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Record of the Third International

Marie Louise Berneri

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After the collapse of the Second International at the outbreak of war in 1914, but before the Russian Revolution, Lenin had suggested the formation of a new International of revolutionary socialist groups who opposed the war on the grounds of class struggle, but it was not until 1919 that the Third International was formed in Moscow. From the start it was made clear that the new International was to be dominated by the Bolsheviks, and for this reason it was opposed by many among the Marxists, including Rosa Luxembourg. She sent Eberlein as German delegate to the preliminary conference with instructions to vote against the formation of such an International. But before the conference began Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht had been murdered and Eberlein, under pressure, withdrew his opposition.

Affiliation to the International was conditional on absolute acceptance of the famous 21 points. These made the 3rd International the most centralised authoritarian body ever formed. Every party which joined had to submit its programme for the

approval of the Executive Committee in Moscow, (Point 15), while Point 16 laid it down that decisions of not only world congresses but also of the Executive Committee, should overrule decisions of the national parties. Furthermore, the international structure of the national Communist Parties was prescribed. Hence by its very constitution the national C.P.s were absolutely tied to Moscow. Right from the beginning the Bolsheviks would draft decisions for these parties and require their leaders” merely to sign on the dotted line.

That absolute control over Communist Parties in all countries was Lenin’s aim is shown clearly by this constitution. But it was also shown in practice. Independent revolutionists who refused to submit to the dictatorship of Moscow were discredited by all kinds of calumnies, while the Comintern welcomed all kinds of servile place hunters. One of the most glaring examples is that of the French Communist Marcel Cachin. His case also shows to what extent the securing of power in Russia had made Lenin modify his original aim of an international of revolutionary organisations which had opposed the war.

In 1914 Cachin had been one of the most violently patriotic of the French Right Wing Socialists. He had acted as agent of the Allied governments in making overtures to Mussolini to induce him to come out in the Socialist paper *Avanti* in support of the Allies. Later, Cachin had been sent by the French Government to persuade the Russian workers to continue the war. Cachin was nevertheless appointed leader of the French C.P., and in 1921 was made a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

The authoritarianism of the Comintern and the dishonest methods it employed, not only attracted the most servile and careerist elements in the working-class movements, but thoroughly disgusted the genuine, sincere revolutionaries. The Italian socialist Serrati refused to commit the Italian Party to the decisions of a handful of Russians in Moscow: he was vilified

bewildering changes of policy and political somersaults. Yet throughout this apparent diversity there has remained one consistent thread by which the most contradictory attitudes can be explained. At every turn the Comintern has counted out the needs of Russian foreign policy in relation to capitalist governments.

While cringingly following the commands of the Soviet government, the most brutal and long-standing tyranny of our era, the Comintern throughout its inglorious history has never at any time served the interests of the working class.

(formerly stigmatized as "Social Fascists") but with liberals as well.

In 1939, failing a pact with England the Soviet Union made an alliance with Hitler, and the constituent parties of the Third International opposed the war. On the dissolution of that pact in June 1941, they swung to an extreme social patriotic position.

The Comintern has almost from the beginning served primarily, not as an instrument for World Revolution, but as an instrument of Russian Foreign Policy. The rigid control over the national Communist Parties by the Moscow committee has made these parties in effect a powerful Russian Fifth Column in all countries. An important aspect of their functions was the supplying of military information to the Russian Government. In most European countries, Communists have served terms of imprisonment on this kind of charge.

Control over the constituent Communist parties was established in the constitution of the Comintern as laid down by Lenin and Trotsky. Infractions of this discipline resulted in a summons to Moscow and subjection to the supervision of the foreign sections of the GPU. The fate of Willi Muenzenburg, Trotsky and many besides must have had the effect of "encouraging the others". But the Comintern also established a financial strangle-hold upon its national parties which were made absolutely dependent on Moscow. How far this principle was carried is shown by the following example, cited by Jan Valtin.² The Swedish C.P. by means of an efficiently run system of seamen's hostels was able to make itself financially independent. The agents of the Comintern therefore set to work to break up this system and so force the too-independent party into dependence on Moscow.

