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ZINOVIEV

Revolution, Stabilization, and Socialism in One Country



Report to a plenum of the CC RKP(b)
Moscow — April 26, 1925

Editorial Note.

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Revolution, Stabilization, and Socialism in One Country:

Report to a plenum of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, Moscow — April 26, 1925

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machine translation

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I shall provide only a brief statement, as I intend to elaborate on this topic in greater detail at the upcoming conference.[1] I am not certain whether you have already had the opportunity to look over the theses that were published today. As you will see—at least those of you who have read these theses—the subject matter has expanded from a mere progress report into a new, or relatively new, framing of a whole range of issues. It seems quite clear to me that we must now establish a connection between our domestic policy and the overall international political situation, as well as the state and trajectory of the labor movement. My theses, which have been published today, represent an attempt to forge such a connection. In this regard, my presentation at the conference will not be so much a formal report as an attempt to characterize a new milestone that has emerged within the international labor movement, a development noted by the enlarged Executive Committee of the Comintern,[2] and which coincides with a significant turning point in our own domestic situation.

The main themes addressed in the theses are as follows: the first concerns the question of a revolutionary situation. We must distinguish between three types of situations: a revolutionary situation in general, an immediate [*neposredstvenno*] revolutionary situation, and an actual, unfolding revolution. We illustrate this distinction using the examples of three countries: Russia, Germany, and England. Russia, which serves as a bridge between Europe and Asia, experienced all three types of situations over the course of 12 years;

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[1] Reference is to the 14th Conference of the RKP(b), held from April 27–29, 1925.

[2] At the 14th Party Conference (April 29, 1925), Zinoviev delivered a detailed report on the work of the Fifth Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI (March 21–April 6, 1925) and provided a rationale for its theses, "On the Tasks of the Comintern and the RKP..."

Germany, a major nation of Central European, recently went through an immediate revolutionary situation that erupted into a series of civil conflicts. In England, a general revolutionary situation is only now beginning to take shape—a development that could determine the entire course of not only the European but the global revolution. Through these examples. by analyzing specific moments in the evolution of revolutionary movements in these three countries, we can clarify how one should distinguish between a revolutionary situation in general, an immediate revolutionary situation, and a direct revolution.

On this we need clarity, and here is why. At the enlarged session of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI),[3] we acknowledged that a certain stabilization of capitalism has taken place in a number of European countries, most notably in Germany. In 1923, the situation in Germany appeared to be immediately revolutionary; today, however, we observe an ebb in what was, until recently, a very powerful revolutionary wave. Our statements and resolutions on this matter have been seized upon by the entire capitalist and social democratic press worldwide, and are being interpreted, in an overly broad and distorted fashion, to suggest that the Executive Committee of the Comintern has effectively abandoned the general line of world revolution. This is currently being discussed in every bourgeois parliament and every social democratic newspaper throughout the capitalist world. During the recent election campaign in Germany, the social democrats, in their struggle against the

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[3] Enlarged plenums of the Comintern, much like Conferences of the Russian Communist Party, were *mini-congresses,* attended by somewhat smaller international delegations but hearing reports and dealing in policy matters with determinative effect. While complete stenographic reports of these gatherings are not yet fully available in English, highlights appear in the English edition of *International Press Correspondence*, a publication of the Comintern. A first volume of proceedings is Mike Taber (ed.), *The Communist Movement at a Crossroads: Plenums of the Communist International's Executive Committee, 1922–1923*, a paperback version of which was published by Haymarket Books of Chicago in 2019. —t.d.

communists, circulated a vast number of leaflets and posters claiming that the Executive Committee itself had admitted that no revolution would take place. They tell the workers: you have received an official statement from Moscow declaring that revolution is no longer on the agenda—that there is no revolution. They argue that it is futile for German Communists to continue calling for independent struggle, asserting that the communists have been defeated, a fact supposedly acknowledged by the Comintern itself, even if "our" local communists still insist on putting on a brave face.

The compromisers [*soglashateli*] are seizing on our words, attempting to misrepresent and distort the meaning of our decisions. It was necessary for us to speak out clearly and precisely, to point out the difference between the situation in Germany in 1923 and in 1925—for Communists cannot and must not live in self-deception or wage a struggle while blindfolded. We need to clarify, for ourselves and for the whole army of revolutionary proletarians, what it is that we truly acknowledge and what we do not.

