

COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE

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For Theory and Discussion

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THE NEXT WORLD CRISIS, THE SECOND WORLD
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KARL KORSCH

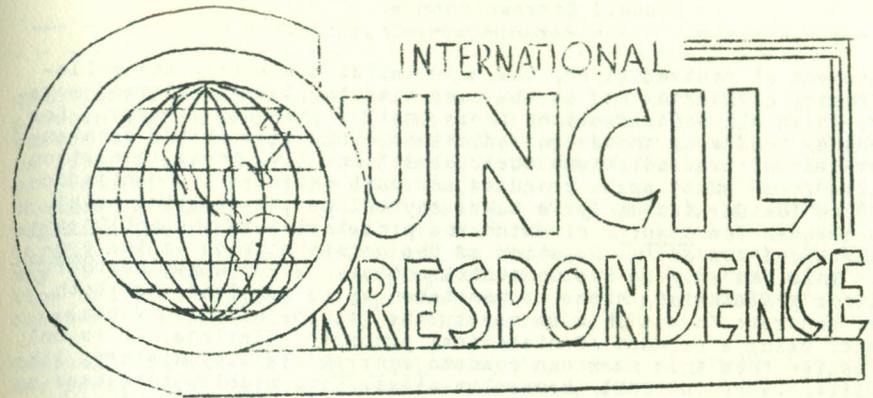
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*** REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM ***

To Marxism, the determining contradiction in present-day society lies in the contradictory development of the social forces of production within the existing relations of production, or, otherwise expressed, between the increasingly socialized character of the productive process itself and the persisting property relations. In all forms of society, the general advance of humanity has been expressed in the development of the productive forces, i.e. of the means and methods of production, enabling ever greater amounts of use articles to be produced with an ever diminishing amount of direct human labor. This process is divisible into historical periods. In it, each stage simply mirrors the attained level of the continuously increasing forces of production and develops for them corresponding social relations. And as soon as a given set of social conditions no longer sufficed, without giving rise to great maladjustments in the social, economic and political spheres, to satisfy the demands of the new and growing forces of production, those conditions were overcome through revolutionary action.

All social development is based in the last instance on the process of interaction between social man and nature. The contradiction arising through human labor between being and consciousness, nature and man, leads to further and further development and change in nature, society, man and consciousness. Within this great contradiction evolve, in the process of development, narrower social contradictions, which in their turn propel the progressive social movement along the path of revolution.

Since the development of the productive forces has throughout the past been bound up with the rise and decline of classes, past history must necessarily be regarded as a history of class struggle. Thus the development of manufacture under feudalism had to lead, at a certain level, to the overcoming of feudalism and to the birth of capitalist society; a transition which took a revolutionary expression in all the social domains.

The statement of contradiction, the materialist dialectic, the philosophic theory of Marxism and at the same time the law of all real movement, seeks in all contradictions their unity - without, however, for that reason, confusing those contradictions - and sees in the spontaneous movement of contradictions their abolition, i.e. their resolution in a third form, which again produces and must overcome its contradiction. Since the Marxist analysis takes capital as its starting point, capital becomes the thesis, of which the proletariat is the antithesis. The dialectical law of the negation of the negation leads to the synthesis. This can only be the communist society, which knows neither capital nor proletariat, since it has taken up or resolved them both in their concrete forms. This is merely the falling off of a social husk, and, being a product of historical property relations, it is only in capitalism that this husk can possess concrete reality. History, like all reality, is dialectical, hence limitless. Each problem possesses no more than historical character. Marxism does not present itself as something absolute, but as the theory of the class struggle within capitalist society.

Not only, from the standpoint of Marxism, is the contradiction between capital and labor the beginning as well as the end of present-day society, but the progressive development of that society is to be seen only in the growth and sharpening of that contradiction. Capital being the result of the exploitation of labor power, so with the growth of capital, that is, in the course of the human progress under way in this historical period, the exploitation of the workers must of necessity be more and more intensified. If the possibilities of the exploitation of labor power in the present system were unlimited, there would be no reason to expect an end of capitalist society. But with the growth of the proletariat, the class struggle also increases, since at a certain point of development the productive forces of the workers can no longer be applied capitalistically. At that point, the proletariat, of its own accord, develops into a revolutionary force, which strives for and brings about an overthrow of the existing social relations.

Marxism, which perceives in the existence of the proletariat the realization of the dialectical movement of society, bases its theoretical justification mainly on the laws of economic development in general, and of capitalism in particular. Capitalist relations of production are not solely determined by nature (land as a basis for labor) and human activity, but these natural conditions are also subordinate to the capitalistic social relations. The concerns of human beings are not regulated from the point of view of their needs as human beings, but from the point of view of capitalist needs for profits. The decisive factor in capitalist society is not the production of use values but of capital; the latter is the motive power of the productive machinery. This dependence of human welfare upon the private interests of the capitalists is made possible through the separation of the workers from the means of production. The workers cannot live except through the sale of their labor power. The buyers of labor power, who are at the same time the owners of the means of production, buy this power only in order to further their private interests as capitalists, without regard to social consequences.

We have seen that in all forms of society, progressive development is illustrated in the continual growth and improvement of the means and methods of production, enabling the output of an ever greater

quantity of products with ever less labor. In capitalism, this same process expresses itself in a more rapid growth of the capital invested in means of production as compared with the capital invested in labor power. That part of the capital which is invested in means of production we call constant capital, since as such it enables no changes of magnitude; and that portion which goes in the form of wages to the workers we call the variable capital, since it adds, through labor itself, new values to those already present. In this way it is shown that the development of the social forces of production under capitalism is expressed in a more rapid growth of the constant capital relatively to the variable.

Capital, and hence its material form, the means of production and labor power, can, however, as already stated, function capitalistically only so long as this may appear profitable to the owners of the means of production. Coming into action only as capital, they must reproduce themselves as capital, a thing which is possible, on the capitalistic basis, only by way of accumulation. The surplus value, from which are derived the funds for accumulation, the additional means of production and labor power as well as the capitalists' profit, is, however, nothing but unpaid labor. It is that part of the workers' products which is not consumed by them but was taken from them. Now since the surplus value is derived exclusively from the variable part of capital, and if this variable part must continually diminish relatively to the advance of accumulation, then the surplus value must, with mathematical certainty, continually diminish relatively to accumulation, even though it increases absolutely. This contradictory movement, by which with advancing accumulation the capitalistic rate of profit falls (the rate of profit is computed on the total capital, constant and variable), -- a process denoted as the growth of the organic composition of capital, -- is, however, up to a certain point of capitalist development, not at all dangerous, since at a rather low stage of development the system is capable of accumulating faster than the rate of profit falls, or, in other words, to compensate for the fall of the profit rate by the growth of the actual profit mass. This possibility is, however, no less historical than all other matters.

Accumulation there must be, and the lower the rate of profit falls as a result of this accumulation, the greater must the accumulation be. When accumulation goes out, the crisis comes in; the solving of the crisis is possible only through further accumulation, and necessarily at a continually accelerated rate. At a rather high level of capitalist development, when the tempo inherent in accumulation requires the further advance of accumulation in such measure that the absolutely swollen mass of profit is too small in relation to those demands for further accumulation, then accumulation must of necessity come to a stop, and the boom turns to crisis. In other words, capitalist accumulation devours for its own purposes, by which all society is conditioned, an increasingly large part of the surplus value produced by the workers; and in spite of the growth of this surplus value, it must nevertheless, at a high point of development, prove insufficient to meet the demands of accumulation. This law of capitalist accumulation, the primary cause of which is to be seen in the contradiction between exchange value and use value, between capital and labor, is confirmed as an actual law by all empirical factors involved. If accumulation comes to a standstill, by reason of the fact that there is not enough surplus value at hand for its continuance, then that part of capital which is destined for but is at the same time insufficient to meet

the needs of accumulation, lies idle and seeks in vain for profitable possibilities of investment. We are faced with the paradoxical truth that a shortage of capital gives rise to a superfluity of capital lacking room for investment. There is no lack of purchasing power, yet, in the capitalist sense, no use can be made of this purchasing power, since from this point of view it is meaningless, because unprofitable.

