviev the main point of the ECCI plenum convened in January 1924 to discuss the October debacle was to amnesty his *own* role and scapegoat Brandler. (The Polish Communists submitted a letter sharply criticizing the ECCI's failure to take any responsibility for the German disaster.) In his pamphlet *Probleme der deutschen Revolution* (Hamburg, 1923) and again at the plenum, the infinitely flexible Zinoviev had taken to again asserting that the workers government meant the dictatorship of the proletariat and cynically attacked the Brandlerites for denying this. Having personally signed the order for the KPD to enter the governments of Saxony and Thuringia, Zinoviev couldn't very well criticize Brandler for that. Instead he insisted that Brandler had not conducted himself as a Communist minister should...in what was a bourgeois government! Leadership of the KPD was soon turned over to Fischer and Maslow. And compounding the October defeat, the majority line in the ECCI pushed by Zinoviev argued that the revolutionary moment had not passed but rather was impending, a position that could only be disorienting.

At the January 1924 ECCI plenum, Radek submitted a set of theses whose purpose in part was to alibi the leadership of Brandler (and Radek himself) in the 1923 events. Trotsky, then ill, was not at the plenum. Radek contacted him by telephone in an effort to get his support. Although he later acknowledged that he had placed too much confidence in Radek in agreeing to have his name appended to a document which he had never read, Trotsky explained that he had endorsed the theses on the assurance that they recognized that the revolutionary situation had passed. In a March 1926 letter to the Italian Communist Amadeo Bordiga, Trotsky stressed that "I lent my signature because the theses affirmed that the German party had let the revolutionary situation lapse

and that there began for us in Germany a phase that was favorable not for an immediate offensive but for defense and preparation. That was for me the decisive element at the time.”

Since Radek had been allied with Brandler on Germany, and Trotsky was associated with Radek in the 1923 Opposition, Trotsky’s signature on Radek’s theses made it easy for Zinoviev and later Stalin to attack him as a “Brandlerite.” This was, of course, an entirely cynical game. Trotsky opposed scapegoating Brandler, not out of political solidarity, but because he knew the Comintern leadership was also complicit and that Fischer and Maslow were no better. Trotsky’s differences with Brandler were spelled out in a number of speeches and writings. This was well known in the upper circles of the Russian party, but less so among European Communists. Trotsky was compelled several times to repeat the explanation he had made to Bordiga, including in a September 1931 letter to Albert Treint and one in June 1932 to the Czech Communist Neurath.

Trotsky’s Later Writings

In his later writings, Trotsky fully recognized that the “workers government” (or “workers and peasants government”) slogan had been, in the hands of the degenerating Comintern, a theoretical opening for the most monstrous opportunism. In the Transitional Program (1938), Trotsky wrote:

“This formula, ‘workers’ and farmers’ government,’ first appeared in the agitation of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and was definitely accepted after the October Revolution. In the final instance it represented nothing more than the popular designation for the already established dictatorship of the proletariat.... “The chief accusation which the Fourth International advances against the traditional organizations of the proletariat is the fact that they do not wish to tear themselves away from the political semi-corpse of the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions the demand, systematically addressed to the old leadership: ‘Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power!’ is an extremely important weapon for exposing the treacherous character of the parties and organizations of the Second, Third and Amsterdam Internationals. The slogan, ‘workers’ and farmers’ government,’ is thus acceptable to us only in the sense that it had in 1917 with the Bolsheviks, i.e., as an anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist slogan, but in no case in that ‘democratic’ sense which later the epigones gave it, transforming it from a bridge to socialist revolution into the chief barrier upon its path.”

However, to our knowledge, Trotsky never explicitly repudiated the Fourth Congress formulations on the “workers government” slogan.

That resolution has since been used as a theoretical opening for pseudo-Trotskyist revisionism of all stripes. In a series of articles in Max Shachtman’s *Labor Action* in October-November 1953, Hal Draper cited the Fourth Congress discussion in an attempt to argue that a “workers government” need not be a workers state. The purpose of this was to embellish the Attlee Labour government elected in Britain in 1945. In the early 1960s, Joseph Hansen of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) likewise drew on the 1922 CI discussion to buttress his claim that the Castro regime in Cuba was a “workers and farmers government.” This was in the service of the SWP’s uncritical enthusing over the Castroite leadership of the Cuban deformed workers state. Hansen even extended the label to the neocolonial government of Algeria under Ben Bella, using it as a theoretical basis to extend political support to bourgeois populist and nationalist regimes.

Hansen’s revisionist apologias filled up a whole *Educational for Socialists* bulletin (April 1974) on the “Workers and Farmers Government.” In addition to the Fourth Congress



Interfoto

Hitler’s attempted 1923 putsch in Bavaria was easily suppressed by government. But German proletariat’s failure to solve crisis of bourgeois rule by revolution allowed bourgeoisie to hand power to Nazis in 1933, unleashing genocide and world war.

theses, Hansen also seized on the following guarded speculation by Trotsky in the Transitional Program:

“One cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc.), the petty-bourgeois parties including the Stalinists may go further than they wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie. In any case one thing is not to be doubted: even if this highly improbable variant somewhere at some time becomes a reality and the ‘workers’ and farmers’ government’ in the above-mentioned sense is established in fact, it would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Just as the Stalinists (and other opportunists) abused Lenin’s “Left-Wing” Communism to justify the most grotesque class-collaborationist betrayals, clever revisionists like Hansen sought to impute to Trotsky their own reformist capitulation to non-proletarian forces.

The Revolutionary Tendency (RT)—predecessor of the Spartacist League—waged a sharp struggle within the SWP against the leadership’s capitulation to Castro. In an 11 June 1961 document titled “A Note on the Current Discussion—Labels and Purposes” (*SWP Discussion Bulletin* Vol. 22, No. 16 [June 1961]), James Robertson, one of the leaders of the RT, pointed to the link between terminology and political appetite:

“And over the Cuban question the same underlying issue is posed—what do you *want*, comrades? Take the use of the transitional demand ‘the workers and peasants government.’ It is transitional right enough, that is it is a bridge, but bridges go *two* ways. *Either* the workers and peasants government is the central demand of the Trotskyists in urging the workers and peasants to take power into their own hands through their mass organizations—i.e., the struggle for soviet power (this is the use the Cuban Trotskyists put it to); *or* it is a label to apply from afar to the existing government and thus serve, not for the first time, as an orthodox sounding formula to side-step the consummation of proletarian revolution and to justify revolution ‘from above’ by leaders ‘one of whose principal difficulties is imbuing the working people with a sense of revolutionary social responsibility.’

"In short, is the Cuban revolution to pass forward over that bridge to soviet power or is an American SWP majority to go backwards?"

Indeed, the SWP's adaptation to Castro marked its descent into centrism and, a few years later, reformism.

In the course of fusion discussions with the Communist Working Collective (CWC) in 1971, which had broken to the left from Maoism, we discovered that they had similar misgivings about the Fourth Congress (see *Marxist Bulletin* No. 10, "From Maoism to Trotskyism"). The comrades in the CWC were very familiar with Lenin's writings on the state. They knew that in the imperialist epoch there were only two types of state, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, corresponding to the two fundamental classes—what then was this vague "workers government" in between? The convergence of views over this augured well for a solid revolutionary regroupment!

In the early 1930s, Trotsky wrote quite a bit about the urgency of applying the united-front tactic against the Hitlerite fascists. Yet the "workers government" à la Zinoviev, i.e., a KPD/SPD government, is *never* an element in Trotsky's propaganda. His formulations on the state are likewise much sharper and clearer than in 1923. Trotsky is categorical, for example, that the cops are the class enemy, even if they are under Social Democratic influence:

"The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker."

— "What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat," 27 January 1932 (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*)

Seeking to justify their invariable electoral support to the social democracy, latter-day centrists and reformists acclaim the "workers government" as the highest form of the united front. In contrast, Trotsky wrote in "What Next?":

"Just as the trade union is the rudimentary form of the united front in the economic struggle, so *the soviet is the highest form of the united front* under the conditions in which the proletariat enters the epoch of fighting for power.

"The soviet in itself possesses no miraculous powers. It is the class representation of the proletariat, with all of the latter's strong and weak points. But precisely and only because of this does the soviet afford to the workers of divers political trends the organizational opportunity to unite their efforts in the revolutionary struggle for power."

But against the fetishists of the united front, Trotsky stressed that soviets "by themselves" were not a substitute for a communist vanguard in leading the struggle for power:

"The united front, in general, is never a substitute for a strong revolutionary party; it can only aid the latter to become stronger....

"To avow that the soviets 'by themselves' are capable of leading the struggle of the proletariat for power—is only to sow abroad vulgar soviet fetishism. Everything depends upon the party that leads the soviets."

The Fight for New October Revolutions

The last serious examination of the German events in the Trotskyist movement was an exchange in the pages of the American SWP's *Fourth International* in 1942-43 between the German Trotskyist Walter Held ("Why the German Revolution Failed," December 1942 and January 1943) and Jean van Heijenoort, using the pseudonym Marc Loris ("The German Revolution in the Leninist Period," March 1943). The exchange has the merit of attempting to situate the KPD's problems in 1923 in the political weaknesses which plagued

the German party from its inception. Held viewed the utterly justified expulsion of Paul Levi in 1921 as the definitive error which doomed the 1923 German Revolution to defeat, even seeing in Levi's expulsion the seeds of the Stalinist bureaucratic degeneration of the Comintern. Van Heijenoort skewered Held for his support to Levi. At the same time, Van Heijenoort wrongly sneered at Held's correct criticism of Trotsky for failing to carry out Lenin's instructions to wage a fight against Stalin at the Russian Twelfth Party Congress in 1923. Held did believe there were revolutionary possibilities in 1923, and he despised Brandler. Held also correctly condemned the KPD's entry into the governments in Saxony and Thuringia—though not acknowledging that Trotsky himself supported this.

One's appreciation of the history of the workers movement very much correlates with programmatic outlook. All manner of fake Trotskyists view the events of 1923 through a prism distorted by social democracy. Pierre Broué's *Révolution en Allemagne 1917-1923* (1971) uncritically supports the CI's Fourth Congress line on the "workers government." A pamphlet published by the German Workers Power group (Arbeitermacht) on the November Revolution claims that the Ebert-Scheidemann regime—butchers of Liebknecht and Luxemburg—was a "workers government," albeit of a "non-genuine" type. Pierre Frank, a longtime leader of the United Secretariat (USec), wrote a polemic denouncing Zinoviev for correctly asserting (on occasion) that a workers government meant the dictatorship of the proletariat.

These groups mystify the fact that a parliamentary regime headed by a social-democratic party is a *capitalist* government, not a "workers government" or a "reformist government." This is in line with their own politics of operating as pressure groups on the mass reformist parties. The perfection of this social-democratic outlook was the Allende Unidad Popular government in Chile in the early 1970s—a bourgeois coalition of Allende's Socialists, the Communists and some smaller capitalist parties—which lulled the working masses with suicidal illusions in the "constitutional" military, and paved the way for Pinochet's bloody coup.

Brandler himself moved sharply away from Leninism, becoming a leader of the Communist Right Opposition and hardening up around social-democratic politics. In an exchange with Isaac Deutscher, Brandler oozed with the smug satisfaction of a provincial German social democrat who had nothing whatsoever to learn from the Bolsheviks:

"Only now do I realize how tremendous was the treasure of ideas which the German workers' movement acquired by its own exertions and quite independently. We were so impressed by the achievements of the Bolsheviks that we forgot our own. Take Lenin's *Imperialism*, which is quite correctly regarded as a standard work. Already at the 1907 International Congress in Stuttgart, and at other conferences at the end of the previous century, most of the ideas which Lenin developed in his *Imperialism* were already being debated, mainly by Kautsky."

— *New Left Review* No. 105, September-October 1977

Lenin's *Imperialism* was a polemic *against* Kautsky, whose theory of "superimperialism"—today resurrected by the "anti-globalization" crowd—is premised on the lie that national antagonisms can be transcended within the framework of capitalism and therefore interimperialist war is not inherent in the capitalist system. It was in counterposition to such social-pacifism and social-chauvinism that Lenin launched the struggle for the Third International!

As for the British Labourite *Revolutionary History*, the editorial in its 1994 issue on Germany couches its anti-



VAAP photos

Leon Trotsky in 1917. Petrograd demonstration, June 1917, raises Bolshevik slogans: "Down With Counterrevolution! Down With the Ten Capitalist Ministers! All Power to the Soviet of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants Deputies!"



revolutionary thesis in a series of questions:

"Was this series of events a failed revolutionary opportunity? Was the upsurge aborted into a bourgeois republic by the treachery of Social Democracy and the failure of the revolutionary left? Was a liberal bourgeois republic a possibility? Were the glaring mistakes of the Communists a result of their own ineptitude, or due to the meddling of the Communist International? How far were the policies of the German Communist Party swayed by the Soviet preference for an alliance with right wing German militarists, a coalition of the two outsiders excluded from the Versailles system? Could more have been gained out of the situation than what finally emerged? Was the later triumph of Hitler made inevitable by the events of this time? If the German Communist Party had not been established, and the working class had maintained its organisational unity, could Hitler's victory have been prevented?"

Where *Revolutionary History's* line of reasoning leads is clear, even if it is necessary to read between the lines, as is usually the case with this "non-party" journal. The line goes something like this: the proletarian revolution did not triumph in Germany in 1918-23 and only sectarians and madmen could think it was in the offing; in the Soviet Union, where in 1917 the revolution did triumph, the Bolshevik leadership soon proved to consist mostly of misguided fanatics and frauds. What's left for *RH*, then, but to lament the split of the proletarian revolutionary forces from the Second International? At all costs they seek to deny the fact that Hitler's rise to power was the result of the SPD's craven attachment to the Weimar Republic, combined with the Communist Party's inability to decisively put an end to it in 1923. Fascism, the brutal oppression imposed by imperialism on the colonial masses, interimperialist war, racism—in the eyes of a social democrat, these are not the necessary outgrowths of the rotting bourgeois social order but unfortunate aberrations which episodically mar the orderly, democratic bourgeois norm.

At bottom, what they all call into question is the validity of the October Revolution and the attempt of the Bolsheviks to extend that revolution internationally. Brandler's line was always one of "Russian exceptionalism," i.e., maybe Lenin's program worked in Russia but it had no applicability in Germany with its ostensibly more "cultured" working class,

allegedly wedded to the framework of parliamentary democracy. With the destruction of the Soviet Union, revisionists have "discovered" that Lenin's program didn't work in Russia either, that the Soviet workers state was a "failed experiment." That's why all of the reformists end up today in the camp of the "anti-globalization campaign," beseeching the imperialists to be "responsible" and "humane."

Fake leftists like Workers Power and the USEC moved far to the right through their support to the counterrevolutionary forces that destroyed the Soviet Union and deformed workers states in East Europe in 1989-1992. Championing the "democratic" credentials of the imperialists and their chosen counterrevolutionary henchmen, they helped destroy the world's first workers state, condemning the proletariat of East Europe and the former USSR to the penury dictated by the imperialist stranglehold on the world market. This underlies the commitment in practice of these fake Marxists to the parliamentary reformist sandbox of bourgeois "democracy," tailing right-wing social democrats like Labour's Tony Blair in Britain or, in countries like Italy or France, popular-front coalitions of reformist workers parties and openly bourgeois parties.

The October Revolution remains our compass. It demonstrated how a revolutionary party rooted in the proletariat can win the working masses away from the reformist class traitors and lead them to power. The critical factor was the subjective element—the revolutionary party. That was the difference between Russia in 1917 and Germany in 1923.

The strategic task posed for German communists is to break the proletariat from the Social Democracy. As Trotsky rightly concluded, that could have been done in 1923. The obstacle was neither the objective situation nor the "omnipotence" of the Social Democracy; it lay with the failure to pursue a revolutionary line, particularly in the critical time period. Here the programmatic weaknesses of the German party, reinforced rather than corrected by a Comintern that itself was beginning to degenerate, proved decisive. We seek to critically assimilate the lessons of 1923 in order to strengthen our international party for the revolutionary struggles that lie ahead. ■

A Critical Balance Sheet

Trotsky and the Russian Left Opposition



Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis

Leon Trotsky in exile in Prinkipo, Turkey, in 1931. Trotsky's Left Opposition fought to defend and carry forward authentic program of Lenin's Bolsheviks. Only proletarian revolutions internationally could break imperialist encirclement of Soviet workers state.

In the 1920s, under the conditions of the isolation and decline of the Russian Revolution, Communists who reacted against the bureaucratization of the Soviet party and state faced many challenges in arriving at a renewed program for the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat. As Trotsky repeatedly emphasized, most notably in his seminal 1936 work, *The Revolution Betrayed*, the source of the malignant bureaucratic cancer was "destitution, aggravated by the destructions of the imperialist and civil wars." Foreign investment had created in the urban centers of tsarist Russia some of the most modern factories in the world, but they existed amid a rural sea of economic and cultural backwardness. The destruction of industry and infrastructure wrought by the world war was compounded by the bloody Civil War of 1918-20. The Bolsheviks understood their revolution as the first step of the European socialist revolution; they knew they could not long retain power without the material aid of an advanced industrial country. But the failure of proletarian revolutionary confrontations in Italy, Finland, Hungary and Germany during the tumultuous years 1919-20 denied the young workers state the aid which would have allowed it to begin to compensate for Russia's acute material want.

The young workers state was the arbiter of scarce resources. Pressures toward bureaucratism in the allocation of those resources were overwhelming, especially given the weight of the former tsarist civil servants, military officers

and technical specialists who had to be employed in the construction of the new state machine. With the prospect for an immediate socialist revolution in Europe receding after the partial stabilization of the capitalist order in 1921, the bureaucracy began to become conscious of its own material interests. Accelerating this development was the New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced early that year. A series of concessions to market forces necessary to get the economy moving again, the NEP created a layer of speculators, small traders and well-to-do peasants who were a corrosive influence on the apparatus which moderated economic activity. At the Eleventh Party Congress in 1922, Lenin spoke with alarm of the danger:

"The economic power in the hands of the proletarian state of Russia is quite adequate to ensure the transition to communism. What then is lacking? Obviously, what is lacking is culture among the stratum of the Communists who perform administrative functions. If we take Moscow with its 4,700 Communists in responsible positions, and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth, they are not directing, they are being directed."

—V.I. Lenin, "Political Report of the Central Committee of the R. C. P. (B.)," 27 March 1922
(*Collected Works*, Vol. 33)

Conscious political struggle was necessary to counteract the conservatizing pressure of this burgeoning bureaucracy

on the small proletarian vanguard organized in the Bolshevik Party. Such political struggle did, indeed, occur—the Bolshevik Party was racked by almost constant factional struggle from 1922 to 1929. With the benefit of hindsight, Trotsky noted in 1935 that the smashing of the loose anti-bureaucratic opposition which coalesced in the fall of 1923 in the lead-up to the Thirteenth Party Conference, held January 1924, “implied in the most direct and immediate sense the transfer of power from the hands of the revolutionary vanguard into the hands of the more conservative elements among the bureaucracy and the upper crust of the working class. The year 1924—that was the beginning of the Soviet Thermidor” (“The Workers’ State, Thermidor and Bonapartism,” 1 February 1935, *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1934-35*).

But the full significance of this event was not—and could not—be appreciated at that time, even by the principal antagonists. The bureaucratization of a workers state was a new historical phenomenon; the issues around which the Opposition fought in 1923 were limited to the internal party regime and the need for more rapid industrialization of the Soviet economy. It would take four more years—and the experiences of the 1925-27 Second Chinese Revolution as well as the 1926 British general strike—before the political battle lines clearly delineated Trotsky’s Left Opposition as the continuators of revolutionary internationalist Bolshevism, as against the growing class collaborationism of the bureaucratic apparatus headed by Stalin. Even then, Stalin’s tactical “left” turn from 1929 to 1933—embodied in the crushing of Bukharin’s Right Opposition, forced collectivization of the Russian peasantry and “Third Period” adventurism on the part of the Communist International—muddied the political waters and disarmed many of Trotsky’s former supporters. Only in 1935, with the elaboration of the “Popular Front” at the Seventh (and last) Congress of the Communist International, did the Stalinists explicitly and officially embrace the program of class collaboration with the “democratic” imperialist bourgeoisies.

To read back these developments into the early period of the revolution’s degeneration would be to replace historical materialism with moralism. In the beginning, Trotsky could not anticipate the full significance of the bureaucracy’s ascendancy and where it would lead—and neither could Stalin. For Marxists, historical evaluation is not a religious act designed to uphold the essential purity of our forebears. Rather, it is a materialist investigation, a necessary part of determining how best to carry out our revolutionary program today. Leninism evolved out of a series of political struggles from 1903 to 1917, as Lenin sought to apply the lever of revolutionary Marxism to the decaying tsarist empire, culminating in the 1917 Russian Revolution. Similarly, “Trotskyism”—better understood, as Trotsky insisted, as the continuity of Leninism—evolved in the struggle to wield that lever in the period of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution. Both represent the revolutionary Marxism of their time and neither should be viewed as a corpus of received wisdom, sprung fully grown like Athena from the head of Zeus.

It was not preordained that the opposition to the Soviet bureaucracy would come to be led by Trotsky, a brilliant but rather imperious and impatient administrator with a long history as a leader of the Russian workers movement but who had joined the Bolshevik Party only in the summer of 1917. Nor was it set in stone that the pedestrian Stalin would emerge as the master of the party’s bureaucratic fac-

tion. Stalin and his clique worked as key constituents of Lenin’s majority *against Trotsky* in the 1920-21 trade-union dispute, an early harbinger of the bureaucratic pressures on the party. Stalin was later able to become unquestioned leader of the apparatus only after Lenin’s death and only under the cover of the blocs he formed, first with Zinoviev and Kamenev from 1922 to 1925, later with Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky from 1925 to 1928.

Even after Stalin crushed Bukharin’s Right Opposition in 1929, he continued to face disaffection within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). At the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934, billed as the “Congress of Victors,” Leningrad party chief S. Kirov received 289 more votes in the elections for Central Committee than did Stalin. Only a few dozen of the 1,966 delegates to the Seventeenth Congress survived the great purges that followed, beginning in 1936. The public show trials of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and other former Oppositionists should not obscure the fact that the 1936-38 purges were aimed overwhelmingly at *Stalin’s own faction*. By 1939, Stalin and a narrow circle of supporters were left at the head of a party membership of some 1,589,000, a full 70 percent of which had joined after 1929. The CPSU was no longer a party of the proletarian vanguard, but the organization of the crude and capricious bureaucratic apparatus of the Soviet state. Only crass and simplistic anti-Communists like Leonard Schapiro or Richard Pipes, or those like Trotsky’s biographer, Isaac Deutscher, who believe Stalinism was inevitable, can insist that this was the only possible outcome of the world revolutionary struggles and political turmoil in the Bolshevik Party in the 1920s.

