

Documents of the International Communist Opposition

Document No. 1

Platform of the International Communist Opposition

Adopted at the International Conference of the International Communist Opposition, December 1930.

Basic Principles

I

The International Communist Opposition stands on the basis of the fundamentals of Communism. It fights for:

1. The establishment of the proletarian dictatorship in the form of the Soviet state as the necessary transition to a classless Socialist society.

2. The defense of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state.

The Communist Opposition regards the consolidation of the Communist Parties and movements in the individual countries into a united Communist Party, into the Communist International as indispensable. The organizational foundation of the Communist International as well as of its sections is democratic centralism. Revolutionary discipline, based upon democratic centralism, is the indispensable binding force of the Communist International and Parties.

Democratic Centralism means:

1. That the decisions be arrived at on the basis of the discussions and the participation of the Party membership. The discussion must, of course, take place within the bounds of Communist fundamentals.

2. That the functionaries of the Party be elected by the membership and can be removed by the membership at any time in the proper manner.

3. That the decisions arrived at by the Party committees in such a manner are unconditionally binding upon the membership.

4. That during any action, discussion as to the necessity of the action (but not as to the manner of carrying it thru) cannot take place.

5. That after its conclusion every action is subject to discussion and examination by the membership.

Revolutionary discipline must serve the carrying out of correct Communist policy. But if discipline stands in the

service of a false policy, then it becomes mere grotesque foolishness (Lenin). Whereas, with a correct Communist policy, the formation of fractions and tendencies is impermissible in a Communist Party, yet when the attempt is made to put thru a wrong policy by disciplinary measures, the formation of fractions becomes a revolutionary duty. Discipline within a Communist fraction or tendency must be even stricter than within a Communist Party.

II

The International Communist Opposition carries on an uncompromising struggle against open reformism and against hidden reformism (centrism). Its aim is the complete destruction of the influence of reformism upon the workingclass.

III

The International Communist Opposition aims at neither building a new Communist Party nor a new Communist International.

It aims to overcome the crisis of the existing parties of the Communist International and in the Communist International as a whole, to save and to restore to health the Communist world movement, to reestablish its unity and fighting power upon the tactical principles of Leninism.

1. Where the Communist Opposition wins the majority of the Communist Party and where the Communist International organizes a counter-party against it, there the Communist Opposition takes over to the fullest extent the tasks of the Communist Party. It has the task of eliminating the minority outside of its ranks as a separate organization. In this case, the Communist Opposition is on a National scale, a component part of the International Communist tendency.

2. Where the Communist Party (ultra-left tendency) is rooted among the masses or is a mass party, there the Communist Opposition, organized as a Communist tendency, has the objective of winning the Party.

3. In a country where the official Communist tendency is not rooted among the masses, the chief task of the Communist Opposition is to create the basis for a Communist mass party out of the existing elements.

IV

The International Communist Opposition, whether inside the Party or expelled, whether minority or majority of the Communist Parties, is therefore a part of the

Communist International and its sections. It is an organized tactical tendency of Communism.

V

The International Communist Opposition fights against the ultra-left course of the Communist International and its sections which represents a break with the tactical principles of Leninism, which contradicts the necessity of the class struggle practicably in its present stage, which makes the Communist Parties incapable of stimulating mass actions of the workingclass, of leading them and of winning the majority of the workingclass for the revolution and which finally destroys the Communist Parties themselves by paralysing the independence of its membership and by replacing democratic centralism by the absolute power of the Party bureaucracy. The Communist Opposition likewise fights all attempts to carry through an unprincipled, partial and bureaucratic elimination of the ultra-left course which necessarily must lead to opportunist deviations (conciliations).

Situation of World Capitalism

The International Communist Opposition bases its tactical views and demands upon the following estimation of the situation of world capitalism:

The chief stages in the development of capitalism since the World War are the following:

1. The post-war crisis, which was accompanied by the first outbreak of the world revolution. The post-war crisis expressed itself in the absolute diminution of production, in the decline in world trade, in the disruption of international credit and in the collapse of fixed values and standards in a number of countries. The first open outbreak of the world revolution led to the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship in the Soviet Union. In Central Europe the developing proletarian revolutions were beaten back with the aid of Social Democracy. In a number of countries the bourgeois counter-revolution, however, put an end more or less to the still unsolved tasks of the bourgeois revolution (Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland). The first open outbreak of the world revolution was closed with the overcoming of the post-war crisis and the reestablishment of the political domination of the bourgeoisie in all countries outside the Soviet Union.

The close of the first stage of the world revolution was accompanied in Europe by the overcoming of the inflation crisis in Germany in 1923-24; in Asia, by the defeat of the workers and peasants by the Chinese bourgeoisie (1927).

2. The so-called stabilisation of capitalism. It rests upon the overcoming of the post-war crisis and the reestablishment of the domination of the bourgeoisie, hitherto shattered.

The so-called stabilisation of capitalism is, therefore, no mere economic phenomenon. It signifies the reestablishment of capitalism, economically and politically. Relative stabilisation is only a phase in the period of the general decline of capitalism. The general decline of capitalism does not mean, however, that capitalism is in decline at an equal rate in every country or has already declined to the same extent in every country. The decline of capitalism proceeds unevenly in the individual countries, just as did its rise. Thus, e.g., the collapse of capitalism in Europe has, as a consequence, the ascendancy of capitalism in America. Humanity is faced with this question: either progress through the world revolution or relapse into barbarism through the destruction of all the achievements of mankind.

The end of stabilisation is characterized thru a new outbreak of the world revolution, i.e., thru the workingclass

and its allies passing to immediate attack against the domination of capital.

The next outbreak of the world revolution is inevitably approaching in revolutionary struggles in India and it shows that the world revolution is already in progress in the East.

The objective prerequisites for the resumption of the struggle for power, i.e., for a new acute revolutionary situation, can be created through economic crisis or war.

An economic crisis does not mean in itself the end of so-called stabilisation. It only signifies such an end if the working class makes use of the objective revolutionary possibilities created for overthrowing the rule of capital.

For the bourgeoisie there is no situation in itself without a way out. If the workingclass fails, then the bourgeoisie will find a way out of the crisis at the expense of the toilers, under certain conditions through the triumph of extreme counter-revolution.

It is incorrect to speak of a special third period of post-war capitalism based upon a schematic transference of the chief stages of socialist construction in the Soviet Union. In the economic development of the Soviet Union, the following three chief stages can be distinguished:

1. The period of war communism.
2. The restoration period in which it was a question of putting the old establishments into motion again and reaching the level of pre-war production.
3. The reconstruction period in which production is extended on the basis of new establishments.

The transference of these periods to the development of the capitalist countries is false:

1. because it is, in general, false to establish capitalist economies on the analogy of Socialist construction;
2. because in most of the capitalist countries no such destruction of the capitalist productive apparatus took place as in the Soviet Union during the Civil War;
3. because, in the capitalist countries, the pre-war levels of production had already been reached on the basis of the renewal of the productive apparatus.

The idea that a special period of the shattering of stabilisation must be assumed is erroneous:

1. because the impression is thereby created that capitalist stabilisation itself has no contradictions or shocks;
2. because it serves as the basis for the thesis of the immediately imminent revolutionary upsurge, of the immediately imminent revolution, which has been continually announced by the Communist International. In reality it depends on the workingclass and on the correct policies of the Communist Parties whether objective revolutionary possibilities can lead to the revolutionary upsurge and the struggle for power. If the workingclass makes no use of these revolutionary possibilities, then, the shaking of the stabilisation passes and thereby also the third period, which according to the Comintern, was supposed to be the stage immediately before the revolution. The practical harm of the fiction of the third period consists in the effect it has in derailing the Communist Parties from their tasks of carrying through the organizational and political preparation for the struggle for power. The consequence of this is either putschism or passivity.

Between the daily struggle and the immediate struggle for power of the workingclass there is no Chinese wall. But the struggle for power can only arise thru the sharpening and intensifying of the daily struggle. The transition from one to the other takes place, not through empty talk and high-sounding prophecies, but through careful and systematic utilization of the daily struggle to awaken in the workingclass an insight and understanding of the struggle for power and the organization of this struggle.

Tactical Principles

From this estimation of the situation of world capitalism as well as from the viewpoint of communist principles these are the tactical fundamentals of the Communist Opposition:

1. The readoption of the tactics of the united front. The tactics of the united front rest upon the rallying of the workers, without regard to political or other views, for partial struggle for daily aims and demands.

The tactics of the united front have for their aim neither a lasting alliance with Social-Democracy nor the organizational fusion of the Communist parties with Social-Democracy but rather the winning of the majority of the workingclass for Communism. The tactics of the united front have for their aim the mobilization and the concentration of the masses for struggle against the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois state. The utilization of the united front tactics therefore signifies no approach (getting nearer) to Social-Democracy and reformism in general, but rather a political enlightenment of the masses as to the anti-labor character of the policy of collaboration with the bourgeois state (especially the coalition policy) which is carried on by Social Democracy. Wherever Communist labor organizations exist side by side with labor organizations basing themselves on other principles (reformist, anarchist, Christian), the tactics of the united front constitute an indispensable means for the winning of the majority of the workingclass for the fundamentals and aims of Communism, i.e., for the struggle for Soviet power.

2. The tactics of the united front require for their execution the setting up of such daily slogans or partial demands which correspond to the existing conditions and to the existing stage of understanding of the masses of the toilers as a whole. With such daily demands which are definite and serve immediate aims for action, is to be tied up propaganda for demands which concretely prepare the minds of the workers for the transition to the struggle for power (revolutionary slogans) as well as the propaganda of Communist fundamentals and aims.

3. The activity of Communists in Parliament and municipal councils must, side by side with basic revolutionary propaganda, aim at the organization of the united front of workers in extra-parliamentary activity. Parliamentary activity must be subordinated to extra-parliamentary activity and must be adapted to the conditions of extra-parliamentary struggle.

The National Question

On the national question, the Communist Opposition stands on the basis of the thesis of the Second World Congress of the Communist International and therefore fights:

1. Against all concessions to bourgeois chauvinism and nationalism, i.e., all attempts to subordinate social questions to national questions and to liquidate or even to weaken the class antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the interests of so-called national unity.

2. Against national nihilism, i.e., lack of attention to the concrete question of the struggle against national oppression in individual countries.

Trade Union Work

Revolutionary work in the trade unions, with the aim of creating united trade unions participating in the general class struggle of the workingclass for the overthrow of capitalism, and after the seizure of power for taking part in the construction of socialism, is the most important tactical demand of the International Communist Opposition. For this it is necessary to eliminate the reformist influence in the

trade unions and to make Communist influence dominant (winning the trade unions).

Here several distinctions must be made:

1. Countries in which the trade union movement is still united (Germany, Sweden, Finland, England, etc.). Here the Communist Opposition is against the formation of the new "revolutionary" trade unions; it is for tactics that will make it as difficult as possible for the reformists to realize their splitting tactics.

2. Countries in which "Red Unions" exist. Here also the general course must be for the reestablishment of trade union unity. But this reunification must not be fought for as a capitulation of the red unions before the reformist unions but rather along the road of strengthening the red unions.

3. Countries in which mass trade unions are only just beginning to be established (India, etc.), or in which the trade unions consciously prevent the organization of definite groups of workers (especially the unskilled workers, as in the USA).

In the last named countries the Communist Opposition pursues the following tactical viewpoint in its revolutionary trade union work:

1. It must use as a basis for the formation of the trade unions all existing trade unions which have a mass character.

2. New trade unions should be organized in those industries where no trade unions exist as yet or where the existing trade unions have no mass basis at all.

