

# Joll's "History of the Second International"

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BOURGEOIS AUTHORS, in offering their conceptions of the history of Socialism, work under the big disadvantage of defending the obsolete capitalist system, either directly or by implication. Consequently, they strive to transform a great historical positive into an historical negative, and vice versa. That is, they try to prove, falsely, that world Socialism is a failure, and that world capitalism is advancing and successful. In consequence of this dilemma, they underplay at many points the strength of Socialism and overplay that of capitalism. James Joll's book, *The Second International: 1889-1914*\* suffers from this elementary weakness.

Joll's volume contains much excellent information material upon the workers' early fight for Socialism, a great deal of good secondary analysis, and many valuable biographical sketches of the leading figures of the pre-World War I Second International. The shortcomings of the book, however, are of a basic character. Here it is not a case of challenging this or that dubious fact or formulation; but rather, of colliding with the book's main premises. Every student of international labor history should read Joll's book for

its wealth of material; nevertheless, the volume cannot stand as a fundamental history of the Second International for the period it covers, 1889-1914. And even less can it achieve its implied aim of serving as essentially an authority on world Socialism in general, with its false thesis, however sketchily stated, that there has been not much left of world Socialism since the Social-Democratic war debacle of 1914.

## DISREGARDING THE CAPITALIST BACKGROUND

One of the basic weaknesses of Mr. Joll's history is his almost complete failure to analyze the capitalist system as the general social framework within which the organization of the Second International grew and functioned. He thus tends to reduce the whole movement largely to a sort of ideological development. His book lacks even the amount of "economic determinism" that is usually to be found in the writings of bourgeois historians since the time of Charles A. Beard. Joll does not see clearly the dynamics of the labor struggle which was the foundation of the Second, as well as of the other two Internationals; namely, the deep-going discontent of the heavily exploited workers, who are impelled to organize and fight by the remorse-

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less workings of the capitalist system. He tends, therefore, unduly to write off Socialism in all its aspects. On the other hand, he assumes that capitalism is altogether a sound system, one that is not responsible basically for the vast Socialist ferment that has gone on within its bosom for the past century and more. Of course, he practically ignores the development of the world crisis of the capitalist system, of which the first World War and the Russian Revolution were such profound precipitants and expressions.

As part of his neglect of general analysis in developing the social background of the Second International, Mr. Joll devotes almost no attention to the evolution of the capitalist system from its competitive to its monopoly (imperialist) stage, which took place fundamentally during the years he deals with, and which had most potent effects in determining the life course of the Second International, and particularly in bringing about its debacle in 1914. In the leading capitalist countries of the world, it was especially during the pre-World War I lifetime of the Second International that the great trusts and monopolies took shape, developed finance capitalism, spawned foreign policies of aggression and colonial conquest, and came to dominant political control in all these countries.

Revisionism—with which Joll deals at considerable length, but never explains—was the trend upon the part of the opportunist leaders of the International to so recast and

adapt labor's policies as to subordinate the interests of the working class to those of the big capitalists. Revisionism, directly produced by imperialism, had by the eve of World War I, come to saturate the entire daily practice and outlook of the decisive bureaucrats at the head of the Second International. It is impossible to explain the character and effects of revisionism unless one shows clearly its direct relationship to imperialism. This basic task, which was a supreme achievement of Lenin, Joll utterly neglects.

Joll's failure to develop the decisive role of monopoly capital and imperialism in determining the course of the Second International makes it quite impossible for him also to draw an authentic picture of the role of the Right-wing leadership of the International and of most of its parties. He depicts the betrayal of the International into World War I, brought about upon the initiative of the German Right Social-Democrats, primarily as the action of confused but sincere leaders, caught unawares by the war situation. He declares that they acted genuinely on behalf of the rank and file, stating (page 176): "But above all, as in Austria, there was the feeling that any other action would be a betrayal of the interests and intentions of the rank and file." Such conclusions by Joll are highly unrealistic.

The German Right leaders, mostly opportunist intellectuals and seasoned trade-union bureaucrats, were not surprised by the advent of the war situation. They had discussed

this question for many years. Had they been of the intention to do so, they could readily have organized an anti-war stand, although admittedly, as in Russia, the immediate cost for them would have been great. Undoubtedly, however, they had long before made up their minds not to oppose the war if and when it should come. Two decades of intense imperialist "prosperity" and almost as much of widespread Bernstein propaganda of revisionism, had done their work thoroughly, sapping the earlier Socialist convictions of these leaders. By the time the war broke out they had already abandoned revolutionary Socialism for all practical purposes, and they supported the war basically as believers in "evolutionary capitalism."

The Right Social-Democratic leadership in all the countries, during the next couple of decades, demonstrated their loyalty to bourgeois reformism by their implacable hatred of the Soviet Union, their shooting down of the German Revolution, their surrender of the Italian and German labor movements to fascism, and their support of the war drive of militant American imperialism against the U.S.S.R. and its allies during the cold war. The Right Social-Democrats who led the workers of the world into World War I were by no means the political innocents that Joll pictures them. From the very outset Lenin correctly characterized their conduct in supporting the war as a gross betrayal of the working class and of Socialism.

