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**Theses on the Role of
the Communist Party
in the Proletarian
Revolution**

Decisive struggles confront the world proletariat. The epoch in which we are now living is the epoch of open civil wars. The decisive hour is approaching. In practically every country where there is a substantial labour movement the working class, arms in hand, is faced by a series of bitter struggles.

Now more than ever the working class needs a strong organisation. It must work indefatigably to make itself ready for this decisive struggle without losing a single precious hour.

If at the time of the Paris Commune (1871) the working class had had a disciplined communist party, however small, the first heroic rising of the French proletariat would have had far greater weight, and many mistakes and weaknesses could have been avoided. The struggles which the proletariat is now facing, in a different historical situation, will be far more fateful than that of 1871.

Therefore the Second World Congress of the Communist International directs the attention of the revolutionary workers of the entire world to the following:

1. The Communist Party is a part of the working class, namely, the most advanced, most class-conscious, and hence most revolutionary part. By a process of natural selection the Communist Party is formed of the best, most class-conscious, most devoted and far-sighted workers. The Communist Party has no interests other than the interests of the working class as a whole. The Communist Party is differentiated from the working class as a whole by the fact that it has a clear view of

the entire historical path of the working class in its totality and endeavours, at every bend in this road, to defend the interests not of separate groups or trades, but of the working class as a whole. The Communist Party is the organisational and political lever which the most advanced section of the working class uses to direct the proletarian and semi-proletarian masses along the right road.

2. Until the proletariat has seized state power and consolidated its rule once for all, and made it secure against a bourgeois restoration, the Communist Party will have in its organised ranks only a minority of the workers. Before the seizure of power, and in the transition period, the Communist Party can, in favourable circumstances, exercise an undisputed ideological and political influence on all proletarian and semi-proletarian strata of the population, but it cannot unite them all organisationally in its ranks. Only after the proletarian dictatorship has deprived the bourgeoisie of such powerful means of exerting influence as the press, the schools, parliament, the church, the administrative machine, etc., only after the final defeat of the bourgeois order has become clear to everybody, only then will all or practically all the workers begin to enter the ranks of the Communist Party.

3. A sharp distinction must be made between the concepts of party and class. The members of the "Christian" and liberal trade unions of Germany, England, and other countries are undoubtedly parts of the working class. The more or less numerous groups of workers who still follow Scheidemann, Gompers, and their like, are undoubtedly part of the working

class. In certain historical circumstances it is quite possible for the working class to include very numerous reactionary elements. It is the task of communism not to adapt itself to these backward sections of the working class but to raise the entire working class to the level of the communist vanguard. Confusion of these two concepts -- party and class -- can lead to the greatest mistakes and bewilderment. It is for example clear that in spite of the sentiments and prejudices of a certain section of the working class during the imperialist war, the workers' party had at all costs to combat those sentiments and prejudices by standing for the historical interests of the proletariat which required the proletarian party to declare war on the war.

Thus, on the outbreak of the imperialist war in 1914 the parties of the social-traitors in all countries, when they supported the bourgeoisie of their "owns" countries, always explained that they were acting in accordance with the will of the working class. But they forgot that, even if that were true, it must be the task of the proletarian party in such a state of affairs to come out against the sentiments of the majority of the workers and to defend the historical interests of the proletariat in spite of all. In the same way, at the beginning of this century, the Russian mensheviks of that time (the so-called Economists) rejected open political struggle against Tsarism on the ground that the working class as a whole was not yet ripe for understanding the necessity of the political struggle.

In the same way the right wing of the German Independents always insist, when acting irresolutely and inadequately, on

"the will of the masses", without understanding that the party exists precisely to lead the masses and show them the way.

4. The Communist International adheres unshakeably to the conviction that the collapse of the old "social-democratic" parties of the Second International should in no circumstances be presented as the collapse of the proletarian parties in general. The epoch of direct struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat brings a new world party of the proletariat to birth, the Communist Party.

5. The Communist International decisively rejects the view that the proletariat can accomplish its revolution without having an independent political party of its own. Every class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle, which inevitably turns into a civil war, is the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organised, and operated except through a political party. Only if the proletariat has as leader an organised and experienced party with clearly defined aims and a practical programme of immediate measures both for internal and external policy, will the conquest of political power turn out to be not an accidental episode, but the starting-point of an enduring communist structure of society built by the proletariat.

