

Introductory

The Coming War

The Third International, foretold by Engels over a quarter of a century before it was formed, received its immediate impetus from the havoc wrought in the existing forms and organisation of society by the Great War. With the memories of that war still in our minds, we move swiftly and inevitably towards another, more embracing in its scope, infinitely more deadly in its potentiality for destruction, not only of the security and lives of human beings, but (a far more serious thing for the war-makers) of the very basis of the society on which their power and authority depend. Communism is no longer a spectre. There, after nearly twenty years, with all its defects and short-comings, stands the Soviet Union, making concrete in the minds of millions of working men and women the hitherto theoretical conception of a Workers' State. It is not only achievement but inspiration. The working-classes of Germany, of Austria, of Italy and of Hungary, will not bear the strain of the coming war as they bore the strain of the last. Russia in 1917 showed a way out, and Capitalism in those countries knows that it must win and win quickly. The war will begin as a conflict between nation and nation. The end of it will be the beginning of an era of conflict between rulers and ruled, in which all the cruelties and deceptions suffered by the workers in Central Europe, the bitterness and despair accumulated during the past twenty-five years, will find decisive expression in the working-class struggle for power. The workers in Europe will make new mistakes, but they will not make the mistakes of 1919.

But it is not only in Central Europe where Fascism reigns, that Capitalism realises the mortal risks which it runs in the coming war. Capitalism in Britain, superficially the proudest and most stable of the surviving democracies, is as frightened as the rest. J. L. Garvin, the ablest and most experienced of its publicists, knows that the coming war heralds the end of the British Empire.

Baldwin, the British Prime Minister, a man of widely different temperament, skilled in deception, saying little in few words, in the House of Commons and on the public platform daily voices an even deeper fear. The inevitable revolution haunts him. While Mussolini's war-planes were pouring liquid fire on the Abyssinian people, Baldwin unctuously held up his hands in horror. If nations use gas, he informed the British public, then at the end of the next war the common people will rise up in their wrath at wickedness in high places and sweep their governments away. The warning is soundly based, and yet at the same time Baldwin's government, and every other government in Europe, provide their millions of gas-masks for the destruction which each prepares.

And there are things Baldwin knows but of which he dare not speak. The last war brought the partial freedom of Ireland, a loosening of the chains of Egypt, and an upheaval in India which has at last seriously crippled the merciless exploitation of centuries. How long could Britain's grip on India survive another war? A mere threat of war in the autumn of 1935, and Egypt and Palestine flared in revolt. In China and the Far East, where Britain has so much at stake, Capitalism is more unstable than anywhere else in the world.

The failure of the working-class movement in 1918–20 was due chiefly to inexperience and the lack of a revolutionary international. It was in just such another crisis as the one which faces us that the Third International was set up to be the deciding factor, ceaselessly struggling against nationalism in all its forms, patiently pointing out to the national sections of the working-class movement the international unity of the proletariat and the suicidal folly of sectional conflict. Thus, in those rare moments when the national class-struggle reaches a high pitch of intensity and the working-class as a whole instinctively seeks its class allies in other countries against its own capitalists, the theoretical and practical basis would already have been laid, and the International would be ready with policy, programme and organisation. Lenin and Trotsky, who, more than any other men, were responsible for the formation of the Third International, who laid down its guiding principles and shaped the policies of its early years, taught that until the workers of the world could overthrow Capitalism in the great capitalist countries of Europe and Asia great wars between the rival imperialisms were inevitable.¹

The majority of workers would go to such wars under the pressure of national tradition, the immediate instinct of self-preservation, life-long education, the propaganda of press, pulpit and radio, the shameless lying of their rulers, and the inevitable participation in that deception by trade union

leaders and labour politicians. Not until 1935 did the Third International ever openly encourage any illusions about being able to stop war except by revolution. The workers, Lenin taught, would fight. But the memories of the last war, the unmitigated horrors of the new war when it came, the extension of hostilities from the fighting forces to the civil population, would bring early disillusionment and inevitable revolt in one country after another. Bourgeois nationalism and patriotic fervour would reach their highest pitch at the beginning of the war, and the bourgeois State would strike heavily at the international revolutionary movement. But after the first rush of enthusiasm the movement, with its foundations well and truly laid, would become stronger with every succeeding day of the war. The more powerfully it had resisted every aspect of war-preparation before the actual outbreak, the quicker would it be able to take advantage of the reaction, inevitable after the devastation of the civil population. Every section of the Third International would struggle for the defeat of its own country. "Turn imperialist war into civil war." The years following 1917 had shown the possibilities of response to this audacious slogan by masses war-weary, maddened by suffering and stimulated by the prospect of peace and a new social order. If the Marxist theory of the class-struggle was the basis of the whole ideological structure of the Third International, the peak of its edifice, the banner which waved over all its teachings, was the repudiation of the first duty laid upon every citizen by the bourgeois State—the duty of national defence. It was subservience to the doctrine of national defence which had ruined the cause of the masses of the people in August, 1914. It was the great gulf between the Second International and the Third, the gulf which could never be bridged.

