
The Moscow International

by Morris Hillquit

Published in the *New York Call*, v. 13, no. 268 (Sept. 23, 1920), pg. 8.

Ever since the formation of the Moscow International I have carefully refrained from public controversies with the leaders of that body. In the general public mind the Communist International is so closely linked with the Soviet government of Russia that every criticism of the former



is liable to be construed as an attack on the latter, and I am anxious to avoid any appearance of hostility to the Soviet government. My sympathies are wholly with the government of the Russian workers and peasants. In spite of its professed dictatorship, it is at bottom more demo-

cratic than any bourgeois government in the world. In spite of its methods of coercion, it makes for a greater measure of true freedom than has ever been realized in the recorded history of the nations. In spite of all its shortcomings, it is a living source of inspiration and hope to the workers of the world by its practical example of struggle, sacrifice, and social idealism. I would fain withhold my criticism of the policies and program of the Communist International while Soviet Russia stands with its back to the wall fighting the combined forces of European and American capitalism.

But, unfortunately, the leaders of the Communist International have not seen fit to exercise a similar degree of consideration toward their comrades in other countries. While the Socialists of England, France, and the United States and the Independent Socialists of Germany rallied wholeheartedly to the defense of the

Soviet government in the face of vilification and attacks of practically the whole body of their non-Socialist countrymen, the official spokesmen of the Moscow International expressed their appreciation of this manifestation of international Socialist solidarity by publicly denouncing them as renegades and traitors. I refer particularly to the bombastic “manifestos” of the chairman of the Moscow Executive Committee, G. Zinoviev, which have become so chronic and aggressive that they can no longer be allowed to go unnoticed and unchallenged.

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I am impelled to take up the unpleasant task of replying to some of these extravagant pronouncements partly in an effort to clarify the issues between Socialism of the Western type and the new doctrines emanating from Moscow, and partly on personal grounds. For some reason I have had the misfortune of incurring the particular wrath of the autocrat of the Communist International, and have been repeatedly held out as one of the horrible examples of Socialist apostasy.

In his encyclical of September 1, 1919, Zinoviev asserts:

The so-called Center (Kautsky, in Germany; Longuet, in France; the Independent Labour Party and some elements of the British Socialist Party, in England; Hillquit, in America) is, in spite of its protestations, an objectively anti-Socialist tendency.

On several other occasions the stern chairman of the Moscow International has nailed me to the cross as an agent of the bourgeoisie with Martov, the leader of the International Social Democracy of Russia; Vic-

tor Chernov, the head of the Socialist Revolutionaries; Friedrich Adler, of Austria; and J. Ramsay MacDonald of England, as companions in the crucifixion.

In his report to the 2nd Congress of the Communist International [July 19-Aug. 7, 1920] he observes:

When we hear that gentlemen like Crispian and Hilferding (leaders of the Independent Socialists in Germany), Morris Hillquit and similarly minded Socialists in America also begin to express sympathy with the Third International and are not disinclined to join it under certain conditions, we say to ourselves that the door to the Communist International must be locked, that a reliable guard must be placed at the gates of the Communist International.

And in a recent interview Zinoviev confides to a reporter of the ultra-capitalist Chicago Tribune:

We know the platform of the leaders like Morris Hillquit. We consider them traitors to the revolutionary movement.

“Traitors,” “anti-Socialists,” “agents of the bourgeoisie” — those are strong words, and do credit to the resolute revolutionary spirit of their amiable author, but they are poor substitutes for argument and proof.

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The sole specification of offense, which, as far as I know, the chairman of the Moscow International has ever vouchsafed in his indictments against the “Centrists” is contained in the following passage in the Manifesto of September 1, 1919:

Then general unifying program is at the present moment the recognition of the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet power.... The so-called Center...is, in spite of its protestation, an objectively anti-Socialist tendency, BECAUSE IT CANNOT AND DOES NOT WISH TO LEAD THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SOVIET POWER OF THE PROLETARIAT. [The capitals are mine.]

Since the Communist International accepts the Marxian definition of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” as a period of political transformation corresponding to the period of revolutionary transformation of the capitalist society into the Communist society, the Zinoviev indictment resolves itself into the

following 4 distinct contentions:

1. The revolutionary transformation from capitalism to Communism or Socialism has been accomplished, or at least is about to be accomplished, in Germany, France, England, and the United States (the principle field of action of the aforementioned “Centrists”), and the corresponding political transformation is now on the order of the day for the workers of those countries.

2. That such transformation must be accomplished under the rule of the proletarian dictatorship.

3. That the dictatorship of the proletariat must assume the form of Soviet organization on the Russian model.

4. That all Socialists who do not accept these theories for their own countries and do not call to active struggle for the immediate realization of a form of government as above outlined impede the path of Socialist progress, become reactionaries and traitors, and are unfit for admission to the Communist International.

Let us examine these assertions in their order.

