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N. SEVRYUGINA

# LESSONS OF HISTORY

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N. SEVRYUGINA

LESSONS  
OF  
HISTORY

From the History of Lenin's  
Struggle with the "Leftists"  
in the International Communist  
Movement (1918-1922)

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It absolutely essential for the international communist movement and especially for the young Communist and Workers' Parties to study Lenin's approach to the process of the formation of a Party of the new type, to study the history of the struggle against reformism, revisionism and petty-bourgeois "Left-Wing" opportunism.

Now it is particularly important to study carefully Lenin's struggle against reformism and revisionism, against dogmatism and "Left" phraseology.

#### NOT A NEW QUESTION

In his work "Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder" written in 1920 V. I. Lenin pointed out that "Bolshevism grew up, took shape, and became steeled in long years of struggle against *petty-bourgeois revolutionism*, which smacks of, or borrows, something from anarchism, and which falls short in anything essential of the conditions and requirements of a consistently proletarian class struggle." Up till the Great October Socialist Revolution, Bolshevism had to struggle against the petty-bourgeois "Socialist-Revolutionary" Party which was formed in Russia at the end of 1901 and the beginning of 1902. The "Socialist-Revolutionaries" did not recognize any class distinctions between the workers and the small proprietors, ignored the leading role of the proletariat in the revolution. Their views, actually, were an eclectic mixture of the ideas of Russian narodniks (from the Russian "narod"—people) and revisionists; they failed to understand the need for a strictly objective estimate of the class forces and their relationship; they recognized the tactics of individual terror. In 1902 in an article against the "Socialist-Revolutionaries" Lenin wrote

that their Party was extremely revolutionary in phrases and not revolutionary at all in the actual conceptions and in its relations with the revolutionary class. He sharply criticized the "Socialist-Revolutionaries'" inability to work steadily, persistently, as well as their ineptitude and reluctance to adapt themselves to altered circumstances.

The Bolsheviks had to struggle with the "Leftist" deviations within their own Party. This struggle was particularly intensified in 1908 over the question of the Party's participation in the reactionary bourgeois parliament and in the legal workers' societies, and again in 1918 during the discussions on the Brest-Litovsk Peace.

In 1908, after the revolution of 1905-1907 was defeated, a number of Bolsheviks committed themselves to the views of "Left" opportunism. Veiling themselves with revolutionary phrases the "Leftists" demanded that the Party refuse to utilize legal forms of work and that it recall its deputies from the reactionary parliament (hence, their name—"Otzovists" (from the Russian "otzvat"—recall). Lenin showed that the so-called "revolutionism" and "Leftism" of the Otzovists were merely the result of their bewilderment and helplessness when confronted with the difficult, painstaking, and complicated work of the Party under the reaction. Accusing the Otzovist supporters of anarchism in his work called "The Faction of Supporters of Otzovism and God-Building" in 1909, Lenin wrote: "In what lies the fallacy of the anarchists' argument? It lies in the fact that, owing to their radically incorrect ideas of the course of social development, they are unable to take into account those peculiarities of the concrete political (and economic) situation in different countries which determine the specific significance of one or another means of struggle *for a given period of time.*"

In 1918 the question of ending the war and signing a peace treaty gave rise to serious controversy within the Bolshevik Party and threatened to split it.

From the very first days of its existence the Soviet Government came forth as a brave and consistent champion of peace. Lenin considered it necessary to sign a peace treaty even on the most onerous terms in order to secure a respite and save Soviet power. At the same time a group of Communists, of leading members of the Party

(N. Bukharin, A. Lomov and others, a group called "Left Communists"), conducted a campaign against the conclusion of a peace treaty. Together with the Trotskyites (Trotsky's formula: "We end the war, we do not conclude peace, and we demobilize the army" was also, in fact, nothing but a negation of peace as a compromise with imperialism), the "Leftists" denied the necessity of saving the power of the Soviets for the sake of the future development of the world revolution. The "Left Communists" considered it possible even to forfeit Soviet power since the conclusion of peace with the German imperialists was, in their opinion, a shameful deal with imperialism, a departure from the fundamental principles of internationalism. They declared that the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty stripped Soviet power of all its revolutionary substance, turned it into "pure formalism" and made it quite unnecessary therefore. The "Leftists" recognized only one set of tactics when dealing with imperialists—the tactics of offensive; though entirely feeble they called for a fight, and rejected the possibility that the proletariat might manoeuvre or enter into provisional compromises.

