

**OUR  
MOVEMENT  
60 YEARS  
AGO**

# The Third International: Organising the revolutionaries to revolutionise the movement



*Trotsky, Lenin and Kamenev discussing at the Second Congress*

Many of the basic ideas of revolutionary Marxism were formulated most clearly and comprehensively by the first four Congresses of the Third International, between 1919 and 1922. Stan Crooke reviews the ideas of the Second [1920] Congress — one of the most important.

ON THE OUTBREAK of the first imperialist World War in 1914, the mass social-democratic parties affiliated to the Second International collapsed into nationalism and class collaboration. Instead of mobilising the working class against the imperialist slaughter, the leaders of the Second International became recruiting sergeants for their own ruling classes.

Lenin recognised that this betrayal marked the ultimate bankruptcy of the Second International, and set about preparing the ground for the founding of a new, Third International.

The first congress of this new International, held in Moscow in 1919, could do little more than proclaim its own exist-

ence. Few of the delegates represented really functioning parties.

But by the time of the Second Congress, which opened in Petrograd [Leningrad] 60 years ago this July, the situation was very different. Functioning Communist Parties now existed in a whole number of countries, and the colonies of European and American imperialism were also well represented at the Congress. It was this, second, Congress, rather than the first, which laid the political and organisational foundations of the Third International, and its debates are still of vital relevance to revolutionaries today.

The Third International was a very different organisation from the Second International. The Second International, as the Russian Communist [Bolshevik] leader Zinoviev contemptuously pointed out, had been a 'letter-box'. It had operated as little more than an information centre and talking shop, turning a blind eye to the acts of betrayal and class collaboration committed by the affiliated organisations.

Its attitude towards the struggle for socialism had been a passive, propagandistic one: socialism was seen as inevitable, sooner or later, so the only thing left for socialists to do was to make propaganda about the coming millennium and

□ August 1914: Major parties of the Socialist [2nd] International support their 'own' ruling classes in the World War. Lenin, Trotsky, and other revolutionary leaders come out for a new International.

□ March 1915: International socialist women's conference condemns the war.

□ September 1915: Zimmerwald conference of left wing socialists condemns the war but fails to call for a new International.

□ April 1916: Second anti-war socialist conference, at Kienthal — closer to Lenin's position.

□ November 1917: Bolshevik revolution in Russia. In 1918-20 revolutionary upsurges followed in Germany, Hungary, and Italy, and a huge political ferment in other countries

□ January 1919: Lenin and Trotsky invite revolutionaries to the founding conference of a new International, to be based on the principles of the Bolsheviks and of the German Spartacusbund.

□ March 1919: Founding congress

try to help along the steady and inevitable process of socialist advance.

The Third International was based on a fundamentally different outlook: "We want to organise ourselves as a fighting organisation that not only propagates communism but also wants to turn it *into deeds*, and to create an international organisation for the purpose... We want to be an *international of deeds*... The Third International is to be an instrument of *struggle*".

It was this basic idea of a single international fighting organisation, mobilising and leading forward the working class on a world scale for head-on confrontation and overthrow of capitalism and imperialism, which ran through all the major debates at the Congress.

But the first debate which had to be won was whether or not a party was needed at all to carry out the revolution. A minority of the delegates, particularly those from Britain and America who had been influenced by the syndicalist movements in their countries, believed that all political parties would end up betraying workers as those of the Second International had done in August 1914.

The minority was certainly correct to condemn the parties of the Second Inter-