

The International Communist Opposition, 1928-1938

by Paul Costello

Without continuous and systematic study, investigation and theoretical work on the part of the Communist movement collectively as well as on the part of individual comrades, any real progress of the revolutionary movement is impossible.

—Will Herberg, 1930¹

Throughout the 1930s the international communist movement was divided into three principal tendencies: the Communist International, directed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU(B)); the Trotskyist International Left Opposition (organized into the Fourth International in 1938); and the International Communist Opposition (ICO). The first two are considerably better known than the last, even though the ICO dwarfed the Trotskyist movement in size and influence for a considerable period of time. At its founding the Fourth International was, in Isaac Deutscher's words, "little more than a fiction,"² with its various sections consisting of a few dozen or at most a few hundred members. The ICO, on the other hand, at one time or another had sections in fifteen countries including sizable formations in Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, India and the United States. Its ranks and sympathisers included a galaxy of leading Communists from the 1920s, including Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer, Nikolai Bukharin, M. N. Roy, Clara Zetkin, Lewis Corey (Louis Fraina), Jay Lovestone, Diego Rivera and Joaquin Maurin.

Unlike the Trotskyists, however, the International Communist Opposition did not survive the tremendous upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s including the destruction of the German and Austrian left by fascism, the Great Purges in the USSR and World War II. Caught in a web of objective and subjective contradictions, the ICO and its various sections disappeared with hardly an organizational trace remaining. Nonetheless, a whole array of its political positions—on developing political line and strategy in accordance with the specific conditions of each country; on democratic centralism and inner-party democracy; on the united front and the trade unions—remain at the heart of the issues still being debated within the world communist movement. The ICO was one of the first important responses to the crisis of Marxism which began in the 1920s

and 1930s. Much of what the International Opposition had to say is vitally important if we are to understand this crisis and seriously begin to overcome its negative, and often disastrous, legacy.

What follows is a brief history of the International Communist Opposition, and a critical discussion of its political orientation and practice in the years 1928-1938. We have also appended a number of important documents by and about the ICO, most of which have never been reprinted since their original publication half a century ago. In addition we have included an important article by Lucio Colletti on Antonio Gramsci and Comintern strategy from the Third Period to the Popular Front. This text, which first appeared in *New Left Review* in 1971, sheds light on Gramsci's political evolution during the critical prison years. The coincidence between the views of Gramsci and those of the ICO on Comintern errors before and after 1935 is striking.

Origins of the International Communist Opposition

The International Communist Opposition arose out of two crises which affected the world communist movement in the late 1920s and 1930s. In the capitalist countries of Western Europe and North America the revolutionary tide which had followed the first world war was unexpectedly superceded by an era of relative "capitalist stabilization," before the Communists were able to successfully take power or even win a majority of the workingclass to their side. Then, in 1928-1929, even before the communists had begun to grasp the nature of the period of stabilization, world capitalism as a whole began to enter into a new period: a long wave of economic contraction and crisis coupled with political instability and the rising danger of war. The failure

to adequately understand the previous period of relative stability, and to produce strategy and tactics appropriate to it, coupled with uncertainty on how to approach the new period of capitalist instability, was the source of this first crisis of Marxism.

Toward the end of his life Lenin had recognized that the revolutionary process in the west would proceed differently and with more difficulty than it had in the USSR. As early as 1918 he stated:

The revolution will not come as quickly as we expected. History has proved this, and we must be able to take this as a fact, to reckon with the fact that the world socialist revolution cannot begin so easily in the advanced countries as the revolution began in Russia—in the land of Nicholas and Rasputin, the land in which an enormous part of the population was absolutely indifferent as to what peoples were living in the outlying regions, or what was happening there. In such a country it was quite easy to start a revolution, as easy as lifting a feather.

But to start without preparation a revolution in a country in which capitalism is developed and has given a democratic culture and organization to everybody, down to the last man—to do so would be wrong, absurd. There we are only just approaching the painful period of the beginning of socialist revolutions.³

The problem of developing a strategy and tactics appropriate to these different conditions in the developed capitalist countries, was a constant source of concern for Lenin. In particular he was sensitive to the need to overcome the division within the workingclass which the split between social democrats and communists had caused. For this reason, he threw his support behind the united front policy inaugurated in 1921 by Paul Levi, then head of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) over the objection of other Comintern leaders, most notably Gregory Zinoviev. Lenin's enthusiasm was translated into Comintern policy at its Third (1921) and Fourth (1922) Congresses, where the struggle against ultra-leftism and for the united front was given central place.

But championing a policy and successfully applying it are two very different things. Although Lenin had urged Communists to "make a deep study of [the revolution's] concrete development in the advanced capitalist countries,"⁴ not much progress was made in this direction in the decade of the twenties. Early on, Antonio Gramsci noted this problem and the resulting crisis:

The tactics of the united front, which has been posed with such precision by the Russian comrades, both theoretically and from the point of view of general orientation, has not found in any country, the party and people able to realize it and draw its practical applications.

Something is not working in the international field. There is a weakness, a lack of leadership.⁵

At this same time the USSR was experiencing a crisis of its own: a crisis of the class struggle under the conditions of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The major problem was the issue of grain procurement, but also involved were the much broader issues of the worker-peasant alliance, the urban-countryside relation, and the role of the party and state in socialist construction. An already divided Bolshevik leadership had debated these questions shortly after Lenin's death in the face of the Trotskyist opposition. The defeat of

that opposition had removed a source of the controversy, but it had not solved any of the problems which were at the heart of the debate.

Within the Soviet Communist Party the "resolution" of this second crisis was only ultimately achieved through a radical left turn which led to the complete abandonment of the NEP, and with it, the rupture of the worker-peasant alliance, the decline of proletarian democracy, an agricultural disaster, partial and one-sided industrial development, and serious distortions in the inner-party situation in the CPSU(B). The victory of this "left" line, under Stalin's leadership, was only achieved through the defeat of the Bukharin-Tomsky-Rykov group in the Politbureau of the Central Committee. These three individuals represented the best of the "Old Bolshevik" nucleus which had led the Party through the long years of Czarism, the October Revolution, and socialist construction.

Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin (1887-1938) had been a member of the Bolshevik Party since 1906. After the revolution he became the editor of *Pravda* and a member of the Politbureau and the Central Committee. After 1926 he was Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI).

Mikhail Pavlovich Tomsky (1880-1936) joined the social democratic movement in 1904. After the revolution he was a member of the Politbureau and of the Central Committee. From 1922 to 1929 he was chairman of the Central Committee of the Trade Unions of the USSR.