Lenin called the position of the "Left Communists" "strange and monstrous". He pointed out that their views resulted from their want of belief in the possibilities of the socialist revolution's victory in the country, from their lack of faith in the strength of the working class of Russia. Both the "Left Communists" and the Trotskyites insisted that the Party adopt a policy that in practice could lead only to the destruction of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin characterized the theories of the "Left Communists" as a complete break with Marxism, as "an itch for revolutionary phrases". In his article "On Revolutionary Phrases" he wrote: "We must fight against revolutionary phrases, so that no one will one day be able to say such a bitter truth about us as that 'revolutionary phrases about the revolutionary war undid the Revolution'."

The "Left Communists" and the Trotskyites considered that the gains of October could be preserved only if the world socialist revolution were victorious, and that this revolution should be "pushed on" by a war with international imperialism. Lenin's criticism of this position was slashing: Revolutions are not made to order, they are not timed to coincide with any special event, they ripen in the

process of historical development and break out when the ground for them has been prepared by the concurrence of a number of internal and external circumstances. The socialist revolution is the result of the objective development of class contradictions. "There are people," Lenin wrote, "who believe that a revolution can break out in a foreign country to order, by agreement. These people are either mad, or they are provocateurs. We have been through two revolutions in the past 12 years. We know that revolutions cannot be made to order, or by agreement; they break out when tens of millions of people realize that it is impossible to live in the old way any longer" (Speech in Reply to the Debate on the Current Situation at the IVth Conference of Trade Unions and Factory Committees of Moscow, June 28, 1918).

In his article "Left-Wing Childishness and Petty-Bourgeois Mentality" published in May 1918 Lenin showed that the "Left Communists" were imbued with the psychology of the declassed petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, that they had failed to understand the substance of the transition from capitalism to socialism, the nature and aims of the proletarian state. "The flaunting of high-sounding phrases is characteristic of the declassed petty-bourgeois intellectuals," he wrote. "The organized proletarian Communists will certainly punish them for this 'habit' with nothing less than derision and expulsion from all responsible posts." Lenin said that the "Left Communists" were actually doing a great deal of harm, since their policy, had it been adopted, would have benefited only the bourgeois counter-revolution.

#### THE PETTY-BOURGEOIS ESSENCE OF "LEFT" OPPORTUNISM

In his works Lenin repeatedly exposed the petty-bourgeois essence of "Left" opportunism.

In "Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder" he wrote: "For Marxists, it is well established theoretically—and the experience of all European revolutions and revolutionary movements has fully confirmed it—that the small owner, the small master... who under capitalism always suffers oppression and, very often, an incredibly acute and rapid deterioration in his conditions,

and ruin, easily goes to revolutionary extremes, but is incapable of perseverance, organization, discipline and steadfastness. The petty-bourgeois 'driven to frenzy' by the horrors of capitalism is a social phenomenon which, like anarchism, is characteristic of all capitalist countries. The instability of such revolutionism, its barrenness, its liability to become swiftly transformed into submission, apathy, fantasy, and even a 'frenzied' infatuation with one or another bourgeois 'fad'—all this is a matter of common knowledge."

In countries where the percentage of small proprietors is predominant the difference between a proletarian and a petty-bourgeois revolutionary inevitably comes to light. A petty-bourgeois revolutionary hesitates and wavers at every turn of events, he passes from violent revolutionism to bitter hatred of the true, steadfast Marxists. On a petty-bourgeois social basis, Lenin wrote, "socialism cannot be built. The only class that can lead the toiling and exploited masses is the class that unswervingly follows its path without losing courage and without giving way to despair even at the most difficult, arduous and dangerous stages. Hysterical spurts are of no use to us. What we need is the steady march of the iron battalions of the proletariat" ("The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government"). The true revolutionary knows that a retreat is necessary when there are not enough forces, that the struggle must be renewed again and again when sufficient strength has been accumulated. Lenin demanded the capacity for steady and stubborn work, the ability to apply the basic principles of theory and tactics to altered circumstances. He severely criticized those people who regarded "slogans", not as a practical conclusion from a class analysis and assessment of a particular moment in history, but as a charm with which a Party or a tendency has been provided once and for all" ("Some Features of the Present Collapse"). Such people, he said, do not understand that the inability to adapt their tactics to the differences between fully defined and as yet undefined situations is the result of political inexperience and shortsightedness. A Marxist, wrote Lenin, "must take cognizance of actual facts, of the precise facts of *reality*, and must not cling to the theory of yesterday which, like all theories, at best, only outlines the main and general trend

and only approximately covers the complexities of life" ("Letters on Tactics"). He repeatedly speaks of Marx's admonition to revolutionaries: not to outstrip the process of revolutionary development, not to transfer revolutionary traditions and methods from one period to another, different from the preceding one. In his work "Against Boycott. Notes of a Social-Democratic Publicist", written in 1907, Lenin noted: "But it is just because we cherish this concern for revolutionary traditions that we must vigorously protest against the view that by using one of the slogans of a particular historical period the essential conditions of that period can be restored. It is one thing to preserve the traditions of the revolution, to know how to use them for constant propaganda and agitation and for acquainting the masses with the conditions of a direct and aggressive struggle against the old regime, but quite another thing to repeat a slogan divorced from the sum total of the conditions which gave rise to it and which ensured its success and to apply it to essentially different conditions."

