THE COMINTERN AND ASIA: IDEAS AND REALITIES

by

A.W. Stephens

A sub-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (International Relations), Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.

May 1986
This sub-thesis is my own work and all sources used have been acknowledged.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II IDEAS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART ONE: THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART TWO: THE EARLY CONGRESSES</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III REALITIES: ALLIANCES IN THE EAST</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV POWER POLITICS IN THE USSR</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V CONCLUSION</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The 'April Theses' submitted by Lenin to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party early in 1917 included a call for the foundation of a new international socialist movement to guide and coordinate world communism. In Lenin's opinion there were two main imperatives for such an organisation: the need to provide an alternative to the reformist (as opposed to revolutionary) Second International; and the perceived imminence of socialist revolution throughout Europe. The First Congress of the Communist International subsequently convened in Moscow in March 1919, by which time the Bolsheviks had seized state power in Russia and revolutionary prospects elsewhere still appeared favourable. Under Lenin's forceful patronage, the Comintern seemed set to play a leading role in the attempt to realise those prospects.

Initially the attention of Comintern delegates was primarily focused on events in Europe, where the theoretically 'classic' Marxist confrontation between labour and capital was considered likely. Circumstances

1. V.I. Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution' (the 'April Theses'), Selected Works, (3 Vols.), Vol. 2, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1975, pp 31-32. (Published 7 April 1917.)
in Asia were much less clear-cut, given that the economic stage of development there was generally considered to be 'colonial and semi-feudal' - a situation which was, of course, inconsistent with rigidly orthodox interpretations of the necessary conditions for proletarian revolution. However, as revolutionary prospects in Europe began to recede rapidly, the Comintern started to pay more attention to the East. It therefore became necessary to develop a programme of action for Asia.

Almost from the outset Comintern officials were confronted by the often conflicting demands of theory and practice. In one of his most famous observations, Karl Marx had once written that 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it'. 2 A crucial question arises from this: in the drive to change the world, to what extent can 'understanding' - i.e. theories and analyses of social development - be interpreted, in the light of prevailing circumstances, during its translation into action?

While many complex factors were involved in developing a programme for action in the East, two emerged as being of primary importance, viz., nationalism and the participation in revolutionary activities of classes other

than the proletariat. These interrelated factors came to represent a source of intense ideological dispute. On the one hand, in the opinion of many communist theorists they characterised a revolutionary programme that was at odds with Marx's analysis of social development, yet, on the other, they were issues which were actively promoted by (among others) Lenin when he, unlike the authors of The Communist Manifesto, found himself a practitioner as well as a theorist of communism. The notions of revolutionary practice which emerged from this ideological conflict were of the utmost importance both within the Comintern and to those colonial leaders who were working within a communist framework in their attempts to overthrow foreign rule.

This sub-thesis is concerned in the first instance with the Comintern's theory for revolution in Asia, particularly in relation to nationalism and class cooperation, and attempts to translate that theory into revolutionary programmes. The consequences of those programmes are also examined, primarily by reference to the revolutionary movements in Turkey, China and Indo-China, which between them experienced most of the resulting vicissitudes. Finally, some attention is focused on the influence on Comintern activities of Soviet foreign policy.
Notes on Terminology

The names 'Asia' and 'the East' when used in this essay include both the Near East and the Far East.

Pinyin romanization has been used for Chinese words except where reference is made to source material, in which instances the romanization used by the particular author has been retained.
CHAPTER II
IDEAS

PART ONE: THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

At the heart of any discussion of Comintern actions in the East is the theoretical basis of those actions: the question the organisation's leaders constantly had to face up to was that of whether or not their policies were consistent with the Marxian analysis of social development. As was noted above, in its early years the Comintern was dominated by Lenin, who in turn has sometimes been accused of being little more than an opportunist who cut his ideological cloth to fit existing objective circumstances. This accusation of theoretical opportunism was put, for example, by Rosa Luxemburg as early as 1904 when she attacked Lenin's pamphlet 'What is to be Done'. In Luxemburg's opinion, 'Lenin's concern [was] not so much to make the activity of the party more fruitful as to control the party'. Yet in that same pamphlet, Lenin had placed great emphasis on the importance of theory to any revolutionary plan of action:

Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity... At this point we wish to state that the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory. 2

In other words, there would be little purpose to any revolutionary action which was theoretically unsound. Regardless of whether one accepts Luxemburg's criticism or Lenin's ideological propriety, the dispute clearly illustrates the importance of the fundamental nexus between revolutionary theory and action. It is because of that nexus that this essay must start with a review of the attitudes of the major communist theorists regarding the key factors in the East.

Nationalism was a question which received relatively little attention from Marx, whose analysis of social forces was essentially international. In the Marxian lexicon, society consists of classes, which are universal social groups defined by their members' relationship to the means of production. Social interests are thus expressed, not through the medium of nation states, but rather through that of universal economic classes. Since the progression to communism via

socialism demands the replacement of the bourgeoisie as
the ruling class by the proletariat, it can therefore be
argued that both nationalism and any kind of revolutionary
cooperation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie
are alien to the Marxian analysis.

Yet within the basic framework of his
argumentation Marx was by no means inflexible. In this
case, while his long-term view was that a successful
socialist revolution had to be international and that
'working men have no country', he and Engels also
appreciated that a sense of national identity existed
within the proletariat, observing in The Communist
Manifesto that: 'Since the proletariat must first of all
acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading
class of the nation, it is, so far, itself national ...'.

Following on from this, Marx and Engels also appreciated
that this sense of national identity could play a
particular and constructive role during any struggle
within nations for political supremacy: given the right
circumstances and correct theoretical guidance,
nationalism could serve as a progressive revolutionary
force.

In the first instance, Marx and Engels
considered that in some nations the drive towards

3. K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto,
Harmondsworth, 1967, p 102. (1848.)
nationalism could be an important force in mobilising a somewhat inert bourgeoisie against autocracy. Further, while they believed that in the long term the socialist revolution had to be international, they also appreciated that the necessary degree of proletarian political organisation could be most effectively developed initially by building up working-class parties within existing nations. They thus supported nationalist movements fighting for Home Rule in Ireland, the unification of both Germany and Italy, and national self-determination in Poland. 4

The success of any nationalist movement in the countries cited would primarily depend on a proletarian/bourgeois alliance. However, in other areas of semi-industrialised Europe the bourgeoisie seemed to lack the impetus to complete the overthrow of feudalism which was its historic mission, regardless of any assistance. This chronic revolutionary weakness was one of a number of factors which led Marx to speculate in the Preface to the 1882 Russian edition of the Manifesto that

---

in Russia the bourgeois (capitalist) phase of economic evolution might be bypassed: a proletarian/peasant alliance might proceed directly from feudalism to socialism under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Clearly, this analysis was of great relevance to the East.

Some Marxists considered that the notion of class cooperation explicit in this observation was peripheral to the main thrust of Marxian analysis. They argued that it was accorded undue moment by subsequent theorists who, they claimed, used it as nothing more than a specious excuse for revolutionary expediency through the promotion of 'unnatural' short-term alliances between inherently irreconcilable classes.

However, as has already been pointed out, Marx and Engels were not inflexible. While this question was

5. Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto, p.56. This observation was accompanied by a significant qualification: 'If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development.' q.v. Marx, 'Letter to Vera Zasulich', Selected Writings, pp 576-580, in which the same observation was made (written in 1881).

6. See, e.g. Rosa Luxemburg, The National Question, (Ed. H.B. Davis), New York, 1976, p 316: 'Today ... to raise the slogan of independence as a means to struggle against national oppression would be ... the denial of the simplest fundamentals of socialism ... The only result of such a program would be the weakening of class consciousness, the sharpening of national antagonisms, splitting the forces of the proletariat and increasing the danger of new wars'.
not central to their work, it was nevertheless one with which they had come to grips. They concluded that the main requirement in any alliance would be that of maintaining revolutionary integrity by protecting proletarian independence and class interests. As early as 1848 when they analysed the revolutionary circumstances then obtaining in Germany and, as a consequence, subsequently advocated a class alliance as a means of revitalising the anti-autocratic forces, they made it plain that partnerships were acceptable for reasons of short-term gain, but should be entered in to only when it was in the proletarian interest to do so. Here, the crucial factor was leadership, which was to be provided by the communist party. Addressing the leading role demanded of the party, Marx and Engels stated that:

In Germany [the party] fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty-bourgeoisie.