3. The general question of organizing the unorganized must be connected with the question of forming a left-wing in the existing trade unions. All efforts must be made to utilize the resources of the old unions for the organization of the unorganized into new unions or for winning them into the old unions.

"Fighting leaderships" established in opposition to the majority of organized workers involved are to be rejected. Communists must strive to win the leadership of economic struggles thru winning decisive influence among the organized workers of the factories involved.

If a strike takes place where the workers involved are not organized, then the strike committee must see to it that the strikers are organized into the trade union movement.

Struggles Against Fascism

The struggle against fascism can only be effectively conducted if the Communists strive to win the non-communist workers and the reformist workers for this struggle. This is impossible as long as the Social Democratic workers are ascribed fascist desires (the theory of social fascism). The "theory of social fascism," because it rests on a false estimation of class forces, prevents an effective fight against real fascism. Communists must be leaders in the defense of all rights, organizations, and institutions of the workingclass against fascism which wants to destroy them.

International Actions

The International Communist Opposition calls attention to the necessity of the organization of international political campaigns to unite the international movements of the workingclass and to serve the struggles of the workers against the international politics of the bourgeoisie. On this field the following questions are noteworthy:

1. The struggle against the Young Plan.

2. Against the international anti-Soviet campaign and for the defense of the Soviet Union.

3. Against the international fascist danger.

4. Against unemployment.

5. Against imperialist armaments and war preparations.

6. Against imperialist oppression in the colonial countries. For the support of the colonial struggles for freedom.

The Inner-Party Regime

The Communist Opposition fights the present inner-party regime in the Communist International and its sections. It fights against the replacement of democratic centralism by bureaucratic centralism.

The Communist Opposition demands of the Communist International:

1. The extension of the right (existing in the statutes but not in fact) of criticism, which today exists only for the leaders of the Comintern.

2. The preparation of important decisions of the Comintern through international discussions.

3. The abandonment of the mechanical transference of the points of view and inner-party differences in the CPSU to the other sections and of the considerations of the questions of the individual sections primarily from the point of view of the differences in the CPSU.

The questions of the individual sections must be examined, estimated and decided from the viewpoint of the special conditions of the class struggle in the individual countries.

4. The replacement of the actual monopoly of the CPSU in the leadership of the Comintern by a real collective and at the same time, united and centralized leadership based upon Party representatives who are in the position to pass their own judgment on the class relations in their own countries and who are not merely officials of the international leadership but actually trusted representatives of their own sections.

5. The legal sections of the Comintern must raise their own means for regular party work. International financial support shall be given (a) to illegal parties; (b) to legal parties for special campaigns and for production and distribution of international propaganda literature.

6. The International leadership shall have as its tasks: (a) the leading of international actions; (b) the working out of general tactical lines; (c) the supervision and control of the carrying through of the fundamental principles as well as the general tactical line by the individual sections. The International leadership cannot replace the leaderships of the sections. The International leadership should lead but not hold in apron-strings.

7. The withdrawal of all expulsions against opponents of the ultra-left course.

The Parties

In the sections of the Comintern the International Communist Opposition demands:

1. In legal times, the election of functionaries by the membership.

2. The election of Party Congress delegates and the delegates to the international congresses by the membership after a fore-going discussion.

3. The right of discussion of all party questions within the bounds of the Communist fundamentals and discipline of action.

4. The removal of all corrupt elements from the Party apparatus.

Against Trotskyism

The International Communist Opposition fights Trotskyism because of its fundamental deviations from the Communist standpoint and because of its false tactical position. The basic deviation of Trotskyism manifests itself

in the complete or partial denial of the character of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state in which socialism is being built.

In respect to tactics Trotskyism shares the ultra-left viewpoint on a whole series of questions.

Two Alternatives

Before the Communist International and its sections stands the alternative: either, with the unrestrained continuation of the ultra-left course, complete destruction as a mass organization outside the Soviet Union, or through the basic correction of this line, the reestablishment of the unity of the Communist Party and the continuation, on the basis of the tactical teachings of Lenin, of the now interrupted progress toward the victory of world revolution.

The Colonial Question

On the colonial question the Communist Opposition stands on the basis of the Second Congress of the Communist International. Therefore it fights the ultra-left deviations in the Comintern on this question.

Document No. 2

The Communist Opposition and the Communist International

Resolution of the International Conference of the Communist Opposition held in Berlin, July 1932.

1. The organization affiliated to the International Union of the Communist Opposition comprises an internationally organized tactical tendency of Communism, which arose in the struggle against the ultra-left course of the Comintern and its sections. The basic aim of the ICO is to overcome the ultra-left course in the Comintern and its sections, in the political, organizational and inner-party fields, and to replace it with really Leninist tactics, i.e., by the correct application of the fundamentals and aims of Communism to the international class struggle of the proletariat and of other oppressed and exploited classes.

An extremely effective means for the achievement of this end is for the International Communist Opposition to win a broad mass influence. By winning the support of masses of workers not belonging to the Communist Party, we are creating a broader basis for winning the non-Communist masses for our aims, for Communism.

Reflecting the conditions under which they work, the organizations of the ICO can be divided into three main types: (a) where the organization of the ICO is the Communist Party as in Sweden; here our task is to extend our role as the Party of Communism to liquidate the existing split organizations of the Comintern and finally to bring it about that in the respective country only one Communist Party should exist. (b) In countries, such as Germany and the United States, where the organization of the ICO is only a group; here our task is to win the Communist Party, but also to take over the role of the Communist Party in every case and in every question possible. (c) In countries such as

India, where the official section of the Comintern exists only on paper; here our task is to build up a real Communist Party on the basis of the tactical fundamentals of the ICO.

The Communist Opposition clearly understands that in any single country only one Communist Party must exist. The official bodies of the Comintern are splitting the Communist movement. The Communist Opposition desires to reestablish unity in the Communist International and to strengthen it.

The organizations affiliated with the ICO stand on the basis of the principles developed by Marx and Lenin, that is, on the basis of the section on fundamentals of the Program of the Communist International, as well as on the basis of the tactical and organizational decisions of the first three Congresses of the Communist International.

2. The decisive aims of the struggle of the ICO are:

I. On the Political Field

(a) The reapplication of the tactics of the united front, which have been abandoned in fact by the present ultra-left course. The sphere of the tactics of the united front is the leadership of the daily struggles of the workingclass and the bringing of the whole class to the struggle for power. The tactics of the united front demand the combination of an appeal to the members of the lower organizations with an appeal to the district and central leaderships of the reformist, centrist and, in various circumstances, Christian labor organizations. The application of the tactics of the united front requires the setting up of such partial demands and revolutionary transition slogans, corresponding to the necessities and the understanding of the workingclass at the particular moment. It requires the spread of these slogans, worked out with the greatest care, among the masses of the proletariat and the toiling people. The agitation and propaganda of slogans of action must always be connected with propaganda of the fundamentals and aims of Communism. The objective of the tactics of the united front is to break the ideological, political and ultimately, organizational hold of reformism, etc., over the workers and to win them for Communism on the basis of their experiences of struggle.

Communist leadership of united front actions cannot be placed as the prerequisite or condition for such actions but must be the result of carefully planned Communist direction in struggle. The tactics of the united front do not aim to set up permanent alliances between Communist and non-Communist organizations, nor do they fuse them organizationally; they aim to set up alliances of struggle for concrete, temporary purposes. The tactics of the united front demand, for the Communist organizations, the full possibility of defending their fundamental principles and of criticizing within the bounds of the discipline of action. These tactics, as a means of winning the majority of the workingclass in the struggle for Communism, reach their limit as soon as this aim is achieved. They are an indispensable means of drawing the majority of the workingclass into the struggle for power and of making the influence of Communism decisive among the workers. The struggle for power itself presupposes that these results have already been achieved. It (the struggle for power), therefore, falls outside the bounds of the united front tactics but bases itself on their results.

(b) The liquidation of the ultra-left trade union course of the Comintern, of the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU), and of their sections, i.e., the course involving the creation of "revolutionary" trade unions outside of and against the already existing, reformist and other, mass organizations, the immediate leadership of economic struggles by the Communist Party, the setting up, in the

trade unions, of dual strike leaderships embracing only a section of workers involved in the struggle, etc. The ultra-left trade union course must give way to the struggle for the winning of the reformist and other organizations to the revolutionary struggle, of the workingclass for power, for the triumph of Communism. In order that this may be achieved Communist fractions must be organized under the leadership of the Party and its organs.

The already organized "Red" unions must, after an open and complete abandonment of the policy of splitting the trade unions by the Communist Party, fight for their admission into the mass unions. The Party must, at the same time, urge and organize on the basis of the slogans of the revolutionary class struggle in the trade union field, the entrance of all those ready to fight for the revolutionization of the trade unions into the trade unions for the purpose of strengthening them organizationally, defending them against all reactionary attacks and reestablishing and defending their unity.

(c) The same holds true for the tactics of the Communist Party in all other proletarian mass organizations.

(d) The abandonment of the false and dangerous "theory" of "social-fascism," which is only a pseudo-Marxist repetition of the liberal theory of fascism, according to which Fascism cannot supplant the traditional bourgeois parties, including also the reformist parties, but must always constitute an auxiliary for them. The theory of "social fascism" is able only to prevent any real analysis of fascism and of Social Democracy and to weaken the recognition of the real danger of fascism. It constitutes an obstacle in the way of winning the Social Democratic workers to Communism.

(e) The abandonment of all deviations in the direction of petty bourgeois nationalism ("national bolshevism," etc.), of all ideological adaptations to Fascist ideology in place of a struggle against it, on the basis of the Communist conception of the subordination of the national to the social struggle for the emancipation of the workingclass and the other sections of the toiling masses.

II. On the Organizational Field

The reestablishment of democratic centralism and of inner-party democracy in the Comintern and in the sections. This includes:

(a) The conducting of discussions on disputed tactical questions with the participation of the entire membership. These discussions must be limited only by fundamentals of Communism and by the necessity of assuring discipline in action.

(b) The election of functionaries, under legal conditions, by the membership and a constant and effective control (supervision) over their activities by the membership. The complete liquidation of bureaucratic distortions of democratic centralism.

(c) The active leadership of the Comintern and its sections on the basis of collective collaboration of the representatives of all sections in the Executive of the Comintern and in its organs.

Already in March 1930 the German Communist Opposition (and other organizations of the ICO) addressed an Open Letter to the Comintern in which it declared: "The Comintern finds itself in a crisis threatening its existence, making it incapable of fulfilling its historic tasks."

And further: "The danger is threatening that the Communist Party will be completely destroyed as political mass factors in their countries, that nothing will remain of them except sects, Party apparatuses stagnating outside of the workingclass." Subsequent developments have not only fully confirmed the correctness of this estimation but have

even sharpened to an extraordinary degree these dangers. In order to overcome these dangers and to provide the conditions for a victorious struggle of the revolutionary class, the Communist Party of Germany (Opposition) at that time, placed the following demands:

The immediate withdrawal of all expulsions and disciplinary measures against the opponents of the ultra-left course. An immediate international discussion on the basis of democratic centralism for the purpose of working out the political course of the Communist International.

The new election of Party leadership and Party functionaries, including the Executive of the Comintern, on the basis of this discussion.

The carrying out of the fundamental idea that the sections of the Comintern are bound, under legal conditions, to raise the necessary means for their regular work out of the contributions of their members.

Subsequent developments have only emphasised the indispensability of these demands.