Aleksey Ivanovich Rykov (1881-1938) had been elected a member of the first Bolshevik Central Committee. After the revolution he was Commissar of the Interior and headed the Supreme Council of the National Economy. On Lenin's death he was elected Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.

Because of their positions and their authority these three were the recognized leaders of a group which, after Lenin's death, were increasingly forced into defensive positions: first defending Leninism against the Trotskyist opposition in 1924-25, and then against the policies of the Stalin group in the years 1928-1930. Such a defensive posture may seem ill-fitting for some of these individuals. Bukharin in particular had gained a well deserved notoriety—and the criticism of Lenin—for his leadership of the "Left" Communists and their "theory of the offensive" in the early years after the revolution. But times had changed, and so had the individuals living in them.

The struggles with the Trotskyist opposition had forced Bukharin to seriously study Lenin's last writings, and his own polemics against Trotsky in the years 1924-1925 helped him to break completely with his "Left" Communist past. They had also made him the foremost exponent and popularizer of Lenin's final thoughts on the NEP and the transition to socialism. Moreover, as Christine Buc-Glucksmann has pointed out, Bukharin was beginning to articulate a conception of proletarian hegemony similar to that which Gramsci was later to further develop under different circumstances.⁶ For Bukharin proletarian hegemony in the Soviet context meant a policy by which the workingclass would lead the peasantry and other middle strata to socialism through economic incentives and political/ideological struggle. He counterposed this to all conceptions which defined proletarian hegemony in terms

of coercion and the imposition of socialism on the masses by force.

When, in 1928-1929, the Stalin group sought to upset the delicate balance of proletarian hegemony which the Soviet workers had been able to develop in relation to the peasants as a result of NEP, Bukharin and his supporters well understood the consequences. He and the forces associated with him put up a clear, if irresolute resistance to the "left" turn on all points. They opposed: (1) an exaggerated and voluntarist conception of economic development and the role of state planning; (2) the one-sided development of heavy industry without sufficient attention to the material requirements of production as a whole and the needs of the masses; (3) the collectivization of agriculture *by force* and the extraction of a "tribute" from the peasantry; (4) the regimentation of the trade unions and destruction of their role in safeguarding the interests of the masses; (5) the steady weakening of the power of the Soviets and other organs of mass proletarian democracy, coupled with the tremendous expansion of the state bureaucracy, particularly its repressive apparatuses; (6) the increasing domination of the party and state by the Stalin group and its supporters; (7) the use of police methods to solve contradictions among the people and differences within the party; (8) the deterioration of the standard of living of the worker and peasant masses; (9) the replacement of the Bolshevik tradition of critical thought with blind discipline and monolithic unity.

The Crisis in the Communist International

Given the close connection between the leadership of the CPSU(B) and that of the Comintern, it was no accident that this inner-party struggle was carried over into the international movement, in the same manner that the prior struggles against Trotsky and Zinoviev had been. As noted earlier, Bukharin was more than a member of the Central Committee of the Soviet Party; he was also the chairman of the ECCI. The Stalin group was, therefore, compelled to carry the struggle against him into that organization, which it did through organizational maneuvers as well as by mechanically transferring the ultra-left turn in Soviet policy into the various sections of the Comintern. The actual removal of Bukharin from his position in the ECCI, begun at the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International in 1928, was finally formalized at the April 23, 1929 meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU(B). This decision was confirmed by the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI in July. More momentous than this change in leadership was the new line which the Tenth Plenum provided as binding on all sections of the International:

(1) an evaluation of the "third period" of post war capitalism as characterized by an economic crisis which was leading directly to a revolutionary situation in all the developed capitalist countries;

(2) the consequent insistence that all communist parties immediately adopt new "revolutionary" tactics, including: (a) the abandonment of the united front policy, and (b) the establishment of separate "revolutionary" trade unions;

(3) the evaluation that the Social Democratic Parties and trade unions had merged with fascism to become "social fascists" with whom no unity was possible;

(4) a strategy of "directing the main blow" at the "social fascists" in general and the "left social fascists" in particular;

(5) the steady narrowing of inner-party democracy and freedom of discussion in the interests of consolidating "monolithic" parties based on "iron" discipline;

(6) the removal from leadership in the Communist Parties of anyone unwilling to immediately embrace the new line and the vociferous labelling of such dissenters as "right opportunists."

The actual beginnings of this new line had been laid earlier, at the Fourth Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU or Profintern) in March 1928, and at the Sixth Comintern Congress held soon after. It was continued and deepened at the Eleventh, Twelfth and Thirteenth Plenums of the Comintern Executive which were held in 1931, 1932 and 1933 respectively. Many were the forces which opposed the "left" line, but not all were willing to openly struggle against it. Georgy Lukacs, then a political leader in one of the leading factions in the Communist Party of Hungary, could not bring himself to break with the Comintern and instead abandoned politics for the study of aesthetics. Jules Humbert-Droz, one of the First Secretaries of the Comintern and head of its Latin Secretariat, also was strongly opposed to the new line. Yet he too made his peace with the organization and subordinated himself to the discipline it required. In the Communist Party of Poland, Adolf Warski, Henryk Walecki and Maria Jusztuska-Wera Kostrzewa sympathized with the Bukharinist forces in the Comintern, but unfavorable conditions in Poland prevented them from making an organizational break with the victorious Stalin group.

Nonetheless, strong opposition to the Comintern's ultra-left line did develop almost immediately. In particular there was strong resistance to:

(1) the mechanical imposition of uniform tactics on all countries when the crisis was developing unevenly in each country;

(2) the idea that the unfolding world economic crisis could be defined as the "final" crisis of capitalism which would lead directly to a revolutionary situation;

(3) the liquidation of the united front policy and the return to the ultra-leftism and dual unionism which Lenin had criticized in *'Left-wing' Communism—An Infantile Disorder*;

(4) the abandonment of inner-party democracy and the installation of new party leaderships, chiefly characterized by their blind servility to the leadership of the Stalin group.

Much of the resistance was opposed to more than just the details of the new line; it also was a fight to defend the right of national parties to make effective decisions for themselves, a relative freedom which they had enjoyed in the previous period. This limited freedom had been a result of the preceding struggle in the Comintern and the Soviet Party. The era of Zinoviev's leadership in the ECCI had been followed by one directed by Bukharin; but even in the late 1920s certain vestiges of the former had remained. The result was a balance in the Comintern between Zinovievist forces and Bukharinist ones:

with the result that it was possible for "leftist" policies in countries like Germany and Italy to coexist with "rightist" policies in countries like China, the United

States, Britain or Yugoslavia. In each case, the determining factors were national rather than international.⁷

This balance came to a more or less abrupt end with the victory of the Stalin group and its imposition of a new leadership on the Comintern and the various section parties. The ease with which this task was accomplished was a result of many factors: the first crisis we discussed above, the prestige of the Soviet Party, the theoretical-political weaknesses of the various national leaderships, the underdeveloped state of democratic centralism and self-criticism within these parties, etc. In any case, from then on the ability of national communist parties to determine their own strategy and tactics was to be more a factor of geographical isolation (China, Vietnam), than it was of political design. Elsewhere, unconditional subordination to Comintern direction was to become the supreme "virtue."