But they never cease, for a single instant, to instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat,... in order that, after the fall of the reactionary classes in Germany, the fight against the bourgeoisie itself may immediately begin. 7

Two years later, in the same context, they spelt out the tactics to be followed by the proletariat:

The relation of the revolutionary workers' party to the petty-bourgeois democrats is this: it marches together with them against the faction which it aims at overthrowing, it opposes them in everything by which they seek to consolidate their position in their own interests. 8

Those tactics would be dictated by the communist party:

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement. 9

Some fifty years later, Lenin amplified this notion of an elite vanguard party to lead the socialist revolution in his famous tract 'What is to be Done?', considered by many to be the definitive exposition on organisational power politics.

If class cooperation and nationalism were factors which could be used constructively in Europe to promote both the capitalist and socialist phases of the classic Marxist revolutionary model, then, as has been noted, they also seemed relevant to the East. There were, however, some important theoretical differences. In contrast to Europe, where the stage of economic


development generally fell somewhere between the categories of feudalism and capitalism, much of Asia remained at the stage of Asiatic (Oriental) despotism or, at best, semi-feudalism. Whereas feudalism and capitalism, according to Marx and Engels, contained within themselves the seeds of their own destruction, Asiatic despotism was a stagnant socio-economic system. Marx and Engels believed that the most likely way in which the seemingly stationary institutional order of an Oriental despotism could be changed was through the influence of outside forces. As an example they cited the profound social impact of British colonisation on the Asiatic order in India where, in Marx's opinion, 'English interference ... produced the greatest, and to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia'.

This outside interference not only shook the previously immobile social order but, by arousing hostile anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist sentiments - which were expressed primarily through nationalism - set in train the inevitable forces of history and, therefore, the inevitable triumph of socialism. Even though the theoretical rationale might be different in some respects, the consequences of galvanising latent nationalist forces

in Asia could be just as positive as those envisaged for Europe.

A perhaps less well-known, but nevertheless noteworthy aspect of nationalism also identified by Marx and Engels was that relating to the activities of a 'civilising power'. The concept here was that, through the expression of nationalist ambitions from outside Asia, indigenous social turmoil would be incited. In an article in the New York Daily Tribune in 1855 they noted with approval the writings of a Count Gurowski, who had argued that:

... the legitimate outlet for the expansive force of Slavonic energies was Asia. As compared with the stagnant desolation of that old continent, Russia is a civilising power, and her contact could not be other than beneficial. 11

Apparently Slavic nationalism, manifested through 'civilising power' expansionism into the East, could engender the same constructive revolutionary consequences - viz., the overthrow of Oriental despotism and, thereby, the release of the necessary economic and class conflicts - as had the essentially commercial British interference in India.

As a final observation on Marx's and Engels' position regarding nationalism and class alliances, their

definition of the revolutionary class in relation to anti-colonial movements is of interest. There was never any equivocation regarding the proletariat's position as the sole 'special and essential' product of social evolution. However, when anti-colonial, anti-imperialist issues were discussed, reference was sometimes made to 'oppressed' peoples and nations, in a context which seemed to embrace most of those social groups opposed to an autocratic ruling order.

Marx and Engels remained somewhat vague in their use of the term, and it was left to Stalin, working under Lenin's direction, to give it theoretical clarity. Immediately prior to World War I, Stalin argued that international proletarian unity could only be realised if the workers of dominant nations were prepared to support the principle of self-determination for oppressed states. The kernel of Stalin's dissertation was an explicit connection between capitalism and imperialism:

When we put forward the principle of the right of peoples to self-determination we are thereby raising the struggle against national oppression to the level of a struggle against imperialism, our common foe. 12

Either we consider that we must create a rear for the vanguard of the socialist revolution in the shape of the peoples which are rising up

against national oppression - and in that case we shall build a bridge between the West and the East and shall indeed be steering a course towards the world socialist revolution; or we do not do this - and in that case we shall find ourselves isolated and we shall be abandoning the tactics of utilising every revolutionary movement among the oppressed nationalities for the purpose of destroying imperialism. We must support every movement directed against imperialism. 13

It was Lenin however who most forcefully and effectively established the necessary connection between 'nationalism', 'oppression', and the imperative for communists to support 'every movement directed against imperialism'. In terms of consistency of theory and analysis, it is noteworthy that he made this connection at least as early as 1897. Addressing the subject in his essay 'The Tasks Facing Russia's Social Democrats', Lenin had urged his party to:

... support the progressive social classes against the reactionary classes, the bourgeoisie against the representatives of privileged landowning estate and the bureaucracy, the big bourgeoisie against the reactionary strivings of the petty bourgeoisie. This support does not presuppose, nor does it call for, any compromise with non-Social-Democratic programmes and principles - it is support given to an ally against a particular enemy ... the Social-Democrats render this support in order to

13. Stalin, op. cit., p 67. Stalin echoed the support of Marx and Lenin for Irish Home Rule in this passage: 'Is not the Irish movement against British imperialism a democratic movement which is striking a blow at imperialism? And are we not to support the movement?"
expedite the fall of the common enemy, but expect nothing for themselves from these temporary allies, and concede nothing to them.  

Particularly interesting is the breadth of social categories included under the broad heading of 'oppressed' groups, all of which were perceived as useful revolutionary allies. The emphasis placed at that early date on the necessity to protect class interests is also significant:

While pointing to the solidarity of one or other of the various opposition groups with the workers, the Social-Democrats will always single out the workers from the rest, they will always point out that this solidarity is temporary and conditional, they will always emphasise the independent class identity of the proletariat, who tomorrow may find themselves in opposition to their allies of today.  

Finally, in a later essay, Lenin agreed with the authors of The Communist Manifesto that struggles for national self-determination could help the working class to acquire organisational strength and a greater sense of class


15. ibid, pp 334-335.
consciousness. On each of those issues his basic position was therefore consistent with that of Marx and Engels.

Lenin in fact subsequently took the theoretical development of the question of nationalism further than had his two great predecessors. In 1914 he argued that, when harnessed constructively, nationalism was an intensely democratic force. He went on to present an economically-derived explanation of the reasons why socialists should support national self-determination, particularly in the East. First, he explained that the tendency of every national movement was towards the formation of national states, 'under which [the] requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied'. He then related this to the Asian situation, suggesting that while it was not possible to determine whether Asia would have time to develop into a system of nation states before the worldwide collapse of capitalism, it

16. Lenin, 'Karl Marx', Selected Works, Vol. 1, p 38 (July-November 1914). 'Nations are an inevitable product, an inevitable form, in the bourgeois epoch of social development. The working class could not grow strong, become mature and take shape without "constituting itself within the nation", without being "national" ("though not in the bourgeois sense of the word")'.

nevertheless remained an 'undisputed fact' that capitalism, having awakened Asia, 'called forth national movements everywhere in that continent'. Under those circumstances, all classes of a population were drawn into politics to oppose feudalism and absolutism. In essence, Lenin was arguing that those economic forces identified by communists as leading inevitably to socialism also underpinned oppressed peoples' urge for national self-determination, in the process of which momentous political agitation was generated. Accordingly, nationalism could be viewed as an integral part, within the Marxian analysis of society, of progressive and universal socio-economic change.

At this stage a brief comment on Lenin's approach to Marxism is necessary. There is in Marxism, as well as a determinist element, an activist element which is most readily apparent in the attention given to the need for revolutionary agitation: although historical development may be moving in a particular direction, it can be given a good push through the dynamics of the class struggle. While always remaining aware of the need for theoretical rigour, Lenin fully understood this dynamic: for him, the only purpose of theory was action. Changing objective circumstances had to be accommodated, and the

18. ibid, p 571.
19. See pp 5-6 above.
imperative was for action sooner rather than later. Like Marx, Lenin knew that the point was to change the world. Theory was not dogma, and new developments had to be confronted.

This approach was consistently reflected in Lenin's analyses of revolutionary prospects, in both Europe and Asia. When revolution in Russia in 1905 and the outbreak of World War in 1914 created profound social turmoil, the Bolshevik leader perceived the possibility of proletarian — as opposed to some sort of proletarian/peasant or proletarian/bourgeois — revolution in its own right. However, on both occasions the socialist movement was unable to generate sufficient momentum from within itself. Given those circumstances, it was only to be expected that Lenin would seek to adjust his tactics in keeping with the activist element of Marxism.