The same class struggle likewise demands the centralisation and unified direction of the most varied forms of the proletarian movement (trade unions, co-operatives, factory councils, educational work, elections, etc.). Only a political party can be such a co-ordinating and guiding centre. The

refusal to create and to strengthen such a party and to subordinate oneself to it implies the rejection of unity in the direction of the different fighting forces of the proletariat acting on the various fields of battle. The class struggle of the proletariat needs concentrated agitation which illuminates the various stages of the struggle from a single standpoint and directs the attention of the proletariat at each given moment to the definite tasks to be accomplished by the whole class. This cannot be done without a centralised political apparatus, i.e. without a political party.

The propaganda conducted by the revolutionary syndicalists and adherents of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) against the necessity for an independent workers' party therefore objectively helped and helps only to support the bourgeoisie and the counterrevolutionary "social-democrats". In their propaganda against a communist party, which they want to replace by trade unions alone or by shapeless "general" workers' unions, the syndicalists and IWW come close to the avowed opportunists.

After the defeat of the 1905 revolution the Russian mensheviks for many years advocated the idea of a so-called workers' congress which was to replace the revolutionary party of the working class. The yellow "labourites" of every kind in England and America preach to the workers the creation of shapeless workers' unions or vague, purely parliamentary associations, to take the place of a political party, and at the same time put through a thoroughly bourgeois policy. The revolutionary syndicalists and IWW are anxious to fight against the

dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, but do not know how. They do not see that without an independent political party the working class is a body without a head.

Revolutionary syndicalism and industrialism mark a step forward only in comparison with the old, musty, counterrevolutionary ideology of the Second International. But in comparison with revolutionary Marxism, i.e. with communism, syndicalism and industrialism are a step backward. The declaration of the "Left" Communists of Germany (KAPD) at their founding congress in April, that they were founding a party, but "not a party in the traditional sense of the word", is an ideological surrender to these reactionary views of syndicalism and industrialism.

The working class cannot win victory over the bourgeoisie by the general strike alone, by the tactics of "folded arms". The proletariat must resort to armed insurrection. Whoever has grasped that must also understand that an organised political party is essential, that shapeless workers' unions are not enough.

The revolutionary syndicalists often speak of the great part that can be played by a determined revolutionary minority. A really determined minority of the working class, a minority that is communist, that wants to act, that has a programme, that is out to organise the struggle of the masses -- that is precisely what the communist party is.

6. The most important task of a genuine communist party is to keep always in closest touch with the broadest masses of the proletariat. In order to do that, communists can and should also be active in associations which, though they are not party organisations, have large proletarian groups among their members, such as the associations of war invalids in various countries, the "Hands off Russia" committees in England, proletarian tenants' leagues, etc. The Russian example of the so-called "non-party" workers' and peasants' conferences is particularly important. These conferences are organised in practically every town, in every working-class district, and also in the countryside. The broadest masses of even the backward workers take part in the elections to these conferences. The most pressing questions are placed on the agenda -- food supplies, housing, the military situation, schools, the current political tasks, etc. The communists exercise a most active influence on these "non-party" conferences, and with the greatest success for the party.

Communists consider it their most important task to carry on the work of organisation and instruction in a systematic fashion within these wider workers' organisations. But in order to do this successfully, in order to prevent the enemies of the revolutionary proletariat from taking possession of these broad workers' organisations, the advanced communist workers must have their own independent tightly-knit communist party, which acts always in an organised way and which is able, at every turn of events and whatever form the movement takes, to look after the general interests of communism.

7. Communists do not by any means shun mass workers' organisations which have a non-party character, even when these are of an outright reactionary character (yellow or Christian unions, etc.); they do not shrink from taking part in them and using them. Within these organisations the Communist Party constantly carries on its propaganda and indefatigably persuades the workers that the idea of non-partisanship as a principle is deliberately encouraged among the workers by the bourgeoisie and their lackeys in order to divert them from organised struggle for socialism.