The economic backwardness and isolation of the world’s first workers state—and especially the enormous letdown after the failure of the expected German insurrection in the



On eve of 1917 October Revolution, banner of “Red Putilov” factory workers reads: “Long Live All-Russian Revolution as Prologue to Social Revolution in Europe.”

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fall of 1923—stacked the deck against the anti-bureaucratic forces who fought within the Bolshevik Party in the 1920s. But these factors did not, *in the short term*, predetermine that the bureaucracy would seize control of the party in January 1924 and successfully maintain itself in power, generalizing its accommodation to the stabilizing bourgeois world order into the program of “socialism in one country.” Only a historical pessimist could argue that Trotsky made no mistakes in the struggle to prevent the political usurpation of the Soviet working class and maintain the USSR as a bastion of world revolution.

In discussions within the International Communist League over the past few years, we have reviewed the course Trotsky followed in the Bolshevik Party disputes of the 1920s, principally as a leading element in the 1923 Opposition and later as the leader of the Left Opposition, a central element of the United Opposition bloc of 1926-27. Our review is based in large part on material published in Pathfinder Press's three-volume series of Trotsky's writings for 1923-29, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition*, which is the most complete documentary record of the Opposition now available to us (the significant Russian-language material that undoubtedly exists in the Moscow CPSU archives is currently beyond our reach). Trotsky's writings on the revolutionary struggles in China from 1925-27, collected in Pathfinder's *Leon Trotsky on China*, are also important.

Trotsky's struggle culminated in the summer of 1928 in his “Critique of the Draft Program of the Communist International” (better known as *The Third International After Lenin*). The first programmatically comprehensive treatment of Soviet bureaucratism and its corrosive effect on the practice of the Communist International (Comintern, or CI), the “Critique” distilled the central lessons of the international class struggle in the 1920s. In it, Trotsky brilliantly demonstrated the link between Stalin's dogma of “socialism in one country” and the capitulatory zigzags of the Comintern, especially the betrayal of the Second Chinese Revolution.

In the crucial early period of the degeneration, however, Trotsky did not wage a consistent battle against the bureaucratic threat represented by Stalin, a fact which he noted soon after his exile from the USSR:

“I avoided entering into this fight as long as possible, since its nature was that of an unprincipled conspiracy directed against me personally, at least in the first stages. It was clear to me

that such a fight, once it broke out, would inevitably take on extremely sharp features and might under the conditions of the revolutionary dictatorship lead to dangerous consequences. This is not the place to discuss whether it was correct to try to maintain some common ground for collective work at the price of very great personal concessions or whether I should have taken the offensive all along the line, despite the absence of sufficient political grounds for such action. The fact is that I chose the first way and, in spite of everything, I do not regret it. There are victories that lead into blind alleys, and there are defeats that open up new avenues.”

—Leon Trotsky, “Stalin's Victory,” 25 February 1929
(*Writings*, 1929)

The Transition from Civil War to NEP

It took almost every last resource of the new workers state for the Red Army to beat the imperialist-backed counterrevolution during the Russian Civil War. The war was winding down by the winter of 1919-20. In the situation of the transition from war to peace the excruciating economic contradictions of the world's first workers state came to the fore. The Revolution was at an impasse. Industry was near complete collapse and the most advanced sectors of the working class had either been killed or drawn into state administration; much of the rest of the proletariat had scattered back into the countryside to scratch some kind of subsistence from the land. The peasantry had turned hostile because of the policy of forced grain requisitions necessary to win the war. Many were sowing only just enough grain to feed their families. The transportation system had almost ground to a halt.

Trotsky was the first Bolshevik leader to propose a way out of the impasse. In December 1919, he suggested that the Commissariat of War assume the job of mobilizing civilian labor for reconstructing the economy—the “militarization of labor,” as he called it. The scheme provoked an outcry when it was published in *Pravda*, and though Lenin supported Trotsky's proposal, a conference of Bolshevik trade-union leaders rejected it. “Militarization of labor” became a reality in another guise. With no trains to transport home demobilized Red Army soldiers, in the Urals, the Ukraine and southern Russia the troops were transformed into vast labor armies, cutting forests, working the mines and performing other necessary tasks. A February 1920 trip to the Urals to inspect the labor armies convinced Trotsky that this was no real solution to the Bolsheviks' dilemma; that same month he proposed to the Central Committee that forced requisitioning be replaced by a tax which the government would collect in the form of agricultural products (a “tax in kind”). His proposal was rejected.

The invasion of the Ukraine by Polish troops a few months later severely taxed the already overstrained resources of the Russian workers state. Only because Trotsky had recently been put in charge of the railways, declaring martial law and implementing a plan for railway repair—the first use of planning in Soviet Russia—did the Red Army have the transport ability to turn back the Polish army. Poland was an ally of the Entente powers, centrally France. Poland's defeat destabilized all of Europe; striking dock workers in the Prussian city of Danzig (now Gdansk) were refusing to ship weapons to Poland and “committees of action” were being formed by the British trade unions to keep their government from entering the war. The Russian victories against Poland galvanized opposition to the post-WWI imperialist order established at Versailles. Germany was seething. An opportunity had opened up for the Russian workers state to link

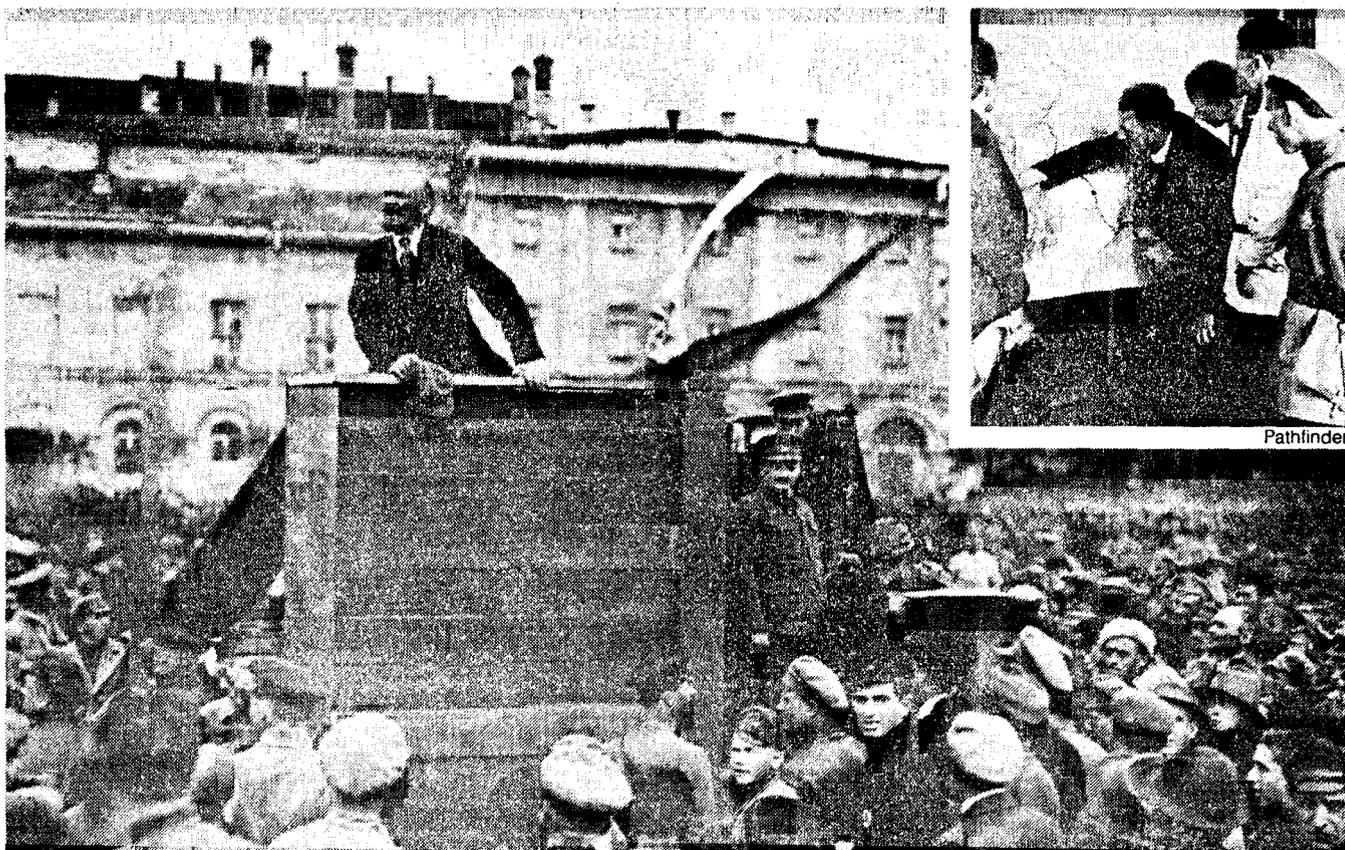
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G.P. Goldshtein

Lenin in Moscow addressing Red Army troops leaving for Polish front, May 1920. Inset: Delegates at Second Comintern Congress track advances of Soviet troops during Polish campaign.

itself directly to the European revolution. It was "a most important turning-point, not only in the policy of Soviet Russia, but also in world politics," as Lenin later noted in a report to the Russian party's Ninth Conference in September 1920 (published in Al Richardson, *In Defence of the Russian Revolution*, 1995).

The Bolsheviks made the decision to follow the retreating Poles across the border, "sounding out with our bayonets Poland's readiness for social revolution," as Lenin put it, and seeking a common border with Germany. The decision was controversial. The workers state lacked the matériel for a major military offensive and there was real concern that the incursion might provoke a nationalist backlash in Poland. In the event, that is what happened. A united and resolute Bolshevik leadership might have been able to overcome the initial nationalist reaction and press ahead to the German border in any case. But Stalin and his early supporters like K.Y. Voroshilov and S.M. Budenny had earlier formed a clique within the Red Army with the central aim of discrediting Trotsky. Stalin was the senior commissar of the southern armies. Instead of moving on Warsaw as ordered, Stalin convinced the commanders, Budenny and A. Yegorov, to move on the city of Lvov to the south, leaving the western armies under M.N. Tukhachevsky open to counterattack. The Red Army was turned back from Warsaw in August 1920. The Soviet defeat opened up a period of isolation, throwing the young workers state back on itself and setting the stage for the degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

The dispute over the trade-union question that broke out in the Bolshevik Party later that fall reflected the unease over the untenable situation in which the party found itself.

During the Civil War, Trotsky—with Lenin's backing—ruthlessly overcame resistance from various quarters to ensure victory on the front as the highest priority of the Soviet Republic. In addition to Stalin's clique in the "military opposition," Trotsky also had to contend with Zinoviev's lawyering for party apparatchiks whose toes had been stepped on. Zinoviev's base in Petrograd, the physically decimated and politically depleted remnants of the proletariat of 1917, had by 1919 begun to succumb to anti-Communist agitation on the part of Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and anarchists in the unions, as material conditions in the country became ever more dire.

As the Civil War drew toward a successful close at the end of 1919, Trotsky increasingly turned his attention to efforts to revitalize the Soviet economy. He wrongly sought to apply and generalize wartime administrative methods of military centralization and discipline to what was now a broader political problem of peacetime trade union/state relations. Trotsky initiated the trade-union fight by zealously advocating in a factional manner that the apparatus of the Russian trade unions coalesce with the state apparatus to run the economy. Behind this proposal lay the assumption that in a workers state, basic organizations of working-class defense like trade unions were at best superfluous, and at worst levers for the kind of retrograde economic and bureaucratic resistance he had contended with during the Civil War.

Lenin marshaled the party majority in an all-out fight against Trotsky and his allies (who included, at that point, Bukharin). Trotsky's authority in the party was greatly damaged as a result. Lenin was correct to insist that in the concrete conditions then prevailing in Soviet Russia, the trade



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Bolshevik commander A.I. Sedyakin addresses an assembly aboard battleship *Petropavlovsk* after suppression of Kronstadt uprising, 1921.

unions were necessary organs for the defense of the working class, not just in counterposition to the peasant majority with whom it was allied, but also against real bureaucratic abuse by the Soviet state itself. The Democratic Centralist Opposition had already formed in the party. Their platform opposed "one-man" factory management and the use of bourgeois specialists (highly paid remnants of the old tsarist order who were intensely disliked by many workers). The Democratic Centralists made the fight against bureaucratism their watchword and Lenin saw their existence as a warning signal of the dangers the desperate economic situation posed to the proletarian dictatorship.

By the time the Tenth Party Congress convened in March 1921 the trade-union dispute had been rendered somewhat moot by the decision—supported by the overwhelming majority of the party—to take a step back from War Communism, replacing the forced requisition of grain with the tax in kind advocated by Trotsky a year earlier. This was the core of the New Economic Policy. The cracks appearing in the *smychka* (alliance) between the proletariat and peasantry made this turn an urgent necessity. As the Tenth Congress opened, the very existence of the Russian workers state was threatened by the revolt of the sailors at the key Kronstadt naval base, which protected Petrograd. The sailors' cry for "soviets without Bolsheviks" reflected their peasant origins. A threat was posed from within the party as well by the "Workers Opposition" (WO) that congealed in the course of the trade-union dispute. The WO demanded that the state entirely relinquish control of industry to the trade unions, a

demand which if implemented would have put the very existence of the workers state in question.

Trotsky agreed with Lenin about the danger posed by the WO platform and his factional supporters were a key component of those who put down the Kronstadt rebellion. When it was suggested that his faction meet during the Tenth Congress, Trotsky vigorously opposed the idea. Nonetheless, it appeared to Lenin that Trotsky, with his previous factional zeal and indifference to protecting the non-party masses against the nascent bureaucracy, was putting himself forward as the spokesman for the growing bureaucratic layer. That Lenin's fears were not far-fetched at the time was recognized in hindsight by Trotsky himself:

"The Soviet bureaucracy did not elevate Stalin to leadership at once and without vacillation. Until 1924 Stalin was unknown even among the broader party circles, let alone the population, and as I have already said he did not enjoy popularity in the ranks of the bureaucracy itself. The new ruling stratum had hopes that I would undertake to defend its privileges. No few efforts were expended in this direction. Only after the bureaucracy became convinced that I did not intend to defend its interests against the toilers, but on the contrary the interests of the toilers against the new aristocracy, was the complete turn toward Stalin made, and I was proclaimed 'traitor'."

—Trotsky, "The Comintern and the GPU,"

17 August 1940 (*Writings, 1939-40*)

As Trotsky noted in *My Life* (1929), it was during the trade-union discussion that "Stalin and Zinoviev were given what one might call their legal opportunity to bring their struggle against me out into the open. They strained every effort to take full advantage of the situation. It was for them a rehearsal of their future campaign against 'Trotskyism.'" Stalin baited Trotsky as the "patriarch of the bureaucrats."

The Central Committee elections held at the Tenth Congress in 1921 were based on the counterposed positions on the trade-union dispute. There were 50 delegate votes for the Trotsky/Bukharin theses, 18 for the Workers Opposition and 336 for the Lenin majority. A radical change in the CC was the result. Krestinsky, who was closely associated with Trotsky, was pulled off the Political Bureau and Central Committee; Zinoviev was put on the PB in his place. Preobrazhensky and Serebriakov, also supporters of Trotsky's position on the trade unions, had been two of the party's top secretaries along with Krestinsky. They were also removed from their posts, and from the CC entirely, as was Andreev,

Lenin and the Vanguard Party

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another Trotsky supporter. Iván Smirnov was reduced to CC candidate and replaced as head of the Moscow party organization. Many of Stalin's allies were promoted: Molotov was awarded one of the party secretaryships and made a candidate member of the Political Bureau. Frunze, Ordzhonikidze and Voroshilov were all elected to the CC for the first time.

In their subsequent war against the Left Opposition, Stalin and his clique were able to make good use of the Tenth Congress decision to ban factional groupings in the party. This measure, enacted in the shadow of the Kronstadt revolt, was, as Lenin noted at the time, meant to be a temporary, exceptional measure to ensure that episodic differences did not harden in a way that posed a danger to the workers state. The Tenth Congress was the last time a factional dispute was debated to democratic resolution in the Russian party. The overhang of bureaucracy, already great, was being consciously combated. The Congress determined to purge the party of careerist elements and over the next year party membership was reduced by 24 percent—from 650,000 to just under 500,000 (E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, Vol. II). Stalin's appointment as General Secretary at the next Congress in April 1922 put an end to the effective struggle against bureaucratism within the party.

Stalin as General Secretary

Stalin entered the period of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution as a key component of the Leninist party majority. But Lenin was distrustful enough to refuse Zinoviev's proposal at the Tenth Congress to elect Stalin General Secretary of the party. He remarked, "This cook will make only peppery dishes." Lenin acceded to Stalin's appointment a year later. Two months after the close of the Eleventh Congress, at the end of May 1922, Lenin suffered a stroke which left him incapacitated until October. With Lenin's strong hand removed, Stalin made ample use of his position. A series of decrees issued by the Secretariat in the summer of 1922 created an apparatus of Central Committee "Instructors" with widespread rights over elected local party bodies. The secretariat began to "recommend" (i.e., appoint) provincial and even local party secretaries. More importantly, Stalin significantly increased the material privileges of apparatchiks. A strict hierarchy of wages was established for party officials, with the minimum for secretaries of local cells set at 30 rubles, three times the average salary in industry at the time. A series of decrees established special bonuses and distribution of goods for party functionaries and created a series of new vacation homes and rest houses for their exclusive use (A.M. Podshchekoldin, "Sur la voie du 'pouvoir exorbitant' ou les débuts du stalinisme" [On the Road to Overweening Power: The Origins of Stalinism], *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* No. 44, December 1990). Stalin showed exquisite consciousness as the defender and nurturer—if still only behind the scenes—of the party bureaucracy.

Lenin's relations with Trotsky had been severely damaged by the trade-union dispute. Yet only some three months after the Tenth Congress, Lenin and Trotsky consummated a political bloc against Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek around the time of the Third Congress of the Communist International, held June-July 1921. Zinoviev et al. sought to throw the prestige of the Russian party behind the Hungarian Communist Béla Kun's idiotic "theory of the offensive," which had led to disaster for the German party in their adventurist "March Action" (see "Rearming Bolshevism—A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern," page 4). This



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Stalin and cronies at Fourteenth Party Conference, April 1925. From left: Alexei Rykov, Kliment Voroshilov, Stalin, Nikolai Skrypnik, Andrei Bubnov, Sergo Ordzhonikidze.

direct collaboration between Lenin and Trotsky was, however, episodic.

When Lenin returned again to partial political activity in the fall of 1922, he discovered his fundamental political convergence with Trotsky. Lenin was horrified that the pressures of the growing bureaucratic layer were finding increasing expression within the Russian Political Bureau, in the first instance in the proposal—pushed by Stalin and others—to weaken the state monopoly of foreign trade. Lenin and Trotsky collaborated to beat back this proposal. In the wake of this victory, Lenin, who had again suffered a series of strokes, dictated in late 1922 and early 1923 his famous "Testament" and its addendum, which called for the removal of Stalin as General Secretary. Lenin also dictated a series of articles containing proposals to combat bureaucratism in the party and state. The Political Bureau—against the vote of Trotsky—resisted publishing Lenin's article, "Better Fewer But Better," which attacked the routinism and inefficiency of the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate, which Stalin had headed until a short time before. When in March 1923 Lenin confirmed his suspicions that Stalin and his cohorts had been acting with heavy-handed centralism regarding the non-Russian nationalities in the Caucasus, pursuing an abusive policy which smacked of Great Russian chauvinism, he resolved to consummate a bloc with Trotsky, preparing to, in the words of one of his secretaries, drop a "bomb" on Stalin at the upcoming Twelfth Party Congress. Unfortunately, Lenin was debilitated by another stroke shortly before the Congress opened. For the rest of his life he was unable to actively participate in the affairs of the Soviet party and state.

Trotsky's Failure at the Twelfth Congress

It was characteristic that Lenin, not Trotsky, drew the hard practical conclusions from the series of skirmishes with Stalin and the Political Bureau majority in late 1922 and early 1923. As the Spartacist tendency has often noted, it was part of Lenin's strength as a revolutionary politician that his empirical political practice often preceded his full-blown theoretical understanding. Thus the 1903 split with the

Mensheviks took place on narrow organizational grounds (the definition of party membership), anticipating the deep political differences on the attitude toward bourgeois liberalism revealed in the 1905 Revolution. Lenin did not finally develop a theoretical understanding of the material basis for reformism until the outbreak of World War I proved the leadership of the Second International to be social-chauvinist defenders of the bourgeois order. In his 1916 work *Imperialism*, Lenin first recognized that the enormous superprofits squeezed out of the colonial world allow the imperialists "to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy." (see Spartacist pamphlet *Lenin and the Vanguard Party*).

In contrast, Trotsky was not inclined to jump ahead of his theoretical understanding. Up until 1917, his experience within the Russian Social Democracy was entirely outside the framework of the Bolshevik faction (which became the Bolshevik Party following the definitive split in 1912). Trotsky stood with the Mensheviks in 1903, though he quickly separated from them. Trotsky's leadership of the Petrograd Soviet in the 1905 Revolution proved that he stood much closer to the Bolsheviks than to the Mensheviks in his intransigent opposition to the parties of the Russian bourgeoisie. Nonetheless, Trotsky continued to stand apart. From 1908 to 1912 the Mensheviks opposed establishing an illegal party organization in Russia. Regrouping with a section of the "pro-Party" Mensheviks at a January 1912 conference in Prague, Lenin founded the Bolshevik Party. Later that year Trotsky called for a unity conference between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, hoping to reconcile these fundamentally counterposed tendencies, one revolutionary and the other reformist. Lenin forcefully rejected this idea and Trotsky found himself at the Menshevik-dominated conference in a de facto bloc against the Bolsheviks (the "August bloc"). It was not until the outbreak of World War I that Trotsky began to understand the necessity for revolutionaries to break not only politically, but organizationally, from reformism and revisionism.

Only in 1917 did Trotsky fully come over to the Bolsheviks, after Lenin's "April Theses" revealed a fundamental agreement between himself and Lenin that the task of the proletariat was to lead the peasantry in the seizure of power on the basis of a socialist program. This had been Trotsky's perspective since he first developed the theory of permanent revolution on the eve of the 1905 Revolution. Lenin, however, had to wage a fight within his own party to reorient it to the seizure of power. Some Bolsheviks initially used the party's previous formula for a "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" as the rationale for critically supporting the bourgeois provisional government. Returning to Russia in May 1917, shortly after Lenin, Trotsky and his Inter-District Organization ("Mezh-rayonka") worked in tandem with the Bolsheviks, fusing with the party in July.

