

# The Cult of the 'Third Period'

By Maurice Spector

The "cloud by day and pillar of fire by night" that the Stalin E. C. C. I. conjures up to shield its disastrous ultra-left zig-zag, is the so-called "Third Period" invented in the theses of the Comintern Congress last July. Now in every "Daily Worker" contribution to the fraudulent "enlightenment campaign" this "third period" is invoked with deadly monotony as the latest all-sufficient, all-hallowing fetish before which the credulous party member must make the sign of the cross.

Insight into the motives for the invention of the "Third Period" may be gained from the study of a not dissimilar manoeuvre executed by the Zinoviev-Stalin leadership at the Fifth Congress (1924) at the beginning of the present crisis in the Soviet Union and the International. The German revolutionary situation of 1923 precipitated by the occupation of the Ruhr and economic collapse, the most favorable opportunity for the workers' conquest of political power since the Russian, was lost not only by the impotent Brandler-Thalheimer strategy but the no less feeble direction of the E. C. C. I. Zinoviev repeated the *laissez-faire* policy that disgraced him in the crucial test of 1917. The sagacious Stalin advocated allowing the Fascisti to get power first! Following the debacle, the bureaucratic Zinoviev-Stalin bloc dominating the E. C. C. I. had to salvage their papal infallibility in the Comintern at all costs, particularly as they were entrenching themselves for the thermidorian falsification of the legacy of Lenin under the guise of a crusade against "trotskyism". The slogan that was invented for this purpose was "Bolshevization", ostensibly aimed at social-democratic traditions in the communist parties.

## THE FIFTH CONGRESS

The Fifth Congress was accordingly fixed up to look very "left" The E. C. C. I. proceeded to throw the blame for all that had gone wrong on the German leadership, on the objective situation, on the Russian Opposition, on the form of party organization, on everybody and anything but itself. The ultra-lefts whom Zinoviev had long patronized in reserve displaced the Brandler and Thalheimers. "Give us fifty such as Maslow" said Stalin in a session of the International Control Commission, "and we will have no more anxiety on the score of the German Revolution". The chameleon Varga, taking on protective coloration, helped Zinoviev to furnish the Congress with a suitably misleading estimate of the world situation. The significance of American intervention for the stabilization of Europe, for the revival of social-democracy, and as a source of future revolutionary upheavals, was completely missed. Armed insurrection was retained on the agenda as an immediate prospect and the putsch in Esthonia was a subsequent by-product.

But the "left course" did not endure very long. Like a bolt from the blue to the Congress itself, came the announcement that the Russian unions were negotiating a bloc with the British General Council for international trade union unity and resistance to the war danger. This orientation on unity with the Amsterdam bureaucracy was the entering wedge of the series of opportunist acts which was the yielding of the Right-Center bloc in the Russian party to the increasing pressure of outside capitalist stabilization and the internal pressure of the kulak, nepman and bureaucrat. At a time when the stabilization was again showing its weaknesses in Great Britain, when the revolution was developing in China, and a new stage of struggle between capitalist and socialist elements was opening in the Soviet Union, Stalin promulgated the slogan "Fire to the Left", formulated the theory of "socialism in one country" with its implication of capitalist stabilization for decades, and came into sharp conflict with the Leningrad Opposition headed by the left centrist Zinoviev at the Fourteenth Party Congress (1925). The swing to the right of the Marxist line in the Russian party was thereupon automatically effected in the whole International. By means of such dishonest expedients as the Open Letter to the German Party, the Fisher-Maslow leadership was eliminated to cut the Leningrad Opposition off from a base in Western Europe, and the E. C. C. I. so unanimously elected at the Fifth Congress was bureaucratically re-constructed in the image of Stalin at successive plenums without mandate from any Congress and in violation of the statutes.

## JUGGLING WITH "PERIODS"

Four years elapsed between the Fifth and Sixth Congresses, during which time the re-vamped E. C. C. I. was the obedient instrument and rubber-stamp of the ruling Right-Center (Rykov-Bucharin-Stalin) bloc. We have seen how the analysis of the international situation was made at the Fifth Congress to suit factional ends. This procedure was repeated at the Sixth Congress four years later, when Bucharin and Stalin did their juggling with the "periods". The official "Communist International" (Vol. VI. No 9-10) recently smuggled in an editorial admission that "in 1926-7... on the basis of the partial stabilization of capitalism, a revolutionary crisis developed in the far West and East". This is what the Communist Opposition, of course, said in those years when it was most important to say it. But for transparent reasons the theses of the Sixth Congress (1928) define the interval between the Fifth and Sixth Congresses, inclusive of 1926-7, the "second period of the post-war capitalism", in a way to suggest that it was not a period of revolutionary possibilities. In the re-capitulation of the attributes of this "second period", its

