

The Communist Party and Parliamentarism.

THESES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL, PRESENTED TO THE SECOND CONGRESS.

(1) In a number of countries in Western Europe and America, one of the burning questions of Communist tactics is that of the Parliamentary struggle. The split in the German Communist Party, the formation of an anti-Parliamentarian fraction in the Italian Party, the position of the Belgian Communist group, the disputes in the ranks of the British Communists, and, finally, the attitude of revolutionary syndicalist circles and of the I. W. W.—all these necessitate clear and definite guidance on the part of the Communist International.

1.

(2) Parliamentarism as a State system is the "democratic" form of bourgeois supremacy, which requires, at a certain stage of its development, the aid of the fiction of popular representation. The latter, outwardly the organization of the people's will irrespective of classes, in reality is a machine of suppression and oppression in the hands of dominant capitalism.

(3) Parliamentarism is a definite form of State structure. Consequently it can in no way be a form of Communist society, which knows neither classes, nor the class struggle, or any form of State whatsoever.

(4) Parliamentarism cannot even be the form of the proletarian government during the period of transition from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie to the dictatorship of the proletariat. At the moment of intensified class struggle, passing into civil war, the proletariat must inevitably build up its State organization as a fighting organization, into which representatives of the former ruling classes cannot be admitted. At such a stage, any fiction of "the general will" is directly harmful to the proletariat; and similarly unnecessary and harmful is the Parliamentary division of functions. The Soviet Republic represents the form of the Proletarian Dictatorship.

(5) The bourgeois parliaments, which represent one of the important parts of the bourgeois State apparatus, cannot be conquered, just as the bourgeois State itself cannot be conquered by the proletariat. The problem before the proletariat consist in blowing up the bourgeois State machine, in destroying it, and destroying with it all parliamentary institutions whether of a republic or of a constitutional monarchy.

(6) The same applies to the bourgeois local authorities, which, from a theoretical point of view, it is incorrect to distinguish from the organs of the State. In reality, they are just as much parts of the bourgeois State mechanism, which will have to be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat, and replaced by local Councils of Workers' Deputies.

(7) Consequently, Communism repudiates parliamentarism as a form of the future; it repudiates the possibility of conquering parliaments; it lays down as its aim the destruction of parliamentarism. For this reason there can be a question only of utilizing the bourgeois State institutions with the object of their destruction. On this, and only on this plan, can the question be discussed.

2.

(8) Every class struggle is a political struggle, since, in the long run, it is a struggle for power. Any strike which spreads throughout the country begins to threaten the bourgeois State, and thereby acquires a political character. To strive to overthrow the bourgeoisie, and to destroy its State apparatus, by whatever means, signifies to carry on a political struggle. The creation of a class apparatus—for the task of government and to crush the opposition of the bourgeoisie (whatever be the nature of that apparatus) means the conquest of political power.

(9) Consequently, the question of the political struggle is not at all the same as the question of our attitude towards parliamentarism. It is the general question of the class struggle of the proletariat, in the measure that the struggle is for the overthrow of the capitalist order.

(10) The fundamental method of struggle employed by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, i.e., against its State power, is, first and foremost, the method of mass action. Mass action is organized and directed by the mass organizations of the proletariat, under the general guidance of a strongly knitted, disciplined centralized Communist Party. The civil struggle is a war. In that war the proletariat must have its efficient corps of political officers, its efficient political general staff directing all operations in all spheres of the conflict.

(11) The mass struggle represents a whole system of developing demonstrations, becoming more and more intensified in their form, and logically leading to a rising against the Capitalist State. In this mass struggle, unfolding itself into a civil war, the guiding party of the proletariat must, as a general rule, consolidate in its rear any and every legal position, making them subsidiary strong points in its revolutionary work, and subordinating them to the plan of the chief campaign, that of the mass struggle.