## SOCIALISM DID NOT DIE IN 1914

The most serious single error in Mr. Joll's book is his conclusion that world Socialism virtually perished with the war debacle of 1914. He does not state this view explicitly, but the implication is there clear enough. Thus, the opening sentence in his concluding chapter reads: "The Socialist world was never to be the same again after 1914"—meaning that it would never again be generally so strong. As his sum-up of things as they now are, he then proceeds to draw a very dismal picture of a once powerful Social-Democracy at present having strongholds in only Great Britain, Belgium, and Scandinavia, and he gives no account whatever of Communist Parties in Communist-led countries as factors in world Socialism.

This constitutes a profound misestimation of the status of world Socialism, which is today vastly more powerful than it was at the beginning of World War I. Socialism did not die with the great betrayal by the Right Social-Democrats, but went into a higher stage. The vast complex of Socialist developments of this period—the revisionist war betrayal, the disaster of the World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the birth of the world Communist movement—taken together, amounted to a great turning point an advance for world Socialism. The historical progress of the world's workers is often marked by tragic defeats, as well as by important suc-

cesses—the birth and death of elaborate economic and political theories, the maturing and decay of great national and international organizations of labor, the loss of huge strikes and even of revolutions, the failure to halt devastating wars and the advance of reaction—but the international working class makes its way ahead nevertheless, learning from its defeats as well as from its victories. In a historical sense, therefore, the Social-Democratic war betrayal of 1914, for all its immediate tragic consequences, was only an incident in the epic forward march of the world's workers toward Socialism.

Joll's passing by of the world Communist movement as though it does not exist in a Socialist sense is his most extreme belittlement of Socialism in the face of a presumably entrenched and dominant world capitalism. But one-third of the world becoming Socialist is not to be so easily exorcised out of existence. The clear fact is that world Socialism today, embracing a whole system of states with some 900 million people, and rapidly growing, is overtaking and surpassing the decrepit and obsolete capitalist system on every front. The central political reality of this period is the swift march of the peoples of the world into Socialism. Khrushchev was speaking in terms of realism when he forecast that the grandchildren of the present generation in the United States would live under Socialism.

The strength of world Socialism, also reflected in the weakness of

world capitalism, is further exhibited by the tremendous break-up of the colonial system that has been going on since about the end of World War II. This is a major disaster to the capitalist system, and by the same token it brings about a tremendous relative and actual increase of strength for world Socialism. Nor can the enormous growth of the trade-union movement (several times over since 1914) and of other basic mass organizations of the workers and of the democratic masses generally in the capitalist countries be disregarded when taking count of the strength of modern-day Socialism.

Joll even understates the post-World War I role and strength of the international Social Democracy. While in 1914 this movement did actually break up on a world scale, it came together again shortly after the first great war had concluded, and since then it and its affiliated national parties have been a very important factor in world politics generally. Since 1918, in fact, almost every country in Europe has had, at one time or another, Right Social-Democrats at the head of its government. More than this, the revisionist leaders exert a powerful influence in the general trade union, cooperative, workers' political, and other mass movements of many countries on all the continents. True, the revisionists in power have left but few traces of Socialism behind them. Their general program has been rather a sustaining one for a "reformed" capitalism than a deter-

mined fight for Socialism. Also, their one-time affiliation with Marxist thinking has just about vanished in a composite of Keynesian "progressive capitalism." Nevertheless, the Social-Democracy, in all its phases, running far beyond the narrow British - Belgian - Scandinavian base ascribed to it by Joll, still commands the support of millions of Socialist-minded workers and constitutes a strong political force. It is these masses who must be constructively reckoned with in dealing with the question of Social-Democracy.

#### STATIC CONCEPT OF SOCIALISM'S PROGRESS

In his book, Mr. Joll not only does not indicate the tremendous progress of world Socialism in general, despite the great betrayal by the revisionists of 1914, but he also does not appreciate the basic advances that have been made at solving, either partly or completely, many of the elementary individual problems that plagued the world Socialist and labor movement in its earlier stages. Thus, he tends to picture rather hopelessly the appallingly difficult questions that wracked the recurring congresses and national organizations of the Second International, including the bitter ideological disputes between Anarchists and Marxists and between revisionists and revolutionaries within the Marxist camp; the quarrels between the advocates of political action and those who proposed direct action, particularly the general strike; the complex and gigantic question of colonialism; the

general problem of nationalism vs. internationalism in labor's ranks; the basic practical problems of how to win universal suffrage in many countries of Europe, how to carry through the historic demand for the eight-hour day, how to achieve trade union unity, and how to overcome the apparently impregnable opposition of the great trusts and monopolies to the trade unionization of their plants. And overriding all other practical questions in the life of the Second International—how to prevent the ever-looming world war.