Thus it was immediately after the failure of the 1905–07 uprising in Russia that he first suggested that the Tsarist regime could be overthrown only by a proletarian/peasant alliance. At about the same time, and consistent with that thesis, Lenin began to pay increased attention to revolutionary prospects in the East, where any uprising would of course have to include the peasants if it were to succeed.20 At the Bolshevik

20. This was a function of Asia's stage of economic development, reflected in the limited number of industrial workers and the sheer weight of numbers of peasants.
Congress in January 1912 he moved a resolution congratulating Sun Yatsen's Republicans on their overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty in China, stating that '... the Conference recognises the world-wide importance of the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people, which is bringing emancipation to Asia and is undermining the rule of the European bourgeoisie'.

This was followed in May 1913 by an article in Pravda entitled 'Backward Europe and Advanced Asia', in which, apparently frustrated by the comparative inactivity of the revolutionary forces in Europe, Lenin contrasted the growth of the 'mighty democratic movement' in Asia, where 'the bourgeoisie still sides with the people against [the feudal] reaction', with the revolutionary hopelessness of the bourgeoisie in Europe.

The social turmoil which accompanied the outbreak of World War I revived Bolshevik hopes of widespread and spontaneous working class uprisings in Europe. When these failed to eventuate, Lenin again focused on the East. In what was perhaps his major theoretical treatise, 'Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism', written in 1916, he established the most explicit connection yet between nationalism in Asia and


the international socialist movement. 23 Whereas Marx had viewed the national question primarily as a 'secondary and subordinate' feature of the socialist revolution, Lenin postulated a correlation between struggles for national liberation and the worldwide struggle of the proletariat and the oppressed. Indeed, he believed that to a considerable extent the fate of the world revolution was now linked to the East. The logic for this conclusion rested on his perception of the changing revolutionary potential of certain social groups. Lenin identified a weakening of anti-capitalist sentiment and activity among some sections of workers in advanced nations, where an opportunistic 'aristocracy of labour' had been bribed away from its true class interests by the super-profits of monopoly capital. 24 In contrast to this, nationalist-inspired anti-imperialist feelings in colonies were increasingly becoming a potent revolutionary force. 'Imperialism' was synonymous with 'capitalism'; therefore, the national struggles in the colonies had to be accepted as an important element of the international


24. ibid, p 714: 'It must be observed that in Great Britain the tendency [is for] imperialism to split the workers, to strengthen opportunism among them ... the "worst English trade unions ... allow themselves to be led by men sold to or at least paid by, the middle class"'.

struggle against capitalism. This perception naturally came to assume great theoretical significance for Asian revolutionaries.

In 1917, however, Asia again was temporarily forgotten, this time because of the overthrow in Russia of the Romanovs, and the apparently highly promising revolutionary prospects in Europe generally and Germany in particular. But by the end of 1919, the socialist uprisings in Europe seemed to have lost their way, so communist theorists once more looked eastwards. It is most notable that on this occasion, Trotsky, who previously had deeply mistrusted proposed alliances with peasant movements, now exhorted the Central Committee of the party to effect a radical reform of its policy regarding Asia. On 5 August 1919, five days after the collapse of Soviet Hungary, he argued that this defeat would, 'in all probability, delay the workers' revolution in the smaller countries: Bulgaria, Poland, Galicia, Romania and the Balkans'.

Asking rhetorically how long this situation might persist, he provided the answer himself, suggesting that it could be as long as five years. Because of that circumstance, he continued, attention should be turned towards Asia. In a now-famous passage, he suggested that 'The road to India may prove at

the given moment to be readily passable and shorter for us than the road to Soviet Hungary'. Trotsky had reached the same conclusion regarding Asia as had Lenin, albeit via a different route.

The Bolsheviks' basic position was neatly summarised by Lenin during an interview with a Japanese journalist in June 1920, when he reiterated the tactic he had elaborated four years previously in 'Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism'. Replying to the question, 'Where does Communism have the best chances for success - in the West or in the East?', he replied:

Genuine communism can thus far succeed only in the West. However, the West lives on account of the East. European imperialist powers support themselves mainly from Eastern colonies. But at the same time they are arming their colonials and teaching them to fight. Thereby the West is digging its grave in the East. 27

* * *

That last quotation is a useful point at which to conclude this section, for it not only summarises most of the key issues, but also is attributed to the dominant figure of the early years of the Comintern. The comment

---

26. ibid, p 623.

was made at a time when the Red Army was under desperate pressure from hostile Western interventionist forces and the Whites, and the very survival of the Soviet revolution was at risk. Given the circumstances, it is significant to note that Lenin's essential theoretical stance was consistent with Marxist orthodoxy, viz. he maintained that 'genuine communism' could only be achieved in economically and industrially advanced countries with their large populations of industrial workers. At the same time, in keeping with the activist element of Marxism, it was perfectly acceptable to agitate for change in the East. Marx and Engels had been by no means inflexible in translating their analysis of social change into tactics, and had argued on several occasions that 'interference' in the East could serve the dual progressive revolutionary purpose of smashing Oriental despotism - thereby releasing the irresistible forces of socio-economic change - and, by mobilising oppressed peoples, promoting socialist objectives. Within that particular framework, they supported nationalism and class cooperation, as long as proletarian class interests always remained foremost. Marx and Engels, and Lenin, agreed that the leadership provided by the vanguard of the communist party would be crucial in securing those interests. Finally, through his powerful attack on imperialism, Lenin had presented an economically-derived rationale for the East to provide, in some respects, the lead in the world-wide socialist
struggle. Communist theorists could reasonably claim, therefore, that they were justified in using nationalism and class cooperation as a means of promoting Marxist revolution in the East.

PART TWO: THE EARLY CONGRESSES

The First Congress of the Communist International was held in Moscow in March 1919. It had been organised hastily and, in the confusion following the end of World War I, with a degree of ignorance on the part of its Bolshevik organisers regarding circumstances in other countries. Only 35 delegates with voting powers attended, and according to the Comintern’s first secretary, Angelica Balabanova, most of those delegates had been hand-picked by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. As that party was represented by Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Chicherin - all of whom would have enjoyed tremendous revolutionary status - the Bolsheviks inevitably dominated proceedings. This situation probably was not intended. However, a firm


29. Ibid, p 37. 'Moscow was the obvious choice for the headquarters of [Comintern]; between congresses, the Executive Committee was to act in its name. It is clear from speeches and articles by the Russian
A large percentage of the First Congress's energies was directed towards approving a new Communist Manifesto, intended to succeed that written in 1848 by Marx and Engels. Both this new manifesto and the Congress's platform placed considerable emphasis on the need to coordinate world-wide proletarian movements as the only way of achieving a 'truly revolutionary, truly proletarian, communist international'. Delegates agreed that the International must subordinate 'so-called national interests to the interests of the international revolution', presenting in their manifesto an appeal for a world-wide revolution which would transcend national frontiers because 'The national State, which imparted a mighty impulse to capitalist development, has become too narrow for the further development of productive leaders at this time that they had every hope and intention of transferring the seat of the Executive to a western capital once conditions were favourable to such a move'.

30. 'Platform of the Communist International Adopted by the First Congress', Degras, op. cit., Vol. 1, p 23 (March 1919).

31. loc. cit.
forces'. 32

However, just as Marx and Engels before them had appreciated the need to avoid stultifying dogmatism in the translation of theory into practice, so too the theoreticians of the Comintern were not inflexible. Thus the Congress's platform spoke of the requirement, in the first instance, for the 'destruction of the bourgeois State machine and the construction of the proletarian State machine'; 33 that is, notwithstanding the belief that social change ultimately would be based on international revolutionary forces, initially new socialist societies would arise on a national basis.

While this analysis related essentially to circumstances in Europe (as had Marx's Communist Manifesto), the delegates did not ignore the East. Reference was made both in the Congress platform and the new manifesto to the 'ferment in the colonies' and the exploitation by imperialist powers, not only of the working class, but also of peasants in 'oppressed colonies'. The section of the manifesto addressing the


33. 'Platform of the Communist ...', Degras, op. cit., Vol. 1, p 19. The intention was that the 'proletarian State machine' would be based on popularly-elected people's councils, i.e. Soviets.
national and colonial question stated that 'the colonial question in its fullest extent has been placed on the agenda [for Comintern action]', but at the same time noted that 'the emancipation of the colonies [would be] possible only in conjunction with the emancipation of the metropolitan working class'. This caveat was reminiscent of one placed by Marx on his analysis of revolutionary prospects in Russia: in 1882 he had qualified his suggestion that socialist revolution might first succeed in that country by stipulating that any such uprising would have to be supported immediately by the proletariat of the industrialised nations of Western Europe. In the Asian case, the Comintern was suggesting that the (anticipated) new proletarian states of Europe would be in the vanguard of the liberation of the colonies. The significance of this was twofold. First, the importance of nations and national action as the medium for initially promoting socialism in the East had been acknowledged by the Congress, and, second, the statement officially recognised the revolutionary primacy of European communist parties—which to all intents and purposes meant the Russian Communist Party.