Lenin warned against an exaggeration of revolutionism, against the danger of forgetting the limits and conditions in which revolutionary methods are appropriate and can be successfully employed. "Genuine revolutionaries," he wrote in 1921, "have come a cropper most often when they began to write 'revolution' with a capital R, to elevate 'revolution' to something almost divine, to lose their heads, to lose the ability to reflect, weigh and ascertain in the coolest and most dispassionate manner at what moment, under what circumstances and in which sphere it is necessary to act in a revolutionary manner, under what circumstances and in which sphere it is necessary to apply reformist action" ("The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism").

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union under Lenin's guidance was especially vigilant against the penetration of petty-bourgeois conceptions and traditions into the ranks of the working class. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union from the very beginning has been a Party of the working class connected with large-scale industry. And every working-class Party must stand firmly on the positions of scientific socialism, must unswervingly follow the principles and ideas of Marx and Engels.

*"Our theory is the theory of development and not a dogma..." (Engels).*

Marxists have always risen against any attempts to turn revolutionary theory into a collection of dry formulas and dogmas. In 1899 Lenin wrote: "We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists *must* develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life" ("Our Program").

All of Lenin's practical activities are an example of the complete understanding of the spirit of Marxism, a teaching that is ever alive, ever in the process of development, that demands unswerving loyalty to the principles, but does not recognize any stereotype or dogma. Lenin rejected all attempts to hide behind the letter of Marxism. He emphasized that Marxism was unconditionally hostile to any and every abstract formula and doctrinaire prescription.

Lenin taught the Parties of the revolutionary class to master every form and aspect of public activity with no exceptions whatsoever, to be prepared for the swiftest change in the methods of struggle. It is wrong to ignore, not to see that the new content of the struggle will force its way through any form, and first of all—through the old forms; and the Party must therefore learn to supplement one form of struggle with another in the quickest and most decisive manner, to substitute one for the other, to adapt its tactics to this change of forms. Unless we are able to master all means of warfare, Lenin said, we stand the risk of suffering great, perhaps even decisive, defeat.

#### THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL AND THE STRUGGLE WITH THE "LEFTISTS"

The Great October Socialist Revolution accelerated the consolidation of the proletariat's revolutionary forces. Under its influence the revolutionary movement in the countries of Europe, Asia and Africa grew irresistibly.

Communist Parties were formed in many countries during the revolutionary struggle. In November 1918 the



Hungarian Communist Party appeared, in December—the Communist Parties of Germany and Poland, in May 1919—the Communist Party of Bulgaria, in September—two Communist Parties in the United States, in August 1920—the Communist Party of England, in December—the Communist Party of France, in January 1921—the Italian Communist Party, in May—the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, in July 1922—the Communist Party of Japan.

In August 1921 Lenin wrote his "Letter to German Communists" in which he said: "We have an army of Communists all over the world. It is still poorly trained and badly organized. It would be extremely harmful to forget this truth or to be afraid of admitting it. This army must be trained in a practical manner with the greatest caution, testing ourselves strictly, studying the experience of our own movement; this army must be properly taught, properly organized, tried in all sorts of manoeuvres, in a variety of engagements, in offensive operations and retreats. Without this long and stern training, victory will be impossible."

The drafting of correct, Marxist strategy and tactics was an aim of primary importance to the young Communist Parties. An extremely significant part in this work was played by the Communist International.

The Communist International was founded in 1919 at the initiative and under the guidance of V. I. Lenin. The Comintern became the leading center of the world revolutionary movement, and trained the new revolutionary Parties of the working class in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism.

Lenin not only followed the development of the international workers' movement intently; his theoretical works, his advice helped the working class of the capitalist countries to find the correct road.

The great, patient and steadfast struggle that Lenin carried on to strengthen the revolutionary Marxist Parties of the new type, to have them work out correct Marxist strategy and tactics, influenced the entire history of the Communist Parties' development, the history of the Communist International, and brought about the consolidation and growth of these Parties.