If accumulation is not continued, the situation must of necessity give rise to a general tie-up of human activity. The commodities destined for further accumulation can find no buyers. They lie unused, and from the over-accumulation results the general over-production of commodities; a circumstance which expresses itself in the closing and paralyzing of enterprises in all spheres of social life and hence in an enormous increase of unemployment.

The crisis also brings with it certain tendencies working to overcome it. The organic composition of capital is lowered by capital being destroyed through bankruptcies and devaluation. Through the export of capital and intensified imperialistic ventures, new sources of additional surplus value are created. Through general rationalization of working methods, further technical innovations in the productive process, cheaper sources of raw materials, as well as through the pauperization of the workers and the expropriation of the middle classes, etc., the quantity of surplus value is adapted to meet the demands of further accumulation. All efforts during the crisis serve to revive profitable capitalist operation on a lower price and value level. If this occurs, nothing stands in the way of a new upswing, which, however, after a certain time, as a result of renewed over-accumulation, necessarily turns off into a new crisis. These factors we call the counter-tendencies directed against the collapse of capitalism.

Like everything else, however, these counter-tendencies are of an historical nature. At a certain point of capitalist development, their effectiveness as factors in overcoming crises ceases. They become too weak in relation to the further demands of accumulation, or are already completely exhausted as a result of previous accumulation. (For example, capitalist expansion meets its objective limits long before it completes its march over the globe.) Furthermore, capitalist rationalization leads, as has been shown, to mis-rationalization, and the revolutionizing of technic, too, has its capitalistic limits. Neither can wages in the long run be kept below the workers' cost of reproducing themselves, nor can the middle-class elements be completely expropriated. Monopolization further lowers the possibility for capital expansion, and imperialistic ventures grow more and more dubious. But regardless of how or when the counter-tendencies are neutralized, it is clear to the Marxist that capitalism must of necessity reach a point where the past cycle of crises gives way to the permanent crisis which capitalism is powerless to overcome.

This permanent crisis, or the death crisis, of capitalism is a crisis no longer restricted by any counter-tendencies--a crisis in which the tendency toward collapse runs its course. But even here we are not presented with a single act, but with a process, a whole historical period. In such an economic condition, the relative pauperization of the proletariat, which goes with the whole of capitalist development, is bound to become absolute, general and permanent. During the upgrade period of capitalism, wages rose, since the cost of reproducing the workers continually increased also, though in relation to what they

produced, their portion was less and less. In the permanent crisis, their real living conditions are bound to grow worse, absolutely and uninterruptedly.

The condition of permanent crisis forms the objective basis of the revolutionary labor movement. The class struggle grows sharper and assumes more naked forms. On the other hand, the means of suppression employed by the ruling class are adapted to this new condition. While in the upgrade period of capitalism, "formal democracy" sufficed to permit the smooth operation of the social mechanism, in the permanent crisis capitalism has to take up with open dictatorship. In the place of "democracy" there arises, at a rather high stage of development, a political condition which today is called fascism. The fact that the ideological basis of fascism is formed by the impoverished middle class does not alter the fact that the fascist movement operates only in the interest of the now monopolized capital. Capitalist concentration, which goes on even in the permanent crisis, necessarily impoverishes also the middle strata of capitalists. The energies thus aroused within the middle class are engaged by monopoly capital for its own purposes. Parts of the petty bourgeoisie are granted concessions at the expense of the workers, though these concessions are only of temporary character.

By destroying the organizations and doing away with the limited "democratic" political liberties of the workers with the aid of the corrupted middle-class gunmen and the part of the workers under their ideological influence, capitalism thinks to secure its continued existence even during the permanent crisis. But even though, through terrorism, the workers can be politically atomized, their congregation in large masses is still necessary for industrial production. With the destruction of the old form of the labor movement, new forms necessarily arise; and since these forms are deprived of other means of expression, they must express themselves on the job itself, whereby their strength is increased a thousandfold. The workers-council movement, the organizational form of the revolution, thus arises naturally out of the very conditions which capitalism has created. The permanent terror is at the same time the political schooling of the workers. So that in the proletariat capitalism not only produces its own grave-diggers; it has also to demonstrate to the proletariat how they can fight successfully.

Even though the workers in great masses may never attain a revolutionary consciousness, in order to live they are forced to take up the fight against capital. And when they fight for their existence under the conditions of the permanent crisis, this fight, regardless of its ideological quality, is a fight which can only turn in the direction of overcoming the capitalist system. Until the successful revolutionary overthrow, the proletariat lives in barbarous, constantly worsening conditions, and the only possibility of getting away from that is communism; that is, the overcoming of capitalist relations of production, the abolition of private property in the means of production, which is identical with the abolition of wage labor.

Marxism is not only a theory which sprung from the existence of the proletariat and its position in society; Marxism is the actual class struggle between capital and labor, that is, a social condition in which the workers, whether they will or not, whether they are conscious of it or not, whether they know Marx or not, are unable to act

otherwise than in accordance with Marxism, if they wish to maintain themselves and thereby at the same time to serve the general progress of mankind. While Marx himself actualized the Hegelian dialectic, that is, recognized the real, concrete movement as dialectical, Marxism can be actualized only by means of the fighting proletariat. A Marxist is not one who has mastered the Marxian theories; a Marxist is one who strives to actualize those theories. In a word: Marxism is not only a view of the world; Marxism is the living, fighting proletariat.

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The article above will be available in printed pamphlet form after May 1, 1935. It is being printed by the Council Communist Press of Chicago. Order from the United Workers' Party.

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THE NEXT WORLD CRISIS, THE SECOND WORLD WAR
AND THE WORLD REVOLUTION.

(Theses)

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(The following Theses are written by a comrade not belonging to our group. Without completely approving them in their present form, we find them interesting and important enough to bring them up for discussion. Our readers are invited to take part in this discussion, which is begun in the present issue with a contribution by Karl Korsch. We shall close the matter with a statement of our own position in one of the following numbers of Council Correspondence.)

- Editorial Board -

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1. - The next world crisis is very likely to coincide with the second world war. We must at any rate be prepared for this possibility.

2. - The second world war will again place the working class face to face with a world-revolutionary situation. We are shocked to realize that the forces of revolution assembled in the revolutionary cycle of 1850-1917 are used up and that the new efforts in that direction are weak. It is our task to promote the organizational and ideational preparedness for the world revolution, to make clear what steps in this connection are ineffectual, which activities are merely action for the sake of action (Scheinaktionen), and what possibilities of action are really open under the new conditions, and for our part to really make the most of each of these possibilities.

3. - We have been able since the beginning of this century to gain ample experience with regard to capitalist crises, capitalist wars and revolutionary convulsions of the capitalist world-system in its entirety. It is high time to bring order into this experience. We have mostly contented ourselves with explaining the causes of capitalist wars; an attempt must be made, however, to understand the capitalist structure of the World War, its function in the whole social process, in order that the process itself, its course, its action, its result may become clear.

The world-war crisis of 1913-1919 represents a combination of world crisis, world war and world revolution. It was shown that between capitalist States the immemorial alternation of war and peace--which in itself goes on in other connections--is involved in the industrial cycle. The industrializing of warfare brought it about that the industrial war has become a special form of crisis: the world-war crisis. What is true of any capitalist crisis whatsoever, namely, that it lays bare the disorderly and inhuman character of bourgeois society and

thus promotes the revolutionary tendency of the workers' class struggle aiming at the world order of labor, holds in higher degree of such a world-war crisis. At the beginning of the first world war stands the crisis, at its end the attempt at world-revolutionary action on the part of the working class.

