

Again the Question of the VI Congress of the C. I.

by M. N. Roy

IN the article on the international situation I have shown how far the decisions of the VI World Congress are responsible for the present crisis in the Communist International. Nevertheless, it does not appear that the Opposition in the Communist Party of America is convinced of the correctness of this viewpoint on the crisis in the Communist International. In his article Comrade Herberg maintains that the VI Congress did not put forward the theory that we are in a period of capitalist collapse that embraces the whole world. He denies that the tactics of the "offensive all along the line"—the platform of the current ultra-left putschism—were proposed by the VI Congress. He believes that the theory of social-fascism did not originate at the VI Congress.

Here are some quotations from the resolution of the VI Congress on all these questions:

"This third period . . . is inevitably giving rise to a fresh series of imperialist wars: among the imperialist states themselves, wars of the imperialist states against the USSR, wars of national liberation against imperialism and imperialist intervention, and to gigantic class battles."

Here is to be noted that this is not brought forward as the perspectives of the situation but rather of the situation itself. (It is not declared that these crises will give occasion to new imperialist wars but that they occasion these wars now). This has shown itself a false prophecy; the fact is that this estimation of the international situation has been proven incorrect. Hysterical shouts in connection with the war danger dominated the tactics and the activity of the Communist Parties for the whole period since the VI Congress . . . Events have shown that the danger of war which continues to exist and becomes greater to the degree that the contradictions in capitalism grow is not as acute as the resolution of the VI Congress pictured. The Congress would not have erred in this matter had it had a correct estimation of the crisis of capitalism. . . .

On the basis of such prophecies (which do not correspond to a Marxist estimation of future development) the nature of the present crisis of capitalism is characterized as follows:

"The intensification of the internal antagonisms in capitalist countries . . . will inevitably lead—thru the further development of the contradictions of capitalist stabilization—to capitalist stabilization becoming still more precarious and to the severe intensification of the general crisis of capitalism."

Either this paragraph contains simply a repetition of the law of capitalist production or it attempts to estimate the perspectives of a given situation on the basis of this law. Apparently the latter is the case; how then is the situation estimated? The general crisis (that is, a crisis embracing the whole world) is not viewed in perspective. It is already here; or else how can one speak of its intensification. As a matter of fact the intensification has not set in to an appreciable degree in more than some countries. The prophecy of the "intensifica-

tion of the general crisis of capitalism," made by the VI Congress, provides the basis for the tactic of "offensive all along the line."

Whatever is said in the resolution about the possibility of local upward developments does not change its general sense which indicates the generality of the crisis from which immediately emerges the coming period of gigantic catastrophe. If this were not the essence of the estimation of the world situation by the VI Congress then the theory of the third period would be meaningless. In fact, the third period, as seen by the VI Congress, was clearly the period of the collapse of capitalist stabilization and of a corresponding revolutionary crisis extending over the whole world, in which the capture of political power is the immediate task of the proletariat in all countries. In this way it was the resolution of the VI Congress which laid the theoretical basis for the ultra-left putsch tactics which naturally did not arise suddenly and all at once. The resolutions of the X Plenum of the E.C.C.I. were the immediate fruit of the theories of the VI Congress.

On the question of tactics we find the following in the resolution of the VI Congress:

"The development of every such strike must lead to its taking on an anti-state character."

Further:

"Just as the beginning of the stabilization period and the general capitalist offensive gave rise to great defensive battles, so the new period is marked by great mass struggles."

The sense of this statement is very clear. It is: the present period is the period of offensive struggle. Here we have the theoretical justification for the present tactics of "offensive all along the line." The cry about the non-existing political mass strikes which today serve the Communist Parties as an excuse to give up all real activity thru which the masses could be mobilized was a discovery of the VI Congress. And what was the basis for the theory that "great mass struggles" are the characteristic feature of this period?

"The strike wave in a number of countries; the uprising of the Viennese proletariat; the demonstrations against the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti; etc."

This declaration represents the self-deception which has become so clear since the Congress that finally an official voice was raised against it (Manuilsky's speech at the Plenum of the Y. C. I.). Furthermore the theory about the political nature of every strike in the third period was a point of departure for the new trade union line which separates the Communist Parties from the organized and advanced sections of the proletariat. If every little action of the working class, even over questions of immediate economic demands, takes on a political character, raises the question of state power then the trade union ceases to be an organ of class struggle. Under such circumstances the work in the trade unions with the object of winning the organized workers for Communism loses all importance; the workers still remaining in their trade unions, that is, the most advanced section of the proletariat, cease to be the leaders in the struggle; the centre of gravity is shifted to the unorganized, glorified as the "storm troops" of the revolution, free from "trade unionist prejudices"; and the trade union as such is considered to be an obstacle to the development of the class-struggle, unless it is a branch of the Communist Party.

The Stalinist theory of the unorganized, which has provided the C.P.'s with the plausible pretext for abandoning all work in the trade unions, has its germ in the resolution of the VI

1 In No. 6 (January 15, 1930) issue of *Revolutionary Age* there appeared an article in connection with some questions about the VI Congress raised by Comrade Roy in an article in *Gegen den Strom* (the theoretical organ of the German Communist Opposition). This article by Comrade Herberg was reprinted in *Gegen den Strom* and to this article Comrade Roy made a rejoinder which is published here. The article of Comrade Herberg represents the general point of view of the C.P.-Majority Group.