We acknowledge that there is no immediate revolutionary situation in individual European countries at present, but we do not acknowledge that there is no revolutionary situation in general. In Russia, from approximately 1908 to 1911, there was no immediate revolutionary situation; tsarism had stabilized, and the Stolypin reform[4] represented a step toward transforming an unbridled autocracy into a bourgeois monarchy. Yet, even then, we maintained that the tasks of the revolution remained unfulfilled, that a general revolutionary situation still existed in the country, and we based our entire tactical approach on the anticipation of a second revolution.

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[4] Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin (1862–1911) — Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Internal Affairs of Russia from 1906 to 1911. He implemented an agrarian reform that granted prosperous peasants the right to secede from the village commune and establish individual farmsteads—a move that contributed to the temporary strengthening of the tsarist regime.

The Mensheviks would seize upon our words, interpreting our statements in an expansive sense and year after year, month after month, they kept reminding us that there was no "second revolution," that we had been mistaken, that our fundamental projections were incorrect, and so on. Then the revolution came, we won, and our forecast was vindicated. Yet, throughout those years between 1908 and 1917, it goes without saying that our opponents had the opportunity to sow confusion among the workers. Since this is the first attempt to draw precise distinctions between the three aforementioned situations on the basis of Leninism, we are bringing this question to your attention.

The second topic concerns the question of *stabilization* and is closely linked to the first. Here, too, an attempt is made to frame the issue more sharply and clearly than was done within the Executive Committee itself. We believe that one should *not speak of a single stabilization, but rather of two stabilizations.* One is the partial stabilization of capitalism in individual countries; the other is our own stabilization—our growth and the consolidation of our national economy as a whole, and of its socialist elements in particular. These issues are intimately connected, for when we speak of international revolution, we must not forget that we ourselves, our Soviet power, are a component of that very international revolution. It is therefore crucial to recognize that a partial stabilization is occurring not only at the capitalist pole but also at our own pole. Were this not the case— if stabilization were confined solely to the camp of the organized bourgeoisie—the advantage would lie entirely on their side.

Recently, Comrade Kalinin[5] expressed the wish, or perhaps even the conviction, that in five years' time, we will become an

[5] Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin (1875–1946) — a member of the Bolshevik Party since 1898; from 1919, Chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Central Executive Committee of the USSR; from 1938, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR; a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) since 1926.

economically developed country on par with America. Five years, I believe, is a rather short timeframe in which to become a "socialist America"—one could easily extend this to 10 or even 15 years—but that we will develop rapidly is indisputable. Therefore, when assessing the international situation, we must never for a moment lose sight of the fact that stabilization is also taking place within our own country.

The third topic concerns the link between our Russian Revolution and the international revolution—the question of the struggle for *socialism in one country.*[6] This issue has now taken on not only theoretical but also practical significance, primarily for us. If we truly acknowledge that a partial stabilization of capitalism is occurring in Europe, and that the global proletarian revolution is slowing down, then the question of the relationship between a revolution that has already triumphed and those that have been delayed—and how they are interconnected—arises with greater urgency. We are attempting to address this question, this main question, by drawing primarily upon statements made at various times by Comrade Lenin himself; consequently, this section of the theses contains numerous citations. This is a very complex and delicate question, and ultimately it is resolved not so much through theoretical analysis as on the basis of practical experience.

At one time, within the Second International, the issue was framed in such a way that a single country could not and should not engage in the struggle; that, it was argued, all the major nations had to reach an agreement to begin the struggle collectively, otherwise it would be nothing more than an "adventurist" gamble. I recall that even among the best figures of the Second International, not only within the organization as a whole, but also at the Zimmerwald and Kienthal

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[6] The slogan *"sotsializm v odnoi strane,"* arguably best rendered as "socialism in a single country," has been associated almost entirely with Zinoviev's partner in the Soviet leadership at this time, Joseph Stalin. Zinoviev's use here is fascinating evidence that the concept was not Stalin's unique and original creation, but rather a prevailing idea within the broader Bolshevik elite during the period of isolation and exclusion of the well-known and popular Leon Trotsky from leadership. —t.d.