Lenin resolutely fought against the penetration of opportunist and centrist elements into the Communist International and warned the young Communist Parties of the dangers of "Leftism". He considered it imperative to heal this "infantile disorder" as quickly as possible.

The basis of the "Leftist" mistakes the young Communist Parties made lay in their complete disregard of the concrete analysis of the situation, in a subjective appraisal of events, in the attempt to skip the unpassed stages in the course of the struggle. All this drove the supporters of "Leftist" views to adventurous actions. These "Leftist" views on the attitude of the Party towards the class and the masses, on the participation of Communists in reactionary trade unions and in bourgeois parliaments, on compromises and agreements with other Parties were deeply erroneous.

One of the first documents that Lenin wrote against the "Leftist" mistakes in the Communist Parties of capitalist countries was his letter to Sylvia Pankhurst (August 28, 1919). S. Pankhurst asked Lenin for his opinion on the problem of parliamentary work. In reply Lenin said that the legality and necessity of criticizing parliamentarism, its reactionary substance in comparison with Soviet power, should not mean a refusal to participate in parliamentary struggle. "... Critics of parliamentarism in Europe and America," wrote Lenin, "when they belong to the anarchists or anarcho-syndicalists, very often prove to be wrong, since they reject *any form of participation* in elections or parliamentary activity. The reason for this is simply insufficient revolutionary experience." A true revolutionary Party connected with the masses, he continued, "will be able to control its own parliamentarians, and turn them into real revolutionary propagandists."

This same idea was expressed by Lenin in a conversation he had with William Gallacher during the meetings of the Second Congress of the Comintern. "Lenin covered one eye with his hand and looked at me intently," writes Gallacher in his memoirs, "I would like to ask you a question," he said, "you say that the bourgeoisie successfully manages to bribe everyone who is elected to parliament. Now if the workers of England had sent *you* to parliament to represent their interests would you become corrupted?" I looked at him with surprise and muttered:



'What a strange question!' 'Comrade Gallacher,' Lenin continued, 'that is a very important question. Would you permit the bourgeoisie to bribe you?' 'No,' I replied, 'I cannot allow anyone or anything to corrupt me.'

"Lenin had been leaning forward, looking at me. When he heard my answer, he straightened and, smiling broadly, said: 'Comrade Gallacher, you must make the workers send you to parliament. Then you will show them how an incorruptible revolutionary works there. Show them how to utilize parliament in a revolutionary way.'

"In the course of our conversation I was forced to admit that we had made a serious mistake when we left the working class of England to the mercy of MacDonal, Henderson and Co." (William Gallacher. Revolutionary Socialism in Scotland and the October Revolution. From the collection "The Great October Socialist Revolution and the World Liberation Movement", Vol. 2, M. 1958).

In autumn 1919 Lenin received the news that the infantile disorder of "Leftism" had appeared in the Communist Party of Germany.<sup>1</sup> The organizations that had formed the "Left" opposition at the Heidelberg Congress were expelled from the CPG.

When Lenin received the news that the Heidelberg Congress had actually expelled the "Left" opposition from the Communist Party, hoping that the revolutionary proletarian elements would now correct their mistakes, he wrote his "Letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany Regarding the Split" (October 28, 1919). In this Lenin said that if there were an agreement

<sup>1</sup> The Constituent Congress of the Communist Party of Germany (December 30, 1918—January 1, 1919) along with a number of correct decisions adopted a completely wrong resolution—to boycott the elections to the National Assembly. Some of the participants of the Congress considered that the division of workers' organizations into political and trade unionist should be done away with, and that Communists should not be allowed to work in reactionary trade unions. At the Second Congress of the CPG held in October 1919 in Heidelberg the "Leftists" put up a fight, and a serious struggle took place between the majority and the "Left" opportunist opposition, especially strong in the Hamburg section of the CPG. The leaders of the opposition G. Laufenberg and F. Wolfheim instead of drawing the appropriate conclusions from the defeat of the German revolution and striving to consolidate the CPG, to strengthen its influence on the masses,—preached anarcho-sindicalist ideas and worked out a petty-bourgeois,

on the basic issues a split might be avoided. From the international point of view restoration of unity in the CPG was both possible and necessary. In his letter "To the Communist Comrades Who Belonged to the United 'Communist Party of Germany' and Have Now Formed a New Party" Lenin wrote that the unity of the German Communists must be restored. He pointed out that the differences would be eliminated in the course of the struggle against the really formidable enemy, the bourgeoisie, and its servants, the Kautskyites. But in spite of Lenin's efforts to prevent a split in the CPG the "Leftists" continued to preach anti-Marxist views and in April 1920 formed the Communist Workers' Party of Germany. The Frankfurt group of German "Leftists" published a brochure "The Split in the Communist Party of Germany" in which the problem of the interrelations of leaders, party, class and masses was treated from an erroneous, anti-Marxist point of view; the theory of negating the work of Communists in reactionary trade unions was advanced once again, and the possibility and necessity of Communists' participating in reactionary parliaments was rejected, as were all compromises and agreements with other Parties in general.

