

The «Third Period» of the Comintern's Mistakes

«No Agreements with the Reformists»

But there is another important tactical deduction from the "Third Period", which Molotov expresses in these words: "Now more than at any other time the tactic of coalition between the revolutionary organizations and the organizations of the reformists is inadmissible and harmful", (*Pravda* No. 177, August 4, 1929).

Agreements with the reformists are inadmissible now "more than at any other time". Does it mean that they were inadmissible before too? How then shall we explain the whole policy of the years 1926-1928? And precisely why have agreements with the reformists, inadmissible in general, become particularly inadmissible now? Because, they explain to us, we have entered a period of revolutionary ascent. Yet we cannot but recollect that the conclusion of a bloc with the General Council of the British trade unions was motivated at the time precisely by the fact that England had entered a period of revolutionary ascent, and that the radicalization of the British working masses pushed the reformists to the Left. By what incident is yesterday's tactical super-wisdom of Stalinism stood on its head? We would look in vain for a solution to the riddle. It is quite simple: the empiricists of Centrism burned their hands on the experiment of the Anglo-Russian Committee and with a strong oath they want to guard against scandals in the future. But an oath will not help, for our strategists have not yet understood the lessons of the Anglo-Russian Committee.

The mistake was not in making the episodic agreement with the General Council, which was actually going "Left" in that period (1926) under the pressure of the masses. The first mistake was in the fact that the bloc was concluded not on concrete practical tasks clear to the working class but on general pacifist phrases and falsely diplomatic formulas. The chief mistake, however which grew into a gigantic historical crime, lay in the fact that our strategists could not immediately and openly break with the General Council when it turned its weapons against the general strike, that is, when it turned from an unreliable semi-ally into an open enemy.

The influence of the radicalization of the masses on the reformists is quite similar to the influence that the development of a bourgeois revolution has on the liberals. In the first stages of the movement of the masses the reformists move Leftward, hoping in this way to retain the leadership in their hands. But when the movement overflows the limits of reform and demands from the leaders an outright break with the bourgeoisie, the majority of the reformists sharply change their tone. From cowardly fellow-travellers of the masses, they turn into strike-breakers, enemies, open betrayers. At the same time, however, part of them, consisting not entirely of their better elements, jump over into the camp of the revolution. An episodic agreement with the reformists, at the moment when under the influence of conditions, they happen to be compelled to make a step or a half-step forward, may be unavoidable. But it must be understood, beforehand that the Communists are ready to break mercilessly with the reformists the moment they take a jump backward. The reformists are betrayers not because they carry out, at every given moment and in every one of their acts, the direct instructions of the bourgeoisie. If that is how the matter stood, the reformists would have no influence on the workers, and consequently would not be needed by the bourgeoisie. Precisely in order to have the necessary authority for the betrayal of the workers at the decisive moment, the opportunists are compelled at the preparatory period to assume the leadership of the workers' struggle, particularly at the beginning of the process of the radicalization of the masses. From here follows the necessity of the united front tactic, in connection with which we are compelled for the sake of a broader unification of the masses to enter into practical agreements with their reformist leaders.

It is necessary to understand the historic function of the social-democracy as a whole in order to force them step by step out of all their positions. The present leadership has not even a trace of such an understanding. It knows only two methods: either, in the spirit of the Brandlerites, to drag at the tail of the social democracy

(1926-1928), or by identifying social-democracy with Fascism, to substitute helpless abuse for revolutionary policy. As a result of the zig-zags of the past six years, we have the strengthening of the social democracy and the weakening of Communism. The mechanical directives of the Tenth Plenum can only serve to worsen the already sufficiently damaged situation.

Only a hopeless ignoramus can imagine that due to the miraculous power of the "Third Period", the working class as a whole will turn away from the social democracy driving the whole reformist bureaucracy into the camp of Fascism. No, the process will develop by more complicated and contradictory roads. A growing dissatisfaction with the Social Democratic government in Germany, with the Laborites in England, the transformation of partial and isolated strikes into mass movements, etc., (when all these developments actually do take place,) will have as their unavoidable consequence—we propose to all the Molotovs to carve it on their noses!—a **Leftward turn** of very wide circles of the reformist camp, just as the inner process in the U. S. S. R. necessitated the Leftward swing of the Centrist camp—to which Molotov himself belongs.

