

ARE THERE LIMITS TO THE FALL?

The plenum of the Executive of the C. I. which met toward the end of December passed a resolution ("Fascism, the War Danger, and the Tasks of the Communist Parties"). This resolution resembles nothing so much as an epitaph—

"The Policy of the German C. P. Was Correct!"

1. The resolution once again takes a solemn oath—evidently there are a few who do not believe it—that the policy of the German Communist Party was unconditionally correct before, during, and after the Hitler overturn. We are told, however, in a parenthesis, that Remmele and Neumann belong to the "right opportunists and defeatists in their appraisal of the perspectives of the German Revolution."

The Growth of Fascism

2. According to the resolution, "The growth of Fascism and its assumption of power in Germany, and in a number of other capitalist countries, imply a growth of the revolutionary crisis and increasing indignation of wide masses against the hegemony of capital."

The Social Democracy

3. "The social democracy—reads the resolution—aims only to fool and disarm the workers by denying the Fascization of bourgeois democracy and by counterposing in principle (!) the democratic countries to the countries with the Fascist dictatorship."

The Reasoning of Anarchism

The 13th Plenum offers us the classic reasoning of anarchism during the period of its primitive dumbness; Messrs. Kuusinen, Manuilsky and so forth are no anarchists; they place much too great a value upon the aid of the G. P. U. in the struggle against revolutionary Marxists. But by the logic of their mistakes, subtleties, and denials they have arrived at anarch-

ist philosophy: changes of political regimes are, if you please, without any "principled" meaning! No doubt, those Communists who are sitting not in Hotel de Luxe but in the concentration camp see these matters differently.

4. The resolution teaches us that the difference between social democracy and Fascism involves only the "forms and methods of Fascization". That's all! In contradistinction to Fascists, social Fascists "defend the preservation of parliamentary forms while putting through the Fascization of the bourgeois dictatorship". But on account of these "forms and methods", Fascism wages a struggle against the social democracy not for life but to death, murdering its leaders, seizing houses and funds, and committing workers to concentration camps. We know that the social democracy is a party which adapts itself to every political power, and which crawls on its knees even before the crowned representatives of the ruling classes; why is it, may we ask, that this utterly opportunist party which strives for Fascization becomes the victim of Fascism, instead of adapting itself to it? Is it only because of non-principled "forms and methods"?

A Provoking Idiocy

g. The social democracy—in the words of the resolution—continues to play the role of being the chief social (!) support of the bourgeoisie also in those countries where an open Fascist dictatorship exists. It is difficult to imagine an idiocy more provoking. The social democracy was driven from all its positions, entirely overwhelmed and trampled underfoot precisely because it had ceased to be of service as a support for the bourgeoisie. The place of the workers' bureaucracy that leaned upon the reformist organizations of the proletariat and received fat bribes from the hands of finance capital has been taken by Fascist thugs who lean upon the unbribeable petty bourgeoisie. The essence of the overturn consisted in supplanting one "social support" by another "social support"—if one were to use the terminology of the leaders of the Comintern: in reality what they have in mind is not social but political support.

Evidently, the wise-acres wish to express the idea that what Fascism leans upon is the lack of confidence of the workers in themselves; and that reformism bears the guilt for this abject condition of the proletariat. Historically, this is true. But it is also true that the Comintern was founded in 1919 in order to liquidate the fatal influence of the social democracy. Up to 1923 the Comintern fulfilled this task successfully. Since then, for the last 10 years, it has been systematically sliding downward.* By compromising the revolutionary methods in the consciousness of the toiling masses, the Comintern provided one of the most important conditions for the victory of Fascism. This does not, of course, imply that the Comintern, today, plays the role of being "the chief social support" of Hitler; but this does imply that to overthrow Hitler, it is necessary to finish with the Comintern.

A Phantom Universe

6. "But—the resolution comforts us—it (the social democracy) is already in process of decomposition in the majority of countries." In a brief communication of the 13th Plenum, the British Communist Party is advised to "redouble the struggle for the united front, attracting into it workers who still (!) follow the Labor party and the trade union bureaucracy". The little word "still" completely exposes

* Some of our critics have the following to say on this score: under Lenin, it appears, everything was fine, but after his death, everything went to the dogs; so where does Marxism come in here? The causes for the bureaucratic degeneration of the U. S. S. R. and the Comintern have been long since disclosed by us; no one has offered any other explanations; but the objective historical processes are realized through people; and specific personal influences can hasten or retard these processes. It remains an incontestable historical fact that Lenin's illness was widely utilized by the bureaucratic reaction and that it prepared a road for itself by means of the rabid struggle against "Trotskyism"

Summary of the 13th Plenum of the Executive of the C.I. by L. D. Trotsky

the phantom universe that the bureaucrats of the Comintern inhabit. The British Communist party is a sorry myth. And on the other hand, the party of the Laborites, covered again by betrayals, is preparing once again to assume power, for new betrayals. In 1926-1927, the Proletarian numbered a "million" workers in the ranks of the Left wing in the trade unions. Nothing was remained today of this movement. We shall not speak of the collapse of the German party which—alas!—will not be saved by the efforts of a few hundred or thousands self-sacrificing workers.

