

Pamphlet no 17

**THE INTERNATIONAL PROLETARIAN
ASSOCIATIONS**

“Working men of all countries, unite!” It was with these words that Marx and Engels, the two founders of scientific socialism, the revolutionary theory of the proletariat, called upon the workers of the world to unite in a single struggle against capital.

Why did Marx and Engels issue this call? Because capitalism had become the mode of production that the bourgeoisie had succeeded in imposing all across the world by destroying all the old modes of social production that existed previously. Indeed, capitalism had penetrated the four corners of the earth and integrated most countries into a veritable international division of labour.

Capitalism at this time was already characterized by two particular aspects. First, it reduced the complexity of class antagonisms to the irreducible opposition between capitalists and proletarians. Second, it subjected all proletarians, regardless of the country in which they lived, to the same exploitation:

“... modern industrial labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany has stripped him of every trace of national character.” (1)

Thus it is the capitalist exploitation common to all proletarians in all countries that is the basis of the call launched by Marx and Engels.

Proletarians have no homeland to lose, but they have a common enemy to defeat. Consequently, they can and must unite across frontiers, even though the form of the proletariat's struggle against the bourgeoisie takes on a national character.

The **proletarian international** was one of the most important forms of international organization developed by the working-class movement in its struggle against the capitalist system around the world. And the guiding principles of relationships between workers in different countries is **proletarian internationalism**. Communists have the historic task of embodying and putting into practice this principle in appropriate forms of organization.

“The communists are distinguished... (in that)... in the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independent of all nationality.” (2)

In this pamphlet we will see how communists, by setting up international organizations, have worked unceasingly to unite the revolutionary working-class movement so as to hasten the victory of the world-wide communist Revolution. We will also see how, within these organizations, they waged a relentless line struggle against opportunists and revisionists and thus contributed to the development of Marxist theory, the science of the proletarian revolution.

At a time when the young Canadian Marxist-Leninist movement is waging a resolute struggle to deepen its knowledge of communist principles, at a time when the working-class vanguard in Canada is beginning to make these principles its own as a guide in its revolutionary struggle, it is most important to become acquainted with and learn from the main lessons of the history of the proletarian internationals in order to use them in the struggle for socialism in our country. It is with this goal in mind that this pamphlet has been prepared.

The First and Second Internationals: from the first revolutionary assaults on capital to the revisionist betrayal of the working class

The First International was founded in 1864. At that time capitalism was still in its first stage, competitive capitalism. On the political level, the counter-revolution had been victorious in Europe. During this period, in effect, the European governments - Russian, French, English, German and Austrian - conspired, in spite of their mutual squabbles, a “Holy Alliance” of reactionary forces intent on crushing the emerging working-class movement. For this period was also one

(1) Marx & Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party.

(2) Ibid.

of tremendous growth for the working class and progress for union organizations; it was also the period of the first great strikes.

In its constitution, the First International clearly indicated the goals which it intended to strive for right from the beginning. The first International Workingmen's Association (IWA) was meant to be a centre of communications, a place to develop the political line of the international communist movement, a means of circulating information, common positions and actions, etc.

The IWA included English, French, Swiss, Belgian, and then Italian, Spanish and American workers' organizations. It supported certain strikes, like in Leipzig, Germany, and that of the London and Edinburgh tailors in 1866.

Within the IWA, there was a continuing and often very lively struggle between different ideological tendencies. Marx, Engels and all the true communists confronted the anarchists, disciples of Proudhon and Bakunin, and the English reformist trade unionists firmly and consistently.

But there is an explanation for this multiplicity of ideological tendencies. The IWA was not based on any common tactical, strategic or organizational principles other than the single desire to unite the growing proletarian forces so as to struggle more effectively against the international bourgeoisie. In the beginning, then it was the practical unity of the movement that was most important. It was indeed the most advanced workers, those most conscious of the universal nature of their cause and who wanted to work towards the international unity of their movement, who constituted the International.