conferences[7] —the prevailing view was that any form of action, not just an armed uprising, but even something as simple as voting against war credits, could only be undertaken on an international scale. The Germans, for instance, stated that they were prepared to vote against war credits in their own country, but only on the condition that the French did the same; if the French did not, then—and this was said with complete sincerity—how could anyone expect the Germans to vote against them? This was how internationalism was understood, even among the left wing of the Second International, even at Zimmerwald and Kienthal, among the finest revolutionaries of that era. Bolshevism could not take a single step forward without shattering this particular conception of internationalism. And Vladimir Ilyich, as the true leader of the revolutionary proletariat, resolutely entered into a struggle against this understanding of internationalism. He waged this struggle along two lines: the theoretical and the tactical. On the theoretical front, he crossed swords with the Kautskys and Trotskys of that era, sparking a debate over the questions of imperialism and ultra-imperialism. This was the period during which Vladimir Ilyich was working on his well-known treatise on imperialism, investigating the laws of capitalism in general and its imperialist phase in particular. He formulated the law of the uneven development of capitalism and concluded that this law implies the possibility for an individual country to break out of the cycle and be the first to begin the struggle. This was the primary line of his struggle in the theoretical, scientific realm.

The second line of struggle was purely tactical. Comrade Lenin argued to Ledebour, Brizon,[8] and the entire Zimmerwald majority that

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[7] At the conferences of left social democrats at Zimmerwald (September 1915) and Kienthal (April 1916) the matters of struggle for termination of the world war, the revolutionary way out of it, and establishment of a new Communist International were discussed.

[8] Pierre Brizon (1878–1923) was a French socialist and lawyer; during the First World War, he aligned himself with the Zimmerwald movement and served as a delegate to the Kienthal Conference.

their way of framing the issue had nothing in common with internationalism. One cannot pose the question by saying that we must all reach an agreement "first" and only then take action—or that if social-chauvinism gains the upper hand in France, then Germany must follow suit. He maintained that an individual country—the working class of that country and its revolutionary workers' party—not only can, but must, take the initiative under certain conditions. Such action should not necessarily be made contingent (as a prerequisite) upon simultaneous action by other countries, since another country might not yet be sufficiently developed to take such a step. He articulated an idea—which he later developed more explicitly—that the task of the proletariat in any given country is to do everything within its power to foster and support revolution in other countries, and indeed in all countries; one cannot engage in a deal in which one side says, "Since you haven't taken a single step forward, I shouldn't take one either."

Thus, while simultaneously refuting Kautsky and his theory of ultra-imperialism, Comrade Lenin formulated the law of the uneven development of capitalism. On this scientific basis, he established the Bolshevik tactic regarding this issue and, on the tactical front, crossed swords with the majority at Kienthal and Zimmerwald, including the most prominent figures of the Second International. It is this issue that we shall now attempt to examine.

To put things in their proper perspective, we try to take stock of the historical experience we have lived through—recalling, step by step, how we initially anticipated the victory of a European revolution within a matter of months or even weeks; how we awaited the imminent arrival of a German revolution; and how that German revolution did indeed arrive—though not as quickly as expected, and as a bourgeois, rather than a proletarian, revolution. Nevertheless, even this revolution provided us with a crucial gain in time, allowing us to consolidate our position. We then address the question of what it means, in the Leninist sense, to say that the final victory is to be

achieved on an international scale. In this section of the theses, which deals with the link between our own revolution and the international one, we attempt to answer how we might hold out given the slower pace of the revolution. The theses cite a passage written by Vladimir Ilyich in 1921 from a plan for a pamphlet on the "tax in kind" [*prodnalog*]. This plan he suggests that with 10 to 20 years of a sound policy toward the peasantry, victory on a global scale would be assured—even if the pace of the world revolution were to remain slow.

Here is the entire program—not for a month or two, but for 10–20 years of establishing sound relations with the peasantry, alongside, of course, a sound international policy—and then, even with a slower pace in the development of the international revolution, we shall emerge victorious. It is precisely this integration that is now taking place or, at the very least, ought to be taking place, before our very eyes. The fundamental task of the Comintern and the Central Committee of our party is to link a sound peasant policy with our overall policy regarding the international labor movement.

The fourth topic concerns the question of *Trotskyism*. Some comrades might perhaps think that this is unnecessary, but it seems to me—and you yourselves should be able to see this—that raising such an issue is bound up with current politics, and that we will inevitably have to contend with Trotskyism here, both as a theoretical and a tactical line. Theoretically, this struggle centers on the well-known debate over the theory of permanent revolution, while tactically, it relates to the current actions of the right wing within the Comintern.

Some young students here in Moscow have raised the following question: if you have now acknowledged a slowdown in the pace of the international revolution, does that not mean Trotsky was right? And moreover, if you, citing Lenin, admit that final victory can only be achieved on an international scale, then how does this perspective differ from the theory of permanent revolution?