In Italy, the faction of "Communist-Boycottists" ("Comunista astensionista") led by A. Bordiga, whose position on the question of the expulsion of reformists from the Party was quite correct, committed a number of

nationalist programme of so-called "National Bolshevism". They declared that the Party had ceased to be a necessity to the proletariat, that it should be replaced by a General Workers' Union, which would sever connections with the reformist trade unions and unite all the revolutionary workers. The Heidelberg Congress deprived the "Leftist" opposition of the right to participate further in its work—until the position of those who elected them was clarified. The question of the expulsion of the opposition was to be settled after its discussion in the Party organizations. However, the fact that the "Leftists" were deprived of the right to participate in the work of the Congress actually meant expulsion (among them were a number of delegates from the largest sections of the Party—Hamburg, Berlin, Bremen), and it proved that the Party had already begun to overcome the sectarian mistakes that were evident at the Congress. The Heidelberg Congress approved the theses on parliamentarism and on the trade unions. These correctly pointed out that to win over the working masses, the Party must use the bourgeois parliament and work in reformist trade unions.

gross mistakes. According to Bordiga the Party should have been merely a small group of "pure" Communists; Bordiga did not entrust the Party with the task of winning the majority of the working class and of gaining influence over the masses; he stood for non-participation in parliament.

The Communist Party of Austria was extremely weak during the first years of its existence. Its ultra-revolutionary "Left" phraseology, its pseudo-radicalism were merely a screen behind which it attempted to hide its tendency to avoid steady, stubborn work inside the working class, to convince the workers of the necessity to win the power, and explain the possible forms of this power.

In Holland the "Leftist" conceptions were propagated by G. Gorter's group. In issue No. 1 of the "Bulletin of the Provisional Bureau in Amsterdam" this group published their theses on parliamentarism which rejected parliamentary methods of struggle.

Thus, the mistakes of the "Leftists" in the international communist movement by the end of 1919 and the beginning of 1920 were very grave. Though these mistakes took on various forms in different countries, they threatened to grow into a serious danger for the Communist Parties. Had these mistakes been aggravated, some of the Communist Parties would have run the risk of turning into sectarian groups isolated from the masses and unable to lead the proletarian revolutionary movement. It became imperative to establish a firm Marxist-Leninist basis for the world communist movement, to raise the theoretical level of the young Communist Parties, to give them a correct tactical guidance. The "Left" Communists had to be told the bitter truth. And this had to be done as quickly and plainly as possible, since among the "Leftists" there were many revolutionary-minded workers, whose "Leftism" was a response to the treacherous behaviour of the social-democratic and trade union leaders. As a rule the mistakes of the "Leftists" were merely the result of their inexperience; they very often expressed the views of young Communists, who were only just coming over to Communism. "People who can give expression to this temper of the masses," wrote Lenin, "who can rouse such temper which is very often dormant, unrealized and unroused among the masses, must be valued and every assistance

must be given them and at the same time we must openly and frankly tell them that temper *alone* is not enough to lead the masses in the great revolutionary struggle, and that such and such mistakes that very loyal adherents of the cause of the revolution are about to commit, or are committing, may damage the cause of the revolution" ("Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder").

#### THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL AND LENIN'S BOOK "LEFT-WING' COMMUNISM, AN INFANTILE DISORDER"

Lenin's book "Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder" came out in June 1920, just before the Second Congress of the Communist International. This book became an invaluable weapon in the struggle for consistent communist tactics, against political sectarianism and doctrinairism.

One of the most important problems discussed in the book is that of the role of the Party in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, of its place in the system of proletarian dictatorship. Lenin pointed out that "without an iron Party tempered in the struggle, without a Party enjoying the confidence of all that is honest in the given class, without a Party capable of watching and influencing the mood of the masses, it is impossible to conduct such a struggle successfully." The views that Lenin expressed in his book on the dictatorship of the proletariat and the leading role of the Party became the basis of the programmes developed by the revolutionary Marxist Parties.

In Lenin's book particular attention was given to the struggle against "Left" Communists. Citing examples from the history of the Bolshevik Party, the practice of the entire communist movement Lenin exposed the harm and adventurism of the "Leftists'" position, showed that the proletarian Party would not be able to become a leading force in the working class, unless it waged a ruthless struggle against "Right" opportunism on the one hand, and "Left" doctrinairism and sectarianism on the other, unless it defeated them ideologically.