The first world-war crisis forms the close of the upgrade period 1895-1913 ('long wave') and ushers in the present period; the distinguishing marks of that crisis make clear the special character of the present ('long') period of depression. In the world-war crisis destruction was the aim of a production intensified beyond its own measure. Since industry was converted to war industry, the presupposition for crisis was set once more within the crisis, overproduction occurred once more as production of materials of destruction and performed the special work of any crisis: destruction of value which cannot be turned to account. In this way the crisis overleaped itself. The over-production, in that it produced war, had apparently become profitable production. It had accordingly all at once gained a meaning, like the dying in the wire entanglements and the hunger back home,--an inhuman, capitalistic meaning. Fantastic war profits flowed into the pockets of individual capitalists. On the fronts, the competition assumed an heroic character. Literally cut-throat competition urged on to the extreme limits of performance and revolutionized technics and organization. Industry, in the form of war industry, experienced a feverish and deceptive upswing. In the meantime, however, there exploded in the steel tempests of the material battles and there flew away with the gas clouds over the shell-torn fields, the lucrative idyll of the two pre-war decades--for victors and for vanquished and beyond recall. Thus there followed upon the mild "trade crises" of 1901 and 1907--mostly signs which were not comprehended--the great world-crisis, and made an epoch. In this crisis it became plain what mighty productive forces had been concealed behind the capitalist business of peace-time. But once unfettered by war, the productive forces threatened to blow up the national-state system resting on wage labor and capital. This breakthrough of the productive forces taking place with the blind elementary power of a natural catastrophe has often been interpreted as the world revolution itself. There is no need for such arts of interpretation, which do away with the clear distinctions. For after the exhaustion of the military energies of capital, there came forward the true bearer of the productive forces, the working class itself, with the attempt at a world-revolutionary action. And it was only after the unvictorious exhaustion of the revolutionary energies of the working class that the gigantic efforts undertaken in this crisis, in this war, in this revolution, had again lost both their bourgeois and their proletarian meaning. To the capitalist class it became plain that the question had merely been one of over-production and destruction of value which could not be turned to account; to the working class, that the world-war crisis could be met only by world-revolutionary action, that when anything less is attempted in such a situation the class, as an army of millions, simply ceases to function in its history-making role.

It was only with difficulty that the new productive forces could again be forced into the capitalist world system for peaceful business purposes. As soon as the productive forces assembled up to 1913, destructively let loose in the first world war and since that time further increased, had been in motion after a fashion for a few years,

it came to light in the great world crises of the present time that the framework of the national-state social system resting on wage labor and capital has already become a crushing fetter upon those forces. To be sure, the effort made in the post-war crises to bind those forces once more to the production relation of wage labor and capital, and to the capitalist process of accumulation and to fit them into the framework of the national State was attended with success, but the capacity of the industrial apparatus cannot be completely utilized even in prosperity. National restriction of production becomes a method of overcoming crises.

Flatly contradictory judgments have been possible regarding the present period: "Decline period of capitalism" (Sombart, Varga, Corey), "Second industrial revolution" (O. Bauer, Boris). Judgments which hold to one side of the process just as abstractly as in the previous period the different theories of imperialism and their more or less belated progeny. The special character of the present ('long') depression period comes to light in the character of the world war crisis and of the post-war crises (1921, 1929). They are crises of the system. One is justified in expecting that the next world crisis will have the same character.

4. - Today, now that the passage from the acute crisis into the depression is accomplished (cf. mounting production figures in U.S.A., England, France, Germany, 1933; Japanese export offensive, American strike wave), the prognosis may be made that once the general trade war which is now on has led to half-way useful results the severe and long-drawn-out depression will be followed by a breathing spell which will end in the next world crisis. There are no grounds by which we could be moved not to count upon the next world crisis around 1940 as upon a reliable anticipation, and to take our measures accordingly.

The new monopolistic forms of State and Capital--children of the great contemporary crises--fulfill the special task of political economy in the present period: to attain at least the highest measure of expansion of the transcending productive forces within the given framework Capital and State--those two sides of the basic social relation, wage-workers vs. capitalists--have been smelted together by the world crises into a single armor-plating, to the end of assuring their continued existence. From the automatic subject Capital with the sponsor State as a special organ there has grown the unified state-subject Capital. The State today is more than the merely 'ideational' total capitalist, as may be seen from its multiplied functions. Through an injection of fresh blood from the middle class, the ruling class has taken on a new aspect and, with the means of political revolution and social reform, subjects the working class and all other elements to far-going changes. The state-subject Capital seizes the monopoly on class struggle. The breaking up of all class organs of the workers is its first accomplishment. A ruthless social-pacification process is introduced with the aim of 'organically' incorporating that part of capital represented by wage labor into the new State. At the same time a far-flung reorganization of the capitalist class is undertaken for the purpose of adapting it to the special task of political economy in the present period. There is today a whole scale of degrees of the fusion of State and Capital. The differences have their root in differences in the history of the various nations, and are not of a fundamental nature. (1. Identity of State and Capital, centralized planned economy

under individual responsibility of the various shop leaders: bolshevist state capitalism. 2. Creation of special authoritarian organs of political economy, to which the individual independent entrepreneur is required to conform: national-socialist "economy steering" (Wirtschaftssteuerung). 3. Corporative self-discipline of the capitalists under state control: fascist "systematic intervention". 4. The American N.R. also, though on the whole of a different sort, reveals related features Etc., etc.) In the place of private-economy profitability there enters national-economy profitability. The state-subject Capital organizes the domestic market, regulates (a national "general cartel") the prices and thereby at the same time sharpens the international competition. The international trade policy has become the vital question of the States, ("Twilight of Autarchy"). The new monopolistic forms have accordingly not only not held up the cyclical course of world economy, they also fail to withdraw their own sphere of influence from the "natural law" of capitalism. As regards crises, those forms can only bring about with in the state economy (insofar as they do away with the automatic nature of the process) a different distribution of the over-production periodically setting in and of the hunger with which it is bound up, (cf. Italy and Russia in the latest crisis).

5. - The productive forces released in war at the beginning of the present period and since then further increased, can no longer come to unfoldment in the given framework of politics and economics otherwise than by way of crisis in a second world war. That is what is at the bottom of the present world unrest. It becomes ever clearer that the anti-crisis campaigns of the new monopolistic state economies have at the same time the character of preparedness measures. More and more is military preparedness the essence of that very industrial energy by which the world is driven forward (motorization, aviation, chemistry, etc.). In long-term production plans, explosive material is being heaped up and stored on a large scale. Likewise the social pacification policy is preparation for war. The disarmament ideology is being replaced by vita militante, soldierly spirit and security. (The Labor Party, in its "Memorial", wheels into the war front: "punitive war against peace breakers" packed in the sepulchral ideology of the League of Nations. The Comintern is entered in the war preparations through the franco-russian alliance.) The incentives to conflict are numberless, the most important being the Japanese expansion in the Far East, the central focus of the second world war. Thus this war is being prepared partly in conscious planning, partly behind the backs of the participants.

And here we have the contradictory drama that those very forms of state and economy which are characteristic of the present epoch actually need and want peace--in part because their preparation for war is incomplete, in part because they are frightened by the vague suspicion that the state system resting on wage labor and capital will not, even in its most modern form, outlast the second world war--and that it is precisely these States which are preparing the war most effectively. They reveal themselves more and more as transitional forms to this second world war, which in all probability will coincide with the next world crisis.

6. - It must be understood to what extent the new monopolistic forms render the workers' world revolution easier and what are the real difficulties of the new situation.

