

12. UNITING THE LEFT AND HOLDING ALOFT THE BANNER OF PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM

During the War, three trends took shape in the working-class movement in many countries: first, the Right, or the social-chauvinist trend; second, the "Centre" represented by Kautsky, or the covert social-chauvinist trend; third, the Left, or the genuine internationalist trend.

Within the parties of all countries the Left were few in number at the time and were not yet organized as an international force. This created serious difficulties for the international proletarian revolutionary cause. An important task at the time was, therefore, "to unite these Marxian elements, however small their number may be at the beginning, to revive in their name the words of real Socialism now forgotten, to call the workers of all countries to relinquish chauvinism and raise the old banner of Marxism".¹ It was obvious that none other than Lenin could shoulder this task.

Lenin carried it out under very difficult conditions. Correspondence and communication presented very great difficulties at that time. There were often no funds and sometimes even no money for the bare necessities of life. But no difficulty could intimidate Lenin. He not only

¹ "Socialism and War", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XVIII, p. 248.

successfully led the Bolsheviks at home and abroad, but established contact with the Left in the revolutionary movements of various countries, using a variety of channels. He worked with tremendous energy in Switzerland organizing the printing and distribution of the publications of the Bolsheviks. The *Social-Democrat* reappeared on November 1, 1914, shortly after the War broke out. It was in this journal that Lenin published his famous manifesto on war, "The War and Russian Social-Democracy". Through this newspaper and other publications Lenin's ideas, breaking down innumerable barriers, became accessible to the revolutionary Social-Democrats, and the people generally in all countries. As a result of his unremitting efforts, the Left in all countries gradually increased in number and, from 1915 onward, began to take the first steps towards a new international unity.

AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES OF WOMEN AND YOUTH

The International Conference of Socialist Women was held in Berne in March 1915. It was convened at the suggestion of the women's organizations affiliated to the Bolshevik Party and was presided over by Klara Zetkin, the well-known activist of the international women's movement. Lenin gave personal guidance to the work of the Russian delegation and drew up a draft resolution for the delegation to be submitted to the conference for discussion. However, because of the conciliationist attitude of the German delegation, the draft resolution submitted by the Bolsheviks was rejected. The resolution which was adopted by the conference exposed the imperialist nature

of the War and condemned the slogan of "the defence of the fatherland", but it only called on the proletariat to struggle for "the sake of peace" and said nothing whatsoever about the betrayal by the opportunists. Lenin declared that there was a difference in principle between the draft resolution submitted by the Bolsheviks and the one adopted by the conference. He said, "Two conceptions of the world, two evaluations of the war and the tasks of the International, two tactics of proletarian parties came into conflict at the conference." One view was that the Second International had not collapsed; there was no strong "internal enemy" in the shape of opportunism. Hence the conclusion that "we will not condemn anybody". The other, entirely contrary view was that "nothing is more harmful, more disastrous to the proletarian cause than the continuation of inner Party *diplomacy* in relation to the opportunists and social-chauvinists".¹

Soon after the International Conference of Socialist Women, the International Socialist Youth also held a conference in Berne. It elected the International Bureau of Socialist Youth, which published a paper, called *Jugend-Internationale*, for which Lenin wrote.

Referring to these two conferences, Lenin said:

These gatherings were animated by the best intentions, but they . . . did not map out a fighting line for the internationalists. . . . At best, they confined themselves to a repetition of old resolutions without pointing out to the workers that, without a struggle against

¹"The Fight Against Social-Chauvinism", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, p. 223.

the social-chauvinists, the cause of Socialism is hopeless.¹

THE ZIMMERWALD CONFERENCE—AN IMMENSE
ACHIEVEMENT IN UNITING THE
REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS

Establishing close contact with the Left revolutionaries in the parties of various countries, through representatives of the Bolsheviks or by correspondence, Lenin made preparations during this period to convene an international conference of Left-wing socialists. Before it took place he finished writing his "Socialism and War", which was published in Russian, German and French. He also drew up a draft resolution for submission to the conference and sent it for discussion to the Left in the parties of the various countries. It helped the workers in Europe to know the Bolshevik attitude to the war and the revolutionary tactics which the international proletariat should adopt in the war.

