

# OUR MOVEMENT 60 YEARS AGO

national; but their mistake was to generalise from this and write off all political parties. In doing so they were allowing themselves to be influenced by bourgeois ideology and propaganda. Zinoviev said: "Every good bourgeois joins a political party as soon as he is 21. But to the workers he comes with propaganda against joining parties, and quite often he catches workers hook, line and sinker".

And not only were the revolutionary syndicalists wrong to believe that the bankruptcy of the Second International meant the bankruptcy of the party type of organisation. They were also illogical. After all, the trade unions had been guilty of crimes against the working class just as gross as those committed by the political parties of the Second International. But the syndicalists did not argue that the idea of trade unions was bankrupt, although, logically, they ought to have.

The class struggles in Russia and Hungary proved, in different ways, the need for a revolutionary party. The October Revolution and the overthrow of capitalism in Russia would have been impossible but for the existence of a Bolshevik party. "If we had not had a centralised, military, iron-disciplined party, which we organised for twenty years, we would have been beaten twenty times over" (Zinoviev).

In Hungary, on the other hand, the numerical and political weaknesses of the party had led it to rely on the trade unions, with fatal consequences. The unions had been entrusted with tasks such as the re-organisation of production, the formation of a Red Army, the distribution of food, etc.

"But", the Hungarian Communist leader Rakosi recounted, "it emerged that these questions could not be solved by them. They did indeed take on these tasks, but in no area did they achieve a satisfactory solution to them. Not only because they were mostly reactionary but also because they were not created to solve political questions. After a few months we were faced with the absolute necessity of forming a strong new Communist party".

But the "centralised, military, iron-disciplined party" which Zinoviev talked of was not simply a necessity for organisational reasons. It was also a political necessity. Because the bourgeoisie controls all the means of propaganda, culture and information in capitalist society (schools, mass media, the church, etc.), the thinking and actions of the working class come to be dominated by bourgeois ideology. Only a party which has purged itself of all bourgeois influences and is a concrete embodiment of revolutionary socialist struggle can break the working class from bourgeois ideology and organise it to overthrow capitalism.

For the Third International the Communist Party was not just a collection of industrial militants. The party was a part of the working class, but also differed from the whole working class in that it had "an overall view of the whole historical road of the working class in its total-

ity". It was "the organisational and political lever with whose help the advanced part of the working class can steer the whole mass of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat onto the correct road".

However correct the syndicalists were to recognise the absolute bankruptcy after 1914 of the parties of the Second International, they were wrong to oppose all party-type organisations. The collapse of the Second International did not signal the bankruptcy of all parties. What it did signal was the need to create a new party of the proletariat: the Communist Party, modelled on the Bolshevik Party which Lenin had built in Russia.

Trotsky declared: "I proceed from the assumption that there is a rather sharp contradiction between the march of historical events and the opinion expressed here with such Marxist magnanimity [by Paul Levi of the German CP] to the effect that the broad masses of workers are already excellently aware of the necessity of the party. It is self-evident that if we were dealing here with Messrs Scheidemann, Kautsky or their English co-thinkers, it would, of course, be unnecessary to convince these gentlemen that a party is indispensable to the working class. They have created a party for the working class and handed it over into the service of bourgeois and capitalist society..."

"Just because I know that the party is indispensable, and am very well aware of the value of the party, and just because I see Scheidemann on the one side and, on the other, American or Spanish or French syndicalists who not only wish to fight



Zinoviev. against the bourgeoisie but who, unlike Scheidemann, really want to tear its head off — for this reason I say that I prefer to discuss with these Spanish, American and French comrades in order to prove to them that the party is indispensable for the fulfillment of the historical mission which is placed upon them — the destruction of the bourgeoisie. I will try to prove this to them in a comradely way, on the basis of my own experience, and not by counterposing to them Scheidemann's long years of experience and saying that for the majority this question has already been settled".

And the main fire of the Congress was directed against the Social-Democratic renegades and traitors. "Opportunism is our main enemy", declared Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution. "Here is our main enemy and we have to defeat this enemy. We must go away from this Congress with the firm resolve to carry on this struggle right to the end in every party. That is our main task".

Why then were delegates from the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), the French Socialist Party (SFIO), and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), invited to the Congress? All of them contained their fair share of right-wingers and waverers (centrists), especially among their parliamentary representatives and top leaders. Their delegacies were accepted not in the hope of reaching some compromise with the opportunists, but in order to sharpen the contradictions in these parties to the point of a split and win over the majority.

Particularly in the case of the SFIO and the USPD, the right-wing leaders had sent delegates to the Congress under the pressure of their leftward-moving rank and file. The leaders hoped that in exchange for making a few left speeches at Congress, the Third International would provide them with a left cover to carry on with their opportunism and treachery at home.

But Lenin and the Executive Committee of the Third International insisted on posing the political differences clearly.

As Zinoviev put it at the end of the 7th session of the Congress: "I ask the Congress, have we lost anything by negotiating so clearly and so exhaustively with these representatives? Will it be bad if yesterday's and today's minutes are published and workers read them?... In this way we will talk to the workers who still have confidence in the centrists. What would we have told them if we had not negotiated with Cachin and Frossard?" (delegates from the SFIO).

The right-wingers in the leadership of organisations like the USPD, PSI and SFIO were exposed to withering criticism, on the basis of their political record of opportunism and class collaboration. The USPD leadership (which included figures like Kautsky and Bernstein) had "sabotaged the revolutionary struggle and until now had given the best service to the bourgeoisie". Turati and the other leaders of the right wing minority of the PSI were denounced as "carrying out counter-revolutionary propaganda". The Third International demanded that the PSI make a clear break from these "people who have been saying the same thing for 30 years because they are consistent reformists".

There could be no room for such people in the national sections of the Third International. The parties affiliated to the Third International were to be the centralised shock troops of the workers, and there was no place in them for the right-wing and opportunist deadwood set adrift by the collapse of the Second International: "These gentlemen should not be allowed to remain in our party and sabotage our fight. We have too many open enemies to allow our concealed enemies into our party" (Zinoviev).

So in its approach to the waverers the Third International combined absolute firmness of principles with flexibility of tactics. In his pamphlet, *Left-wing Communism*, written just before the Congress, Lenin argued: "attacks of the German Lefts on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany for entertaining the idea of a bloc with the 'Independents' [USPD]... appear to us to be utterly frivolous and a clear proof that the 'Lefts' are in the wrong... The German Independent Social-Democratic Party [USPD] is obviously not a homogeneous body: alongside the old opportunist leaders... there has arisen in this party a Left, proletarian wing which is