3. The ICO rejects the attempt to look upon the theory of "socialism in one country" (concretely, the affirmation of the possibility of building up socialism in the Soviet Union before the victory of the proletariat revolution in other countries) as the source of the ultra-left course of the Comintern. It rejects, likewise, the attempt to find this source in a necessary contradiction between the interests of the Soviet Union and those of the international proletariat, on the contrary, it is of the opinion that the interests of the first country in which the workingclass rules and in which socialism is being built, coincide fundamentally and are in complete harmony with the interests of the struggle for the emancipation of the workingclass and the other sections of the toiling people in the rest of the world. It is the duty of every Communist to defend against all attacks of the counter-revolution the Soviet Union as a workers state upon a socialist foundation as the bulwark of the proletarian revolution.

Although the interests of the Soviet Union and those of the world revolution coincide fundamentally, it is nevertheless quite possible that methods and forms of struggle in countries in which the workingclass has not yet achieved power should not coincide with those in which this has already been accomplished. The application of the fundamentals and aims of Communism as well as of tactical and organizational fundamentals must be adapted to the concrete relations of the class struggle in the various countries.

The real basic source of the ultra-left course is seen by the ICO to be the false transference of the methods and forms of struggle corresponding to a country in which socialism is being built to the Communist Parties of those countries in which the majority of the workingclass has still to be won and the prerequisites for taking up the struggle for power still have to be created. This false transference is accompanied by the destruction of the possibility of properly evaluating and taking into account the experiences of the Communist Parties outside of the Soviet Union. A further cause is the mechanical transference of the factional struggles within the CPSU to the Comintern and its sections.

The basis of all this is the monopoly of leadership of the CPSU in the Comintern. Until Lenin's death this was still a positive factor; it has now, however, outlived its usefulness because the gap between the tasks of the CPSU (the tasks of socialist construction) and the tasks of the other sections of the Comintern (the tasks of the preparation and the carrying through of the struggle for power), have been continually growing, especially in recent years in view of the much greater tempo of socialist construction in the USSR, as

compared with the advance of the revolution in the capitalist countries. For these reasons the monopoly of leadership must be abolished and there must be created a collective leadership for the Communist International which will direct the forces of the revolution of the whole world (the victorious workers of the Soviet Union and the still oppressed workers of the rest of the world) according to uniform fundamentals but with consideration for the special conditions of their activity.

The ICO therefore sees in the ultra-left tactics of the Comintern, not the inevitable and permanent effect of an alleged contradiction between the interests of the Soviet Union and of the proletarian revolution in other countries, but rather the effect of a temporary, but serious failure on the part of the leadership of the CPSU to understand the tactical necessities of the Communist movement outside of the Soviet Union.

4. The ICO and its sections did not separate voluntarily from the Comintern and its sections but were expelled in violation of democratic centralism and inner-party democracy because they refused to surrender their Communist right of criticizing the ultra-left course. The ICO fights for the rehabilitation of the Comintern and of its sections. The basic condition for this is the reestablishment of inner-party democracy and of democratic centralism in the individual sections of the Comintern and the Comintern as a whole.

The ICO recognizes that the reestablishment of inner-party democracy and of democratic centralism (as they are given in the demands of the March 1930 Open Letter of the Communist Party of Germany (Opposition)) is only a part of the liquidation of the ultra-left course. It, however, regards the reestablishment of normal Party life as sufficient to allow it to work, within the Communist Party, and in the limits of Communist discipline, for the complete and open liquidation of the ultra-left course which would make this liquidation possible at minimum cost and damage to the Party and would stimulate the quickest and most extensive reestablishment of the Party, today so badly damaged by the ultra-left course and the leadership responsible for it.

The rehabilitation of the Communist International demands, from a positive viewpoint, that the leadership of the Comintern develop its activities within the following limits:

- (a) To assure the maintenance of Communist fundamentals in the Comintern and in all its sections.
- (b) To organize international actions and campaigns.
- (c) To coordinate the activities of the various sections.

In the working out of specific questions in the individual countries the important and most decisive role must fall to the parties of those countries themselves. However, the highest and final decision in those questions belongs to the leadership of the Communist International. It must take care that, in the settlement of those questions, the Communist fundamentals and the tactical principles are maintained. But, on the other hand, the leadership of the Comintern must not replace the leadership of the individual sections.

5. The ICO and its affiliated organizations reject the maneuvers of the leading bodies of the Comintern and its sections, having as their object to play off individual national organizations of the ICO, local groups, and single members against each other by calling upon them to rejoin the Party. With such maneuvers the Party leaders show that they do not themselves take seriously their accusations against the Communist Opposition and recognize that the latter has not left the basis of Communist principles.

On the other hand, however, the ICO greets the increasingly frequent honest desires of the members of the

Comintern for the readmission of the Opposition; it emphasizes the necessity for the members who honestly desire this to take a stand for it in the Comintern and the Communist parties. The Communist Opposition, which has carried on a four-year struggle for the liquidation of the ultra-left course, is conscious of the fact that it has rendered the Communist movement an indispensable service. It declares that its criticism and action, carried out in bitter struggle under the greatest difficulties, have already had and are now having deep-going and wholesome effects in the Communist Parties and the Comintern, as well as in the labor movement generally. It declares that its estimation of the effects of the ultra-left course has been fully verified by the facts and, in a number of cases, has even been recognized by the leading committees, even if these latter have been either unwilling or unable to recognize the ultra-left course as the cause of the trouble and to remove this cause. On the basis of these facts the Communist Opposition is confident that it will finally overcome all difficulties and emerge victorious. But this victory can only be achieved through the active intervention of the Party members who will draw the necessary lessons from the negative experiences. It is for this cooperation that the Communist Opposition appeals above all.

6. The Communist Opposition declares to the leadership of the Comintern that, in the face of the extremely acute danger of a Fascist seizure of power in Germany as well as of a war of intervention against the Soviet Union, no time must be lost in giving up completely and openly the ultra-left course, thereby creating the decisive and indispensable prerequisites for the Comintern and the Communist Parties winning leadership of the workingclass for the defeat of fascism, for the achievement of a revolutionary way out of the crisis, and for the defense of the Soviet Union and thereby also bringing about a revival of the declining labor movement outside of the Soviet Union, a consequence of the ultra-left course.

In order to achieve the aim of communism, the consolidation of the workingclass of the whole world for the overthrow of the bourgeois State, for the destruction of the capitalist system, and for the construction of a socialist order of society, the organizations of the ICO have always been and are now ready to stretch out a hand to reestablish the unity of the Communist Movement under the above mentioned indispensable conditions, which alone assure the elaboration of correct Communist tactics on the basis of the collective experience and the collaboration of all sections of the Comintern and which alone provides for the rapid correction of tactical mistakes through the participation of the membership.

Document No. 3

The Viewpoint of the International Communist Opposition

Written by Will Herberg of the Communist Party (Opposition), USA, and published in the June 1933 issue of the Modern Monthly.

With Germany staring us in the face it would be an insult to the intelligence of the readers of this journal to pile up

evidence to prove that there is a crisis in world Communism today. Nothing is more obvious to those who have eyes to see and courage to think. But to recognize the lamentable state of affairs in the international Communist movement is not enough; it is above all necessary to probe the roots of the crisis, to examine its forms and to outline a program for the rehabilitation of the only movement that offers mankind a way out today. These problems have been faced by the International Communist Opposition and attacked, in the last four years, with a measurable degree of success. In the following paragraphs, I propose to describe very briefly the main conceptions that have been hammered out in these years of theoretical and practical work of the Communist Opposition.

From an immediate standpoint, it is almost self-evident that the present political impotence and demoralization of the official Communist parties, outside of the Soviet Union, are directly traceable to the incredibly sectarian tactics with which these organizations have been operating since the onset of the crisis in 1928. Sectarianism is a fatal blight in the revolutionary movement; by playing with slogans and tactics too "advanced" for the situation, it sacrifices realistic revolutionary achievement to high-sounding radical phrasemongering and systematically breaks the ties binding the Communist vanguard with the masses of the proletariat, bringing the degeneration of dry-rot to the former and surrendering the latter to political confusion and the influence of reaction. And, as we shall see, sectarianism has its logic for the party organization as well.

In what does this fatal sectarianism consist? I think the best way of approaching this question is by placing in sharp contrast the tactical standpoint of the Communist Opposition and that of the official Communist Party, in this way outlining both the positive and negative aspects of the situation.

1. The Communist Opposition emphasizes as fundamental the fact that "the development of the revolution in different countries proceeds along varying paths with varying rapidities" (Lenin). It therefore rejects the conception of "mechanical uniformity," dominating the Communist International today, according to which not what is *specific* in the conditions of the class struggle in each country (these specific features are sometimes even denied!) but what is *common* to all countries, is taken as the point of departure for strategy and tactics. Such a method leads, as Lenin warned us, to the "mechanical adjustment and equalization of the tactical lines of struggle." The Communist Opposition takes its stand upon the idea that "the main problem . . . is: the specific national features must be studied, ascertained and grasped before concrete attempts are made in any country to solve the aspects of a single international problem . . . to overthrow the bourgeoisie and to institute a Soviet republic and proletarian dictatorship." It is the reckless disregard of this apparently elementary Marxist idea that has led to the obvious sterility of official Communist activity and to the unmistakable air of unreality and "foreignness" that much of what the Communist parties say and do.

2. The Communist Opposition emphasizes as fundamental that "Marxism requires the most accurate and objectively confirmed analysis of the mutual relations of classes and of the concrete peculiarities of every historical movement." (Lenin). We insist upon a realistic estimate of objective conditions and the relation of forces in the labor movement: we reject the romantic, pseudo-"revolutionary" phrasemongering characteristic of the "analyses" of the official leadership of the American Communist Party and of the Comintern.

3. The Communist Opposition emphasizes as

fundamental that, for the breakdown of capitalism, the revolutionary class action of the proletariat is indispensable. We point out that there is no crisis which the bourgeoisie cannot overcome, temporarily and at the expense of the masses, if the workingclass is not ready and not able to take advantage of the critical state of affairs to overthrow the rule of capital. We therefore reject the conception dominating the Communist International today, in one form or another, of the "inevitable" collapse of capitalism as the mechanical (automatic) result of the aggravation of the world-wide economic crisis.

4. The Communist Opposition emphasises as fundamental that "it is particularly important for the purpose of winning over the majority of the proletariat to win the trade unions . . . To work in the reactionary trade unions and skilfully to win them, to win the confidence of the workers, to change and remove from their posts the reformist trade union leaders—these are the important tasks of the preparatory period" (Program of the Communist International). We insist that all Communist work in the trade unions must be directed to the goals of "converting" the trade unions into a real support of the revolutionary proletariat" (Third Comintern Congress). We therefore reject all policies and tendencies in the direction of splitting or deserting the conservative mass unions, as inimical to the interests of the proletariat and as a serious obstacle in the way of the fulfillment of the Communist objective. We condemn in the sharpest possible manner the sectarian course dominating the Communist International today which, in spite of all twists and turns, still aims to split and desert the mass unions, directly or indirectly.

To its utterly sectarian position on the trade unions must be mainly attributed the devastating loss of Communist influence among the organized workers the world over. In the United States, the "classic land of dual unionism," the recrudescence of dualism has been well-nigh suicidal.

The Communist Opposition stands for the unity of the trade union movement; one union in every industry, one trade union federation in every country, one world trade union federation! We are categorically opposed to the dual unionism that is at the foundation of official Communist tactics today. We are opposed to the splitting of the conservative mass unions to form "Red" unions. We stand for the organization of the unorganized and for the affiliation of the newly formed unions to the American Federation of Labor. We propose that the existing "Red" unions (as well as the Trade Union Unity League, their "center") should be done away with as dual organizations; as a matter of fact, they enjoy merely a paper existence today; they are official fictions. Whatever membership these "Red" unions have, should be urged to join the mass unions and to strengthen the revolutionary wing in these conservative bodies.