At the Sixth Comintern Congress Bukharin reminded the delegates of something Lenin had once said to him and Zinoviev: "if you are going to expel all the not very obedient but clever people and retain only the obedient fools, you will most assuredly ruin the party."⁸ Bukharin was not just retelling an ironic anecdote: he was both criticizing the practice of the Stalin group and warning the Comintern of the fate in store for it. The tragedy of the situation was how few of the assembled delegates at the Sixth Congress understood his words or their significance for the future course of Communist history.

The Struggle Against Ultra-Leftism in the International

The largest and most important section of the Communist International outside the Soviet Union was the Communist Party of Germany. The KPD was also the first and most important center of opposition to the new ultra-left line. This opposition was led by two outstanding figures in German Communist history, Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer.

Heinrich Brandler (1881-1967), a bricklayer at the age of fifteen, had joined the German Social Democratic Party in 1901, and was active in its left wing. He joined the Spartacus League in 1916 and was sent as its delegate to the first Zimmerwald Conference. He was a founding member of the Communist Party of Germany, and was elected to the Central Committee at its Second Congress. He became Party Chairman in 1921, and was elected to the Presidium of the ECCI in the following year. With the failure of the German October uprising in 1923 (actually instigated by Zinoviev)⁹ he and Thalheimer were removed from leadership and sent to Moscow where Brandler worked as a member of the CPSU(B) in the Comintern, the RILU and the Peasant International.

August Thalheimer (1884-1948) joined the Spartacus League during World War I and was an editor of its underground press, the *Spartakusbriefer*. At the founding congress of the KPD in 1918 he was elected to the Central Committee. In 1920 he was made a member of the Politbureau and chosen to be editor-in-chief of the Party's central organ, *Rote Fahne*. Thalheimer was also active in the work of the Communist International, where he

reported on the work toward a Comintern Program at the Fourth and Fifth Congresses. In Moscow with Brandler after 1924, he worked in the central apparatus of the Communist International and at the Marx-Engels Institute. With Bukharin he co-authored the 1928 *Program of the Communist International*.

Although out of Germany for a number of years, Brandler and Thalheimer kept in close touch with the situation at home and the developments in the KPD, the leadership of which still contained a number of their supporters. With the imposition of the ultra-left line to which they were bitterly opposed, they returned to Germany and immediately launched a theoretical journal, *Gegen den Strom* (Against the Current) to fight for their views. In November 1928, they were expelled from the Communist Parties of Germany and the Soviet Union and one month later, on December 30, they convoked the founding conference of the Communist Party of Germany-Opposition (KPD-O). Soon after, a number of important KPD leaders and thousands of rank and file members were also expelled for participating in the new organization. These included founding members of the Spartacus League and KPD such as Jacob Walcher and members of the KPD Central Committee and the German Reichstag such as Paul Frolich and Rosi Wolfstein (also one of the several personal friends of Rosa Luxemburg who were involved in the Opposition).

The expulsion of the German "right" and the formation of the KPD-O, together with the defeat of the Bukharin-Tomsky-Rykov group in the CPSU(B), enormously accelerated the struggle against the "right opposition" in all the Communist parties. In June 1929 the top leadership of the Communist Party, USA was reorganized on Comintern orders despite the fact that it had been duly elected by an overwhelming majority at the Party's Sixth Convention four months earlier. Three leaders, Jay Lovestone, Benjamin Gitlow and Bertram Wolfe were expelled from the Comintern and the Party on orders from the ECCI after a series of meetings of its American Commission in May.¹⁰

Jay Lovestone (1898-) was elected to the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of America at its founding Convention in 1919. Two years later he became editor of its official journal, the *Communist*. In 1925 he became the party's organizational secretary, and in the spring of 1927 its General Secretary. He actively participated in the work of the Sixth Comintern Congress and was elected to the Presidium of the ECCI in 1928.¹¹

Benjamin Gitlow (1891-1965) together with John Reed was a leader in the formation of the Communist Labor Party of America. After his release from prison on a conviction for criminal syndicalism he has elected to the Politbureau of the Central Committee. In 1924 and 1928 he was the Party's candidate for vice-president of the United States. At the Sixth Congress of the Comintern he was elected an alternate member of the ECCI, and at the Sixth Congress of the US party in 1929 he was elected its Secretary General.

Bertram D. Wolfe (1896-1977), together with John Reed and Louis Fraina, drafted the Manifesto of the Left Wing of the American Socialist Party and sat on its nine-member national council. After helping to found the Communist Party of America he went to Mexico where he became a member of the executive committee of the Mexican Communist Party and its representative at the Fifth

Comintern Congress. Returning to the United States he became educational director of the US party, a delegate to the Sixth Comintern Congress and US representative on the ECCI.

The expulsion of these three was followed by a purge of several hundred others. These included nearly one-third of the former central committee: C. W. Bixby, leader in the shoe unions; Ellen Dawson, textile union leader; William Kruse, head of the party organization in Chicago; William Miller, party leader in auto; Frank Vratarić, Communist leader in the anthracite coal fields; William J. White, Communist steelworker; and Charles Zimmerman, party leader in the garment industry. Expelled candidate members of the Central Committee included: Alex Bail, party leader in Boston; Bert Miller, head of the New York District; Charles Novak, a leading Yugoslav Communist; Herbert Zam, secretary of the Young Communist League and member of the executive of the Young Communist International; and Ed Welsh, black member of the national executive of the Young Communist League and leader in Harlem.¹²

In October many of those who were expelled and others who resigned from the Party established a new organization, the Communist Party, USA-Majority Group (CP-MG), named for the majority which their leaders had received at the Party's Sixth Convention. On November 1, 1929 the first issue of their newspaper appeared, the *Revolutionary Age*, named after the publication of the left-wing of the Socialist Party originally published in 1919.

October also saw the formation of a number of other Communist Opposition groups. A Communist Party (Opposition) in France held its first national conference in that month while virtually the entire Communist Party in the Alsatian region went over to the opposition and established a Communist Party of Alsace (Opposition) at the same time. Soon after, opposition groups were also established in Austria and in Czechoslovakia.

