

THE DRAFT PROGRAM OF THE COMINTERN

A CRITICISM OF
FUNDAMENTALS

By L. D. TROTSKY

THE draft program, that is, the most vital document which is to determine the work of the Comintern for many years to come, has been published only a few weeks prior to the convocation of the Congress, which is being held four years after the Fifth Congress. No reference can be made to the fact that the first draft was published prior to the Fifth Congress, precisely for the reason that it was done several years ago. The second draft differs from the first in structure and endeavors to sum up the developments of recent years. To pass this draft at the Sixth Congress, a draft which bears obvious traces of hurried, and even careless work, without a preliminary serious and scientific criticism in the press, or an extensive discussion in all Parties affiliated with the Comintern would be a very careless and precipitate act.

In the few days we had at our disposal between the receipt of the draft and the dispatch of this letter, we could deal only with some of the most vital problems which must be elucidated in the program.

A series of most important ideas of the draft which perhaps are less burning today but may become of extraordinary importance tomorrow, we are compelled, owing to the lack of time, to leave entirely without consideration. Suffice it to say we could not even receive the first draft program and we had to rely on our memory in dealing with it, as in two or three other cases. It stands to reason that all quotations have been taken from the originals after careful examination.

A Program of International Revolution or a Program of Socialism in One Country.

The chief question on the agenda of the Sixth Congress is the adoption of the program. The nature of the program can for a long time determine and make up the physiognomy of the International. The significance of a program is not so much in the way it formulates the chief theoretical ideas, which in the final analysis is merely a question of "codification," namely a question of laying down in a concise form the concrete truths and generalizations which have been definitely and firmly obtained; it is much more a question of summarizing the world economic and political experiences of the recent period, and particularly the revolutionary struggles of the last five years which were so rich in events and mistakes. The fate of the Communist International in the course of the coming years depends in the literal sense of the term on how these events, mistakes and differences are understood and evaluated in the program.

1.—GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

In our epoch which is an imperialist epoch, i. e., an epoch of WORLD economics and WORLD politics, under the hegemony of finance capitalism, not a single national Communist Party can build its program wholly or chiefly on the conditions and tendencies of national development. This fully holds good also for the Party that holds sway in the U. S. S. R. The death knell for national programs was definitely sounded on August 4, 1914. The revolutionary Party of the proletariat can rely only on an international program corresponding to the nature of the present epoch as an epoch of the apex and destruction of capitalism. An international Communist program is by no means a summary of national programs or of their common features. An international program is based directly on an analysis of the conditions and tendencies of the world economic and world political system as a whole with all its points of contact and antagonism, i. e., with all the antagonistic interdependence of its parts. In the present epoch the national orientation of the proletariat must and can, to a larger extent than in the past, be based only on a world orientation, and not vice versa. Therein lies the basic and fundamental difference between the Communist International and all shades of national socialism.

Based on this, we wrote in January of this year the following:

"It is necessary to start to draw up a Program of the Comintern (Bucharin's program is a bad program of a national section of the Comintern; it is not a program of a world Communist Party)." — (Pravda, January 25, 1928).

We have constantly insisted on this on the same grounds since 1923-1924 when the problem of the United States of America arose in its full scope as a problem of WORLD and, in the most direct sense of the word, EUROPEAN POLICY. In boosting the new draft program Pravda said that a Communist program.

"differs fundamentally from the program of international Social Democracy not only by the substance of its main ideas, but by the characteristic internationalism of its construction." — (Pravda, May 29, 1928).

In this rather indefinite formulation is expressed the idea which we have outlined above and which was formerly stubbornly rejected. One can only welcome the departure from the first draft program presented by Bucharin which, properly speaking, did not rouse any serious exchange of opinion as it did not give enough cause for such. While the first draft gave a vague schematic reflection of the development of one abstract country toward Socialism, the new draft is trying, insistently and without success as we will unfortunately see, to take world economy as a whole as its starting point in determining the fate of its individual parts.

Linking up countries and continents of various stages of development in a system of mutual dependence and antagonism, leveling out the state of their development and at the same time enlarging the differences between them and irreconcilably setting up one country against the other, world economy has become a mighty reality which holds sway over the economy of individual countries and continents. It is this basic fact that makes the very idea of a world Communist Party a reality. Bringing world economy as a whole to the highest possible phase of development on the basis of private property, imperialism, as the draft absolutely correctly states in its introductions:

"intensifies the contradiction between the growth of the productive forces of world economy and national State barriers."

