

The «Third Period» of the Comintern's Mistakes

The Art of Orientation

The art of revolutionary leadership is primarily the art of correct political orientation. Under all conditions, Communism prepares the political vanguard, and through it the working class as a whole, for the revolutionary seizure of power. But it does it differently in different fields of the labor movement and in different periods.

One of the most important elements in orientation is the determination of the moods of the masses, their activity and readiness for struggle. The mood of the masses however does not fall from the skies. It changes under the influence of certain laws of mass psychology, which are set into motion by objective social conditions. The political condition of the classes is subject, within certain limits, to a quantitative determination (press circulation, attendance at meetings, demonstrations, strikes, elections, etc., etc.) In order to understand the dynamics of the process, it is necessary to determine in what direction and under the influence of what reasons the mood of the working class changes. Combining the subjective data with the objective, it is possible to get to a certain degree the perspective of the movement, i. e., the scientifically based prediction without which a serious revolutionary struggle is in general inconceivable. But prediction in politics has the character, not of a rigid schema, but of a working hypothesis. Directing the struggle to one or the other direction, it is necessary attentively to follow the changes in the objective and subjective elements of the movement, in order to introduce opportunely into the tactics corresponding corrections. Even though the actual development of the struggle never fully corresponds with the prognosis, that does not absolve us from having recourse to political prediction. One must not however, get intoxicated with finished schemas but continually check up the course of the historic process and conform oneself with its indications.

Centrism, which now rules the Comintern, as an intermediary tendency living on the ideas of others, by its very nature is incapable of historical prognosis. In the Soviet Republic, Centrism attained its domination under the conditions of reaction against October, at the descent of the revolution, when empiricism and eclecticism constituted the warrant that permitted it to swim with the stream. And since it had previously been proclaimed that the course of development automatically leads towards socialism in one country, this in itself was enough to liberate Centrism from the need of a world orientation.

But the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries, which still have to struggle for power or to prepare for such a struggle, cannot live without prediction. A correct, every-day orientation is a question of life or death for them. But they do not learn this most important art because they are compelled to leap and skip interminably at the command of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Bureaucratic Centrism which is able to live for a time off the interest on the capital of already captured proletarian power, is entirely incapable of preparing the young Parties for the conquest of power. In this lies the principal and most formidable contradiction of the present Comintern.

The history of the Centrist leadership is the history of fatal mistakes in orientation. After the epigones missed the revolutionary situation in Germany in 1923 which profoundly changed the whole situation in Europe, the Comintern went through three stages of fatal mistakes.

The years 1924-25 were the period of ultra-Left mistakes: the leadership saw an immediate revolutionary situation ahead of them at a time when it was behind them. In that period they called us Marxist-Leninists "Rights" and "liquidators"

The years 1925-27 were the period of open opportunism, which coincided with a stormy rise of the labor movement in England and the revolution in China. In this period they called us nothing else than "ultra-Leftists".

Finally, in 1928, the "Third Period" is proclaimed, which repeats the Zinoviev mistakes of 1924-25 on a higher historical plane. "The Third Period", has not yet come to a close: on the contrary it continues to rage, laying organizations and minds to waste.

All the three periods are characterized.

not accidentally, by a systematic decline in the level of the leadership. In the first period: Zinoviev, Bucharin, Stalin. In the second period: Stalin, Bucharin. In the third period: Stalin and . . . Molotov. There is a regularity to be seen in this.

Let us look closer at the leadership and theory of the "third period".

Molotov «Enters With Both Feet»

The Plenum of the E.C.C.I. which met a year after the Sixth Congress (July 1929) could not simply repeat what the Sixth Congress had already said but had to take a higher note. Already on the eve of the Plenum, the theoretical organ of the C. P. S. U. wrote:

"In the whole capitalist world the strike wave is rising. This wave is occurring in the highly developed imperialist countries as well as in the backward colonies at times and in places which interlink with elements of a stubborn revolutionary struggle and civil war. Into the struggle are drawn and actively participate the masses of the unorganized. . . The growth of dissatisfaction and the Leftward swing of the masses also embraces the millions of the agricultural workers and oppressed peasantry". (Bolshevik, June, 1929, No. 12, page 9).

