

INTERNATIONALISM

by

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THE ATTITUDE of internationalist revolutionaries is at once critical and appreciative, not mincing words in relation to revolutionary events, and at the same time giving fraternal assistance to the fighters. This was the attitude of Marx and Engels to the Paris Commune. It was also Lenin's attitude to the Polish social democrats . . .

Believing that the socialist revolution would occur simultaneously in a number of the most important European countries, Marx had to consider how, side by side with, or more likely within, the International, the various sections of it could display evidence of their independence and at the same time of their capacity to achieve general demands in concrete conditions which were very varied. Thus, arising from the hypothesis of the Marxist conception of the simultaneous victory of the revolution in many countries at the same time, there arose the principle of the polycentric character of the working class movement, acting according to the general principles and decisions of the International.

It never entered Marx' head that one could, for example from London, direct in detail all the activities of the Paris Commune. This is eloquently proved by the manifestos and the address of the General Council of the International ("Civil War in France") . . .

Everyone knows that in the period of imperialism the situation has changed radically. Lenin demonstrated that the socialist revolution could occur in a single country. In 1917 this theory was proved in practice. And it became necessary to apply the slogan "workers of the world, unite" in these new conditions. Formerly, the idea of international working class unity had the victory of the future revolution as its sole aim, but after 1917 a second objective appeared—to defend the first country where the revolution had been victorious. To be an internationalist meant to link one's destiny to that of the October Revolution. This placed this country, as well as the working class of the capitalist and colonial countries in a special situation. For one thing, the Soviet

Union, by force of circumstances, occupied a leading position in the working class movement, if only because of its revolutionary experience. In addition, the international working class regarded the question of attitude to the Soviet Union as a fundamental political criterion. It was precisely because of this, and because of the break up of the Second International, that Lenin became one of the principal founders of the Third International, a new type of international working class organisation . . .

The habit, until recently widespread, of describing the history of the working class movement and also that of the Soviet Union as an uninterrupted series of victories, concealed such simple facts as the following: that the victory of the Leninist conception of the revolution, that of the Third International, together with the successes which it achieved, also created new difficulties for the working class and gave it new tasks. One of these difficulties was the question of the connection between the policy of the Soviet Union, considered as a State having relations with capitalist countries, and the policies of the communist parties in other countries. It is necessary to say that in this connection, in the course of the last thirty years, the Stalinist interpretation of internationalism has been responsible for a number of mistakes made by the international working class movement.

In the time of Lenin, the Third International was a forum where the communist parties could exchange opinions, frankly and sincerely. Later this began to change. This change resulted from the beginning of the "cult of the personality"—from Stalinism.

A conception exists, according to which Stalinism was a result of the regrettable characteristics of Joseph Stalin. In fact, certain of the matters dealt with in this article could confirm this thesis only if examined superficially.

In 1927, the C.P.S.U. delegation to the Executive Committee of the International presented a draft resolution which condemned Trotsky's letter to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. When the Italian delegation, which included Togliatti and Ignazio Silone (now a member of Saragat's party), stated that before voting on this resolution they would like to know the contents of Trotsky's letter consternation reigned. Stalin (today Togliatti and Silone agree on this point) tried at all costs to prevent the representatives of the international working class from knowing the text of Trotsky's letter. (This was the letter in which Stalin was criticised, among other things, for his mistaken attitude towards the Kuomintang a short time before the notorious massacre of Shanghai, in which Chang-Kai-chek had the whole communist organisation in that town murdered). Since ___ in spite of his insistence—the Italian delegation continued to refuse to condemn Trotsky's letter without having seen it, Stalin withdrew

the draft resolution, not wanting to make known the contents of the letter to the delegates.

Obviously, one can see this affair solely as a matter of individual character. This seems, however, to be too superficial. Actually, this business was not a matter of a private quarrel between some individuals, but of the relations between communists in different countries. This story, proves that, by 1927, something had already happened to poison these relations, that Stalin was trying to exploit the esteem enjoyed by the Soviet Union for purposes which had nothing to do with the principles of democracy or of equal rights between all communist parties, that is to say with the principles of internationalism.

And here is another example concerning a very important question, the matter which so fatally affected the Communist Parties of Britain and France in 1939-40.