The Communist Opposition rejects the conception, in which the sectarian tactics of the official Communist party are rooted, that the conservative unions are not workers organizations at all but are rather "capitalist" organizations, in fact, adjuncts of the bourgeois state! We emphasise that the trade unions, no matter how conservative they may be, are "genuine mass workingclass organizations, closely bound up with the everyday life of the workers" (Comintern Program).

The Communist Opposition points out that genuine trade unions cannot be party adjuncts but organizations in which the masses of workers, even the most backward, are to be found. Of course, we reject the conception of "no politics in the unions," since such a conception obviously means leaving the field clear to bourgeois politics. Communists must work in the trade union field with the objective of

winning the members, on the basis of propaganda and the lessons of experience, to the political viewpoint of Communism. But this is not equivalent to, it directly excludes, every attempt to make the trade unions organizationally and formally subordinate to the Communist Party. The autonomy of the trade unions is absolutely essential if they are to function as real mass organizations.

5. The Communist Opposition emphasises as fundamental the tactics of the united front, by which is understood a block or alliance of labor organizations of various political tendencies on the basis of a certain minimum program, each participating organization retaining its full right of political expression and criticism. We condemn very severely the diplomatic maneuvers under cover of which the official Communist movement has, in fact, completely repudiated this indispensable method of uniting labor's ranks and winning the masses for revolutionary struggle by such sectarian phrases as the "united front from below," the "united front around the party," and so on. The total isolation of the official Communist movement from other tendencies in the labor movement must certainly be traced mainly to the rejection of the tactics of the united front.

6. The Communist Opposition emphasises as fundamental the establishment of proper relations between the Communist and the Socialist workers. In spite of its essentially bourgeois policies, the Socialist Party is a *workers* party and is thereby a section of the labor movement; to challenge this means to insist that the American labor movement is really synonymous with the Communist Party and its adjuncts—something that even the most brazen ultra-sectarian theoretician of the official Communist Party has not yet had the temerity to do. The victory of the revolutionary over the reformist idea can be achieved only by convincing the Socialist workers of the fact that their socialist aspirations can be realized only thru the Communist Party and not by charging that the Socialist Party is "no more" than a capitalist party, just like the Republican and Democratic organizations, or even worse than these. We categorically reject the theory of "social fascism," because it represents a false analysis of the character of Social Democracy, because it gives rise to a totally false orientation of struggle, because it places great obstacles in the way of winning the Socialist workers to Communism.

These great points of difference all relate to fundamental problems of strategy and tactics and not to the principles of Communism. But this in no way reduces their vital significance for, without effective strategy and tactics, principles are no more than sterile dogmas, at bottom obstacles in the way of the development of a revolutionary movement of labor. "Mistakes in tactics," Engels warned us, "may under certain conditions end in a break with principles."

As I mentioned before, sectarianism has its own logic, for the party organization as well as for policy and tactics. Sectarianism breeds bureaucracy and cliquism within the party itself. The unhealthy, introverted orientation of sectarianism, running counter to all the objective demands of the class struggle and to the inner necessities of the revolutionary movement, can fortify itself only by building up an abnormal regime upon which it can rest. In order to overcome all signs of protest against the ever more obviously false policies of the official leaders, in order to prevent differences of opinion from arising within the organization and challenging the system, in order to miseducate the new membership into ready acceptance of the new gospel, a most repressive regime has grown up in all

official Communist parties throughout the world.

Democratic centralism, upon which all Communist organizations should rest, implies the right of free expression of opinion within the party and free discussion of all vital issues, side by side with the disciplined execution of decisions regularly arrived at. But the whole system of democratic centralism has today given way to a most odious form of bureaucracy, which crushes every right of membership, every right of free discussion, every possibility of criticism of policy, every opportunity of correction of mistakes. The inevitable consequences are the stifling of the normal course of political development and the fostering of a sterile, and parrot-like repetition of general and ill-understood phrases that constitute a serious menace to the life of the Communist movement.

The excesses to which the stupid bureaucracy dominating our movement has led are almost indescribable. The most irresponsible falsification, the most conscienceless slander and abuse, the most disgusting anti-proletarian hero-cults are all its fine flowers. The spiritual degradation and corruption of thousands of militant workers, especially the youth, will be a charge that the present leadership of the official Communist movement will find it difficult indeed to meet in the future!

What is the source of the positively disastrous state of affairs in the world communist movement, of the crass sectarianism in policy and the stifling bureaucracy in regime?

The roots of the present crisis in the world Communist movement run deep indeed. They touch the very foundations upon which the Communist International is reared: its organization and system of leadership. The Communist International arose as the organizational expression of the revolutionary wing of the Socialist movement; it was born under the impact of the great Russian Revolution. Within it, from the very beginning, were to be found Communist Parties of two distinct types. On the one hand, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which had already accomplished the revolution, was in control of state power, and was faced with the problems of socialist construction; on the other, the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries, faced with the quite different task of establishing themselves as the vanguard of their class, of winning and organizing the workers for revolution. From the beginning, also, the CPSU completely overshadowed all other parties in the Comintern for obvious and natural reasons; it must be stated, however, that, at the outset, this influence was rather of revolutionary authority than of power. In the early years of the Communist International, say from 1919 to 1923, this whole situation was not very serious because, first of all, the primary task then was the assimilation of the great international lessons of the Russian Revolution by the non-Russian parties and, secondly, because the acutely revolutionary situation in Western Europe rendered the conditions there largely comparable to the conditions in Soviet Russia engaged in direct military struggle with world capitalism. Nor must we overlook the decisive fact that, under Lenin, the preponderant influence of the CPSU in the Comintern was exercised with great care and discretion.

But it was not long before the situation underwent a fundamental change in all respects. Economic problems and socialist reconstruction became all-absorbing in the Soviet Union, and properly so. On the other hand, the course of the revolution in Western Europe began to slow down and the many and difficult problems of the preparatory period emerged as dominant. The gap which thus developed systematically between conditions in the Soviet Union, the land of rapidly rising socialism, and those in the capitalist

world, obviously made essential, in order to bridge it, the crystallization of a really international, collective leadership for the Comintern, reflecting all aspects of the world movement. In such a leadership, the CPSU would be first among equals, but nothing more, for its own good as well as for the good of the Comintern. Instead, there has actually come into being a rigid monopoly of leadership of the Communist International, tightly held by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, or rather, by its leadership. The Communist International has thus become, in fact if not in form, an appendage of the leading (Stalin) faction of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

What have been the inevitable consequences of this state of affairs? First, the mechanical transference of the methods and forms of struggle, suitable to the Soviet Union, a country in which the workingclass has already triumphed, to those countries in which the majority of the workingclass is still to be won for Communism and the very prerequisites of the struggle for power are still to be created. In the Soviet Union, all trade unions are "Red" unions, directly led by the party; so must it be in the United States as well, even if it means the desertion of the mass unions and the demoralizing swindle of paper TUUL "unions." In the Soviet Union, where the CPSU has quite properly monopoly of political existence and all other parties are only counter-revolutionary conspiratorial circles, there can be no talk of the united front; so must it be in the United States as well, even if it means complete isolation from the labor movement! Only the crassest sectarianism can result from such an outlook.

Secondly, there is an irresistible tendency to transfer mechanically political turns and changes of policy in the Soviet Union, where they may be quite justified, to the non-Soviet parties, where this may not be the case necessarily or even probably. Thus, in 1924, Soviet policy quite properly took a turn to the left; immediately followed the automatic swing of the Comintern line to the left, here without objective justification and therefore assuming the character of ultra-leftism. Witness the Ruth Fisher-Maslow course in Germany, which brought the Party to the brink of ruin; Treint-Suzanne Girault in France; Neurath in Czechoslovakia; etc., etc. Then, in 1925-1926 came a turn to the right in the Soviet Union; immediately it was projected outside, fortunately this time, because conditions demanded a swing in this direction. Then, in 1928, came the beginning of the great socialist offensive, the Five Year Plan, a drive to the left. Again, mechanical transference and again sectarianism! We see how it is then that these haphazard zig-zags take place, they are largely *illegitimate* consequences of perfectly proper and necessary changes of policy of the CPSU.

Accompanying this type of mechanical transference, in the third place, is another type of even greater impact, the mechanical transference of factional issues and factional differences from the CPSU to the non-Soviet parties. With the Comintern serving as the appendage of the leading faction of the CPSU this became well-nigh inevitable. Note that even if the leadership of the Soviet party is thoroughly correct in its position, the mere attempt to extend these factional struggles artificially to parties where such issues do not exist, does untold harm.

In the fourth place, there arises a tendency, more and more obvious with time, for the leadership of the Communist International (that is, the leading faction of the CPSU) to replace the leaderships of the individual Communist Parties in the actual guidance of the class struggle in the various countries, a tendency to suppress the political initiative and ideological self-reliance of these parties. It is clear enough that such a condition is positively

fatal to any organization striving to become the vanguard of the workingclass and organically united with it. A Communist Party capable of leading the proletariat in the overthrow of capitalism cannot itself be led by long distance (by cable instructions) or by mere puppets without ideas or political character!

It should be obvious at this point that we do not trace the sources of the crisis in the Communist International to any allegedly false policies of the Stalin leadership in Soviet matters, in socialist construction. On the contrary, the general policies of the CPSU in economic construction, especially since the sharp change of course in March, 1930, meet with our endorsement as basically correct. We do, however, criticise most sharply the excessively bureaucratic regime dominating the Soviet party, the odious Stalin hero-cult flourishing so rankly, the suppression of any real self-criticism or political independence within the party. We do so not because we agree with the programs of any of the oppositions in the CPSU, but precisely because we believe that the best way of eliminating false views and arriving at clear and correct ones is party democracy. We oppose the Stalin regime within the Soviet party because it is a grave violation of the basic ideas of democratic centralism, because it leads to ideological chaos and political confusion, because it places great obstacles in the way of the most adequate solution of the economic problems facing the Soviet Union.

There is no inconsistency whatever between endorsing the main policies of the Stalin leadership in the Soviet Union and at the same time vigorously fighting against the ultra-sectarianism of the Communist International, dominated by the same Stalin leadership. I hope I have been able to show that it is quite possible for Stalin to be correct in the Soviet Union and yet do untold harm in the Comintern by mechanically transferring Soviet tactics, methods, "turns" of policy and factional disputes to the non-Soviet parties where they are entirely inappropriate. It is precisely this chasm between the conditions and requirements of the Communist movement in the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and in the capitalist world, on the other, which is at the root of all our troubles!

The adherents of the Left Opposition, the Trotskyites, in spite of the superficial intransigence of their opposition to "Stalinism," share completely its besetting sin: the totally false *system of political leadership* in the Comintern which makes the Communist International the mere appendage of the leading faction in the CPSU. Trotsky is far from desiring to disturb this arrangement; he has never whispered a word against it. What Trotsky would like is very simple: to replace the Stalin program and faction by the Trotsky program and faction but to keep the system itself intact. We maintain that this would not only yield no improvement but would actually make matters much worse.

That Trotsky has no serious objection to the system of political leadership prevalent in the Comintern today is quite obvious from the fact that he has reproduced it *in toto* in his International Left Opposition: Prinkipo replaces Moscow; the Russian Left Opposition, the CPSU; Trotsky, Stalin! The non-Soviet Trotsky groups live, or rather exist, in the reflected glory of the Russian Opposition. The basic program of the Trotsky group in America, for example, has nothing essentially to do with the conditions of class struggle or the labor movement in this country; it is merely a translation into English of the standpoint of the Russian Opposition. What your opinion is about the Communist tasks in the trade union movement in this country is of no significance compared with what your opinions are on the possibility of building socialism "in one country." And the inner-life of the International Left Opposition reproduces

with a ludicrous fidelity the regime of the Comintern. The same hero-cult, the same mysterious ukases from on high (see Trotsky's pontifical letters to the various sections of the ILO), the same summary expulsions and demoralizing splits (there are far more heterodox Trotskyites outside the fold than orthodox ones within it!), the same high-sounding excommunications, the same at all points! Stalin is Pope, Trotsky is anti-Pope; we are against the Papal system as such, anywhere and everywhere.