The picture leaves no room for doubts. If the strike wave is actually traversing the whole world, drawing even "the millions of agricultural workers and oppressed peasantry", and interlinking with "revolutionary struggle and civil war", then it is clear: the revolutionary situation is at hand and the task of an outright struggle is on the order of the day. Whether to call such conditions the "third period" or to leave them unnumbered on this count we would agree not to quarrel.

The tuning fork at the Tenth Plenum appeared, as is known, in the hands of the maestro Molotov. In his programmatic speech before the leaders of the Comintern, Molotov said: "One must be a dull opportunist (!), one must be a sorry liberal (!), in view of the facts of the world labor movement, not to see that we have entered with both feet into the realm of most tremendous revolutionary events of international significance." (Pravda, No. 177). "With both feet"—what power of argumentation!

Harmonizing with Molotov's tuning fork, Bolshevik, the theoretical organ of the Russian Communist Party wrote in August 1929:

"On the basis of the analysis of the working class struggle in the principal capitalist countries, the Tenth Plenum established the development and deepening of the processes of the Leftward turn and revolutionization of the masses, which grows, already at the present time into a beginning of the revolutionary rise, (at least in such countries as Germany, France, Poland)". (No. 15, page 4).

There can be no doubt: if not with his head, then with his feet, Molotov has decisively established the revolutionary character of the period we are living through. Since nobody wants to be called a "dull opportunist" or a "sorry liberal", then Molotov's argumentation appears to be immediately insured against the criticism of the Plenum. Not burdening himself with economic nor political analysis, for reasons which it must be admitted are very valid, Molotov limited himself to a short catalog of the strikes in the different countries (Ruhr, Lodz, Northern France, Bombay, etc.) as the sole proof of the fact that "we have entered into the realm of most tremendous revolutionary events". This is how historic periods are created!

There only remained for the Central Committee and the papers of the national sections to see to it that their own feet, getting ahead if possible of their heads, should be immersed as quickly as possible into "most tremendous revolutionary events". But is it not a suspicious circumstance that the revolutionary situation appears simultaneously in the whole world, in the metropolises and the colonies, completely ignoring in this period "the law of uneven development", that is, that single historic law which, at least in name, is known to Stalin? In reality, there can be no talk of such simultaneousness. The analysis of world conditions is substituted for, as we have just seen, by the summing up of isolated conflicts occurring in different

countries and for different conditions. Of the European countries, Austria alone, perhaps, has gone through a crisis in the past year which, with the presence of an influential Communist Party, might have assumed an immediately revolutionary development. But it is precisely Austria that is not even mentioned. What are mentioned are France, Germany and Poland as "those countries which —(according to Molotov)— find themselves at present in the front ranks of the revolutionary rise". In a series of articles we examined the strike wave in France, in order to determine its actual place in the development of the proletariat and the country. We hope to analyze in the same detail, in the nearest future, the basic indicators which characterize the struggle of the German working class. But the conclusions we arrived at with the French example, which is included by the Tenth Plenum among the least of the three most revolutionary countries of Europe, already show that Molotov's analysis is a combination of three elements: theoretical ignorance, political irresponsibility and bureaucratic adventurism. However it is not "the third period" that these elements characterize, but the Centrist bureaucracy —in all periods.

Are Economic Strikes Called Forth By Crises or Rises?

"Wherein lies the basis of this revolutionary rise?" Molotov makes the attempt to reflect, and right here presents the fruits of his deliberations: "At the basis of the rise can only lie the growth of the general crisis of capitalism and the sharpening of the basic contradictions of the capitalist system."

Whoever does not agree, is a "sorry liberal." But where is it written that at the basis of economic strikes "can only lie" a crisis? Instead of analyzing the actual economic conditions and finding on the basis of them a correct place for the present strike movement, Molotov proceeds in reverse order, enumerating a half a dozen strikes, comes to the conclusion about "the growth" of the capitalist crisis and—lands in the clouds.

The rise of the strike movement in a series of countries was caused, as we already know, by the improvement of economic conjuncture in the course of the past two years. This refers primarily to France. True, industrial revival which is far from general for the whole of Europe remained until now very retarded even in France and the tomorrow is far from secure at that. But in the life of the proletariat, even a small turn of conjuncture in one direction or the other does not take place without leaving its mark. If they continue daily to lay off workers in the factories, then those at work will not have the same spirit which is bred with them by the hiring of new workers, even though in limited numbers. The conjuncture has no less an influence on the ruling classes. In the period of an industrial revival which always breeds hopes for a still greater revival in the future, the capitalists are inclined to a softening of the international contradictions precisely in order to secure the development of a favorable conjuncture. And this is the "spirit of Locarno and Geneva".