The series of national, political revolutions resulting from the post-war crises, once the revolutionary force of action of the working class was exhausted, has created on a national scale a new order which internationally is much of a kind, an order which in the second world-war crisis will reveal itself as dangerous disorder of the world. In the second world war it will become plain that there is only one convincing program: the world order of labor, and that the liberation of the workers is the precondition for its actualization. If, however, the workers then fail to win their freedom, the new means of mastery which the ruling class has today constructed on a national scale will be extended by it internationally on ruins and blood and the productive forces subjected to a still sharper discipline. That will be the essence of the new world-revolutionary struggles. The free unfoldment of the productive forces is assured only through the action of the producers.

That sluggishness which settled over the labor movement and which was the precondition for the victory of national revolutions was not so much the consequence of individual revolutionary defeats, but above all the consequence of the paralyzation and disintegration which was brought about by the actual tying up of the labor movement with social-reformist and politico-revolutionary tasks, hence the actual tying up of bourgeois and proletarian revolution. Since the labor movement down to 1914, engaged in wage struggles, pay-rate negotiations, ballot battles and social politics, had actually not taken steps to break through at any point the framework of the form of state and society resting on wage labor and capital; since by the side of this actual "day-to-day struggle" the "final goal" (as it was called) embraced, as its accompanying ideology, at most the idea of "political revolution", and since the proletarian-revolutionary minorities, transcendent utopian under-currents, could themselves under these circumstances furnish no more than a further ideological supplement to the actual intra-capitalist wage-worker movements--in a word, since the revolutionary energies assembled in the cycle of 1850-1917 were concerned with national tasks--the workers entered wholly unprepared into a situation in which they could win only on a world-revolutionary scale. It remains to the undying credit of the Russian October revolution that in its first, heroic phase the Russian revolutionists still made the attempt to push forward their Russian revolution as the incipient world revolution. The working class failed, as it showed, to keep pace with the tempo of the material battles. The destructive work of the World War had created conditions with which the available energies of the labor movement failed to cope. The workers "drew back before the enormity of their own aims". For the moment, there followed inexorably that sluggishness which prevailed for years. Of the Comintern there remained only a mutilated and crumbling fossil.

It appeared that at many places there was still need of a national recuperation in order to create the presuppositions for the workers' revolution. For this reason even the national revolution of 1917 contains the element of counter-revolution. The victory was won not simply by the bourgeois revolution against the workers' revolution, but the national limitation of the revolutionary struggles, their pervasively national genesis and task branded in advance even the "Russian" revolution with the element of counter-revolution. Each national victory of the revolution was, as such, already counter-revolutionary. And this is not in the least altered when one interprets the series of national revolutions of the present period as the "permanent revolution"

and pours over them the ideological camouflage of the proletarian world revolution.

This state of things serves to explain the peculiar bolshevist-fascist twilight lying over the world today. Revolutions win counter-revolutionarily, counter-revolutions revolutionarily. Something completely unexpected occurred: the workers having been worn out in the struggle, the bourgeoisie shaken in its self-confidence through unexampled world crises, the Third Estate, roused up by war and crisis, "awoke". To it, the twilight between the great decisions is the most becoming illumination. It develops the "new activism", has visions, speaks in tongues. It discovers that one really belongs to no class at all, but to an estate. With good reason it evokes the military spirit for the cranking up and serving of the industrial apparatus, which still bears on itself the easily legible trade-mark "World War". It becomes the preacher and banner-bearer of the only thing possible in the given framework: the new monopolistic reorganization of capital, which corresponds to the special task of political economy in the present period. With the aid of the insurrection of the middle elements it rises in great numbers into state positions, and thus in part incorporates itself personally with the state-subject Capital.

To monopolistic capital this personnel supplement comes in very handy. For the worker revolutionists the new condition is gratifying: the fascist third estateras chancellor or minister of monopoly capital is better than the Socialist a la Severing or Norman Thomas. Now that the political revolution and the only possible social reform has won against the workers, and turns out to be their complete lack of freedom, the workers have at least won the negative freedom for their own gigantic ends. No Kautsky and none of his russian disciples can still entertain the notion of whispering to them "from the outside" what their "historical mission" truly is. No Bernstein and none of his english teachers can still make it appear to the workers that taking up places in the state apparatus is a "growing into socialism". One has only to bring out the dusty portraits of the marxist twins and the change becomes clear at once. The umbilical cord between bourgeois and proletarian revolution is severed. The world-revolutionary overthrow of Capital and State has become a palpably concrete task.

The genuine difficulties of the new situation, however, all spring from the circumstance. that the revolutionary movements of the working class, in spite of embittered struggles in all countries throughout the world, must on the whole begin all over again at the beginning while at the same time, with the approach of the second world war, a world-revolutionary situation already enters the range of vision.

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REMARKS ON THE THESES REGARDING THE NEXT WORLD CRISIS,
SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE WORLD REVOLUTION.

By Karl Korsch.

In analyzing these theses, one will do well to leave out entirely the first three paragraphs (i.e. Theses 1 and 2, the first paragraph of Thesis 3). They contain in part unsupported assertions (the 'likely' coinciding of the next world crisis with the second world war), in part subjective experiences of the author, (his 'shock' at noting that the forces of revolution previously assembled are used up), in part an enumeration of the points to be clarified and defined in the Theses themselves. It is not until we come to the last sentence of this section ("We have mostly contented ourselves with explaining the causes of capitalist wars", etc.) that we get something which serves as a real introduction to the analysis of the World War beginning immediately thereafter.

With this omission, the structure of the Theses becomes quite clear. In the first part (remainder of Thesis 3) is discussed the pre-history and history of the present crisis period setting in with the World War; in the second part (Theses 4 and 5) the further development after the "transition from the acute crisis into the depression" and the prospects for the next world crisis coinciding with the second world war. Thereupon follows as third part (Thesis 6) the exposition of the "satisfactions" and "difficulties" arising from the new state of affairs and the tendencies revealed therein for the workers' world revolution, together with a backward glance at the "sluggishness which settled over the labor movement" prior to the present state of affairs, the cause of that sluggishness and the now visible overcoming of those causes.

This general glance of itself brings out a peculiarity of these Theses. The present world economic crisis which has lasted since 1929 and which at least in some respects has kept on growing deeper and sharper, and in a certain sense even the "present" in general, in this analysis of the total situation of the labor movement of our time is quite left out of consideration. It is not with relation to this present-day crisis, but with relation to "the post-war crises", or the "great world crises of the present time", of which therefore the present crisis forms only a special example, that it is stated (in next to the last paragraph of Thesis 3) that in them, to be sure, there came to light, on the one hand, the fettering character of the national-state social system resting on wage-labor and capital, but that on the other hand the effort to bind the productive forces once more to the production relation wage-labor and capital and to the capitalistic process of accumulation and to fit them into the framework of the national state was "attended with success". Likewise in the last paragraph of Thesis 3, the "post-war crises (1921, 1929)" are, to be sure, on the one hand (in connection with the "present depression period", following, in the cycle of the "long wave", upon the "upgrade period 1895-1913") denoted as "crises of the system", but on the other hand the idea of final crisis which such an expression seems to imply is forthwith dismissed by way of the following "expectation" that "the next world crisis will have the same character." In the

next sentence (Thesis 4) the "acute crisis" has already become no more than a thing of the past, from which the transition into the "depression period", with a "breathing spell" following at the latest within a few years, is said to be already accomplished.