It is essential to clarify this, both for our Russian comrades and for an international audience. We must explain to our comrades that our Leninist approach has nothing in common with the theory of permanent revolution. Trotsky's error does not lie in the fact that he saw the possibility of a definitive victory only on an international scale—that, in fact, is correct—but his error lies in the fact that, while remaining on this issue essentially wholly within the framework of the Second International, he deemed it impossible to achieve victory and consolidate a revolution in a single country without "state support" from the victorious proletariat of other nations.

In other words, he failed to grasp the mechanics of how a proletarian revolution develops, and he did not understand the relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry, both within Russia and on an international scale. Across theoretical, tactical, and practical lines, we are attempting to explain to the comrades that our dispute with Trotsky was not about whether or not the revolution had slowed down—it had been clear to us ever since the 3rd Congress[9] that the revolution was indeed slowing—but rather about the tactics we ought to pursue during this period of a slowed-down revolution. In much the same way, back in the 1908–11 period, our debates with the Mensheviks, including the Trotskyists, were not so much about whether the revolution had slowed down, but about what tactics we should employ during such a period. Furthermore, we now know that

[9] The 3rd Congress of the Communist International was held in Moscow from June 22 to July 12, 1921. The stenographic report, edited and translated by John Riddell, is *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921,* available in paperback from Haymarket Books of Chicago. —t.d.

Radek and Trotsky supported an openly right-wing position.[10] Radek—whose statement you have all read, and which was duly assessed in the response from our Politburo—states explicitly that in 1923–24, he and his associates pursued a course toward a coalition with the "left" social democrats. In our view, the fact that the international revolution has slowed down does not in any way necessitate a coalition with the left social democrats; rather, it calls for the "united front" tactic— understood in the sense we have defined on more than one occasion.[11]

Finally, the fifth topic concerns the Profintern [Red International of Labor Unions], the Amsterdam International,[12] and the rapprochement of our trade unions. Comrade [Mikhail] Tomsky has reported to you in detail on the progress of the negotiations with the British.[13] You have all followed these developments. It is a very serious matter—one of immense significance, whether viewed from the perspective of the

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[10] This refers to a statement submitted on March 25, 1925, to the Politburo of the RKP(b) Central Committee by K. Radek, H. Brandler, and A. Thalheimer, in which they expressed their solidarity with the tactics of the Comintern—as proclaimed at the Fifth Plenum of the ECCI—and requested the reinstatement of over 50 activists into the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) who had been expelled by the R. Fischer–A. Maslow faction on the grounds that they were supposedly "rightists." The RKP(b) delegation to the ECCI brought this matter before the ECCI Plenum, which, in a resolution dated April 4, 1925, found Radek, Brandler, and Thalheimer guilty of "social-democratic distortions of KPD tactics," stating that they "remain firmly planted on the ground of coalition tactics with social democracy, and continue to drift away from Bolshevism toward Menshevism."— See: *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional v dokumentakh.* Moscow, 1933, pp. 523–525.

[11] Reference is to the so-called "united front from below," in which communist party members were to seek joint action with the social democratic rank-and-file, while eschewing cooperation with and fiercely criticizing the social democratic party and trade union leadership. —t.d.

[12] The Amsterdam International, shorthand for the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), was the formal alliance of trade unions affiliated with the rival Labour and Socialist International. —t.d.

[13] M. Tomsky spoke at this plenum of the Central Committee RKP(b) on April 24, providing information on the Anglo-Soviet trade union conference in London and the establishment of the Anglo-Russian Committee.

state, the broader system of international politics, or the Comintern. For the first time, a new situation is beginning to take shape in England. England is undergoing a process of revolutionization—albeit, it must be said, very slowly. One cannot yet claim that an immediate revolutionary situation exists there. But for the first time, we can truly hear the subterranean rumbling of major, mounting revolutionary processes in England. Our negotiations should not be viewed as a superficial phenomenon, but rather as a reflection of much deeper processes.[14] England is clearly entering a new phase in its development. The rule of the Conservatives—as we have noted on several occasions—is resting upon a number of landmines. The radicalization of England will become increasingly intense and apparent with each passing month and year. This is the source of the new currents emerging within the English trade unions. The First International sought the key to the English labor movement, yet Marx and Engels did not find it. The German revolutionary social democrat, the elder Liebknecht, also sought this key—a political approach to the English labor movement—with the assistance of Engels. We are familiar with a remark made by Wilhelm Liebknecht during his exile in London: he likened the English labor movement to a massive steam hammer that had yet to be set in motion—a stationary, lifeless implement. Now, however, this steam hammer is beginning to stir into life. And the Comintern, guided by the directives provided by Vladimir Ilyich at the Second Congress, is finding various avenues toward resolving this complex English problem: the question of the English labor movement. In this light, the rapprochement between our own Soviet trade unions and the English trade unions takes on a significance of world-historical proportions.