2 Comrade Roy is here referring to an article of his on "The World Situation" which appeared in *Gegen den Strom*.

Congress. It is found in two different places. Dealing with the role of the "left" Social Democratic leaders the resolution says:

"Therefore, while taking into account the leftward swing, even among the workers in the ranks of Social Democracy, etc., etc."

In the chapter on tactics we find the following:

"Nor is the slogan: 'Fight for the Masses' (including the masses following the lead of the bourgeois and Social-democratic parties) repealed by this."

In both cases, the organized workers are placed in a subsidiary category. On whom, then, is the main attention riveted? Obviously on the workers who are neither "in the Social-democratic ranks" nor "follow the lead of the Social-democratic Parties," that is, on the unorganized workers.

On the vital question of trade union policy, we read the following in the resolution of the VI Congress:

"To organize the unorganized, to win over the reformist trade unions, to organize the expelled where conditions are suitable (in countries where the trade union movement is split), to break away local organizations we have captured and get them to affiliate to revolutionary industrial organizations—these are the tasks of the day."

These measures are recommended, of course, after a homily on the necessity of working in the trade unions. But once the theory is accepted that in the given period the trade union ceases to be an organ of class-struggle, all talk about working in them is meaningless. Why should the Communists work in organizations that have become obstacles to the development of revolutionary struggle? On the contrary, the interests of proletarian revolution demand their disruption. Can we accuse them of revising the "Leninist" resolutions of the VI Congress, who do nothing but draw the logical conclusion from those resolutions?

This sort of recommendation "to organize the unorganized" necessarily leads to the formation of new, parallel unions, since this recommendation is not accompanied by the specification regarding where they should be organized. When the old unions are considered to be bulwarks of reaction, the Communists cannot be expected to lead the unorganized masses into them. The other recommendations similarly are admirable points of departure for the present trade union tactics.

The roots of the theory of "social-fascism" are equally to be traced in the resolution of the VI Congress. Here they are:

"This evolution finds political expression in the general crisis of bourgeois democracy and of bourgeois parliamentarism."

Then:

"It is precisely this state of affairs (political nature of every strike) that compels the bourgeoisie and its state to resort to complex methods of economically and politically corrupting definite sections of the working class itself and its political and industrial organization."

When the Social-democratic leaders undertake the administration of the government under conditions of "the general crisis of bourgeois democracy," they naturally become converts of fascism; for between bourgeois parliamentarism and dictatorship of the proletariat there is no other way. The second quotation testifies to the size of "the labor aristocracy which is the social basis of social fascism." It goes further. It predicts the "fascisation" not only of the Social-democracy, but of the "political and industrial organizations" of the working class!

Further,

"Simultaneously with corrupting Social-democracy, the bourgeoisie in critical moments and under certain conditions establishes a fascist regime."

Thus grows "social-fascism," for

"the ideology of class-cooperation—the official ideology of Social-democracy—has many points of contact with fascism."

The adherence to parliamentary democracy as an abstract principle is the characteristic feature of the revisionist Social-democracy. On the contrary, fascism grows out of the collapse of parliamentary democracy. The theory of Social-fascism is all nonsense because it disregards this basic contradiction. Insofar as this disregard crept into the basic resolution of the VI Congress, it laid the foundation for the theory of social-fascism.

In view of these achievements of the VI Congress, it is rather dogmatic to assert, as Comrade Herberg does, that had the line of the VI Congress been carried thru, there would be no crisis in the C.I. now. The crisis in the C.I. has been caused no more by the imagined revision of the VI Congress line than by the simple adoption of that line. It is caused by the contradiction that has grown inside the C.I. in the course of its development. It is caused by the monopolization of its leadership by one single party, after the original objective grounds of that monopoly have long been removed. The strikingly false resolutions of the VI Congress were the first imposing expression of the crisis. The resolutions of the VI Congress should be considered independent of the fractional fight in the C.P.S.U. Be it led by Stalin or by Bukharin or some one else, the C.P.S.U. can no longer monopolize the leadership of the C.I. The VI Congress made this evident. Hence its significance as the indicator of the crisis in the C.I.

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(An extended rejoinder to Comrade Roy's article is hardly necessary since the questions raised have already been dealt with in my first article. It is only necessary to note that—aside from a certain ambiguity which must be admitted—the quotations which Comrade Roy presents to prove his point actually prove, in my opinion, very much the opposite. Comrade Roy, for instance, complains that the task of winning the reactionary unions is placed *second* on the list of tasks in the resolution of the VI Congress and is therefore "minimized," thus providing the occasion for the complete neglect of this central task. But is this not essentially mere hair-splitting? The important thing is that the VI Congress did speak and speak emphatically of the "winning of the trade unions" while now the winning of the trade unions is "opportunism," "Social-democracy," "Brandlerism," etc! Or take the question of social-fascism. The quotations adduced by Comrade Roy, whatever construction may be placed upon them, certainly cannot wipe away the fact that the VI Congress resolution enjoined upon all Parties "to make a clear distinction between the Social-democratic leaders . . . and the honest but misled masses of workers!"

Comrade Roy also makes an error when he declares that I maintain that the crisis in the Comintern is *caused* by the revision of the line of the VI Congress. We believe—and so does Comrade Roy and the whole Communist Opposition movement—that the fundamental source of the crisis is: *the maintenance of the monopoly of leadership of the CPSU in the Comintern under conditions of the growing gap between the tasks facing the CPSU and those facing the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries.* On this basic question there is agreement. But the question of the role of the VI Congress in the crisis in the Comintern still remains. It is a very important question and it is very good that a discussion has been initiated on an international scale on this question.)

—Will Herberg.

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