That Trotsky was a relative newcomer to the Bolsheviks gave him a certain detachment in evaluating the various party leaders, but it also meant he lacked Lenin's inner-party factional experience and the overwhelming political authority Lenin had accrued from years of struggle to forge the leadership of the Bolshevik tendency. By the spring of 1923 Trotsky was aware that Stalin had allied himself with Kamenev and Zinoviev in a secret "triumvirate" within the Russian leadership, the sole purpose of which was to prevent Trotsky from assuming leadership of the party. He dis-



M. I. Ulyanova

Lenin in Gorky, 1922. In the last months of his life, Lenin called for Stalin's removal from post of General Secretary, sought to oppose growing bureaucratism in Soviet party and state.

missed this as essentially a personal cliquist conspiracy, failing to see that behind the triumvirate stood the burgeoning party bureaucracy, controlled by Stalin, and just beginning to rise to self-consciousness. Lenin had warned that Stalin would seek to "make a rotten compromise in order then to deceive," rather than fight in the open at the Congress. But, with Lenin ill, Trotsky's primary concern was to avoid a split within the leadership. Thus he accepted a deal proffered by Kamenev just before the Twelfth Congress opened. Trotsky's resolutions on the key issues of the national question and quickening the pace of industrialization of the Soviet economy were adopted by the Congress; Stalin kept his post as General Secretary.

There were reasons for Trotsky's reticence to go on the offensive. He was at pains to prove false the rumors being circulated by the triumvirs that he was simply seeking power for himself. The triumvirs insinuated that Trotsky was "arrogant" for refusing the post of deputy head of the Soviet government, a post which Lenin repeatedly asked him to take up, beginning in April 1922, only two weeks after Stalin was appointed General Secretary. But Trotsky acutely felt his Jewish origins would be a liability to the workers state in the still deeply anti-Semitic Russian countryside. This had been the key factor in Trotsky's refusal of the post of People's Commissar for Internal Affairs in 1917, and it was still a factor in his mind in 1922:

"And that time, when Vladimir Ilyich proposed that I should be the Deputy of the Chairman of the Soviet of People's Commissars (the only deputy) and I refused resolutely for the same reasons, in order not to give our enemies cause for confirming that a Jew governed the country."

—Trotsky, "Summary of Concluding Speech at the Plenary Session of the Central Committee and Central Control Committee," 26 October 1923, published in V. Vil'kova, ed., *The Struggle for Power: Russia in 1923* (1996).

In the context of the looming battle in the Russian party, Trotsky would have been in a better position if he had taken up the post of Lenin's deputy. But his concerns were not unfounded—during the fight against the Left Opposition Stalin made ample use of anti-Semitic innuendo, slyly appealing to backward elements still infected with the vile Great Russian prejudices inherited from tsarism.

Trotsky later wrote, "I have no doubt that if I had come forward on the eve of the twelfth congress in the spirit of a 'bloc of Lenin and Trotsky' against the Stalin bureaucracy, I should have been victorious even if Lenin had taken no direct part in the struggle. How solid the victory would have been is, of course, another question" (*My Life*). *But a temporary victory against Stalin would have bought some time during 1923, a crucial year in which Germany was in almost constant revolutionary turmoil, with proletarian revolution a palpable possibility. A workers victory in Germany would have shattered the basis for bureaucratism in the USSR.*

The apparent political agreement Trotsky had extracted on the national question and the economy at the Twelfth Congress was, in any case, simply formal, since Stalin remained in charge of the apparatus. In the aftermath of the Congress, the bureaucracy continued to dither on strengthening the state planning agency (Gosplan) and beginning a program of industrialization. Thus, the structural problem that Trotsky had labeled the "scissors crisis"—the ever-growing gap between the price at which peasants sold their grain and the price at which they could buy manufactured goods—only deepened. Meanwhile, the triumvirate continued to reshape the party and state apparatus, appointing cadre loyal to themselves and removing Trotsky's allies from key positions. But Trotsky hoped that Lenin would recover and that a proletarian revolution in Europe would come to the aid of the USSR.

The Comintern and the 1923 Debacle in Germany

The bureaucratic cancer, however, affected not only the Soviet party and state but also the leading cadre of the Communist International. The leaderships of many of the Comintern's national sections had broken from the reformist defenders of the capitalist order in the Second International only reluctantly and under great pressure from their memberships in the revolutionary tumult of 1919-20. The Comintern was faced with the need to distinguish the aspiring Communists from assorted careerists, adventurers and opportunists. The full implications of the Bolsheviks' experience of intransigent struggle against all reformism and revisionism still had to be assimilated and applied on the various different national terrains.

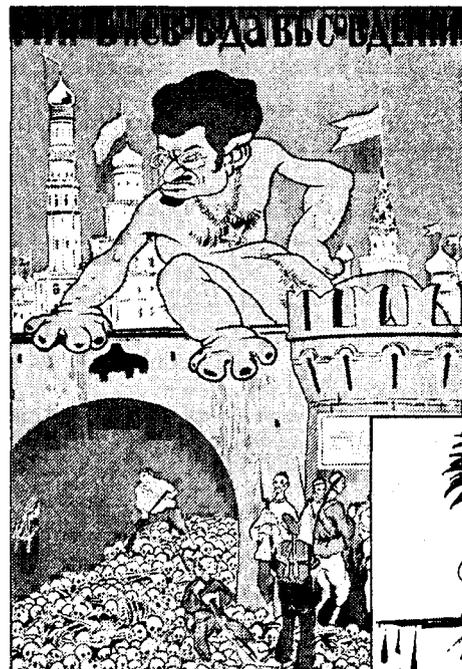
Unfortunately, this political sorting out intersected the growth of the Soviet bureaucracy, whose increasing conservatism began to reinforce the opportunist impulses that continued to animate the leaderships of many of the CI's national sections. This tendency accelerated after Lenin's first stroke in the spring of 1922 forced him to withdraw from his formerly heavy involvement in the Comintern, effectively removing the counterbalance to the centrist and bureaucratic tendencies of the mercurial Zinoviev. As the accompanying article in this issue lays out, the effects of Lenin's withdrawal on the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) were particularly severe. In 1922, the Comintern endorsed the KPD's practice of supporting Social Democratic-led governmental coalitions in German provincial parliaments. Rather than seeing itself as the indispensable independent agency to lead the

proletarian insurrection to *overthrow* the capitalist state, the KPD sought to "pressure" the Social Democrats to the left through bourgeois parliamentary combinationism.

The theses on the "workers government" adopted by the Comintern's Fourth Congress, held November-December 1922, not only recognized Social Democratic-led governments based on the bourgeois state apparatus as "workers governments," but even sought to define the conditions under which a Communist party could enter them. Thus the Congress left the KPD leadership under Heinrich Brandler mired in opportunist parliamentary cretinism, unable to recognize, let alone take advantage of, the revolutionary opportunity which opened up when the French army invaded the Ruhr in January 1923 to ensure the payment of the war reparations dictated by the Treaty of Versailles.

The attention of the entire leadership of the Russian party was turned in early 1923 not externally, toward Germany, but internally toward the growing rift in the party leadership and the potential for an open political struggle by Trotsky at the Twelfth Party Congress in April. Even after a deal was struck at the Congress, domestic matters consumed most of the Russian leadership's attention. In early summer Trotsky and several other members of the Political Bureau took their customary vacations away from Moscow. Not until August did Trotsky realize that a revolutionary situation existed in Germany. As he later acknowledged, this was very late. Prodding the Russian party leadership and the Comintern into action, Trotsky insisted on setting a date for a German insurrection. Though Stalin's view was that the Germans should be "restrained," the triumvirs could hardly afford to be seen as obstructing revolution in Germany and they acceded to Trotsky (while refusing Brandler's request that Trotsky go to Germany to assist).

Vile anti-Semitism inherited from tsarism in the service of Stalinist Thermidor



Basil Blackwell Inc. photos

1930 Stalinist caricature of Trotsky

White Guard poster during Russian Civil War shows Trotsky as embodiment of "Jew-Bolshevism"





Trotsky's "New Course" rode the crest of a massive outpouring of discontent that flooded the pages of *Pravda* at the end of 1923. In reply, Stalin closed its pages to inner-party discussion, forever. The other pre-eminent leader of the 1923 Opposition was Christian Rakovsky, shown here with Trotsky, June 1927.



Wide World

Trotsky's emphasis on setting a date for the insurrection was, however, an *administrative* measure that ignored the *political* obstacles represented by both the pressure-the-SPD politics of the Brandler leadership and the ambivalence of the triumvirate. Failing to identify and combat the opportunist strategy of Brandler, Trotsky supported the KPD's entry into the SPD governments in Saxony and Thuringia in October, arguing that the provinces could become a "drill-ground" to prepare the proletariat to fight for revolution. The KPD's entry into these provincial governments was but the prelude to Brandler's calling off the insurrection when the SPD refused to go along with the call for a general strike. Trotsky's writings about Germany in the fall of 1923 give full force to the criticisms in Lenin's Testament that Trotsky showed "excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work."

Thirteenth Party Conference

In the fall of 1923, the economic situation in Soviet Russia itself was reaching a crisis point as the scissors gap became an abyss and with little effort being made to revive heavy industry. On the eve of the expected German insurrection, a major wave of economic strikes and discontent swept Moscow and Petrograd. It was in this conjuncture that Trotsky opened fire against the growing bureaucratism of the Soviet party and state, writing to the Central Committee on 8 October 1923 to demand action on the urgent question of planned industrialization and the opening of a campaign against bureaucratism in the party. Forty-six leading party members soon signed a declaration along the same general lines, targeting in particular what they called the "completely intolerable" bureaucratic regime within the party.

The triumvirate's response was an all-out campaign to vilify, discredit and isolate Trotsky and his supporters at a joint plenary session of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission, held October 25-27. (For more details on this period, see "Original Documents Published from Soviet Archives: Trotsky's Fight Against Stalinist Betrayal of Bolshevik Revolution," *Spartacist* No. 53, Summer 1997.)

Party sentiment against the anti-Trotsky campaign was strong enough, however, that the triumvirs were induced to open the pages of the party paper, *Pravda*, to internal debate on November 7. *Pravda's* circulation doubled and the triumvirs were shocked by the outpouring of opposition to the party regime revealed in the journal's pages. They were made all the more fearful when both the French and Polish parties protested against the anti-Trotsky campaign. Trotsky again acceded to the triumvirs' urgent attempts to reach "agreement" with him. Jointly with Stalin and Kamenev, he authored a resolution calling for the implementation of the Twelfth Congress resolutions on the economy as well as charting a "New Course" against bureaucratism in the party. Adopted unanimously by the Political Bureau, the resolution was another empty paper agreement. The phony public "unity" of the Central Committee served only to muddy the political waters in the fight for delegates to the party's upcoming Thirteenth Party Conference. (The Bolshevik Party at this time held two types of delegated gatherings: an authoritative Congress and a more informal Conference. The norm—not always followed—was for these alternating gatherings to be held once each year.) The triumvirs felt confident enough to open up a counteroffensive in mid-December, replacing the editors of *Pravda's* "Party Life" pages. By the end of the month, the journal's pages were effectively closed, forever, to the Opposition's views.

The exhausted Soviet proletariat was closely following the events in Germany—all the resources of the party and Red Army were mobilized to prepare to come to the aid of the German proletariat. When Brandler ignominiously called off the insurrection on October 21, he shattered the hope that a proletarian revolution in Europe would end the desperate isolation of the Soviet republic and reconfirm its revolutionary course. A wave of demoralization swept the Soviet working class, strengthening the triumvirate, who expressed the conservative and nationalist outlook of the coalescing bureaucratic stratum. The Opposition won 25-30 percent of the votes in the Moscow and Petrograd party organizations. Support for the Opposition was particularly strong in the Red Army and the youth organization; the triumvirate disbanded the Central Committee of the youth organization to put an end to it. The election process was so rigged that when the Thirteenth Conference opened in January 1924 the Opposition had just three delegates out of a total of 128. The triumvirate's victory at this conference marked the decisive point at which the bureaucratic caste seized political power from the Soviet working class. From this point on, the people who ruled the USSR, the way the USSR was ruled and the purposes for which it was ruled all changed.

Lenin's death a few days later removed from the equation a possibly very dangerous foe of the ascendant bureaucratic caste. The triumvirate cynically initiated the "Lenin Levy," taking party membership (including full and candidate members) from 472,000 at the beginning of 1924 to 1,078,182 by early 1926 (E. H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country 1924-1926*, Vol. II). This opened the floodgates to aspiring careerists, diluting the historically forged proletarian vanguard.

The program of Trotsky's 1923 Opposition was a program of anti-bureaucratic reform of the party and state apparatus, combined with the demand for economic planning and a faster pace of Soviet industrialization. As regards the internationalist principles and program of the October Revolution, there still appeared to be substantial agreement within the Bolshevik Party on the Comintern's program. Trotsky did not identify the source of the German defeat in the opportunist strategy of pressuring the left Social Democrats, as codified in the misuse of the "workers government" slogan. Nor did he recognize the Comintern leadership's role in helping to chart Brandler's opportunist course. The events in Germany hardly figured in the struggle of the 1923 Opposition because Trotsky did not realize at the time that the bureaucratic disease within the Soviet party already posed a direct threat to the revolutionary program and activity of the Communist International.

Suffering from recurring and unexplained high fevers, Trotsky left Moscow for the Caucasus to convalesce. He did not attend the Thirteenth Party Conference or the January 1924 Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI) session which assessed the German events. Concerned from afar that Zinoviev's attempt to cover up the gravity of the defeat in Germany would lead to adventurist actions, Trotsky agreed to put his name to a set of confusionist theses authored by Radek for the ECCI meeting, an act he later viewed as a mistake. Stalin maneuvered to make sure Trotsky did not return to Moscow for Lenin's funeral, an absence that was later used against him. He returned only in May for the Thirteenth Party Congress, which formally put an end to the "New Course" debate. Enjoined by the Congress from any factional activity, Trotsky allowed the 1923 Opposition to dissipate in a formal organizational sense. He continued to meet regularly with a close circle of supporters that included Christian Rakovsky, Karl Radek, Evgeny Preobrazhensky, Yuri Pyatakov and Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko.

The "Literary Discussion"

Throughout the early months of 1924, Trotsky sought to analyze the reasons for the German debacle (see our accompanying article). In May, in an introduction to a book of his writings, Trotsky underlined the high stakes and the consequences of the KPD's paralysis:

"We have here a truly classic example of a revolutionary situation permitted to slip by. From the moment of the Ruhr occupation, and all the more so when the bankruptcy of passive resistance became evident, it was imperative for the Communist Party to steer a firm and resolute course toward the conquest of power. Only a courageous tactical turn could have unified the German proletariat in the struggle for power.... True, in the month of October a sharp break occurred in the party's policy. But it was already too late."

—Trotsky, Introduction to *The First Five Years of the Communist International*

In June 1924, Trotsky insisted that "It was necessary to show the masses, and above all the party itself, that this time it was a matter of immediate preparation for the seizure of power.... The question of setting a date for the uprising can have significance only in this connection and with this perspective" (Trotsky, "Through What Stage Are We Passing?", 21 June 1924, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1923-25*).

Recognizing the urgent need to contrast the German party's failure with the Bolsheviks' own experience in 1917, Trotsky took the opportunity offered by the publication of a collection of his 1917 writings to pen a powerful introduction on this theme. Published in September, *The Lessons of*

October detailed the struggle Lenin waged to rearm and reorient the Russian party throughout the year 1917, starting in April with the fight against those (like Stalin) who used the outdated formula "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" as a cover for giving critical support to the bourgeois Provisional Government. Trotsky documented Zinoviev and Kamenev's opposition to the insurrection in October, a not-so-subtle challenge to their attempts to present themselves as Lenin's heirs.

The massive counterattack launched by the triumvirs went down in party annals, somewhat incongruously, as the "literary discussion." Inventing out of the whole cloth a supposed doctrine of "Trotskyism," the triumvirs counterposed to it the "Leninism" they claimed to defend as members of the party's so-called "Old Guard," beginning the process



Terra

Stalin with his close collaborators (from left) Rykov, Zinoviev and Bukharin in 1924.

that would lead to the wholesale Stalinist school of falsification of Russian revolutionary history.

The key target for attack was Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which Trotsky had projected before the Russian Revolution of 1905 and subsequently elaborated in *Results and Prospects*, published in 1906. Noting that the Russian bourgeoisie was fully intertwined with the tsarist nobility and foreign imperialist investors, that the peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie could not play an independent role in history, and that industrialization had created a small but powerful and concentrated proletariat in Russia, Trotsky posited that a successful revolution in Russia would mean "that the representative body of the nation, convened under the leadership of the proletariat, which has secured the support of the peasantry, will be nothing else than a democratic dress for the rule of the proletariat." Only the dictatorship of the proletariat could break the fetters of political despotism and economic and social backwardness, tasks historically associated with the bourgeois-democratic revolutions in Europe. But in taking power, the proletariat would also have to begin the collectivist reconstruction of the economy. Thus Trotsky posed the Russian Revolution as the first step of the European socialist revolution. Only by extending the revolution to the imperialist centers of Europe could the Russian proletariat attain triumph.

The actual course of the 1917 Revolution took permanent revolution out of the realm of theory, completely confirming Trotsky's prognosis. The first printing of *Results and Prospects* in 1906 had been confiscated by the police; few copies

were available to the revolutionary Russian reading public. It was reprinted in Moscow in 1919; according to Isaac Deutscher, Lenin read Trotsky's work for the first time in this edition. The Communist International published an English translation in 1921. But the fact that Trotsky had correctly charted the course of the Russian Revolution was never codified in the programmatic statements of the Bolshevik Party or the Comintern. Nor was Lenin's April 1917 repudiation of the slogan "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" ever officially recognized. No standard history of the Revolution was written. An in-depth examination of the Russian experience would have gone a long way toward arming the young Communist parties of the world. Instead, the triumvirate was able to take full advantage of the Bolsheviks' failure to chronicle their own course. By 1924, the majority of party members had no direct personal experience with the prerevolutionary debates; less than 1 percent had been party members in early 1917.

In dealing with other countries of belated capitalist development in the early 1920s, the Russian experience did not automatically come to mind. Russia had been the weakest link in the imperialist chain, a developing capitalist country in the shell of a pre-capitalist empire, a situation not necessarily analogous to the more backward colonies and semi-colonies of Asia. Moreover, the Bolsheviks felt little need to look for indigenous proletarian revolutionary movements in the colonies, since they believed that imminent proletarian revolutions in the imperialist countries would drag the colonial world in their wake. In his report on the National and Colonial Question at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, Lenin had advocated that "The Communist International should advance the proposition, with the appropriate theoretical grounding, that the backward countries, aided by the proletariat of the advanced countries, can go over to the soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage" (*Collected Works*, Vol. 31). The Comintern's attention was directed toward insisting that Communist parties in the imperialist countries combat the imperialist depredations of their own bourgeoisies from within.

But the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921 recognized that the European capitalist order had temporarily restabilized. It was on this basis that a re-evaluation of the prospects for proletarian revolution in the East was called for. The cutting off of world trade during World War I meant the development of industry in India and China, and a small but concentrated urban industrial proletariat had developed in both countries, existing side by side with semi-feudal agricultural relations in the countryside, as in Russia. The local bourgeoisies were utterly intertwined with the landlords and the imperialist overlords. An astute and forward-looking leadership of the Comintern would have soon been forced to recognize that what had happened in Russia could happen in other, newly industrializing areas of the world.

The triumvir's virulent campaign against permanent revolution prevented this necessary re-evaluation. And Trotsky, concerned to prove that a distinct doctrine called "Trotskyism" was a complete fiction, was put utterly and impermissibly on the defensive by the triumvirate's attacks. He implicitly repudiated his 1906 work, insisting, "I reject in any case, as something completely laughable, the opinion attributed to me, that Lenin or the Bolshevik Party came over to 'my' formula on the revolution after realizing the erroneousness of their own" ("Our Differences," a document written in



Dietz Verlag

May Day demonstration in London, 1926. Reformist trade-union "friends" of USSR provided left cover for British Labour tops who sold out 1926 general strike.

November 1924 but never published, whether by choice or prohibition is unclear [*Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1923-25*]). In his only public statement of the period, a letter proffering his resignation as chairman of the Revolutionary Military Committee written 15 January 1925, Trotsky wrote that permanent revolution applied "wholly to the past" and had "no reference to the question of present-day political tasks."

In the midst of the "literary discussion" Stalin first promulgated his doctrine of building "socialism in one country" in a December 1924 *Izvestia* article entitled "October and comrade Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution." Stalin's counterposition of the utterly revisionist idea of "socialism in one country" to permanent revolution should have been an indication to Trotsky that more than his own political record was at stake. Stalin was implicitly challenging the Soviet Union's commitment to world proletarian revolution. However, only with the formation of the United Opposition over a year and a half later did Trotsky put himself on record against "socialism in one country." And it was not until the Fifteenth Party Conference in November 1926 that he personally spoke out against Stalin's new dogma.

Trotsky's defensiveness no doubt reflected the reaction of some of his 1923 cothinkers, who viewed the publication of *Lessons of October* as a tactical error because it gave the triumvirate an excuse to reopen their anti-Trotsky campaign. Trotsky saw that the "literary discussion" would have been launched in any case on one pretext or another (see "Some Documents Relating to the Origin of the Legend of 'Trotskyism'" in *The Stalin School of Falsification* [1937]).

"Socialism in one country" was at first simply used as a rationale for economic autarky; under its rubric Stalin insisted that it was the private peasant market which must set the pace for Soviet economic development. The most vocal advocate

of this policy was Bukharin, around whom coalesced a school of "red professors" and other rightist elements. The repeated accusations that Trotsky "underestimated the peasantry" were designed precisely to appeal to the most backward, potentially pro-capitalist elements of the Soviet population against the 1923 Opposition.

Trotsky went without a post in the Soviet state for some four months after his resignation as head of the Red Army in January 1925. It was during this period that he wrote "Where Is Britain Going?" a powerful polemic against the decrepit reformism of the Labour Party. An official British trade-union delegation had visited Russia in November 1924 and written a favorable report; as Trotsky completed his pamphlet, the leader of the Russian trade unions, Tomsy, was leading a reciprocal visit to Britain. On May 14, the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee (ARC), a fraternal organization composed of British and Russian trade unions, was inaugurated. Trotsky later wrote that "Where Is Britain Going?" "was aimed essentially at the official conception of the Politbureau, with its hope of an evolution to the left by the British General Council, and of a gradual and painless penetration of communism into the ranks of the British Labour Party and trades-unions" (*My Life*). Trotsky's polemic was designed to evade the censorship of the Political Bureau, which approved the work before its publication.

