

WEEK 3

LENIN, THE REVOLUTIONARY

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Terms of Admission into Communist International

The First, Inaugural Congress of the Communist International[1] did not draw up precise conditions for the admission of parties into the Third International. When the First Congress was convened, only communist trends and groups existed in most countries.

It is in a different situation that the Second World Congress of the Communist International is meeting. In most countries, Communist parties and organisations, not merely trends, now exist.

Parties and groups only recently affiliated to the Second International are more and more frequently applying for membership in the Third International, though they have not become really Communist. The Second International has definitely been smashed. Aware that the Second International is beyond hope, the intermediate parties and groups of the "Centre" are trying to lean on the Communist International, which is steadily gaining in strength. At the same time, however, they hope to retain a degree of "autonomy" that will enable them to pursue their previous opportunist or "Centrist" policies. The Communist International is, to a certain extent, becoming the vogue.

The desire of certain leading "Centre" groups to join the Third International provides oblique confirmation that it has won the sympathy of the vast majority of class conscious workers throughout the world, and is becoming a more powerful force with each day.

In certain circumstances, the Communist International may be faced with the danger

of dilution by the influx of wavering and irresolute groups that have not as yet broken with their Second International ideology.

Besides, some of the big parties (Italy, Sweden), in which the majority have adopted the communist standpoint, still contain a strong reformist and social-pacifist wing that is only waiting for an opportune moment to raise its head again, begin active sabotage of the proletarian revolution, and thereby help the bourgeoisie and the Second International.

No Communist should forget the lessons of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Hungarian proletariat paid dearly for the Hungarian Communists having united with the reformists.

In view of all this, the Second World Congress deems it necessary to lay down absolutely precise terms for the admission of new parties, and also to set forth the obligations incurred by the parties already affiliated.

The Second Congress of the Communist International resolves that the following are the terms of Comintern membership:

1. Day-by-day propaganda and agitation must be genuinely communist in character. All press organs belonging to the parties must be edited by reliable Communists who have given proof of their devotion to the cause of the proletarian revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat should not be discussed merely as a stock phrase to be learned by rote; it should be popularised in such a way that the practical facts systematically dealt with in our press

day by day will drive home to every rank-and-file working man and working woman, every soldier and peasant, that it is indispensable to them. Third International supporters should use all media to which they have access—the press, public meetings, trade unions, and co-operative societies—to expose systematically and relentlessly, not only the bourgeoisie but also its accomplices—the reformists of every shade.

2. Any organisation that wishes to join the Communist International must consistently and systematically dismiss reformists and “Centrists” from positions of any responsibility in the working-class movement (party organisations, editorial boards, trade unions, parliamentary groups, co-operative societies, municipal councils, etc.), replacing them by reliable Communists. The fact that in some cases rank-and-file workers may at first have to replace “experienced” leaders should be no deterrent.

3. In countries where a state of siege or emergency legislation makes it impossible for Communists to conduct their activities legally, it is absolutely essential that legal and illegal work should be combined. In almost all the countries of Europe and America, the class struggle is entering the phase of civil war. In these conditions, Communists can place no trust in bourgeois legality. They must everywhere build up a parallel illegal organisation, which, at the decisive moment, will be in a position to help the Party fulfil its duty to the revolution.

4. Persistent and systematic propaganda and agitation must be conducted in the armed forces, and Communist cells formed in every military unit. In the main Communists will have to do this work illegally; failure to engage in it would be tantamount to a betrayal of their revolutionary duty and incompatible with

membership in the Third International.

5. Regular and systematic agitation is indispensable in the countryside. The working class cannot consolidate its victory without support from at least a section of the farm labourers and poor peasants, and without neutralising, through its policy, part of the rest of the rural population. In the present period communist activity in the countryside is of primary importance. It should be conducted, in the main, through revolutionary worker-Communists who have contacts with the rural areas. To forgo this work or entrust it to unreliable semi-reformist elements is tantamount to renouncing the proletarian revolution.