34. 'Manifesto of the Communist ...', Degras, op. cit., Vol. 1, p 43. The manifesto was written by Trotsky and adopted unanimously.

35. See fn 5 above.
The question of class cooperation received little specific attention. Nevertheless, in the months following the First Congress the issue did arise, albeit fleetingly, from time to time: for example, a manifesto from the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) to the communist parties of Bulgaria, Rumania, Serbia and Turkey in March 1920 reminded those organisations of the 'necessity of drawing into the communist movement the working peasantry, [and] the poor and middle peasants' as well as the proletariat. 36

* * * * *

A far more catholic gathering assembled in Moscow in July 1920 for the Comintern's Second Congress. There were 217 delegates from 41 countries, including representatives from the important Asiatic states of China, Persia, Korea, Turkey and India.

This time the national and colonial question was one of the main items on the agenda. Debate on the question was dominated by Lenin and M.N. Roy, an Indian

36. 'Extracts from a Manifesto to the Communist Parties of Bulgaria, Rumania, Serbia and Turkey', Degras, op. cit., Vol. 1, p 87.

The ECCI was elected by Congress to act as the Comintern's central committee between Congresses. President of the ECCI was the Russian revolutionary, G. Zinoviev.
considered by many to be the outstanding Asian Marxist.

Lenin presented his Preliminary Draft Theses on the subject in which he sustained the thrust of his earlier analyses: within certain identifiable constraints, conditions in colonial states were suitable for Marxist-oriented revolutionary agitation. Consistent with his exposition on imperialism, the Draft Theses defined the general colonial revolutionary setting essentially in terms of anti-imperialism, in which circumstances the distinction between classes became less important than that between 'oppressed' and 'oppressor' nations. Also of note was the argument that, with the world socialist movement currently prospering only in Russia — and indeed in dire trouble in the rest of Europe — priority should be given to securing some sort of support for the socialist homeland. Lenin's Theses therefore proposed that the Comintern should cooperate with any 'progressive' national movement. Strengthening such movements, in the interests


38. ibid, p 378. 'World political developments are of necessity concentrated on a single focus - the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouped, on the one hand, the Soviet movements of the advanced workers in all countries, and, on the other, all the national liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities, who are learning from bitter experience that their only salvation lies in the Soviet system's victory over world imperialism.'
of gaining allies for the Soviet government, might for the moment be more important than either internationalism or the class composition of any alliance:

... one cannot confine oneself at present to a bare recognition or proclamation of the need for closer union between the working people of the various nations; a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia, of all the national and colonial liberation movements. The form of this alliance should be determined by the degree of development ... of the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement of the workers and peasants in backward countries or among backward nationalities. 39

This perception underpinned one of Lenin's major tactical propositions. Arguing that '... all Communist parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations ... and in the colonies', 40 he made specific reference to cooperation with the bourgeoisie. Indeed, not only was assistance to be given, but also alliances were permissable:

The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form. 41

39. loc. cit.
40. ibid, p 379.
41. ibid, p 381; q.v. p 380.
Clearly, the notion of a united front between the proletariat and other anti-imperialist groups was central to Lenin's thesis for revolution in the East. He envisaged the communist-led revolution taking place in two phases. First, there would be a nationalist phase in which all factions of the alliance would be active. The paramount quality of any alliance would be its capacity and will to complete both of the tasks required of a 'nationalist' revolution, viz. anti-imperialism (the overthrow of foreigners) and anti-feudalism (the defeat of the landed gentry). An alliance not committed to both goals could be counter-productive. The second phase would be the socialist, in which only the proletariat would play a substantial revolutionary role. This total concept meant that, in the first instance, Lenin was concerned with the establishment of correct political, rather than economic, circumstances.

Lenin's concept for the East was essentially consistent with that which he had developed for and effected in Russia, where the two phases were the bourgeois-democratic (which had been completed by a worker-bourgeois-peasant alliance) and the socialist. For all practical purposes, the 'national liberation' and 'bourgeois-democratic' phases fulfilled the same purpose, viz. that of overthrowing the existing autocratic-feudal regime. The second phase of the 'dual' revolution
postulated an advance to socialism without going through the stage of capitalist development.

M.N. Roy took issue strongly with Lenin on the matter of class alliances. Lenin's caveat regarding the 'independence of the proletariat'\(^{42}\) in any alliance did nothing to assuage Roy's objection to the proposition. In his opinion there were two distinct anti-imperialist movements in the colonies, the first consisting of bourgeois-democratic nationalists who merely sought political independence within the capitalist order, and the second of oppressed landless peasants who were rising against their capitalist oppressors.\(^{43}\)

As was noted above, Lenin had in 1917 suggested that, in certain circumstances and to a limited degree, socialist revolutionaries in backward Asia might give a lead to the proletariat of the West.\(^{44}\) Roy took this further, arguing that socialists in Europe in fact would not be able to overthrow the bourgeoisie until Asiatic countries had shrugged off the yoke of imperialism, for it was only through the profits from the colonies that the

\(^{42}\) See p 31 above.


\(^{44}\) See pp 20-22 above.
European bourgeoisie were able to 'buy off' their proletariat. Accordingly, Roy maintained that the 'bourgeois-democratic' and 'oppressed' movements were inherently opposed, and any cooperation between them would be theoretically unsound and inimical to the long-term prospects of the East's oppressed peoples.

The Comintern thus was faced with a confrontation which raised questions of both theory and practice. Lenin promoted his thesis by reminding delegates of the need for tactical flexibility. Perhaps nowhere is his talent as a tactician better presented than in his trenchant essay "Left-Wing" Communism : an Infantile Disorder', published only weeks before the Second Congress. That essay developed most forcefully Marx's maxim that the imperative is not merely to interpret the world in various ways, but rather to change it. In a characteristically vigorous passage, Lenin had dismissed those critics who, in his opinion, failed to appreciate the importance of adjusting tactics to meet changing objective circumstances:

45. Carr, op. cit., p.254. Roy's analysis ironically seems to have originated from, or at least owed a debt to, Lenin's treatise on 'Imperialism : the Highest Stage of Capitalism'. Roy had, however, given that analysis a particularly Asiatic/colonial interpretation.

46. Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism : an Infantile Disorder', Selected Works, Vol. 3, pp 293-363. (27 April 1920.) This work also illustrates Lenin's intimidating capabilities as a polemicist.
Naive and quite inexperienced people imagine that the permissability of compromise in general is sufficient to obliterate any distinction between opportunism, against which we are waging, and must wage, an unremitting struggle, and revolutionary Marxism, or communism. ... [in] nature and society all distinctions are fluid ... 

... to renounce in advance any change of tack, or any utilisation of a conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one's enemies, or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating or conditional allies) - is that not ridiculous in the extreme? 48

He then quoted with approval the authors of the Communist Manifesto: "'Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action, said Marx and Engels.'" 49

As is the case in so much of Lenin's contribution to Marxist debate, the focus (either explicitly or implicitly) for maintaining revolutionary integrity during periods of tactical adjustment was placed on the need for 'correct' leadership, provided by the vanguard of the communist party. 50 This leadership

47. See p 2 above.
49. ibid, p 336. Emphasis in original.
in the case of the East would come from the Comintern.

In this particular debate it seems that many Congress delegates considered Roy's analysis placed undue emphasis on events in Asia\(^51\) and this factor, in combination with Lenin's forceful argument and revolutionary stature, saw the Bolshevik leader's position hold sway. At the same time, Roy's attack on open alliances with bourgeois-democratic movements apparently caused some unease. The outcome was that the Theses on the National and Colonial Question which were adopted by the Comintern on 28 July 1920 were almost a verbatim transcription of Lenin's Preliminary Draft Theses, but, where applicable, the phrase 'bourgeois-democratic' movement was replaced by 'revolutionary liberation' movement.\(^52\) In Jane Degras' opinion this substitution was little more than a verbal expedient\(^53\) which in no sense altered the thrust of the Leninist notion of utilising nationalism and class alliances in the East.