In May, he was appointed to serve on the Supreme Council of the National Economy. All of his work in this capacity, and especially "Toward Capitalism or Socialism?", serialized in *Pravda* in September 1925, emphasized that the Soviet Union was locked in mortal combat with world imperialism in both the political and economic spheres. Repeating the question posed by Lenin in relation to the NEP, "Who beats whom?", Trotsky emphasized the need for the USSR to greatly accelerate its rate of economic development, trading on the world market and obtaining advanced industrial machinery where possible. This was only an *implicit* polemic against "socialism in one country," made at a time when Zinoviev and Kamenev, having broken with Stalin, were openly challenging this dogma.

The Split in the Triumvirate

During the "literary discussion" Zinoviev and Kamenev were more vociferous in their anti-Trotskyism than Stalin, demanding, for example, that Trotsky be removed from the Political Bureau. For most of 1924 and early 1925, Zinoviev considered Stalin a second-rate figure and struggled to make *himself* Lenin's heir. Stalin was quite content to let his partners play the forward role; he insisted that Trotsky must remain on the PB. Stalin excelled at this kind of cunning maneuver; he was to make use of his apparent "softness" toward Trotsky later that year.

In a lengthy reply to a letter from a reader in 1984, *Workers Vanguard* wrongly asserted that the triumvirate began to break up at the Thirteenth Congress in May 1924 ("Should Trotsky Have Made a Bloc with Zinoviev in 1924?", *Workers Vanguard* No. 369, 21 December 1984). This same article criticized Trotsky for failing to make a bloc with Zinoviev and Kamenev at that time. The very idea of a bloc in 1924 is absurd! The triumvirs presented a united face to the Thirteenth Party Congress. Stalin still *needed* Zinoviev and Kamenev; on Krupskaya's insistence, Lenin's Testament was read to a meeting of senior party leaders just before the Congress opened. Largely because Zinoviev and Kamenev pleaded Stalin's case, he was able to keep his post (Trotsky

remained silent throughout the proceedings). Lenin's Testament was not made known to the Congress as a whole.

Not until April 1925, at the time of the Fourteenth Party Conference, did signs of a growing rift in the triumvirate begin to appear. Zinoviev and Kamenev objected to Stalin's attempts to get the party's formal endorsement of "socialism in one country." The triumvirs' disagreement was kept from public view; the wording of the final conference resolution was ambiguous on the question. It is almost impossible to believe that Trotsky and his supporters did not hear of the growing rift. And it is certainly no accident that the following month Trotsky was appointed to the Supreme Council of the National Economy. Very likely Stalin held out the promise of reconciliation along with the promise of productive work.

The Fourteenth Party Conference had adopted a series of measures enlarging the scope of private farming and trade, abolishing restrictions on the leasing of land and the hiring of labor. The measures failed to produce the results predicted by Bukharin. The harvest of 1925 was excellent, but the amount of grain sold to the state lagged far behind; the kulaks and middle peasants were withholding their crops, expecting prices to rise as grain became scarce through the winter and spring. There was not much they could buy with their earnings in any case. Trotsky had long warned that the *smychka* was threatened by the lack of manufactured goods to sell to the peasantry at reasonable prices: "The foundation of the *smychka* is the cheap plow and nail, cheap calico, and cheap matches" (*The New Course* [1923]). Yet rather than tax the kulaks to provide for a higher rate of industrialization, Bukharin advocated yet another round of concessions, issuing his famous dictum to the kulaks to "enrich yourselves." Over this issue *public* rifts appeared within the triumvirate in the summer of 1925.

Zinoviev had been a strong advocate of the pro-kulak policy, but his base was in the heavily proletarian Leningrad party organization, which vehemently opposed concessions to the rich peasants. Similarly, Kamenev's base was in the Moscow party. The conflict of interest that pitted Zinoviev's and Kamenev's proletarian bases in Leningrad and Moscow against Stalin and Bukharin's neo-Narodnik agrarianism made the triumvirate a patently unstable alliance. Zinoviev and Kamenev publicly attacked Bukharin over the continued concessions to the kulaks. Zinoviev's treatise, *Leninism*, published in the summer of 1925 and designed to push his own claims as Lenin's heir, criticized the idea of "socialism in one country." The "Declaration of the Four" issued by Zinoviev, Kamenev, Sokolnikov and Krupskaya demanded an open and democratic discussion period before the Fourteenth Party Congress, called for the end of 1925.

The disagreement among the triumvirs signaled in the first instance a bureaucratic power struggle. Nonetheless key programmatic issues were being brought into dispute. Yet Trotsky made no approach to Zinoviev and Kamenev. In July he acceded to Stalin's demands that he sign a statement repudiating *Since Lenin Died*, recently published by his American friend and Opposition supporter, Max Eastman. Eastman's book contained a true account of Lenin's Testament and the inner party struggle; Trotsky's cothinker Christian Rakovsky, at the time the Soviet ambassador in Paris, read the manuscript before it was published. Trotsky later wrote that the decision to sign the statement was unanimous among the leading group of the 1923 Opposition, who "considered it inadvisable at that time to initiate an *open* political struggle, and steered toward making a number of concessions" ("Max

was aimed against a clerical-reactionary parliamentary government that favored the nobility and landlords. The Polish Communist Party, disoriented by Zinoviev's Comintern, which was then insisting on the need for two-class "worker and peasant parties," initially supported Pilsudski's power grab, though they quickly backed away from what became known as the "May Mistake."

Almost immediately upon his return from Berlin, Trotsky attacked the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee in the pages of *Pravda*. He also began serious negotiations for a bloc with Zinoviev and Kamenev.

The United Opposition

The United Opposition (UO) announced its existence with the "Declaration of the Thirteen" at a joint meeting of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission in July 1926. At the beginning it included not only supporters of Trotsky and Zinoviev, but also remnants of the 1921 Workers Opposition and the Democratic Centralist current. Little documentation exists of the negotiations that led to the formation of the UO, or of its subsequent internal deliberations, since it was forced to operate in conditions of semi-clandestinity from the beginning. Early organizing meetings were held in a wood outside Moscow. The organizers of these meetings were being reprimanded by the Central Control Commission and expelled from the Central Committee even before the UO publicly announced its existence. Zinoviev, nominally still head of the Communist International, was expelled from the Political Bureau at the July plenum.

The complete record of the UO's public political pronouncements has never been published, at least not in English. The record that does exist, however, makes it clear that Trotsky was forced to subordinate his own sharp criticisms of the Comintern's growing opportunism in the interests of Opposition "unity." For the fight against the opportunist drift in the Comintern, the UO was a mixed blessing. A bloc is by its very nature an agreement for *limited* aims. Trotsky and Zinoviev-Kamenev shared a theoretical opposition to "socialism in one country" and an opposition to the pro-peasant economic policies of the Stalin/Bukharin bloc. But they differed on the concretes of Comintern policy. Zinoviev naturally insisted on defending the policies he had followed as head of the Comintern. Thus the United Opposition *necessarily* led to a muddying of the programmatic waters in regard to the Communist International. The "Declaration of the Thirteen" attacks the British trade-union traitors as unreliable allies of the Soviet state, but does not call for the Soviet unions to break from the ARC. It does not mention the "May Mistake" of the Polish party. Nor does it mention, let alone condemn, the criminal policy of continuing the entry of the CCP into the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang in the midst of a burgeoning revolution.

Within the UO there was substantial agreement on the domestic front. The "Declaration of the Thirteen" saw the growing bureaucratic deformation of the state as the source of the undemocratic and factional regime in the party. Arguing for an end to the appointment system and the restoration of a democratic internal party regime, the declaration saw in Bukharin's admonition to the kulaks to "enrich yourselves" a potentially fatal conciliation of social forces which would inevitably seek the restoration of capitalism in Russia. The Opposition advocated the planned construction of heavy industry, to be financed by increased taxation of the kulaks. It proposed the use of economic incentives to further

voluntary collectivization among the poorer peasants. It sought an immediate amelioration of the living standards of the working class with a call for higher wages. The July plenum ignored the appeal, but soon afterward the Political Bureau gave way. Wage increases were implemented in September in an attempt to undercut the Opposition.

Throughout the United Opposition's year and a half of existence, Stalin was able to effectively play on existing differences between its components, relying on Zinoviev and Kamenev's well-known penchant for centrist vacillation. E. H. Carr succinctly described Stalin's strategy as seeking "to wrest the maximum concessions from the dissidents by holding out to them the hope of an agreement, and then to pronounce the concessions inadequate" (*Foundations of a Planned Economy*, Vol. II). Thus in September 1926 the Comintern ordered the expulsion of Zinoviev's supporters in the German party—the historic "left" headed by Ruth Fischer, Arkady Maslow and Hugo Urbahns—because they had gathered some 700 signatures for a declaration in defense of the United Opposition. Stalin used the threat of similar expulsions in the Russian party to force the UO to back down on the eve of the Fifteenth Party Conference, held October-November 1926. He promised a cease-fire if UO leaders repudiated their German supporters and promised to respect the 1921 ban on factions. The UO acceded to his demands.

The repudiation of the German "left" served only to demoralize and demobilize the UO's heterogeneous international supporters. Stalin had no intention of allowing his enemies any breathing space. Less than a week later, he submitted a set of theses to the Political Bureau noting that the Opposition had not renounced its "errors in principle" and denouncing the UO as a "Social Democratic deviation." It was at this Political Bureau meeting that Trotsky denounced Stalin as the "gravedigger of the revolution." Submitting his theses to the conference, Stalin delivered a scathing report against the Opposition. Though the UO leaders had earlier decided not to speak on the floor of the conference, they were forced to respond. In his speech Trotsky publicly attacked the dogma of "socialism in one country," refuting it in detail with quotes from Lenin's writings. The conference removed Zinoviev from all work in the Comintern and removed Trotsky and Kamenev from the Political Bureau. Stalin went on to get the CI's official imprimatur for "socialism in one country" at the Seventh Plenum of its Executive Committee in December 1926. But his efforts to keep UO leaders from speaking at this ECCI plenum failed—Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky all took the floor to denounce "socialism in one country." However, Trotsky in his speech once again declared that Lenin had been right on the issue of permanent revolution. He did not attack the opportunist policies in China and Britain. The international bourgeois press gleefully greeted the defeat of Zinoviev and Trotsky at the plenum as a move against internationalism by the "moderate" Stalin leadership.

The United Opposition and China

In the spring of 1927, Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition brought the revolutionary turmoil of southern China into the Yangtze valley heartland. But the CCP continued to try to hold back the peasants and workers for fear of a break with Chiang. This policy was clearly a noose around the neck of the Chinese proletariat, allowing the bourgeois forces around Chiang to gather strength. As Chiang's army approached Shanghai, a workers uprising took control of the city. On March 26 he entered the city, subsequently declaring

martial law and beginning negotiations with the imperialists. With disaster looming in China, the UO in Moscow initiated a campaign to force a change in the Comintern's China policy. Demanding an end to the political subordination of the CCP to the Guomindang and the establishment of a daily CCP press, the UO raised the call for soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers deputies. A key breakthrough for the Opposition, this posed the real possibility of a *proletarian* leadership of the Chinese revolution. The slogan was raised on Trotsky's initiative and taken up by the entire Opposition.

The UO did *not*, however, demand the complete withdrawal of the CCP from the Guomindang. This question had been under debate within the bloc since at least August 1926. The demand was opposed by Zinoviev and his supporters, and also by Radek, a leading member of the Left Opposition. Thus Trotsky compromised on the *sine qua non* for a revolutionary perspective in China—the complete organizational and political independence of the proletarian vanguard. He later acknowledged that this had been a mistake:

“We publicly raised the slogan of the Communist Party's leaving the Kuomintang about two years later than was dictated by the entire situation and by the most vital interests of the Chinese proletariat and revolution.”

—Trotsky, “The Opposition's Errors—Real and Alleged,” 23 May 1928 (*Challenge of the Left Opposition*, 1928-29)

Before the UO was formed, Trotsky had called on the CCP to withdraw from the Guomindang. Stalin and Bukharin were able to make use of the obvious differences within the Opposition, and repeatedly asserted that the Opposition did call on the CCP to withdraw from the Guomindang. As Trotsky noted in an article written at the end of his life:

“In certain important questions, it is true, the 1923 opposition made principled concessions to the opposition in 1926—against my vote—concessions which I considered and still consider impermissible. The circumstance that I did not protest openly against these concessions was rather a mistake. But there was generally not much room for open protests—we were working illegally. In any event, both sides were very well acquainted with my views on the controversial questions.”

—Trotsky, “From a Scratch to the Danger of Gangrene,” *In Defense of Marxism* (1940)

In the spring of 1927 Stalin/Bukharin were preaching a policy of reliance on the “left” Guomindang forces grouped around the national government which had been established in December 1926 in the Yangtze industrial center of Wuhan. The working class in Wuhan had seized the British concession on February 3, and the Guomindang there needed to continue its alliance with the CCP to regain control of the situation. In March 1927 two CCP members were brought into the nationalist government as ministers of agriculture and labor; in return the CCP agreed not to publish anything that would upset the cooperation between the two parties. Stalin and Bukharin insisted on taking as good coin Chiang's assurances that he would accept the “discipline” of the Guomindang government in Wuhan. China policy was debated in a Central Committee plenum in mid-April and Stalin opposed the call for soviets on the grounds that it would be “a slogan of struggle against the government of the revolutionary Guomindang” (“The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin,” 7 May 1927 [*Leon Trotsky on China*]).

On April 5 Stalin gave a speech before a meeting of Moscow party workers in which he insisted that the Communists had to make use of Guomindang rightists like Chiang Kai-shek, the better to later throw them away “squeezed out like a lemon.” This speech came only a week before Chiang's troops moved against the workers of Shanghai on 12 April

1927, massacring tens of thousands and re-establishing bourgeois order. Needless to say, Stalin's April 5 speech was never published.

Stalin and Bukharin were desperate to cover up the disastrous result of their opportunist policy. Also in April, the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee met in Berlin: British trade-union leaders refused the Russian proposal for a “Hands Off China” campaign, while extracting from the Russian trade unionists a pledge of non-interference in the internal affairs of the British unions. Emboldened, the British government raided the Soviet trade mission in London and broke diplomatic relations. Stalin and Bukharin exaggerated the British military threat as an excuse to prohibit public debate on China. Nonetheless, Trotsky and the Yugoslav Zinovievist Voja Vujovic, leader of the Communist Youth International, were able to present the Opposition's views to the Eighth Plenum of the ECCI in May.

The UO raised the call for soviets in China while continuing to insist that the Chinese revolution could only be a “national-democratic” revolution, not a socialist one. They used the pre-April 1917 Bolshevik formula, calling for the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.” Stalin and Bukharin also made use of this slogan, imbuing it with the utterly Menshevik perspective of reliance on the democratic, so-called “anti-imperialist” bourgeoisie. Therein lies the problem with the pre-1917 Bolshevik perspective, which Trotsky had rightly criticized at the time as inherently contradictory. It is impossible for a revolutionary government over the long term to represent the interests of *two* classes.

Even within the United Opposition, the slogan “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” hid substantial differences, centering around an evaluation of the “left” Guomindang in Wuhan. In “The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin,” Trotsky opposed Stalin's fiction that the bourgeois Guomindang was a “workers and peasants party,” and called for “the complete theoretical, political, and organizational independence of the Communist Party” (*Leon Trotsky on China*). Zinoviev, in a set of theses dated 15 April 1927, labeled the Guomindang an “amorphous organization under the Right wing leadership” and argued, “In the present military and political situation, the Communist Party of China can and must remain in the Kuo Min Tang” (published as an appendix in Trotsky's 1932 *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*). Trotsky insisted that the Wuhan government was based on “nothing or almost nothing,” counterposing the call for soviets as the only way to forge an alliance between the revolutionary workers, peasants and soldiers. Zinoviev wrote, “The Communists can and must support the national armies and the National government.”

Zinoviev's line, not Trotsky's, was the public line of the UO. The “Declaration of the Eighty-Four,” written for the ECCI plenum and submitted to the Political Bureau on May 25, included an explicit renunciation of the idea that the Opposition demanded a complete withdrawal of the CCP from the KMT. Trotsky and Vujovic, defending Zinoviev's theses at the plenum, did not condemn the shameless participation of the CCP in the Wuhan bourgeois government. Trotsky himself understood the urgency of this question. Toward the end of the plenum, on May 28, he wrote a short note calling for the CCP's withdrawal from the Wuhan charade (“Hankow and Moscow,” 28 May 1927, *Trotsky on China*). It is unclear if this note was written for internal circulation

in the UO or for submission to the ECCI.

In July 1927 the Wuhan government began a campaign of repression against the CCP, reconciling itself with Chiang's government in Nanjing. Trotsky later wrote:

"I came to the opinion that there would not be any democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in China from the time the Wuhan government was first formed. I based myself precisely upon the analysis of the most fundamental social facts, and not upon the manner in which they were refracted politically, which, as is well known, often assumes peculiar forms, since, in this sphere, factors of a secondary order enter in, including national tradition. I became convinced that the basic social facts have already cleared the road for themselves through all the peculiarities of political superstructures, when the Wuhan shipwreck destroyed utterly the legend of the left Kuomintang."

—Second Letter to Preobrazhensky, written March or April 1928 (*Trotsky on China*)

However, not until September 1927 did Trotsky begin to argue that "the business at hand is the *dictatorship of the proletariat*" in China ("New Opportunities for the Chinese Revolution, New Tasks, and New Mistakes," September 1927, *Trotsky on China*). Even then, the public line of the UO remained that of Zinoviev. The "Platform of the Opposition," submitted in the name of the UO in September in preparation for the Fifteenth Party Congress, called for the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" (*Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1926-27*). It insisted that the pre-1917 Bolsheviks had been right as against Trotsky on the issue of permanent revolution. Writing a year later, Trotsky condemned this failing:

"Last fall we did not explain aloud that the experience of 1925-27 had already liquidated the slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry for the Chinese revolution, and that in the future this slogan would lead either to a regurgitation of Kuomintangism or to adventures. This was quite clearly and precisely predicted. But even here we made concessions (completely impermissible ones) to those who underestimated the depth of the backsliding on the Chinese question."

—Trotsky, "The Opposition's Errors—Real and Alleged," 23 May 1928 (*Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1928-29*)

While the Opposition Platform called for the CCP to "dissolve all organizational and political dependence upon the Kuomintang," it did not call for the CCP's withdrawal. This was despite the fact that Trotsky had already, in June, termed this policy a "serious blunder":

"We have proceeded from the fact that the Communist Party has spent too much time in the Kuomintang, and that our party and the Comintern have been overly occupied with this question, but that openly calling for immediate withdrawal from the Kuomintang would even further sharpen the contradictions within our own party. We formulated the kind of conditions for the Chinese Communist Party's remaining in the Kuomintang, which—in practice, if not on paper—essentially excluded the possibility that the Chinese Communist Party would remain within the Kuomintang organization for a long period. We tried in this way to devise a *transitional* formula that could become a bridge our Central Committee could use to retreat from its erroneous course to a correct one. We posed the question *pedagogically* and not *politically*. As always in such cases, this turned out to be a mistake. While we were busy trying to enlighten a mistaken leadership, we were sacrificing political clarity with respect to the ranks."

—Trotsky, "Why Have We Not Called for Withdrawal from the Kuomintang Until Now?", 23 June 1927 (*Trotsky on China*)

Even as late as September 1927, Trotsky apparently lost the vote on this question within the UO.

Stalin was discredited enough by the disaster in China that in the summer of 1927 he had trouble (briefly) getting other



L'Illustration/Sygmara

Armed workers militia in Shanghai, 1927 (above). Stalin ordered liquidation of Chinese Communist Party into bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, who drowned Chinese Revolution in blood. More than five thousand Communists were slaughtered in Canton, December 1927 (below).



Universal



Earl Swisher

leading party members to accede to his demands. In late July, he convened the Central Control Commission (CCC) in an attempt to expel Zinoviev and Trotsky from the Russian party. But the CCC drew out the proceedings, refusing to make a final decision on the expulsions. As the CCC hearings dragged on, the UO came to Stalin's rescue by accepting another "truce" on August 8. Stalin agreed to simply "reprimand" Trotsky and Zinoviev if they declared their opposition to the idea that Thermidor had already begun in the USSR and renounced all attempts to split the Russian Party and Comintern.

At the time the question of "Thermidor" was being widely discussed in Opposition circles, and this analogy with the overthrow of Robespierre in the French Revolution was widely understood to mean a social (not political) counterrevolution—i.e., the restoration of capitalism. (In 1935 Trotsky corrected his use of the analogy in his work, "The Workers'

State, Thermidor and Bonapartism," explaining that the Soviet Thermidor was the seizure of political power by a bureaucratic *caste*, not a class, which continued to rest on working-class property forms.) The Democratic Centralists insisted that the social counterrevolution had already occurred and that a new revolutionary party had to be built in the USSR. These were positions which Trotsky and Zinoviev had argued against, insisting that the social gains of October had not been destroyed and that the Opposition must work as a faction of the Bolshevik Party and CI. Stalin thus extracted from Zinoviev and Trotsky a denunciation of views which they had never held. Precisely for this reason the statement was a sign of weakness, a weapon in Stalin's hands.

Stalin let the new "truce" last just long enough to shore up his own position. When the Opposition began to circulate its Platform in September 1927, he declared that the August agreement had been broken. Trotsky was expelled from the ECCI in September. The bureaucratic apparatus of repression moved into high gear in November after the UO's public demonstration on the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the party on November 14 in order to prevent their appearance at the Fifteenth Congress, which opened in early December. The Congress declared the Opposition's views incompatible with party membership. Zinoviev, Kamenev and most of their followers capitulated almost as soon as the Congress ended. In the months following the Congress 1,500 Oppositionists were expelled from the party, while some 2,500 signed statements of recantation.

Adolf Joffe, long one of Trotsky's closest political collaborators, had opposed the 8 August 1927 compromise with Stalin. This makes all the more powerful the letter he wrote to Trotsky just before committing suicide on 16 November 1927 (the Stalinists had denied Joffe permission to travel abroad to seek treatment for an increasingly painful medical condition):

"I have always believed that you lacked Lenin's *unbending will*, his *unwillingness to yield*, his readiness even to remain alone on the path that he thought right in the anticipation of a future majority.... *Politically you were always right*, beginning with 1905, and I told you repeatedly that with my own ears I had heard Lenin admit that even in 1905, *you, and not he*, were right. One does not lie before his death, and now I repeat this again to you....

