

THE DEATH AGONY OF CAPITALISM AND THE TASKS OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

THE OBJECTIVE PREREQUISITES FOR A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

The world situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.

The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Mankind's productive forces stagnate. Already new inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth. Conjunctural crises under the weight of social crises affecting the whole capitalist system weigh ever heavier deprivations and suffering upon the masses. Growing unemployment, in its turn, deepens the financial crisis of the state and undermines the unstable monetary systems. Democratic regimes, as well as Fascist stagger from one bankruptcy to another.

The bourgeoisie itself sees no way out. In countries in which it already has been forced to stake its last upon the card of Fascism, it now toboggans with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe. In the historically privileged countries, i.e. in those where the bourgeoisie can still for a certain period permit itself the luxury of democracy at the expense of national accumulations (Great Britain, France, the US, etc.) all of capital's traditional parties are in a state of perplexity, bordering on a paralysis of will. The "New Deal", despite its first period of resoluteness, represents but a special form of political perplexity, possible only in a country where the Bourgeoisie succeeded in accumulating incalculable wealth. The present crisis, far from having run its full course, has already succeeded in showing that "New Deal" politics, like popular front politics in France, opens no new exit for the economic blind alley. International relations present no better picture, under the increasing tension of capitalist tension of capitalist disintegrations, imperialist antagonisms reach an impasse at the height of which are sprate clashes and bloody local disturbances. (Ethiopia, Spain, the Far East, Central Europe) must inevitably coalesce into a new configuration of world dimensions. The Bourgeoisie has become aware of the mortal danger to its domination represented by a new war. But that class is now immeasurably less capable of averting war than of the eve of 1914.

All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet "ripened" for socialism is the product of ignorance and conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have ~~not~~ not only ripened, they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the most historical period at that, --- a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.

THE PROLETARIAT AND ITS LEADERSHIP

The economy, the state, the politics of the Bourgeoisie and its international relations are completely blighted by the social crisis, characteristic of a pre-revolutionary state of society. The chief obstacle in the path of transforming the pre-revolutionary into a revolutionary state is the opportunistic character of the proletarian leadership; its petty-bourgeois cowardice before the big bourgeoisie and its perfidious connection with it even in its death agony.

In all countries the proletariat is wracked by deep disquiet. In millions, the masses move again and again on the roads of revolutionary outbreaks. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic apparatus.

The Spanish proletariat has made series of heroic attempts since April 1931, to take power in its hands and guide the fate of society. However its own parties, (Social Democrats, Stalinists, Anarchists, [POUMists])-- each in its own way acted as a brake and thereby prepared Franco's triumph.

In France the great wave of sit-down strikes, particularly during June 1936, revealed the wholehearted readiness of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist system. However the leading organizations (Socialists, Stalinists, Syndicalists) under the label of the popular front succeeded in canalizing and damming ~~the~~ at least temporarily the revolutionary stream.

The unprecedented wave of sit-down strikes and the amazing rapid growth of industrial unionism in the (US) (CIO) is the most indisputable expression of the instinctive strivings of the American workers to raise themselves to the level of the tasks imposed upon them by history. But here too the leading political organizations, including the newly created CIO, do everything possible to keep in check the revolutionary pressure of the masses.

The definitive passing of the Comintern to the side of the bourgeois order, its cynically counter-revolutionary role throughout the world, particularly in Spain, France, the US, and other "democratic" countries, created exceptionally supplementary difficulties throughout the proletariat. Under the banner of the October Revolution the conciliatory politics practiced by the peoples front dooms the working class to impotence and clears the road to fascism.

"Peoples Front" on the other hand - fascism on the other; these are the last resources of imperialism in the struggle against proletarian revolution. From the historical point of view, however, both these resources are stop-gaps. The decay of capitalism continues under the sign of the Phrygian cap in France as under the sign of the swastika in Germany. Nothing short of the overthrow of capitalist society can open the road out.

The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism, and second by the treacherous politics of the old workers' organizations. Of these factors the first, of course, is the decisive one; the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus. No matter how the methods of Blum to the judicial frame-ups of Stalin - they will never succeed the revolutionary will of the proletariat. As time goes on their desperate effort to hold back the wheel of history will demonstrate more clearly to the masses that the crisis of proletarian leadership having become the crisis of mankind's culture can be resolved only by the Fourth International.