Without fully understanding the meaning of this, which has for the first time been vividly revealed to humanity in the last imperialist war, not a step can be made in dealing with the big questions of world politics and world revolutionary struggles.

One would only have to welcome the bold replacement of the axis of the program in the new draft were it not for the fact that in the effort to conciliate this, the only correct position, with tendencies of an entirely opposing character, the draft has become an arena containing great contradictions which undermine the fundamental significance of the new statement of principles.

2. THE UNITED STATES OF EUROPE

To characterize the first, fortunately discarded draft, it will suffice to say that, so far as we remember, it did not even mention the United States of America. The cardinal problems of the imperialist epoch which, by dint of the very nature of the epoch, must be taken not only in their abstract theoretical but also in their material and historical aspect, were dissolved in the first draft into a lifeless outline of a capitalist country "in general." However, the new draft, and this of course is a great step forward, states that "the economic center of the world has shifted to the United States of America"; that "the 'Dollar Republic' has become the exploiter of all countries"; that the United States "has already won world hegemony for itself," and finally that the competition (in the draft it is wrongly stated "conflict") between United States and European capitalism, primarily British capitalism, "is becoming the pivot in the world conflicts." This has already become absolutely obvious, and a program which would not contain a clear and exact definition of these main facts and features of the world situation would not be a program of an international revolutionary Party.

Unfortunately the main facts and tendencies of the international development of the new epoch indicated above are mentioned in the text of the draft, grafted on to it, so to say, in the way of theoretical back-writing without having any intercontact with the rest of the structure and without leading to any perspective of strategical deductions.

The NEW role of America in Europe since the capitulation of the Communist Party of Germany

and the defeat of the German proletariat in 1923, has been entirely left out of consideration. It has not been made clear that the period of "stabilization," "normalization," and "pacification" of Europe including the "regeneration" of Social Democracy, has developed in close material and ideological connection with the first steps of American intervention in European affairs.

Furthermore, it has not been made clear that the inevitable further development of American expansion, the contraction of the markets of European capitalism, including the European market itself, entails the greatest military, economic and revolutionary disturbances such as will leave all disturbances of the past in the shade.

It has not been made clear that the inevitable further onslaught of the United States will place capitalist Europe on a constantly more limited ration in world economy which, of course, does not involve a mitigation, but on the contrary, a monstrous sharpening of the inter-State relations in Europe with furious paroxysms of military conflicts, because States as well as classes, are even more frantically fighting for a hunger ration, nay, a diminishing ration, than for a lavish and growing ration.

In the draft it has not been made clear that the internal chaos of the State antagonisms of Europe render hopeless a more or less serious and successful resistance to the constantly more centralized North American Republic and that the overcoming of the European chaos in the form of the Soviet United States of Europe is one of the first tasks of the proletarian revolution, which in not the least degree as a result precisely of State barriers, is much closer in Europe than in America and which will therefore most likely have to be defended from the North American bourgeoisie.

On the other hand it has been left entirely unmentioned—and this is not the least important phase of the same world problem—that it is precisely the international strength of the United States and its unbridled expansion resulting from it, that compels it to include powder magazines throughout the world among the foundations of its structure—the antagonisms between the east and west, the class struggle in Old Europe, uprisings of the colonial masses, wars and revolution. This on the one hand transforms United States capitalism into the basic counter-revolutionary force in the present epoch, becoming constantly more interested in the maintenance of order in every corner of the globe, and on the other hand prepares the ground for a gigantic revolutionary explosion of this already dominant and still increasing world imperialist power. The logic of world relations leads to the idea that the time of this explosion cannot be very far apart from that of the proletarian revolution in Europe.

Our elucidation of the dialectics of the interrelations between America and Europe resulted, during the last few years, in the most diversified accusations against us—accusations about our pacifist denial of the existence of European contradictions, our acceptance of Kautsky's theory of ultra-imperialism and of many other sins. There is no need to deal here with these "accusations," which at best result from a complete ignorance of the real processes and of our relations to them. But we cannot refrain from mentioning, however, that it would be difficult to waste more effort in confusing and muddling up the most vital world problem than was wasted, by the way also by the authors of the draft program, in the petty struggle against our formulation of the problem which has been entirely confirmed by the course of events.