"But you have often *abandoned your rightness* for the sake of an overvalued agreement or compromise. This is a mistake.... You are right, but the guarantee of the victory of your rightness lies in nothing but the extreme unwillingness to yield, the strictest straightforwardness, the absolute rejection of all compromise: in this very thing lay the secret of Lenin's victories. Many a time I have wanted to tell you this, but only now have I brought myself to do so, as a last farewell."

—Adolf Joffe, Letter to Trotsky, 16 November 1927

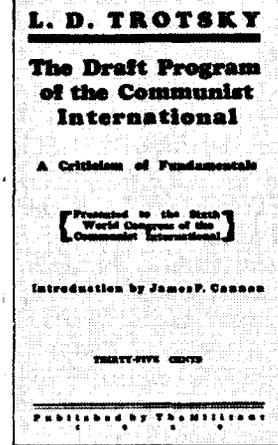
The Spartacist tendency has often noted that Joffe's letter played a key role in stiffening Trotsky's resolve in the struggle to forge the International Left Opposition.

When he began arguing for the perspective of permanent revolution in September 1927, Trotsky wrote the following judgment on the slogan of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry":

"The call for a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, if it had been advanced, let us say, at the beginning of the Northern Expedition, in connection with the call for soviets and the arming of the workers and peasants, would have played a tremendous role in the development of the Chinese revolution, would have completely assured a different course for it. It would have isolated the bourgeoisie and thereby the conciliationists, and it would have led to the posing of the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat under conditions infi-



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James P. Cannon with Red Army soldiers in 1928. Won to Left Opposition by reading partial version of Trotsky's Critique of CI's Draft Program distributed at 1928 Sixth Congress, Cannon smuggled document out of Russia and published it in 1929.

nately more favorable than in the past. But we cannot reverse the course of history. The bourgeoisie retreated from the revolution on its own initiative—under circumstances chosen by it and most favorable to it. Exactly the same is true of the conciliationists. Because we were afraid to isolate them at the right time, they successfully isolated us. It always happens that way—and at that, not only in Shanghai, but also in Edinburgh, as is shown by the last congress of trade unions [the British trade-union tops had just voted at their conference in Edinburgh to break with the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee]. "But in any case, the retreat from the revolution by the bourgeoisie—the big bourgeoisie and the middle and upper petty bourgeoisie in the city and the countryside, and the intelligentsia as well—is an accomplished fact. Under these conditions, the call for a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry—given a new revolutionary upsurge—will prove to be vague and amorphous. And any vague and amorphous slogan in a revolution becomes dangerous for the revolutionary party and the oppressed masses."

—Trotsky, "New Opportunities for the Chinese Revolution, New Tasks, and New Mistakes," September 1927 (*Trotsky on China*)

The course of the Second Chinese Revolution demonstrated the Chinese bourgeoisie's utter prostration before imperialism, while showing the young and vibrant proletariat to have the social weight to put itself at the head of the national democratic revolution. Out of the crushing defeat of the Second Chinese Revolution, Trotsky began to generalize the program of permanent revolution, which had been validated by the Russian Revolution, to colonial and semicolonial countries like China and India. In 1928, Trotsky was even sharper in his denunciation of the Bolsheviks' pre-1917 slogan:

"To advance now the slogan of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry after the role not only of the Chinese bourgeoisie, but also of Chinese 'democracy' has been put to a thorough test, after it has become absolutely incontestable that 'democracy' will play even a greater hangman's role in the coming battles than in the past—to advance this slogan now is simply to create the means of covering up the new varieties of Kuomintangism and to prepare a noose for the proletariat."

—Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*

In coming to this conclusion, Trotsky had to wage a battle among his own supporters, many of whom had been disarmed by his own repeated renunciations of permanent revolution. Preobrazhensky, Radek and many other leading Oppositionists opposed him. Trotsky refused to compromise any longer; from this point his struggle to preserve the program of Leninism against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution took on real programmatic and theoretical consistency. He waged a series of fights within the Opposition, sharply objecting when Radek and Preobrazhensky submitted their own, more conciliatory theses to the Comintern's Sixth Congress. Radek's document, which was also endorsed by Smilga, was eventually withdrawn. Both signed the appeal for reinstatement of the Left Opposition written by Trotsky. But it was clear that their refusal to come over to permanent revolution was the sign of broader political weakness.

The Fight Against a Bloc with the Bukharinites

Trotsky found new political resolve in the recognition that he was fighting for nothing less than the continuity of the revolutionary program of Bolshevism—Leninism. He was to need all of this resolve in the next period. When Bukharin's conciliation of the kulaks proved every bit the disaster predicted by the Opposition, Stalin moved to purge his former Bukharinite bloc partners and implement part of the Opposition's economic program. Having laid none of the technical or economic foundations, with Stalin's characteristic brutality the Soviet state moved to collectivize the peasantry and initiate an adventurous rate of industrialization. This turn foreclosed the immediate threat of capitalist restoration in the USSR.

The split was no surprise to Trotsky, who had long seen the party leadership as an unstable bloc between the Bukharinite right and Stalin's center faction. But it utterly disarmed the Democratic Centralists, who had refused to see any political differentiation between Stalin's base in the bureaucratic apparatus of the workers state and Bukharin's "red professors," allied with the conservative trade-union bureaucrats under Tomsky. Bukharin/Rykov/Tomsky were committed to policies which could only strengthen capitalist restorationist forces within the USSR. Stalin and his supporters were only committed to maintaining themselves in power.

Trotsky was deported to Alma Ata in January 1928. He was expelled from the USSR in early 1929, and in exile he began the fight to forge an International Left Opposition. It was from Turkey that Trotsky saw the Comintern promulgate a "Third Period" of post-1917 capitalism in which international proletarian revolution was declared to be imminent. Comintern sections expelled their own pro-Bukharin right wings and began to pursue an adventurist and sectarian course, abandoning the established trade unions to their reformist leadership, on the slogan of building "revolutionary" unions, and opposing any joint actions with social democrats, who were labeled "social fascists." This rhetorical leftism was simply a convenient—and temporary—posture. Trotsky continued to define the Stalinists as *bureaucratic centrists*. Stalin's turn was accompanied by stepped-up repression against the remaining Opposition supporters. Deportations to Siberia and Central Asia increased from 700 to 7,000 between August 1929 and November 1930. As a result the LO presence was destroyed in the Soviet urban areas.

A spate of capitulations ensued. Not surprisingly, the chief capitulators were Radek and Preobrazhensky, who

opposed permanent revolution. Having given up on an international proletarian revolutionary perspective, they argued that Stalin was at least implementing a more rapid pace of Soviet industrialization. As Trotsky later noted:

"Radek always remained a left centrist within the Opposition. There is nothing unnatural in this. From 1923-27 the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party and the Comintern had, with the exception of the Zinoviev turn, a right-centrist character. At that time, the left-centrist elements inevitably gravitated toward us. But after the splitting of the right-centrist bloc and the Stalinists' turn to the left, the centrists within the Opposition see their 'final goal' reached and even are beginning to fear that under the pressure of the Left Opposition Stalin might move still further left. That is why Radek and the others are already starting to defend official centrism against the Opposition and tomorrow will prove to be the fifth wheel on the *right* on the cart of the ruling bloc."

—Trotsky, "Diplomacy or Revolutionary Politics?",
1 July 1929 (*Writings*, 1929)

Bukharin capitulated to Stalin early on. But a Bukharinite Right Opposition (RO) coalesced internationally. The Bukharinites too opposed Stalinist "Third Period" sectarianism, but from an evolving *class-collaborationist* perspective which was to lead most of their supporters into the Social Democracy—if not into the arms of outright capitalist reaction—before the decade was out. Heinrich Brandler, vacillating head of the German party during the failed revolution of 1923, became the leading international spokesman of the Communist Right Opposition, whose leaders also included the unprincipled American adventurer Jay Lovestone and the Indian nationalist M. N. Roy. Opposing only the new left turn of the Comintern, the RO continued to defend the disastrous policies followed by the Comintern in China in 1925-27. Moreover, they insisted on *support to Stalin* in regard to his leadership in domestic Soviet affairs. Thus they supported the persecution of the Left Opposition.

Trotsky opposed a bloc with the Right Opposition for any other purpose than the limited one of restoring party democracy in the Bolshevik Party and Comintern:

"We are prepared to conclude an 'agreement' with any section of the party in any place, on any particular matter, for even a partial restoration of the party statutes. In relation to the rights and centrists as political factions, this means that we are ready to conclude an agreement with them about the conditions for an irreconcilable struggle. That's all."

—Trotsky, "On the Topics of the Day," December 1928
(*Challenge of the Left Opposition*, 1928-29)

In a signed article reviewing Isaac Deutscher's biography of Trotsky, in an early issue of *Spartacist*, Shane Mage followed Isaac Deutscher in arguing that Trotsky made a major error in refusing to bloc with the Right Opposition:

"The 'logic' itself was faulty.... They [the Trotskyists] continued to regard the Stalin faction as the 'center' even after it adopted adventurist policies that placed it at the *extreme* (or, if you wish, 'ultra') *left* of the Soviet Communist Party and the Communist International, destroying the previous relationship of the mid-1920's, when Trotsky and Bukharin had symbolized opposite poles. *Bukharin* recognized this change when he told Kamenev, 'Our disagreements with Stalin are far, far graver than those we have had with you.' Trotsky, however, and still more the rest of the Trotskyist Opposition, continued to view the Bukharinist right as 'the chief antagonist'."

—Shane Mage, "Trotsky and the Fate of the Russian Revolution," *Spartacist* No. 5,
November-December 1965

Mage could not have been more wrong. *The Left Opposition's intransigent opposition to any merging of banners with the Bukharinite Right Opposition was the key factor in the fight for the continuity of revolutionary Bolshevism.* Implicit in Mage's argument is the view of Trotskyism

as primarily a "democratic" opposition to bureaucratic Stalinism, not the struggle for the program and principles of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

The concessions to the kulaks and NEP forces advocated by the Bukharinite right had brought the Soviet Union to the brink of disaster by 1928. Any bloc with them would have been a bloc for capitalist counterrevolution—sooner or later. The Right Opposition had been easily crushed in 1928-29 because it was unwilling and unable to appeal to the kulaks and NEPmen outside the party who formed its real base of support. In the case of an open clash between Stalin's center faction and the kulak/NEPmen—a real possibility in this period—the Left Opposition made very clear that they would side *with Stalin*.

But there was much more involved than defense of the gains of the Russian Revolution. The Right Opposition confronted the Left Opposition *internationally*, and the line between them was the line between Leninism and rightward-moving centrism evolving rapidly toward reformism. Trotsky waged repeated fights in the early ILO against elements who wanted to merge banners with the Right Opposition on various national terrains. He understood that any such unity meant a step backward from Lenin's struggle to split the communist vanguard from all varieties of centrism and reformism. Those who insist that Trotsky should have made an ongoing political bloc with the Bukharinites place themselves outside the framework of the Trotskyist movement *from its inception*.

The overwhelming proof of the correctness of Trotsky's understanding is provided by the case of Andrés Nin and the Spanish Left Opposition. Nin had a heroic history as a revolutionary syndicalist and as a founding Spanish Communist

and representative in Moscow to the Red International of Labor Unions. In Moscow, he was won to the Left Opposition. Expelled from the USSR, he returned to Spain on the eve of the overthrow of the monarchy in 1931. At this time of intense political ferment in Spain, Trotsky fought many battles against Nin's substitution of personal diplomacy for hard political discussion. Nin resisted the ILO's political perspective of acting as an expelled faction of the Communist International, ignoring the Spanish Communist Party, which numbered no more than 800 members in 1931, in favor of orienting toward the larger Catalan-based Workers and Peasants Bloc led by Joaquín Maurín. Maurín's organization had split from the Spanish party in opposition to the Third Period and was affiliated with the Right Opposition.

Even after the ILO declared the Comintern dead as a revolutionary force after its failure to mobilize the proletariat against Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, and began to orient toward the building of new parties internationally, Nin continued to distance himself from Trotsky. He ignored the promising leftward motion in the Spanish Socialist youth group, which was in 1936 swallowed up by the Spanish Stalinists, giving them the mass base they used to sell out the Spanish Revolution of 1936-37. Instead, Nin led the erstwhile Spanish Left Opposition into a merger with Maurín's organization. The resulting centrist party, the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification), refused to put itself at the head of embryonic organs of dual power during the Spanish Revolution, and instead joined the capitalist Popular Front government in Catalonia, politically disarming the masses before Franco's counterrevolutionary onslaught. Far from placating reaction, the POUM's treachery simply emboldened it. In the wake of the May 1937 workers uprising in Barcelona, the POUM was banned, its Central Committee arrested and its central leader, Andrés Nin, murdered. This campaign of terror, spearheaded by the Stalinists, was but a prelude to Franco's victory and the crushing of the Spanish workers movement. The Spanish Left Opposition had the chance to put itself at the head of the most promising proletarian revolutionary development in Europe since Germany in 1923. Instead, it proved in blood the anti-revolutionary course pursued by those who sought to merge Left and Right Oppositions.

The Heritage of the ICL

In the second volume of his Trotsky biography, *The Prophet Unarmed*, Isaac Deutscher noted that no more than 20,000 members of the CPSU actively took part in the factional struggles of the late 1920s, out of a total party membership of more than a million. Already in March 1922 Lenin had written, "If we do not close our eyes to reality we must admit that at the present time the proletarian policy of the Party is not determined by the character of its membership, but by the enormous undivided prestige enjoyed by the small group which might be called the Old Guard of the Party" (Letter to Molotov, 26 March 1922, *Collected Works* Vol. 33). The "Lenin Levy" had buried the Old Guard in an avalanche of aspiring bureaucrats. The Opposition drew its ranks overwhelmingly from the Old Guard, and from the youth whose shaping political experience had been the Bolshevik Revolution. Deutscher estimates that the 4-8,000 active members of the United Opposition were evenly divided between Zinovievists and Trotskyists. The active membership of the Bukharin and Stalin factions was not much greater. He concludes, "As to the Stalin faction, its strength lay not in its



Roger Viollet



Workers man barricades in Barcelona, May 1937. Unification of Spanish Left Opposition led by Andrés Nin (inset) with group associated with Right Opposition produced POUM, centrist obstacle to proletarian revolution.



Left Oppositionists in Siberian exile demonstrate in 1928 on anniversary of Bolshevik Revolution. Banner at left reads: "Turn the Fire to the Right—Against Kulak, Nepman and Bureaucrat." Above: the "Transitional Program" published in the *Bulletin of the Opposition*, May-June 1938

Basil Blackwell Inc.

size, but in its leader's complete mastery of the party machine" (*The Prophet Unarmed*, 1959).

The Left Opposition that emerged from the crucible of the anti-bureaucratic struggle in the Soviet party was unquestionably the continuity of Leninism, the real heirs to the 1917 Russian Revolution. When French Zinovievist Albert Treint, who sojourned briefly in the ranks of the French Trotskyists before returning to syndicalism, insisted on making a litany of Trotsky's "errors" in the Russian fight, Trotsky freely admitted them, while challenging Treint:

"Have you understood that whatever might have been this or that partial mistake or sin, the basic nucleus of the 1923 Opposition was and remains the vanguard of the vanguard, that it conducted and still conducts a struggle for the theory of Marxism, for the strategy of Lenin, for the October Revolution; whereas the opponent grouping to which you belonged carried through the fatal revision of Leninism, shook the dictatorship of the proletariat, and weakened the Comintern?"

—Trotsky, "A Letter to Albert Treint,"
13 September 1931 (*Writings*, 1930-31)

The program of the 1923 Opposition was limited to the issues of party democracy and Soviet industrialization. Though the KPD's utter inability to take advantage of the revolutionary situation in Germany in 1923 was certainly an indication that the bureaucratization of the Soviet party was beginning to corrode the Comintern, neither Trotsky nor any other Opposition leader saw this at the time. Trotsky's 1924 *Lessons of October* was the first intimation that at stake in the Russian fight was the program of world proletarian revolution. The Comintern's opportunist practice in the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee and especially in the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-27 then reactivated the 1923 Opposition. They made a bloc with Zinoviev and Kamenev and other opposition forces, launched an offensive in the Russian party and, insofar as they were able, took the Russian fight into the *Communist International*. Despite the blunted edges of the United Opposition's propaganda on China, it raised the call for *soviets* and won hundreds of Chinese Communist students then studying in Moscow to fight for the class independence of the Chinese Communist Party. Those who made it back to China (and they were few) became cadre in the Chinese Trotskyist movement.

In his 1928 "Critique of the Draft Program of the Communist International," Trotsky distilled the lessons of the Second Chinese Revolution, extending the program of permanent revolution to China and other newly industrialized countries. He also critically surveyed the record of the Comintern's zigzags from 1923 to 1927, which he had been constrained from doing during the bloc with Zinoviev. Trotsky's "Critique" proved that the fight in the Russian party was a fight not only against the bureaucratic deformation of the USSR, but to preserve the theoretical and programmatic heritage of Bolshevism, the revolutionary Marxism of the imperialist epoch. Thus *The Third International After Lenin* stands as the founding statement of international Trotskyism. This is the document which won the founding cadre of American Trotskyism to the International Left Opposition. This is the heritage that the ICL proudly stands on. ■

ICL Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program

The Declaration of Principles of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) is a concrete expression of our purpose: to build national sections of a democratic-centralist international which can lead the struggle for worldwide socialist revolution. This important document, which was adopted at the Third International Conference of the ICL in early 1998, was published in the four language editions of *Spartacist* and additionally in nine other languages.

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ICL Statement for Prague Protest Against IMF, World Bank

Smash Imperialist Exploitation Through World Socialist Revolution!

We publish below a 16 September 2000 International Communist League statement issued for intervention into the 26-27 September 2000 protest against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in Prague, capital of the Czech Republic. In Prague, the capitalist rulers mobilized their security forces massively to bar youth from elsewhere from entering the country. Demonstrators were beaten by police, fired at with water cannons and sprayed with pepper gas; many of those arrested were brutally tortured in police custody. More recently, youth protesting the North American Free Trade Agreement in Quebec City in April 2001 were repeatedly tear-gassed and over 400 were arrested. The ICL has protested the vicious repression of demonstrators from Seattle to Melbourne, Nice, Naples and elsewhere. We demand immediate freedom for all those arrested.

Though "globalization" demonstrations have spread world-wide since the Seattle protests in November 1999, this is anything but a coherent international "movement." The demands which have brought youth onto the streets have been strongly colored in every country by the ideology and interests of each capitalist ruling class. While often motivated by outrage against racism and sympathy for the impoverished masses of the so-called "global South," many demonstrators are hostile to a Marxist revolutionary perspective and combine tactical militancy with utterly reformist politics of beseeching the imperialist state powers to be more "responsible" and making common cause with the oppressors in their

own country against working people in other lands. In this they have the "help" of opportunist leftists like the British Cliffite Socialist Workers Party (SWP). When such groups profess a "working-class" orientation, they mean loyalty to the sellout labor bureaucracy, which is loyal to its own capitalist rulers.

The dominant political character of the Seattle events was provided by the American AFL-CIO labor tops, who railed about keeping Mexican truckers off American highways and dumped Chinese steel in the harbor to underline their jingoist anti-Communism. The main demand in Seattle was for the U.S. government to pressure the World Trade Organization to adopt and enforce a code of international labor and environmental standards. The idea of the American imperialists as a force for "humane" labor practices is grotesque: these people are in the business of starving the poor countries to increase their own profits, while using their economic and military power to prop up brutal dictatorships overseas which enforce the imperialist plunder of their "own" people. The U.S. imperialists' recent spy plane provocation against the Chinese deformed workers state underlines what is at stake: in Seattle, "globalization" ideology served as a bridge to enlist youth in the direct service of Yankee imperialism. The purported "radicals" of a generation or two ago (exemplified by the Cliffites) who enlisted in their bourgeoisies' holy war against the USSR are a textbook example of such class treason.

As we explained in our Prague statement, the notion of a



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Breed

Thousands of youth who turned out for "anti-globalization" protests in Prague were met with a massive mobilization of police. Of the more than 900 arrested, many were brutally mistreated.



Der Spiegel



P. Glaser

Roma (Gypsy) children in Slovakia; unemployed and homeless at soup kitchen in Berlin. Capitalist counter-revolution has brought misery to working people of East Europe and unleashed pogromist terror against oppressed minorities and immigrants.

“multinational” capitalism standing above national divisions is a fiction. International economic institutions like the IMF and WTO are politically dominated by the major imperialist states while increasingly becoming an arena of conflict between them. But ruling classes do cooperate across national lines in pursuit of common class interests, such as suppressing a proletarian revolution or, more currently, locking down Europe’s borders against desperate immigrants and political refugees, many of them East Europeans fleeing the consequences of the deliberate inflaming of national hatreds which was a battering ram for capitalist counterrevolution. Europe’s bourgeoisies have a real common interest in seeking to counter the more powerful American economy and military machine, while also being riven by bitter rivalries, for instance between France and Germany. Thus, youth protests in France, reflecting the politics of the French rulers, have very visibly taken up anti-American and anti-German slogans. At the same time, many youth are moved to oppose the racist, anti-immigrant policies of the government at home.

During the Balkans War, the European “left” emerged as more or less open proponents of the interests of their “own” imperialists as distinct from those of the Americans. The “left” provided valuable service to the social-democratic-led governments they supported, furnishing left-sounding rationales such as “self-determination” or “democracy” to cover up the imperialists’ war aims. Meanwhile, as the imperialists embarked on murderous forays from Haiti to Rwanda to Iraq to East Timor, supposed leftists have supported military operations of their “own” ruling classes in the name of “human rights” or have pushed the lie that the imperialists’ United Nations can be a force for peace.

As the ICL statement makes clear, no “movement” which makes common cause with its own bourgeoisie can fight imperialism anywhere. The starting point for opposition to world imperialism as a system is the fight against one’s “own” rulers at home. We intervened at the Prague protest to win students and young workers to the understanding that only proletarian revolutions from the imperialist centers to the dependent neocolonial countries can liberate the workers, peasants and other toilers from exploitation, poverty,

social degradation and war and lay the basis for an international planned socialist economy.

* * *

“Turn Prague into Seattle”? Were it not for the capitalist counterrevolution which destroyed East Europe and the former Soviet Union a decade ago, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund would not be meeting in Prague! The “velvet revolution” ripped Czechoslovakia apart and now the working people, women and national and ethnic minorities suffer the raw exploitation, impoverishment and depredations of the capitalist market. As for the illusions of “freedom,” today police forces specially trained by the American FBI and backed up by NATO threaten labor and leftist demonstrations with a brutal enforcement of “law and order” for the imperialist bankers.