6. It is the duty of any party wishing to belong to the Third International to expose, not only avowed social-patriotism, but also the falsehood and hypocrisy of social-pacifism. It must systematically demonstrate to the workers that, without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, no international arbitration courts, no talk about a reduction of armaments, no “democratic” reorganisation of the League of Nations will save mankind from new imperialist wars.

7. It is the duty of parties wishing to belong to the Communist International to recognise the need for a complete and absolute break with reformism and “Centrist” policy, and to conduct propaganda among the party membership for that break. Without this, a consistent communist policy is impossible.

The Communist International demands imperatively and uncompromisingly that this break be effected at the earliest possible date. It cannot tolerate a situation in which avowed reformists, such as Turati, Modigliani and others, are entitled to consider themselves members of the Third International. Such

a state of affairs would lead to the Third International strongly resembling the defunct Second International.

8. Parties in countries whose bourgeoisie possess colonies and oppress other nations must pursue a most well-defined and clear-cut policy in respect of colonies and oppressed nations. Any party wishing to join the Third International must ruthlessly expose the colonial machinations of the imperialists of its “own” country, must support—in deed, not merely in word—every colonial liberation movement, demand the expulsion of its compatriot imperialists from the colonies, inculcate in the hearts of the workers of its own country an attitude of true brotherhood with the working population of the colonies and the oppressed nations, and conduct systematic agitation among the armed forces against all oppression of the colonial peoples.

9. It is the duty of any party wishing to join the Communist International to conduct systematic and unflagging communist work in the trade unions, co-operative societies and other mass workers’ organisations. Communist cells should be formed in the trade unions, and, by their sustained and unflagging work, win the unions over to the communist cause. In every phase of their day-by-day activity these cells must unmask the treachery of the social-patriots and the vacillation of the “Centrists”. The cells must be completely subordinate to the party as a whole.

10. It is the duty of any party belonging to the Communist International to wage a determined struggle against the Amsterdam “International” of yellow trade unions.[2] Its indefatigable propaganda should show the organised workers the need to break with the yellow Amsterdam International. It must give every support to the emerging international federation of Red trade unions [3] which are

associated with the Communist International.

11. It is the duty of parties wishing to join the Third International to re-examine the composition of their parliamentary groups, eliminate unreliable elements and effectively subordinate these groups to the Party Central Committees. They must demand that every Communist proletarian should subordinate all his activities to the interests of truly revolutionary propaganda and agitation.

12. The periodical and non-periodical press, and all publishing enterprises, must likewise be fully subordinate to the Party Central Committee, whether the party as a whole is legal or illegal at the time. Publishing enterprises should not be allowed to abuse their autonomy and pursue any policies that are not in full accord with that of the Party.

13. Parties belonging to the Communist International must be organised on the principle of democratic centralism. In this period of acute civil war, the Communist parties can perform their duty only if they are organised in a most centralised manner, are marked by an iron discipline bordering on military discipline, and have strong and authoritative party centres invested with wide powers and enjoying the unanimous confidence of the membership.

14. Communist parties in countries where Communists can conduct their work legally must carry out periodic membership purges (re-registrations) with the aim of systematically ridding the party of petty-bourgeois elements that inevitably percolate into them.

15. It is the duty of any party wishing to join the Communist International selflessly to help any Soviet republic in its struggle against counter-revolutionary forces. Communist

parties must conduct incessant propaganda urging the workers to refuse to transport war materials destined for the enemies of the Soviet republics; they must conduct legal or illegal propaganda in the armed forces dispatched to strangle the workers' republics, etc.

16. It is the duty of parties which have still kept their old Social-Democratic programmes to revise them as speedily as possible and draw up new communist programmes in conformity with the specific conditions in their respective countries, and in the spirit of (Communist International decisions. As a rule, the programmes of all parties belonging to the Communist International must be approved by a regular Congress of the Communist International or by its Executive Committee. In the event of the Executive Committee withholding approval, the party is entitled to appeal to the Congress of the Communist International.

