

# The Rise and Decline of Neo-Communism

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(Continued from last issue)

AS I said previously, in the last years before the war it became more and more evident that European social democracy, while holding fast to the Marxian view on social reform, practically abandoned the Marxian stand that reforms were valueless except as stimuli to further struggle which should culminate in the social revolution; from a means to goal (the social revolution), social reforms became a goal in themselves. It was evident that socialism daily lost more and more of its revolutionary character. The revolutionary minorities in the various European parties, as well as in this country, organized themselves in "left wings" and fought against these tendencies, but without success. The mass had either too much confidence in their leaders and followed them blindly, or lost all confidence in them and went over to the syndicalists. The left wing of the socialist movement, however, was not against the actual activities of the movement, but what they demanded was more revolutionary education for the masses. All we do now must be in the form of preparations for the coming revolution.

It goes without saying . . . that all socialists will lend their assistance to all elements of the population that are fighting against reaction in favor of labor legislation and reform, but it does not follow that they should consider this the chief part of their work.

Thus one of the lefts summed up their position in 1912. It is possible that this cleavage between right and left might have gone on for years without causing a split, but that finally this split would have had to come we cannot question.

The war, with the great betrayal of the principles of the largest and oldest socialist parties, caused the split to come sooner than it would have under other conditions.

At the moment when the Russian revolution triumphed, the socialist movement in Europe and America had not yet been split, but it had been demoralized and disorganized. The workers had lost all confidence in their leaders. They felt themselves fooled and betrayed beyond hope. Even those who before believed that the war was a war for democracy, a war to end war, and had therefore applauded their leaders who helped to fool them, had already discovered their mistake. In the European countries, especially in the defeated ones, starvation and disease were added. The workers were enraged, they were anxious to do something desperate, but what? Their leaders could not suggest anything to them but patience. In the midst of all this came the Russian revolution. The Russian workers, a small minority of them, took up arms and did what the workers of the world had always dreamed of—why not imitate them? Why not emulate them?

Large masses, starving and disappointed could not be expected to occupy themselves with the examination of whether the objective conditions were ripe for such an act. Their leaders, those who had not betrayed them, knew very well that what had been achieved in Russia could not, at least at that time, be achieved in any other country. They tried to explain it to the workers of their respective countries, but the workers had no more confidence in them. If the Russians could, why couldn't they? So they reasoned. The Russians suddenly became in their eyes, the saviours of socialism. The Russians and those who allied themselves with them gained their confidence. They waited for them to tell them what to do. History placed a great re-

sponsibility on the leaders of the Russian revolution. How did they use this opportunity?

As a result of the Russian revolution the (third) communist international was organized. This new international was greeted with joy everywhere. The Russian Bolsheviks, though they changed their name from social democrats to communists, repeatedly assured us that the change in name did not signify a change in theory or tactics—they were as they had been, Marxists. Steklov wrote a brochure, published by the Soviet government, to show that the new name was adopted only as a defensive measure, so that the masses, who knew little about the differences that existed between the various factions of the movement, would not confuse the revolutionary Marxists with the opportunists. The organizing of the new international meant, consequently, the reunion of all the revolutionary forces of the proletariat. Unity was urgently needed at that moment, and there were no others besides the Russian communists who could bring this about. But already at the first congress of the communist international it became apparent that what the communists contemplated was not international unity of the proletariat, but international strife within the movement. Their slogan became, not "workers of the world unite," but "socialists of the world exterminate each other." This may seem exaggeration, but the facts I shall adduce will prove that it is not. The first duty of the communists all over the world was declared to be a splitting of the parties to which they belonged if they could not get control over them; and if they could get control, to expel every one that did not agree with them even in the slightest measure. The communist international could have had as its members the largest and most important parties in Europe. The Independent Social Democrats of Germany, at that time a large and powerful and really a revolutionary party; the French United Socialist party, the Italian Socialist party, even the Socialist party of America, and many other parties applied for admission, but the communist international refused them. It preferred the splitting up of these parties, the organizing of small and powerless communist sects, to the reunion of all socialist forces. I know some one will now ask, "Should Lenin and Sheidman, Trotsky and Noske have reunited?" No, they should not have. Socialists of the type of Sheidman and Noske would not have entered the new international even had they been invited. They would not have been admitted if they would have applied for admission. But this Sheidman-Noske type of socialist could have been positively isolated and made harmless by the united front of all revolutionary socialists. One of the famous 21 points was that if any one disagreed with even one point, or with any of the theses and resolutions of the communist international, he should be expelled. What was the result? The most important parties in Europe were split, torn to pieces by inner strifes. The real opportunists were given the chance to unite their forces and to demonstrate to the workers that the revolutionists are nothing but sectarians, fighting each other over hairsplitting differences. At the convention of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany in 1921, in Halle, a delegate asked Zinoviev, who came to split the party, "Why not unite instead of splitting?" To this Zinoviev replied:

Comrades, it has been said here, Would it not be better if we organize a united front against the bourgeoisie? Yes, of course, it would be very fine and very desirable, but to our regret, it is not possible as yet. The workers

are already strong enough to throw off the bourgeoisie, even tomorrow, if we would only all stand united for communism. If the workers will remain in their dormant state, it is because we have not yet conquered the cursed inheritance of the rotten ideology within our own ranks.

In other words, we have to fight first of all the "enemy from within." In his opening speech at the second congress of the Communist International, Zinoviev made plain what he thought the immediate task of the communist movement to be: It is to fight not the capitalists but the social democrats. "Our fight against the second international," he said, "is not a fight between two factions of the same revolutionary proletarian movement, it is not a fight between different streams within the same class; it is practically a class struggle." This fight against all other socialists (and in this fight no difference was made between the "right" and the "center"), has gone so much over the limits that Lenin saw fit to rebuke his comrades for their excessive zeal. In his letter to the United Communist Party of Germany (August, 1921) he says:

Some exaggerated the fight against the center, overstepped the bounds somewhat, thus transforming the fight into a sport and compromising revolutionary Marxism.

The fight against socialist heresy finally became a kind of "witch hunting" process, even within the communist ranks. They also began to split and fight each other, and they have continued to keep up this "revolutionary activity" to the present day.

Why has the communist international taken this attitude? Is it because the communist leaders are bad men or dishonest? Or have not the interests of the proletarian class struggle in their hearts? Certainly not. The communist leaders are neither bad nor dishonest; they are positively well-meaning, revolutionary socialists whose tactics were dictated to them by the singularity of the situation. This singularity was the complete hegemony of the Russian Bolsheviks over the Communist International; the same people who were the leaders of the Russian Soviet government also became the leaders of the Communist International; the same men who had to fight the battles of the Soviet republic also had to fight the battles of the International Communist movement.

These men had, at the time when the new International was born, not only an actual war with the whites, but also a theoretical war with all other socialists. They considered, and I think rightly, that the pamphlets of Plechanoff and Kautsky, of Martov and Bauer, were more dangerous for them than the guns of the white guards, or the blockade of the imperialist governments. Their socialist opponents attacked them especially on three points:

(1) That no social revolution could be made successfully by an armed minority.

(2) That socialism could not be established in an economically undeveloped country.

(3) That the Soviet government would not be able to hold out long against the capitalist countries of the world. The logical way for the Bolsheviks would have been for them to have drawn the attention of their critics to the specific Russian conditions, conditions so unique, which could not be found anywhere else. But the Bolsheviks, who were distinguished for their revolutionary romanticism—and fanaticism—chose the opposite way. They made a virtue out of necessity; they simply rationalized their experience and satisfied themselves that what had been done in Russia could and would be done everywhere. Russia is an economically undeveloped

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