In terms of organization, Marx, who was a member of the General Council of the International, strove for the adoption of the concept of a single and centralized organ of **political leadership** responsible for the development, on the basis of local situations, of a unified general tactic, of one sole general tactic, for the working class' revolutionary struggle. For at the time, there were some who were satisfied with an IWA that was vaguely defined organizationally and who advocated full autonomy for the national, and even the local, sections.

The First International, a scene of intense ideological struggle

Marxism develops in the struggle against that which is anti-Marxist. For Marx and Engels, the First International was a particularly important platform for propagating their scientific principles and enabling the entire revolutionary workers' movement to grasp them and apply them in the reality of the practical struggle against capital.

Two of the main tendencies opposed to Marxism in the International — the anarchists' petty-bourgeois socialism and the trade unionists' reformism — did not stand up to the rigour of Marx's and Engels' revolutionary principles. Demonstrating the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and of revolutionary political struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels lashed out against the disciples of Proudhon who, in the name of freedom and anti-authoritarian individualism, opposed all revolutionary action aimed at political power. They denounced the trade unionists who confined the working-class movement to legal struggles for reforms and who constantly tried to line up with **their** bourgeoisie against the workers of other nations. They defended the collective appropriation of the means of production by the working class, as opposed to the revival of small-scale private ownership advocated by Bakunin's followers.

The history of the IWA was thus the history of an unyielding struggle which resulted in the victory of scientific socialism in the working-class movement. Indeed, each congress of the International marked the defeat of a form of petty-bourgeois utopian socialism and the success of Marxist revolutionary principles such as the **necessity of a revolutionary political party of the proletariat to seize political power, the necessity of destroying the apparatus of the bourgeois State and the necessity of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to attain communism**. But it was the practice itself of the revolutionary working-class movement that irrefutably confirmed the correctness of the Marxist theses for all class-conscious workers across the world. Indeed, the lessons of the Paris Commune of 1871, both positive and negative — the violent destruction of the bourgeois

State's apparatus and the establishment of organs of proletarian power, as well as its failure owing to the lack of centralized and truly proletarian leadership - proved that Marx and Engels were right. Taking power in Paris and in other regional French cities, the proletariat showed in practice for the first time in history that it could lead and organize a new society. Marx and Engels were right when they incessantly repeated that, once in power, the working class must smash the machine of the bourgeois State, forcibly expropriate the large owners of the means of production and impose its power by force on the reactionary classes. The Paris Commune paid dearly in blood for having left the bourgeoisie free to resume the offensive against proletarian power.

In 1872, the Marxists decided to dissolve the International, for, after the bitter lessons of the Paris Commune, unity was no longer possible with the anarchists and the reformists. Moreover, the IWA had fulfilled its historic role, which was to have laid **"the foundation of an international organization of the workers for the preparation of their revolutionary attack on capital (3)**, and to pave the way for the creation of national working-class parties, in accordance with the communist principles of Marx and Engels.

The Second International: a merciless struggle against opportunists and revisionists

When the Second International was created in 1889, capitalism was in the midst of transformations. It was in the process of passing from its competitive to its imperialist stage. During this period of competition for new markets and world-wide expansion and consolidation, capitalism experienced relative political stability in the metropolitan centres.

"General economic development gave the bourgeoisie of the richest countries the possibility of corrupting and seducing the upper strata of the working class, the labour aristocracy, by means of small handouts taken from its enormous profits. The ranks of the official social-democratic parties were flooded with petty-bourgeois "companions in struggle" who gradually oriented them in a bourgeois direction. The leaders of the peaceful, parliamentary working-class movement, the union leaders and the secretaries, editors and employees of social democracy formed a labour bureaucracy caste with its own selfish group interests that were in reality opposed to socialism." (4)

This analysis sums up well the causes that spawned the opportunist tendency that soon emerged within the Second International. The latter had been created by the Marxists to co-ordinate the action of the national socialist parties. As Lenin put it, the Second International was the international organization of a proletarian movement "spread out thin". Indeed, the first socialist working-class parties, founded on the model of the German Social-Democratic Party which had been the first to put into practice the organizational principles of Marx and Engels, rapidly consolidated themselves as mass working-class parties, thanks to the International. But, added Lenin, this phenomenon led to a lowering of their revolutionary level.