17. All decisions of the Communist International's congresses and of its Executive Committee are binding on all affiliated parties. Operating in conditions of acute civil war, the Communist International must be far more centralised than the Second International was. It stands to reason, however, that in every aspect of their work the Communist International and its Executive Committee must take into account the diversity of conditions in which the respective parties have to fight and work, and adopt decisions binding on all parties only on matters in which such decisions are possible.

18. In view of the foregoing, parties wishing to join the Communist International must change their name. Any party seeking affiliation must call itself the Communist Party of the country in question (Section of the Third, Communist International). The question

of a party's name is not merely a formality, but a matter of major political importance. The Communist International has declared a resolute war on the bourgeois world and all yellow Social-Democratic parties. The difference between the Communist parties and the old and official "Social-Democratic", or "socialist", parties, which have betrayed the banner of the working class, must be made absolutely clear to every rank-and-file worker.

19. After the conclusion of the proceedings of the Second World Congress of the Communist International, any party wishing to join the Communist International must at the earliest date convene an extraordinary congress for official acceptance of the above obligations on behalf of the entire party. ■

Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions For The Second Congress Of The Communist International

In submitting for discussion by the Second Congress of the Communist International the following draft theses on the national and the colonial questions I would request all comrades, especially those who possess concrete information on any of these very complex problems, to let me have their opinions, amendments, addenda and concrete remarks in the most concise form (no more than two or three pages), particularly on the following points:

- Austrian experience;
- Polish-Jewish and Ukrainian experience;
- Alsace-Lorraine and Belgium;
- Ireland;
- Danish-German, Italo-French and Italo-Slav relations;
- Balkan experience;
- Eastern peoples;
- The struggle against Pan-Islamism;
- Relations in the Caucasus;
- The Bashkir and Tatar Republics;
- Kirghizia; Turkestan, its experience;
- Negroes in America;
- Colonies;
- China-Korea-Japan.

-N. Lenin

June 5, 1920

1) An abstract or formal posing of the problem of equality in general and national equality in particular is in the very nature of bourgeois democracy. Under the guise of the equality of the individual in general,

bourgeois democracy proclaims the formal or legal equality of the property-owner and the proletarian, the exploiter and the exploited, thereby grossly deceiving the oppressed classes. On the plea that all men are absolutely equal, the bourgeoisie is transforming the idea of equality, which is itself a reflection of relations in commodity production, into a weapon in its struggle against the abolition of classes. The real meaning of the demand for equality consists in its being a demand for the abolition of classes.

2) In conformity with its fundamental task of combating bourgeois democracy and exposing its falseness and hypocrisy, the Communist Party, as the avowed champion of the proletarian struggle to overthrow the bourgeois yoke, must base its policy, in the national question too, not on abstract and formal principles but, first, on a precise appraisal of the specific historical situation and, primarily, of economic conditions; second, on a clear distinction between the interests of the oppressed classes, of working and exploited people, and the general concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class; third, on an equally clear distinction between the oppressed, dependent and subject nations and the oppressing, exploiting and sovereign nations, in order to counter the bourgeois-democratic lies that play down this colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's population by an insignificant

minority of the richest and advanced capitalist countries, a feature characteristic of the era of finance capital and imperialism.

3) The imperialist war of 1914-18 has very clearly revealed to all nations and to the oppressed classes of the whole world the falseness of bourgeois-democratic phrases, by practically demonstrating that the Treaty of Versailles of the celebrated “Western democracies” is an even more brutal and foul act of violence against weak nations than was the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of the German Junkers and the Kaiser. The League of Nations and the entire post war policy of the Entente reveal this truth with even greater clarity and distinctness. They are everywhere intensifying the revolutionary struggle both of the proletariat in the advanced countries and of the toiling masses in the colonial and dependent countries. They are hastening the collapse of the petty-bourgeois nationalist illusions that nations can live together in peace and equality under capitalism.