A bold stand for internationalism at the very beginning of the war would have enormous significance in every country. The knowledge and the evidence that the same policy was, from the outbreak of war, being heroically followed in every country would give increasing courage to the awakening revolutionary spirit of the masses. Conversely any breach in the international front might imperil the success of the whole movement, perhaps delay it for years at a time when every month was an historical period.

The Third International and the Coming War

Yet today, with the war long predicted imminent at last, with the great cracks in the imperialist structure widening day by day, with the rapacious Treaty of Versailles and its consequences, the fiasco of disarmament, the imposing

assembly and pitiable collapse of the World Economic Conference, all teaching the masses the truth about Capitalism far more ably than the propaganda of the Third International; with the clash of interests over the Abyssinian question stripping to rags the drapery of the League of Nations, and exposing to millions of the most politically backward the hideous lusts and nauseating corruption of what they will be called upon to fight for, at this moment the Third International has refurbished the doctrine of national defence, is ready to fight for tricolour or stars and stripes, and clamours to defend the Union Jack. In France, after the election victory of the Popular Front, the so-called Communists of France sent a special deputation to the French Prime Minister to ask for the strengthening of the French army, that army which for years they have so rightly taught is for use not only against enemies abroad, but against those who do not submit to Capitalist law and order at home. In their propaganda against the Hitler menace they outdo the most fanatical diehards who inveighed against Germany before 1914. In Czechoslovakia it is the same.

But it is not only in countries which have a direct military understanding with the Soviet Union that the Communists shatter the foundations of the building which houses them. British Capitalism at the present moment wavers between an understanding with Germany and a "reform of the League," and a straight alliance with France, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and other small nations, a bloc which could be held up to the light as the League, pure, unadulterated and unreformed. In Britain the Third International seeks the good graces not only of labour leaders but also of Liberals and churchmen, pacifists and cravens, and even for some weeks supported Eden against Baldwin as the protagonist of peace. In Italy the Italian Communist Party calls to its "brothers," the Fascists, to fight for collective security and international peace. In America they summon to the new crusade "farmers' organisations, the Communist Party, Socialist Party, state Farmer-Labour parties, veterans' organisations, working women's organisations, workers' and farmers' co-operatives, workers' fraternal societies, tenants' leagues, anti-war societies, groups of intellectuals, etc. . . . The new mass party of toilers should also strive to include sections of the sprouting Fascist or partly Fascist organisations and tendencies—such as company unions, American Legion posts, and groups of the Coughlin and Long movements, etc."²

All the world must fight against Hitler and Japan. The African enslaved by the Kenya settler and French colonist, the starving millions of India whom for nearly twenty years they have called to struggle for their national inde-

pendence, these also are summoned to fight for the peace-loving democracies against war-making Fascism. In 1914 it was the war against German militarism. Today it is the war against Fascism. In 1914 it was the war for the independence of small nations and the pledged word of the allied nations. Today it is the same, except that the pledge is to be sanctified at the altar of Geneva, revised version or unreformed.

To gain scope for this monstrous deception, the Third International does not hesitate to sacrifice every principle which stands in the way. It commits the unspeakable treachery and folly of impeding with all its power the revolutionary movement in France. Unity is the cry, and the sections hammer at the gates of the Second International. The British section makes strenuous efforts to enter the British Labour Party, and pledges itself to obey the constitution of the most reactionary Labour movement in Europe. This at a time when the temper and suspicion of the masses is so great that the leaders of the Second International dare not use even the vapid pre-war phrases of resistance to war, but pledge themselves openly to fight for "international law."

In August, 1914, Lenin was with Zinoviev in a little mountain village in Galicia when he heard that the German Social Democracy, the most powerful and influential section of the Second International, had voted for the German war-credits. He refused to believe the news, said that the copy of *Vorwärts* was forged. When he received confirmation his first words were: "The Second International is dead." After such a betrayal not its millions of members, its hundreds of parliamentarians, the range and variety of its publications, could make of it an instrument fit to carry out the first wish of the masses who supported it—the wish for international peace. Every succeeding year has confirmed that instantaneous judgment. Léon Blum is one of the greatest jingoes in France. In September, 1935, not even waiting on their more cautious masters, Herbert Morrison, Walter Citrine and the British Social Democracy shouted war at Mussolini. Before Hitler planted the boot that they were bending to kiss on the face of German Social Democracy, Wels had promised the support of the Social Democracy to his foreign policy, that is to say, war to the death against foreign Capitalism and the Soviet Union. And, following in the footsteps of these men whom it has condemned for twenty years, the Third International has announced its capitulation in advance.