The careful reader of Volume III of "The Communists" by Aragon, will see that in autumn, 1939 and spring, 1940 the French Communist Party opposed the war against Hitler and called for the conclusion of peace with the Third Reich. The British Communist Party adopted a similar policy. How can we explain this inconceivable attitude? Why should communist parties oppose an anti-Hitler war? We should add that this policy allowed the bourgeois Governments in France and Britain to attack the Communist parties and to close the communist newspapers. It appears that this mistaken policy was the result of identifying the policy of the Soviet Union as a State, with the policy of communist parties in other countries. The line of reasoning in this case appears to be—from the moment when the Soviet Union concluded a pact with Germany the communist parties must demand the cessation of the war against the Germans. Can one describe such a type of reasoning as internationalism? It seems more likely that this is an example of a serious deformation of the principle of international working class solidarity, in favour of a policy of supporting the predominance of the Soviet Union, a predominance which led to a complete change in the tactics of the communist parties, and to a neglect of the interests of the countries which these parties should represent. Neither did such an attitude bring any advantage to the Soviet Union. In fact it is obvious that the weakening of the working class movement in the capitalist countries is synonymous with the weakening of the strength of the Soviet Union.

This last question can in no way be explained by reference to the characteristics of a particular leader. It is probable that at the time—the eve of the second world war—such changes had been made in the principle of internationalism that its content had been substantially altered.

Whilst in the Soviet Union, the system of the cult of the individual brought in its train dogmatism and the disappearance

of creative thought and free initiative by the people, the role of apologist for the Soviet Union which made all fraternal criticism impossible, objectively strengthened these deviations. Thus there was a double weakening: internal deformations in the first socialist country influenced the international movement, the loss of the critical spirit and the absence of a severe and uncompromising understanding of these alterations on the part of this movement strengthened Stalinism, weakened the revolution.

When provocation and terror hit the old Bolshevik Leninist fighters, the heroes of the struggle against the Tzar, the heroes of the civil war, the fighters who had borne on their shoulders the brunt of the first Five Year Plan, provocation and terror did not spare the members of the Comintern. Bela Kun, Kostrzewa, Warski, shared the fate of Postichev, Kossier and Roudzoutak.

The whole working class movement shared the same fate. The period of panegyrics demanded that the attitude of the Comintern should change, that its role should no longer be active but contemplative, that it should change from exercising a critical role to one of merely glossing over reality. Fine phrases replaced analysis and understanding worthy of materialists, of marxists.

Came the time when not only the successes but also the mistakes of the Soviet Union were passively copied. And the very fact of passively copying, of mechanically transplanting to one country or another, existing conditions and principles worked out in the Soviet Union, and correct for that country, could also lead, and has in fact led, to mistakes.

"Who has given you the right to criticise the Soviet Union?" We know this question. For a long time, and particularly in recent years, it has been less a theoretical question than the practical means of stifling despotically even the most timid attempt to appraise critically any aspect whatsoever of life in the Soviet Union. In fact, who has given us such a right?

We think that we would be better able to get to the bottom of the business if the question were posed in a slightly different way. Who, in People's Poland, has taken away the right of socialists to criticise the Soviet Union?

Honest and sincere criticism has always been a prerequisite of international relations and of all joint action by oppressed classes and peoples.

Its absence has usually been the result of disturbance of these relations. Without sincere and fraternal criticism there is no internationalism. By its very nature, internationalism includes the right of ideological allies to criticise each other. We can go further—it includes not merely the right but the duty. Whoever gives up this right, in our opinion, gives up the idea of inter-

nationalism. They renounce it for lies, hypocrisy, diplomacy and blind loyalty.

It is a bad thing when two parties renounce the right of criticism in their relations, and then take up an attitude which is opportunist and insincere. But it is even worse when, in the relations between two parties, one gives up the right to criticise and the other takes to itself and centralises all such rights, when it takes over the rights of its ally.

It cannot be denied that such phenomena existed in our relations with the Soviet Union. An apologetic and admiring way of dealing with all that happened in the U.S.S.R. was the a priori condition of all our political, scientific and propagandist activity. This situation has continued long enough—for about the last thirty years—to become deeprooted.

Seemingly, similar ideas were characteristic of the attitude of our Soviet comrades towards People's Poland. Who, before October, 1956 had ever read the most mildly critical article about Poland in the Soviet press? There; were no such articles. Who had ever read the slightest criticism of Poland in any Soviet book? The only articles on studies that appeared were apologetics of the same type as those which were published about the Soviet Union in our country . . .

Behind the official facade supplied by newspapers and books, of mutual compliments and praise, the reality was a condition of inequality. This had deep roots in the complicated political and economic mechanism of our mutual relations, a mechanism which functioned with amazing accuracy and precision. There was no place for the smallest sign of criticism in our country, or therefore for the slightest sign of independence. All actions were subordinated to a situation in which a single party had taken all rights to itself, in which a single party had the monopoly of initiative, intelligence and example. The official facade of equality in all spheres hid the true fact that apology and passivity were the function of only one party — that of Poland.