I strongly suspect that at least in England and France the Socialists have yet a large task to perform before their countries enter upon the period of active Socialist transformation. But on this point the comrades of those countries can speak with greater authority than I can. As far as the political, social, and economic conditions of the United States are concerned, I maintain, without fear of serious contradiction, that they show no symptoms of an imminent breakdown of the capitalist order. American capitalism is not in a condition of collapse, nor are the American workers in a state of revolution. The war and the resultant economic upheavals have weakened the foundations of the capitalist system in the United States, but they have not destroyed them. The capitalist rule is still powerfully entrenched in the whole industrial and political system of the country.

The American workers are discontented and restless. A large portion of them are in revolt not only against their masters, but also against their old-line leaders in the conservative trade unions. The industrial life of the country is replete with strikes, sporadically and spontaneously flaring up in the rank and file of the workers against the advice and without the sanction of their leaders. But these are mostly narrow trade

and wage movements. The conditions of industrial unsettlement and labor unrest in the United States are exceedingly favorable to the cause of Socialism; they furnish fertile ground for the development of an enlightened sentiment of class-consciousness and for the formation of powerful and aggressive working class organizations, political and economic, under Socialist leadership. But discontent and unrest alone do not constitute Socialism, and least of all a "struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet power."

But should not the proletarian dictatorship, if admitted to be desirable, be emphasized in the Socialist propaganda even at this state of immaturity of the American workers? I do not think so. In his famous letter in which the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" first occurs, Karl Marx, writing about the program of the German Social Democracy in 1875, observes: "The program at this time does not have to deal with the period of transition any more than with the nature of the future state in the Communist Society."

That is precisely the situation in the United States, and no doubt in most West European countries. What we have before us is not the question of the political form of the "transitional" state, but the concrete work of propaganda and organization. Those who would turn the activities of the American Socialist movement from this realistic and important task to the sterile discussion of academic issues are, in the language of G. Zinoviev, "an objectively anti-Socialist tendency."

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Even if the subject of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" were of timely and practical importance for the Socialists of the Western countries of Europe and of the United States of America, the Zinoviev formulation of the doctrine is arbitrary and faulty. We all accept the Marxian assertion that the political form of the "transitional" state must be a "dictatorship of the proletariat." Our differences arise only on the proper interpretation of the term "dictatorship" in the above phrase. Unfortunately, Marx himself has never felt called upon to specify his meaning. From his general political and social philosophy, as well as from some more or less direct hints from his own pen and from

that of Frederick Engels, it is reasonable to infer that Marx used the term as equivalent to "political rule" or "political domination." In this meaning the statement is almost axiomatic. The transformation of capitalist society into a Socialist order implies a series of planful and fundamental industrial and political changes. Such changes will not be undertaken by the capitalist class in power. They can only be accomplished by the workers. In order to perform the task the workers must be in control of the government machinery, and such control must continue until the work of socialization has been fully accomplished, all economic classes have been abolished, the working class itself has ceased to exist as a class, and the working class state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) has given way to the classless administration of the Socialist regime. But what is the nature of the proletarian control in this "transitional" state? Must it be 100 percent rule based upon suppression of all political opposition, or will a simple majority control of the government suffice, as it has in the past proved adequate for the capitalist class to maintain its economic system?

The Communist International proclaims that the dictatorship of the proletariat implies the total disfranchisement of the bourgeoisie and the forcible suppression of political opposition. This is the principal contribution of the new Communist philosophy. It is a naked assertion, unsupported by a sufficient range of historical experience and unrelated to the fundamental problems of Marxian Socialism. The Russian soviet government has adopted the policy of suppressing opposition and has succeeded in maintaining itself in power. But what proof is there that it would not have fared as well or better with a policy of political tolerance? And even assuming that the policy of repression was demonstrably necessary to preserve the revolution in Russia in view of the extraordinary circumstances with which it was confronted, does it follow that similar conditions must necessarily accompany the Socialist revolution in all other countries? The need of repression in support of a revolutionary government is always determined by the social forces behind such government. If the revolution is the result of a luck coup d'etat, or of an unusual combination of temporary circumstances, and feels itself unstable and insecure, it can only survive by forcible and merciless suppression of all opposition. If, on the other

hand, a revolution is deeply rooted in the needs and aspirations of the large body of the people, and comes as the consummation of an organized and intelligent movement of the masses, it can maintain itself without forcible repression of the minority opposition. Rational Socialists do not desire a reign of terror for the mere pleasure of the excitement. They countenance violence and repression only when dictated by clear and imperative necessity, mostly in order to repel actual or threatened violence of the ruling classes. If and when such conditions arise, they impose their own law upon the revolution. But one of the great objects of the Socialist movement is to train, organize, and strengthen the large masses of the workers to an extent that will obviate or at least minimize the need of violence and repression in accomplishing the social revolution.

Proceeding upon the assumption that the dictatorship of the proletariat necessarily implies the disfranchisement of the bourgeoisie, the spokesmen of the Moscow International decree that the organization of the Soviets is THE instrument of such dictatorship. This is another aprioristic and wholly unproven assertion. All forms of class government possess the power of repression. The governments of Europe and America, even under parliamentary regimes, have amply demonstrated their ability to disfranchise the workers and to suppress political opposition. The bourgeois government of the great French Revolution has managed to expropriate, disfranchise, disarm, and outlaw the nobility and suppress counterrevolutionary movements through the institution of special tribunals, without Soviets. There is no reason to suppose that a working class government would not have the power to apply similar measures to its political and class opponents, even if it were organized on a non-Soviet basis. Here again we are met with the incorrigible tendency of the Moscow International to deduce from specific and casual Russian conditions infallible social maxims of universal applicability.