How has it fallen so fast and so far? What blindness is it that, at this most critical time, makes it even more short-sighted and more criminal than those Labour leaders who in 1914 thought that they could forget internationalism for the duration of the war and manoeuvre with history as at a game of cards.

It is superficial to say that it is due to a mistake in judgment, or that it is merely a tactic of the moment. It is ignorance or self-interest which attempts to deny the complete break with a past whose whole history is in the memory of so many living men. The Third International has not arrived where it is today by accident. The apparent volte-face is in reality the culmination of a process the first significant date of which can be stated with precision: October, 1924, when Stalin, in defiance of all the teachings of Marx and Lenin, first produced his theory that it was possible to build Socialism in a single country, that country being Soviet Russia. The present policies have resulted from this first conscious concession to nationalism. The opponents of this theory said at the time that, if it was adopted, then it led straight to the liquidation of the Third International as a revolutionary force. But the theory was forced through the International and acted upon, with the results that we see today. It is chiefly that process which we propose to trace. Not so much a history of events, as a history of principles, their origin, when and why they were departed from, the necessity for their regeneration. And for us any such study necessarily demands a parallel account of the foundation and development of the Soviet Union. The men who led the Russian Revolution and guided the Soviet State through those early years believed that the fate of the Soviet Union depended, in the last analysis, on the success or failure of the Third International.

The USSR Cannot Survive without a Revolutionary International

How far does the fate of the USSR depend today on the Third International? What has been achieved in Russia? How much of it is permanent, whatever the course of world history during the coming years? On the one hand we have the Seventh Congress of the Communist International celebrating in a resolution, undebated and unanimously voted for, "the final and irrevocable victory of Socialism in the USSR."³ Between 1917 and 1923 a resolution of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or the Communist International aimed at that objective statement of the truth which alone can be the basis of scientific Socialism in thought or action. It could be pointed to with pride as the only political writing in the world which could dare to tell the truth so far as apprehended in a political world compounded of lies and deception, a promise of the Socialist society to come. Those days are over. For suppression, evasion and hard lying the documents of the Soviet Union and the Third International today form, along with British colonial propaganda and

fascist demagoguery, a trilogy which future historians will contemplate with wonder. "The final and irrevocable victory of Socialism" deceives nobody today, not even the "Communists" themselves. But the enquirer who turns in despair from this subservient acquiescence in a mendacious absurdity is bewildered by the conflicting judgments in that section of the bourgeoisie which, within the limits of its own security, is not unfavourable to the Socialist State.

In a long leading article devoted to the Soviet Union the *Manchester Guardian* gives a summary of the position today based on recent investigations. "The level of life is still desperately low. Housing conditions are primitive. Professor Polanyi's interesting calculations put the nutritive value of the food supply per head as less than in 1913. The average monthly wage is no more than the pre-war wage (Professor Polanyi puts it at 52s. 6d. a month).⁴ This dismal enumeration is, however, lightened by a hope: "But everywhere there is industrial progress and confidence."⁵ In what do these originate? "The change in policy is seen in many fields—in the growth of private property on the collective farms; in the abolition of the rationing system and the reintroduction of marketing and of a uniform value of the rouble; in the encouragement of piecework and the incentive to earn (which the high prices of a freer market stimulate); in the drive for profitability in industrial plants, the increase in managerial powers, and the lessening of the rigidities of planning."⁶ Is it then as the scoffers say, that after nearly twenty years of herculean effort and suffering Socialist Russia is at last discovering what the capitalists knew hundreds of years ago? And, if so, where will all this end? "But whatever problems these changes bring in their train a sceptical world has to admit that collective ownership is surviving, that it has created a new kind of patriotism and new incentives (like the Stakhanovite movement) to labour."⁷ What is this new incentive, the Stakhanovite movement? As much pay (and honours) as possible for as much work as possible. Neither more nor less. And to crown this explanation which explains nothing "It may not be the Socialism of the fathers or the prophets, but it works."⁸ It is not the Socialism of the prophets, it is not any sort of Socialism, and it does not work in any precise sense of that word. "But whatever problems these changes bring in their train. . ."⁹ That was and is the whole question. What has determined these changes in the past? What will determine them in the future? Where goes the Soviet Union? The answer is to be sought not only inside but outside of Russia, in the fortunes of the revolutionary movement in the East and West, in the rise and fall of the Communist International.