The trotskyites attempt to dignify their inverted Stalinism with the grand name of internationalism. But this is clearly misleading. Marxian internationalism is poles apart from the abstract pseudo-radicalism that strives to free itself from national limitations ignoring the specific character of the objective conditions in which it has to operate. To attempt to build a movement in America on the program of one or the other faction in the CPSU is not internationalism; it is a crass form of inverted nationalism.

For these reasons and because its political system represents ultra-leftism in a theoretically complete form, Trotskyism offers no way out of the present crisis of world Communism. It is not only that, as an actual force in the Communist movement it is completely insignificant outside of the Soviet Union and Greece; it is not only that it has proved itself politically bankrupt in every major test of recent history (Spain, the German crisis); it is rather that in its very essence it is only an aggravated form of the disease that is consuming the official Communist movement today.

The Communist Opposition regards itself as an organized tendency in the Communist movements of the various countries and in the Communist International. It stands on the fundamental principles of Communism as developed by Marx, Engels and Lenin and confirmed by the experience of the proletarian struggles of decades. All of the malicious "prophecies" so recklessly flung about by the official Comintern and Trotskyites alike, that the Communist Opposition would "soon find its way to the bosom of Social Democracy," stand repudiated by the facts themselves. Today, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is the International Communist Opposition and it alone which has not only laid bare the nature and forms of the crisis in the world Communist movement, but which has quite definitely taken the road leading to its rehabilitation and unification!

Document No.4

The Need for Communist Unity (*Excerpts*)

A letter from the International Communist Opposition to the Communist International, November 9, 1935.

Never was the unity of Communist forces so essential as it is today. Never were the fruits of disunity so obvious. The sound unification of the world communist movement is especially urgent today because of the acute danger of imperialist war and the growing menace of fascism.

The resolutions of the Seventh World Congress have now been published; so have the reports in full and the discussions. After an examination of these decisions, we declare that we are willing to collaborate with all our energy in the execution of these decisions in the spirit of the following declaration made by Comrade Dimitrov in his summary speech at the Seventh Congress: "We want the

workers who belong to the Second International and the Amsterdam International and those workers who belong to other political organizations to discuss the resolutions with us; to bring us their practical proposals and supplementary proposals, to try to think of the best methods of application and to join us hand in hand to carry them out in practice."

Only an organized discussion and a thorough examination of all these questions, with the participation of the entire membership, can enable the Communist parties "to utilize their own experiences as well as the experiences of the international Communist movement and to avoid the mechanical transference of the experiences of one country to another and to replace concrete Marxist analyses for schematism and general formulas."

The resolution on Dimitrov's report, the Offensive of Fascism and the Tasks of the Comintern in the Struggle for the Unity of the Workingclass Against Fascism contains the liquidation of the ultra-left trade union and united front policy. The resolution recognizes the "temporary defeat of the proletariat in Central Europe, in Germany, Austria and Spain." This does away with the nonsensical talk of denying the defeat of the workingclass in Germany until the end of 1933. We welcome this and consider it as a pre-requisite for learning from the defeat.

Fascism is, on the one hand, correctly defined as the rule of finance capital. This is a welcome differentiation from the dangerous confusion of the essence of fascism which contributed considerably toward the Communist Party of Germany being unable to fulfill its tasks. This same resolution, however, contains the dangerous formula according to which fascism is the "open, terrorist dictatorship of the most chauvinist, the most imperialist elements of finance capital." This is both false and dangerous because it lends aid and comfort to the conception of the Social Democrats that other elements of finance capital can be expected to make a fight against the fascist dictatorship.

The resolution states that the united front is "the most important immediate task of the international labor movement in the present historical epoch." We welcome the strong emphasis on the necessity of turning to the reformist organizations. This is especially urgent in view of six years of ultra-leftism and the "united front from below." But the resolution lacks a simultaneous emphasis on the limits and the objective of the united front movement. The Seventh Congress gives directives not only for the next few months, but for a longer period. Therefore, the resolution should have stated expressly and unequivocally that the winning of political power by the workingclass is not possible through the united front movement. The seizure of political power presupposes that the Communist Party is already the leader of the majority of the workingclass, i.e., the leader of the workingclass for an armed uprising, a civil war, and not only for partial and immediate demands as in the united front struggle. To be silent on this, for fear of repelling a temporary ally, will lead to opportunist deviations and to a possible collapse of the strong united front movement. The failure to uncover the limits of the united front movement weaken the correct appeal of the resolution "not to give up independent work of Communist education, organization, and mobilization of the masses." A true united front movement is not weakened but strengthened thru a clarification of its limits.

United front tactics can only serve as the means for ushering in the struggle for the seizure of power. The united front movement is indispensable for this purpose. To grasp clearly the limits of the united front movement is the pre-requisite for the proper organization, as demanded in the

resolution, "of elected (or in the countries under the fascist dictatorship, selected from the most authoritative participants in the movement) non-partisan class organs of the united front in the factories, among the unemployed, in the workers' districts, among the small townfolk and in the villages." Only when these non-partisan broad class organs of the united front are conceived of as the preliminary stages of the future political Soviets can the united front movement build the organs of an extra-parliamentary struggle for political demands. Without these organs, serious successful partial struggles are impossible. The experiences had in these broad non-partisan united front organs during the struggle for partial demands form the starting point for the transformation of those organs for partial demands into political councils (Soviets)—into organs for the struggle for political power.

The resolution further suffers from a dangerous omission and unclarity in the section on the attitude of Communists toward bourgeois democracy. The incorrect statements by Dimitrov in his speech which were to the effect that it is no longer the choice between bourgeois democracy and proletarian dictatorship but between bourgeois democracy and fascist dictatorship and that the Communists in such a situation must defend bourgeois democracy is not repeated in the resolution. The resolution says:

In the struggle to defend against fascism the bourgeois democratic liberties and gains of the toilers, in the struggle to overthrow fascist dictatorship, the revolutionary proletariat prepares its force, strengthens its fight in contact with its allies and directs the struggle toward the goal of achieving real democracy of the toilers—Soviet power.

This formulation is not incorrect, *but* in the face of the confusion which has been created as to the relation of communism to bourgeois democracy it is inadequate.

It is necessary to say that Communists do not defend bourgeois democracy as such, not even when they are defending the democratic rights of workers against the attacks of fascists and other reactionaries. Even in the struggle against fascism within the bourgeois state no heed must be paid to the democratic rules so far as the fascists are concerned. The democratic rights of the workers can be defended in the long run and thoroughly only thru the revolutionary liquidation of bourgeois democracy which is the bearer of the germs of fascism. We fight against the limitation of the democratic rights of the workers. We fight for the denial of democratic rights to the fascists.

The resolution on the report of Comrade Ercoli on the tasks of the Comintern in relation to the preparation of a new world war by the imperialists is more replete with omissions and greater indefiniteness than the report itself. The greatest shortcoming of the resolution is that it does not give a concrete analysis of the attitude which should be taken by communists in case the bourgeoisie of their country line up on the side of the Soviet Union in a war.

We agree with section IV: "The Communist parties of all capitalist countries must fight against military expenditures (war budgets)." We agree to the pledge of the Communists: "To lead the opponents of war organized in the struggle for peace to the struggle for the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war against the fascist instigators of war, against the bourgeoisie, for the overthrow of capitalism."

We consider it unfortunate that the following section from the Stuttgart resolution was taken over without any criticism: "If, nevertheless, war should break out, it is their duty to work for its speedy termination." The formulation

may be turned into an obstacle for the Communist parties and the workingclass in a situation in which the bourgeoisie of a country which has started the war as an ally of the USSR urges a speedy end of the war in order to abandon the Soviet Union. If this formulation is repeated without reservation, it can facilitate in such circumstances the work of bourgeois pacifism and social patriotism in their efforts to confuse the workers.

Section VI of the resolution on war lifts the bars and opens the gates to dangerous opportunist deviations: "If any weak state is attacked by one or more big imperialist powers which want to destroy its national independence and national unity, or to dismember it as in the historical instance of the partition of Poland, a war conducted by the national bourgeoisie of such a country to repel the attack may assume the character of a war of liberation in which the workingclass and Communists of that country cannot abstain from intervening."

If every war waged by the bourgeoisie of a country in order to prevent the national dismemberment of its own territory in case of defeat can be a struggle for national liberation, then, all imperialist wars of today can become possible national wars of liberation, because every country is today threatened with national partition in case of defeat. For example, fascist Germany would be threatened with this fate, if it were defeated by France or vice versa. For instance Lenin thought that, properly speaking, the defense put up by the Serbians against the attack of the Austrians in 1914—taken by itself—was a war of national defense. Lenin, however, declined to look upon the attack on Serbia in itself and rejected the slogan of the defense of the fatherland in Serbia.

At this point, the lack of a clear analysis of the tasks of the workingclass and Communists in those countries whose imperialist bourgeoisie fight on the side of the Soviet Union is particularly evident. It is necessary, in the event of a war against the USSR, to distinguish clearly between countries which are against the USSR in which countries the workers and Communists must advocate revolutionary defeatism—and the tasks of the workers and Communists in those countries which are on the side of the Soviet Union. In the latter countries the Communists and workers have the task of fighting not for the defeat of their own country but for the transformation of the imperialist war waged by their own bourgeoisie into a civil war and for the victory of the Red Army and the Soviet Union.

How well founded is our criticism of the omissions and shortcomings of the decisions of the Seventh Congress, can be seen from the various opportunist mistakes characterizing the policies of important sections of the Comintern since the Congress. The policies of the Communist Party of France are a crass example of the danger of right opportunism in the application of the united front tactics—a danger indicated by the Seventh Congress itself. The CPF has given up regular and effective criticism of the reformist conceptions of social democracy from the viewpoint of Communist fundamentals. The erroneous idea that an alliance of the proletariat with the petty bourgeois working masses—a true people's front—could be realized by an agreement with capitalist parties has led the CPF to neglect the most urgent tasks of the class struggle in France. The so-called People's Front policy of the CPF has hindered and continues to hinder an effective struggle against the emergency decrees of the Laval government because no agreement for such a struggle could, of course, be reached with the Radicals. Furthermore, in spite of the clear decisions of the Seventh Congress that a mass self-defense organization against fascism should be created, the CPF not

only does not attempt to carry out this decision but publicly warns the workers against all efforts in this direction. This, likewise, is due to the tendency of the CPF to avoid friction with the Radicals in order to build up the so-called People's Front.

The deviations in regard to bourgeois democracy manifest themselves in a particularly crass form when they are transferred mechanically to countries where bourgeois democracy is still relatively strong and not yet seriously challenged by Fascists, as *the* form of capitalist dictatorship (USA, Canada, England). In such countries the concentration of activities by the Communist Parties on the defense of democratic rights in general can only lead to the weakening of the struggle against the concrete manifestations of the attack by capitalist reaction which is preparing the way for fascism.