The Comintern moved quickly to implement the Theses endorsed by the Second Congress. On 1 September 1920 the ECCI convened a congress of the 'oppressed

---


52. 'Theses on the National and Colonial Question adopted by the Second Comintern Congress', Degras, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp 139-144.

peoples of the East' in the city of Baku, on the Caspian Sea, with the intention of coordinating the nationalist revolutionary movements of the East with the socialist revolutionary movements of Europe. Lenin's close associate Zinoviev, who was president of the ECCI, was the senior Comintern official present. Zinoviev delivered a brilliant speech in which his appeal to a broad cross-section of the audience was based on anti-imperialist rather than socialist sentiments: the Comintern was, he stated, ready to help any revolutionary struggle in the campaign to liberate the East from French and English capitalists. This was a sensible line to adopt, for many of those present were revolutionary only in the sense that they were nationalists. Indeed, because of the politics of his audience, Zinoviev cast his net even wider by linking anti-imperialism in the East to the Islamic notion of holy war. According to the conference's official record, the Comintern president called on delegates to

... start on the organisation of a true and holy people's war against the robbers and oppressors. The Communist International turns today to the peoples of the East and says to them: 'Brothers, we summon you to a

holy war, in the first place against English imperialism!' 55

The Times newspaper subsequently noted the incongruity of communists 'summoning the world of Islam to a *jihad*. 56 Putting aside the wry humour of this, it is noteworthy that in calling for a united front against imperialism, Zinoviev carefully avoided reference to the internal political differences currently dividing Muslim revolutionaries. In the short-term the Comintern's main ambition in the East was that of mobilising anti-imperialist forces, and any class antagonisms within those forces could be dealt with later. Zinoviev's speech was well-received.

* * * * *

Baku probably represented the high point of the Comintern's aspirations for and status in the East. A theoretical basis for revolutionary action had been established, endorsed by the Comintern Congress, and translated into tactics which seemed to offer the promise of quick results. The response in Baku had been encouraging.


56. ibid, p 108.
Clearly, however, while the tactics endorsed by the Comintern were not inconsistent with Marxism, they were dangerous, involving as they did class cooperation in which 'the allies of today - the peasants, the bourgeois nationalists, the social democrats - were the enemies of tomorrow'.\(^{57}\) As the Bolsheviks were currently finding out the hard way in Russia, these were tactics which could quickly give rise to the classic confrontation between theory and practice,\(^{58}\) under which circumstances the pressures to adopt expedient solutions or theoretically questionable compromises could become overwhelming.

---


58. Almost as soon as they assumed power in Russia, the Bolsheviks faced enormous problems in dealing with their erstwhile allies, the peasants.
CHAPTER III

REALITIES : ALLIANCES IN THE EAST

Even while the Comintern had been setting in place the policies and organisational structure it hoped would mobilise the nationalists of the East in support of the proletariat of the West, other forces were already applying immense constraints on Soviet Russia's - and, therefore, the Comintern's - capacity for independent action. Those constraints were arising, aptly enough, from irresistible economic pressures. After years of World War, revolution, foreign intervention and finally civil war, Russia's economy was close to collapse. The most graphic manifestation of this came with the appalling famine of 1920-21, during which millions died.¹ As a reaction to this desperate circumstance, and consistent with his belief in tactical flexibility, Lenin had turned to the New Economic Policy (NEP) as a means by which economic activity in Soviet Russia might be revitalised. NEP essentially promoted entrepreneurship and the growth of small businesses by permitting a limited but

¹ The famine caused enormous social dislocation. 'Millions of hungry survivors wandered [the country] in search of some sort of food' and 'untold millions' died as the famine was accompanied by outbreaks of diseases such as typhus. A. Nove, An Economic History of the USSR, Harmondsworth, 1976, p 86.
nevertheless significant degree of capitalism in various areas of the economy\(^2\).

As an economic strategy NEP was an undoubted success. However, as was mentioned above, it carried with it ineluctable consequences for Russian foreign policy and, as a result of that, Comintern strategy. For NEP to succeed, the Soviet Government had to have continuing access to capitalist markets and resources for a considerable number of years. It was for that reason that on 16 March 1921 the Soviets signed a trade agreement with Great Britain. This was a crucial treaty, being the first and most important of a number of agreements on which it would not be an overstatement to say the reconstruction of Russia depended. Among the other treaties which quickly followed, the Rapallo pact with Germany was particularly noteworthy, conferring as it did the dual benefits of trade and military cooperation.\(^3\) At about the same time, treaties were also concluded with Persia and Turkey.\(^4\) In the opinion of the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Chicherin, these agreements denoted 'a turning point in Soviet foreign policy'.\(^5\)

---

2. For a detailed review of NEP, see Nove, \textit{op. cit.}, pp 83-159.


4. The treaty with Persia was signed on 26 February 1921 and that with Turkey on 16 March 1921.

A number of the agreements contained some sort of undertaking by the Soviet Government to reduce revolutionary agitation in the geographic areas of influence and hegemony of the other party. The trade agreement with Great Britain was probably the most forcefully expressed, particularly in the clause which stated that:

... more particularly ... the Russian Soviet Government [will refrain] from any attempt by military or diplomatic or any other form of action or propaganda to encourage any of the peoples of Asia in any form of hostile action against British interests or the British Empire ...

The decision to concentrate on reconstructing the Russian economy and buying some time for the embattled Soviet Government was soon reflected in Comintern resolutions and activities. Zinoviev's 60-page report on ECCI activities prepared for the Comintern's Third Congress in June 1921 contained a bare three sentences on the National and Colonial question. It also was as a corollary to NEP and the change in Soviet foreign policy that Lenin in an address to the Third Congress called for a temporary retreat from world revolution in order to calm


capitalist misgivings about trading with Russia. Lenin advised the Congress delegates that

... we must take into account the fact that a certain equilibrium has now undoubtedly set in ... between the international bourgeoisie as a whole, and Soviet Russia. 8

This situation, he continued, had to be used to the communists' advantage:

We admit quite openly, and do not conceal the fact, that concessions in the system of state capitalism [i.e. NEP] mean paying tribute to capitalism. But we gain time ... Our point of view is: for the time being - big concessions and the greatest caution, precisely because a certain equilibrium has set in, precisely because we are weaker than our combined enemies, and because our economic basis is too weak and we need a stronger one. 9

Yet again Lenin's theses 'On Tactics' received the overwhelming support of Congress. There was some opposition to his line, however, and it is worthy of mention. Within the Congress it was led once more by M.N. Roy, who was moved to deliver an 'energetic protest' against the manner in which the national and colonial question was being treated - or, rather, ignored. The consequences of NEP also drew into the open the

9. ibid, p 492 and p 496.
dissatisfaction of the Tatar communist, Sultan-Galiev. Sultan-Galiev held a high position in the Soviet Commissariat of Nationality Affairs and on occasions worked closely with Lenin and Stalin. Like M.N. Roy, he was disturbed by the tactic of forming alliances with the national-bourgeoisie in Asia.

Despite his close connection to the Soviet communist hierarchy, Sultan-Galiev apparently from the earliest days of the Bolshevik revolution had harboured reservations regarding the capacity, or indeed the will, of any world proletarian movement to secure the liberation of colonial and semi-colonial peoples: he feared that colonial domination would merely pass from one group of oppressors to another.\(^{10}\) His close connection to the leaders of the Russian revolution did not allay that suspicion. The introduction of NEP in Russia confirmed Sultan-Galiev's doubts, so he began to promote the proposition that liberation in Asia would only be possible if backward nations established dominance over industrialised states, apparently regardless of the socio-economic system under which those states were governed:

We maintain that the formula which offers the replacement of the world-wide dictatorship of one class of European society (the bourgeoisie) by its antipode (the proletariat), i.e. by

---

another of its classes, will not bring about a major change in the social life of the oppressed segment of humanity. At any rate, such a change, even if it were to occur, would not be for the better but for the worse ... In contradistinction to this we advance another thesis: the idea that the material premises for a social transformation of humanity can be created only through the establishment of the dictatorship of the colonies and semi-colonies over the metropolises. 11

Sultan-Galiev accordingly called for the founding of a Colonial International as a counter to the Comintern, as the latter was of course intended ultimately to serve the industrial workers.