8. The old "classic" division of the workers movement into three forms -- party, trade union, and co-operative -- is clearly obsolete. The proletarian revolution in Russia has created the basic form of the proletarian dictatorship, the soviets. The new division, which we are approaching everywhere, is: 1. party, 2. workers' councils (soviets), 3. producers' associations (trade unions). But both the councils and the revolutionary unions must be constantly and systematically guided by the party of the proletariat, that is, by the Communist Party. The organised vanguard of the working class, the Communist Party, which must direct the struggles of the entire working class in the economic and the political field, as well as in the sphere of education, must be the animating spirit within the unions and the workers' councils, as well as in every other kind of proletarian organisation.

The rise of soviets as the historical basic form of the dictatorship of the proletariat does not in any way diminish the leading role of the Communist Party in the proletarian

revolution. When the German "Left" communists say (see their appeal to the German proletariat of 14 April 1920, signed "Communist Labour Party of Germany") that "the party too must adapt itself more and more to the Soviet idea and assume a proletarian character"(Kommunistische Arbeiterzeitung no. 54), that is a confused expression of the idea that the Communist Party should merge in the soviets, and that the soviets could replace the Communist Party. This idea is basically wrong and reactionary.

There was a period in the history of the Russian revolution when the soviets were opposed to the proletarian party and supported the policy of the agents of the bourgeoisie. The same was true of Germany. The same is possible in other countries also.

In order that the soviets may be able to achieve their historical tasks, a strong Communist Party is essential, a party which does not simply "adapt" itself to the soviets, but is able to ensure that the soviets do not "adapt" themselves to the bourgeoisie and to white-guard social-democracy, a party which through its fractions in the soviets is able to make them follow it.

Whoever suggests that the Communist Party should "adapt" itself to the soviets, whoever sees in such an adaptation a strengthening of the "proletarian character" of the party, is doing both the party and the soviets a highly questionable service, and has failed to grasp the significance either of the party or of the soviets. The stronger the party that we create in any country, the sooner will the "Soviet idea" triumph. Many

"independents" and even right-wing socialists now pay lip-service to the "Soviet idea". We shall be able to prevent these elements from distorting the Soviet idea only if we have a strong communist party which is able to exercise a decisive influence on the policy of the soviets and to lead them.

9. The Communist Party is necessary to the working class not only before the seizure of power, not only during the seizure of power, but also after the transfer of power to the working class. The history of the Communist Party of Russia, which has been in power nearly three years, shows that the role of the communist party after the working class has seized power does not diminish but, on the contrary, grows enormously.

10. On the morrow of the conquest of power by the proletariat its party remains, as before, only a part of the working class -- but it is precisely that part of the working class which organised victory. For two decades in Russia, and for some years in Germany, the Communist Party has been fighting not only the bourgeoisie, but also those "socialists" who are the agents of the bourgeoisie among the proletariat; it took into its ranks the staunchest, most far-sighted, and most advanced fighters of the working class. Only if there is such a disciplined organisation of the best part of the working class is it possible to surmount all the difficulties confronting the workers' dictatorship on the morrow of victory. In the organisation of a new proletarian Red Army, in the real destruction of the bourgeois State apparatus and its replacement by the beginnings of a new proletarian State apparatus, in the fight against narrow craft tendencies among groups of workers, in the struggle against local and

regional "patriotism", in clearing the way for the creation of a new labour discipline -- in all these fields the Communist Party has the decisive word. By their own example its members must inspire and lead the majority of the working class.

11. The need for a political party of the proletariat disappears only with the complete abolition of classes. On the road to this final victory of communism it is possible that the historical importance of the three basic forms of proletarian organisation today (party, soviet, producers' union) will change, and that gradually a single type of workers' organisation will crystallise out. But the Communist Party will only merge completely in the working class when communism ceases to be a goal to be fought for and the entire working class has become communist.

12. The Second Congress of the Communist International not only reaffirms the historical mission of the Communist Party in general, but indicates to the international proletariat, although only in broad outline, what kind of communist party we need.