The war danger is more and more imminent. Mussolini has started a colonial war. Hitler is arming feverishly. The sharpening of class relations in Hitler Germany cannot be sufficiently utilized to organize mass resistance leading to the overthrow of fascism because of the present condition of the CPG and the weakness of all workers organizations. The lack of a CP in Italy able to fight effectively has encouraged Mussolini to seek escape from domestic difficulties by resorting to the advantage of war. We consider it our duty to do all in our power to strengthen the CP in every country so that they will be able to organize mass resistance and to give Communist leadership. The trained underground members of the CPG-O can be of invaluable aid in this. In America the CPO has won decisive positions in the trade unions which are an indispensable point for the application of the trade union tactics decided upon at the Seventh Congress. In other countries where there are ICO members and followers they occupy important positions in the proletarian mass organization and possess trained cadres.

Our examination of the resolutions has led us to the following conclusions:

1. The resolutions offer the basis for the liquidation of the ultra-left course; 2. the basis for the application of the reform of the Comintern, considered by us as necessary, as decided by the Seventh Congress; 3. for correct united front tactics and a Communist trade union policy for winning the broad working masses for Communism; 4. the fact that unclarity, omissions and errors are still to be found in the resolutions, and there is reluctance in the Comintern to their application, and that it can lead to dangerous right deviations do not constitute an obstacle to reunification as far as we are concerned. The omissions, errors and unclarity can and must be eliminated in a broad organized discussion among the entire membership. Thru party democracy it becomes possible for differing viewpoints, within the limits of communist fundamentals, of course, to exist and express themselves fully within the party, without impairing the discipline or weakening its fighting power. Party democracy means that a minority has the right to express its viewpoint within the limits of communist fundamentals but that the decisions of the majority are to be carried out by the entire membership regardless of differences of opinion. We don't ask for any special privileges. We are prepared to dissolve our organization when unity is established on the basis of inner-party democracy on the lines herewith indicated. Inner-party democracy for all members is for us sufficient for disciplined cooperation in the Comintern and its sections.

The Buro of the ICO, therefore, proposes a meeting with the representatives of the Comintern in order to talk over the entrance, the concrete realizations of the unification of the ICO with the Comintern and its sections.

We ask the ECCI to name the place and the date and to inform us of same as soon as possible.

For the International
Communist Opposition

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Editor's Note: The Communist International never responded to this letter.

Document No. 5

The People's Front Illusion (*Excerpts*)

The following is an abridged version of chapter one of Jay Lovestone's 1937 pamphlet, The People's Front Illusion.

The Newest Line

The sum and substance of the newest line of the Comintern is the following: The present world situation, it holds, is everywhere characterized by a struggle between democracy (i.e. bourgeois or capitalist democracy) and fascism. In some countries fascism has already won. There the job of the Communist Parties is to do everything possible to restore this democracy (Germany). In other countries, the menace of fascism is growing in varying degrees (France, England, USA). Here the main task of the communists is to save capitalist democracy from the onrushing hordes of fascism. In both cases, it is necessary for the Communist Parties to collaborate not only with organizations and political parties of the lower middle class but even with those of other sections of the capitalist class if the latter are prepared to defend the democratic state (the form of government now prevailing in the USA, Great Britain and France). This collaboration of "all anti-fascist forces" is to be secured by the communists even at the cost of giving up both the right to propagate the principles of communism and the right of independent working class action in defense of the most elementary immediate interests of the proletariat.

More than that. This line is carried over into the realm of international policy. The programmatic declaration on the war question made by George Dimitroff, general secretary of the Communist International, provides for the various Comintern sections rallying to the defense of the democratic (capitalist) countries against the aggression of the fascist (capitalist) powers. This means that the Communist Parties are no longer to try to win over the working class to a program of militant class struggle against the imperialist ruling classes in those cases in which the capitalist classes insure their domination through the so-called democratic form of state—especially in case of a war with a fascist state.

These tactics of class collaboration at home—in the so-called democratic countries—have been baptized with the name of People's Front. These tactics of defense of the "democratic fatherland" against fascist assaults are paraded as efforts in behalf of universal peace and progress. The latter is really an extension of the former. The two are organically tied together. Both sets of tactics are a

monstrous violation of Marxist and Leninist teachings on the state and the revolutionary struggle against capitalism and against imperialist war. As "brilliant tactical maneuvers," as strategy modeled on the theory of the "Trojan Horse" (Dimitroff), they are suicidal. As an even momentary break with communist principles, such moves are costly beyond calculation or repair—regardless of the nobility of the motives animating the tacticians. This criticism is not based on dogma or the mechanical parroting of a phrase or finding of Marx, Engels, Lenin—or even Stalin. It is the criticism of a policy which turns its back on some of the most fundamental experiences and lessons of history. We must continue to test theories and policies in the light of their real effects on life.

Back to First Principles

On this basis only will we examine some of the concrete acts of the Comintern and its sections, since its Seventh Congress in the summer of 1935. To do so it is necessary to recapitulate and reaffirm a number of positions which are axiomatic for all Marxists, for all revolutionaries in the labor movement. This repetition of the obvious is made necessary because since the Seventh Congress the CI, with increasing frequency and crudeness, has been acting in utter disregard and even contempt of the principles of communism in regard to bourgeois democracy and imperialist war. Besides, it is necessary to call attention to certain basic ideas and principles in order to see more clearly the sinister significance of the practical application of the newest line of the Comintern in the struggle against fascism and imperialist war.

In the days before the Seventh World Congress, Marxists, communists, never spoke of democracy in the abstract. They always realized that there is no such thing as pure democracy in a society divided into classes. Today, the official communists seem to have forgotten, or at least act as if they had never learned, that modern history knows two kinds of democracy: the capitalist democracy of the type we have in the USA, Great Britain and France, and the proletarian democracy of the type we have in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it had always been the contention of all communists—those in the Comintern as well as those in the International Communist Opposition—that, as the class struggle sharpens, the mask of bourgeois democracy is discarded and reveals capitalist dictatorship in its open ugly, brutal form—fascism. Until recently, the official communists went along with us in pointing out the organic connection between the capitalist dictatorship known as "democracy" and the capitalist dictatorship known as "fascism." Time and again Earl Browder himself pointed out how false it is to conclude that "fascism is the opposite of capitalist democracy" or that "this democracy is the means of combatting and deflating fascism." On countless occasions the party members were taught that it is impermissible to counterpose "democracy against dictatorship" and that "capitalist democracy is not the enemy but the mother of fascism, that it is not the destroyer but the creator of fascism" and that, while it is true that "fascism destroys democracy," it is criminal "to propagate the falsehood that democracy will destroy fascism."

But "Conditions Have Changed"

Perhaps the official party leadership will explain that "conditions have changed" since Hitler triumphed in Germany. Would they have communists believe that since fascism conquered Germany bourgeois democracy is no longer a mechanism by means of which its victims are deluded into approving their continued status as an oppressed lower class? Certainly the comrades in the

leadership of the Comintern do not predicate their new attitude towards the capitalist democracies on the conclusion that since Hitler came into power England, France and the USA have become much more genuinely democratic in their relations to the working classes and the oppressed colonial masses in their empires.

Let us turn to the field of international politics, that is, the field of the international class struggle. Would the comrades in charge of the various sections of the Comintern have us believe that, in the event of a war between democratic France and fascist Poland on the one side and fascist Germany on the other, the French and Polish workers should become chauvinists and patrioteers and rally to their national colors in order to defeat fascist Germany on the field of battle? Would Comrades Browder and Hathaway, for instance, have Comrade X and Mr. Y, if he were elected to Congress, vote for the establishment of defensive naval bases in the Pacific in order to help defend democratic USA against "fascist Japan"? And would Browder or Hathaway say that in a war against Nipponese imperialism with the USSR lined up with the USA, the objectives of the Washington-Wall Street government would become non-imperialist or progressive?

Background of Present Course

The present ultra-right line of the Comintern may seem quite a long way from the ultra-left course which preceded it. Some may be at a loss to understand how it comes that the CI could swing from one extreme to the very opposite. There is no great distance traversed in this swing. First, extremes do meet. The fundamental approach is identical in the ultra-left line of yesterday and the ultra-right line of today. In both cases the Comintern has discarded the Marxist method of examining and evaluating mass movements and social struggles from the point of view of dynamic class relations.

An examination of both lines will reveal their blood-brotherhood and disclose the fact that the ultra-right line is only the ultra-left line standing on its head. In the days of the third period and social-fascism, in the ultra-left days of "class against class," the French Socialist Party (SFIO) was held to be so bad that *the Comintern could see no difference between this Socialist Party of Blum and the Radical Party of Herriot*. Then the French Socialist Party was a "bourgeois party." Today, in the ultra-right period, in the days of the "people against the two hundred families," the Radical Party has become so good that *the Comintern can again see no difference between the Radical Party of Daladier and the Socialist Party*.

In both cases, in both "periods," the Comintern failed to measure in class terms. It, therefore, arrived at a false estimate in each instance. Here is the common root of the two types of errors, branching out in opposite directions.

In the ultra-left course, with its theory of social-fascism, the Comintern refused to recognize any difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism. In those days all parties, with the exception of the official communist organizations, were labeled fascist or branded social-fascist. Then, the CI went so far as to herald the arrival of a fascist regime in Germany as an essential prerequisite for the "revolutionization" of the masses. This description of policy is not a fantasy. It was printed in a "resolution of the Presidium of the Comintern on the situation in Germany," after Hitler took power:

The Communist Party was right in giving the name of social-fascists to the Social-Democrats. . .

The establishment of an open fascist dictatorship, by destroying all the democratic illusions among the masses and liberating them from the influence of social-

democracy, accelerates the rate of Germany's development towards proletarian revolution. (*Communist International*, No. 8, pp. 245-246, May 1, 1933.)

When this outrageous stuff was gospel in the Comintern, all conflicts within and between bourgeois parties were considered sham battles. Compare this position with that of the American party leadership in the last campaign when it sought to find *fundamental* differences between Roosevelt and Landon. A veritable 180-degree turn! There is nothing more fallacious than the conclusion that wrong policy turned on its head becomes correct policy.

Though the ultra-left theory prevented viewing class relations and divisions as they actually were, it had one redeeming feature. In the days before the Seventh World Congress of the CI it was not only permissible but imperative for the various parties to stress the independent role of the proletariat as a class. Then, there was no loose talk about that fantastic and vague concept, the "people." The mistake then lay in the assumption that the Communist Parties had already assumed the leadership of the working class. Thus, there resulted the fallacious substitution of the independent action of the party as such for the independent action of the working class as a whole.

False Approach Persists

Applying an equally un-Marxian method today, and moved by despair over the defeats brought on by the ultra-left course, the Comintern has flown in panic to the ultra-right strategy of the People's Front.

According to the People's Front theory, fascism is not a form of the rule of *the bourgeoisie as a class*, but rather the "dictatorship of the most imperialist, the most chauvinist elements of finance capital" (resolution of the Seventh World Congress). Hence, in France, fascism would appear to be a dictatorship of the wealthiest "two hundred families." In the USA, we shall perhaps soon be told that fascism is a dictatorship of the famous "four hundred" over all the rest of the capitalists as well as over all the workers and farmers!

Only on this basis can one comprehend the proposal to set up a united front of all the people which shall include not only the working class but also the petty bourgeoisie and that section of the capitalist class which does not belong to "the most imperialist, the most chauvinist elements of finance capital." It is only on the basis of such an approach that the Communist Party of the USA could get out a special Christmas Day issue of its central organ, the *Daily Worker*, in which it declared editorially: "The Pope was *ill-advised* in the utterance which he made"—the attack on world communism.

In the same Christmas Day issue of the *Daily Worker*, there was featured *without comment or criticism* the following holiday greetings from Dorothy Day, editor of the *Catholic Worker*:

The *Catholic Worker* joins in an appeal for democracy and peace and, therefore, asks you to join in a protest against all dictatorships—fascist and bolshevist; against all suppression of civil liberty—fascist and bolshevist. That includes freedom of religious propaganda, education and organization—against all war, whether imperialist, civil or class. Merry Christmas. (*Daily Worker*, December 25, 1936.)