In Scandinavia opposition groups developed in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark. In Sweden, in October, a majority of the Party's Central Committee, including the Party leader, Karl Kilbom, were accused of "rightism" and "Lovestoneism" and expelled from the Comintern. Seventy-five percent of the party members followed their leadership into the opposition. At the Eighth Convention of the Communist Party of Sweden, held in November, they endorsed the line of the international opposition and re-elected Kilbom and his supporters.

Karl Kilbom (1885- ?), a metal worker by occupation, had been a secretary of the Swedish Young Social Democratic Union before becoming a supporter of the Zimmerwald Left during World War I. In 1917 he was instrumental in helping Lenin get the sealed train which took him through Germany to revolutionary Russia. A founding member of the Communist Party of Sweden, he became its leader in 1924. Elected to the ECCI in 1923, he was elevated to its Presidium in 1928 and played a prominent role at the Sixth Comintern Congress.

In December 1929 the Comintern announced the expulsion from its ranks of the internationally known Communist leader of India, M. N. Roy, for his activities on behalf of the KPD-O. Roy (1887-1954) had been involved in the work of the Communist movement since 1919 when, with the aid of Mikhail Borodin, he participated in the

formation of the Communist Party of Mexico. As a representative of that party he was able to attend the Second Comintern Congress where he had debated Lenin on the national and colonial question. Returning to Moscow for the Third Congress, he was elected to the ECCI, and in 1925, to its Presidium, a position he held until the Sixth Congress.

In 1930 other opposition groups were established in Switzerland and in Canada. In Switzerland the Communist Party-Opposition was centered in the Canton of Schaffhausen, an industrial area where much of the country's machine tool production and watch-making was located. In later years opposition groups which shared a degree of support or at least sympathy for the ideas of the International Communist Opposition were formed in Hungary, Holland, Greece, Great Britain, Spain and Mexico.

The Formation and Early Years of the ICO

The existence of so many opposition groupings raised the question of an international organization. On the proposal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Sweden a preliminary meeting was held in Berlin in March 1930, attended by representatives of the Swedish, German and Czech oppositions and M. N. Roy. As a result an international center was established in Berlin to prepare for a conference and to publish the *International Information of the Communist Opposition*. The International Communist Opposition itself was established at a conference held in Berlin, December 15-17, 1930. In attendance were delegates from the opposition groups in Germany, Alsace, Sweden, the United States, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia and Norway. Written reports were submitted from Austria, Finland, Italy and Canada. It was at this conference that the Platform of the International Communist Opposition (see Document No. 1) was adopted. A second International Conference was held in July 1932 at which a resolution on the relationship between the Comintern and the ICO was adopted (see Document No. 2).

The ICO appeared to be off to a favorable start. The Communist Party of Sweden, after it was expelled from the Comintern, retained 13,500 of the 18,000 members who had previously belonged to it, and 50% of the Young Communist League. It published a daily newspaper, *Folkets Dagblad* with a circulation of 20-30,000, and maintained eight members in the Swedish parliament and city councilmen in several major cities. In the 1932 parliamentary elections it received 5.7% of the vote.

The Communist Party of Germany-Opposition had a membership of some 6,000-8,000 and eight weekly and bi-monthly papers with a circulation of 25,000. In 1930 it launched a daily paper, *Arbeiterpolitik*. The KPD-O youth organization had a thousand members and a paper, *Junge Kampfer* with a circulation three times that size. In the state of Thuringia where the opposition was strong, it won twenty-one seats in the municipal council elections of 1932 compared to thirty-eight won by the official communist party in the same municipalities. The KPD-O also enjoyed considerable support from within the ranks of the official Communist Party. One of the most important of these supporters was Clara Zetkin who openly disagreed with the

KPD's ultra-left line and wrote for the KPD-O press. When Jay Lovestone was in Germany in 1930 on ICO business he had a long meeting with Zetkin concerning the crisis in the communist movement.¹³

The Communist Party of Alsace-Opposition was large enough to publish a daily paper in the city of Strasbourg, *Die Neue Welt*, as well as to elect one of its members, Charles Huber, the mayor of that city. It also had a member in the French Chamber of Deputies. In the 1931 municipal elections the candidates of the CPA-O received a plurality of votes, more than the candidates of either the bourgeois parties or the official CP.

The Swiss Communist Opposition played a leading role in the labor movement and the movement of the unemployed in that country, particularly in the cities of Schaffhausen and Neuhausen. In the Schaffhausen municipal elections in October 1932 the Opposition received one hundred votes less than all the bourgeois parties combined. One of its members, Walter Bringolf, who together with Jules Humbert-Droz had been a delegate to the Second Comintern Congress, was elected Mayor.

Communist Opposition forces in India had considerable influence both in the Indian National Congress Party and in various trade unions. They issued a number of periodicals, both in English and Bengali, and set up groups around the country. In 1930 they played a leading role in the Textile, Dockworkers, and Railwaymen's Unions in Bombay. At the 1931 convention of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) two supporters of the Opposition were elected vice presidents of the organization and Tayab Shaikh, a close associate of M. N. Roy, was elected one of its four secretaries. At the AITUC's Twelfth Annual Meeting in 1932 another Roy supporter was elected Organizing Secretary of the Congress which also endorsed a platform submitted by Roy himself.

While the Communist Opposition in the United States was not large (1,000-1,500) it did have a significant presence. It published what started as a bi-weekly (*Revolutionary Age*) and later became a weekly newspaper (*The Workers Age*), as well as various other specialized bulletins and journals, pamphlets, etc. The activities of the CP-MG (or Communist Party-Opposition as it was called after 1932) were also diverse. In New York City it operated the New Workers School directed by Bertram Wolfe. In Harlem it established a branch of the Workers Unemployment Union, led the Harlem Tenant's Union, briefly published a monthly magazine, *The Negro Voice*, and had its own Workers School. In Anthracite, Frank Vrateric was a member of the Executive Board of the National Miners Union. In San Antonio the opposition participated in a local cigar workers strike and held a meeting celebrating the Fifteenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution with speeches in English and Spanish. A Marxian Educational Society was organized in Hartford, Connecticut and a jobless council in Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

The US Opposition was also influential in other sections of the workingclass and participated actively in the labor movement. In 1933 Charles Zimmerman was elected manager of powerful Local 22 of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) on a progressive slate. Less than three months later Local 22 led a successful general strike in the dress making industry in New York and neighboring areas which "marked the virtual rebirth of the

International Ladies Garment Workers Union."¹⁴ The CP-O later won control of Local 155, the Knitgoods Workers Local of the ILGWU, and was strong in the silk workers locals of the Textile Union in Paterson, New Jersey, as well as in the Doll and Toy Workers Union in New York City.