(12) One of these subordinate strong points is the floor of the bourgeois parliament. It is not permissible to urge against participation in parliamentary action that parliament is an institution of the bourgeois state. The Communist Party enters that institution not for the purpose of carrying on organic work there, but in order to blow up the bourgeois machinery of govern-

ment, and parliament itself, from within (e.g. the activity of Liebknecht in Germany, of the Bolsheviks in the Imperial Duma, in the "Democratic Conference" in Kerensky's "Pre-parliament," finally, in the "Constituent Assembly," and likewise in the town councils).

(13) This work in parliament, which resolves itself mainly into revolutionary agitation from the floor of the House, exposure of opponents, the proclamation of watchwords for the masses, etc., must in its entirety be subordinated to the forms and problems of the mass struggle outside parliament.

(14) For this, the following conditions are essential:—

1. The absence of any form of "autonomy" for the Communist groups in Parliament, and their unquestioning subordination to the central committee of the Party.

2. Constant control and guidance on the part of the executive committee.

3. The arrangement of simultaneous demonstrations both within and without parliament.

4. A revolutionary attitude in parliament itself, i.e., the absence of any fear "on principle" of transgressing the rules of parliamentary debate.

5. The execution by Communist members of parliament of non-parliamentary work, especially in connection with mass demonstrations.

6. Constant touch with the illegal work of the Party, and the utilization of parliamentary privilege, so far as the latter exist, in this direction.

7. The immediate recall or expulsion from the Party of every member of the parliamentary group who, in his parliamentary work, disobeys the order of the Party.

(15) The electoral campaign itself must be carried on not in a spirit of pursuit of the maximum number of parliamentary seats, but in the spirit of the revolutionary mobilization of the masses around the watchwords of the proletarian revolution. The electoral campaign must be carried on by, the whole mass of the members of the party, and not only by the leaders. It is necessary to utilize and be in complete contact with all mass actions taking place at the given moment (strikes, demonstrations, movements among soldiers and sailors, etc.). It is necessary to involve in active work all the mass organizations of the proletariat.

16. If these conditions are observed parliamentarism work represents the complete anticthesis of that dirty political scheming carried on by the Social-Democratic parties of all countries, who enter parliament to support that "democratic" institution, or, at best, to "conquer" it. The Communist Party can stand only and exclusively for the revolutionary utilization of parliamentarism, as practised by Karl Liebknecht, Hoglund, and the Bolsheviks.

3.

(17) Anti-parliamentarism "on principle," in the sense of an absolute and categorical refusal to participate in elections and in revolutionary parliamentary struggle, thus appears as a naive, childish doctrine, unable to bear criticism, which sometimes has its foundation a healthy disgust at parliamentary politicians, but which at the same time does not realize the possibilities of revolutionary parliamentarism. In addition, this doctrine is frequently connected with a completely inaccurate understanding of the part to be played by the Party, which it views not as the fighting centralized vanguard of the workers, but as a decentralized system of feebly connected revolutionary groups.

(18) On the other hand, there does not follow from the recognition of the principle of parliamentary work the absolute recognition of the necessity, under all and any circumstances, of actual elections, or of actual participation in the sessions of parliament. Here the question depends on a series of specific conditions. With a certain grouping of these conditions, it may become necessary to leave parliament. This is what the Bolsheviks did when they left the Pre-parliament in order to "blow it up," at once rendering it helpless and placing in sharp opposition to it the Petrograd Soviet, which was about to take charge of the insurrection. This is what they did in the Constituent Assembly on the day of its dissolution, transferring all their activity to the second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Under different circumstances it may be necessary to boycott elections and organize a direct violent attack on the bourgeois parliamentary clique; or to participate in elections while boycotting parliament itself; and so on.

(19) In this way, while recognizing, as a general rule, the necessity of participating in elections, both to central parliaments and to the taking part in the work of these institutions, organs of local self-government, as well as of the Communist Party must decide the question concretely, basing itself on the peculiar conditions of the actual moment. The boycott of elections or of parliament, and similarly the abandonment of the latter, are permissible, speaking generally, when conditions exist for a direct transition to an armed struggle for power.