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The oft repeated formula "Who has given you the right to criticise the Soviet Union?" is linked with another "theoretical" principle. Even the most friendly sign of criticism of the Soviet Union is "factionalism" which the enemy will use for his own ends.

What has been the practical result of this principle, which has certainly existed for many years? We do not think it is necessary to enter into complicated historical and theoretical analyses to prove that the idea of the "faction" has been destructive, that it has split the world working class movement. It has been used to give political and moral justification to a hypocritical and opportunist silence on differences of opinion and outlook, and

to justify secrecy on the subject of contradictions, to cloak the gravity of the conflicts between socialist countries and workers' parties:

The negative influence of the idea of the "faction" and the practical results of the application of this idea can be seen throughout the whole working class movement, and in relations between all the working class parties. It has also existed between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and our party and between the U.S.S.R. and People's Poland.

The silence maintained in press and propaganda about Polish science, about a series of differences of opinion and of contradictions between Polish society and Soviet society, a silence maintained on questions concerning certain historical events when Polish-Russian or Polish-Soviet relations were strained, has not resulted in the strengthening and consolidation of our friendship with the Soviet people. Unfortunately this practice here encouraged the appearance of nationalist and anti-Soviet feelings . . .

The undeniable fact of an absence of perfect equality in our ideological, political, economic and cultural relations with the Soviet Union was undoubtedly the thing which caused the most feeling among the majority of the people. The social and economic repercussions which resulted from this lack of independence were obvious to everyone.

People were also irritated by the fact that a whole series of questions, a whole series of incidents in the history of Poland and the Soviet Union were falsified, hypocritically embroidered or sometimes cynically ignored. Distrust was aroused by the absence of any explanation of the deportation of Poles in 1939-41, and by an obstinate silence on the attitude, mistaken in our opinion, of the Soviet authorities to the Home Army groups in Vilna and Lvov in 1944, and many other similar facts. Public opinion demanded sincere and truthful explanations of all these points. It seemed as if these would be given after the 20th Congress, that after that Congress truth would really mean truth. Unfortunately the obstinate silence continued. Let us have the courage to recognise that this is not favourable to the development of Polish-Soviet friendship. Nor is the fact that up to the present time chauvinist tendencies in the Soviet Union have not been condemned. These tendencies were extremely widespread in recent years and led to the glorification of everything and everyone Russian — of Suvorov, for example. Propaganda exalting the grandeur of Russia has had destructive effects on the development of proletarian internationalism in Poland. It has, in fact, encouraged the growth of a, dangerous chauvinism.

The regulation of our relations with the Soviet Union in accordance with the principles of legality and sovereignty, the explanation of all questions of interest to the Polish people about

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which lies have been told or concerning which silence has been maintained—this is the most effective way to ensure and consolidate Polish-Soviet friendship. History will show who were the true friends of the Soviet Union (not merely the followers) and who were the true internationalists; those who struggled for the removal of the real political and social causes of anti-Sovietism, for the removal of anti-Soviet feelings and tendencies, or those who tried to perpetuate them and thus, objectively, to prevent the development and deepening of our friendship with the Soviet people.

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Just as Stalinism was a catastrophe for the international working class movement, so the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was a victory for the workers of the whole world. It is not the actual date which is important. It can be argued that it was not the 20th Congress but the July Plenum of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. or the visit of the Soviet leaders to Yugoslavia. The fact is that we live during the period of the renaissance of communism, and that this renaissance means a return to real internationalism in the relations between States . . .

Will this not reduce and weaken the cohesion of the movement? Certainly not. Obviously this will create new fraternal relations, completely equal relations between equals, in which capacity for leadership and the development of marxist ideas and not the size of a State or the strength of administrative pressure will decide influence in the international movement . . .

But now, precisely because we have finished with the passive acceptance of models, difficult times are beginning. It is necessary to work out new economic forms which are in accordance with the traditions and conditions of the country. The need, and indeed the absolute necessity for a sharp discussion, based on mutual respect and without invective, for criticism and polemic is growing . . .

Obviously there will be obstacles in the way. On the one hand, in the development of internationalist relations we meet with obsequious diplomacy, which expresses itself in insincere eulogies. On the other hand we encounter decrees, invective, the giving of labels and other things which are a substitute for ideological discussion. However such demonstrations belong to the past — at least we hope so. The irreversible movement of history has created new links between the people and the communist parties, links which are based on justice and truth. The Polish working class **and** its communist party have frankly taken this new road.

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