4) From these fundamental premises it follows that the Communist International’s entire policy on the national and the colonial questions should rest primarily on a closer union of the proletarians and the working masses of all nations and countries for a joint revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landowners and the bourgeoisie. This union alone will guarantee victory over capitalism, without which the abolition of national oppression and inequality is impossible.

5) The world political situation has now placed the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day. World political developments are of necessity concentrated on a single focus—the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouped, on the one hand, the Soviet movements of the

advanced workers in all countries, and, on the other, all the national liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities, who are learning from bitter experience that their only salvation lies in the Soviet system’s victory over world imperialism.

6) Consequently, one cannot at present confine oneself to a bare recognition or proclamation of the need for closer union between the working people of the various nations; a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia, of all the national and colonial liberation movements. The form of this alliance should be determined by the degree of development of the communist movement in the proletariat of each country, or of the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement of the workers and peasants in backward countries or among backward nationalities.

7) Federation is a transitional form to the complete unity of the working people of different nations. The feasibility of federation has already been demonstrated in practice both by the relations between the R.S.F.S.R. and other Soviet Republics (the Hungarian, Finnish^[2] and Latvian^[3] in the past, and the Azerbaijan and Ukrainian at present), and by the relations within the R.S.F.S.R. in respect of nationalities which formerly enjoyed neither statehood nor autonomy (e.g., the Bashkir and Tatar autonomous republics in the R.S.F.S.R., founded in 1919 and 1920 respectively).

8) In this respect, it is the task of the Communist International to further develop and also to study and test by experience these new federations, which are arising on the basis of the Soviet system and the Soviet movement. In recognising that federation is a transitional form to complete unity, it is necessary to strive for ever closer federal unity, bearing in mind, first, that the Soviet republics, surrounded

as they are by the imperialist powers of the whole world—which from the military standpoint are immeasurably stronger—cannot possibly continue to exist without the closest alliance; second, that a close economic alliance between the Soviet republics is necessary, otherwise the productive forces which have been ruined by imperialism cannot be restored and the well-being of the working people cannot be ensured; third, that there is a tendency towards the creation of a single world economy, regulated by the proletariat of all nations as an integral whole and according to a common plan. This tendency has already revealed itself quite clearly under capitalism and is bound to be further developed and consummated under socialism.

9) The Communist International's national policy in the sphere of relations within the state cannot be restricted to the bare, formal, purely declaratory and actually non-committal recognition of the equality of nations to which the bourgeois democrats confine themselves—both those who frankly admit being such, and those who assume the name of socialists (such as the socialists of the Second International).

In all their propaganda and agitation—both within parliament and outside it—the Communist parties must consistently expose that constant violation of the equality of nations and of the guaranteed rights of national minorities which is to be seen in all capitalist countries, despite their “democratic” constitutions. It is also necessary, first, constantly to explain that only the Soviet system is capable of ensuring genuine equality of-nations, by uniting first the proletarians and then the whole mass of the working population in the struggle against the bourgeoisie; and, second, that all Communist parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations (for

example, Ireland, the American Negroes, etc.) and in the colonies.

Without the latter condition, which is particularly important, the struggle against the oppression of dependent nations and colonies, as well as recognition of their right to secede, are but a false signboard, as is evidenced by the parties of the Second International.