In Canada the Opposition was never very large, being restricted almost entirely to Montreal and Toronto. They did manage however, to attract several important figures including William Moriarty, former first secretary of the Communist Party of Canada, and Kalmen Kaplansky, a member of the executive committee of the Quebec Labor Party.

Of more lasting importance than the forces which the International Communist Opposition was able to mobilize in the various countries was the theoretical and political line on which it was initially organized, and its response to the ultra-left excesses of the Third Period in Comintern history.

The Line of the International Communist Opposition to 1935

A critical reading of the viewpoint of the International Communist Opposition from 1928 to 1935 (see Documents Nos. 1-3) in terms of its mass line and its conception of Communist organizational practice, shows that it more closely corresponded to the requirements of that period than either those of the Communist International or the International Left Opposition (Trotskyists). Not only that. Its perspective has important lessons for contemporary struggle to revive revolutionary communism and to root it in the concrete realities of American life. The most pertinent of these lessons may be briefly summarized as follows. (1) The ICO started from the principle that capitalism, in the imperialist epoch, develops unevenly, rather than simultaneously in various countries and regions. This uneven development was seen as necessitating in each country, strategy and tactics corresponding to the actual development of class and social struggles in that country. This was a point made more than once by Lenin, but it was systematically ignored by the Comintern under Stalin as an obstacle to "monolithic unity." In the United States this perspective was denounced as "American exceptionalism." In the 1928-1935 period the International Opposition insisted that the effort of the Comintern to mechanically impose on all countries, regardless of conditions, "revolutionary" ultra-left tactics was both anti-Leninist and inappropriate to the concrete development of the revolutionary movement in those countries.

(2) The ICO started from the principle: "never forget class struggle." This helped it to keep much of its bearings in the face of the rising tide of economism which was sweeping the world communist movement during the great depression. Thus the Comintern and the Trotskyists insisted on viewing the capitalist economic crisis as caused by the system's inability to develop the productive forces and leading, by its very nature, to a revolutionary situation in many countries. The ICO, on the other hand, correctly argued that a revolutionary crisis would only develop as a result of the class struggle and not as a natural outcome of economic factors, such as the contradiction between productive forces and relations.

(3) Unlike the Comintern and the Trotskyists who consolidated their organizations around loyalty to one or another faction in the CPSU(B), the ICO insisted on its critical independence from the factional struggles within the Soviet Party. While praising Bukharin for his line in the Comintern, the CPUSA-Majority Group insisted in 1929:

Our struggle has never been nor can it be an appendix to an individual or group in the CPSU, victorious or defeated. While we have always condemned the anti-Bolshevik methods used by the Stalin group in the struggle against Comrade Bukharin on the Russian questions, yet our struggle has never been based upon or associated with the line of Comrade Bukharin in these questions. Indeed the Russian questions have never been issues in our struggle. . . Our struggle is based exclusively upon the task of overcoming the present crisis in the Comintern and restoring it and our party to the Leninist line.¹⁵

(4) Throughout this period and after, the ICO continued to defend the conception of the workers united front developed by the Comintern in the early 1920s. It insisted that only the united activity of the workingclass could create an effective force against capital and win for it allies among the petty-bourgeoisie and middle strata. It likewise exposed the fact that the Comintern's so-called "united front from below" was, in fact, no united front at all, but a retreat into political and organizational sectarianism.

(5) The ICO upheld the continuing necessity of communists to work and participate actively in the life of the trade unions and other mass workers' organizations. It criticized the Comintern's ultra-leftism in establishing dual, "revolutionary" unions and other similar organizations, as sectarian and an abandonment of the masses of working people who refused to follow communists into these new organizations. Also significant, given recent events in Poland, is the ICO's insistence that trade unions not be reduced to simple "party adjuncts," but rather that they had to be genuine independent mass organizations of all the workers.

(6) The ICO continued to recognize that the basis of Social Democratic control over the majority of the workingclass in the developed capitalist countries of Europe was reformism and the ability of the Social Democrats to protect and defend certain short term economic interests of the class. For this reason the ICO was opposed to the Comintern's theory of the "social-fascist" character of social democracy. Not only did this theory erroneously substitute "fascism" for reformism as the basis of social democratic power, but it also sought to equate social democracy with fascism, despite the fundamentally different character of both these movements/processes. At the same time, by characterizing all non-communist left forces as "social-fascist," the Communist Parties virtually cut themselves off from the rest of the politically minded workingclass in a period which required, not sectarian isolation, but energetic efforts toward the *broadest* unity.

(7) The ICO reaffirmed the central principles of democratic centralism both within the Communist Parties and in the Communist International itself. It upheld the necessity for each party to take primary responsibility for its own strategy and tactics, and opposed the lack of a broad, democratic and collective leadership in the Comintern.

While opposed to factionalism, the ICO in its national sections provided freedom for different points of view within those sections to put forward their perspectives up to and including access to the party press. From its inception the International Opposition criticized the hero-cult manufactured around Stalin and other national leaders in the Communist movement and refused to allow a similar practice to develop in its own organizations.

(8) The ICO drew firm lines of demarcation with Trotskyism and with Social Democracy as erroneous tendencies within the international workers' movement.

The Rise of German Fascism

In spite of its great initial promise the ICO was effectively destroyed as a significant international force in the terrible year 1933. The causes of this turn of events were many and complex, involving objective as well as subjective factors.

In 1933 the only mass communist party outside the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of Germany, was destroyed in the Nazi seizure of power. The shock waves emanating from this major defeat shook the world communist movement: only a tragedy of this magnitude could finally put an end to the ultra-left madness of the third period line. Nazism also destroyed the KPD-O, the most important organization and leading force in the International Communist Opposition, forcing its cadre underground and its top leaders into exile.

For a long time the Trotskyists were able to claim that they, and they alone, foresaw the coming of German fascism and understood the correct measures to prevent its victory. Recent works¹⁶, however, have shown that Trotsky's understanding of the nature of fascism, as well as his strategic approach to the united front against it contained serious flaws. Much important work remains to be done in this area, but when the final judgment is in there can be no doubt that the theory and practice of the ICO in this great historic battle against fascism will be given prominent place.

It cannot be denied that, in the struggle which preceded the Nazi march to power, the KPD-O had a record of theoretical analysis and political line which was unmatched by any other German Communist group. In 1930 August Thalheimer produced an important and original theoretical text on the nature of fascism¹⁷ which is still considered to be a major contribution toward the Marxist theory of this subject and which has since been widely reprinted and discussed.¹⁸ Basing himself on Marx's writings on Bonapartism as an exceptional form of the bourgeois state, Thalheimer attempted to define fascism as a form of the exceptional state appropriate to the capitalism of the imperialist epoch. In the course of his argument, Thalheimer rigorously distinguished his position from the perspective dominant both in the Comintern and in Trotskyist circles at the time.