Engels had already in his time defended the correctness of Marxist principles against opportunists of all sorts opportunists like Bernstein, who advocated the peaceful transformation of capitalism into socialism and tended to compromise with the bourgeoisie.

Faithful to the interests of the working class, Lenin once again raised the flag of revolutionary Marxism. He unyieldingly defended these fundamental principles within the Second International: **the necessity of building a revolutionary party, that disciplined vanguard of the proletariat, capable of guiding the masses in the attack on bourgeois power and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to prevent the bourgeoisie from retaking power.**

(3) Lenin, "The Third International and its place in history", Collected Works, Vol. 20, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1965, p. 306

(4) "Resolution of the First Comintern Congress on the Berne Conference of the Parties of the Second International", March 6, 1919, Our translation, from the text in Manifestes, thèses et résolutions des quatre premiers congrès mondiaux de l'Internationale communiste, 1919-1923, Bibliothèque communiste, Librairie du travail, June 1934 re-published in facsimile by IN STRUGGLE!, 1975, p. 14

In the hands of the opportunists, the Second International became a good reflection of the social-democratic parties that constituted its membership. It was organized on a federated instead of a centralized basis, and it abdicated its internationalist tasks of leading and unifying the international communist movement, concentrating its work solely on the national level.

This abandonment of internationalist tasks led the leaders of the Second International into the worst betrayal of the interests of the working class. In effect, these co-called defenders of the proletariat sent the proletariat of their countries to the side of their bourgeoisies against the proletariat of other nations in the imperialist war of 1914-18. By thus trampling proletarian internationalism underfoot, these opportunist traitors finished unmasking themselves in the eyes of the revolutionary masses.

But it was **once again the revolutionary experience of the masses** - this time, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 - that proved unequivocally the correctness of the Marxist theses defended by Lenin and strengthened the position of the true communists who were waging the struggle within the Second International. Although in the minority, the communists nevertheless unceasingly denounced the majority which had joined the camp of the bourgeoisie since the war. Discredited in the eyes of the revolutionary masses, the Second International was no longer anything more than a moribund organization that did more to divide the working-class movement than it did to unite it. At this point, the unity of the international communist movement necessitated a rupture with the social-democratic traitors and the creation of a new international revolutionary organization. In spite of the betrayal of its principal leaders, the Second International had prepared the way for the transformation of the working-class movement into a broad mass movement.

Today, the Second International is a vulgar caricature of a real international proletarian organization. It includes such "revolutionary (!)" parties as the Labour Parties of Indira Gandhi in India and Golda Meir in Israël, and it continues to undermine the unity of the international working-class movement, even drawing upon funds provided by the imperialist powers to do so.

The Third International: a truly communist International

The victory of the Bolshevik revolution marked the beginning of a new period in the history of humanity: that of the decline of imperialism and the growth of proletarian revolution. This decline is characterized by a generalized and increasingly acute worldwide crisis of capitalism.

During this period of crisis immediately following the imperialist war of 1914-18, the revolutionary movement, victorious in Russia, made considerable progress in all capitalist countries, including Italy, Germany, France, and Hungary.

"The growth of the revolutionary movement in all countries, the danger that the alliance of capitalist States will strangle this movement, the attempts of the parties of social traitors to unite... finally the absolute necessity of co-ordinating proletarian action - all this must lead to the foundation of a truly revolutionary, truly proletarian, communist international." (5)

It is thus the logic of the world conjuncture in the midst of revolution that forced the communist leaders to accept the necessity of creating a centre of world-wide leadership of the proletarian revolution that would break with the opportunism of the Second International and undertake the completion of the work begun by the first Workingmen's International.

That is why in its manifesto the Third Communist International addressed itself to the proletariat of the entire world in these terms:

"Our task is to generalize the revolutionary experience of the working class, to cleanse the movement of the disintegrating admixture of opportunism and social-patriotism, to mobilize the forces of all genuinely revolutionary parties of the world proletariat and

(5) "Platform of the Communist International adopted by the First Congress", March 4, 1919, In The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents, Vol 1 (1919-1922), selected and edited by Jane Degras; London: Frank Cass & Co., 1971, p. 23

thereby facilitate and hasten the victory of the communist revolution throughout the world." (6)

To carry out this task, the Communist International applied itself to uniting workers the world over through very solid organizational links.

