

# The Ultra-Left Policy on Right Dregs

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The following article represents chapter seven from the larger work of L. D. Trotsky entitled "Revolutionary Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch", which, in turn, makes up the third section (yet to be printed in full in English) of the document "The Criticism of the Draft Program of the Comintern" presented to the Vth Congress by the Bolshevik-Leninist Opposition led by Trotsky. The document was suppressed by the Stalin-Eukharin regime. The first two sections were published in brochure form by the Militant and copies may be obtained through the Militant. Chapter eight of the section "Revolutionary Strategy in the Imperialist Epoch" was published in the April 5th, 1930 issue of the Militant under the title, "The Period of Right Centrist-Down-Sliding in the C.I."

After the period of the storm tide of 1923 began the period of a long-lasting ebb. In the language of strategy this means an ordered retreat, rearguard battles, strengthening of the position within the mass organizations, re-examination of one's own ranks and cleansing and sharpening of the theoretical and political weapons. But adoption of this attitude was characterized as liquidatory. As in general with this, as well as with the other ideas of the Bolshevik lexicon in late years, the very greatest abuse was practiced. No longer did they teach and train, but only sowed dissension and confusion. Liquidationism signifies a renunciation of the revolution and endeavors to substitute the roads and methods of reformism for the road and methods of revolution. The policy of Lenin had nothing in common with liquidationism. Yet just as little did it have anything to do with an ignoring of the changes in the objective situation, or with the maintenance of the course of armed uprising with mere words, at a time when the revolution had already turned its back upon us, and a long-lasting road full of stubborn, systematic laborious work among the masses for the preparation of the Party for a new revolution lay before us.

## The German Defeat of 1923

When a man ascends a stairs he needs one kind of motion, but when he descends it—another. Most dangerous is such a situation in which a man puts out the light, raises his foot to ascend when there are three downward steps before him. A crash, injuries and dislocations are unavoidable thereby. The leadership of the Comintern in 1924 did everything to extinguish a criticism of the experiences of the German October, like all criticisms in general. It repeated stubbornly: The workers are immediately approaching the revolution—the stairs lead upwards. Is it then astonishing that the directives of the Fifth Congress applied in the revolutionary ebb had to lead to heavy political crashes and dislocations?

In No. 5-6 of the Information Bulletin of the German Opposition, March 1, 1927, it says:

"The greatest mistake of the Lefts at the Frankfurt Congress in the Spring of 1924, when they took over the leadership, consisted in not speaking relentlessly enough to the Party of the heaviness of the defeat of 1923; in not drawing the necessary deductions, in not showing the Party, soberly and unembellished, the tendencies of the relative stabilization of capitalism and indicating a corresponding program for the impending period with its struggles and slogans. This would surely have been possible, just as well as a correct and absolutely necessary sharp underscoring of the individual program demands."

These lines showed us already at that time that a part of the German Left, who participated during the Fifth Congress in the struggle against our fictitious "liquidationism", seriously understood the lessons of 1924-25. That made possible a further approach on the foundation of principle.

## The Bulgarian and Esthonian Adventures

The main year of the turn was the year 1924. Nevertheless the recognition of this ensuing brusque turn ("stabilization") followed only a year and a half

later. What is astonishing here, since the years 1924-25 were filled with Left adventures and putschist experiments? The Bulgarian terrorist adventure, like the tragic history of the Esthonian armed uprising, form an outbreak of despair evoked by the false orientation. The fact that these attempts to force the historical process by means of a putsch remained without critical investigation, led to a relapse in Canton towards the end of 1927. In politics not even the smallest mistakes are made unpunished, much less the big ones. And the greatest mistake of them all is when the mistake is veiled, when it is sought to suppress a criticism and a correct Marxist estimate of the mistake in mechanical ways.

We write no history of the Comintern for the last five years. We bring here only a factual illumination of two strategical lines in the fundamental stages of this period and at the same time—an illumination of the seclusion from the world of the draft program, for which all these questions do not exist at all. We cannot therefore, give here a description, however general, of the inextricable situation into which the Parties of the Comintern, placed between the directives of the Fifth Congress on the one hand and political reality on the other, had to land constantly. Of course, not everywhere were the contradictions solved through such deadly convulsions as was the case in Bulgaria and Esthonia in 1924.