(20) It is necessary constantly to keep in mind the relative unimportance of this question. If the centre of gravity lies in the struggle for power outside parliament, then it follows as a matter of course that the question of proletarian

dictatorship, and of the mass struggle for the latter, is not on a par with the minor question about the utilization of parliamentarism.

(21) The Communist International, therefore, declares in the most categorical fashion that it considers as a crime against the Labor movement any split, or attempt at a split, within the Communist parties on this point. The Congress summons all elements standing for the mass struggle for proletarian dictatorship under the guidance of the centralized party of the revolutionary proletariat, which exercises its influence in all the mass organizations of the working class, to strive for the complete unity of all Communist elements in spite of any possible divergence on the question of parliamentarism.

Annex to Thesis on Parliamentarism.

BY G. ZINOVIEV.

To Communist members of bourgeois parliaments and municipal bodies, and to the Central Committees of Communist Parties, whose duty it is to direct the Communist groups in bourgeois parliaments.)

The opposition to the Communists entering the bourgeois parliaments is sustained mostly by the recollections of Social-Democratic parliamentarism during the epoch of the Second International. The conduct of the majority of the Social-Democratic members in the bourgeois parliaments was really so unprincipled and, frequently, treacherous, that this bitter experience cannot be forgotten by the working class.

That is why it is necessary for the Communist International, which has in the interest of the revolution advocated the utilization of the parliamentary tribune by the Communists, to observe very strictly the activity of the Communist members, and to take all measures to create a new type of revolutionary parliamentarian, a parliamentary Communist warrior.

To this end it is necessary that:

1. The Communist Party as a whole, and its Central Committee, should, during the preparatory stage, i.e., before the parliamentary elections—inspect very carefully the quality of the personnel of the parliamentary group. The Central Committee should be responsible for all the work of the parliamentary Communist group. The Central Committee must have the undeniable right to reject any candidate of any organization, if it is not perfectly convinced that such candidate will carry on a real Communist policy when in parliament.

The Communist Parties must desist from the old Social-Democratic habit of electing as deputies only the so-called "experienced" parliamentarians—chiefly lawyers and so forth. As a rule, it is necessary to put workmen forward as candidates, without troubling about the fact that these may sometimes be simple rank-and-file workers, without much parliamentary experience. The Communist Party must treat with merciless contempt those elements who try to make a career by joining the party just before the elections in order to get into Parliament. The Central Committees of the Communist Parties must sanction the candidatures of only such men as have, by long years of work, proved their unwavering loyalty to the working class.

2. When the elections are over the organizations of the parliamentary group must be wholly in the hands of the Central Committee of the Communist Party—whether the party as a whole is a lawful or illegal one at the given moment. The chairman and the presidium of the parliamentary Communist group must be confirmed in their functions by the Central Committee of the Party. The Central Committee of the Party must have its permanent representative in the parliamentary group, with the right of veto. On all important political questions the parliamentary Communist group must be bound by instructions from the Central Committee of the Party.

Previously to any important demonstration of the Communists in parliament, the Central Committee must be entitled and bound to appoint or reject the orator of the faction, to demand of him to hand in beforehand the theses, of his speech, or the text, for confirmation by the Central Committee, etc. Every candidate entered on the Communist list must sign a statement to the effect that, at the first request of the Central Committee of the Party, he is bound to give up his mandate, so that the Party can obtain a new election.

3. In countries where reformist, semi-reformist, or simply career-seeking elements have managed to penetrate into the parliamentary Communist groups (as has already happened in several countries) the Central Committees of the Communist Parties are bound radically to weed out the personnel of the groups, on the principle that it is better for the cause of the working class to have a small but truly Communist group than a numerous one without a regular Communist line of conduct.

4. A Communist deputy, on the decision of the Central Committee, is bound to combine legal work with illegal work. In countries where the Communist deputy still enjoys a certain inviolability, the latter must be utilized by way of rendering assistance to the illegal organization and propaganda of the Party.

5. The Communist members shall make all their parliamentary work dependent on the work of the Party outside parliament. The

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