For all the talk about concern for the toiling masses, the official call for a “global day of action” in Prague says nothing about the capitalist shock treatment which has led to a plunge in life expectancy and returned starvation to Russia, rolled back women’s right to abortion across East Europe, and given rise to a murderous brown plague of fascist terror directed especially against immigrants and Roma (Gypsies). Last year’s Balkans War wreaked worse devastation on Serbia than Hitler’s Nazis. The resulting economic, social and ecological disaster in the Balkans also does not merit mention in the official manifesto for Prague. Why is this? Because ostensible leftists organizing this year’s “anti-globalization” protest are mainly the very same people who supported the imperialist war against Serbia in the name of “humanitarian” concern for the Kosovar Albanians. They are also the same “leftists” who joined with their own capitalist rulers in fighting for the destruction of the Soviet Union and the East European deformed workers states and who supported the election of the bloody cabal of fake “socialist,” ex-“communist,” and “Labour” leaders presently ruling capitalist Europe.

We comrades of the International Communist League are proud to fight for the authentic communism of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks. Our perspective is proletarian, revolutionary and internationalist. We recognize that the fundamental conflict in society is the struggle by labor against

Free Imprisoned Leftist Protesters in Prague!

We publish below a protest letter sent by the International Communist League on 30 September 2000 to Czech president Vaclav Havel, the Ministry of the Interior and Czech embassies in various countries.

The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) demands the immediate release of all leftists arrested while protesting against the World Bank and IMF summit in Prague on September 26 and 27, 2000. We further demand that all charges against them be dropped. The Czech-based OPH (Obcanske Pravni Hlidky) legal observers report 859 overwhelmingly Czech prisoners and most are being denied legal recourse. Other reports indicate that the actual number of prisoners may be much higher.

Released prisoners and other witnesses have reported extreme police brutality. The Italian *Liberazione* (30 September) reports that one woman, Silvyva Jolanda Machova, was thrown from the window of a Prague police station and required surgery (police reports say that she "fell"). Other reports, including in the German *junge Welt*, indicate severely violent beatings, denial of water and food, "disappearance" of prisoners, denial of medical attention to injured demonstrators as well as medicine to the sick, extreme overcrowding with reports of 22 demonstrators crammed into a 4 square meter cell while 30 demonstrators were kept in an outdoor courtyard overnight without blankets or food. *Liberazione* reports that the police released 500 foreign prisoners yesterday, leaving them in the middle of desolate countryside. Eyewitness reports by released prisoners also

describe processing rooms where groups of 40 to 60 people were spread-eagled while being beaten, their heads knocked back, groins kicked and punched, while handcuffed protesters were thrown downstairs.

The police brutality was obviously long planned. The Czech government worked overtime before the protests to seal the borders against protesters. FBI and Scotland Yard advisers provided lists of potential demonstrators. The Czech government banned the demonstrations while borrowing tear gas grenades from Germany and water cannons from Greece. Some 12,800 armed police were mobilized, twice as many as the official police count of demonstrators. This was clearly aimed at punishing the demonstrators to prove that this former deformed workers state has a reliable bourgeois state apparatus to defend capitalism against its working class and plebeian victims. This inhuman treatment of young leftist demonstrators exposes the lies of "freedom" of opinion and press put forward as bait by proponents of the so-called "velvet revolution" which was actually a social counterrevolution which has brought widespread misery through the restoration of capitalism. Capitalist counterrevolution has led to a surge in anti-Semitism and terror directed at the Roma people.

We stand as proletarian internationalists in the tradition that "an injury to one is an injury to all." Once again we demand the immediate release of *all* the leftist demonstrators and the dropping of all charges against them. We will publicize these atrocities to the working classes throughout Europe, the Americas and Asia.

capital. Because of its central role in production, the proletariat has the social power to bring down the capitalist exploiters and their whole system of class exploitation, racial, sexual and national oppression and imperialist war. The proletariat has the power and the class interest to create a society—initially a workers state—based on collectivized property and a rational, planned international economy, leading to a classless, communist society and the withering away of the state. To achieve this goal requires the construction of an international Leninist-Trotskyist egalitarian party. We struggle to become the party fit to lead international socialist revolutions.

Integral to our fight is holding on to proletarian conquests already wrested from the capitalist class. That is why we Trotskyists fought for the unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union and the deformed workers states of East Europe against imperialist attack and capitalist restoration. With every resource at our disposal we fought in 1989-90 in the DDR [East Germany] to lead a workers political revolution, maintaining the collectivized property forms and replacing the Stalinist misleaders with the rule of workers councils. This could have been the beacon for resistance against capitalist restoration across East Europe and for proletarian socialist revolution in the West. The ICL again fought to rouse the Soviet workers to preserve and extend the gains of the 1917 Russian Revolution which had been grossly betrayed by decades of Stalinist misrule but not overthrown until 1991-92. Today the fate of the Chinese

deformed workers state and the lives of billions of working people in China, across Asia and around the world hang in the balance. We fight for the unconditional military defense of the Chinese workers state against renewed imperialist military machinations and economic encroachments. The gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution are threatened by the Chinese Stalinists' market economic "reforms," but these attacks have also engendered significant proletarian revolt. A Trotskyist party is necessary to lead the proletariat to victory through a workers political revolution to preserve and extend the gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution.

The devastating and worldwide consequences of capitalist counterrevolution also destroy the anti-Marxist theories of "state capitalism" espoused by the late Tony Cliff's International Socialist Tendency and the crackpot and ever-shifting "theorists" of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI, a/k/a Workers Power) and other renegades from Marxism (see "The Bankruptcy of 'New Class' Theories," *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 55, Autumn 1999). According to the Cliffites, the triumph of counterrevolution in the former USSR was merely "a step sideways" from one form of capitalism to another. Their rabid Cold War anti-Sovietism was expressed at the time: "Communism has collapsed.... It is a fact that should have every socialist rejoicing" (*Socialist Worker* [Britain], 31 August 1991).

Today, the proletariat has been hurled back, worldwide, and the U.S. imperialists, unhindered by Soviet military

might, now ride roughshod over the planet, sometimes using the United Nations as a fig leaf, wrapping global military interventions in the cloak of "humanitarianism." Rival imperialisms, especially Germany and Japan, no longer constrained by Cold War anti-Soviet unity, are pursuing apace their own appetites for control of world markets and concomitantly projecting their military power. These conflicting national interests led to the breakup of the WTO talks in Seattle last year. These inter-imperialist rivalries outline future wars; with nuclear weapons, this threatens to extinguish life on the planet.

Thus the task of wresting power from the capitalist exploiters is more urgent now than ever. Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. Today the basic premises of authentic Marxism must be motivated against the false and prevalent misidentification of the collapse of Stalinism with a failure of communism. Stalinist rule was not communism but its grotesque perversion. The Stalinist bureaucracy, a parasitic caste resting atop the workers state much like a labor bureaucracy sits atop a trade union, arose in the Soviet workers state under conditions of economic backwardness and isolation due to the failure to extend the revolution to any of the advanced capitalist countries. The Stalinists claimed they were going to build "socialism in one country," an impossibility, as Leon Trotsky (and before him Marx and Engels) explained since socialism is necessarily international in scope. "Socialism in one country" was a justification for selling out revolutions internationally to appease world imperialism. As Trotsky brilliantly explained in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), the contradictions of Soviet society could not endure forever: "Will the bureaucrat devour the workers' state, or will the working class clean up the bureaucrat?" That contradiction was resolved bitterly in the negative.

Marxism vs. Anarchism and "Globalization"

People who call themselves "anarchist" run the gamut from right-wing petty-bourgeois thugs who hate the working class and attack communists to subjective revolutionists who solidarize with the proletariat and genuinely seek the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. In the latter case, anarchism's appeal is a healthy rejection of the parliamentary reformism of the social democrats, the ex-Stalinists and the fake leftists who prop up and maintain the capitalist order. In fact, for opposing the reformist falsifiers of Marxism, Lenin himself was denounced as an anarchist. When the Bolshevik leader arrived in Russia in April 1917 and called for a workers revolution to bring down the capitalist Provisional Government, the Mensheviks denounced Lenin as "a candidate for... the throne of Bakunin!" (Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record* [1984]). (Bakunin was the anarchist leader in the First International.) As Lenin put it in *State and Revolution*: "The opportunists of modern Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of a parliamentary, democratic state as the limit which cannot be overstepped; they broke their foreheads praying before this idol, denouncing as Anarchism every attempt to *destroy* these forms."

It is not surprising that there is something of a revival of anarchist beliefs, fertilized by the all-sided bourgeois triumphalism that "communism is dead." The Russian Revolution redefined the left internationally and its final undoing is having a similar impact in reverse. When the new workers state was in fact a beacon of liberation, and at the height of the international revolutionary upheavals spurred by the Russian



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The movement of capital around the world has created new centers of militant proletarian struggle. Daewoo auto workers in South Korea protested cop attack on their sit-down strike last February.

Revolution, the best of the anarchist and syndicalist militants (e.g., James P. Cannon, Victor Serge, Alfred Rosmer) became dedicated and disciplined fighters for the communism of Lenin and Trotsky. Before his later break from Marxism, the anarchist Serge reviled the social democrats who led the workers to the imperialist carnage of World War One and he traveled to Soviet Russia to support the new workers state. In the course of struggles against counterrevolutionary revanchists (which some anarchists criminally supported), Serge joined the Bolshevik Party and wrote to his French anarchist friends motivating communism against anarchism:

"What is the Communist Party in a time of revolution?
 "It is the revolutionary elite, powerfully organized, disciplined, obeying a consistent direction, marching towards a single, clearly defined goal along paths traced for it by a scientific doctrine. Being such a force, the party is the product of necessity, that is the laws of history itself. That revolutionary elite which in a time of violence remains unorganized, undisciplined, without consistent direction and open to variable or contradictory impulses, is heading for suicide. No view at odds with this conclusion is possible."

—*La Vie ouvrière*, 21 March 1922; reprinted in *The Serge-Trotsky Papers*, Cotterill, ed. (1994)

The diffuse popularity of "anarchism" among youth today is itself a reflection of the retrogression in political consciousness in the new political period which began with the colossal defeat of capitalist counterrevolution in the USSR and East Europe. At bottom, anarchism is a form of radical democratic idealism which appeals to the alleged innate goodness of even the most rapacious imperialists to serve humanity. The League of the Just (which changed its name to the Communist League around the time Karl Marx joined it in 1847) had as its main slogan, "All men are brothers." Observing that there were some men whose brother he was

not and had no desire to be, Marx convinced his comrades to change the slogan to "Workers of all countries, unite!"

Historically, anarchism has proven to be a class-collaborationist obstacle to the liberation of the oppressed. Uniting with the counterrevolutionary White armies, some anarchists hailed the Kronstadt uprising against the Russian Revolution, and Kronstadt remains an anti-communist touchstone for anarchists today. During the Spanish Civil War, anarchists became ministers in the popular-front government which disarmed and repressed the armed workers' struggle against capitalism, opening the road to decades of Franco's dictatorship.

Today the fundamental differences between revolutionary Marxism and anarchist liberal idealism can also be seen in the "globalization" protests. The notion that large capitalist corporations have today transcended the nation-state system and now rule the world through institutions like the IMF and WTO is false to the core. "Globalization" is a present-day version of the notion of "ultra-imperialism" put forward by the German Social Democrat Karl Kautsky, who argued that capitalists in different countries can resolve their conflicts of interests through peaceful (even democratic) means. As we pointed out in our pamphlet *Imperialism, the "Global Economy" and Labor Reformism*: "So-called multinational or transnational firms do *not* operate above or independently of the nation-state system. Rather they are vitally dependent on their own bourgeois national states to *protect* their investments abroad from popular opposition and rival capitalist states. Hence, imperialist states must maintain strong military forces and a corresponding domestic industrial base."

Many organizations supporting the Prague mobilization call for "democratic control" over the IMF or World Bank in order to better the conditions for people in the "Global South" (Asia, Africa and Latin America). The German PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) argues that the work of the IMF and World Bank must become more transparent and for a genuinely international United Nations. We've called these appeals for action on behalf of the workers and the oppressed by their direct imperialist overlords and oppressors "human rights imperialism." Not only absurd, these appeals to impe-



Der Spiegel

"Human rights" imperialism in Somalia, 1993: demonstrators gunned down in the streets by UN "peacekeepers."

rialism to somehow become responsible and humane are reactionary because they foster deadly illusions that the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in its "democratic" trappings can somehow be the agent for social change in the interests of the workers and the oppressed. This lie binds the exploited to their exploiters and charts a dead-end road for social struggle.

The notion that a "global" United Nations could act in the interests of humanity is a lie which masks the fundamental economic mechanisms of capitalist imperialism. Imperialism is not a policy based on "bad ideas" but is integral to the workings of a system based on private property, the extraction of profit and the necessity for capitalism to conquer new markets. As Lenin explained regarding the UN's predecessor, the League of Nations: "It became plain that the League of Nations was non-existent, that the alliance of the capitalist powers is sheer fraud, and that in actual fact it is an alliance of robbers, each trying to snatch something from the others.... Private property is robbery, and a state based on private property is a state of robbers, who are fighting for a share of the spoils" ("Speech to Chairmen of the Executive Committees," 15 October 1920).

The UN's first intervention (1950-53) was a "police action" against the North Korean and Chinese deformed workers states, slaughtering up to four million Koreans. A decade later, the murderous military intervention in the ex-Belgian Congo was led under UN auspices and included the killing of left-nationalist Patrice Lumumba.

At the left end of the anarchist spectrum appears an article on the anarchist "A-Infos Web site" which stands out among builders of the Prague demonstration for its sharp opposition to begging the class enemy to act morally and "cancel the Third World debt." They call to smash the IMF and World Bank and propose: "Direct demands will be placed not on the appeasers and Co., but on workers organizations and their reformist leaderships to scrap the IMF-World Bank and to cancel the trillion-dollar debt—NOW!" But the world won't be transformed through slogans raised at one big demo or even one big strike, and the reformist leaderships they call on support capitalist imperialism. How then do we get from capitalism to socialism? That's the question to which anarchism has no response.

Marxist theory and the model of Lenin's Bolsheviks leading the working class to state power in the October 1917 Russian Revolution is the only revolutionary solution. The workers cannot take hold of the machinery of the capitalist state and "reform" it in the interests of the oppressed. They must fight for power, smashing the capitalist state and creating a workers state—a dictatorship of the proletariat—which will put down the counterrevolutionary resistance by the former capitalist rulers. Lenin's Bolsheviks canceled the debt amassed by the tsar and the Russian bourgeoisie by taking power and refusing to pay it. This was part of the Bolsheviks' revolutionary internationalist perspective—against appeasement of imperialism, they fought to extend the Russian October to world socialist revolution. They understood that socialism could not be built in one country.

Against the reactionary aspects of the idealism preached by traditional anarchists like Proudhon and echoed today by petty-bourgeois "Greens" that workers should not aspire to wealth but live a spartan communal existence, we Marxists fight for the elimination of scarcity, for a society where workers enjoy the fruits of their labor which today are expropriated by the capitalists. Telling workers to "tighten



WV Photo

ICL called for military defense of Serbia against U.S./NATO imperialism during 1999 Balkans War.

their belts" is in fact the program of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank through starvation "austerity" policies inflicted on the masses of the "Third World." In the name of "defending the environment," the Green parties now in the governing coalitions in Germany and France are even more aggressive in imposing capitalist "austerity" than the social democrats. In the face of recent mass protests against extortionate fuel prices, the French Greens opposed the concession by the Socialist prime minister to reduce the tax on fuel by 15 percent.

In contrast to the anarchist/green impulse to hold back technological advancement and drive down levels of consumption, we Marxists side with Big Bill Haywood, a leader of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World, a/k/a the "Wobblies"). When reproached by a comrade for smoking a good cigar, he replied: "Nothing is too good for the proletariat!" Marxists recognize that the history of human progress has been a struggle to master the forces of nature. The development of agriculture and domestication of animals was a successful incursion into the "natural ecology" of the planet which created a social surplus, opening a way forward from the brief and brutal struggle for daily survival in early human society. To extend to the impoverished masses of the "Third World" all the things Western petty-bourgeois leftists take for granted—electricity, schools, clean drinking water on tap, medicine, public transport, computers—will require a huge leap in industrial and technological capacity. That leap requires a victorious international revolution led by a conscious revolutionary vanguard to render the working class conscious of its mission and to break it from the grip of capitalism's reformist and pseudo-revolutionary lackeys.

It is precisely the loyal service of bourgeois-nationalist "Greens" to the ruling class that leads them to ignore the greatest ecological disasters on the planet. Thus Joschka Fischer, the "Green" foreign minister for the Fourth Reich,

vociferously backed bombing Serbia. The Balkans are now riddled with depleted uranium shells; the poisoned water and destruction of modern industrial and social infrastructure mean the true death toll of the Balkans War will be tallied for years to come. With "Greens" like this, who needs Dr. Strangelove, I. G. Farben and Dow Chemical Company?

Likewise, the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq has destroyed one of the most advanced societies in the region. Ten years ago, the child mortality rate in Iraq was among the world's lowest and today it is the highest; a population whose overwhelming majority was literate and had access to medical care now is literally being starved to death by the ongoing United Nations blockade. So-called "leftists" who opposed the devastating air war against Iraq counterposed UN sanctions as a "humanitarian" alternative. The ICL opposed sanctions as an act of war which has killed more people than the bombs. The support of the fake left for the bloody crimes of "human rights imperialism" is the only explanation for the thundering silence on these questions in any official propaganda for "anti-globalization" protests in Seattle, Washington, D.C. and Prague. The French LCR openly called for an imperialist military intervention in Kosovo under OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] or UN control (*Rouge*, 1 April 1999). The LRCI (Workers Power) openly campaigned for the defeat of Serbian forces by the KLA tools of NATO imperialism, shared a platform in London with enthusiasts for NATO bombing and cheered the withdrawal of Serbian troops, idiotically proclaiming "in the aftermath of NATO's victory in Kosova, a pre-revolutionary situation is maturing" ("The Fight to Overthrow Milosevic in Serbia," 11 August 1999 LRCI statement).

In contrast, the ICL fought everywhere for military defense of Serbia against U.S./UN/NATO imperialism without giving a milligram of political support to the Serbian chauvinist Milosevic, just as earlier in the Gulf War we fought to mobilize the proletariat for the defeat of imperialism and forthrightly championed the defense of Iraq (see April 1999 ICL declaration on the Balkans War in *Spartacist*). Revolutionary internationalists struggle for the defeat of their "own" bourgeoisie and the defense of the victims of imperialist war. The orgy of social-chauvinism of ostensible leftists is a direct reflection of their support to the European governments prosecuting the Balkans War. Two years earlier,

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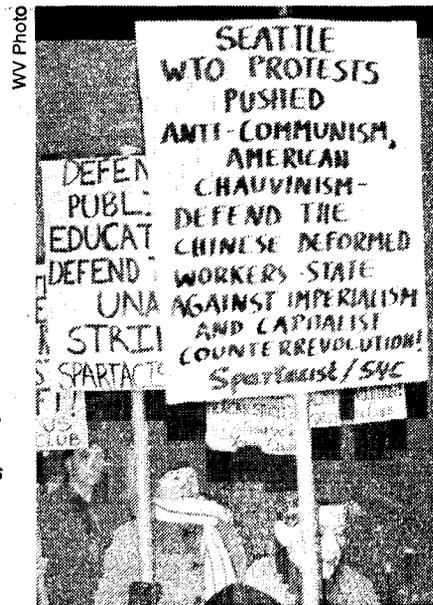
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Imperialist Revolution Must Up
The "Global Economy" and Labor Reformism



Glasel/Seattle Post-Intelligencer

November 1999 Seattle WTO protests were politically dominated by AFL-CIO bureaucracy's chauvinism and anti-Communist China-bashing, with signs reading: "People First Not China First." While fake lefts hailed "spirit of Seattle," Spartacists denounced circus of pro-imperialist protectionism.



WV Photo

the British SWP [Cliffite Socialist Workers Party] campaigned for and declared itself "over the moon" for the election of Tony Blair, who was the biggest NATO hawk in Europe. While posturing to the left in the Balkans War against the craven "poor little Kosovo" crowd, the SWP gave their game away in their fulsome support to "New" Labour's Tony Benn, whose opposition to the war was steeped in "Little England" chauvinist anti-Americanism. To argue that the war should be run directly by Europe's imperialist pigs rather than Americans is hardly an antiwar movement!

At the right end of this nationalist spectrum are the fascists. Last year, German Nazis marched against the Balkans War with slogans like "No German blood for foreign interests!" The nationalist anti-Americanism which the European anti-"globalization" movement deeply imbibes shades over to outright fascism. Czech fascist organizations plan to stage a provocation for their genocidal program in Prague on September 23.

In the crucible of the first major war in Europe in 50 years, the fake "Trotskyists" proved themselves to be decomposition products of the "death of communism." Today they jockey for position to wrest control of the "anti-globalization movement." Only a fool could trust that groups which helped bring the present European capitalist governments to power can now fight these governments, their banks and institutions in the interests of the oppressed. Far from a Marxist alternative to anarchism, the pseudo-Trotskyists are active opponents of revolutionary Marxism embodied in the program and practices of the ICL.

The Material Basis for Opportunism and National Chauvinism

Bourgeois ideology—e.g., nationalism, patriotism, racism and religion—penetrates the working class centrally through the agency of the "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class," the parasitic trade-union bureaucracies based on a privileged upper stratum of the working class. If not replaced by revolutionary leadership, these reformists render the working class all but defenseless against capitalist attacks and allow the organizations of the proletariat to be destroyed or rendered impotent by tying the unions increasingly to the capitalist state. In his 1916 work, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage*

of *Capitalism*, Lenin explained:

"The receipt of high monopoly profits by the capitalists in one of the branches of industry, in one of the numerous countries, etc., makes it economically possible for them to bribe certain sections of the workers, and for a time a fairly considerable minority of them, and win them to the side of the bourgeoisie of a given industry or a given nation against all the others. The intensification of antagonisms between imperialist nations for the division of the world increases this urge. And so there is created a bond between imperialism and opportunism.... The most dangerous of all in this respect are those (like the Menshevik, Martov) who do not wish to understand that the fight against imperialism is a sham and humbug unless it is inseparably bound up with the fight against opportunism."

The national chauvinism and craven capitulation of the organizers of a movement against "globalization" are abundantly evident. Thus trade-union organizers of the Seattle protest against the WTO united with far-right anti-communist forces denouncing "slave labor" in the Chinese and Vietnamese deformed workers states. Chinese steel was dumped in the harbor and signs proclaimed, "People First Not China First." Illustrating why Trotsky described the American labor bureaucracy as Wall Street's ideal tool for imperialist domination of Latin America, American trade-union tops campaigned to ban Mexican truck drivers from work in the U.S. Not for nothing, the AFL-CIO is popularly known throughout Latin America as the "AFL-CIA." Incredibly, the Italian *Rifondazione Comunista* and the pseudo-Trotskyist *Proposta* grouping uphold the AFL-CIA's "leadership" as a model for the European workers to emulate (see *Proposta* No. 27, January 2000)!