The Comintern has in fact never been an instrument of revolution. During the last twenty years it has performed the most

with every kind of calumny. In a letter to Lenin, written in 1920, he declared:

"Your party has six times as many members now as before the Revolution, but notwithstanding the strict discipline and frequent purges, it has not gained much as far as quality is concerned. Your ranks have been joined by all the slavish elements who always serve the powerful. These elements constitute a blind and cruel bureaucracy which is creating new privileges in Soviet Russia. Those elements which became revolutionary on the day after the Revolution have made of the Proletarian Revolution which cost the masses so much suffering, a source of enjoyment and domination."¹

The effect of this extreme centralisation coupled with attacks on all independent revolutionists who refused to be dominated by the Bolsheviks, was to demoralise the revolutionary movements all over the world.

Lenin justified the structure and behaviour of the Comintern on the grounds of the "necessity for stern discipline for the bringing about of the revolution". A brief survey of its activity during the major revolutionary crisis of the past two decades will suffice to show how it worked in practice.

In 1923 German capitalism was tottering from the repercussions of the war and the inflation. In this most important of potential revolutionary situations the policy of the Comintern was expressed in Stalin's letter to Bukharin and Zinoviev: "In my opinion the Germans must be curbed, and not pushed on." The Executive Committee ordered the German Communist leader, Brandler, at this time when Governmental authority was held in contempt by the German workers, actually to enter the Social Democratic Government of Saxony.

In 1927 revolutionary feeling was so high in China that the peasants in many districts expropriated the land and formed peasant soviets. At the same time the industrial workers car-

² *Out of the Night*, London, 1941, pp. 318-320.

¹ Quoted in *My Life as a Rebel* by Angelica Balabanoff.

ried out the most militant strikes in the principal cities. The Comintern ordered the Chinese Communists to discourage the formation of soviets, and to bury their arms. In this way it disarmed the revolutionists and abandoned them to the tender mercies of Chiang Kai-Shek to be literally massacred. These moves of the Comintern won the approval of the capitalist countries and offered prospects of fruitful collaboration with Stalin. The American ex-Ambassador to Russia, J. Davies, declared recently:

”As far back as 1938, I was reliably informed in Moscow that the Soviet Union was most helpful to the Government of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek, in that it exercised its influence on behalf of the Chinese Government to prevent communistic activities which would impair the common defence against Japan. That is indicative of the kind of decent co-operation which in my opinion, can be expected from the Soviet Government in the interests of a peaceful world.”

But in 1936 a far more important situation arose. On July 19th the Spanish workers organised the armed resistance to Franco. Here, surely, was the opportunity for a so-called revolutionary International to show its capabilities. What happened? The Russian Government, as Andre Gide showed, gave the minimum of publicity in its papers to the fact that the Spanish revolution had ever occurred. Russia was the first power to sign the Non-Intervention Agreement. Meanwhile the national sections of the Comintern were unanimous in declaring that so far from a revolution having taken place in Spain, the Spanish workers were fighting for bourgeois democracy! Later the agents of the Comintern devoted their energies not to fighting Franco at the front, but to assassinating revolutionists behind the lines, while Communist Brigades destroyed the work of the peasant and workers collectives. The Comintern in Spain acted as the instrument of counter-revolution and devoted its energies to destroying the achievements of the Revolution.

In every revolutionary situation which confronted it the Comintern managed to destroy the revolutionary forces and demoralize the working-class. Have they any better record in the day-to-day resistance to the class enemy?

Quite early in its history, the allegedly revolutionary aims of the Comintern stood in contrast to the diplomatic relations of the Soviet Union with other countries.

Thus the Bolsheviks entered into commercial agreements with Mussolini's Fascist Government soon after it assumed power in Italy. On the morning after the murder of the Socialist deputy Matteotti the Soviet Ambassador called on Mussolini. At the very same time when the German Communists were planning the overthrow of the State, the Russian government was not only making trade agreements with the German capitalist government, but even making secret arrangements whereby the Germans could evade the military terms of the Treaty of Versailles by establishing arms factories, and training armies, on Russian soil. Wherever a clash occurred the claims of Soviet foreign policy prevailed over the needs of the revolutionary class struggle.

The clearest example of the ineptitude of the Comintern is to be found in its attitude towards Nazism. As long ago as 1929 they were declaring that, as compared with German Social Democracy, Hitler's National Socialism was the less pernicious. At a session of the International, D.Z. Manuilsky (whose name now appears on the document dissolving the Comintern), declared that "Fascism of the Hitler type does not represent the chief enemy." In 1931 the German C.P. actually joined in a campaign to overthrow the predominantly socialist democratic government of Germany. Even when Hitler came to power in 1933 their slogan continued to be "After Hitler, our turn". When Stalin wished to form a treaty with France, the Communist Parties were ordered to carry out a Popular Front programme of unity not only with social democrats