For all their differences both the Comintern and the Trotskyists shared some significant points of unity on the nature of fascism. Both defined fascism as an expression of the period or epoch as a whole, an epoch defined in terms of an insoluble capitalist crisis, on the one hand, and a rising tide of workingclass revolution, on the other. Given this period, so they said, in instrumentalist fashion, the bourgeoisie creates fascism, and uses it, like social

democracy, as a weapon with which to defeat the proletarian revolution. To which they both added, either fascism would not be able to long rule in a developed capitalist country like Germany, or, in the Comintern's perspective, the victory of fascism would be short lived, hastening the rising revolutionary tide of the workers by curing them of their "bourgeois democratic illusions."

Thalheimer took strong exception to these views. For him fascism was not the simple expression of some general epoch (this same epoch had also given rise to new forms of bourgeois democracy: the New Deal), but the product of a "specific complex of class relations," a "specific point in the class struggle."¹⁹ Such relations, he stated, were characterized by a crisis within both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, one in which the proletariat had been defeated, and in which the bourgeoisie, divided and weakened, cannot continue to rule in the old way. Employing nationalist, racist and radical ideology, fascism gathers around itself a mass base of heterogenous elements, cut loose from their traditional class and political moorings by the crisis. Against instrumentalism, Thalheimer insisted that the rise of fascism to power in such circumstances would be the result of objective factors, primarily the class struggle, and not the mere subjective desires of the bourgeoisie.

With this advanced theoretical perspective guiding its politics, the KPD-O was able to accurately predict the course of the Nazi rise to power, even though it was far too weak to stop the process it was observing. As early as 1929 the KPD-O defined fascism as the open but indirect dictatorship of capital characterized by a counter-revolutionary mass organization composed of petty bourgeois and other declassé elements. To prevent the growth of this mass base, the KPD-O proposed to the KPD a united front and a trade union policy which would fight fascism and defend the economic and political interests of the workers and other oppressed sections. That same year, in September, Thalheimer warned that "Hitler is no longer a desperado who operates beyond the boundaries of bourgeois reaction; the national socialists are now the vanguard of a capitalism which is concentrating on the basis of fascism."²⁰

In 1930 Thalheimer predicted the tremendous Nazi successes in the September Reichstag elections and afterwards disputed the KPD's prediction that this victory "was the beginning of the end for the Nazis." He likewise opposed their continuing insistence that the social democrats were the real enemy because they were still the "principal prop of bourgeois reaction." In 1932 the KPD-O again urged the Communists and Social Democrats to formally adopt a united front policy in the face of a rising fascist danger. Once Hitler came to power Thalheimer disputed Communist predictions that his government would soon collapse, adding that it would "surpass by far the brutality of Italian fascism."²¹

In hindsight all of this is eminently sensible. It appears remarkable only when one remembers that as late as May 1933, five months after Hitler assumed power without any significant mass resistance by Communist or social democratic workers, no less an authority than the Presidium of the Communist International could still be saying about Nazi Germany:

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 toward proletarian revolution.²²

It was not until the July 1934 Session of the Presidium, called to discuss the situation in Germany, that this tragic nonsense was finally abandoned, an abandonment which paved the way for the Seventh Comintern Congress, held in Moscow in August of 1935.

Rectifying the Communist Movement

Throughout this period the ICO's commitment to the united front, its opposition to the theory of directing the main blow against the social democrats, and its program for workingclass unity against fascism, had been fully vindicated. Yet, not only did it fail to grow as a result of the German events, but its membership actually declined sharply. How is this to be explained?

The principal factor, at least initially, was the fact that the primary leadership of the ICO, its American and German sections, insisted on linking the struggle for its mass line and its own organizational development to an erroneous strategy for rectifying the international communist movement. In the beginning this strategy was put forward at the ICO's founding conference under the slogan "For the return of the Comintern to the tactical line of Leninism." Organizationally the ICO insisted that there could be only one genuine communist party in each country and that its sections were temporarily expelled tendencies of those parties rather than the start of a distinct movement. Reunification was possible, they insisted, only when the Comintern returned to the policies of Leninism. Needless to say, these arguments of the ICO were not received favorably by the official parties. The logic behind the strategy of the ICO was explained by Herbert Zam:

We had a dual perspective: either (a) our efforts to win the party to a Leninist line would be successful and unity would be established in that manner; or (b) the CP through its wrong line would continue disintegrating, would become a "shell" and our group, having the correct line, would continue to grow and gain influence.

But, as Zam sadly concluded, "after four years of bitter experience, we must frankly declare that neither of these perspectives have seen fulfillment in reality."²³

In 1932, at its Second Congress, the ICO moderated its position on reunification. It no longer insisted on the return of the Comintern to Leninism, and under the slogan, "For international communist unity," stated that its sections were willing to rejoin the official communist parties if only basic democratic centralism and freedom of discussion were restored.

As early as 1933, however, it should have been clear that any strategies of this type were doomed to failure. In spite of the fact that ultra-leftism had greatly reduced most Communist Parties in size and influence by comparison with the pre-1928 period, the prestige of the Soviet Union and the material and financial help it provided them kept them from disintegration. And, because of this dependence on the Comintern and the USSR, and their own failure to independently develop theory and politics, the Communist

Parties also showed no signs of rectifying their lines, either by returning to Leninism or even allowing freedom for critical discussion and debate on basic theoretical or strategic questions. The proof of just how far this would go was to be seen in Germany where a mass Communist Party allowed itself to be smashed through suicidal ultra-leftism and, even after its defeat, continued to uphold the line which destroyed it.

The ICO leadership, however, failed to recognize this situation and draw the appropriate conclusions. People like Brandler, Thalheimer and Lovestone had been Communist functionaries throughout the 1920s and had seen many ups and downs and left and right turns, bringing with them new leaderships to power. This could happen again to them, so they reasoned. What they failed to see was that the Comintern was not the same body it had been in the 1920s; a qualitative change had occurred in 1928-1929 as a result of the victory of the Stalin group. No longer was it possible for a change in line to bring a dissident minority like themselves back into leadership as occurred in the KPD or CPUSA in the previous decade. The sections of the Communist International had been largely reduced to passive instruments of the Stalin group in the CPSU(B) and their leaders to pliant and obedient caretakers. The ICO, representing the critical thinking, and theoretical-political legacy of Leninism, was a threat to the structure and leaders of the new Comintern and, thus, forever barred from a return to leading positions regardless of the new politics that it, or the Comintern itself, might adopt.