The social democrats and those of the Amsterdam International with the exception of the more conscious Right wing elements (types like Thomas, Herman Mueller, Renaudel, etc) will be compelled, under corresponding conditions, to assume the leadership of the advance of the masses—it is understood, only in order to confine these advances within narrow limits, or in order to attack the workers from the rear when they will overstep these limits. Although we know that in advance, and openly warn the vanguard about it, nevertheless, in the future there will still be tens, hundreds and thousands of cases when the Communists will not only be unable to refuse practical agreements with the reformists, but will have to take the initiative in such agreements in order, without letting the leadership out of their hands, to break with the reformists the moment they turn away from shaky allies into open betrayers. This policy will be unavoidable primarily in regard to the Left Social Democracy, which during an actual radicalization of the masses, will be compelled to oppose the Right wing more decisively, even to the point of a split. This perspective in no way contradicts the fact that the head of the Left Social Democracy most often consists of the most degraded and dangerous allies of the bourgeoisie.

How is it possible to refuse practical agreements with the reformists in those cases where, for instance, they are leading strikes? If there are very few of such cases now, it is because the strike movement itself is very weak as yet and the reformists can ignore and sabotage it. But with the drawing into the struggle of great masses, agreements will become unavoidable for both sides. It is just as impossible to block the way for practical agreements with the reformists—not only with the Social Democratic mass, but in many instances also with their leaders or what is more likely with part of the leaders—in the struggle against Fascism. This perspective may turn out to be not very far off, not only in Austria but also in Germany. The directives of the Tenth Plenum are simply a result of the psychology of opportunists scared to death.

The Stalin, Molotovs, and the other allies of yesterday of Chiang Kai Shek, Wang Chin Wei, Purcell, Cock, Fimmen, LaFollette and Raditch, will undoubtedly raise the cry that the Left Opposition stands for a bloc with the Second International. These cries, as soon as the real Leftward swing of the working class takes the bureaucrats unawares, will not prevent the pronouncement of a fourth period, or a second stage of the third, and all the Molotovs will enter at least with "both feet" into an epoch of opportunist experiments like the Anglo-Russian Committee and the workers and peasants Kuo Min Tang.

Do Not Forget Your Own Yesterday

Let the present leaders of the French Communist Party, just as, by the way, all the other Parties in the International recall their own still fresh history. All of them, with the exception of the Youth, came from the ranks of the reformists un-

By L. D. Trotsky

der the influence of the Leftward swing of the workers. That did not prevent us Bolsheviks from entering into agreements with the Leftward moving reformists, putting very precise conditions to them. One of these innumerable agreements was, for instance, Zimmerwald. Whence, this self-satisfied confidence of the social-patriots of yesterday, that the masses, when they actually approach the "advanced positions of the revolutionary rise," will not bring forward a new shift of Cachins, Monmousseaus, Thaelmanns, and others, (the second edition, let us hope, will be better than the first)—and that we shall not be men by the ears into revolutionary position, once more to pull these gentletons, entering with them into episodic agreements, putting before them, in later stages, 21 and perhaps 42 conditions, or on the contrary, throwing them overboard with their heads into the mud of opportunism, when they start to draw back?

The official theoreticians quite falsely explain the present strengthening of the Right wing in Communism by the fact, that the "inner" reformists got scared of the radicalization of the masses. Here is a complete misunderstanding of political psychology! Opportunism presupposes a very great elasticity and ability for adaptation. If a mass pressure were felt, the Brandlers, Jileks and Lovecenes would have moved to the Left and not to the Right, particularly such worn-out careerists as Sellier, Garchery, and others who are concerned primarily with the retention of their legislative mandates. It is true, the capacity of opportunists for moving Leftward is not unlimited. When the Rubicon—the decision, the uprising—is reached, the majority of them jumps back to the Right wing. This was proved by the experience of even so tempered a Party as the Bolshevik (Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov, Kalinin, Tomsky, Lunacharsky and others). After the victory, the opportunists once more moved "Left", or more correctly to the side of power (Léovsky, Martinov, Kussinen and others, and following them, such heroes as Pepper, Cachin and Frossard). But in France matters are far from having reached a decision. And if the French opportunists do not go Leftward at present, but jump to the Right, then this in itself is a true sign that the revolutionary pressure of the masses is not felt, that the Party is growing weak, and the municipal and other careerists hope to retain their mandates by coming out against Communism.* The desertions of such rotted elements is in itself a gain for the party. But the misfortune lies in the fact that the at one and the same time false, irresponsible, adventurist self-praising and cowardly policy of the official leadership creates a very favorable cover, for the deserters and pushes towards them proletarian elements whose place should be in the Communist ranks.