Efforts have been made—on paper—in the leading Communist press, also of recent date, to minimize the significance of American hegemony by referring to the imminent economic and industrial crisis in the United States. We cannot enter into a consideration of the problem of the time of the American crisis and as to its possible depth. This is not a question of program but of conjuncture. For us, of course, the inevitability of a crisis is absolutely unquestionable and, considering the present world expansion of American capitalism, its great depth and sharpness is not excluded. But the efforts to minimize or weaken the importance of North American hegemony on this ground is not justified by anything, and can only lead to most profound errors of a strategical character. On the contrary, IN A CRITICAL EPOCH THE HEGEMONY OF THE UNITED STATES WILL PROVE EVEN MORE COMPLETE,

FOREWORD

With this issue The Militant begins the publication "The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals" by L. D. Trotsky. This document, a masterpiece of Marxist-Leninist literature was submitted by comrade Trotsky to the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International which finally adopted the draft program drafted by comrades Bucharin and Stalin, without any important changes. The entire validity of this timely and fundamental criticism remains in spite of the fact that it was kept from the Congress and never discussed by the delegates. The sole attention accorded it was its distribution to members of the Program Commission and a report on the document to the "Seniors-Konvent" of the Congress which immediately "settled" the issue without discussion.

A rigid control on this document was established forthwith and the few copies of the document which were distributed, were recalled by the Secretariat. Our publication is an authentic copy which we have just received. It deals chiefly with the role of American Imperialism and the prospect of new revolutionary situations, the revisionist theory of "Socialism in one country," with the Chinese revolution and its lessons, and with the formation of workers and peasants parties which Trotsky, in line with Lenin, condemns in principle. Trotsky's comment on the "Third Party Alliance" with La Follette, the fight against which was led by him, will be especially interesting to American communists. The entire document will be printed in full consecutively in this and the forthcoming issues of The Militant without any changes. Its basic importance for the international revolutionary movement and the unanswerable correctness of its position on the burning problems of the Communist International make it an invaluable contribution to the Bolshevik literature of our period.

—Editor.

MORE OPEN, MORE RUTHLESS, THAN IN THE PERIOD OF BOOM. The United States will try to overcome and get out of its difficulties and helplessness primarily at the expense of Europe—regardless whether this will happen in Asia, Canada, South America, Australia or Europe itself.

It must be clearly understood that if the first period of American intervention had a stabilizing and pacifist effect on Europe, which to a considerable extent is still alive today and may occasionally recur and even become stronger (particularly in time of new defeats of the proletariat), the general line of American policy, particularly in time of economic difficulties and crises, brings the greatest disturbances for Europe as well as for the whole world.

From here we draw the not unimportant conclusion that there will be no lack of revolutionary situations within the next ten years any more than in the past. That is why it is so important to understand the main springs of development so that we may not be caught by their action unawares. If in the past decade, the main cause of revolutionary situations lay in direct consequence of the imperialist war, in the second post-war decade the main causes of revolutionary situations will be in the relations between Europe and America. A big crisis in the United States will give rise to new wars and revolutions. We repeat: There will be no lack of revolutionary situations. It is all a question of an international proletarian Party, the ripeness and fighting ability of the Comintern, the correctness of its strategical positions and tactical methods.

This trend of thought has found absolutely no expression in the draft program of the Comintern. The mentioning of a fact of such great importance as the fact that "the economic center of the world has shifted to the United States of America," appears as a mere superficial newspaper remark and no more. It is of course absolutely impossible to say in justification of this that there was lack of space, for what are the questions that must find place in a program if not the principal questions? Besides, it should be added that too much space is given in the program to questions of secondary and third-rate importance—let alone the general literary looseness and the numerous repetitions, by a reduction of which the program might be condensed at least one-third.

2a.—SLOGAN OF A SOVIET UNITED STATES OF EUROPE

The elimination of the slogan of a Soviet United States of Europe from the new draft program, a slogan which has already been accepted by the Comintern after a drawn-out internal struggle in 1923, can by no means be justified. Or is it perhaps precisely on this question that the authors want to "return" to Lenin's position of 1915?