The International Socialist Conference was held in Zimmerwald in September 1915. The majority of the 38 delegates who attended were Kautskyites or near-Kautskyites and only 8 were Left delegates. Lenin attended, and he organized and led the Left in a sharp struggle against the Kautskyites. As the genuine Left were in the minority, the draft resolution which Lenin had drawn up was rejected. However, as a result of the struggle which he waged, some important Marxist principles were embodied in the manifesto ultimately adopted by the conference. This manifesto declared that

¹"Socialism and War", *op. cit.*, p. 245.

the war was imperialist; it denounced the slogan of "the defence of the fatherland" and condemned the opportunists for their violation of the Stuttgart and Basle resolutions.

Commenting on the Zimmerwald conference, Lenin said that the manifesto it adopted signified a step towards a break with opportunism and social-chauvinism. At the same time, he said, it suffered from inconsistency, timidity, and failure to say everything that ought to have been said. It made no direct mention of the betrayal by the parties of the Second International and said nothing about the collapse of the Second International and the reasons for it. Nor did it directly, openly and clearly state the revolutionary methods of struggle which the working class had to adopt.

When the manifesto came up for adoption, the Left-wing delegates headed by Lenin, although they added their signatures to it, submitted a statement pointing out its weaknesses. Lenin said:

Was our Central Committee right in signing this manifesto, suffering as it does from lack of consistency, and from timidity? We think so. That we disagree, that not only our Central Committee but the whole international Left Wing section of the Conference adhering to the principles of revolutionary Marxism disagrees, is only expressed both in a special resolution, in a separate draft manifesto and in a separate declaration on the motives of voting for a compromise manifesto. We did not hide one iota of our views, slogans, tactics. The German edition of our pamphlet, *Socialism and War*, was distributed at the conference. We have broadcasted, are broadcasting, and shall broadcast our

views. . . . It would be sectarianism to refuse to take this step *together* with the minority of the German, French, Swedish, Norwegian, Swiss Socialists.¹

Lenin made a high appraisal of the Left at the Zimmerwald conference and of their activities. He remarked:

The ideological struggle at the conference was waged between a compact group of internationalists, revolutionary Marxists, and the vacillating near-Kautskyists who formed the Right wing of the conference. The compactness of the former group is one of the most important facts and one of the greatest achievements of the conference.²

He also pointed out:

From the very outset, the Zimmerwald International adopted a vacillating, "Kautskyite," "Centrist" position, which immediately compelled the *Zimmerwald Left* to dissociate itself, to separate itself from the rest, and to issue *its own* manifesto. . . .³

SOME KINDS OF COMPROMISES MAY BE CONCLUDED WITH THE KAUTSKYITES, BUT THE POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE MUST NEVER CEASE

After the Zimmerwald conference the Left, which had become united, set up their own Standing Bureau and

¹"The First Step", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XVIII, pp. 343-44.

²"Revolutionary Marxists at the International Socialist Conference, September 5-8, 1915", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, p. 227.

³"The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 52.

published their magazine *Vorbote*. Lenin shifted the focus of the anti-Kautskyite struggle, concentrated it on those who had attended the Zimmerwald conference and began to work for a second International Socialist Conference of the Zimmerwald movement.

In February 1916, Lenin attended the Enlarged Meeting of the International Socialist Committee, which was held in Berne. This meeting adopted proposals and many articles of "The Draft Resolution Concerning the Convocation of the Second Socialist Conference" which he had drafted for the second conference.

On the eve of the conference Lenin instructed the branches of the Bolshevik Party abroad to mobilize all the possible forces of the Zimmerwald Left and to elect Left delegates to the conference.