## Falsification and Fiction Replace Facts and Truth

Yet always and everywhere the Parties felt themselves bound, gave no echo to the demands of the masses, went about with eye-flaps and stumbled. In the purely Party propaganda and agitation, in the work in the trade unions, on the parliamentary tribune—everywhere the Communists had to drag the decisions of the Fifth Congress behind them like a chain. Every single Party, one more, the other less, became a victim of the false positions of departure. They chased after phantoms, ignored completely the real process, transformed revolutionary slogans into howling phrases, compromised themselves in the eyes of the masses and lost all the ground under their feet. To crown all this, the press of the Comintern was robbed of every possibility, then as well as now, to gather, to arrange and to publish the facts and figures on the work of the Communist Parties in the recent years. The leadership of the epigones, after the defeats, mistakes and lack of success, preferred to accomplish the retreat and the accounting with extinguished lights.

Finding itself in a great and growing contradiction with the real factors, the leadership had to cling ever more to fictitious factors. The Executive Committee of the Communist International lost the ground under its feet and strove constantly to disclose revolutionary forces and signs where there weren't any. In order to balance itself, it had to cling to rotten ropes.

## The Illusions About the Peasantry

In the same measure that an obvious, growing swing to the Right was going on in the proletariat, there began in the Comintern the line of idealizing the peasantry, a wholly uncritical exaggeration of every symptom of its "break" with bourgeois society, an embellishment of every possible peasant pseudo-organization and a direct hochpappelung of "peasant" demagogues.

The task of a long and stubborn struggle of the proletarian vanguard against the bourgeois and peasant demagogy for influence upon the village elements most deprived of rights, was always more and more replaced by the hope for a direct and independent revolutionary role of the peasantry on a national as well as on an international scale.

In the course of the whole year of 1924, that is, the main year of the "stabilization", the Communist press was constantly publishing completely fantastic re-

ports on the strength of the lately founded Peasants International. Dombal, the representative of the latter, declared that the Peasants International, six months after its formation, already unites within itself a few million readers.

## Zinovieff on Raditch

There was enacted the scandalous incident of the leader of the Croatian "Peasants" Party, Raditch, who considered it advisable to show himself in Red Moscow in order thereby to strengthen his ministerial chances in White Belgrade. On July 9, 1924, Zinoviev, in his report before the Leningrad Party workers on the results of the Fifth Congress, told of a new "victory":

"At this moment an important turn

is taking place within the peasantry. You have all surely heard already of the Croatian Peasants Party of Raditch. Raditch is now in Moscow. There is a real people's leader... Behind Raditch stands united the entire poor and middle peasantry of Croatia... Raditch has now decided in the name of his Party to join the Peasants International. We consider this event very important... The building of the Peasants International is an extraordinarily great event. Some comrades did not believe that a big organization would grow out of this... Now we are getting a great auxiliary machine—the peasantry..." (Pravda, July 28, 1924.)

And so forth and more of the same.

## The LaFollette Maneuver

The leader LaFollette corresponded on the other side of the ocean to the "genuine people's leader", Raditch. The representative of the Comintern, Pepper, in order to set "the auxiliary machine"—the American farmers—into motion at an accelerated tempo, drew the young and weak American Communist Party into the senseless and shameless adventure of creating a "Farmer-Labor Party" around LaFollette so that American capitalism might be overthrown in the quickest way.

The glad tidings of the closeness of the revolution in the United States on the foundation of the farmers filled the speeches and articles of the official leaders of the Executive Committee of the Communist International at that time. In the sessions of the Fifth Congress, Kolarov reported:

"In the United States the small farmers have created a Farmer-Labor Party, which becomes ever more radicalized, comes closer to the Communists, and is being permeated by the idea of the creation of a workers' and peasants' government in the United States." (Pravda, July 6, 1924.)

So; neither more nor less.