In regarding to the slogan of the United States of Europe, Lenin, as is known, vacillated at the beginning of the war. The slogan was at first included in the theses of the Social Democrat (the central organ of the Party at the time) and then rejected by Lenin.

This in itself shows that its suitability was not a question of a general principle; it was merely a question of tactics, a question of comparing its plus and minus signs from the viewpoint of the given situation. Needless to say that Lenin denied the possibility of a realization of a CAPITALIST United States of Europe. That is also how I regarded the question when I advanced the United States slogan, exclusively as a perspective State form of the proletarian dictatorship in Europe.

"A more or less complete economic amalgamation of Europe ACCOMPLISHED FROM THE TOP by means of an agreement of the capitalist governments is a Utopia," I wrote. "Here it cannot go further than partial compromises and half measures. By this alone an economic amalgamation of Europe such as would promise colossal advantages both to the producer and consumer and to the development of culture in general, is becoming a REVOLUTIONARY TASK OF THE EUROPEAN PROLETARIAT in its struggle against imperialist protectionism and its instrument—militarism." — (Trotsky, The Programme of Peace: collected works, Vol. 3, part I, page 85, Russian edition).

Further: "A United States of Europe represents first of all a form—the only conceivable form—of proletarian dictatorship in Europe." — (Ibid., page 92).

But even in this formulation of the question

Lenin saw AT THAT TIME a certain danger. With the absence of experience of a proletarian dictatorship in one country, the absence of a theoretical clarity on this question even in the left wing of the social democracy of that period, the slogan of a United States of Europe might have given rise to the idea that the proletarian revolution must begin simultaneously at least on the whole European continent. It is against this danger that Lenin issued a warning on this question there was not a shade of difference between Lenin and myself. I wrote at the time:

"that not a single country must 'wait' for the other countries in its struggle. This elementary idea it will be useful and necessary to repeat so that the policy of international inaction may not be substituted for the conception of parallel international action. Without waiting for the others, we begin and continue the struggle on national grounds with the full conviction that our initiative will give an impulse to the struggle in other countries." — (Ibid., page 89-90).

Then follow my words which Stalin presented at the Seventh Plenum of the E. C. C. I. as the most vicious expression of "Trotskyism," i. e., as a "disbelief" in the inner forces of the revolution and the hope for aid from without.

"And if this" (development of the revolution in other countries—L.T.) "will not occur, it is hopeless to think (this is borne out by history and by theoretical thought) that for instance revolutionary Russia would be able to hold out in face of conservative Europe, or that Socialist Germany would be able to remain isolated in a capitalist world." — (Ibid., page 89-90).

On the ground of this and two of three similar quotations is based the condemnation of "Trotskyism" by the Seventh Plenum as having held in this "fundamental question" a position "which has nothing in common with Leninism." We will therefore stop for a moment and listen to Lenin himself.

On March 7, 1918 he said on the question of the Brest-Litovsk Peace the following:

"This is a lesson because the absolute truth is this: without a revolution in Germany we will perish." — (Vol. 15, page 132, Russian Edition).

A week later he said:

"World imperialism side by side with a victorious onslaught of the social revolution cannot get along together." — (Ibid., page 175).

A few days later on April 23, Lenin said:

"Our BACKWARDNESS has thrust us forward and WE WILL PERISH if we will not be able to hold out until we meet with the mighty support of the INSURRECTIONARY workers of other countries." — (Ibid., page 187. Our emphasis).

But perhaps this was all said under the special influence of the Brest Litovsk crisis? No! In March 1919 Lenin again repeated:

"We do not live merely in a State but in a system of states and the existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with imperialist states FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME IS INCONCEIVABLE." — (Vol. 16, page 102).

A year later, April 7, 1920, Lenin reiterates:

"Capitalism, if taken on an international scale, is even now, NOT ONLY IN A MILITARY BUT ALSO IN AN ECONOMIC SENSE, stronger than the Soviet government. WE MUST BASE OUR POLICY ON THIS FUNDAMENTAL IDEA WHICH WE MUST NEVER FORGET." — (Vol. 17, page 102).

In the same year of 1920 we find again:

"World imperialism cannot live together with the triumphant social revolution." — (Ibid., page 197).