architects conveniently "forget" to mention the facts of the Chinese Revolution, the British General Strike and the Viennese uprising. It is merely spoken of as a period of "relative stabilization, defensive struggles of the workers, successful socialist construction in the U. S. S. R. growing political influence of the Communist Parties, and inner consolidation of the Comintern." Nine-tenths of this characterization is falsehood and the remaining tenth needs qualification.

The method of optimistic lying to maintain the prestige of the leadership and keep up the "morale" of the home populace is not Marxist but was habitually resorted to by the general staffs in their communiques during the late world war. The history of the "second period" was falsified to stifle discussion and prevent the heavy accounting that otherwise Stalin and Bucharin would have had to render. They would have had to explain why they failed to give the correct bolshevik leadership that would have utilized the revolutionary possibilities of this period to develop offensives for the overthrow of the stabilization. They would have had to admit that they displayed no revolutionary initiative but pursued such right wing and centrist policies that objectively helped to strengthen capitalism, that they staked nearly all on the Kuomintang bourgeoisie, undermined the independence of the Chinese Communist Party, and opposed the propagation of the Soviets. They would have been found guilty of transforming the British Communist Party and the Minority movement into adjuncts of the British General Council, incapable of offering any substantial resistance to the betrayal of the General Strike. Under the shadow of their regime, the Viennese uprising found the Communist Party helpless and bewildered, the Sacco-Vanzetti demonstrations developed really outside the orbit of the Comintern influence, the French Party after heroic proclamations against the American Legion, turned tail and retired for polite demonstration to a Parisian suburb and the Red Day organized by the Czech Party against Fascism was turned into a farce by the passivity of the leadership.

The extension of the political influence of the Communist parties and their inner consolidation during this period are equally myths. The machine man Piatnitski's brochure "Organization of the World Party" establishes for the critical reader that the member-

ship of nearly every communist party declined, as did their trade union influence, press circulation and political activity of the nuclei. The membership of the American Party, it may be recalled, fell from 16,325 in 1925 to 7,277 in 1928. The proceedings of the Sixth Congress will show that every "monolithic" party was rent by violent factional struggles that resulted in fresh splits in Czecho-Slovakia, the United States, Germany in addition to those which had already taken place in France, Holland, Belgium and the Soviet Union. The authors of the "second" and "third" periods equally misrepresent the real situation in the Soviet Union, where under their regime the growth of the restorationist elements culminated in a bloodless uprising of the Kulaks creating the grain crisis of 1927-8, and they omit to record the unparalleled development of bureaucracy in party and state apparatus.

CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE

## SLOGANS for GASTONIA

The New York district of the Young Communist League publishes a monthly District Bulletin for the membership. In the August 1929 issue we find the following: On page 2 is a big headline which reads: "SMASH the GASTONIA FRAME-UP". On Page 3, among the slogans advanced for International Youth Day, is included this one: "FIGHT THE GASTONIA FRAME-UP!" On page 9, at the conclusion of an official editorial entitled "Soviet Union Invaded", we find the slogan: "Fight the Gastonia Frame-Up!" On page 19, in an article entitled "Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial", we read: "This demonstration will be of utmost importance this year because of the attempts to repeat the Sacco-Vanzetti case by the legal murder of the Gastonia framed-up textile strikers". (All emphasis ours).

The Bulletin of the Y.C.L. grasps the central feature of the Gastonia case and raises the correct leading slogan of the campaign for defense, as pointed out before in the Militant. It is to be hoped that the Party "elders" will learn elementary lessons like this from the Youth.

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of the Militant will contain, among other material, the following: A complete review of the T. U. E. L. conference in Cleveland, and a report on the proceedings by one of the delegates; an article on the significance of L. Hendin's quitting the Communist Party; another article by comrade Trotsky on Brandler and Thalheimer; and many other articles of vital importance.

## The Party's Election Program in New York

The New York district of the Communist Party is circulating a mimeographed "Platform of the Class Struggle" for the municipal and state election campaign in 1929, with the central slogan of "Class against Class"; that is, with the same slogan applied with such disastrous results in England, and in France for almost two years.