The continuing insistence that the various Communist Oppositions were not in fact separate parties also flew in the face of reality, not to mention continuing Comintern hostility. And, in 1933, with the Comintern still reaffirming the correctness of the KPD line after its spectacular defeat, any hope of rectifying the line of the International seemed to many to be misplaced. Besides, if the main thing was the reestablishment of communist unity, could not this best be done from inside the Communist Parties, rather than by belonging to another organization?

As long as the ICO concentrated on reforming the Communist Parties rather than the building of independent organizations based on Leninist principles, it undermined the reasons for its own separate existence. The refusal of the German and American sections of the International Opposition to abandon this perspective proved to be the undoing of the ICO. On the one hand some members and small groups went back into the Communist Parties to try to reform them from within. Other, more important sections of the ICO, such as the Oppositions in Sweden and Norway, considered the reformation of the Comintern to be hopeless and left the ICO to concentrate on the formation of an independent international of Left Socialist and Communist Parties. Other sections of the ICO soon followed. The destruction of the left in Finland in 1930 and in Austria in 1934 also hurt the ICO as did the arrest and imprisonment of M. N. Roy in India in 1931.

The Nature of Revolution; The Question of the USSR

Additional theoretical and political weaknesses plagued the International Communist Opposition as well. Some it

shared in common with the Comintern and the Trotskyists; others were unique problems of its own. Here we want to touch on only two: the nature of revolution in the west and the question of socialist construction in the USSR.

The basic understanding of the revolutionary process which the Comintern, the ICO and the International Left Opposition shared was almost entirely shaped and derived from the Russian revolutionary experience, and drew little from the conditions of other countries. Hence the ICO, like the others, spoke of the revolutionary process in the west in essentially derivative terms: preparing the masses for Soviets, armed assault on the state, and the dictatorship of the proletariat, etc. While the ICO was clearly committed to the united front policy it also tended to understand this process in Russian terms and frequently lacked an awareness of the problems of applying the policy creatively in the concrete conditions of various other countries. In spite of the fact that the ICO stood for the development of strategy and tactics based on the specific forms of class struggle in each country, in practice it often failed to sufficiently develop the united front and other political forms appropriate to the conditions of the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and the United States. The only really original work done in this direction in the 1930s was produced in isolation by Antonio Gramsci in a fascist prison; although, as we have noted, his own critique of the Comintern closely paralleled that of the ICO (see Document No. 6). Notice should also be taken of the efforts by the CPUSA-O, particularly in the writings of Bertram Wolfe, to understand and politically respond to the specific and often unique conditions in the United States. One example of this concern was their rejection of the Comintern's insistence that black oppression in the United States could best be understood as a national question. Instead, the US Opposition argued that it was a question of racial oppression.²⁴ While the work of the Communist Opposition in the United States on unique American conditions and that of the KPD-O on fascism are important, the general record of the ICO on advancing Communist political strategy beyond the imitation of Russian conditions is a weak one.

A second major weakness of the ICO was its analysis (or rather lack of it) of the USSR. While criticizing the practices and methods of the Stalin group in the CPSU(B), the ICO generally supported the Stalinian line on Soviet socialist construction. This attempt to treat the Stalin group's incorrect inner-party regime as apart from its correct line on the development of the USSR became increasingly difficult to maintain as the 1930s wore on and the contradictions in Soviet society became more apparent. Within the ICO itself this position led to a number of splits. While the Communist Opposition was correct to reject the various Trotskyist theories of "Thermidor," its own failure to produce an organic critique of the internal life of the USSR was an important weakness which played a major role in the ICO's demise. This weakness became particularly glaring in the late 1930s, when the ICO was unable to produce a satisfactory Marxist explanation of the Great Purges in which Bukharin and the numerous other "Old Bolsheviks" were executed. How much this refusal to take a critical stand on the USSR was due to the effort to gain readmission in the Comintern will perhaps never be known but it was certainly one of the ICO's major shortcomings.

The Seventh Comintern Congress and After

The initial turn of the Comintern away from the ultra-left course it had pursued since 1929 was fervently welcomed by the ICO (see Document No. 4). At first it seemed that the reunification of the international movement might be on the agenda. In mid-1934 the KPD and KPD-O officially agreed to cooperate in the preparation of mass actions and to form organs of joint struggle.²⁵ Similar initiatives were taken in other countries, including the United States.²⁶ It soon became apparent, however, that the change in the Comintern line was not a return to Leninist principles, but a progressive drift toward right opportunism and revisionism (see Document No. 5). The ICO's Executive Bureau, which had moved to Paris from Berlin after the Nazi seizure of power, now found itself criticizing the Comintern from the left after having been on its "right" flank for years. The ICO critique of the Popular Front line can be summarized as follows:

(1) As it had previously, the ICO rejected the imposition on all Communist Parties of uniform tactics, this time the anti-fascist Popular Front. As the ICO correctly noted, anti-fascist unity was correct in countries in which the primary danger was fascism, but incorrect where the main danger to the workingclass was not fascism, as in the United States, Great Britain, etc.²⁷

(2) From the very beginning the ICO rejected the Comintern's definition of fascism as "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most imperialist sections of finance capital." As the ICO pointed out, this implied that fascism had a very narrow class base in the bourgeoisie, and opened the door to a strategy of collaborating with supposedly non-fascist sections of capital and even finance capital. The ICO did not deny that circumstances might arise in which there would be a *coincidence of interests* between the masses and some sections of capital (the struggle against German fascism in World War II is an example). What it rejected was any policy of turning this coincidence of interests into an *alliance* which would limit the independence and initiative of the masses to the benefit of capital and foster illusions about the true nature of the workers' class enemies.

(3) While endorsing the need for Communists to fight to defend the bourgeois democratic rights of the masses which had been won through previous struggles, the ICO pointed out that any struggle for "democracy" and "freedom" in the abstract could easily result in the fostering of bourgeois democratic illusions among the masses and end up as a struggle which would strengthen capitalist hegemony rather than weaken it.

(4) The ICO supported the necessity of workingclass cooperation with the petty bourgeois masses in the revolutionary process, but rejected the Popular Front approach to this issue. It correctly pointed out that the Popular Front policy and especially its practice was not one of building the organic unity of the masses at the rank and file level, but rather one of negotiations between Communists and the leaders of various petty bourgeois, and even bourgeois parties and groups, negotiations centered not around organizing mass struggle but electoral coalitions. The end result of these coalitions was a foregone

conclusion—the subordination of workingclass interests to joint work with unstable and unreliable electoral allies, the abandonment of independent workingclass activity, and ultimately class collaboration.