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Before Prague, the British SWP labored mightily to promote a Labourite trade-union demonstration in defense of saving British jobs at the Rover car plant. This demonstration was a sea of Union Jacks and virulent anti-German chauvinism pitting British workers against Germans and tying the former to the British ruling class. Slogans like "Britain won two world wars, let's win the third" give a flavor of the poison. After Rover, the SWP buried itself in campaigning for Ken Livingstone for mayor of London, a Labourite politician who was a vociferous proponent of imperialist terror against Serbia and unbridled police force at home. When anarchist protesters irreverently defaced the symbols of British imperialism in a May Day protest in London, the SWP stayed away (bar a token presence) for fear of embarrassing their candidate for London mayor, "Red" Ken Livingstone. Livingstone endorsed police repression of the May Day protesters, several of whom still languish in jail or face prosecution.

In France, José Bové leads masses in protest against McDonald's and the incursions of American fast food on the French palate. Our interest is organizing the horribly underpaid workforces in these fast-food chains, whatever their national ownership or "cuisine." Moreover, if cultural or culinary preferences are synonymous with "imperialism," then by the dim lights of Bové we better worry about the Italians, because people love pizza and it is now marketed everywhere from the Aleutian Islands to the Amazon. Or was it "imperialism" when a particular German device, namely the printing press, conquered the world and made mass literacy possible?!

More seriously, the national chauvinism and opportunism of the labor tops and fake left poison class consciousness and solidarity among workers by fomenting religious, national and ethnic divisions. In recent years this has reached a fever pitch in an anti-immigrant frenzy. This threatens the unity and integrity of the proletariat as a class to resist attacks by the capitalists and their state. As noted in the ICL Declaration of Principles (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 54, Spring 1998):

"Modern capitalism, i.e., imperialism, reaching into all areas of the planet, in the course of the class struggle and as economic need demands, brings into the proletariat at its bottom new sources of cheaper labor, principally immigrants from poorer and less-developed regions of the world—workers with few rights who are deemed more disposable in times of economic contraction. Thus capitalism in ongoing fashion creates different strata among the workers, while simultaneously amalgamating the workers of different lands."

In the Schengen agreement, European powers closed their borders to immigrants, many of whom fled the counter-revolutionary destruction of East Europe. The racist anti-immigrant policies of today's ruling social democrats echo "the boat is full" demagoguery of the Nazis and indeed fuel fascist terror. Meanwhile, the social-democratic popular-front governments across Europe (coalition governments involving reformist workers parties and bourgeois parties) dangerously lull the workers with parliamentary illusions that the social democrats, whose own policies pave the road for the fascists, will "ban" the fascists. Such bans historically serve only to refurbish the image of the very bourgeoisie which resorts to fascism when its rule is threatened. Historically such bans against "extremists" have been used against the left, not the right. In Germany in the immediate postwar period, a small neo-Nazi party was banned in 1952 to cosmetically touch up the "democratic" credentials of the heirs of the Third Reich rebuilding capitalist Germany under American imperialist

Soviet cartoon after Bolshevik Revolution shows Lenin sweeping away kings, priests, capitalists.

V. Deni and M. Chremnykh



auspices. The real purpose was to "justify" a constitutional ban of the German Communist Party in 1956. We demand: Full citizenship rights for all immigrants! No reliance on the bourgeois state! For labor/minority mobilizations to stop the fascists!

The Party Is the Instrument for Socialist Revolution

The Leninist party is the instrument for bringing revolutionary consciousness to the proletariat, for organizing proletarian struggles and guiding them to victorious consolidation in a socialist revolution. A revolutionary party must fight every instance of social injustice and all manifestations of oppression. Central to our task is combatting every instance of women's oppression and "all the old crap" which has come back with religious obscurantism, attacks on abortion rights and anti-gay bigotry. Welding the audacity of the youth to the social power of the proletariat is crucial to the fight for a new socialist society.

Our aim is a revolutionary leadership whose cadre must be tested and trained in the class struggle. The road forward is for the presently small forces adhering to the program of Lenin and Trotsky to forge parties with the experience, revolutionary will and authority among the masses to lead successful proletarian revolutions. Nothing less than a reformed Trotskyist Fourth International will suffice for the task of leading the workers and oppressed to the victory of world socialism. We have no illusions that this will be an easy road, and we recognize that the possession of the technology of nuclear holocaust by an irrational and genocidal ruling class foreshortens the possibilities: there is not a lot of time.

We are guided by the program and practices of authentic communism. As Trotsky wrote in "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International" (1938):

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International."

Join the International Communist League! ■

French Revolution...

(continued from page 64)

responsibility for that lies primarily with the Stalinist bureaucracy which usurped political power from the working class in 1923-24 and betrayed the revolutionary purpose of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party and the revolutionary Communist International that they founded. Not the least of the Stalinists' crimes was the glorification of the family and the reversal of many gains for women. We called for a proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy and return to the road of Lenin and Trotsky.

In celebrating International Women's Day, we reaffirm that the struggle for women's rights is inextricably linked to revolution and we honor the women fighters through the centuries whose courage and consciousness has often put them in the vanguard of struggles to advance the cause of the oppressed. The Russian Revolution was a proletarian social-revolution; it overthrew the rule of the capitalists and landlords and placed the working class in power. The Great French Revolution of 1789-94 was a bourgeois revolution, the most thorough and deepgoing of the bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries.

The French Revolution overthrew the rule of the monarchy, the nobility and the landed aristocracy and placed the bourgeoisie in power. It swept Europe with its liberating ideas and its revolutionary reorganization of society. It transformed the population from subjects of the crown to citizens with formal equality. Jews were freed from the ghettos and declared citizens with full rights; slavery was first abolished on the territory of the French nation. It inspired the first successful slave revolt in the colonies, the uprising led by Toussaint L'Ouverture in what became Haiti. And, within the limitations of bourgeois rule, it achieved gains for women that were unparalleled until the time of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Today's capitalist ruling class is unsurpassed in bloody terrorism against working people around the world in defense of its profits and property. As hard as it is to imagine, the ancestors of this bourgeoisie played a historically progressive role then, sweeping away the backwardness, irrationality and inefficiency of the previous feudal system. The leaders of the French Revolution, who represented the most



VAAP

March 1917: Petrograd women carry banner reading, "As long as women are slaves there can't be freedom. Long live women's equality!"

radical sector of the French bourgeoisie, spoke with—and for the most part believed—the words of the Enlightenment, justifying its fight to destroy the nobility as a class and take political power itself as the advent of "liberty, equality and fraternity" for all. They could not, and the majority of them did not intend to, emancipate the lower classes. Nevertheless, something changed in the world.

Particularly since "death of communism" propaganda has filled the bourgeois press and media following the destruction of the Soviet Union, there's been a real attempt to demonize not just the Russian Revolution but any revolution, the French Revolution in particular. The push for retrograde social policies has been historically justified with a virtual flood of books and articles attacking the humanist values of the Enlightenment philosophy which laid the ideological basis for the French Revolution. Today, while the bourgeoisie in its decay disowns the rationalist and democratic values it once espoused, we Trotskyists stand out not only as the party of the Russian Revolution but the champions of the liberating goals of the French Revolution.

Bolshevik leader V. I. Lenin identified with the Jacobins, the radical wing of the French revolutionary bourgeoisie, whose most prominent leaders were Maximilien Robespierre, Jean-Paul Marat and Louis-Antoine de Saint-Just. Lenin wrote that the "essence of Jacobinism" was "the transfer of power to the revolutionary, oppressed class" and that Jacobinism was "one of the highest peaks in the emancipation struggle of an oppressed class." You can better understand why Lenin was inspired by the Jacobins from the following words by Saint-Just: "Those who make a revolution with half-measures are only digging their own grave."

Women's Oppression and Class Society

In the early 19th century, a French socialist named Charles Fourier carefully studied the French Revolution. He wrote biting, witty and humorous criticism of existing social relations, including working out a whole scheme—kind of nutty but fun and food for thought—for perpetually satisfying sexual relations. Needless to say, he thought sexual monogamy was a curse worse than death. In a famous statement quoted by Karl Marx in his 1845 book *The Holy Family*, Fourier said:

"The change in a historical epoch can always be determined by women's progress towards freedom, because here, in the relation of woman to man, of the weak to the strong, the victory of human nature over brutality is most evident. The degree of emancipation of woman is the natural measure of general emancipation."

And that quite profound observation guides us today in our understanding of society.

Women's oppression is rooted in the institution of the family and has been a feature of all class societies. At one point before recorded history, it didn't much matter who the father of a child was, since children were largely cared for communally. But then inventions such as agriculture made it possible to produce more than the producers could actually consume. This ability to produce a surplus meant that a leisure class could live off the labor of others and accumulate property. It became important to know who the father of a child was so that he could pass on his property to his own children. Monogamy appeared, making the man dominant and the woman subservient, enslaved.

The family is a key social unit for the maintenance of capitalism. For the capitalists, the family provides the basis for passing on accumulated wealth. And where there is no prop-

erty to pass on, the family serves to rear the next generation of workers for the capitalists and to inculcate conservative social values. It is the family—and the necessity to control sexual access to the woman to ensure that the man knows who his real heir is—which generates the morality codified in and reinforced by religion. It is the family which throughout a woman's life gives definition to her oppressed state: as daughter, as wife, as mother.

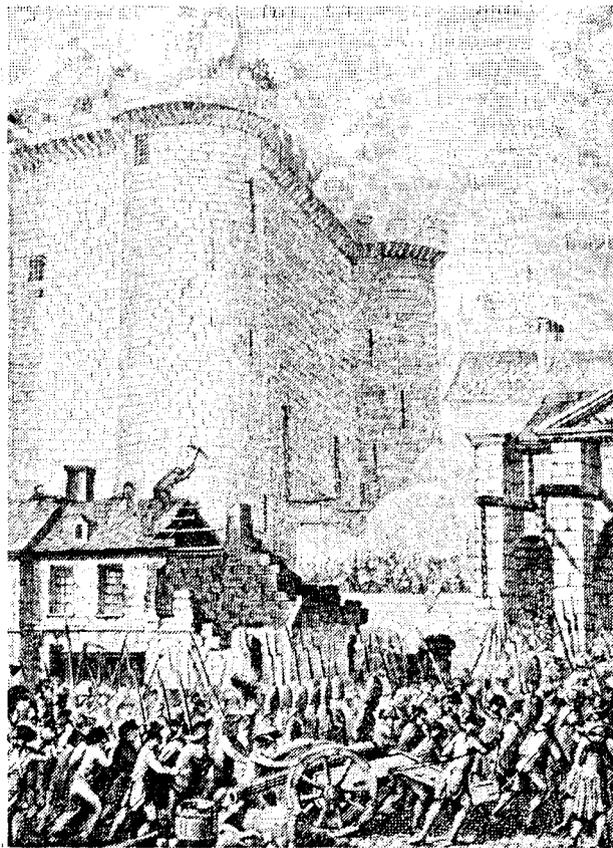
We Marxists fight to rip the means of production out of the hands of the capitalists in order to put them at the service of the needs of the working people that create the wealth. Only then can household drudgery be replaced with socialized childcare, restaurants, laundries and so on. The program of communism is for a classless society in which the family is transcended by superior sexual and social relations which will be free of moral or economic coercion. Our slogan is: "For women's liberation through socialist revolution!"

Marx said that revolution is the locomotive of history. In the Great French Revolution, the women of Paris were often the engineers in that locomotive. I'm going to be talking about the role of thousands of women leaders, military commanders, propagandists and organizers whose role at key junctures of the French Revolution was quite simply decisive. Groups like the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women literally shaped history. Count Mirabeau, one of the major actors in the beginning of the revolution, was an extremely sleazy guy, firmly in favor of a constitutional monarchy, occasionally in the pay of the king. But even he said: "Without women, there is no revolution."

Most histories of the French Revolution concentrate their chief attention on the upper levels of society and the top layers of the plebeian masses. In recent years, a number of French and American women historians have done very interesting and important research into the dusty archives of the revolution in Paris—police reports, newspaper articles. Some of these historians are feminists; that is, they see the fundamental division in society as that between the sexes.

At the time of the revolution, a movement focused specifically on women's rights was in the minority. One person who was what you would call a feminist today, at least as far as I have been able to put together her history, was Olympe de Gouges. In her pamphlet, *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Female Citizen*, written in the fall of 1791, she implicitly called for the vote for women, for a women's assembly and for equal rights with men. She also dedicated her pamphlet to the despised queen Marie Antoinette! De Gouges was not an aristocrat but a butcher's daughter from outside Paris, yet she remained a royalist throughout most of the revolution and was guillotined in November 1793.

Some of the recent analysis by feminist historians feeds right into today's reactionary climate. Taking aim at the French Revolution itself, they claim that the failure of women to secure the right to vote for national parliaments and the suppression of the exclusively women's political



Mansell Collection

14 July 1789: Depiction of storming of Bastille by Parisian working people. Right: Parisian *sans-culottes*.



Bulloz

clubs during the most radical period of the revolution proves that misogyny triumphed. This view is also promoted in an article in the *New York Times Magazine* (16 May 1999) called "The Shadow Story of the Millennium: Women." The article states that the French Revolution's "new philosophy of rational natural rights placed all men on an equal footing in regard to citizenship and the law" but adds: "Men of the revolution said that women should stay home and rear their sons to be good citizens."

Let us allow a participant to refute this falsehood. Mère Duchesne was a domestic servant, a cook, who, unlike most domestic servants then, defied her aristocratic masters. She was described in a police report as "the satellite and missionary to all women under Robespierre's orders, a most ferocious woman." The *Mère Duchesne* newspaper wrote in September 1792:

"In the past, when we wanted to speak, our mouths were shut while we were told very politely, 'You reason like a woman'; almost like a goddamn beast. Oh! Damn! Everything is very different now; we have indeed grown since the Revolution."

"The Columns of French Liberty"

Now I want to go into some detail about the French Revolution itself. A revolution is a monumental military and social battle between *classes*. The dominant class in any society controls the state—the police, courts, army—which protects its class interests. In modern society there are two fundamental classes: the big capitalists who own the means of production (the mines, factories, etc.) and the workers who own absolutely nothing except their personal effects and are compelled to sell their labor power to the capitalists. At the time of the French Revolution, there were essentially four

classes. The king and the nobility who owned nearly all of the land, the rising bourgeoisie, the peasants (who constituted over 80 percent of the population) and the urban *sans-culottes*. The latter consisted of artisans, who worked either at home or in very small workshops, shopkeepers, day laborers, the poor and unemployed. Those who did manual labor wore loose trousers and were *sans*—without—the tight silk leggings worn by aristocrats and those imitating them.

A revolution happens when the ruling class can no longer rule as before, and the masses are no longer willing to be ruled in the same way. We're talking about a political crisis in which the rulers falter and which tears the people from the habitual conditions under which they labor and vegetate, awakening even the most backward elements, compelling the people to take stock of themselves and look around. That political crisis was provoked in France by the 1776 American Revolution.

France had taken the side of the American colonies against its perpetual enemy England and so had emerged on the side of the victors, but totally broke. In May 1789, King Louis XVI convened an *Estates General*—a meeting of representatives of the nobility, the clergy and the non-noble property owners and lawyers (the so-called Third Estate)—at Versailles, where his palace was located, about 12 miles from Paris. He hoped to convince some of them to pay more taxes. But they refused, while every village throughout the country wrote up its grievances to be presented at Versailles. The meeting of the three estates transformed itself into a National Assembly.

It was clear that the king was gathering troops to disperse the National Assembly. The negotiations out at Versailles might have gone on forever, except the Parisian masses took things into their own capable hands and organized to arm themselves, seizing 60,000 muskets from armories like the Invalides and the Bastille prison fortress around the city on 14 July 1789. You know of this event as the storming of the Bastille. The freeing of the handful of prisoners was incidental; it was the arms that were the goal. The Paris garrisons had

been deeply influenced by revolutionary propaganda following a massacre of rioters in the working-class quarters of Faubourg Saint-Antoine some months earlier. In June, the troops paraded through the streets to shouts of "Long live the Third Estate! We are the soldiers of the nation!"

The king backed down, but the monarchy still had its army and its throne. The bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, mutually hostile classes, were relying on essentially incompatible government institutions, the National Assembly and the royal throne. One or the other would have to go. Either the king (and his many royal cousins and relations by marriage ruling other countries of Europe) would crush the National Assembly or the king would meet up with what came to be known as "Madame la Guillotine."

The weeks following the July 14 events were known as the "Great Fear," the fear that the aristocrats were coming to take the land back and were organizing brigands and robbers and bands of pirates and so forth. So the peasants armed to protect themselves. Then it turned out to be a rumor, but there they were, armed and ready, and being practical sorts, they turned on the landlords' manor houses and made use of the arms that they'd gotten.

The people's representatives, who were deliberating out at Versailles, took note of the insurrection and on August 4 passed laws eliminating feudal privileges, which had been the original issue all summer. The problem was that you had to buy your way out of your feudal duties and pay 25 times your feudal taxes in order to free yourself from them. Most peasants simply ignored that and had been seizing the land all over the country since July 14. They also would burn down the lord's manor house, where the records and the deeds were kept. You know, straightforward and practical.

The next major event is crucial to our understanding of the women's role. It was October and the people of Paris were starving again. October is usually a cold and wet month in Paris. It was indeed raining at 8 a.m. on the morning of 5 October 1789. Thousands of women—eventually some 8,000—had already gathered in front of City Hall. They knew where to find the arms because it was they who had helped store them here after July 14.

The king had allowed the symbol of the revolution—the red-white-and-blue cockade (rosette)—to be trampled underfoot by some foreign troops brought in to protect him and his Austrian queen, Marie Antoinette. The women intended to stop this anti-revolutionary activity and they wanted bread. Huge stores of fine white flour waited at Versailles. They began to walk there. They couldn't get anyone to come with them, but later in the afternoon about 20,000 troops of the National Guard—which had been formed by the bourgeoisie—forced the very reluctant General Lafayette, whom you might know as a hero of the American Revolution, to lead them there. One of the women was Pauline Léon, a chocolate maker, who was later to lead the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women. That day she was armed with a pike, which was known as the people's weapon, because it was so easy to make. You could pull something off the top of a railing and attach it to a good hefty stick. It was said that "the pikes of the people are the columns of French liberty."

This was no protest march—it was a sea of muskets and pikes. The women were determined not to come back without the king and his family. There were still plenty of illusions in the king, but they wanted him under their watchful eye, in Paris. At one point the crowd apparently invaded the palace and was wandering through Marie Antoinette's



Bibliothèque Nationale

Contemporary print shows May 1791 decree giving civil rights to free black men and Declaration of Rights of Man. Reason is seen holding a level to symbolize equality of black and white.



Musée Carnavalet

A women's political society meets during the French Revolution.

chambers and some things were getting broken and stepped on and stomped and so forth. One very respectable woman in a velvet hat and cloak turned around and said very haughtily, "Don't do that, we're here to make a point, not to break things." And a woman from the artisan class turned around and said, "My husband was drawn and quartered for stealing a piece of meat." Finally the women demanded that the royal family get into their carriage. Lafayette's troops led the way and the women marched in front carrying on their pikes loaves of fresh, very white bread—the kind reserved for the upper classes—and the heads of two of the king's bodyguards.

The Revolutionary Jacobin Dictatorship

While pretending to be happy with the situation, the king was secretly corresponding with the other royal heads of state and nobles began to emigrate en masse, establishing counter-revolutionary centers outside the country. In June 1791, the king and queen disguised themselves and tried to escape, intending to return with the backing of the Austrian army. But an observant revolutionary recognized them in the town of Varennes, and they were brought back to Paris. This destroyed the people's remaining illusions in the monarchy and triggered an upsurge in revolutionary agitation. But the bourgeoisie, fearing things could get out of hand, sought to maintain the monarchy and clamp down on the mass turmoil. A month after the king's arrest, a petition to abolish the monarchy was being circulated among the crowd on the broad expanse of the Champs de Mars. The National Guard fired on the crowd and many were killed. Commanded by the aristocrat Lafayette, the National Guard had been organized as a force not only against the king but also against the threat that the bourgeoisie had already seen coming from the Parisian working people.

The Champs de Mars massacre marked a split within the bourgeois revolutionary forces. The two main factions that emerged—the Girondins and the Jacobins—represented the same social class, but they were deeply politically divided. The Prussian monarchy and the rest of royal Europe were mobilizing militarily and in April 1792 revolutionary France

went to war. The Girondins sought a "negotiated solution" with the reactionary feudal armies combined with concessions to the nobility and the clergy. The Jacobins were ready to make temporary concessions to the hungry urban masses in order to thoroughly vanquish feudal reaction. You could say that the Girondins were the reformist wing and the Jacobins the revolutionary wing of the bourgeoisie.

In June 1792, thousands of armed marchers, including numerous women armed with sabers, paraded through the Assembly in the first of what became known as *journées*, or days of action. One official observed at the time, "The throne was still standing, but the people were seated on it, took the measure of it." The monarchy was finally overthrown by a second *journée* on 10 August 1792, when the masses invaded the king's residence at the Tuileries Palace in Paris and imprisoned the royal family.

The war was not going well. Most of the former officers, aristocrats, had emigrated. A government representative appealed for recruits by invoking "the heartbreaking thought that, after all the efforts that have already been made, we

A Spartacist Journal

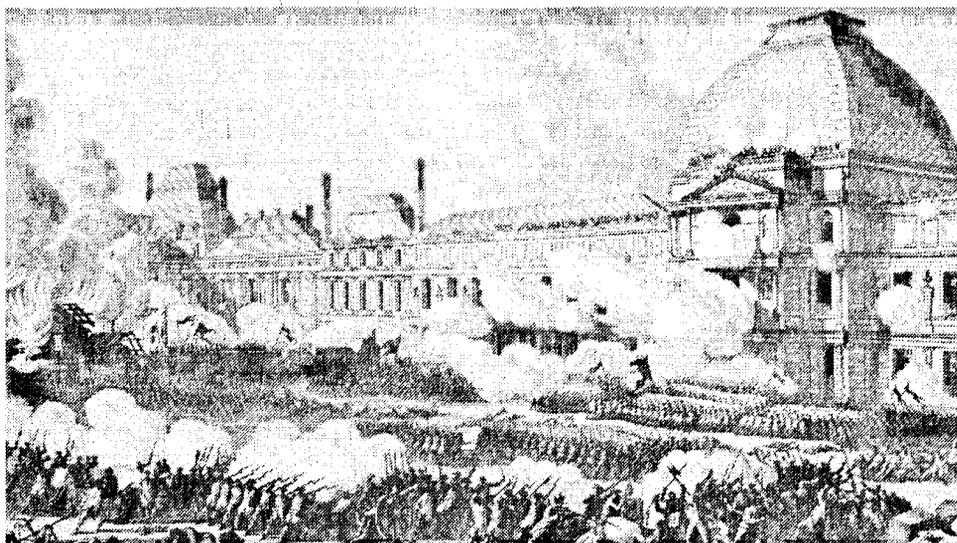
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**10 August 1792 *Journée*:
Assault on Tuileries
Palace, king's residence,
marked overthrow of
monarchy.**

might be forced to return to the misery of our former slavery." While the best of the revolutionaries volunteered for the front, they were untrained and assumed to be undisciplined. Most of the new recruits were tradespeople, artisans and journeymen, not the sons of the bourgeoisie as before. The road to Paris seemed open to the Prussian royal armies.