Lenin taught the Communists that to be victorious they had to win over the masses and lead them to the

revolution, that this could not be accomplished without the liquidation of "Left" doctrinairism, without complete elimination of its mistakes. Communists had to work among and with the masses, never fencing themselves off from them, no matter what reactionary organizations they entered. Communists had to be able to differentiate between the reactionary leadership of trade unions and the rank-and-file trade union masses. Lenin especially emphasized that Communists had to work in bourgeois parliaments.

The Second Congress of the Communist International approved the tactics of Communists' participation in parliamentary elections and in the work of parliaments.

Chapter VIII of Lenin's book is called "No Compromises?" Here Lenin showed complete bankruptcy of the "Leftists'" theses that a revolutionary proletarian Party could and should not allow any compromises or agreements with other Parties or groups. "Naive and utterly inexperienced people imagine that it is sufficient to admit (permissibility of) compromises *in general* in order to obliterate the dividing line between opportunism, against which we wage and must continue to wage a determined struggle, and revolutionary Marxism, or communism. But if these people do not yet know that *all* dividing lines in nature and in society are mutable and conventional to a certain extent—they cannot be assisted otherwise than by a long process of training, education, enlightenment and by political and everyday experience." Lenin wrote that to accept battle at a time when it is obviously advantageous to the enemy is not revolutionarism, but a crime and that "the political leader of the revolutionary class who is unable 'to tack, manoeuvre, and compromise' in order to avoid an obviously disadvantageous battle, is absolutely worthless." Lenin taught that each compromise had to be considered from a concrete, historical point of view, after careful appraisal of the correlation of forces and of the practical possibilities of the struggle. Marxists could not reject those compromises which strengthened the revolutionary positions of the working class. Through every compromise, however, the revolutionary Party had to preserve absolute loyalty to its principles, to its class and to its final goal—communism. The views and conclusions of Lenin's book "Left-Wing' Communism, an

Infantile Disorder" were taken as the basis for the decisions adopted by the Second Congress of the Comintern.

The work of the Second Congress of the Communist International was of great importance to all Communist Parties. The Congress developed the programme, tactical and organizational principles of the Communist Parties and marked a significant stage in the consolidation of the international forces of the working class. The Second Congress and the publication of "Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder" were an important step in the progress of Marxist-Leninist theory, in the development of the strategy and tactics of proletarian Parties under new historical conditions. Lenin's book served as a powerful weapon in the struggle for the establishment of the principles of revolutionary Marxism, for getting the understanding of the fundamentals of communist strategy and tactics in the young Communist Parties; this book helped many workers who were carried away by "ultra-revolutionary" phrases to recognize the true path to communism.

**"IF THE CONGRESS DOES NOT LAUNCH A DETERMINED  
OFFENSIVE AGAINST SUCH MISTAKES AND "LEFTIST"  
ABSURDITIES, THE WHOLE MOVEMENT WILL  
BE DOOMED" (LENIN)**

Despite the enormous amount of work Lenin did before the Second Congress of the Comintern and at its meetings, the "Leftist" mistakes in the Communist Parties were not overcome completely. Shortly after the Congress, on August 15, 1920, Lenin was compelled to write his "Letter to the Austrian Communists", as the Austrian Communist Party had decided to boycott the parliamentary elections. The letter was published in Vienna in the communist paper "Die Rote Fahne" on August 31, 1920. In this letter Lenin called the position of the Austrian Communists a mistake and urged them to declare their open and forthright recognition of international proletarian discipline. "We are proud," he wrote, "that we settle the great problems of the workers' struggle for emancipation by submitting to the international discipline of the revolutionary proletariat, taking due account of the

experience of the workers in different countries, reckoning with their knowledge and their will, and thus giving effect in deeds... to the unity of the workers' class struggle for communism throughout the world."

The "Leftist" trends still remained in the Communist Party of Germany in spite of the expulsion of the "Leftists".<sup>1</sup>

After the Second Congress of the Communist International G. Gorter, a Dutch Communist, published a brochure entitled "Open Letter to Comrade Lenin" ("Offener Brief an den Genossen Lenin. Eine Antwort auf Lenins Broschüre 'Der Radikalismus eine Kinderkrankheit des Kommunismus'"). Gorter accused Lenin of opportunism. He said: "There are two trends in Western Europe: radicalism and opportunism. You, comrade Lenin, support opportunism... From a Marxist leader you are turning into an opportunist leader."