Underlying all the problems and struggles of the congresses of the Second International, which Mr. Joll portrays so graphically and with such detail, but too statically, there was going on an irresistible progress in an accumulation of understanding, experience, and organization. This was true even if the Second International, like the First, was destroyed and the Third International dissolved in the historical process. The central fact is that in the intervening years since the Social-Democratic war debacle in 1914, the world's workers and their colonial allies, in the course of, or under the pressures of, the imperialist wars and great revolutions of the period, have found the answers to most of the knotty questions which tore the Second International, like the First, with internal disputes and overwhelmed it with immediately insoluble practical problems.

Together with blazing the way to Socialism in many countries, the workers' and allied forces have, dur-

ing the past forty years or so, in practically all the major capitalist lands, organized the bulk of the hitherto almost impregnable basic industries, established the eight-hour day far and wide, won elaborate systems of social security, and cracked the hard nut of the voting franchise for both women and men. They have also found the key to the erstwhile baffling colonial question and are winning new freedoms for hundreds of millions of the slaves of imperialism. And of vast historic importance, during the past few years, they have administered the first great defeats to the imperialist war-makers. Where the forces of democracy and Socialism were not strong enough to prevent World War I and II, they are now proving able to block the attempt of American imperialism to plunge the world into an atomic war in its desperate bid for world domination. Thus, they are mastering the great question of war, which wrecked the Second International and which still threatens disaster to the world.

The greatest of all the individual achievements of the forces of Socialism, however, has been to bring Marxism, enriched during the past half century with Leninism, ever more to the front as the theoretical guide of the world's working class and its political allies. Marxism-Leninism is the end-product of the decades-long ideological conflicts among Anarchists, Syndicalists, Revisionists, pure and simple trade unionists, and other labor currents. Marxism-Leninism has proved over and over

again in the daily class struggle, and in the fire of successful revolution, that it points the way, both to the most successful struggle for the workers' interests under capitalism and to the abolition of capitalism and the building of Socialism. It has already become the most dominant world labor theory and program of action, and its prestige and influence are irresistibly on the increase. At the present time—freeing itself from Stalinist bureaucratic and doctrinaire excesses, largely the products of many years of super-disciplined revolutionary struggle, and also curing itself from a recent infection of Right-revisionism, produced primarily by the post-war effects of the capitalist "boom," particularly that of American imperialism—Marxism-Leninism, flexible and adaptable, is now taking one of the greatest leaps forward in its progressive history. But this, too, like so many others of Labor's major advances, is not being accomplished without much difficulty and travail.

Of course, the forces of Socialism have not solved all the individual problems which historically have plagued the labor movement—else the capitalist system would be no more. Chief among these specific unsolved problems is that of the need for an ever-greater unity in the ranks of labor and its allies. Already in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels, with their great slogan, "Workers of the World, Unite!" signaled the central character of the problem of unity and the workers have wrestled with it for many decades. But here, too, vast prog-

ress has been made since the war debacle of 1914, although Joll does not indicate it. All the above-listed advances of the workers and their allies, tending to clarify and entrench the labor movement, are at the same time basic factors in furthering labor unity, nationally and internationally. The question is much more complex than merely establishing better working relations between Communists and Social-Democrats, important though this is.

The most powerful manifestation of the growing world unity of the forces of democracy and Socialism is the system of Socialist states that has been built up since the end of World War II. Akin to these gigantic forces also is the powerful aggregation of colonial and semi-colonial peoples lately combined in the Bandung movement. Of epoch-making importance, too, in the general unity respect, was the enormous consolidation of pro-peace forces that were organized to resist the war drive of American imperialism during the cold war years. The great World Federation of Trade Unions, formed at the end of the war (but now split), likewise indicates the eventually irresistible forces of unity that are at work in the vital field of trade unionism. The people's front and people's democracy policies have also proved to be open ways to broad unity developments in various countries. And the new Communist perspective of a parliamentary achievement of Socialism is opening up fresh possibilities of mass

unity, particularly with the Social-Democracy. Already, world unity of the forces of democracy and Socialism, of which the Left is the main organizer and leader, has reached the point where it is able to block the war plans of the imperialists, to prevent the growth of fascism upon an international scale, and to guarantee the existence of new Socialist states in the face of the hostile capitalist sector of the world. And still more far-reaching expressions of expanding unity developments will not be long in manifesting themselves.

The 1914 war debacle of Right Social-Democracy, so painstakingly portrayed by Mr. Joll, was, true enough, a vast tragedy in the history of world Socialism. But by no means did it halt this historic movement. On the contrary, the disaster eventually contributed indirectly to the movement's soaring, through the Russian Revolution and other basic developments, to higher levels of achievement than ever before. One very important thing that the war debacle also did was to deal a mortal blow to the dominant world leadership that the revisionists had long enjoyed in the Second International. From 1914-17 on, the trend in the world labor movement, regarding its leadership, has been from Right to Left; nor is this general tendency likely to change. The revolutionary program of Lenin has triumphed over the surrender program of Bernstein; hence the world is now rapidly travelling to its inevitable historical goal of Socialism.