In the same way, everything that is said in these Theses regarding the situation, tasks, prospects and difficulties of the labor movement of our time is nowhere related to the present, but to the "next world crisis", the "second world war", (closing sentence of Thesis 5), and the therewith approaching "second world-revolutionary situation" (closing sentence of Thesis 6). The Theses deal, that is, practically not at all with the actual present, which is passed over as quite uncertain and undeterminable, but with a future computed, without any apparent basis, with complete certainty in terms of years: "There are no grounds by which we could be induced not to count upon the next world crisis around 1940 as upon a certain anticipation and to take our measures accordingly". In reality, the author of the Theses could say at most, in view of his previous very general disquisitions, that if we have special positive grounds for anticipating the world crisis "around 1940", no counter-reasons come forth from the presently visible general tendencies of economic development. But even apart from such special defects in the formulation and support of individual assertions, this actual disregard of the real present and fictitious actualization of a "likely" revolutionary situation in the future is a blow at the very foundations of these Theses as regards their materialistic-practical character. The place of such a character is taken, on the one hand, by pure idealism and idealistic subjectivism, which sets its standpoint "over against" objective reality, and on the other hand, as the unavoidable polar supplement, by that pseudo-materialistic objectivism which speaks of the necessity of given historical processes in a too general manner, without "thereby" determining its standpoint.

While the connection between such hitherto always too isolatedly regarded phenomena as world crisis, war and revolution, or Capital and State, in modern monopoly-capitalist society, has been demonstrated in these Theses with much force from the objective side and represented in striking and sometimes new and original formulations, the practical task springing from this objective connection for the working class has been proclaimed only in abstract manner. The author contents himself in this respect with the simple repetition of the one phrase, "world revolution", which now, however, from this subjective side, remains quite indeterminate and without content. We learn from him positively only one thing, namely, that as a revolutionary activity of the workers in the present epoch nothing less can avail "us" than this "world-revolutionary action of the working class", to be carried out directly and as a whole, and the organizational and ideational preparedness directed immediately to this goal (Theses 2, 3, 4, 6). It is only this direct "world revolution", he says, which at all deserves the name of a "working-class revolution". When "anything less is attempted" -- as already shown by the movement in the period following the late war and which in victory and defeat failed as revolution -- "the class, as an army of millions, simply ceases to function in its history-making role". Every revolution which either at its very beginning or in its further course is limited to a single country is said to contain unavoidably "the element of counter-revolution", and this holds in particular of the "russian" revolution of 1917. (Beside this one, the author of the Theses is aware of still others, a whole "series" of national political revolutions flowing from the post-war crisis and for the "victory"

of which the preceding "sluggishness which had settled over the labor movement" had formed the precondition. What other victorious national revolutions are meant by this does not become clear). The attempt of Trotskism to set in place of the real world revolution its mere "ideological camouflage" by interpreting the series of national revolutions of the present period as the "permanent revolution" is expressly waved aside. And all those "proletarian-revolutionary under-currents" which in the previous period "transcended" the limited character of the then labor movement, "tied up with social-reformist and (only) political-revolutionary tasks", are denoted without exception as mere "utopian" tendencies which leave unchanged the actually intra-capitalist wage-worker movements of that time, but were able to furnish them "merely a further ideological supplement". So that the "workers' world revolution" proclaimed in these Theses remains a pure dream of the future (Zukunftsmusik) for which in the past and present, apart from a few attempts undertaken at the end of the "first world war" but in the meanwhile completely exhausted and 'decayed' (among them particularly the 'heroic attempt of the russian october revolutionists to push forward their russian revolution as the incipient world revolution), in the actual movement and development of the working class there is still no real beginning. Though in Thesis 2, after the constatation of the used-up character of all the "energies of revolution assembled in the revolutionary cycle of 1850-1917", we at first still have a reference to certain, though 'weak' new beginnings, still at the end of the Theses it is expressly stated that "the revolutionary actions of the working class must, on the whole, begin all over again from the beginning". This state of affairs is, to be sure, on the one hand denoted as a 'difficulty' (the only 'genuine difficulty of the new situation'), but on the other hand also celebrated as the final "severing of the umbilical cord between bourgeois and proletarian revolution" and hence as a "gratifying state of affairs for the worker revolutionists". The workers--we might briefly express the sense of this closing part of the Theses--at that zero point of their revolutionary action at which they have now finally arrived, have "at least won the negative freedom for their own enormous ends".

Against this assertion there is first to be objected that as a matter of fact it is not true. When the Theses state, among other things, that now none of their old dilapidated and bankrupt leaders can no longer presume to whisper to the workers what their "historical mission is: the sad reality shows rather the contrary. They can so presume, they can do it and they do actually do it, and the workers also listen to them, not only in England and other extra-german countries, but also in Germany, and again today more than in the first period after the unresisting capitulation of both the old social-democratic-communist party leaderships before the hitlerian "national and socialist revolution". Secondly, however, this "negative freedom" of the workers from all the influences through which they have hitherto been "diverted" from their own, ex hypothesi "enormous" (i.e. still completely undefined and unformed) ends--such freedom would be at the same time their "freedom" from their whole previous history, inclusive of all the fighting experiences won in this history, and the reversion of the working class out of that determinateness which it has won in its previous development to the initial state (given through their mere economic existence as suppressed and exploited class within capitalist society) of the "class in itself". It is impossible to conceive how it could pass over all at once and without a new "drawing back before the undefined enormousness of its own tasks" out of this condition of an absolute

freedom, i.e. of an absolute nothingness, through the mere "approach of the second world war" and the "second world-revolutionary situation to which it gives rise, to that highest reality and determinateness of a direct and total truly proletarian, truly class-befitting, truly world-embracing genuine workers' revolution for which alone, in the view of the author of these Theses, the throwing in of the proletarian forces, after the bitter experiences of the past, is still at all worth while and without the full attainment of which any new militant activity of the workers must lead merely to another and still worse decline into sluggishness. As a matter of fact, it is not the rousing call to action (that is to say, to the directly world-revolutionary action of the workers in connection with the next world-war crisis "around 1940") but the fearful punishment set on the failure to follow this last warning--it is this punishment which forms the real content of the prospects expressed in these Theses. The author says in effect: there is offered to the workers once more--at a period now lying only a few years in the future--that incomparable opportunity of which they failed to make full use at the end of the "first world war". "In the second world war it will become evident that there is only one convincing program: the world order of labor, and that the emancipation of the workers is the precondition for its actualization. If the workers then fail, however, to win their freedom, then the new means of mastery which the ruling class today has constructed on a national scale will be extended by it internationally on ruins and blood and the productive forces subjected to a still sharper discipline. That will be the essence of the new world-revolutionary struggles." Here in the very formulation it remains undecided whether, after all, these new "world-revolutionary struggles of the near future as well will not in their actual result lead rather to the "international extension" of the "new (fascist) means of mastery" than to the "emancipation of the workers" and rather to a "still sharper (fascist) discipline" than to the "free unfolding of the productive forces".

At this place we come up against a point from which it becomes imperative to attack not only the subjectively practical content of these Theses, but at the same time their theoretically objective content; that is, the theoretical analysis which they give of the historical development and of the objective developmental tendencies coming to light therein. The question arises whether there is not concealed even in the objective combination of world crisis, war and revolution, as it is given in these Theses twice (once retrospectively for the first world-war crisis 1913-1919, the other time prospectively for the impending new world-war crisis of a near future), some capitulation or other before the violent attack of the capitalist-fascist opponent, an attack which at the present moment is obviously felt as over-powerful. With such capitulations, defeatist states of mind and prison ideologies the entire European labor movement is teeming today, and even the revolutionary tendency within the labor movement shows some of the same affliction.