On November 27, 1920, Lenin, in dealing with the question of concessions, said:

"We have now gone over from the arena of war to peace and we have not forgotten that war will come again. As long as we still have capitalism and socialism we cannot live peacefully—either one or the other will be the victor in the end. The obituary will have to be sung either over the death of world capitalism or the death of the Soviet Republic. Now we have only a respite in the war." — (Ibid., page 398).

But perhaps the further existence of the Soviet Republic made Lenin "realize his mistake" and discard his disbelief "in the inner force" of the October revolution?

At the Third Congress of the Comintern, to wit, in July 1921, Lenin declared:

"We have obtained an extremely unstable, an extremely unsteady, but nevertheless an equilibrium such in which the socialist republic can exist—OF COURSE NOT FOR A LONG TIME—in capitalist surroundings." — (Theses on the Tactics of the C.P.S.U.).

Moreover, on July 5, 1921 Lenin squarely declared at the Congress:

"It was clear to us that without aid from the international worldwide revolution a victory of the proletarian revolution is impossible. Even before the revolution, and also after it, we thought that the revolution either IMMEDIATELY OR AT LEAST very soon will come also in other countries, in the more highly developed capitalist countries, OTHERWISE WE WILL PERISH. Notwithstanding this conviction, we did our utmost to preserve the Soviet system under any circumstances and at all costs because we knew that we are not working only for ourselves but also for the international revolution." — (Vol. 18, part 1, page 321—Our emphasis).

How infinitely far are these words, so excellent for their simplicity and so permeated through and through with the spirit of internationalism from the present self-sufficient epigone machinations.

At any rate, we have the right to ask wherein do all these utterances made by Lenin differ from the ideas I expressed in 1915 that the coming revolution in Russia or the coming socialist Germany will not be able to hold out alone if "isolated in the capitalist world"? The time of realization is different from that outlined not only in my but also in Lenin's predictions. But the main idea remains in full force even now and perhaps at the given moment more so than ever before. Instead of condemning this idea as the Seventh Plenum of the E. C. C. I. has done on the basis of an incompetent and unscrupulous speech, it must be included in the program of the Communist International.

In defense of the slogan of a Soviet United States of Europe we said in 1915 that the law of uneven development is in itself not an argument against it because the UNEVENNESS of historical development in relation to the difference countries and continents IS IN ITSELF UNEVEN. European countries develop unevenly in relation to each other. Nevertheless it can be maintained with absolute historical certainty that it will not be the fate of a single one of them, at least in the historical epoch under review, to run so far ahead in relation to the other countries as America has advanced in relation to Europe. For America there is one SCALE OF UNEVENNESS, for Europe there is another. Geographically and historically conditions have predetermined such a close organic contact between the countries of Europe that by no means can they tear themselves out of it. The modern bourgeois governments of Europe are like murderers chained to one cart. The revolution in Europe, as has already been said, will, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, be of decisive importance also for America. But DIRECTLY, in the immediate historical course, a revolution in Germany will be of an immeasurably greater significance for France than for the United States of America. From this historically developed relationship follows also the political vitality of the slogan of a European Soviet Federation. We speak of its RELATIVE vitality because it stands to reason that this Federation will extend, through the great bridge of the Soviet Union, to Asia and will then effect an amalgamation of the World Socialist Republics. But this will be a second epoch or a further great chapter of the imperialist epoch, and when we enter it more closely we will also find the corresponding formulae necessary for it.

That the differences with Lenin in 1915 on the question of the United States of Europe was a narrow tactical, and by its very essence, temporary character, can be proven without any difficulty by further quotations, but it is best proven by the further trend of events. In 1923 the Comintern officially adopted the slogan. If it is true that the slogan of the United States of Europe could not be accepted in 1915 on grounds of principle, as the authors of the draft program now maintain, then the Comintern had no right to adopt it eight years later. The law of uneven development, one should think, has not lost its force of action during these years.

The formulation of the question as outlined above follows from the dynamics of the revolutionary process taken as a whole. The international revolution is regarded as an inter-connected process which cannot be predicted in all its concreteness—but the general historical outlines of it are absolutely clear. Without understanding them a correct political orientation is entirely out of the question.

Matters, however, appear quite differently if we proceed from the idea of socialist development