(5) The ICO warned that the united front against fascism was a defensive policy for building workingclass unity and, by itself, not a strategy for revolution. It therefore criticized the Comintern's discussion of the popular front as if it were a strategy valid up to the revolution itself. In this it foreshadowed the anti-revisionist critiques of our time which have targeted the anti-monopoly coalition strategies of the revisionist communist parties which are, in essence, no more than an updated popular front line.

(6) The ICO rejected the way that the Comintern divided up the world of the mid-1930s into "democratic, peace-loving nations," (the United States, Britain, France), and "fascist, war-like" nations (Germany, Italy, Japan). This characterization worked to conceal the imperialist nature of the former countries, and in its abandonment of class criteria in analysis foreshadowed the current "three worlds theory." It also led to the down-playing of the national liberation struggles in the colonial countries of the French and British Empires in the name of contributing to "anti-fascist unity" and cementing the alliances Communists were making with various bourgeois parties. Also involved here was the issue of the nature of the new world war which was clearly in the making by 1935-36.

The ICO recognized the possibility of another world imperialist war, but one which this time could well involve the Soviet Union on the side of one of the imperialist blocs. In the event of such an occurrence, it advocated special tactics for the communist parties allied to the Soviet Union so as to aid the USSR while still maintaining revolutionary principles and proletarian independence. The theory and practice of the Comintern in this period concealed the imperialist character and aims of the capitalist powers which were potential allies of the Soviet Union in the coming war, but the ICO had no such illusions. As early as 1935 Bertram Wolfe stated:

The American rulingclass would not cease to be capitalist, its war aims would not cease to be imperialist, merely because, for those very aims it might enter into a temporary and unstable, not to say improbable, military cooperation with the Soviet Union against an enemy which would attack both at the same time.²⁸

Weaknesses in the ICO Line in this Period

The undeniably superior character of the ICO line in this period when compared to that of the Comintern should not lead us to ignore its inadequacies. Like all Communists and Trotskyists in the 1930s its views were strongly marked by a class reductionism which treated all ideology as class specific.²⁹ Thus popular democratic ideology was seen as somehow inherently petty-bourgeois and the ICO frequently failed to grasp the importance of the successful use of this ideology in political struggle. Likewise the ICO often counter-posed, in rather mechanical fashion, proletarian revolution to either fascism or bourgeois democracy without being able to make this alternative seem

realistic or realizable. But, if the ICO insisted that the workingclass should fight for socialist revolution, it by no means thought that the victory of the workingclass would be the inevitable result of the defeat of fascism. That would depend, it warned, on the struggle itself, and the combination of objective and subjective factors involved. Thus when August Thalheimer was asked whether Italian fascism would be followed by a new bourgeois democracy or proletarian rule, he responded that only the struggle itself could tell—the combination of objective and subjective factors: the strength and maturity of the workingclass, its relations to other classes of working people, the international class struggle and the strength, maturity and effectiveness of the Communist Party. The task of the Party, he reminded them, was to prepare for the struggle in the best possible way.³⁰

The Last Years of the ICO

The last years of the ICO were spent in vainly seeking to win the Comintern away from the rightism of the Popular Front line and to maintain its own precarious existence. Notable in this regard was the support it rendered to the Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista (POUM) in Spain, with which the ICO had fraternal relations. Often mistakenly described as Trotskyist, the POUM had actually been formed by the merger of a small group of former Trotskyists under the leadership of Andres Nin and the much larger Bloque Obrero y Campesino (BOC) led by Joaquin Maurin. The BOC was a group which split off from the Communist Party of Spain for reasons similar to those which had led to the formation of the sections of the International Communist Opposition. A long report on the work of the BOC written by Maurin was read at the Second Congress of the ICO.

The rightist role of the USSR, the Comintern and the Communist Party of Spain during the civil war in that country, and the destruction of the POUM at their hands, coupled with the steadily rightward shift in the Comintern elsewhere and the Great Purges in the USSR, 1936-1938, finally convinced the ICO that further efforts to reform the Communist International were doomed to failure. In 1938-1939 the remnants of the International Communist Opposition merged with a variety of other independent socialist and communist groups in the International Revolutionary Marxist Center, a short-lived body which did not survive the Second World War. Some of the remaining opposition groups dissolved themselves, such as the US section in 1941. Many of its leaders thereafter became bitter anti-communists, most notably Jay Lovestone. Others, particularly the leaders of the KPD-O, remained communists and returned to East and West Germany after the war. Heinrich Brandler's return was followed by an effort to reestablish the KPD-O which resulted in the formation of the *Gruppe Arbeiterpolitik*, which continues the tradition of the ICO.

Conclusions

The legacy left us by the International Communist Opposition is a contradictory one. It produced an important

contribution to the Marxist theory of fascism, but failed to develop an explanation for the abandonment of Leninism in the USSR. It stood for the creative application of communism to the concrete conditions of each country, but made little progress in implementing this principle. It reaffirmed the vital lessons of revolutionary communism developed in the 1920s, but failed to significantly advance this theory and practice in the world of the 1930s.

Nonetheless, certain ICO principles have withstood fifty years of history. A mass revolutionary movement cannot develop where there is indifference to the concrete conditions in which it finds itself. Nor can it develop from a bureaucratic sect which forbids critical thinking and theoretical work unshackled by political expediency. Nor from slavish imitation of foreign examples and the mechanical and uncritical parroting of foreign thinkers. Nor finally from those who would subordinate and ultimately sacrifice the struggle of the masses themselves by substituting for it the activity of a Party and self-appointed "leaders."

The successful development of revolutionary Marxism can only come from the concrete application of advanced theory and organic politics to the specific conditions of each country, developed in the course of democratically participating in and learning from the struggles of the masses. The failure of the world communist movement to grasp this principle and practice it in an all-sided way is at the heart of its present international crisis. In the ongoing struggle for a return to this principle the International Communist Opposition has much to teach us.

NOTES

Acknowledgement: This article is dedicated to Eugene Kreinin whose unshakable political dedication is an inspiration to us all.

¹ *Revolutionary Age*, February 1, 1930.

² *The Prophet Outcast*, (Vintage, 1965), p. 420.

³ Quoted in Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p. 193.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260-63.

⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (International, 1971), p. lxviii.

⁸ *International Press Correspondence*, VIII, 70 (1928), pp. 1267-77.

⁹ The role of the Comintern in instigating the "German October" is discussed in Chapter 9 of E. H. Carr's *The Interregnum, 1923-1924* (Penguin, 1954).

¹⁰ On the Lovestoneites struggles in Moscow see Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (Viking, 1960), ch. 18.

¹¹ Lovestone and most of his associates, as is generally well known, became bitter and notorious anti-communists after the Second World War.

¹² Robert J. Alexander, *The Right Opposition* (Greenwood, 1981), p. 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

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).