In France the split of the Socialist party did not help the decomposing Communist party a hair's breadth. The Unitary trade unions dropped from half a million to less than 200,000, while the reformist grew from 300,000 to 800,000. In Belgium the Communist party does not exist politically; the party of his Majesty's Minister, Vandervelde, still continues to rule over the workers' movement. In Austria the social democracy is consistently leading the proletariat to complete debacle, while the Communist party never emerged from its state of nonentity. Despite the fact that in Sweden and Denmark the social democracy has been in power for years, the official Communist parties in these countries remain ciphers.

In Norway the perfidious reformist Tranmel, who in 1923 had slightly less than did the orthodox section of the Comintern, received 45% of the votes of the population during the last elections while the Communist party has degenerated into a pitiful sect. In Switzerland the social democracy has been winning one canton after another while the party draws further and further back into obscurity. In Spain where the social democracy has borne the direct responsibility for strangling the revolutionary masses during the last few years, and where it has indubitably become weaker; and where anarchist-syndicalism had exposed its insufficiency on an unheard of scale, the Communist party failed to emerge from its state of nonentity. Everything seems to indicate that by passing over to the opposition side, the Spanish socialist party will regain its lost position once more.

The Polish Communist party, which as late as 1931 represented a major political force, has completely frittered away its influence over the masses. The leadership of the working class has returned back again into the hands of P. S. P. (Polish Socialist party). The reporter Kuusinen could have described eloquently how the Communist party of Finland passed into the limbo under his leadership. The resolution of the 13th plenum mentions only one country by name where it appears "the majority of the working class solidly follows the Communist party in serious ranks": this country is Bulgaria! But even in Bulgaria the workers did not react at all against the terroristic measures which were legislated against the Communist party. These are the facts.

Figures from the "Yearbooks"

7. The "yearbooks" of the Comintern, a few years ago, gave the following data relating to the numerical strength of the Communist parties:

Table with 3 columns: Country, Year, Members. Includes Germany (1921-1926), England (1921-1926), France (1921-1926), Czecho-Slovakia (1921-1926), Norway (1921-1926).

With 1926, the statistics of the Comintern, as well the publication of the yearbooks come to a dead stop: before an abyss, one had best shut one's eyes. But the real decline, which assumed an irresistible character in the course of the "Third Period", began only in 1925-1926. Outside of the U. S. S. R., where the party has been liquidated

by bureaucratic strangulation, it would be no exaggeration to say that the total number of members of the Comintern is now 1-10 of the number in the period of its apex. As regards the Proletariat, it would be necessary to cite a proportion even more depressing. The "Krestintern" (Peasant International) gave up its ghost long ago, and its very name has dropped out of circulation. The cited figures, however, far from provide a complete picture of the theoretical collapse of the Comintern, and of the decline of its revolutionary prestige.

Explaining the Facts

8. How does the Comintern itself explain these facts? It does not explain them but keeps mum on the subject. It makes a fleeting comment; only in speaking of the tasks of "mass work" of the Communist parties does the 13th Plenum remark that "their weakest side as yet (!)...is their work in enterprises and trade unions, that is, in the proletariat. Where is its strongest side? Evidently in the circus tent of Muenzenberg, and in the Moscow Hotel de Luxe. What do the words "as yet" signify? The period when the Communist parties were winning over trade unions and shop committees and when the Proletariat was an imposing power lies in the past and not the future. The policy is not retrieving the past. The policies of Zinoviev-Bucharin-Stalin-Manuilsky-Kuusinen ruined the Comintern.

9. Only a fraudulent, made-to-order optimism has remained of the strength that was frittered away. "It would be a right opportunist error—pronounces oracularly the 13th Plenum—not to see now the objective tendencies of the intensified ripening of the revolutionary crisis in the capitalist world". And what does "intensified" signify? Is it in comparison with that situation when Hitler had not as yet conquered? And did this catastrophe result from a lack of "the objective tendencies of a revolutionary crisis"?