This is the charger that the Party's parliamentary generals Weinstone, Trachtenberg, et. al., have now changed to after having rode so belliciously (it was not so many months ago) in the ranks of an unconditional united front with Jacob Pauken, Roewer of Boston and the Milwaukee socialists. We opposed the notorious Panken "maneuver" of Weinstone and company (before the Comintern decision as well as afterwards) and we oppose the slogan of "Class against Class" with the same vigor.

What is wrong with this slogan? Everything. It flies in the face of every principle of Marxism and Leninism, which teach us that there is no fixed relation and existence of only two organized, well-defined and homogeneous classes, that outside of the proletariat there is only one reactionary mass. It excludes the possibility for the workers to win allies among the urban petty bourgeoisie and the rural peasantry for the struggle against the big bourgeoisie. It contains precisely that error, raised to the n-th degree, of which the Stalinists have falsely accused Trotsky of entertaining with regard to the theory of permanent revolution. It is a hypnotic formula intended to cover up the failure to mobilize the workers on the basis of their immediate demands and needs, a substitute which cannot mobilize the masses because it is abstract, since it assumes that the workers (especially in the United States) have attained a high degree of class consciousness and differentiation, and class organization. The American workers, who have not yet even entered upon the path of independent political action, who do not yet even vote for the reformist socialists, will not and cannot be set into motion by this slogan. Even in a directly revolutionary situation, the slogan is worth nothing. The Bolsheviks in 1917 mobilized the workers for the revolution with the concrete, immediate, practical slogans of "Bread, Peace and Land" If all these political and theoretical considerations are not sufficient, then the experiences in France and England will more than supplement them.

One would think that with such a "very revolutionary" (in reality it is revisionist-sectarian) central slogan, the rest of the platform would be in the same tone. But that is not the case. The platform contains the incredible number of ninety-eight demands, by actual count. This is equivalent to raising no immediate demands. What is far worse is the thoroughly opportunist character of most of these demands. We would need a volume to analyze all of them; we will point out only a few of them here, demands not calculated to mobilize the workers for struggle against capitalism on the basis of their immediate demands, but calculated to instill reformist and pacifist illusions in the workers.

The Platform demands that "judges shall not be appointed. They shall be elected by the working people and should be removable at any time by the will of the majority of their electors". These are shadows from the graves of Allan Benson and Charles Edward Russell. Why not the general initiative, referendum and recall?

The Platform raises as its main demand in the transit muddle the five cent fare and free transfers! It staunchly calls for free milk for all pre-school children, and "free diet kitchens and food stations" for mothers. Why not municipal meat markets and crematories? They are also contained in the municipal campaign books of the old Socialist Party, edited then by the same Trachtenberg who so calmly appropriates them now for the Communist municipal platform. There is, by the way, a startling identity of the Party's demands in general with those of the old S. P. (See the 1920 Campaign book and the 1914 Congressional campaign book of the S. P.)

The sections on the Negro problem are indistinguishable from the standpoint of any advanced liberal or the N. A. A. C. P.—with the exception of the slogan of the right to self-determination. There is no attempt to indicate the class purpose behind segregation, discrimination, and other persecutions of the Negro, and no call for a united struggle of Negro and white workers. The same can be said with little change of the "housing demands". The main complaint of the Party on "mothers' pensions provided under the New York State law" is that they are "entirely inadequate" (!), i. e., an acceptance of the basic principle.

Only at the very end of the Platform is the "coming imperialist war" dealt with. The danger of war is not inextricably knitted with all the other problems. It is not connected with rationalization, with the persecution of and drive upon the workers, with the whole relation of forces and the struggle between the workers and the master class in the United States. No, it is still raised as some special, isolated question, for which special methods, a specific line of policy must be applied. There is not even a mention of the Kellogg Pact (has Weinstone, as well as Stalin and Rykov, signed it?); there is no mention of the heart of the war danger, i. e., the struggle between England and the U. S., but the main and only emphasis is put on the less likely danger of war between Russia and the U. S.

But the demands raised against the war danger are most outrageous. "Abolition of the present mercenary army and navy and state militia". A thoroughly pacifist and anti-Leninist slogan which disgraces a Communist document! "Immediate withdrawal from the world court." There is more petty-bourgeois and pacifist nonsense in the platform than we have space for.

The Platform is a bad one, a very bad one, it should be condemned and withdrawn. It is corrupted with petty-bourgeois and reformist poison. There is a burning need for a platform of class struggle directed against the twin Parties of the bourgeoisie and their socialist train-bearers.