Once More on War Danger

In order to worsen this tangle the recognition of an immediate revolutionary situation is multiplied by the announcement of just as immediate a war danger. In defense of this thesis, Molotov unexpectedly directed the full power of his knowledge against Varga, the well-known theoretician courtier, the Shakespearean Ponceus who is inclined to say something agreeable to every "prince," Right or Left, depending upon the state of weather. This time however, Ponceus did not hit the mark. His very acquaintance with the foreign press, with facts and figures, prevented his timely replacement of the meridian of the Comintern at the place where Molotov stepped with his left leg. Varga brought into the resolution the following political correction:

"The sharpening of imperialist contradictions which not one of the major imperialist countries considers at present sensible to decide by way of war, compels them to attempt temporary conciliation of these contradictions in the sphere of the reparations question."

It would seem that this ultra-careful phrase is absolutely irrefutable. But as it nevertheless, demanded some additional strain of thought, Molotov was completely exasperated. How can one think,—he yelled—that not one of the main imperialist powers does not consider it sensible at present to decide the imperialist contradictions by way of war? "It is known to everyone (!)"

listen, listen: Molotov is talking!—"It is known to everyone that the danger of a new imperialist war is growing every day." Nevertheless, Varga "sees the contrary". Isn't it monstrous?—How does Varga dare "deny that precisely as a result of the execution of the Young reparations plan, the sharpening of contradictions are unavoidable". . .

All this is so absurd, so primitively stupid, that it even disarms irony. "It is known to everybody, that the danger of new imperialist war grows daily." What power of thought! Known to everybody? Unfortunately, this is known only to a small percent of humanity, just as the newly-appeared leader of the Comintern does not know at all how the growth of the war danger proceeds in reality. It is absurd that it increases "daily" just as it is absurd that the masses go further to the Left daily. We have before us a dialectical process with temporary weakening of imperialist friction and their new growth. Molotov may have heard that even the development of the productive forces of capitalism, the most basic of all its processes, does not quite take place "daily" but through crises and rises, through periods of the drop of the productive forces, and even their mass destruction (during war). Along these lines develop also the political processes, but with still sharper convulsions.

In 1923 the reparation problem led to the occupation of the Ruhr. This was an outright staging of war on a small scale. But this scale appeared sufficient to create a revolutionary situation in Germany. The Comintern, directed by Zinoviev and Stalin, and the German Communist Party, led by Brandler, wrecked this exceptional opportunity. The year 1924, which brought the Dawes Plan, was a year of weakening of the revolutionary struggle in Germany and started the softening of contradictions between France and Germany. This is how the political prerequisites for economic stabilization were created. When we stated this aloud, or more correctly, when we predicted this development at the end of 1923, Molotov and the other wise ones, accusing us of liquidationism, immediately entered confidently into a period of revolutionary ascent.

The years of stabilization brought forth new contradictions and sharpens a series of old ones. The question of the revision of the Dawes plan rose in all its sharpness. Had France or Germany refuse to accept the Young Plan, Europe would have been confronted today with a repetition of the Ruhr occupation, but on a far wider scale, with the consequences following from it. But precisely this is lacking. All the participants in the game considered it wiser at the present moment to come to an agreement, and instead of a second Ruhr occupation, we see a cleaning up of the Ruhr district. Ignorance is characterized by the mixing up of things, knowledge though begins with their differentiation. Marxism has never indulged in ignorance.

But must there not, exclaims our strategist, "as a result of the execution of the Young reparation plan," necessarily come a further sharpening of contradictions? Necessarily come! But—as a result. It is necessary to understand the succession of events and the dialectics of their alternation. As a result of high capitalist conjuncture there inevitably comes a depression and sometimes a crisis. But from this it does not follow that a high conjuncture is as strong as a low one, and that a crisis "grows daily". "As a result" of his life a human being follows his ancestors, but from this it does not follow that a man does not go through the periods of infancy, growth, illness, maturity and old age, before he reaches the gates of death. Ignorance is characterized by the mixing up of things. The apple of wisdom teaches to distinguish them. But Molotov never had a bite of that fruit.

The sorry schematism of the present leaders is not altogether innocent; on the contrary, it practically strikes the revolution at every step. The Soviet-Chinese conflict created an urgent necessity for the mobilization of the masses against the war danger and for the defense of the Soviet Union. There is no doubt that on this road the Communist parties, even under the present conditions, could have attained considerable successes. For this it was necessary that in the propaganda the tremendous fact should speak for itself. But as if out of

Continued on Page 8