Stalinism Assisted Hitler

Had the Comintern placed, from 1929, or even from 1930 or 1931, at the foundation of its policies the objective irreconcilability between social democracy and Fascism, or more exactly between Fascism and social democracy; if upon this, it had built a systematic and persistent policy of the united front, Germany, within a few months, would have been covered with a network of mighty committees of proletarian defense, potential workers' Soviets, that is. Had the government of the U. S. S. R. announced in time that it would view Hitler's coming to power as a preparation to strike Eastward; if by utilizing the favorable situation in Europe, it had at the same time taken the necessary preparatory military measures on the Western boundaries of the U. S. S. R., it would have imbued a double assurance into the ranks of German workers, and Germany would have had all the chances of becoming a Soviet republic. Europe and the entire world would have had a different aspect by now. Instead of this, the Stalinist Comintern, as well as the Stalinist diplomacy, assisted Hitler into the saddle from either side. After which Platitsky put his forefinger to his head and explained: The German workers surrendered to the executioner without a battle because... there was no revolutionary situation. Messrs. Strategists, how many "revolutionary situations" are you prepared to ruin? Fortunately your hands have become considerably shorter.

The revolutionary development

10. "The revolutionary development—teaches us the 13th Plenum—is at the same time both made difficult and is hastened by the Fascist madness of the bourgeoisie". To this equivocal phrase there is appended the following melancholy postscript "At the given moment the revolutionary hatred of the proletariat is growing in less open (!) forms in Germany". That's it! On the day after the Fascist overturn we had been promised a proletarian insurrection in the next few months, if not weeks, in fact it was postponed that it would coincide with October. Whoever refused to believe it was branded a counter-revolutionary. Subsequently in the plebiscite, Hitler received 43 million votes as against 3 million for

A Self-Indicting Recommendation

13. The E. C. recommends fighting for the right to strike, and the right to hold workers' meetings, in other words: for the democratic rights of the proletariat. To this must be added the defense of free elections and the inviolability of Communist deputies—and consequently the defense of parliamentarism itself against Fascist and Bonapartist assaults. In what a cowardly, confused, circumspect and hem-and-hawing manner do the ill-fated leaders of the Comintern approach the question of defending the democratic positions of the proletariat! These masked demi-concessions are entirely insufficient for a correct policy; but they more than suffice for an indictment against the Comintern.

Prospectives

15. And what of the prospectives? On this score, the resolution refers

us back again to the question whether the victory of Fascism speeds up the proletarian revolution. One could maintain with equal success that a shipwreck "speeds up" the voyage from Europe to America. The great importance of this question is patent: if Fascism—"speeds up", then it is permissible to repeat in France, Spain, Belgium, Holland, etc., those policies which were applied so successfully in Germany. One can have no doubts as to the happy results. All the more mercilessly must the Bolsheviki-Leninists drive the theory and practice of bureaucratic adventurism out of the ranks of the workers' movement!

It is incontestable that the proletariat crushed by Fascism will pass ultimately out of the deficit; but only at the cost of terrific sacrifices, equivalent to the political ruin of an entire generation. The struggle of Italy clearly attests this.

As against the Italian example the Plenum advances the following conception: "In contradistinction to the first wave of the Fascization of capitalist states, which occurred during the transition from a revolutionary crisis to a partial stabilization, the capitalist world today is passing from the end of capitalist stabilization to the revolutionary crisis..." The modicum of truth included in these words is lavishly diluted with lies. The victory of Hitler does not coincide at all with the transition from stabilization to crisis, because the unheard of world crisis began in 1929 and Hitler conquered some four years later, at the moment when the general social crisis of capitalism may again be mitigated for a time by a conjunctural revival. In any case, one thing is indubitable, the contradictions of capitalism, internal and international, have sharpened monstrously, and all bourgeois regimes, including the Fascist, are heading toward terrible experiences and tests.

New Revolutionary Situations

On this point the resolution remarks: "At any moment the turn may occur which would signify the transformation of the economic crisis into a revolutionary crisis." The idea itself is old enough; the Bolsheviki-Leninists explained long ago how and why our epoch is the epoch of political turns. But this idea is least of all applicable today precisely in relation to Germany. In every other country in Europe a revolutionary situation may arise sooner than in Germany where the proletariat requires a considerable period to recover from the havoc and the demoralization, to recuperate and to regain confidence in its own forces. Needless to say, the victory of the proletariat in any other country would immeasurably speed up the process of the revolutionary resurrection of Germany.

The center of gravity is not lodged, however, in the revolutionary order of countries. In whatever country it may occur, "the transformation of the economic crisis into a revolutionary one" does not quite decide the question. In order that the revolutionary crisis be transformed into the proletarian revolution and not into a new Fascist overturn, a correct policy is required and consequently a genuine revolutionary party. A new International is necessary.

16. There is no ground for taking pride in the fact that 15 years after the foundation of the 3rd International it is necessary, in a certain sense, to begin from the beginning. But the guilt for so great a slide backward lies upon the leadership of the Comintern. The past cannot be remedied. One must take his point of departure from things as they actually are in order to consolidate the international revolutionary vanguard on a new historic stage.