This shameful anti-working class epistle could appear in a paper calling itself communist *only on the basis of the People's Front theory*.

Democracy and Dictatorship

We cannot repeat too often that the evaluation of bourgeois democracy must be made realistically and, therefore, viewed in the light of the class conflicts of the decaying capitalist system. It is only because the Comintern failed to do so that its section in France demands the defense of declining bourgeois democracy there, that its sections in Germany and Italy demand the restoration and revitalization of their defunct capitalist democracy. It is only on this basis that the American CP could make its central slogan in the last presidential elections the "defense of democracy" in a country where the first job of the communists and all class-conscious workers is to disillusion the masses with the "virtues" of the prevailing system of bourgeois democracy. In short, in practice the People's Front policy entails not merely a postponement of the struggle but even the abandonment of the agitation for the proletarian dictatorship *for an indefinite period*.

Do not our comrades in the Comintern see that only a golden-age of capitalism could end the menace of fascism, insofar as its objective roots go? No such age is in store for world capitalism. If the danger of fascism is rooted in the decay of capitalism as a social and economic system, is the attack on the system to be abated in order to postpone the final symptoms of the disease? Certainly the struggle for proletarian dictatorship and for socialism must proceed steadily and grow throughout the period when bourgeois democracy is sick, if it is to be victorious over the rising fascist forces.

Hence, to ask the proletariat to postpone the agitation or struggle for the proletarian dictatorship until the danger of fascism is over, means to postpone it for a period as long as capitalism lasts. This can mean nothing else but giving up the struggle for proletarian dictatorship altogether and for ever.

In view of the Comintern policies, particularly as applied today by the French CP, the ECCI should again turn to what Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

Marxists are for collaboration with the petty bourgeoisie *under certain conditions*—so long as they are prepared to fight side by side with the proletariat against the big bourgeoisie, against monopoly capital. But this does not mean that we must line up with the small or bigger bourgeoisie for the purpose of defending and perpetuating capitalism as a social system.

New Role of Bourgeoisie

It is wrong to conclude that, because the bourgeoisie played a progressive role against feudalism, they will, therefore, be able to play a progressive role in the struggle against fascism. The fact that fascism has certain features in common with medieval barbarism does not mean that the Hitler or Mussolini regime spells a return to feudalism, an abandonment of the *capitalist* base of society. Fascism is only the outward or political expression of capitalism in complete decay. The very emergence of the fascist movement proves that only a proletarian revolution can today guarantee and promote the progress of humankind. Therefore, in the struggle against fascism, the working class cannot have a *permanent* alliance with bourgeois parties and organizations—unless, of course, the working class gives up the struggle against capitalism as a system in decay.

It is significant that in 1848 when the bourgeoisie was still able to play a revolutionary role, Marx and Engels did not go so far as the Comintern goes in its relations with petty and even bigger bourgeois outfits—today, when capitalism is

declining as a world system! Today, we are no longer in a situation where we can support the bourgeoisie in order to advance our own class interests. The People's Front strategy is in diametric opposition to the basic fact of the present world situation—the reactionary nature of the bourgeoisie as a ruling class and the reactionary nature of capitalism as a social system.

Finally, the Comintern would do well to remember and be guided by the following position taken by the Communist League in Germany in 1850—even when the bourgeoisie could, unlike today, still play somewhat of a progressive role: "The workers party will collaborate with the petty bourgeoisie against the reactionaries whom both aim to overthrow, but it will oppose the petty bourgeoisie on all issues pertaining to the working class." For one thing, this precludes a permanent bloc with the petty bourgeoisie; it prohibits the postponement or repression of working class issues and interests; it assumed as a prerequisite for such a temporary coalition the actual engagement of the petty bourgeoisie in a fight against the reactionaries. In none of the requirements does the People's Front fulfill these elementary conditions. It violates all of them—at the workers' expense.

Document No. 6

Antonio Gramsci and the Italian Revolution

by Lucio Colletti

One of the most dramatic, yet shadowy, events touched upon by Giuseppe Fiori in his *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary* [Now published in English: NLB, 1970] is the disagreement between Gramsci on the one hand and Togliatti and the Italian Communist Party on the other, after the political 'turn' brought about by the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International. To prevent any speculation, it should immediately be added that the revelation of this dispute does not date from Fiori's book. Already *Rinascita* of December 1964, in a brief comment following the publication of Athos Lisa's report on Gramsci in Prison, pointed out that between 1928 and 1933 the positions of Gramsci at Turi 'showed a way of thinking not only objectively inconsistent with the policy of the Party but actually critical of it on a whole range of questions that had emerged from the Ninth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the International, its Sixth World Congress and later its Tenth Plenum and to which 'the politics of the Italian Party adapted itself.' Fiori's undoubted achievement, is not so much to have actually discovered this disagreement, as to have made the first attempt to set it explicitly into its historical context and to give it a historical-political evaluation (from which we, however, disagree on a crucial point). He has also enriched and clarified its nature with new information, of which one of the more important items is the decisive testimony rendered by Gennaro, Gramsci's elder brother, shortly before his death.

We shall assume total ignorance on the part of the reader and resume briefly Fiori's account. In 1928-30 Stalin, who was then engaged in a violent struggle against Bukharin, imposed a sharp turn on the International. The line of this turn, soon to be reinforced by the great economic crisis of 1929, can be summed up in the following terms. Capitalism is in its death-throes and the destruction of bourgeois power will be *immediately* followed by the dictatorship of the proletariat, without a period of transition and intermediate objectives. Social-democracy is not only a non-revolutionary force, an instrument with which the bourgeoisie tries to arrest the revolutionary impetus of the masses, but is itself a form of bourgeois rule: it is, in effect, social-fascism. Communist parties should, therefore, conduct isolated struggle for the destruction of capitalism, outside any system of alliances. Their aim should be frontal clash of classes and, in the specific instance of the Italian Party, all-out struggle against the 'Justice and Freedom' group and against catholic and republican anti-fascist forces.

The crude and sectarian character of this Stalinist line is quite clear. It was sectarian because it maintained an equivalence between social-democracy and fascism and because it failed to base its policies on any serious analysis of the concrete situation. It was simply absurd in the case of Italy where fascist reaction and terror had long ago succeeded in breaking up and decimating the organized power of the proletariat. Gramsci's theses, put forward at the Congress of Lyon, were thereby turned upside down.

How did the PCI respond to the new Stalinist directive? It split at the top. In the leadership, Togliatti, Camilla Ravera and Longo adapted themselves to the turn. Alfonso Leonetti, in charge of the clandestine press, Paolo Ravazzoli, leader of the trade-union movement, and Pietro Tresso, in charge of the underground organization, rejected it. All three were expelled for this: first from the leadership, then from the Central Committee and finally from the Party.

It is here that Gennaro Gramsci's testimony must be introduced. He was an exile, living in Paris, when he was charged by Togliatti to go and visit Antonio in prison in Turin, to inform him of the recent vicissitudes and to find out his point of view. According to Fiori Gennaro told him that he found Antonio actively hostile to the expulsions and sharing the opposition to the turn. Altogether, Gramsci was in agreement with Leonetti, Tresso and Ravazzoli on the question of the turn, thought their expulsion unjustified and rejected the International's new policy to which, he thought, Togliatti had agreed too hastily.

However, on his return to Paris, as he was later to recall to Fiori, Gennaro went to Togliatti and told him: 'Nino is in complete agreement with you'. The reason for this move, as Gennaro explained, was his fear that the accusation of 'opportunism', given the heat of the struggle and the determination of the group around Togliatti to suppress all dissent, would have been levelled even against his brother. 'Had I told a different story, not even Nino would have been saved from expulsion'. [Fiori, p. 253.]

But even Gennaro's prudent move turned out to be not quite sufficient. Towards the end of 1930 Gramsci had decided to start a new political education class among his prison comrades and to give a series of talks during the exercise hour in the courtyard. Some comrades (Athos Lisa among others), who were already aware of the new policy of the International and the Party, contended with and combated his theses. Left to himself and subjected to slanderous accusations, Gramsci decided to break off relations with them, and withdrew into isolation. From then on Fiori has commented 'there is no indication, written or

oral, of any attempt by Gramsci to contact any member of the Party (at any level, whether in exile or not) during the remaining years in prison and afterwards during his recovery at the Cusumano clinic in Formia (where he was allowed to go out a number of times) and at the Quisisana clinic in Rome'. Tresso wrote that the Party had expelled Gramsci. For its part, *Stato Operaio*, which was being published in Paris under Togliatti, failed to mention Gramsci's name for many years.

Fiori's narrative, resumed here almost in his own words, ends at this point. The authenticity of this narrative has been vindicated by many sources. It has been confirmed by two Communists who were in the Turi prison together with Gramsci. It has further been corroborated by Athos Lisa's report to Togliatti and the Party Centre (evidently at the request of the latter) on the theses held and defended by Gramsci in his opposition to the turn. Finally it has been confirmed by Ezio Riboldi, a Communist deputy, who was also imprisoned at Turi. According to Riboldi, in March of 1931 Gramsci had received an English publication which contained, in invisible ink, resolutions of the Congress of Cologne (which ratified the turn) and, in a fit of irritation, gave the following appraisal of Stalin: 'We must bear in mind that Lenin's intellectual scope was quite different from that of Stalin. Lenin, who had lived abroad for many years, had an international view of socio-political problems. The same cannot be said of Stalin. Having never left Russia, he retained the nationalist mentality, the mentality which can be seen in the cult of "great Russians." We must be on our guard, for inside the International as well Stalin is first a Russian and then a Communist'.

Two main objections have been raised against Fiori's book, by U. Sardia, local Party secretary, in *Rinascita Sarda*, and a note without signature published in *Rinascita*. The essence of their complaints is this. The reasons, writes Sardia, for the expulsion of the 'three' (Tresso, Leonetti and Ravazzoli) were not those reported by Fiori. No doubt grave errors of political perspective and method were committed, but 'the essential element of the turn was the dramatic effort, resulting in an almost superhuman tension, to conduct the anti-fascist struggle inside the country'. Other arguments against Fiori are more general. They appeal to the complexity of the historical period, reproach Fiori with a certain schematism in attributing the 'turn' solely to Stalin, evoke the need for further research, study and meditations. These considerations are all impeccable. But they do not cancel the impression that by exalting virtue to the sky they make it unattainable and that in placing 'historical truth' on high and inaccessible peaks they condemn one to the plain. What *Rinascita*, in particular, offers is not only ungenerous but ultimately does not square with the facts. Why did not Gramsci restore his contacts with the Party? Why did he stay isolated after Turi even when, as in the case of Formia, he was allowed to go out freely? *Rinascita* cites the state of his health as the reason. 'It seemed that Gramsci was going to die any day', for 'such were the conditions under which he continued to live even after obtaining conditional freedom'. This is unfortunately true, but this truth, when pushed to the limit, turns into its opposite. Set free on October 29th 1934, even if only conditionally, Gramsci continued to work and write. 'The will-power of this man,' writes Fiori in his book—a biography which restores Gramsci to his ethico-political greatness without any false glitter of hagiography—'driven almost insane by suffering, certainly bordered on the superhuman, at this stage in his life. Even now, he could still react to the remorseless disintegration of his physique and the exhaustion of all his energies by withdrawing into the still centre: instead of giving up or disappearing, he concentrated the last of his resources on

severe intellectual work. *To the Formia period (1934-5) belong five notebooks begun at Turi, and another eleven composed entirely in the Cusumano clinic.* [Fiori, p. 286.]