If from this critical point of view one examines the objective theoretical content of the present Theses, at first everything appears here in the best, revolutionary order. It is a revolutionary attack on the enemy position, and no capitulation, when the "immemorial(?) alternation of war and peace"--which apparently (not, as stated in the Theses with a too far-going adaptation to the opponent's ideas, "in itself") "goes on in other connections"--is recognized as "in-

involved in the industrial cycle" and modern "industrial warfare" is recognized as a special form of capitalist crisis. To be sure, this new and revolutionary insight is presupposed in the Theses as a directly obvious state of affairs rather than supported and proved, and the characterization of war as a form of capitalist crisis which in its very course becomes intensified once more to crisis still contains in this unmediated form a metaphorical and mystifying character. The equating of war to crisis loses, however, even this final remnant of apparent mystification when one adds the plain and in no sense metaphorical observation that the special mode of production of modern war a mode of production which does not produce products and means of production, but destruction and means of destruction--represents nothing more than a normal manifestation of capitalist production. The capitalist mode of production has constantly contained and contains in itself at all its stages of development both kinds of production, that of the creation and that of the destruction of products. Both form inseparable components of capitalist production in its specific social form as "commodity production", that is, as production not simply of products, but of products as commodities, and this historical mode of production is not complete until we have both together. What comes up newly today is simply this, that now even certain formal distinctions which hitherto have ever existed between the two phenomenal forms of capitalist production (the so-called normal production for peace, and the other--in reality no less normal--production for war and in war) are being more and more eradicated through a process of mutual assimilation and that thereby the inner identity of these two equally legitimate branches of capitalist production is made manifest. In an epoch when a part of the "normal" production in peace-times consists in the conscious and "planful" mass destruction of products, means of production, productive forces and producers, when at the same time the relative weight of the so-called "war industry" even in peace exceeds by far and in rapidly increasing measure that of any other single branch of production, and each special branch of production in its turn is treated potentially even in peace and on the approach of war then also actually as a mere subordinate department of the one unified war industry,--in such conditions it appear only logical that war itself, which according to aim and mode of existence is no longer to be distinguished from war industry and peace industry, should finally no longer be distinguished from these other branches of capitalist commodity production, even in thought. If one has taken this step, then that paradoxical sentence in which war itself is regarded as a mere special form of the crises unavoidably occurring periodically in the course of capitalist production, that is, as a crisis which in another, more direct and more simple manner "performs the special work of any crisis, destruction of value which cannot be turned to account"--this sentence of the Theses thus becomes not only understandable as a plain, matter-of-fact observation. Rather it also becomes clear forthwith why in the process of war now going on even in the forms of capitalist production "the presupposition of crisis is set once more within the crisis", in that the "over-production" occurring in every crisis occurs here also in the form of a "production intensified beyond its own measure"--production of materials of destruction and of destruction itself. This intensification of the crisis to a new crisis occurring in the crisis itself is in fact the unavoidable tendency breaking through in war and peace, a tendency which came clearly to light in the late World War and which by reason of the further development of the capitalist forms of production (in their now recognized

double mode of existence as genuine forms of production and forms of destruction, both of which under capitalistic relations combine to form an indivisible whole and of which only the two together represent the concrete reality of capitalist commodity production) has kept on growing stronger and must continue to grow still stronger in the future. The present development of the capitalist mode of production is thus heading, in one and the same process, both toward the new crisis and the new war, and toward the combining of both in a new world-war crisis though which, for the class of real producers uniformly suppressed and exploited in war and peace, the presuppositions for a new world-revolutionary situation are from the objective side being actually fulfilled. The masterly (in spite of its brevity) clarification of this objectively revolutionary situation is tantamount to a genuine, and in its consequences for the preparation and carrying out of the revolutionary struggle of the workers, also practically important further development of our insight into proletarian revolution.

And it is likewise a revolutionary attack on the enemy position, and no capitulation, when in the Theses the line of separation sharply drawn by the old marxist theory between economics and politics, Capital and State, is in tendency blotted out and the "State" converted from the merely 'ideational' to the actual "Total Capitalist", and the automatic subject "Capital" with the sponsor "State" as special organ is smelted to a "unified total-subject Capital". The struggle against the capitalist State has today, as a matter of fact, become in a quite different, more direct manner a component of the revolutionary proletarian class struggle against capitalist mastery than it was in the earlier period when the socialist labor movement actually (as admirably represented in the Theses) continually moved about within the (on both sides unsatisfying) contradiction of social reform and (only) political revolution and consequently the workers were unable on either field to arrive at the full concrete reality of their social-revolutionary struggle. It is also a revolutionary criticism which strikes at the heart not only of the present-day enemy, but also of the earlier and present-day false friends of the labor movement, when it is stated in the Theses that through the seizure of power by the hitlerian National Socialism "the political revolution and the only possible social reform against the workers has won" simultaneously and hence at the same time the (in result) counter-revolutionary character of both these ostensibly progressive goals of the now surpassed forms of the labor movement has become manifest.

By the side of these real revolutionary intensifications of the proletarian attack on all the old and new forms of incorporation of the capitalist state and economic power there is, however, in these Theses also a series of formulations through which the one struggle which lies open to the workers in Germany, the struggle against what there today is the only incorporation of the capitalist class rule, is rendered vague and ambiguous. It is a dangerous tendency, in its consequence for the revolutionary unfoldment of the proletarian force of attack in the present historical period of development, when in these Theses the lapidary statement is made that through the new monopolistic forms of State and Capital the task of attaining "at least the highest measure (!) of unfoldment (!) of the transcending (?) produc-

tive forces in the given framework" is in the present being fulfilled. Let us recall in this connection also the preceding thesis in which the present world economic crisis was proclaimed as a thing of the past, now overcome, and the transition into the depression with the prospect of a "breathing spell" soon setting in and coming to a close in "the next world crisis" was announced. Let us recall, further, the peculiar form with which, later on in these Theses, there was denoted as another, and in reality perhaps more probable prospect for the international further development of the present world condition, by the side of the complete unfoldment through the proletarian revolution of the productive forces tied up in the inadequate "national" framework, also the merely "still sharper discipline" of these productive forces through the extension of fascist mastery on an international scale as well. It is seen that these three formulations taken together--the crisis already belonging to the past, the solution of those tasks whose continuing solution according to the marxist doctrine forms the real material content of the whole world-historical development, but at the present time being accomplished by victorious fascism on a national scale, and in future perhaps to be accomplished by it still further on an international scale--these three formulations result in a way of future historical development on which, between world crisis, world war and world revolution a quite different, exactly opposite form of union may be brought about than the one which the author of these Theses has in his subjective consciousness and would like to proclaim as a fighting slogan for the revolutionary proletariat. In the place of the bursting of the capitalistic fetters and of the unfettered free development of the productive forces, there comes first in the national and thereafter possibly also in the international framework their maximal unfoldment (violently 'attained' by victorious fascism without the bursting of their present capitalist form) in the way of a still further sharpened "discipline". First attacking nationally, and then extending the captured positions on an international scale, Fascism accomplishes its "historical task", in that it shows to capitalist society, menaced on the one hand by the social revolution, and on the other by its own dissolution, an heroic way out and forces upon it the choice of this heroic way. With this perspective, however, the social revolution of the proletariat is converted from a general necessity of the development of human society into the private affair of an isolated class or even only of an interested band of jewish or other racially foreign agitators.