At the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921 it became clear that the rate of development of the world revolution had slowed down. This brought about the acute necessity of the work with the masses and of having a firm policy. A number of events that took place during this period proved that the young Communist Parties were still weak, that they were yet unable of capturing decisive influence over the working class and making it follow them. The winning over the masses deceived by the centrist phraseology of the leaders of the Second and Two-and-a-Half Internationals was becoming more and more important. "Capitalism's main support in the industrially developed countries," Lenin pointed out, "is that section of the working class which is organized in the Second and Two-and-a-Half Internationals" (Speech Delivered at the Third Congress of the Communist International on the Tactics of the Russian Communist Party, July 5, 1921). Events

<sup>1</sup> In December 1920, at the Joint Congress of the CPG and the Left wing of the independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, the "Leftist" sectarian tendencies were quite evident when the Congress proclaimed that the Party was capable of rising to carry out the revolution by itself. The "Manifesto to the German and International Proletariat" adopted by the Congress said that "the Communist Party of Germany had enough strength to begin independent actions when circumstances called for these" ("Bericht über die Verhandlungen des Vereinunsparteitages der USDP (linke) und KDP (Spartakusbund) abgehalten in Berlin von. 4, bis 7 December 1920", Berlin, 1921, S. 232.)

also proved that at that time the Communist Parties did not yet know how to combine defensive and offensive tactics. This became especially evident after the defeat of the proletariat in Italy, Czechoslovakia and Germany in 1920-1921.

Another reason for these defeats of the proletariat apart from the treachery of the top leadership of the Social-Democrats who had managed to retain their influence on the majority of the working class, was the weakness of the young Communist Parties. The "infantile disorder of 'Left-Wing' communism" had not passed; on the contrary, it became more dangerous in the changed situation at the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921. By the Third Congress of the Comintern "Leftism" had become a serious obstacle on the road of the proletariat to the achievement of its final goals. It pushed the Communist Parties to sectarianism and adventurism and began to bring direct and practical harm to the communist movement. The very existence of Communist Parties as the Parties of a new type and the pattern of their future development were at stake. The theory of Marxism-Leninism and the practice of the Russian and international revolutionary movement called for an immediate intensification of the struggle against "Leftism".

In 1922, in his article "Notes of a Publicist (On Ascending a High Mountain; the Harm of Despondency; the Utility of Trade; Attitude Towards the Mensheviks, etc.)", Lenin wrote of his position at the Third Congress of the Communist International: "At that Congress I was on the extreme Right flank. I am convinced that this was the only correct position, for a very large (and influential) group of delegates headed by many German, Hungarian and Italian comrades, occupied an immoderately and incorrectly Left position, and too frequently, in place of a sober appraisal of the situation which was not very favourable for immediate and direct revolutionary action, staged the vigorous waving of small red flags." Lenin's works and numerous recollections written by contemporaries enable us to have a good and detailed picture of Lenin's struggle with the "Leftists" at the Third Congress of the Comintern.

Before the Congress Lenin talked to the delegates, carefully studied the situation in different Communist Par-

ties, paying special attention to the communist movement in Germany. He did this because the struggle inside the United Communist Party of Germany had become especially acute a few months before the Congress and during its sessions. The question of the March uprising of the German proletariat took a prominent place at the Congress. During the March uprising the UCPG made a number of grave mistakes. Instead of warning the workers against provocations, the leaders of the UCPG displayed complete indecision and were unable to give the working class correct and clear orientation.

After the defeat of the uprising the Central Committee of the UCPG put forward the so-called "theory of the offensive". According to this a Party should carry on an offensive without due consideration of both objective provisions for a revolutionary drive and the available support of the broad masses of the working classes.

The "theory of the offensive" found adherents among the "Leftists" in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Austria, France. Before the Third Congress of the Comintern and at the Congress itself the followers of the "theory of the offensive" tried to have it adopted as the basis for the resolution on the tactics of the Communist International.

Lenin received the delegates of the UCPG to the Congress and had several discussions with them. On June 15, 1921 at the session of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, Lenin made a speech against the representatives of the "Left-Wing" in the UCPG. His criticism was obviously slashing. In his recollections F. Gekkert tells of Lenin's talks with the German delegates, of the dressing-down he gave them. Lenin said: "The provocation was as clear as daylight. And what did you do? Instead of mobilizing the workers for defence against the attacks of the bourgeoisie, you invented the absurd 'theory of the offensive'..." ("Recollections of V. I. Lenin").