From Nebraska came Green—one of the leaders of the LaFollette organizations—to the peasants' congress in Moscow. For some reason or other he "joined" in order, as is customary, to help along later on at a conference in St. Paul to strangle the Communist Party when it made the weak attempt to go over to the realization of the great plans of Pepper. The same Pepper who was councillor to Count Karolyi and who put on an extremely Left air at the Third Congress as a reformer of Marxism. The same Pepper who was one of those who butchered the revolution in Hungary.

Pravda of August 29, 1924 complained as follows:

"The American proletariat as a whole has not even risen to the consciousness of the necessity even of so conciliatory a Party as the English Labor Party is."

And about a month and a half before that, Zinoviev reported to the Leningrad Party workers:

"A few million farmers are being voluntarily or involuntarily pushed by the agrarian crisis all at once (!) to the working class." (Pravda, July 22, 1924.)

And Kolarov immediately added: "to a workers' and peasants' government."

## The Farmer-Labor Party and the Class

The press spoke continuously about the impending building of a Farmer-Labor Party in the United States for the overthrow of capital, "on a not purely proletarian, but a class" foundation. What the "not proletarian, but class" character was supposed to mean, no sage either on this or the other side of the ocean could point out. In the long run it was only a Pepperized edition of the idea of a "Joint workers' and peasants' Party" on which we will yet have occasion to speak in greater detail in connection with the lessons of the Chinese revolution. Here it is enough to establish that this reactionary idea of non-proletarian but class Parties arose entirely from the pseudo-Left policy of 1924, which, when it lost the ground from under its feet, clung to Raditch, LaFollette and the inflated figures of the Peasants International.

"We are at present witnesses,"—so proclaimed the academician of commonplaces, Millutin—"of an extraordinarily important and significant example of the splitting away of the peasant masses from the bourgeoisie, the coming forth of the peasantry against capitalism and an ever stronger consolidation of the united front of the peasantry and the working class in the capitalist countries in struggle against the capitalist system." (Pravda, July 27, 1924.)

In the course of the whole year of 1924, the press of the Comintern did not tire of telling about the general "Leftward trend of the peasant masses", as though something independent could be excepted from this, in most cases only apparent, Leftward trend of the peasants in a period of the open Rightward trend of the workers, the strengthening of the social democracy and the consolidation of the bourgeoisie.

We meet the same mistake in political vision towards the end of 1927 and the beginning of 1928 with regard to China. After every great and deep crisis, in which the proletariat suffers a decisive defeat for a long time, the stirring still continues for a long time among the semi-proletarian masses in city and country, like the circles in the water when a stone has fallen in. So that when the leadership ascribes an independent significance to these circles and contrary to the process within the working class, points to them as a symptom of an approaching revolution, we know that this is an infallible sign that the leadership is once more going towards adventures, as with the Esthonian or Bulgarian in 1924 or the Cantonese in 1927.

## The Course Toward the Kuomintang

During the same period of ultra-Leftism, the Chinese Communist Party is driven for several years into the Kuo Min T'ang, which is characterized by the Fifth Congress as a "friendly Party" (Pravda, July 25, 1924), without undertaking a serious attempt to investigate the class character of the latter. The idealizing of the "national revolutionary bourgeoisie" develops the greater. That is how the false Left course, with its eyes shut and burning with impatience, laid the foundation for the subsequent opportunism with regard to the East also. To give form to opportunism, Martinov was called upon, who was all the more a loyal councillor of the Chinese proletariat, having himself limped behind the petty bourgeoisie during the three Russian revolutions.

In the hunt after an artificial acceleration of the process not only Raditch, LaFollette, the mythical peasant millions of Dombal and even Pepper were clung to; a basically false perspective was also built up for England. The weaknesses of the English Communist Party gave birth at that time to the necessity of replacing it as quickly as possible by a more imposing factor. At that time arose the false estimate of the tendency of English trade unionism. Zinoviev gave us to understand that he counted upon the revolution finding an entrance, not through the narrow gateway of the British Communist Party, but through the broad gateway of the trade unions. The struggle of the Communist Party for the masses or-

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