10) Recognition of internationalism in word, and its replacement in deed by petty-bourgeois nationalism and pacifism, in all propaganda, agitation and practical work, is very common, not only among the parties of the Second International, but also among those which have withdrawn from it, and often even among parties which now call themselves communist. The urgency of the struggle against this evil, against the most deep-rooted petty-bourgeois national prejudices, looms ever larger with the mounting exigency of the task of converting the dictatorship of the proletariat from a national dictatorship (i.e., existing in a single country and incapable of determining world politics) into an international one (i.e., a dictatorship of the proletariat involving at least several advanced countries, and capable of exercising a decisive influence upon world politics as a whole). Petty-bourgeois nationalism proclaims as internationalism the mere recognition of the equality of nations, and nothing more. Quite apart from the fact that this recognition is purely verbal, petty-bourgeois nationalism preserves national self-interest intact, whereas proletarian internationalism demands, first, that the interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of that struggle on a world-wide scale, and, second, that a nation which is achieving victory over the bourgeoisie should be able and willing to make the greatest national sacrifices for the

overthrow of international capital.

Thus, in countries that are already fully capitalist and have workers' parties that really act as the vanguard of the proletariat, the struggle against opportunist and petty-bourgeois pacifist distortions of the concept and policy of internationalism is a primary and cardinal task.

11) With regard to the more backward states and nations, in which feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations predominate, it is particularly important to bear in mind:

first, that all Communist parties must assist the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in these countries, and that the duty of rendering the most active assistance rests primarily with the workers of the country the backward nation is colonially or financially dependent on;

second, the need for a struggle against the clergy and other influential reactionary and medieval elements in backward countries;

third, the need to combat Pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the khans, landowners, mullahs, etc.; [*In the proofs Lenin inserted a brace opposite points 2 and 3 and wrote "2 and 3 to be united".—Editor.*]

fourth, the need, in backward countries, to give special support to the peasant movement against the landowners, against landed proprietorship, and against all manifestations or survivals of feudalism, and to strive to lend the peasant movement the most revolutionary character by establishing the closest possible alliance between the West European communist proletariat and the revolutionary

peasant movement in the East, in the colonies, and in the backward countries generally. It is particularly necessary to exert every effort to apply the basic principles of the Soviet system in countries where pre-capitalist relations predominate—by setting up "working people's Soviets", etc.;

fifth, the need for a determined struggle against attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries; the Communist International should support bourgeois-democratic national movements in colonial and backward countries only on condition that, in these countries, the elements of future proletarian parties, which will be communist not only in name, are brought together and trained to understand their special tasks, i.e., those of the struggle against the bourgeois-democratic movements within their own nations. The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form;

sixth, the need constantly to explain and expose among the broadest working masses of all countries, and particularly of the backward countries, the deception systematically practised by the imperialist powers, which, under the guise of politically independent states, set up states that are wholly dependent upon them economically, financially and militarily. Under present-day international conditions there is no salvation for dependent and weak nations except in a union of Soviet republics.

12) The age-old oppression of colonial and weak nationalities by the imperialist powers

has not only filled the working masses of the oppressed countries with animosity towards the oppressor nations, but has also aroused distrust in these nations in general, even in their proletariat. The despicable betrayal of socialism by the majority of the official leaders of this proletariat in 1914-19, when “defence of country” was used as a social-chauvinist cloak to conceal the defence of the “right” of their “own” bourgeoisie to oppress colonies and fleece financially dependent countries, was certain to enhance this perfectly legitimate distrust. On the other hand, the more backward the country, the stronger is the hold of small-scale agricultural production, patriarchalism and isolation, which inevitably lend particular strength and tenacity to the deepest of petty-bourgeois prejudices, i.e., to national egoism and national narrow-mindedness. These prejudices are bound to die out very slowly, for they can disappear only after imperialism and capitalism have disappeared in the advanced countries, and after the entire foundation of the backward countries’ economic life has radically changed. It is therefore the duty of the class-conscious communist proletariat of all countries to regard with particular caution and attention the survivals of national sentiments in the countries and among nationalities which have been oppressed the longest; it is equally necessary to make certain concessions with a view to more rapidly overcoming this distrust and these prejudices. Complete victory over capitalism cannot be won unless the proletariat and, following it, the mass of working people in all countries and nations throughout the world voluntarily strive for alliance and unity. ■