Let us take other commentators. On the surface an entirely different appraisal of Soviet Russia is given us in *Soviet Communism* by Sidney and Beatrice Webb; nearly a thousand pages, indulgent to the Soviet past, panegyric of its present, lyrical as to its future, and hailed by the Third International and that recently discovered political phenomenon, the progressive person, as conclusive proof of Socialism triumphant in the Soviet Union. On a casual examination, and then after careful study, the book turns out to be a monument of painstaking research, with gross errors of historical fact, infantile political judgments, and, where evidence is too much for the enthusiasm of the authors, the most unscrupulous juggling.¹⁰

But both these widely divergent points of view are united on one common basis. They see no connection whatever between the Soviet Union and the Third International. For both of them the future of “collective ownership” is taken for granted; yet both rejoice in the bankruptcy of the Third International. For them the Soviet Union is better off without it. The *Guardian* is always derisive, the Webbs deprecating. The whole consistent body of thought which links the Soviet Union and the Third International, and makes them but component parts of the international workers’ movement has no significance for either. The *Manchester Guardian* ignores the issue. The Webbs, in a book of a thousand pages, cannot avoid it, and they resort to one of the most blatant and discreditable evasions that has ever appeared in a book of such scope and pretensions. The prophets and fathers who laid the foundations on which the Soviet Union was built would have abjured such errors as dangerous crimes. The leaders who were responsible for bringing it into being, who, all things considered, foretold the future developments of history with astonishing precision, ceaselessly taught, and those who are alive still teach, the dependence of Russia on the revolutionary International, not only for its external safety, but also for its internal development towards Socialism. “The CI will not survive five more years of similar mistakes. But if the Comintern crumbles neither will the USSR long survive.” That was Trotsky’s opinion, written eight years ago.

How far is that true today? The *Manchester Guardian* and the Webbs (typical of many) have no doubts, and their unity on this question is no accident. It is but another manifestation of nationalism, the common vice which is leading the Capitalist world to destruction, and unites Fascists, Conservatives, Liberals, Labourites, the whole of modern bourgeois society, against their common enemy—international Socialism. Nationalism in economics, and therefore nationalism in politics, nationalism in thinking, however

bravely those on the left may use internationalist phrases. The radical bourgeois no sooner casts his eye towards international Socialism than he seeks to divide it into its component parts. That is not to be wondered at. It is in the nature of things. What is to be noted, however, is the close relationship which now exists between this section of Capitalism and the Third International. The International seeks to do in fact what Liberals and Socialists wish it to do in theory, lose its identity in the nationalist state of Capitalism in the hope of building a national Socialism in Russia; it seeks to separate the ultimate destiny of the Soviet Union from the organisation of Socialist revolution in the rest of the world. For us the errors of such a view are fundamental and complete. For us bourgeois nationalism of any sort is incompatible with Socialism. The defence of the USSR from hostile capitalist countries cannot be artificially separated from its internal economic and social development. The problem is one.

Every defeat of the Third International in Western Europe has thrown the Soviet Union further from the Socialist road. If the Third International loses its last stronghold, in France, and Fascism conquers in that country, then unless the workers of the world can create another international organisation (that work has already begun), the Workers' State of Soviet Russia is doomed. No major economic or political development in Russia, and few of the minor ones, can be understood, except in relation to the strength of the revolutionary movement in Western Europe, so long dominated by the Third International. But for the defeat of the German proletariat in 1933, the new constitution might never have seen the light. For it is not only a reflection of the alignment of social forces in the Soviet Union, but it is a direct bid for more support in the democracies of the West. The Russians themselves admit it openly. "No honest fighter for Socialism, not even he who honestly fights for no more than elementary democratic rights for the toiling masses can any longer find the least excuse for refusing to co-operate, for refusing to work together with the Communist Party. The fact that the fullest democracy in world history is now being carried out by the Communist Party has finally cut the ground from under the feet of all the enemies of the *proletarian united front*."¹¹ No one can longer dare to oppose this united front in the name of democracy without exposing himself in the eyes of the masses as in reality an enemy of democracy."¹²

Yet Professor Harold Laski in appraising the constitution¹³ either does not see or does not think it necessary to mention one of the most powerful and obvious motives behind this sudden development. Thus nationalism leads to

error after error. The Russian Revolution of October, 1917, began as the first stage in the international Socialist revolution, and despite the strangeness and variety of the historical developments of the past years the two remain indivisibly linked. We shall show in detail not only how the revolutionary working-class movement, through the Third International, has influenced the development of the Soviet Union, but how the development of the Soviet Union has in turn exercised a constant influence on the fortunes of the Third International and, through it, on the fate of the whole world. The intelligent observer, still more the commentator, may or may not accept the doctrines of Marx and Engels, of Lenin and Trotsky. But he ignores them at his peril. Without a firm grasp of these he sinks deeper into the mire at every step. There is no understanding the USSR, its past, present and future, except by the principles of Marxism. That is why the bourgeois from 1917 to the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial¹⁴ have always been so consistently wrong, and will go on being wrong. Of late so many distortions have been introduced into these doctrines that it is necessary for us to restate them and bear them well in mind; otherwise it will be possible to avoid palpable inconsistency only by taking refuge in transparent and easily demonstrated falsehood.