THE MINIMUM PROGRAM AND THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM.

The strategic task of the next period, a revolutionary period of propaganda and agitation and organization, consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard. (The confusion and the disappointment of the older generation; the inexperience of the younger generation). It is necessary to help the masses in their process of daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist ~~maxim~~ program for revolution. This bridge should include a bridge of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and ~~at~~ unalterable leading to one conclusion; the conquest of power by the proletariat.

Classical Social Democracy functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism divided its program into two parts independent of an other; the minimum program which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the maximum program which promised substitution for capitalism by socialism, in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and maximum program no bridge existed. And indeed Social Democracy has no need for such a bridge since the word socialism is used only for holiday speechifying. The Comintern has set out to follow the path of Social Democracy in an epoch of decaying capitalism; when in general there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and the raising of the masses living standards; when every serious demand of the proletariat and of the petty-bourgeois inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and the bourgeois state.

The strategic task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow. The political aim is conquest of power by the proletariat for the purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie. However the achievement of this task is unthinkable without the most considered attention to all, even small and partial tactics. All sections of the proletariat, all its layers, professions and groups should be drawn into the revolutionary movement. The present epoch is distinguished not for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day to day work but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly linked with the actual tasks of their revolution.

The Fourth International does not ~~discard~~ discard the program of the old "minimal" demands to the degree to which these have preserved the last part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the social conquests and democratic rights of the workers. But it carries on this day to day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective. Insofar as the old partial "minimum" demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism - and this occurs at each step - the Fourth International advances a system of transitional demands, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively will they be directed against the basis of the bourgeois regime. The old "minimum" program is superseded by the transitional program, the task of which lies in the systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution.

EXCERPTS FROM THE FOUNDING CONFERENCE 'FACTORY COMMITTEES' PP22 - 23

During a transitional epoch the workers movement does not have a systematic and well-balanced but a feverish and explosive characters. Slogans as well as organized forms should be subordinated to the indices of the movement. On guard against the routine handling of a situation as against a plague, the leadership should respond sensitively to the initiative of the masses. Sit-down strikes, the latest phenomena of this initiative, go beyond the limits of "normal" capitalist procedure. Independently of the demands of the strikers, the temporary seizure of the factories deals a blow to the ideology of capitalist property. Every sit-down strike poses in a practical manner the question of who is boss of the factory, the capitalist or the worker.

If the sit-down strike raises the question episodically, the factory committee gives it organized expression. Elected by all the factory employees, the factory committee immediately gives a counterweight to the will of the administration. To the reformist criticism of the bosses, of the so-called "economic royalists" (type like Ford in contradistinction to the "good" democratic exploiters, we counterpose the slogan of factory committees as centers of the struggle against the first as well as against the second. Trade union bureaucrats, in accordance with their general conduct, will resist the creation of factory committees as they resist every bold step taken ~~by~~ along the road of mobilizing the masses.

However the wider ~~the~~ the sweep of the movement, the easier will it be to break the resistance. Where the closed has already been instituted in "peaceful" times, the committee will formally coincide with the usual organ of the trade union, but will renew its personnel and widen its function. The prime significance of the committee however lies, in the fact that it becomes the militant staff for such working class layers as the trade union is usually incapable of moving into action. It is precisely from these more oppressed layers that the most self-sacrificing battalions of the revolution will come.

From the moment that the committee makes its appearance, a factual dual ²⁹ power is established in the factory. By its very essence it presents the ~~the~~ transitional state because it includes in itself two irreconcilable regimes; the capitalist and the proletariat. The fundamental significance of factory committees is precisely contained in the fact that they open the doors if not to a direct revolutionary, then to a pre-revolutionary period - between the bourgeois and the proletarian regimes. That the slogan of the factory committee is neither premature nor artificial is amply attested to by the waves of sit-down strikes spreading through several countries. New waves of this type will be inevitable in the near future. It is necessary to begin a campaign for factory committees in time in order not to be caught unaware.