13. The Communist International is of the opinion that, particularly in the period of the proletarian dictatorship, the Communist Party must be built on foundations of iron proletarian centralism. In order to lead the working class successfully in the hard and prolonged civil war the Communist Party must establish iron military discipline in its own ranks. The experience of the Communist Party which for three years has led the working class in the Russian civil war has shown that without the strictest discipline, without complete centralisation, and without the fullest comradely confidence of

all party organisations in the party centre, the victory of the workers is impossible.

14. The Communist Party must be built on the basis of democratic centralism. The basic principles of democratic centralism are that the higher party bodies shall be elected by the lower, that all instructions of the higher bodies are categorically and necessarily binding on the lower; and that there shall be a strong party centre whose authority is universally and unquestioningly recognised for all leading party comrades in the period between congresses.

15. A number of communist parties in Europe and America have been compelled, as a result of the "state of siege" decreed by the bourgeoisie against communists, to lead an illegal life. It must be borne in mind that in such a state of affairs the principle of election cannot be strictly observed and the leading party bodies must be given the right of co-opting members, as was done at one time in Russia. Under a "state of siege" the Communist Party is unable to make use of a democratic referendum about every serious question (as was proposed by a group of American Communists); instead it must give its central body the right in emergencies to take important decisions for all party members.

16. At the present time the advocacy of broad "autonomy" for the local party organisations only weakens the ranks of the Communist Party, undermines its capacity for action, and favours petty-bourgeois, anarchist and disruptive tendencies.

17. In countries in which the bourgeoisie or the counterrevolutionary social-democracy are still in power, the Communist Parties must learn to systematically combine legal and illegal activity. Legal work must always be under the practical supervision of the illegal party. The communist parliamentary fractions, in both central and local government institutions must be completely under the control of the party, regardless of whether the party is at the given moment legal or illegal. Deputies who refuse, in whatever manner, to subordinate themselves to the party must be expelled from the party.

The legal press (newspapers and publishing houses) must be completely and unconditionally subordinate to the entire party and its central committee. No concessions are admissible on this point.

18. The basis of the entire organisational activity of the communist party must be the creation of communist cells everywhere it finds proletarians and semi-proletarians, although even in small numbers. In every soviet, in every trade union, in every co-operative, in every factory, in every tenant's council, wherever there are even three people who sympathise with communism, a communist cell must be formed immediately. It is only the strict organisation of the communists which enables the vanguard of the working class to be the leader of the whole class. All Communist Party cells working in non-party organisations must be unconditionally subordinate to the party organisation as a whole, regardless of whether the party is at the given moment working legally or illegally.

Communist cells of all kinds must be subordinate to each other in a strictly hierarchical order of rank as precisely as possible.

19. Almost everywhere the Communist Party arises as an urban party, a party of industrial workers living mainly in towns. To facilitate and hasten the victory of the working class the Communist Party must become the party not only of the towns, but also of the villages. The Communist Party must carry its propaganda and its organising work to the agricultural workers and the small and medium peasants. The Communist Party must pay particular attention to organising communist cells in the countryside.

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The international organisation of the proletariat can be strong only if, in all countries where communists live and fight, the ideas about the role of the Communist Party here formulated take firm hold. The Communist International invites to its congress every trade union which recognises its principles and is ready to break with the yellow International. The Communist International will organise an international section of red trade unions which acknowledge communist principles. The Communist International will not refuse to co-operate with any non-party workers' organisation which is willing to wage a serious revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. But at the same time the Communist International will never cease to emphasise to the workers of the whole world:

1. The Communist Party is the chief and primary weapon for the liberation of the working class. We must now have in every country not mere groups or tendencies, but a Communist Party.
2. In each country, there must be only one Communist Party.
3. The Communist Party must be built on the principle of the strictest centralisation, and in the epoch of civil war military discipline must prevail in its ranks.
4. Wherever there are a dozen proletarians or semi-proletarians, the Communist Party must have an organised cell.
5. In every non-party organisation there must be a Communist Party cell which is strictly subordinate to the party.
6. While adhering firmly and unyieldingly to the programme and revolutionary tactics of communism, the Communist Party must always be connected as closely as possible with the broad workers' organisations, and avoid sectarianism as much as lack of principles.

Source: "communiste program", No. 2, March 1976, Translated from the "Protokoll des II Weltkongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale", Hamburg, 1921.