In the not distant past, we had a great illustration of the correlation of conjunctural and basic factors.

The years of 1896-1913 were with few interruptions years of a powerful industrial rise. In 1913, this changed to depression, which for all informed, clearly opened the long and drawn out crisis. The threatening break of conjuncture, after the period of an unprecedented boom, created an extremely nervous mood in the ruling classes and served as a direct impetus to the war. Of course, the imperialist war grew out of basic contradictions of capitalism. This generalization is known even to Molotov. But on the road to war, there were a whole series of stages when the contradictions either sharpened or softened. The same applies also to the class struggle of the workers.

In the pre-war period, the basic as well as the conjunctural processes developed much more regularly than in the present period of brusks turns and steep breaks, when comparatively steep breaks, when the comparatively less important vacillations in economy breed tremendous leaps in politics. But from this it does not at all

flow that it is possible to close one's eyes to the actual development and to repeat three incantations: "Contradictions sharpen" "the working masses are turning to the Left", "the war is imminent"—every day, every day, every day. . . If our strategic line is determined in the last analysis by the inevitability of the growth of contradictions and the revolutionary radicalization of the masses, then our tactics, which serve this strategy, proceed from the realistic evaluation of each period, each stage, each moment, which may be characterized by a temporary softening of contradictions, a Rightward turn of the masses, a change in the correlation of forces in favor of the bourgeois, etc. If the masses were to turn Leftward uninterruptedly, then any fool could lead them. Fortunately or unfortunately, matters are more complicated, particularly under the present inconstant, vacillating "capricious" conditions.

The so-called general line is a phrase, unless we correlate it with each alternating change in national and international conditions. How does the leadership of the Comintern act? Instead of evaluating conditions in all their concreteness, it smashes its head at every new stage and then satisfies the masses for its subsequent defeat with a change and even expulsion of those on guard duty in the Central Committees of the national sections. We firmly advise Cachin, Monmousseau, Thaelmann and all the Renmeles (and Foster!—Ed.) to prepare themselves in advance for the role of the victims for the theory and practice of the Third Period. This will happen when Stalin has to correct Molotov—naturally after the fact.

The Rise of the U. S. S. R. as a Factor in the «Third Period»

As the first reason for the "revolutionary rise" in the last two years, Molotov sees the economic crisis which, by the way, he discovered deductively. The second reason he sees in the economic successes of the U. S. S. R. and he even accuses the Plenum of the E. C. C. I. of not having sufficiently appreciated the revolutionizing effect of the Five Year Plan. That the economic successes of the Soviet Republic have a gigantic importance for the world labor movement does not require any proof. But from this it does not at all follow that the Five Year Plan is capable, in an a priori manner, of causing the revolutionary rise in Europe and the whole world. The broad working masses do not live by the prospective figures of the Five Year Plan. But even if we leave aside the Five Year Plan, and take the figures of factual successes of industrialization, we still cannot see in them the reason for the strike of the dock workers in France or the textile workers in India. Millions of workers are led in their actions by conditions which immediately surround them, not to speak of the fact that the greatest majority of the workers learn of the successes or failures of Soviet economy from the lying articles of the bourgeois and social democratic press. Finally, and this is more important than all the rest, what would immediately impress the broad circles of foreign workers is not the abstract figures of statistics but the actual and substantial improvement in the conditions of the workers in the U. S. S. R. It is clear that the conditions of severe food difficulties in Moscow and Leningrad cannot inspire tens of millions of workers in the capitalist world with revolutionary enthusiasm. It is a fact, unfortunately, that only about 100 workers came to hear the triumphant report of the last French delegation to return from the U. S. S. R. A hundred workers—for the whole of Paris! This is a menacing warning; but the noisy and boastful bureaucrats do not consider it necessary to reflect upon it.

The Slogan of the General Strike

Entering so heartily into the "most tremendous revolutionary events" Molotov five minutes later returns to the same strikes and unexpectedly declares, "However, these manifestations against capital and reformism that serves it, still bear an isolated and fragmentary character".

It would seem that isolated and fragmentary strikes occur in different countries for quite different reasons, but in general, arising as they do out of a conjunctural

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