The Soviets were never generally recognized institutions in the class struggle, such as the Socialist parties or labor unions. They are specific Russian institutions, and owe their existence to the immaturity of the Russian labor movement. If at the time of the first outbreak of the revolution in 1917 there had been in Russia a strong and unified Socialist party and a

powerful, countrywide organization of labor unions, the chances are that one, or, more likely, both of them, would have taken charge of the situation. But the revolution found the Russian workers practically unorganized, and forced upon them the expedient of hastily gathered and loosely organized "workers' councils," after the pattern of the spontaneous and short-lived Petrograd institutions of 1905.

When the Bolshevist party unfolded its active agitation after the February [1917] Revolution they demanded the immediate convocation of a Constituent Assembly on the basis of unrestricted franchise. The Soviets were already in full swing, but the Bolsheviki had little influence in their councils. When the elections were held several months later the Bolsheviki secured a strong minority representation in the Assembly, while the Socialist Revolutionaries were in the majority. But beneath the election and the meeting of the Assembly the Bolsheviki had succeeded in capturing the Soviets and the government machinery of the country. It was then and then only that they coined the slogan "All power to the Soviets," and discovered that the Soviets were the only logical instrument of proletarian rule.

Let us now assume the reverse of the situation, i.e., that on the day of the opening of the Constituent Assembly the Bolsheviki had found themselves in the majority in that body, while the Soviets were in control of the non-Bolshevik Socialist parties. Would the theoreticians of Moscow Communism still insist upon the "dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet power," and would they have dispersed their own Constituent Assembly? If I may venture a guess I should say that in the hypothetical but not impossible situation outlined, the body to be dispersed would have been the Soviets, and the revolutionary formula now preached to the world would have been "the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of a constituent Assembly," and, of course, the Bolshevist administration could and probably would pursue the same policy in the name of the Constituent Assembly, as it now pursues in the name of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets. The peculiar feature of our Communist friends is that while they seek to force the Socialist movement of all foreign countries into a rigid mold of dogmatic formula, they themselves have never hesitated to change their program and policies to suit the chang-

ing conditions of their country, and it is this political opportunism to which they largely owe their practical success.

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“The struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet power” is thus a doubtful, if not impossible, formula of Socialist tactics in most countries outside of Russia, and yet the Communist International insists on its explicit acceptance as an indispensable condition of affiliation. The trouble with the Moscow International is that it is not international, but intensely and narrowly national. It is a purely Russian institution, seeking to impose its rule upon the Socialist movement of the world. Its policy is one of spiritual imperialism. It does not strive to unify all revolutionary working class forces in the general struggle for the abolition of capitalism, leaving them free to choose the methods most suitable in each case, but insists upon working class salvation strictly according to the Koran of the Bolshevik prophets.

The Moscow International is pleased to style itself the “Third International.” It has not yet acquired the right to that name, and perhaps never will. The succession of international organizations in the Socialist movement is not determined by preemption as a trademark or copyright, but by conditions of historic development. Seventeen years after the first international organization of Socialism and labor had been disorganized by the forces of anarchism, the Socialists of the world built a new international union. It was the recognized organization of the Social Democrats of all countries and of all shades, the International of Socialism in fact as well as in name. It was the legitimate and undisputed successor of the First International, and history has accorded to it the name of the Second International.

The Second International has now in its turn been disrupted. A new world organization of Socialism must be created. The pitiable remnants of diluted reform Socialism which recently met in Geneva [11th Congress: July 31-Aug. 4, 1920] has neither the vitality nor the inspiration to accomplish that task. The Moscow organization has had an unequalled opportunity to lead in the work of reuniting the revolutionary Socialist forces of the world for the common and final struggle. But its doctrinaire leaders evidently prefer a holy sect to a vital world movement.

According to a report published in the United States, the 2nd Congress of the Moscow International has transformed the organization into a centralized Communist world party, with the affiliated national organizations reduced to the position of subordinate and dependent groups. All such national groups must accept the theory of “the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet power,” and their methods; tactics and management of internal affairs are subject to the direction of the International Executive Committee.

If the report is true the keepers of the Third International may save themselves the trouble of locking its doors. There is little likelihood that the Socialists of the Western world will attempt to force their way into the Communist temple. True Socialists will continue to support the Soviet government of Russia against its capitalist assailants. They will support it for the good it has accomplished and for the greater good it may accomplish in the future. They will support it in spite of the mistakes and shortcomings of the Bolshevik regime. But they will refuse to accept a glorified version of such mistakes and shortcomings as infallible articles of a new Socialist faith, and to submit the working class movement of the world to the dictatorship of Russian Communism.

The task of erecting the Third International of Socialism is still before us.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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