We must be perfectly clear about what is at stake. That we ought to reach an agreement here is entirely beyond dispute—this has never been a subject of any contention. Yet, we must bear in mind that the

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[14] Reference is to ongoing negotiations between the Profintern and the British General Council of the Trades Union Congress. —t.d.

those with whom we are negotiating, the General Council,[15] is reformist in its outlook. It cannot be said that English reformists are in every respect similar to German social democrats—rather, they are social democrats of an English type. Within the Labour Party, which includes the English trade unions, there is a great deal of unrest and much that remains unclear. Given that all of this is unfolding against the backdrop of a general radicalization of social life in England, we are likely to encounter many unexpected developments—a great many surprises—in the future.

Through the Profintern, we are connected to the revolutionary elements of the global trade union movement. Our policy, pursued via the Profintern, of achieving victory through a direct, frontal assault has not succeeded. This we have acknowledged at one of the plenums of the Central Committee. The Profintern was established with the direct participation of Vladimir Ilyich. It failed to fulfill its historical mission—it simply could not do so.[16] Nevertheless, it has played a significant role, and it currently stands as the only existing organization that unites all the revolutionary elements of the international labor movement. We are being pressured to separate the Soviet trade unions from the Profintern. We are being pushed toward this not only by the Social Democrats, but to a significant extent by our counterpart—the General Council of the British trade unions, or at least a portion of it. However, we need a clear directive for ourselves. We want the plenum of the Central Committee of the RKP to endorse our position with its full authority, so that we know how

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[15] The General Council of the Trades Union Congress was the governing body of the British labor federation, best conceived as a more democratic version of the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor. —t.d.

[16] During the first half of the 1920s, RILU ineffectually attempted to form dissident left wing caucuses within the established trade unions. Its attempt to create a parallel international federation to the social democratic union movement was very nearly stillborn. As the Comintern moved to its revolutionary "Third Period" tactics in 1928, the tactical line shifted to the formation of dual "red" unions, which were roundly rejected as splitting trade union unity. —t.d.

and in what direction to proceed. We consider the proposed agreements to be correct. We believe that a concession—if it can even be called a concession—such as the establishment of a commission for external relations within the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS), is acceptable. We must bear in mind that the issue under discussion is of immense, and without exaggeration, world-historical significance—even if not all the figures among the British trade unionists acting as our counterparts fully grasp the magnitude of this world-historical moment.

How will things develop from here? It is difficult to say. It seems to me that there are two possibilities. One possibility is that the British trade unions might, in one way or another, break with Amsterdam and, together with our own trade unions, form the nucleus of a new, 3rd Trade Union International. New forces would then rally around this core, absorbing all the elements of the Profintern. At present, it appears that only a few individuals among the British, those who have thought this through to its logical conclusion, are moving toward this prospect. The General Council as a whole has decided: we shall make a proposal to the Amsterdam group; if they reject it, we will propose a conference chaired by the British; and if that conference also rejects it, then, as a final step, we will report the matter to the congress. That is the maximum we can offer for now! It is unclear how things will turn out at the congress. Given the growth of revolutionary sentiment within the British labor movement, there is a possibility that the congress might, in one way or another, break with Amsterdam; in that event, a rapprochement between Russian and British trade unions could serve as the genuine starting point for a new, 3rd world organization of trade unions. Naturally, this would be the most favorable outcome.

Another possibility is that the British might prove persistent enough to compel the Amsterdam group to sit at the same table as our trade unions—and, subsequently, the other components of the Profintern. Under such circumstances, and faced with the pressure of

advancing capital on a global scale, an attempt at an international agreement might become possible. Both scenarios would be advantageous for us. The third possibility—that the Russian trade unions join the Amsterdam International on their own—we reject.

The slogan of a unified international trade union movement is extremely popular everywhere, regardless of ideological orientation. Given our firm level of organization, we stand to gain from this.

Such is the substance of the theses presented here for your consideration.

I move for the adoption of these theses, which were unanimously approved by a Politburo commission—comprising five Politburo members—and subsequently endorsed by the Politburo itself. [17]

[17] The theses were "approved in principle." Discussion of their specific content was deferred to the 14th Party Conference. — RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 171, l. 216.