It is noteworthy that, like M.N. Roy, Sultan-Galiev was unable to mobilise worthwhile support, which indicates the general acceptance within the international communist movement of the Comintern line. Sultan-Galiev's actions made him persona non grata with the Soviet hierarchy, and he soon faded from the scene. 12

Further endorsement of the Comintern's position was given by the delegates to the First Congress of


12. There is an interesting footnote to Sultan-Galiev's fall from grace, for, according to Trotsky, he was the first high ranking Soviet official to be purged by Stalin. Trotsky mentioned this while relating a conversation he once had with Lenin's former close associate, Kamenev: "Do you remember the arrest of Sultan-Galiev, the former chairman of the Tatar Council of People's Commissars in 1923?" Kamenev continued. "This was the first arrest of a prominent Party member made upon the initiative of Stalin. Unfortunately Zinoviev and I gave our consent to it." L. Trotsky, Stalin, London, 1947, p 417.
Communist and Revolutionary Organisations of the Far East which convened in Moscow in January 1922. Delegates formally accepted the theses of the Second Comintern Congress on the National and Colonial question. They made a particular point of acknowledging the current importance, given the prevailing circumstances, of forming alliances with the national-bourgeoisie, by urging communists to support every national revolutionary movement as a means of making the first inroads against imperialism. In general terms the 'Theses' of the Second Congress remained as the basis of Comintern policy, but, because of the need to protect Soviet Russia's trading interests, that policy would now be applied more cautiously than perhaps was originally intended.

*     *     *     *     *

The tactic of the 'united front' was neither illogical nor theoretically reprehensible. Nevertheless it carried with it a number of considerable dangers, which, it seems, were either ignored or not identified by the Comintern. One of those dangers, already touched on in Chapter II, was that of accepting as today's allies those who would most probably be tomorrow's enemies. Because a certain degree of trust is necessary if a united front is to function, the participants become mutually vulnerable to betrayal. To assume in this situation that one's ally is less capable of manipulating and manoeuvring
outside the alliance to safeguard or secure vital interests is both naive and foolish; and yet, as will be discussed later in this Chapter, the Comintern seems to have been guilty of making this assumption in a number of alliances formed with nationalist groups in Asia. The crucial question the Comintern never addressed properly was: what did the nationalists with whom they sought alliances want in the long-term - what were their ultimate objectives? Only through a thorough understanding of their potential allies could the Comintern answer that question, and so provide the kind of leadership that, as their theoretical debates had acknowledged, would be essential.

Another tactical challenge which had to be resolved once alliances were formed was that of deciding whether or not to support a weak and ineffectual local communist party, with few apparent long-term revolutionary prospects, in preference to a strong nationalist group which clearly presented an immediate challenge to imperialist powers, but which might become strongly anti-socialist should it acquire power.

Finally, the question of local conditions throughout the East remained unanswered. The fact was that the Comintern had endorsed a plan of action which it related to the East in its entirety. This was all right as far as it went, but much more attention to detail was needed: India was not China, China not Turkey, Turkey not
Indo-China, and so on. The belief that one basic set of tactics would be applied in all oppressed countries, with little adjustment for local circumstances, was inconsistent with the dynamic element of Marxism. Here, it seems that men who in the main had realised the need for specific revolutionary tactics to meet Russia's specific conditions and needs in 1917, were now guilty of the (not uncommon) failing of generalising about foreign countries in terms they would not accept for their own country. At the very least, the failure to determine the particular requirements of each oppressed state was indicative of a sorry lack of knowledge on the part of Comintern officials of conditions in Asia.

The major effects of Comintern policies on socialist revolutionary movements in the East are reviewed in the remainder of this Chapter. Reference is made primarily to the movements in Turkey, China and Vietnam, which between them, from the time of the First Comintern Congress in 1919 to the Seventh Congress in 1935, experienced most of the consequences of those policies.

* * * * *

Comintern officials had appreciated the opportunities existing in the Near East in general and Turkey in particular from the time of the First Congress. Their interest rested on good, practical grounds, for it
was clear that, in backward states like Persia and Turkey, Islam was one of the few social forces with the strength and coherence seriously to challenge Western hegemony. Turkey especially appealed as a likely ally, for the peace terms imposed on that country by the West following World War I included, *inter alia*, the granting of free access to the Black Sea for all nations: this condition humiliated the Turks and threatened the Russians, thus setting the stage for an otherwise somewhat improbable liaison.

The most prominent Turkish leader, Kemal Ataturk, was not a socialist. His belief in Turkish 'republicanism, nationalism and secularism' found its antecedents in the classical bourgeois parliamentary democracy of the West. At the same time, Kemal was no reactionary and indeed was in some respects a radical reformer. His policies were for their times unquestionably progressive, including as they did a commitment to breaking the power of the Muslim clergy and modernising the Turkish economy. Among the extremely significant reforms contained in Kemal's programme were those relating to the emancipation of women, education, national self-determination for minorities in the former

---

Turkish Empire, industrialisation, and the modernisation of governmental administrative practices. Those reforms were similar to part of the programme already being introduced in Soviet Russia by the Bolsheviks, so it was not surprising that Russian officials found no great difficulty in making common cause with Kemal. For his part, the pragmatic Kemal was keen to secure Soviet diplomatic support for his efforts to rebuild Turkey in the face of Western opposition.

Not all Russian officials supported the proposition of an alliance with Kemal. Stalin, for example, was suspicious from the start, believing that the Turkish leader was always likely to double-cross the communists by turning towards the Entente once he had achieved his nationalist objectives: the Georgian expressed the fear that Kemal might 'betray the cause of the liberation of the oppressed peoples'.


15. Stalin made this comment during an interview with Pravda which appeared on 30 November 1920. Carr, op. cit., p 301, fn 3. Some years later in a 'Talk with Students of the Sun Yat-Sen University', Stalin elaborated on his assessment of the nature of Kemal's revolution: 'A Kemalist revolution is possible only in countries like Turkey, Persia or Afghanistan, where there is no industrial proletariat, or practically none, and where there is no powerful agrarian-peasant revolution. A Kemalist revolution is a revolution of the top stratum, a revolution of the national merchant bourgeoisie, arising in a struggle against the foreign imperialists, and whose subsequent development is essentially directed against the peasants and workers, against the very possibility of an agrarian revolution'. J. Stalin, Works, (13 Volumes), Vol. 9, Moscow, 1952-1955, p261.
Stalin's choice of words is interesting, as the emphasis on 'oppressed peoples' rather than, say, Soviet Russia or the Comintern, suggests that the motives for joining in an alliance with the Turkish nationalists were not opportunistic, but consistent with Comintern objectives and tactics. In fact the alliance signed between Soviet Russia and Turkey on 16 March 1921 was framed in terms of the 'struggle against imperialism', in which 'the mutual affinity between the national liberation movement of the peoples of the East and the struggle of the workers of Russia for a new social order' was seen as a natural bond.

The alliance with Kemal undoubtedly strengthened the anti-imperialist forces in the Near East, but it also undermined the Turkish Communist Party. Here, the harsh but inescapable fact the Comintern had to accept was that the Turkish Communist Party was weak, unpopular and ineffectual. Following the Second Comintern Congress and the Baku Congress, the Turkish delegates on returning to their homeland had been executed by public mobs. With the Turkish Communist Party by itself clearly having few prospects, the decision to form an alliance with the nationalists must have seemed rational to the Comintern. It was at the same time a callous decision. Obliged to limit its anti-capitalist agitation, and in the perceived

16. Carr, op. cit., p 303 (the quotation only).
interests of furthering the world-wide socialist revolution, the Comintern had little choice other than effectively to abandon the Turkish party in favour of Kemal once the alliance was formalised.

In terms of Comintern policy the Russo-Turkish alliance succeeded to the extent that Kemal, by mobilising Turkish nationalism, forced the abrogation of the Treaty of Sevres, which in turn amounted to a considerable defeat for the capitalist powers. However, having achieved this objective, Kemal no longer needed the diplomatic support of the Soviet Government. Determined to remove any potential opposition, he instigated a campaign of the most severe persecution against the Turkish communists, from which they never recovered.