"The Communist International recognized that in order to hasten victory, the Workingmen's Association which is fighting to annihilate capitalism and create communism must have a strongly centralized organization. The Communist International must, in fact and in deed, be a single communist party of the entire world. The parties working in the various countries are but its separate sections. The organizational machinery of the Communist International must guarantee the workers of each country the opportunity of getting the utmost help from the organized proletariat of other countries at any given moment". (7)

In order to organize the joint action of the proletariat of different countries, the Third International was organized according to the Bolshevik principles of democratic centralism. Its supreme body was the World Congress of all affiliated parties and organizations. The World Congress approved the different parties' programmes. Between congresses, the supreme body was the Executive Committee of the Communist International, and the instructions given by this executive committee to all the affiliated parties and organizations were binding.

The uncompromising struggle against opportunism

The struggle against the opportunists who dominated the international working-class movement was of constant concern to the Third International. This struggle was all the more important inasmuch as the groups and parties that had until very recently belonged to the Second International now wanted to join the new International so as to sabotage it.

To counter this threat from the opportunists, the International had to draw up criteria for the admission of working-class parties based on the experience of the Russian Communist Party. Some of the most important were that: daily agitation and propaganda must have a truly communist character and be consistent with the programme of the Third International; parties must have created a clandestine organization parallel to the legal organization; the denunciation in the masses of the social-democrats' betrayals must be constant; support for the colonized peoples' liberation movements, not only in word but in deed, must be indefectible; there must be unflinching agitation and propaganda within unions, co-operatives and other organizations of the working-class masses; there must be unreserved support for Soviet Russia; and the parties must conform to the decisions of the International.

In all the countries where working-class organizations existed, the same process was repeated: under the pressure of the revolutionary movement the communists separated from the reformists and constituted themselves as sections of the International.

But since these new communist parties were more like tendencies than organizations able to assume the leadership of class struggles, the revolutionary wave of 1918-19 did not lead to victorious proletarian revolutions. On the contrary, a period of repression for the movement developed early in the 1920's, encouraged by the relative prosperity of capitalism and the social-democrats' betrayal.

The parties are consolidated thanks to the International

The Third International was not long in reacting to this change in the balance of power. As early as its Fourth Congress in 1923 it launched the watchword of the **United Front** of all workers so as to resist capitalism's attacks more effectively. As for the social-democrats, they once again preferred unity with the bourgeoisie over unity with

(6) "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the entire world", March 6, 1919; in *The Communist International*, op. cit., p. 38

(7) "Statutes of the Communist International Adopted at the Second Comintern Congress", August 4, 1920; in *The Communist International*, op. cit., p. 164

the proletariat and tried to sabotage the proletarian front that the communists were building.

At the Fifth Congress, the International waged an intense ideological struggle for the "Bolshevization" of the communist parties and to better prepare them for the coming attacks. In effect, certain of the parties that had joined the Third International were still structures in neighbourhood cells, like the old electoralist social-democratic parties. There was thus a struggle to have all the communist parties reorganize along the lines of the Bolshevik Party and make factory cells their solid foundation.

Already, at the Sixth Congress in 1928 the International had foreseen the inevitable crisis of capitalism and was preparing its troops in consequence when the fascist hordes were overrunning Europe. During the 1930's, the communist International called for the creation of **united anti-fascist fronts**. The communists, linked to the International and organized to carry on planned and clandestine work, were the most consistent combatants against the fascist yoke in the capitalist countries. Together with Soviet Russia, guided by its great leader Stalin, they were the main gravediggers of fascist reaction in Europe.

During these years when the unity of progressive people and revolutionaries was so decisive in the outcome of the struggle against fascism, Trotsky and other counter-revolutionaries excluded from the ranks of the Bolshevik Party and the Third International attempted in 1935 to marchal their handful of disciples and form a new International, the Fourth, Trotskyist, International. Unable to have his reactionary ideas triumph within the Third International, Trotsky thus created his own organization, supposedly internationalist but in practice counter-revolutionary. This organization was rapidly denounced by true communists and unmasked by the revolutionary masses.