With the aim of exposing and repudiating the "democratic" peace programme of the Kautskyites and of formulating principles to guide the activities of the Left, Lenin wrote "The 'Peace Programme'" and "Proposals Submitted by the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party to the Second Socialist Conference". He explained:

. . . the main and fundamental task of the Socialists in the struggle for a lasting and democratic peace must be: firstly, explanation to the masses of the necessity of *revolutionary mass struggle*, systematic propaganda for it and the creation of the corresponding organizations; secondly, exposure of the *hypocrisy* and *lies* of the bourgeois-pacifist as of the socialist, and particularly the Kautskyite phrases about peace and the "una-

nimity" of the Second International on the question of the "peace programme".¹

The Second Zimmerwald International Socialist Conference took place in Kienthal in April 1916. It mainly discussed problems concerning the fight to bring the war to an end and the standpoint of the proletariat on the question of peace. The Left gained in strength at this meeting. Headed by Lenin, the Left put forward a joint draft resolution on the question of peace. Although this was rejected, the meeting adopted a resolution, as a result of the struggle put up by Lenin, censuring the International Socialist Bureau and condemning social-pacifism. The resolution denounced the social-chauvinist stand taken by the International Socialist Bureau, and indicated that "lasting peace cannot be built on the social foundations of capitalism" and that "the struggle for lasting peace can only be encompassed in the struggle for the realization of socialism".² It warned the workers not to believe the lies of the pacifists whatever cloak of socialism they might don.

However, the Kienthal conference did not accept the basic principles of the Bolsheviks, namely, the conversion of the imperialist war into a civil war, the defeat of one's own imperialist government in the war. The Bolsheviks voted for the limited manifesto and resolution with reservations.

Later on, Lenin remarked:

¹ "Proposals of the CC RSDLP to the Second Socialist Conference Convened by the ISC (Berne)", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 36, p. 348.

² *Resolution of the Second Zimmerwald International Socialist Conference Concerning the Attitude of the Proletariat Towards the Peace Question.*

During the war we concluded certain compromises with the "Kautskyites," with the Left Mensheviks (Martov), and with a section of the "Socialist-Revolutionaries" (Chernov and Natanson); we were together with them at Zimmerwald and Kienthal and issued joint manifestoes; but we never ceased and never relaxed our ideological and political struggle against the "Kautskyites," Martov and Chernov. . . .¹

IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF NUMBERS, BUT OF GIVING
CORRECT EXPRESSION TO THE IDEAS AND POLICY
OF THE TRULY REVOLUTIONARY PROLETARIAT

For a long time in the struggle against the opportunism of the Second International, the revolutionary group headed by Lenin was in the minority. But, as Lenin said, "The question is not one of numbers, but of giving correct expression to the ideas and policy of the truly revolutionary proletariat"; it was on the internationalists, and on their deeds alone, that "the future of Socialism depends".²

In one of his letters Lenin wrote:

The genuinely-revolutionary internationalists are numerically weak? Go tell your tales! Let us take as examples France in 1780 and Russia in 1900. The conscious and resolute revolutionaries, who in the first case were representatives of the bourgeoisie — the revolutionary class of that epoch — and in the second case

¹ "Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 398.

² "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution", *op. cit.*, pp. 54 and 51.

were representatives of the revolutionary class of the present time — the proletariat, were extremely weak numerically. They were mere units, comprising at a maximum only 1/10,000 or even 1/100,000 of their class. Yet several years later these same units, this same minority which was supposedly so negligible, led after itself the masses — millions and tens of millions of people. Why? Because this minority truly represented the interests of these masses, because it believed in the coming revolution, because it was willing selflessly to serve it.¹

“Numerical weakness?” Lenin went on to ask, “But since when have revolutionaries made their politics dependent on the fact of whether they are in the majority or the minority?”²

The evidence showed that Lenin’s diligent efforts were not in vain. Although the Zimmerwaldists later disintegrated as a result of sabotage by the Kautskyites, the Left that had rallied around Lenin eventually grew stronger. During the years of war and revolution it was these unflinching Marxist fighters who became the true leaders of the revolutionary masses in various countries, the vanguards for destroying bourgeois rule, the backbone and nucleus of the international solidarity of the proletariat.

¹ “Open Letter to Boris Souvarine”, *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Vol. 23, p. 191.

² *Ibid.*