There is little evidence that the Comintern seriously considered changing its tactics after the Turkish experience. Admittedly there were suggestions of remorse, at least in relation to individual suffering, in the letter sent by the Fourth Comintern Congress to the Turkish Communist Party exhorting them to continue the struggle:

17. The Peace Treaty of Sevres of 10 August 1920 had been signed by the Turkish government but never ratified by their Parliament. It effectively dismembered the Ottoman Empire and gave Greece, Turkey's most despised enemy, authority over some previously Turkish-dominated territory. The Treaty also permitted the occupation of key Turkish centres (e.g. Constantinople) by allied forces.
Arrested comrades! The Communist International, as the general staff and defender of the entire world proletariat, greets in you with the greatest warmth the class conscious and most devoted representatives of the Turkish working masses.

Do not forget, comrades, that the darkness of prison can never blot out the sun of revolution.

Do not forget, comrades, that on the eve of the victory of the revolution the powerlessness of the ruling class is expressed in their greater brutality. 18

However, well-intentioned encouragement was the limit of the Comintern's reaction. During the discussion at the Fourth Congress on the Eastern question, Radek's summary on the outcome of the alliance with Kemal made it clear that the tactical approach to revolution in the East would remain unchanged:

We do not for a moment regret telling the Turkish communists that their first task after the formation of the party was to support the national liberation movement ... Even now, with the persecutions, we say to our Turkish comrades, do not let the present moment blind you to the near future. Defend yourself against your persecutors ... but do not forget that historically the time has not yet come to take up the

decisive battle; you still have far to go. 19

A similar theme was pursued by Bukharin at the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party when he made the point that, despite their persecution, the Turkish communists were playing a revolutionary role by contributing to the destruction of imperialism. 20

The experience in Turkey was subsequently repeated in Persia where, in the interests of forming an anti-imperialist alliance with nationalist forces, the Comintern and the Soviet Government once more abandoned the comparatively weak local communist party.

Whether or not Comintern and Soviet complicity in the rise to power of two nationalist governments at the expense of the colonial powers would serve the interests of international socialism to the extent anticipated remained to be seen. What was immediately obvious, however, was that the Comintern's tactics had in the Near East abetted the destruction of two local communist parties.

* * * * *

19. Radek, quoted in Degras, Introduction to 'Open Letter to the Communists ...', op. cit., Vol. 1, p 380. Radek was a leading figure in the Bolshevik hierarchy. Of Polish-German origins, he had made his name originally through his revolutionary pamphlets and his belief in internationalism.

20. loc. cit.
First-hand contact between Comintern agents and Chinese communists first occurred in the spring of 1921, through the Comintern's Asian branch at Irkutsk in Siberia. This meeting almost coincided with the formal establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) which, at its foundation congress and in the presence of a Comintern representative, passed a resolution adopting the Leninist organisational model and Marxist-Leninist objectives. Soviet Russia enjoyed tremendous revolutionary status with the Chinese communists, and the influence conferred by that status was reflected in the constitution endorsed by this first All-China Soviet Congress:

The Soviet Government in China declares its readiness to form a revolutionary united front with the world proletariat and all oppressed nations, and proclaims the Soviet Union, the land of proletarian dictatorship, to be its loyal ally. 21

This amounted to an acceptance of the Comintern programme for revolution in Asia. Similarly, the CCP saw no reason to disagree with the Comintern over its analysis of the revolutionary circumstances obtaining in China. Comintern theorists held that China was not yet ready for a socialist revolution, so it would be the CCP's task to

assist with the completion of the necessary bourgeois revolution. This would be achieved through the accepted tactic of class cooperation within nationalist movements. In the specific Chinese case the nationalist alliance was to work for the dual goals of national unification and independence. The Comintern leaders believed, not unreasonably, that a movement of national unity would provide a framework within which the oppressed workers and peasants of China would be able to develop socialist awareness through the process of throwing off the yoke of feudalism, while the attainment of Chinese national independence by definition would mean a defeat for imperialism.

Putting those ideas into practice meant almost inevitably that an alliance would have to be formed with the most powerful nationalist party, the Guomindang (Kuomintang) led by Dr Sun Yatsen. An alliance accordingly was concluded in January 1924. From the outset this arrangement reflected the Comintern's appalling ignorance of the CCP, the Guomindang and conditions in China. The basic theory behind the

Comintern policy may have been sound enough, but, as had also been the case in Turkey, the particular circumstances to which that theory was being applied simply were not understood well enough. There is little doubt that China was becoming ready for some sort of socio-political change, but the situation there was so complex that the most astute and informed leadership clearly was a *sine qua non* of success. Regrettably for the CCP, the Comintern did not manifest those qualities, particularly when it came to the matter of understanding the Guomindang.

The fact was that under Sun Yatsen the Guomindang's social objectives - while unquestionably an improvement on those of the Manchus and the colonial powers - were strictly limited, expressed as they were in vague terms of improving 'people's livelihood' and aspiring to 'social betterment'.

There was even less cause for confidence regarding the nature of the Guomindang once Sun Yatsen was succeeded as leader by General Jiang Kaishek (Chiang Kai-shek) in 1925. Jiang

23. As C.P. FitzGerald has observed, 'It is true that Dr Sun's three principles, the basic doctrine of his party, included in the third, people's livelihood, a vague and imprecise aspiration to social betterment. But whether this principle meant in practice Socialism, the Welfare State, or merely some measures of modern hygiene, better communications and other accompaniments of a developed capitalist society, was left obscure ... It was not on democracy that the new revolutionary appeal was based, but on nationalism'. C.P. FitzGerald, *Revolution in China*, London, 1952, pp 50-51.
had no real notion of reform. He ascribed the evils affecting China solely to foreign imperialism, ignoring the possibility of any deep-seated national social malaise: his vision of political life in China after a nationalist revolution was little different to the system he wished to supplant, save that feudal power would be exercised by a Guomindang central government instead of regional warlords and foreigners. That most bourgeois of institutions, parliamentary democracy, was not on his agenda; indeed, in many respects Jiang's promotion of militarism and authoritarianism most resembled fascism. If the Guomindang seemed to offer promise in terms of achieving the first task - viz. anti-imperialism - of the nationalist phase of China's revolution, it offered nothing as far as the second task of anti-feudalism was concerned. From a reformist/revolutionary perspective this would appear to have made the organisation a dubious proposition. At the very least, its members needed to be treated with great caution. The moribund nature of a party based on only one belief - nationalism - was succinctly captured by C.P. FitzGerald when he wrote:

Nationalism was not enough ... Democracy was manifestly not the ideal or the practice of the [Guomindang] regime; it repudiated the past, yet seemed to hanker after Confucianism; it was not Christian, although many of its leaders

were baptised Christians. To what end, to what vision of the future, the Kuomintang progressed, no one really knew. Not many of its members cared. 25

Notwithstanding this, the Comintern threw its full support behind Jiang Kaishek. Russian weapons, money and military advisers were sent to the Guomindang, while officers from the party, including the General himself, went to Moscow for training. The Guomindang was even given associate membership of the Executive of the Comintern. 26 Leadership of the united front in China was placed firmly in Guomindang hands, as Zinoviev acknowledged in a telegram sent to Jiang Kaishek following the General's accession to the leadership:

The Executive of the Communist International will do everything in its power to explain to the broad working masses of all countries the significance of Sun Yat-sen's work. It is convinced that all sections of the Communist International will give support to the Kuomintang party, which will carry Sun Yat-sen's cause to a successful end ... 27

This sentiment was faithfully echoed by the CCP, who in the manifesto issued by their Third Congress accepted that "... the KMT should be the central force of the revolution

The Guomindang-CCP alliance was most successful in achieving national unification, for by early 1927 its forces had occupied the key centres of the North and the authority of the new central government was generally accepted. Benefit had also been derived by the communists in terms of numbers of active members, for in six years the membership of the CCP had grown from less than 100 to over 58,000. It was at this stage, however, that the militarily far stronger Guomindang decided to move against its communist associates, whose ideas and values had always been anathema to Jiang Kaishek, and whose support he no longer needed.

Jiang acted ruthlessly, his intention being to destroy the CCP as an alternative government. Ironically the massacre began in Shanghai, which not three weeks before the communists had helped capture. The CCP was no match for the overwhelmingly superior forces of the Guomindang: M.N. Roy assessed that about 25,000 bona fide and alleged communists were killed in the spring of 1927, in a savage campaign from which the party did not recover for many years.

Having routed the communists, Jiang


Kaishek began to implement policies which clearly identified him as being little more than another feudal ruler, albeit one who had largely succeeded in unifying China and establishing some degree of national independence. Those policies had never, of course, been secret. Basically, Jiang maintained the status quo in the countryside, reached mutual agreement with those warlords who remained powerful, and concluded more favourable arrangements with the occupying imperialist powers.