An organization that no longer corresponds to new conditions

In 1943 the Executive Committee of the International announced the dissolution of the Third International. The imperialist war launched by the German fascists had sharpened the differences that had begun to develop among the various national parties. During this war, in effect, the strategic tasks of the communist parties varied enormously. In the countries of the fascist bloc, their task was to unite with all anti-fascist forces to defeat the fascist governments as rapidly as possible, while in the occupied countries they had to wage national liberation struggles. In the countries of the anti-fascist coalition, however, the communist parties had to support their governments' war efforts. In such conditions, unity of action under the leadership of a single, unified centre became in practice impossible. The communists thus subordinated organizational forms to the fundamental interests of the working class and proceeded to dissolve the Third International which no longer corresponded to the needs of the period.

After having been the leading centre of the world-wide Revolution for an entire generation, the Third International ceased to exist. But this did not mean the death of the unity of the communist movement.

An International rich in lessons for the international communist movement

The Third International, faithful to Marxism-Leninism, allowed the great lessons of the Bolshevik revolution to be extended to all the countries of the world, and gave an unprecedented impetus to the international communist movement. Some of the most important of these lessons can be summed up in the following way:

To make revolution, a communist party is necessary. Without this party armed with Marxist-Leninist principles, organized along the lines of democratic centralism and able to establish tactics and strategies of struggle consistent with the revolutionary goal pursued, without this headquarters for the revolution made up of elements of the vanguard of the proletariat and other strata of the people, the working class cannot hope to free both itself and the people as a whole from the yoke of capitalism.

Communists struggle against leftist and dogmatic deviations,

and link themselves to the masses by working in the organizations where the masses are present - unions, mainly, but organizations like co-operatives, as well. There they defend the proletarian point of view on each issue, concretely showing through communist agitation and-propaganda that this point of view serves the fundamental interests of the proletariat.

The goal of the proletarian revolution is the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is to say the violent destruction of the apparatus of the bourgeois State and the building of organs of proletarian power. Unmasking bourgeois falsehoods about democracy being above and beyond classes, communists openly defend the dictatorship of the proletariat because they know that democracy in any capitalist society is in fact the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over the people. In advocating the dictatorship of the proletariat, they defend democracy for the majority, the people, and dictatorship for the minority, the bourgeoisie.

In the era of imperialism, the struggle of the exploited peoples of the Third World is decisive in the victory of socialism. The communists of the Third International were the first to recognize the revolutionary force of these people and support concretely their liberation struggle.

The current unity of the international communist movement

After the second great imperialist war, a new revisionist tendency formed within the international communist movement. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the revisionists were able to hatch and carry out a plot to take power in the USSR and usurp the leadership of most of the world's communist parties. Using this position of force they worked for years to sabotage the unity of the international communist movement and definitively transform the communist parties into revisionist parties. Playing the game of the imperialist powers, and especially of US imperialism they schemed to isolate China, practising dogmatic denunciation instead of principled struggle. In 1963 they succeeded in realizing their splitting and wrecking designs. They thus contributed to smashing the unity of the international communist movement in spite of the courageous and resolute struggle waged by the Chinese and Albanian communists to maintain this unity in the face of the increasingly aggressive designs of imperialism. Once again the unity of the international communist movement necessitated a rupture with the revisionist traitors who were misleading the masses and disarming them in the face of imperialism.

Today, with the acute crisis of capitalism, organizations and parties faithful to the principles of Marxism-Leninism are re-emerging in all capitalist countries. These organizations and parties are slowly winning the confidence of the revolutionary masses in the struggle and tearing them away from the influence of the revisionists and the social-democrats. Renewing the tradition of the proletarian internationals, the Marxist-Leninist movement in all these countries is waging a vigorous struggle against opportunist deviations within the movement and demarcating from the revisionist and social-democratic betrayers of the proletariat, as the history of the three proletarian Internationals teaches us to do.