
The Third International

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We are standing in the midst of a catastrophe of the working class movement, such as it has never experienced in all its history. The collapse of the International due to the world war is not simply a surrender of international sentiment before the power of intensified nationalism. It is at the same time a collapse of tactics, of methods of fighting, of the entire system which has been incorporated into the Social Democracy and the working class movement during the last few decades.

The knowledge and the tactics which, during the early rise of capitalism, were of great service to the proletariat, failed in the face of the new imperialistic development. Outwardly this was apparent in the increasing impotency of the parliament and the labor union movement intellectually in the substitution of tradition and declamation for clear insight and militant tactics, in stultification of tactics and the forms of organization, in the transformation of the revolutionary theory of Marxism into a doctrine of passive expectation.

Imperialist Development.

During the period when capitalism was developing into imperialism, was establishing new aims for itself, and was energetically arming for the struggle for world supremacy, this development of the majority of the Social Democracy remained unobserved. It allowed itself to be fooled by the dream of immediate social reforms and did nothing to increase the power of the proletariat to fight against imperialism.

Hence the present catastrophe does not mean only that the proletariat was too weak to prevent the outbreak of war. It means that the methods of the

era of the Second International were not capable of increasing the intellectual and material power of the proletariat to the necessary extent of breaking the power of the ruling classes. Therefore the world war must be a turning point in the history of the working class movement.

With the world war we have entered into a new period of capitalism, the period of its extension by force over the entire earth, accompanied by embittered struggles between nationalities and huge destruction of capital and men; a period, therefore, of the heaviest oppression and suffering for the working classes. But the masses are thereby driven to aspiration; they must raise themselves if they are not to be completely submerged.

Proletarian Victory.

In great mass struggles, alongside of which former struggles and methods are merely child's play, they must grapple with imperialism. This struggle for indispensable rights and liberties, for the most urgent reforms, often for mere life itself, against reaction and the oppression of the employing class, against war and poverty, can only end with the overthrow of imperialism and the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie. It will at the same time be the struggle for Socialism, for the emancipation of the proletariat. Therefore, with the present world war there also dawns a new period for Socialism.

For the new struggle our bearings must be taken anew. Lack of clear socialistic insight was one of the chief causes of the weakness of the proletariat when the war began — it knew neither imperialism nor its own tactics. The fight against imperialism, this most recent

and most powerful form of capitalism, made demands upon the highest material, moral and organizational, qualities of the proletariat. It could not succumb to stupid, impotent desperation; but it was not enough that it break out into spontaneous actions against the unbearable pressure. If these are to lead anywhere and to gain new stages on the climb to power it is necessary that they be inspired with clarity in regard to the aims, the possibilities, and the meaning of such actions. Theory must go hand in hand with practice, theory which transforms blind acts to conscious ones and spreads light over the path.

The New Solution.

“Material Force can only be broken by material force. But even theory becomes material force when it takes hold on the masses.” (Marx) The germs of this theory, this new weapon, were already at hand in the defeat of the former practice of imperialism and mass action. Now the world war has brought much new insight and has shaken minds out of the sleep of tradition. Now is the time to gather together everything in the way of new ideas, new solutions, new propositions, to inspect them, to prove them, to clarify them by means of discussion and thus to make them of service in the new struggle.

An immense number of new questions lie before us. First of all the question of imperialism, its economic roots, its connection with the export of capital, procuring of raw material, its effect upon politics, government, and bureaucracy, its power upon the bourgeoisie. Then those questions which relate to the proletariat, the causes of their weakness, their psychology and the phenomena of social-imperialism and social-patriotism. Added to these are the questions of proletarian tactics, the significance and possibilities of parliamentarianism, of mass actions, of labor union tactics, reforms and immediate demands, the significance and the future role of organization; also the questions of nationalism, of militarism, and colonial policies.

Upon many of these questions the old Socialism had settled answers, which had already crystallized into formulas — but with the collapse of the Second International even its formulas have gone by the board. In the old rules and ideas of the pre-imperialistic era

the proletariat can find no guides for its actions under new conditions. Nor can the social democratic parties furnish it with a firm foothold. They have in the great majority surrendered to imperialism; the conscious, active or passive, support of war policies by the party and labor union representatives has dug too deep to make possible a simple return to the old pre-bellum point of view.

This support of imperialism in its most important and vital phases characterizes these working class organizations, no matter how strongly they subscribe to the old socialist solutions and combat the most intimate effects of imperialism. For in this way they come into conflict with the necessarily revolutionary aims of the proletariat and are themselves forced into a difficult crisis of their own. Between those who would make of the Social Democracy a tool of imperialism and those who want to see it a weapon of revolution no unity is possible any longer.

The task of elucidating those problems, of offering solutions, of formulating the proper direction for the new struggle, falls to those who have not allowed themselves to be misled by war conditions and who have held fast to internationalism and the class struggle. In this their weapon will be Marxism. Marxism, regarded by the theoreticians of Socialism as the method to explain the past and the present and in their hands degraded more and more into a dry doctrine of mechanical fatalism, again is to come into its birthright as a theory of revolutionary acts. “The philosophers have interpreted the world in a number of differing ways: the real necessity is to alter it.” As a live revolutionary method this sort of Marxism again becomes the most solid principle, the sharpest intellectual weapon of Socialism.

There is no more pressing task than this elucidation of the new problems. For it is a life and death question for the proletariat — and hence for the entire development of humanity — that it should see its way, clear and bright, before leading to new heights. And there are no questions of the future whose solution can be postponed until we can once more discuss them in peace and quietness. They are not capable of postponement. Even during the war and after its conclusion they form the most important and immediate vital questions for the working class of all nations.

Workers' Chief Enemy.

Not merely the important question, which everywhere is the kernel of the object of struggle, whether and how the proletariat can emerge, hasten the end of the war, and influence the terms of peace. At the conclusion of the war the immense economic shattering of the world will first be felt in its entirety, when, with the condition of general exhaustion, lack of capital, and unemployment, industry must be organized anew; when the fearful debts of all nations necessitate colossal taxes and state socialism, the militarization of agricultural pursuits, as the only way out of the financial difficulties. Then the problem must be met with or without theory; but then the lack of theoretical insight will entail the most disastrous errors.

There lies the greatest task of our journal: by discussion and elucidation of these questions it will support the material struggle of the proletariat against imperialism. As an organ of discussion and elucidation it is at the same time an organ of battle — the publisher and the contributors to the journal have the common will to give battle, the same point of view in regard to these chief questions of the practice to be adopted at this time.

First of all the struggle against imperialism, the chief enemy of the proletariat. But this struggle is only made possible by a simultaneous relentless struggle against all the elements of the former Social Democracy, which would bind the proletariat to the chariot of imperialism; also the open imperialism which has become the mere agent of the bourgeoisie, and that social-patriotism of all shades which would gloss over undisputable antagonisms and would rob the proletariat of the sharpest weapons in its struggle against imperialism. The reconstruction of the Third International will only be made possible by an absolute break with social-patriotism.

With this knowledge we stand upon the same ground as the Left Wing of the Zimmerwald Conference. The principles put forth by this group of international socialists as their aim, our journal will support by theoretical work; by the most intense struggle against social-patriotism, by merciless analysis of the errors of the old revisionism and the radical socialism to pave the way for the new International. If the proletariat recognizes the weaknesses and mistakes of the old points of view, the practical collapse of which it is now suffering from, it will gain the foresight for the new struggle and the new Socialism.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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