The ambiguity brought into the Theses through this formulation regarding the presently given economic possibilities of social development is still further strengthened by way of an equally ambiguous political formula occurring in the same connection: "The state-subject capital seizes the monopoly on class struggle". That may mean, and does in fact mean according to its first and most obvious sense, that the fascist State suppresses the whole previous class struggle of the wage-workers against capital. "The breaking up of all class organs of the workers is its first accomplishment". To the quite correct observation contained in this first sentence there would only remain to be added, from the standpoint of a clear marxist conception based on the fact of the class struggle, a further statement throwing light on the point as to what change is experienced, as a result of this "monopolization" through the fascist State, by the other side of the class struggle hitherto carried on under capitalist society, the class struggle of capital against the wage-workers. This statement would have to

demonstrate, say, that the fascist State--bound up in the closest manner with large capital and, though formally set over the individual capitalist, yet in its general material existence unconditionally dependent on capital--continues to carry on, in this other, expanded and sharpened form, "on behalf on the State", that 'monopolized' class struggle against the workers. Finally, from a truly dialectical, i.e. practically materialistic and revolutionary marxist conception, there would have to be added that the fascist State, by reason of this continuing, expanding and sharpening of the class struggle which it has "monopolized", is at the same time on its own part exposed to the continued, expanded and sharpened class struggle of the workers. Instead of this class-befitting, dialectical and revolutionary conception, the formula of the "monopolization of the class struggle by the fascist State" is based on a different conception, as the very next following sentences prove. The author of the Theses entertains the idea that in this "monopolization of the class struggle" in its two antagonistic forms as a struggle of wage-labor against capital and of capital against wage labor, the fascist State is, as a matter of fact, at least temporarily and on a national scale being successful: "A ruthless social-pacification action with the aim of the 'organic' fitting of that part of capital represented by wage labor into the new State is introduced. At the same time, a far-flung reorganization of the capitalist class is undertaken, in order to adapt it to the special task of political economy in the present period. . . . In the place of private-economy profitability there arises national-economy profitability. The state-subject capital organizes the domestic market, regulates (a national general cartel) the prices...."

All these tasks, then, according to the statements here quoted from the Theses, are fundamentally being accomplished by the fascist State in exactly the one manner in which they could be accomplished by a revolutionary workers' state proceeding from a genuine workers' revolution, insofar as this State should remain limited to the national framework, or should later on become so limited. It is expressly declared that between such different forms and degrees of the fusion of State and Capital as, on the one hand, "bolshoivist state capitalism", and, on the other, the fascist "systematic intervention" and the national-socialist "economy steering" there is no difference of a fundamental nature. In reality, with this failure to make distinction between historically oppositely directed developments, and with the whole supporting undialectical appraisal of the economic and political possibilities of a fascist or national-socialist State remaining fundamentally in the capitalist framework, the historical accomplishment and capacity of accomplishment, hence also the force of attack and defense of the at present triumphant fascist-national-socialist counter-revolution is monstrously and, for the development of the proletarian counter-movement, =damagingly overrated. In order to make clear the measure of this over-rating, we may recall that such a monopoly on the class struggle as, according to these Theses, the hitlerian National Socialism and the mussolinian Fascism have today 'seized' was not laid claim to even by the revolutionary dictator Lenin for his revolutionary "workers and peasants' State" in the "war communist" development of the year 1920. In the disputes waged at that time, prior to the transition to "NEP", regarding the future character of the soviet-russian trade unions, the most that Lenin had ventured to suggest was in substance that the trade unions should restrict themselves in future to the ordinary class struggle for the purpose of safeguarding the workers' direct interests within the

framework of the soviet economic and state system and should henceforth renounce the revolutionary intensification of this struggle, now that the further extension of the revolution had become the immediate task of the soviet State. In the later development of russian state socialism and state capitalism, in the forms of NEP and Neo-NEP, even this right, at first granted by Lenin, to the ordinary class struggle for the workers' immediate interests was, as we know, again denied to the trade unions. The present-day stalinist state capitalism has, that is, just as did the dictatorial state of Hitler and Mussolini, completely conferred upon itself the "monopoly of the class struggle". But neither in the one case nor in the other (and in the latter case, if only because of the incomparably weaker position of these capitalist counter-revolutionary "dictatorships" as against the claim to profit on the part of private capital--a claim which was never fundamentally or actually broken--much less than in the Lenin-Stalinist dictatorship) has this ideological "monopolization" of the class struggle in the hands of the State even for a time and within the national framework been actually realized. Just as according to the international principle of revolutionary Marxism, proletarian socialism cannot be constructed "in one country" either wholly or in part, either permanently or for a time, so also according to the same principle the class struggle in its two antagonistic manifestations cannot be done away with "in one country" or converted into a simple component of the economic and political ruling functions exercised--without contradiction within the national boundaries--by the State.

To the two tasks of the fascist economic and state power which in these Theses are recognized as capable of accomplishment within the national framework, the author himself sets a limit. In the single place where he thinks "dialectically", i.e. truly materialistically and practically revolutionarily, he declares that "the state-subject Capital", in that as a general cartel it regulates the prices, "thereby at the same time (!) sharpens the international competition". "The international trade policy has become the vital question of States ('Twilight of Autarchy'). The new monopolistic forms have therefore not only failed to hold up the cyclical course of world economy; they fail also to withdraw their own sphere of action from the 'natural law' of capitalism

But even apart from the fact that the--here directly geographical--limit set for the accomplishment of the economic and political tasks of the present world development by means of Fascism is later, after all, regarded as not entirely insuperable, but rather that the possibility of its being crossed by a Fascism extending internationally its new means of mastery is expressly admitted, this final introduction of the dialectical manner of looking at things, through which a positive solution of the tasks set by the present development of the productive forces and productive relations is in the fascist framework nationally and internationally precluded, comes much too late. Just as dialectically as the regulating of the domestic market through the fascist state-subject Capital actualizes itself on an international scale as a sharpened competition which very quickly recoils upon the domestic market as well, so the alleged 'solution' of the economic and political tasks of Fascism becomes involved in advance, within the production process itself on the purely national scale, and from the first step onward, in ever new and sharper contradictions. At this place it would have been in order to take up a truly marxist, materialistically practical analysis of the present and future combinations of world crisis, world war and world revolution, and to proclaim the present

struggle of the proletariat in each country and on an international scale against the here and now present form of capitalist mastery, and all its expressions, as the single genuine content of the proletarian "world revolution."

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CAPTURING THE A. F. of L.

The development of the American labor movement has been different from that of Europe and England in several respects. The trade union movement here not only refrains from independent political action, but actively supports the capitalist parties. Repeatedly the socialist and communist movements have tried either to capture or to destroy the American Federation of Labor. These tactics have fluctuated between "boring from within" to outright organization of dual unions. The history of these efforts is interesting.

The developments of trade unions during and since the world war necessitate a complete revision of the earlier conceptions by Marxians. The expectations of the Communist Manifesto have not been fulfilled. Hopefully as the unions were greeted in 1848 and as lately as 1870 in the days of the First International, they have now definitely assumed a reactionary character.

Although the American movement shows considerable differences in development from that of Europe, the trade unions of Europe and America alike demonstrated their reactionary character. The Socialist unions of Europe were no less enthusiastic in their support of the mass slaughter than Gompers and his cohorts in America. The reaction of both sprang out of their inherent qualities, from their preferred positions in capitalist society, from their fear of losing their treasures and "achievements", from their general satisfaction with the status quo.

The trade unions of Germany were as conservative an influence on the German labor movement as were the revisionist Bernstein, and the agrarian Vollmar. They insisted on and established the principle that they be not expected to come into action for any revolutionary purpose, and were as autonomous of the German workers' political movement as the A.F. of L. was of the American Socialist movement. The opportunism of the German Social Democracy winked at and even encouraged the reaction of the unions. The Socialist concessions to the unions ensured Pyrrhic parliamentary victories, and the lesson so clear to American revolutionists at an early date--that the predominant unions were reactionary and hopeless--was not learned by the few revolutionists in the European movements until too late. As a consequence, the German unions paved the way for Hitler. They were unwilling to risk their existence on "revolutionary adventures". They actually preferred Hitlerism to communism, for they were much more aggressive against communism than against Hitlerism.

The Austrian trade unions likewise hesitated and temporized, and like the Germans paved the way for the politicians who finally destroyed them.

The British trade unions, unwillingly were precipitated into the 1926 general strike and then recoiled in horror at their own temerity. Now they are passive while dole and wage cuts are proceeding apace.