EXCERPTS FROM THE FOUNDING CONFERENCE - THE PICKET LINE - DEFENCE GROUPS - WORKER'S MILITIA - THE ARMING OF THE PROLETARIAT - PP 27-29

Sit-down strikes are a serious warning from the masses addressed not only to the bourgeoisie but also to the organization of the workers, including the Fourth International. In 1919 - 1920, the Italian workers seized the factories on their own initiative, thus signaling the news of their "leaders" of the coming social revolution. The "leaders" paid no heed to the signal. The victory of Fascism was the result.

Sit-down strikes do not yet mean the seizure of factories in the Italian manner, but they are a decisive step toward such seizures. The present crisis can sharpen the class struggle to an extreme point and bring nearer the moment of denouement. But that does not mean that the revolutionary situation comes at one stroke. Actually its approach is signaled by a continuous series of convulsions. One of these is a wave of sit-down strikes. The problems of the sections of the Fourth International is to help the proletarian vanguard understand the general character and tempo of our epoch and to fructify in time the struggle of the masses with ever more resolute and militant and organizational measures.

The sharpening of the proletariat's struggle means the sharpening of the measures of counterattack on the part of capital. New waves of sit-down strikes can call forth and undoubtedly will call forth resolute counter-measures by the bourgeoisie. Preparatory work is already being done by the confidential staffs of the big trusts. Woe to the revolutionary organizations, woe to the proletariat if it is caught unaware!

The bourgeoisie is nowhere satisfied with the official police and Army. In the US even during peaceful times, the bourgeoisie maintains militarized battalions of scabs and privately armed thugs in factories. To this must be added the various groups of American Nazis. The French bourgeoisie at the first sign of danger mobilized legal and semi-legal detachments of Fascists, including such as are in the Army. No sooner does the pressure of the English workers once more become stronger than immediately the Fascist bands are doubled, tripled, increased tenfold to come out in a bloody march against the workers. The bourgeoisie keeps itself most adequately informed about the fact that in the present epoch the class struggle irresistibly tends to transform itself into total war. The examples of Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain, and other countries taught considerably more to the magnates and lackeys of capital than the official leaders of the proletariat.

The officials of the second and third internationals, as well as the bureaucratic trade unions, consciously close their eyes to the bourgeoisie's private army; otherwise they could not preserve their alliance with it for twenty-four hours. The reformists systematically implant in the minds of the workers the notion that the sacredness of democracy is best guaranteed when the bourgeoisie is armed to the teeth and the workers are unarmed.

The duty of the Fourth International is to put an end to such slavish politics, once and for all. The petty-bourgeois democrats - including Social Democrats, Stalinists, and Anarchists - yell louder against the struggle against fascism the cravenly they capitulate to it actually. Only armed workers detachments, who feel the support of tens of millions of toilers behind them can successfully prevail against the fascist bands. The struggle ~~is~~ against fascism does not start in the Liberal's editorial office but in the factory - and ends in the street. Scabs and private gun men in factory plants are the basic nuclei of the fascist army. This is our point of departure. In connection with every strike and street demonstration, it is imperative to propagate the necessity of creating workers guards for self defense. It is necessary to write this slogan into the revolutionary wing of the trade unions. It is imperative everywhere possible, beginning with the youth groups, to organize groups for self-defense, to drill and acquaint them with the use of arms. A new upsurge of the mass movement would serve not only to increase the number of these units but also to unite them according to neighborhoods, cities, regions, etc. It is necessary to give an organized expression for the valid hatred of the workers ~~to~~ toward the scabs and bands of gangsters and fascists. It is necessary to advance the slogan of workers militia as the one serious guarantee for the inviolability of workers organizations, meetings, and the press.

Only with the help of such systematic, persistent, and indefatigable, courageous agitational and organizational work, always on the basis of the experience of the masses themselves, it is possible to root out from their consciousness the tradition of submissiveness and passivity; to train detachments of heroic fighters, capable of setting an example to all toilers; to inflict a series of tactical defeats upon the armed thugs of the counter revolution to raise the confidence of the exploited and oppressed, to compromise fascism in the eyes of the petty-bourgeois and pave the road to conquest of power by the proletariat.

Engels defined the state as bodies of "armed men" The arming of the proletariat is ~~is~~ is an imperative concomitant element to its struggle for liberation. When the proletariat wills it, it will find the road and means to arming. In this field, also, the leadership falls naturally to the sections of the Fourth International.