The king of Prussia expected the French troops to scatter in disarray when his troops moved to drive them out of a strip of land near Valmy in eastern France. But not a man flinched as the French general waved his hat in the air on the point of his sword, shouting "Long live the nation!" The *sans-culottes* fired straight and repeatedly at the enemy. With a torrential rainstorm some hours later, the armies fell back. The German writer Goethe was present at Valmy, and as he looked out over the battlefield that night he said, "This day and this place open a new era in the history of the world."

He could not have been more prescient. On that day, the Assembly gave way to the Convention, which was elected by universal male suffrage and convoked expressly to give the nation a constitution which codified the overthrow of the king. Also, as we will see, the most progressive marriage and divorce laws until the Bolshevik Revolution were passed on exactly the same day as the victory at Valmy. Five months later, the king was beheaded.

In a third uprising in June 1793, the people of Paris and 80,000 National Guard troops surrounded the Convention and demanded the arrest of the Girondins and a comprehensive program of revolutionary defense of the country. This ushered in the Jacobin revolutionary dictatorship, which irremediably abolished seigniorial (feudal) rights, instituted the price controls (referred to as the "maximum") demanded by the *sans-culottes* and destroyed the resistance of the feudal order through a reign of revolutionary terror carried out by the Committee of Public Safety.

A month after the foreign troops were driven from France in mid-1794, on July 27 (9 Thermidor in the revolutionary calendar), the conservative wing of the bourgeoisie took the reins of power. The next day Robespierre followed the Girondins to the guillotine. The Thermidorians thought they could do without the alliance with the lower classes. That calculation was proved false, and they were themselves replaced in 1799 in the coup of the 18th Brumaire (November 9) by Napoleon Bonaparte, who subsequently declared himself emperor. But the Jacobin dictatorship had irreversibly con-

solidated the central achievement of the French Revolution, the rooting out of feudal relations in the countryside.

Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance

As materialists, we understand, as Marx put it, that "Law can never be higher than the economic structure and the cultural development of society conditioned by that structure." The rising capitalist class was firmly committed to the preservation of private property, as indeed it had to be. It was precisely this which staked out the limits of the revolutionary social changes that could be carried out, although the most radical years of the French Revolution went very far indeed.

The family was temporarily undermined in order to serve the needs of the revolution against its enemies, the feudal nobility and Catholic church. This is one demonstration of the fact that social institutions which seem to be immutable, to be "natural" and "eternal," are in fact nothing more than the codification of social relations dictated by the particular economic system that is in place. After the bourgeoisie consolidated its power as the new ruling class, it re-established the constraints of the family. But nothing would ever be the same again. The contradictory reality of the French Revolution—the breathtaking leap in securing individual rights and the strict limits imposed on those rights by the fact that this was a bourgeois and not a socialist revolution—was captured by Karl Marx in *The German Ideology*:

"The existence of the family is made necessary by its connection with the mode of production, which exists independently of the will of bourgeois society. That it was impossible to do without it was demonstrated in the most striking way during the French Revolution, when for a moment the family was as good as legally abolished."

The feminists who want to dismiss the bourgeois revolution as anti-woman end up echoing those who justify *suttee* (widow-burning) in India and the imposition of the *chador* in Iran and Afghanistan as "cultural differences." Where the bourgeois revolution did not triumph, the status of women is qualitatively inferior. It is enough to contrast the condition of women today in West Europe with Afghanistan, groaning under the rule of the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban.

I'll give you a very small example of what it meant to have a society in which a rising, vigorous, productive class—the bourgeoisie—was held in check by outmoded institutions. France was a Catholic country. In 1572, tens of thousands of French Protestants were killed in the St. Bartholomew's

Day massacre, and more fled the country. The 1598 Edict of Nantes assured them the free exercise of their religious beliefs, but this was revoked in 1685. Some of the richest merchants were Protestant, but marriages performed by their own pastors were not officially recognized. At the death of a spouse, you would have distant Catholic relatives claiming the inheritance, because legally there was no spouse and the children were illegitimate. Both Protestants and Jews accepted divorce. In 1769, according to James Traer in his *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (1980), a respected author advocated permitting divorce on the grounds that "the Protestant nations of northern Europe were enjoying both population growth and prosperity while the Catholic states of southern Europe were suffering from declining population and poverty." But the conservatives always managed to get the law postponed.

Under the Old Regime, women had the right to exactly nothing. The monarchy consistently sought to reinforce, supplement and extend the father's control over the marriage of his children. Women found guilty of adultery were sentenced to public whipping or imprisonment. Women were also put into convents for life for adultery. Marriage was indissoluble—a life sentence. If you were a man, you couldn't marry until you were 30 without your parents' permission. If your family had property, your father could get the king to issue a *lettre de cachet*, something like an unlimited arrest warrant, and you could be locked up indefinitely. If you married a minor (under the age of 25 for women) without permission, the penalty was death for rape notwithstanding the woman's consent. By the way, actors and actresses couldn't marry either, because their profession was viewed by the church as immoral.

The aristocracy was hardly committed to the sanctity of marriage. It was said at the court of Louis XIV some decades before the revolution that the aristocracy frowned on marital fidelity as being in bad taste, and a German visitor noted, "I know of not a single case of mutual affection and loyalty." I introduce this to make the point that marriage for the upper classes was all about property. Many of the *sans-culottes* did not marry at all. But in the Paris of the French Revolution, women were still largely dependent on men for economic reasons (whether or not they were legally married).

Much debate and several pieces of draft legislation on marriage and divorce had already been considered by the Na-

tional Assembly before September 1792. All proposed to make marriage a simple civil affair. However, what stood in the way of this was the Catholic church. Those clergy who refused to swear an oath of loyalty were threatened with deportation. But the Pope forbade it, and a lot did refuse. Though some were deists or free thinkers, the bourgeois deputies in the Assembly had no intention of suppressing religion; they nearly all agreed that some kind of religion was necessary to keep the people pacified. But now they had a big problem on their hands as the village priests became organizers for counterrevolution.

The local priests not only carried out marriage ceremonies, baptisms and funerals, but also recorded them. If these records were in the hands of hostile forces, how could you count the population? You wouldn't even know if you had enough draftees for the army. When in June 1792 the Minister of Justice wrote that the civil war launched by the aristocracy and the church in the Vendée region in southwest France had completely disrupted the keeping of records, one delegate rose to propose that the marriage ceremony be abolished with the cry, "Freedom or death!" So in some ways, the progressive marriage and divorce laws enacted in September the same day as the victory at Valmy were war measures.

The age of adulthood was lowered to 21 and marriage without parental consent was legalized. This was followed by a June 1793 decree that proclaimed the right of illegitimate children to inherit from both their mothers and their fathers. At a stroke, the institution of the family lost one of its main functions as the framework for the transfer of property from one generation to the next. While inheritance rights didn't mean much to those without property, the new laws also tended to legitimize "free unions." For example, soldiers' common-law wives could receive government pensions.

Divorce had not been high on the list of grievances before the revolution, but as the pamphlets flowered, so did the notion that divorce was a necessary right in society. Probably rarely in history had a simple law so delighted the female population. When a certain citizen Bellepaume came to the town hall intending to oppose the divorce demanded by his wife, he found that she had organized "a considerable number of citizens of both sexes, but chiefly women" who pursued him in the corridors, abused him and tore his clothes. In the first year after the divorce law was passed, women

Planeta



AP



Afghanistan: Women in Kabul under Soviet military presence (left). 1989 Soviet withdrawal meant regression to feudalist backwardness under Taliban fundamentalists.

initiated over 70 percent of all divorces. One woman wrote to the Convention:

"The female citizen Govot, a free woman, solemnly comes to give homage to this sacred law of divorce. Yesterday, groaning under the control of a despotic husband, *liberty* was only an empty word for her. Today, returned to the dignity of an independent woman, she idolizes this beneficial law that breaks ill-matched ties and returns hearts to themselves, to nature, and finally to divine liberty. I offer my country six francs for the expense of war. I add my marriage ring, which was until today the symbol of my slavery."

The Society of Revolutionary Republican Women

The question of women's status in society had been a subject of debate throughout the Enlightenment. The Encyclopedia, published just before the revolution and intended as a compendium of all knowledge, contained four contributions under the category "Women": one in favor of equality, one ambiguous and two against. Even in a very radical work like Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), woman's role as subordinate to man inside the family was not seriously called into question. Wollstonecraft was part of a circle of British radical-democratic revolutionaries who supported the French Revolution against English monarchical reaction, even participating in the French government.

Most of the Enlightenment thinkers and writers concentrated on education for women, and that was about it. Now, this is undeniably a very important question, and it refuted the prevalent idea that women were inferior to men and their brains worked in an inferior way. Only about a third of French women at the time were literate. You'd find them during the revolutionary years at the corner café with their glass of red wine, reading or listening to someone else read

Robespierre's latest speech. The hunger for knowledge was totally linked to the desire to change society. Before 1777, France had no daily newspaper. Two years later, there were 35 papers and periodicals and by 1789 there were 169. Thousands of political pamphlets rolled off the printing presses.

One of the novels based on the new research published in the last few years has the Enlightenment philosopher Condorcet, who wrote very eloquently about women's rights, and his lovely young wife enjoying long mornings reading a bit of Voltaire or the equivalent of the Sunday *New York Times* in bed with their café au lait, making love, and then getting up in the afternoon to walk in the garden and do their very serious intellectual work. Not a bad life, right? But it wasn't available to most people, of course. Condorcet ended by opposing the execution of Louis XVI, ostensibly on the grounds of opposition to the death penalty.

The working women of Paris who were a motor force in the revolution lived very different lives. Perhaps 45,000 women in Paris, some 20 percent, were wage earners; a similar percentage of women in cities like Lyon and Rouen worked. Because of the war, women were able to break into traditionally male professions and they were also employed at sewing, as domestic servants. Some were proprietors of shops. Wives, legal or otherwise, of soldiers at the front were given subsidies. The Paris municipal government and the political clubs set up spinning workshops that at a certain point employed several thousand women, though the wages were miserable. They were centralized by the government office responsible for producing clothes for the troops.

It was from among these women of the *sans-culottes* that the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women was formed in the spring of 1793. One of the leaders of the society was the chocolate maker Pauline Léon, whom we last saw with her pike on the October 1789 march to Versailles. Another was the actress Claire Lacombe, who always followed her signature with "A Free Woman." A third was Anne Félicité Colombe, who owned a print shop. Typography was generally a man's job, so she was already exceptional for this. In 1791, she had been one of the four women arrested when the National Guard shot down demonstrators at the Champs de Mars calling for the overthrow of the monarchy. Colombe printed the revolutionary newspapers of Jean-Paul Marat, *L'Ami du Peuple* (The Friend of the People) and *L'Orateur du Peuple* (The Orator of the People). She was dragged into a libel suit, which she eventually won, and distributed the 20,000-livre settlement to the poor in her neighborhood.

While women did not win the right to vote for delegates to the Convention, especially after the establishment of the Jacobin dictatorship in 1793 they played a full role in the Parisian sectional assemblies, intervening, presenting positions, voting and being elected as delegates. They refused to be "servile women, domestic animals," as one put it in May 1793. Interestingly, the one widespread demand for formal equality was for the right to bear arms. In March 1792, Pauline Léon had led a delegation to present a petition to the Assembly declaring:

"You cannot refuse us and society cannot remove from us this right which nature gives us, unless it is alleged that the Declaration of Rights is not applicable to women and that they must allow their throats to be slit, like sheep, without having the right to defend themselves."

The women demanded the right to arm themselves with pikes, pistols, sabers and rifles, and to assemble for maneu-



Musée Carnavalet

Women fighters in 1871 Paris Commune, the first realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat.



The Woman Worker, newspaper published by the French Communist Party in the early 1920s.

vers on the Champs de Mars. After much debate, the Assembly moved to put the petition in the minutes with honorable mention. Dozens of women actually went to the front when the war began, a few as officers.

The Society of Revolutionary Republican Women solidly backed the Jacobins as the revolutionary government and politically supported the extreme left Enragés around Jacques Roux, who spoke for the popular masses. Just after the Revolutionary Republican Women was founded, they mobilized the support of the masses in the streets for the Jacobins, whose battle to oust the Girondins was then coming to a head. As the split deepened, there were many more women than men in the street gatherings, according to police reports. The Revolutionary Republican Women dressed in military clothes and carried sabers. One account has them waging a military battle in the Convention to get back the seats which had been taken from them by supporters of the right-wing Gironde.

Reversal of Gains Under Thermidor

In October 1793, the society became one of the first organizations to be banned by the Jacobin government. Those feminist historians I mentioned earlier claim that this proves that the French Revolution was essentially hostile to women. That's wrong. The society was banned not because it was composed of women, but because it was one of the most radical expressions of the *sans-culottes*.

Here's what happened. The Enragés and the Revolutionary Republican Women fought for strict price controls, especially on food, and an upper limit on the size of personal fortunes. In October, the Revolutionary Republican Women launched a campaign to force all women to wear the revolutionary cockade. They brought their campaign to Les Halles, the central marketplace in Paris. The market women were of course hostile to the price maximum on food that had just been imposed by the Jacobin government as a concession to the *sans-culottes*. The question of the cockade was just the pretext for the major-league brawl that ensued between the market women and the women revolutionaries. This fight represented an early split in the Jacobins' base, and the Jacobins sided with the market women, banning the Revolutionary Republicans.

The peasants wanted maximum food prices, the artisan-proletariat in the cities wanted minimum ones, pointing to the spectre of a civil war which the *sans-culottes* could not win. The Jacobins could have tried to strike a deal, but ultimately they could not satisfy the conflicting demands of the urban poor and the peasantry. When revolutionary Russia in

the early 1920s was confronted with the "scissors crisis," as the price of scarce manufactured goods rose and the price of agricultural products fell and the peasants threatened to withhold their produce, Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky proposed a course of planned industrialization to make more manufactured goods available to the peasants and maintain their support for the proletarian dictatorship. Trotsky's proposal was rejected at the time (only to be implemented at forced-march pace a few years later by Stalin). But such an option was objectively unrealizable in the capitalist economic system of pre-industrial France.

By the fall of 1793, the Jacobins and revolutionary France were gasping for air. Mandatory conscription had provoked mass uprisings in the Vendée; there had been treachery at the front; the armies of the European monarchies had reinvaded France; and Girondin provinces were seceding; Marat, the "friend of the people," had been assassinated by the royalist Charlotte Corday. Against this backdrop, the Revolutionary Republican Women, in their revolutionary zeal against the market women, threatened to get in the way of prompt and regular deliveries of food to the city from the countryside, without which the Jacobins would have lost the allegiance of the urban masses.

Many of the revolutionary women continued to be active as individuals. Even after being arrested by the Jacobin government, Claire Lacombe stayed loyal to Robespierre. She never renounced her support, and after Robespierre's execution she always refused to point out that she had been arrested by his revolutionary government because she hated the idea of becoming a hero of the Thermidorians. Women played a vanguard role in the last uprising of the French Revolution in the spring of 1795, after Thermidor. The rallying cry was "Bread and the Constitution of 1793!"

The modern feminist historians believe that the role of women who rose up from the "cellars and catacombs" has been largely obscured because of prevailing patriarchal attitudes in society. Or they seek to show that women acted only on "women's issues," mainly food shortages. While there's some truth in both these observations, they fundamentally miss the point. The mass of active women in the French

**SUSAN ADAMS
MEMORIAL COLLECTION**

The Prometheus Research Library is honoring our comrade Susan Adams by creating a special collection as a tribute to her lifelong commitment to the fight for women's liberation through socialist revolution. The PRL, central reference archive of the Spartacist League of the U.S., is seeking contributions to expand its holdings of archival and current materials of the Marxist and workers movement related to the woman question, particularly its international aspects. This special memorial collection will enable our comrades and visiting researchers to pursue further study in this area of great importance to Marxists. Those who wish to contribute may make checks payable to Spartacist, earmarked "Susan Adams Memorial Fund." Mail to: Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116.



Progress Publishers

1917 postcard with Russian translation of French Revolution slogan: "Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!"

Revolution did not fight and organize as women but as *revolutionaries*. And, as the October 1789 march that brought the king back from Versailles showed, it wasn't simply the question of bread that motivated them.

Thermidor marked the end of the radical phase of the revolution, and women were among the first to feel this. This was especially true for divorced women, who would have trouble finding work and maintaining themselves under the conservative Thermidorians. Divorce became identified with the "ruin of society" and the "torrent of corruption that invaded the cities and especially Paris" during the Terror and the months that followed it. Proof of a legitimate marriage became a requirement for soldiers' wives seeking to receive aid. After May 1795, the Convention banned women from "attending political assemblies," urging them to withdraw to their homes and ordering "the arrest of those who would gather together in groups of more than five."

The Napoleonic Code saw a further reversal of the gains of women. It's reported that the only part of the deliberations on the Napoleonic Code that Bonaparte sat in on was the Family Code enacted in 1804. The Family Code again made women minors from the standpoint of the law, mandating that they had to have the approval of their husbands for all contracts and so forth. In 1816, a year after Napoleon was overthrown and the monarchy restored, divorce was abolished.

For Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

I want to briefly trace the revolutionary continuity extending from the French Revolution through the 19th century. The French Revolution, refracted through Napoleon's armies, brought the first notions of women's equality to hideously backward tsarist Russia. Following Napoleon's defeat, Paris was occupied by Russian troops for a period of time. A number of young officers spent a lot of time in the cafés talking to people about what had been going on, and went back to St. Petersburg and led the Decembrist Uprising against the tsarist autocracy in 1825. They fought, among other things, for women's equality.

The very first communist ideas came out of the analysis developed by some of the radical Jacobins while in prison after the defeat of the Jacobin dictatorship. Revolutionaries like Gracchus Babeuf, who organized the Conspiracy of

Equals, and Philippe Buonarroti came to believe that private property itself was the cause of oppression. They provided a living link to Marx and Engels, who issued the *Communist Manifesto* as the next revolutionary wave swept Europe in 1848, declaring: "The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital." In France, a program was advanced for women's emancipation that called for replacing domestic slavery with socially organized and financed services. I found this 1848 program reprinted in an early 1920s women's journal published by the French Communist Party, *L'Ouvrière* (The Woman Worker).

In the Paris Commune in 1871, women once again played an extremely important role. Marx described the Commune as the first realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat, though it lasted less than three months. The women of the Paris Commune were called the "incendiaries" by the reactionary press, and a correspondent for the London *Times* wrote, "If the French Nation were composed of nothing but women, what a terrible nation it would be." But Marx hailed them: "The women of Paris joyfully give up their lives on the barricades and execution grounds" (quoted in Edith Thomas, *The Women Incendiaries* [1967]). When the French capitalist rulers finally defeated the Commune after heroic resistance, they slaughtered at least 30,000 people in one week, and many thousands more were sent to penal colonies.

Today, bourgeois France is an imperialist power, where the July 14 storming of the Bastille is celebrated as a chauvinist glorification of the "grandeur of France"—much like July 4 here—while French colonial atrocities are carried out to the music of the once-revolutionary hymn, the *Marseillaise*.

We Trotskyists know that it will take world socialist revolution to do away with the institutions which are the root cause of women's oppression. In our fight to reforge Leon Trotsky's Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution, to lead new October Revolutions around the planet, we are guided by the words of the Fourth International's founding document, the 1938 Transitional Program: "The sections of the Fourth International should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class, consequently among the women workers. Here they will find inexhaustible stores of devotion, selflessness, and readiness to sacrifice." Join us! ■

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Women and Revolution



— WOMEN AND THE — FRENCH REVOLUTION



Bulloz

October 1789: Parisian women armed with pikes, the "people's weapon," march on the royal palace at Versailles to protest counterrevolutionary outrages and demand bread.

We publish below an edited version of a presentation given by our comrade Susan Adams at a Spartacist League forum to celebrate International Women's Day 2000 in New York City, first published in Workers Vanguard No. 752, 16 February 2001. Susan, who died this February (see obituary, page 2), was a longtime leader of the ICL's French section and maintained an intense commitment to the study of history and culture throughout her years as a communist. These interests were put to particular use in her work as a member of the Editorial Board of Women and Revolution while that journal existed.

International Women's Day originated in March 1908, with a demonstration here in Manhattan by women needle trades workers. They marched to oppose child labor and in favor of the eight-hour day and women's suffrage. March 8 became an international day celebrating the struggle for women's rights. And then on International Women's Day in 1917, right in the middle of World War I, 90,000 textile workers, many of them women, went on strike in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), the capital of the Russian tsarist empire. They rose up from the very bottom rungs of society, and it was these most of the oppressed and downtrodden of the proletariat who opened the sluice gates of the

revolutionary struggle leading to the October Revolution, where Marx's ideas first took on flesh and blood.

The Soviet state was the dictatorship of the proletariat. It immediately enacted laws making marriage and divorce simple civil procedures, abolishing the category of illegitimacy and all discrimination against homosexuals. It took steps toward replacing women's household drudgery by setting up cafeterias, laundries and childcare centers to allow women to enter productive employment. Under the conditions of extreme poverty and backwardness, those measures could be carried out only on a very limited scale. But they undermined the institution of the family and represented the first steps toward the liberation of women. The collectivized planned economy laid the basis for enormous economic and social progress. Fully integrated into the economy as wage earners, women achieved a degree of economic independence that became so much a matter of course that it was barely noticed by the third generation after the revolution. We fought for unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution up until the very last barricade.

The great October Russian Revolution has now been undone and its gains destroyed. Surrounded and pounded by the imperialists for seven decades, the Soviet Union was destroyed by capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92. The

continued on page 54