A review of American trade union history will show the development of this reactionary tendency to a point where it becomes obvious that the American Federation of Labor--the junction of unions under the constitution and laws of that federated body--must be destroyed as a definitely counter-revolutionary force. Its form of organization is not susceptible to change. It is so removed from rank and file control that even a severe crisis arousing the members of the unions composing it would keep them helpless and powerless. It is essentially an organization of officials whose comfortable, well paid jobs and political connections have reconciled them to the capitalist system, and who would fight to the bitter end against proletarian victory as a direct threat to their positions. A real proletarian victory is possible only after this bulwark of reaction has been destroyed.

While history is but the recounting of the dead past, the history of the attempts to change, reform, and displace the A.F. of L. will enable us to form a correct estimate of the A.F. of L. and to formulate the position of revolutionary workers in relation to it.

These attempts may be roughly divided into four major actions: first, the organization of the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance, 1895; second, the organization of the I.W.W., 1905; third, the Great Steel Strike, 1919, and the subsequent organization of the Trade Union Educational League; and fourth, the organization of dual unions by the Communist Party from 1928 onwards.

The first major conflict between the A.F. of L. and the Socialist movement occurred in 1890. At the Detroit convention of the A.F. of L. in that year, the Central Federated Union of New York was refused a charter because it admitted delegates of the Socialist Labor Party to its deliberations. Bitter conflicts continued at succeeding conventions until 1895 when the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance was organized. This was in effect a dual union in opposition to the A.F. of L.; but it never prospered. It never developed beyond the stages of a propaganda organization. Within the S.L.P. it engendered a conflict that split it in 1899 and resulted in the organization of the Socialist party in 1901. The S.L.P. (De Leon) carried on a vigorous campaign against the A.F. of L. while the Socialist Party (Hillquit, Berger, Debs) hoped to win over the federation by education and propaganda.

It was believed at first that the corruption of the (then declining) Knights of Labor was a main factor in the organization of the S. T. & L. A. The Socialist Labor Party's National Executive Committee's report at the 1896 convention, however, already had framed the "political-economic" dualism that ever after stamped the De Leonite S. L. P. Its declaration reads in part:

"The pure and simple union is no longer an organization that even pretends to better the condition of its members by

fighting the boss, . . . it is content to fight the poor devil of a fellow worker who happens to be out of work. . .

"But the class antagonisms in modern capitalist society will sometimes bring about collisions between the opposing forces . . . when they do, the political supremacy of the capitalist class created and backed up by the votes of the workers soon asserts itself with disastrous effect . . .

"But there has appeared a silver lining in these black clouds; the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance is born. To the superficial observer it may seem that this organization was formed only because of the reeking corruption among the general officers of the once powerful Order of the Knights of Labor.

"Yet this was only an incident, the lever, as it were, to relieve and set free the pent-up disgust of so many workers with the inactivity, the impotence of the fakir-ridden older organizations.

"It is to be hoped . . . our party will give notice to the labor fakir that he had better stand from under, thus making it clear to all that the Socialists and new trade unionists have joined hands and are coming . . . to put an end to . . . that artificial barrier between the economic and political phase of the American labor movement . . ."

The Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance was endorsed in the following resolution introduced by De Leon:

"WHEREAS, Both the A.F. of L. and the K. of L., or what is left of them, have fallen hopelessly into the hands of dishonest and ignorant leaders;

"WHEREAS, These bodies have taken shape as the buffers for capitalism, against whom every intelligent effort of the working class for emancipation has hitherto gone to pieces;

WHEREAS, The policy of propitiating the leaders of these organizations has been tried long enough by the progressive movement, and is, to a great extent, responsible for the power which these leaders have wielded in the protection of capitalism and the selling out of the workers;

WHEREAS, No organization of labor can accomplish anything for the workers that does not proceed from the principle that an irrepressible conflict rages between the capitalist and the working class, a conflict that can be settled only by the total overthrow of the former and the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, This conflict is essentially a political one, needing the combined political and economic efforts of the working class; therefore be it

Resolved, That we hail with unqualified joy the formation of the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance as a giant stride

towards throwing off the yoke of wage slavery and of the robber class of capitalists. We call upon the Socialists of the land to carry the revolutionary spirit of the S.T. & L.A. into all the organizations of the workers and thus consolidate and concentrate the proletariat of America in one irresistible class-conscious army, equipped both with the shield of the economic organization and the sword of the Socialist Labor Party ballot".

This action of the S.L.P. was the forerunner of the organization of the I.W.W. The resolution laid down that peculiar and distorted interpretation of political action that typifies the S.L.P. to this day. The overrated De Leon could never understand the class struggle as anything else than a ballot struggle reinforced by "economic action". The comic-tragic element of his interpretation appears when it is realized that his "economic action" was adopted by the syndicalist wing of the I.W.W. later as being all sufficient--a direct reaction to confusing parliamentary action as the sole form of political action.

But it was not yet the time for the organization of the I.W.W. De Leon and Gompers both were stationed in New York. The center of industrial activity was farther west. Both had their major followings among the "genteel" trades. The horny handed, sweating and crude industrial workers in mines, mills and other basic industries were outside the influence of either.

The railroad brotherhoods were outside the A.F. of L. and Socialism became known to them considerably later.

In 1877 Eugene Debs attended his first convention as delegate to the Brotherhood of Locomotive firement. In 1880 he accepted the position of secretary-treasurer and editor-in-chief of the magazine at a time when the order was so weak that no more conventions were expected by most. By 1892 he faced the B. of L. F. now a strong, vigorous organization, with his resignation. Despite a loyal following and a splendid reputation as an organizer, he felt that organization was lacking in true solidarity and hampered by craft prejudices. He differed too much with the organization to remain any longer at its head.

Following his resignation, Debs organized the American Railway Union. It was to embrace all railway workers, - engineers, firemen, switchmen, brakemen, shopmen and track-walkers. Within one year the A.R.U. had 150,000 members. In April, 1894 trouble broke out on Jim Hill's Great Northern Railroad and the A.R.U. had its first test. By May 1st they had wrung practically all their demands from the road.

On May 11, 1894 the workers in the Pullman shops at Chicago came out on strike. They called upon the A.R.U. for support and got it in the form of a boycott on Pullman cars. Twenty railroads and 125,000 workers were affected. Chicago-ward traffic was paralyzed. Grover Cleveland sent federal troops to break the strike, the federal courts cited and sentenced Debs to jail for contempt of court, and the A.R.U. passed from view on the heels of this defeat.

Debs served six months in jail and upon his release tried to restore the wrecked A.R.U. He failed in this, but he was turning more and more toward Socialism. By 1897 a convention of the A.R.U. wound up

its affairs and reorganized as the "Social Democracy".

Debs' entry into the Socialist movement is significant because he represented no white-collared intelligentsia, but came fresh from contact with the workers of a basic industry. He carried into that section of the Socialist movement which had broken away from De Leon and the S.T. & L.A. the idea of fighting the old craft unions. Hardly had the "safe and sane" socialists rid themselves of De Leon, than they were saddled with Debs. And the latter was much more formidable at that time than De Leon. He was illogical, sentimental and unscientific -- the direct opposite of De Leon. But he was fiery, aggressive, and had a tremendous reputation and following. The Socialist Party had to reckon with him.

It was a strange combination that later materialized in the I.W.W.-Debs, De Leon, Haywood, A.M.Simons, Mother Jones, Untermyer, Hagerty, Sherman and Bohn. It probably never would have been organized but for Debs' venture with the A.R.U. and De Leon's efforts to fight the A.F. of L. with the S.T. & L.A. These two efforts represent the prelude to the I.W.W. The S.T. & L.A. represented the theoretical differences of the Socialist movement with the A.F. of L., the realization that the limitations of craft unions and the narrow viewpoint arising therefrom were inimical to Socialist interests. Debs' movement represented the revolt of workers in industry who saw themselves betrayed and forsaken by the labor aristocracy. Both elements fused for a time in the organization of the I.W.W.

(In future issues, the I.W.W., the T. U. E. L., and the communist unions will be discussed.)

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