Lenin taught that it would be injurious and absurd to develop the tactics of the Communist International on the assumption of an easy victory, that it would be harmful and foolish to say that the period of propaganda was over and the time for action was ripe, as the "Leftists" did. Tactics had to be based on a different founda-

tion—on the steady and systematic winning over of the majority of the working class in general, and the old trade unions, in particular.

On June 17, Lenin spoke at the enlarged meeting of the Executive Committee of the Comintern which was discussing the question of the French Communist Party. Lenin's brilliant speech put an end to the waverings of many delegates. He convinced some hesitant delegates that the "theory of the offensive" threatened to bring the heaviest defeats to the parties, and gave the "Right-opportunist" elements in the Comintern a dangerous weapon. (V. Kolarov. "Lenin at the Third Congress of the Communist International", "Recollections of V. I. Lenin".)

Lenin paid a great attention to the formation of a united front against imperialism. The "Leftists" did not realize the necessity of reorganizing the entire work of the Communist Parties to win over the masses, which in the main still followed the Social-Democratic and Centrist Parties, of organizing a united front against the attacks of the imperialist reaction. This lack of understanding could lead only to the isolation from the masses, to sectarianism. Lenin said that until the Communists had won over the greater part of the workers who still followed the centrists, it was dangerous and harmful to play the "Leftist" game.

Lenin's exposition of his views before the Congress and later at its sessions was of tremendous importance for the theoretical and political development of the Communists, taught them to be high-principled and flexible.

"The Congress took Lenin's side. As far as I remember, even the initiators of the 'Leftist' amendments did not muster enough courage to vote for their own proposals," wrote O. V. Kuusinen in the article called "How Lenin Cured 'the Infantile Disorder of Left-Wing Communism'".

The Third Congress of the Communist International unanimously adopted the resolution on tactics. In accordance with the Leninist tactics of winning over the majority of the working class, the Third Congress set the Communist Parties of every country the practical and urgent task—to win the masses. The slogan "To the Masses!" given by the Third Congress was the beginning of the tactics of the united front.

## THE UNITED FRONT TACTICS

The aim and the substance of the tactics of the united front was—to bring the broadest masses into the struggle against capitalism.

Acting on the assumption that all labourers have common interests, the Communist Parties attempted to arrange for joint actions with the workers affiliated with other Parties, to overcome the split in the working-class movement. The task of the Communist Party after taking the lead in the struggle was to prove that it was the Communist Party alone which was the most consistent champion of the interests of the working class.

The slogan "To the Masses!", the tactics of the united front not only saved the young Communist Parties from a defeat from the advancing bourgeoisie, they gave them the possibility to grow and develop under the conditions of the capitalist offensive.

Both before and after the Third Congress Lenin carefully studied every manifestation of unity of action in the world revolutionary movement, noticed and supported every trace of it. In July 1921, stressing the necessity for the workers to unite in their struggle against capitalism, no matter what Party they belonged to, he wrote: "If the 'Leftists' are against this, they must be brought to reason." Lenin asked for the materials on the Rome events of July 1921 when during a demonstration against fascism the workers of all other Parties joined the Communists. Lenin taught the Communists of every country "to penetrate into closed premises, where the workers were being influenced by representatives of the bourgeoisie". In his article "We Have Paid Too Much" published on April 9, 1922, Lenin remarked: "The Communists who refuse to understand this and do not want to learn how to do this cannot hope to win the majority among the workers; at all events, they hinder and retard the work of winning this majority. And for Communists, and all genuine adherents of the workers' revolution, this is absolutely unpardonable."

The young revolutionary elements in the Parties, who thought that the only correct way to act was to break through all obstacles, that it was better to perish than to manoeuvre and wait for more favourable situation, disapproved of the tactics of the united front. The "Right"

elements, on the other hand, considered these tactics to be a bridge leading to Social Democracy. The Fourth Congress of the Communist International waged a decisive struggle against both of these tendencies.

A study of the history of the international communist movement, of Lenin's struggle against reformism and revisionism on the one hand, and "Left" opportunism on the other, permits the following conclusions.

Since revisionism and reformism meant a complete rejection of the main strategic aim—the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat—Lenin's principal blows were directed against the danger from the "Right".

Since the mistakes of the "Leftists" during the formation of the Communist International and of the advanced Communist Parties involved erroneous appraisals of the current situation which in turn led to incorrect tactics, but did not seriously threaten the workers' movement, Lenin considered these errors comparatively insignificant, and regarded them as an "infantile disorder".

However, as soon as "Leftism" objectively started threatening to deviate the Party from its strategical goal, Lenin turned upon it with as much force and determination as he had against the "Rights". This has been proved by his struggle against the "Left-Wingers" during the Third Congress of the Communist International.