This is what happened. What I now want to ask is the following: *in the name of what political practice did Gramsci oppose the turn?* What was his own strategic perspective? Those who compare the Lyons theses with the exposition of Gramsci's thought outlined in Athos Lisa's report cannot but notice the essential homogeneity of the two documents. Between 1926 and 1932 (which is the time limit of Lisa's report) and, in the absence of proof to the contrary, until his death, the fundamentals of Gramsci's political thought did not change. Naturally this thought became more complex and profound over time, but—and this is the vital point—it never departed from its basic line of inspiration. The general theme of this thought (as it already emerged in the Lyons theses) is *the actuality of the socialist revolution*. In Europe, Gramsci wrote, 'the objective conditions for the proletarian revolution have existed for the past fifty years'. This is the case above all in Italy. Although capitalism there has developed in a weaker and more backward form than in other Western countries (Gramsci wrote forty years ago), this does not mean that the Italian revolution will be bourgeois-democratic; on the contrary Italy, like Russia (and this is the lesson learnt from Lenin and 1917), 'is *the weakest link in the capitalist chain*—which can, and should, be the first to break'.

The attainment of this strategic objective demands, because of Italian backwardness, specific tactics: since the Italian proletariat does not form the majority on its own, it must win over the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. 'Without these alliances no serious revolutionary movement is possible for the proletariat'. The need for these alliances is based on two fundamental conditions: to muster a *force* strong enough for revolutionary attack ('the Party has as its objective the violent conquest of power') and to be able to act with popular consent. The same argument was developed by Lenin in 1917. 'The insufficient strength of the Russian proletarian masses, their inadequate consciousness and organization,' wrote Lenin, 'force them to look for allies'. Which allies? 'Russia today is in a state of effervescence. Millions and tens of millions of men and women have woken up and are drawn into political activity. For most part they are peasants and petty bourgeois. Russia is the most petty-bourgeois nation in the world'. These then are the allies. On the other hand 'the less organizational experience the Russian masses possess, the more decisively we should proceed to set up organizational structures for their action'. 'The party of the proletariat should by no means think in terms of 'instituting' socialism in a country of small peasantry until the overwhelming majority of the population has acquired an awareness of the necessity of the socialist revolution'.

Gramsci and Lenin

Gramsci, without necessarily knowing these writings of Lenin, reasoned in a similar manner. In order to demolish fascism and proceed to the socialist revolution, the Italian proletariat must first win over to it wide strata of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry. However 'the direct struggle for the conquest of power is a step to which these strata can be brought only very gradually'. Therefore: 'the first step to which they should be directed is that which leads them to express themselves on the constitutional and institutional problem'. The *intermediate* objective should be a Constituent Assembly. ('Besides, the first article of the Bolshevik Party's programme included the Constituent Assembly'.) But 'the possibility of transcending intermediate slogans—which mark the various phases in

winning over these social strata and thus altering the relation of forces' to the advantage of the working class—demands that the action of the party should also be aimed at '*devaluing all programmes of peaceful social reform*' and demonstrating to the Italian working class that *the only solution possible in Italy is the proletarian revolution*.

These are the general outlines of Gramsci's Leninist conception (it can, of course, be debated how much of it is still relevant today). One can well understand why Gramsci could not possibly have been in agreement with Stalin and have adapted himself, like Togliatti, to the turn of 1928. It should be stressed that Gramsci's opposition was not inspired by petty and local motives, let us say, of a 'national' kind. He opposed the turn because he considered it fatal to the revolution and the interests of the working class. He opposed the liquidation of the 'three' because he opposed the Stalinization of the Italian Party, just as in 1926 (again against Togliatti) he was opposed to the Stalinization of the Bolshevik Party. 'Today you risk destroying your own handiwork, you are degrading and may even annul completely the leading position which the CPSU acquired under the direction of Lenin. It seems to us that your passionate absorption in Russian questions is making you lose sight of the international implications of these questions, and is causing you to forget that your duty as Russian militants can and must be fulfilled only with reference to the international working class'. [See Fiori, p. 214.]

Now, what are the errors of political judgment in Fiori's book? He continuously underlines, in a very one-sided fashion, the 'democratic nature' of Gramsci's orientation, thereby losing and weakening many of its essential features—such as the anti-democratist emphasis at the very origin of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, which took shape in the specific forms and institutions of working-class struggle, from the 'Councils' of 1919-20 to the 'Workers' and Peasants' Committees' of '24-25. Not content with this, however, Fiori, in the subsequent discussion aroused in the press by his book has substituted the so-called 'Popular Front' policy for Gramsci's Leninist line.

The logic of his argument is of disconcerting simplicity. 'In all the editions of *Stato Operaio*', he writes, 'Gramsci's name was not to be seen between 1931 and 1935'. But suddenly in 1937 (he goes on) 'Togliatti wrote and published in *Stato Operaio* his first essay on Gramsci. What had happened in the meantime? In 1935 the Seventh World Congress of the International had taken place. Stalin's theory of social-fascism had demonstrated all its flaws, absurdity and tragic abstraction... With the shelving of this suicidal policy, the policy of the popular anti-fascist fronts was revived, namely a return to Gramsci'. Gramsci's position becomes in this way the very policy of the 'Popular Front'. History appears here as a faction struggle. In 1928, at the time of the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern, the Italian Party, under pressure from Stalin, renounces the correct line. In 1935, at the Seventh Congress, the situation is reversed: Gramsci's line is taken up again by the Italian Party and the Italian Party line becomes also that of Stalin.

The facts which refute this thesis and which, on account of space, I shall only indicate, are the following: 1. the 'popular front' policy was exclusively concerned with the *defence* of bourgeois democratic institutions, and not with the socialist revolution; 2. the international working-class movement derived this policy from a strategy hinged on the *defence* of the Soviet State. This defence as such was necessary and fundamentally correct. But it is quite clear that it did not need to be externally proposed to Stalin. For Stalin, in the interests of political realism, at this date wanted to avoid the spread of fascism in Europe, namely the encirclement of

USSR by fascist states—all the more so because of his conviction that all capitalist countries, including England, France and the United States, were inevitably bound to become fascist in the end, since fascism was the typical form of political rule of contemporary capitalism. Thus the manipulation of the international working class by the 'popular front' line was all too clear in its outcome. Firstly, in the vagueness and indeterminacy of the political and the programmatic platform on which these 'fronts' were constituted. Their content remained largely concerned with the 'incompletion' of the bourgeois revolution, and consequently alliances were established only on 'the lowest common denominator'. Secondly, in the rapidity with which—precisely because of their programmatic vagueness—they entered into crisis and disintegrated. Thirdly, in the fact that the frontist policy of the Communist parties never involved them in any original research into the forms and means of achieving socialism in the West; on the contrary, it implied supine acceptance of the Soviet bureaucratic model.

The 'Popular Front' line, in other words, presupposed a conscious 'duplicity': it was constructed on the separation of means from ends, of tactics from strategy. The defence of bourgeois-democratic institutions remained in this way only a defence, a tactic. It was never imagined that the defence of democracy implies a drive to push its institutions beyond their class limits into a revolutionary transformation of the State.

On the contrary. The strategic aim, namely the conquest of power and the transition to socialism, rather than being adapted to the state of maturity and the development of struggle inside individual countries, was made to depend on 'outside interests': as in the People's Democracies after the War, where the various 'fronts' soon became (and remained for some years) little more than a mask for the bureaucratic regimes installed by the Red Army. The fact that this 'duplicity' (what Togliatti, speaking of PCI policy from 1945 onwards, once called even more appropriately 'duality'), was not an accidental but an integral element of the Popular Fronts, was demonstrated by the record of the French Communist Party, which was the first to try out this policy. This party, in the space of a few years, passed from an adherence and support for the bourgeois government of Leon Blum (that self-confessed manager of capitalist interests), not only to the acceptance (which would still be understandable) of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, but all the way to an infamous attempt to find in this pact a basis 'of principle' in certain 'social' characteristics of the Nazi regime.

These are the essential features of the line that emerged from the Seventh Congress. One can now understand how little basis there was for the attempt (recently repeated by Amendola and Sereni in *Critica Marxista*) to force an opposition between the Sixth and Seventh Congresses in order to erase the deep continuity between the two. [Giorgio Amendola, "Insegnamenti del VII Congresso del Internazionale Comunista (Rileggendo Dimitrov)," *Critica Marxista*, July-August 1965; Emilio Sereni, "Appunti per una Discussione sulle Politiche di Fronte Popolare e Nazionale," *Critica Marxista*, March-April 1965.] Amendola writes that 'the Sixth Congress initiated the period of monolithism within each party, in which there was no longer any place for dissidents or minorities, first within the leadership and then within the party itself. There was even less room for opponents, who came to be accused of 'objectively' occupying the positions of the class enemy and who were therefore adversaries to be defeated by all available means. The line of the Sixth Congress thus provoked within the Communist parties a process of

"bolshevization," frequently set in motion by administrative measures, and led up to lacerations and expulsions. But is it not obvious that exactly the same is true of the Seventh Congress? Did it not coincide with the most extreme period of Stalinism, the period of ceaseless trials, suspicion, and purges inside the Soviet Party and all other Communist parties?

All this is of no interest to Amendola. He hopes to extract from an indiscriminate exaltation of the Seventh Congress something that he most needs today: a cover for, and legitimation of, social-democratic ideology in the ranks of the PCI—or, better still, a pretext for charging anybody who opposes him with sectarianism. Today, the epoch of the leading state is over and with it that intimate bond with the Soviet Union which, although one of the two components of the 'popular' front' policy, was also in a certain sense its most valid element—in so far as it expressed, even if in a radically distorted form, the international character of the movement. Amendola, in celebrating today the Seventh Congress, celebrates and invokes only its other element: adherence to and support for bourgeois governments. It is still uncertain today if sufficient forces will rise from the working-class movement against this operation, to combat and to defeat it. But in so far as it rests with us, we should not allow either Amendola or anybody else to cover themselves with the name of Gramsci as they pursue their own—very different—aims.

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¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁵*Revolutionary Age*, December 15, 1929.

¹⁶Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship* (NLB, 1974), pp. 61-62; Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (Verso, 1977), pp. 130-32.

¹⁷August Thalheimer, "On Fascism," *Telos* No. 40 (1979), pp. 109-21.

¹⁸Martin Kitchen, "August Thalheimer's Theory of Fascism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* XXXIV (Jan.-Mar. 1973), pp. 67-78.

¹⁹"On Fascism," p. 117.

²⁰Kitchen, *supra* at 74.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 77.

²²Quoted in Lovestone, *The People's Front Illusion* (Workers Age, n.d.), p. 7 from the *Communist International*, No. 8 (May 1, 1935), pp. 245-46.

²³*Workers Age*, November 1, 1933.

²⁴*Revolutionary Age*, Feb. 14, 1931; *Workers Age*, Feb. 6, 1932.

²⁵*Workers Age*, October 1, 1934.

²⁶Alexander, *supra*, Chapter 5.

²⁷On this point see Paul Costello, "Toward a Contemporary Strategy: Lessons of the 1930s," *Theoretical Review*, March-April 1981.

²⁸"What Will I Do When America Goes to War?" *Modern Monthly*, Vol LX, No. 5 (September 1935), pp. 265-66.

²⁹See Laclau, *supra*; Goran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (Verso, 1980).

³⁰"On Fascism," p. 121.

Most of the factual data in this article which was not footnoted was taken from issues of Revolutionary Age and Workers Age or from Robert J. Alexander's The Right Opposition (Greenwood, 1981).