This is equally necessary both in the interests of the world revolution and for the salvation of the U. S. S. R. Today nothing threatens the world position of the first workers' state to such a degree as placing faith on the parasitic Comintern. In the moment of danger to the U. S. S. R. one can expect the same aid from Cachin and Jacquemotte as from Leon Blum and Vandervelde.

The New International

17. The plenum did not leave unnoticed the question of the New International either. After posing "the leftward trend of the social democratic workers" and the "dog-fights among the social-Fascist tops" that flow from this, the resolution takes note of the attempt to "concoct a new 2 1/2 International" out of the left splinters. The political thought of the leaders of the Comintern does not rise higher than the level of these cheap words. Yet before us is the question of a new stage in the world working class movement.

The influx of workers to the social democracy, coupled with the mortal danger of Fascism, knocks the camp of reformism out of its old equilibrium and engenders in it new currents and differentiations. The present growth of the social democracy only prepares for it. One must go to meet this crisis with a clear strategic plan and not dismiss

it with shallow witticisms upon the theme of "dog fights among the tops."

One must understand that the social democracy was never before caught in such a fearful vise as now. It is no accident that in the last minute before the crash, Staempler phoned the Soviet consulate seeking assistance against Hitler. The traditional division of labor between Blum and Vandervelde has turned into a split. Blum, who led the venomous struggle against Soviet "imperialism", nuds himself compelled to announce the French social democracy now leads its "struggle for peace" in a united front with the U. S. S. R. The Belgian social democracy advances the recognition of the U. S. S. R. as one of its chief slogans. Among Russian Menshevik tendencies are becoming stronger in favor of recognizing the Soviet state—as a workers' state. At the same time, an interest, partly simulated, partly sincere, is growing in the ranks of the left reformist bureaucracy in the ideas of the Bolsheviki-Leninists. Even among the Russian Mensheviks, "inhabitants" appear who discover the progressive sides of... "Trotskyism".

Estimating the Socialist Kitts

One would have to be an infant to accept all this in a lump for sound currency; one would have to be a Kuusinen not to see in it anything more than "dog fights among the social-Fascist tops." It is necessary to catch the squirming reformists at their own words, and to compel the reformist masses to the road of action—but the enemy with his own weapons.

Least of all does there flow from this perspective the courting of social democratic bureaucrats, the hushing up of their crimes, the exaggerating of their "services" and so forth. Such a policy is worthy of Left-Trotskyism which feels itself to be only the shadow of reformism and which fears to counterpose itself actually to reformism. He who seeks a road to the masses by courting reformist leaders will assuredly be cast away by the masses together with the compromised leaders. A consistent struggle against reformism! Not the slightest concession to Centrism!—These are the inscriptions on the banner of the 4th International.

18. Under the present conditions, the left flank of the social democracy would evolve quickly to the side of Communism, if the road were not barred by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Failing to understand the historical dialectic of the degeneration of the Comintern, many "left" groupings halt midway and entertain notions of merging the two Internationals, of creating an intermediate International, and similar reactionary phantasmagorias.

But alongside of these fence-sitting currents for whom there is in store an uneasy evolution with inevitable internal splits, there are being extruded even at this moment more progressive groupings which set as their task the creation of the Fourth International, that is, the re-establishment of the policies of Marx and Lenin on a new and higher historical level.

"Counter-Revolutionary"

The 13th plenum graciously takes note of this tendency also, "The hireling of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie, Trotsky, by his pathetic attempts to create a 4th International... seeks without success to halt the transition of the social democratic workers over to the side of Communism." It is quite in character for people who pass off the victory of counter-revolution as the "speeding up" of revolution, to pass off Marxists for counter-revolutionists. It is not worthwhile to dwell on it. There is another side to the matter which is more interesting. It appears that "the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie" (evidently there exists a revolutionary one also!) which has the social democracy for its chief "social support" and which, at the same time, entrusts to Fascism the blasting of its "chief support" although there is no "principled" difference between the two—this "counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie", it appears, requires over and above this—the 4th International. At any rate, there is consolation in the fact that despite the efforts of counter-revolutionists "the transition of social-democratic workers over to the side of Communism" not only is not being hindered but on the contrary is growing not by the day but by the hour... Only people who split upon the public opinion of the working class can lie so crudely and idiotically.

The decisions of the 13th plenum are permeated with the spirit of bureaucratic cynicism. The Comintern is dead for the revolutionary cause. Nor will it be revived by the VIII Congress which has been called at last for the "latter part" of the current year. The revolutionary movement will follow another course. The Bolsheviki-Leninists have the right to be proud on the fact that history has placed upon them the mission of being the new trail blazers.

—L. TROTSKY.
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