It must be stressed that this disastrous reverse did not necessarily invalidate the theoretical analysis which underpinned the CCP-Guomindang alliance. The Comintern's failure was not so much one of theory, but rather one of tactics and leadership. Quite simply, the Comintern seemed out of touch with reality and incapable of reading clear warning signs that tactical flexibility was demanded. One prime example of this came in the wake of the shooting of a number of Chinese demonstrators by foreign troops in Shanghai in 1925 following an anti-colonial protest. Chinese from a wide social spectrum were outraged by the foreigner's actions, to the extent that a wave of radical dissent broke out in numerous important centres. As a consequence of this new movement, workers' and peasants' organisations not only grew in size rapidly, but also began to make demands for change which far exceeded those endorsed by the Comintern
in the alliance with the Guomindang. However, analysts in far-off Moscow had no real appreciation of the extent of this radicalisation, and instructed the CCP to curb the movement. The Comintern assessment was that China was not ready for radical change, that circumstances were not right for social revolution, and that nothing should be done which might place at risk the nationalist movement. CCP officials thus found themselves instructed to inhibit popular social agitation in the interests of preserving the alliance.31

Equally blinkered was the Comintern's understanding of the essential nature of the Guomindang. This failing was most apparent in the gross underestimation made of the capabilities of the organisation's leadership. Early in 1927 Chinese communists had become keenly aware that the Guomindang might turn against them at any moment. There were good reasons for the CCP to be nervous, for in March 1926 Jiang Kaishek had ordered the arrest of numerous Soviet political advisers and communist political commissars working with the Guomindang.32

31. 'Extracts from a Manifesto of the ECCI, Rilu, and YCI against Imperialist Atrocities in China', Degras, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp 218-220 (8 June 1925).
Addressing the 14th CPSU Congress after the Shanghai incident, Zinoviev stated 'There was a tendency [within the CCP] ... of carrying the movement to an acute phase, even to armed insurrection. The Comintern gave a directive against these moves'.

CCP leaders had been so alarmed they had proposed a pre-emptive attack then and there. Despite some uneasiness Comintern officials held firm to the line that the alliance would be the springboard for dealing the necessary 'blow ... at the economic foundations of imperialist power' and therefore should be preserved at almost any cost. It is interesting to note that the arrests were never mentioned in either the communist press or ECCI resolutions.\(^\text{33}\)

At the start of 1927 the CCP again suggested that it was time to break the alliance, but the Comintern, working through its agent Mikhail Borodin, insisted that circumstances were not suitable: the nationalist front had more to achieve before the communists would be in a position to 'seize power from within'. So strong was the Comintern's commitment to the united front that in early April 1927 it went so far as to advise CCP officials to bury or hide the weapons of their more radical factions in order to circumvent the possibility of an attack on the Guomindang.\(^\text{34}\) It was only days after this extraordinary advice that Jiang Kaishek turned his troops against the CCP.

An interesting analysis of the Comintern's failure was made by Leon Trotsky in 1928. Trotsky at

\(^{33}\) ibid, p 276.

\(^{34}\) Snow, op. cit., p 163.
that time was engaged in an ideologically-derived power struggle with Stalin, so his objectivity may be questioned as Stalin was intimately associated with Comintern policy. Nevertheless, Trotsky's analysis contains much logic. In his opinion the Comintern had become preoccupied with completing the nationalist phase of the revolution, to the detriment of the ultimate objective of their involvement in China, viz. socialist revolution. He argued that:

This goal [of socialism] could be achieved only if the revolution did not halt merely at the solution of the bourgeois-democratic tasks but continued to unfold, passing from one stage to the next, i.e. continued to develop uninterruptedly (or permanently) and thus lead China toward a socialist development. This is precisely what Marx understood by the term 'permanent revolution'. How can we, on the one hand, speak of a non-capitalist path of development for China and, on the other, deny the permanent character of the revolution in general? 35

Trotsky was suggesting that the Comintern leadership had been guilty of tactical ineptitude, which in turn prevented it from proceeding along the path of permanent revolution which he had in 1906 identified as a prerequisite for a Marxist revolution in a backward state, and which Lenin had implemented in 1917.

The difference between Russia in 1917 and China in 1927 was that the Comintern's determination to support the Guomindang nationalists - whose notions of social reform were as much feudal as bourgeois-democratic - locked them into a stagnant alliance. The importance of opposing one's temporary allies 'in all points where the interests [of the revolutionary masses] arise', and of always remembering that 'the proletariat is a class apart, which tomorrow may be opposing its allies of today' seemed to have been forgotten or ignored.\(^{36}\) In short, the Comintern's leaders had failed to follow the guidance of Marx and Lenin concerning the necessity in any alliance to protect the independent class interests of the revolutionary masses. They had 'merged' with the Guomindang instead of 'upholding [the] independence' of their forces.\(^{37}\)

\* \* \* \* \*

Notwithstanding the failures in Turkey and China, this essay has been suggesting that the Comintern's basic concept for revolution in Asia was not necessarily wrong. In fact, until the united front policy was abruptly turned on its head by the Comintern's Sixth

\(^{36}\) See pp 10-11 and p 16 above.

\(^{37}\) See p 31 above.
Congress in 1928, communist revolutionaries in Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh had been enjoying considerable success by skilful application of precisely that concept.

While China and Vietnam were both encompassed by the Comintern's broad definition of the 'Far East' and 'colonial and semi-colonial countries', marked differences existed between their respective socio-political conditions - a factor of the utmost significance. To a fair extent the circumstances in Vietnam were more favourable to the communists. Instead of having to confront the complex combination of feudal warlords and a variety of occupying powers, the nationalists in Vietnam were able to focus squarely on the one major enemy, colonial France. Further, while a number of influential bourgeois nationalist parties emerged to oppose the French, none ever achieved the dominance ultimately enjoyed by the Guomindang; thus, Vietnamese communists had more scope for taking the initiative than did their Chinese counterparts. The astute 'on-the-spot' leadership provided by Ho Chi Minh was another most significant factor (Mao Zedong's remarkable influence on the CCP was not felt until several years after the 1927 massacre). Many more complex issues naturally were involved, but those mentioned above provided a basis from which the Vietnamese communists - unlike their contemporaries in Turkey and China - were able to take the lead in revolutionary activities, at least in the sense of
planning, organising and controlling events.

Before discussing the tactics used by the Vietnamese communists, some brief comments on Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary perspectives are warranted because of the extraordinary influence he exerted on events in Indo-China. The criticism is sometimes made of the Vietnamese leader that he was motivated more by patriotism - i.e. nationalism - than by any commitment to communism. It is true that patriotism initially drew Ho Chi Minh to Marxism-Leninism: in one of his earliest essays he wrote that he admired Lenin as a 'great patriot'. The Bolshevik leader's 'Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions' made a particular impact in this regard, for within its implacable hostility to imperialism Ho Chi Minh saw 'the path to our [Vietnamese] liberation'. As he later stated, the initial attraction lay in the notion of liberation, not communism. However, this early perception of Marxism-Leninism did not

38. Ho Chi Minh used many aliases during his lifetime, and for most of the period reviewed in this essay was known as Nguyen Ai Quoc. Here, however, the better-known name, which he adopted in July 1942, is used.

39. In 1933 Ho Chi Minh's book The Road to Revolution was attacked, apparently with the Comintern's approval, as 'a document which reeks of Nationalist stench'. Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945, Ithaca, 1982, p 184.

endure. Through his involvement with anti-imperialist organisations in Europe, Ho Chi Minh's political perspectives became more radical: he began to believe that colonisation had been built and sustained by violence, and could be overcome only by violence. As he became increasingly politicised, Ho Chi Minh turned more to the revolutionary content of Marxism-Leninism: gradually he 'came upon the fact that only Socialism and Communism [could] liberate the oppressed peoples and the working people throughout the world from slavery'.

An important aspect of this radicalisation was his belief in universal revolutionary action, evident in the preceding quotation. Internationalism was a central issue to Ho Chi Minh, and his essays and speeches consistently reflected a commitment to worldwide social and economic change. At the Fifth Comintern Congress held in Moscow in mid-1924 he criticised delegates for their inactivity in the whole colonial sphere. It is also important to note that as early as 1922 he had identified the potential long-term danger nationalism posed to communists - a perception which doubtless would have subsequently been sharpened by the way in which the Guomindang turned against the CCP in 1927. The point here is that Ho Chi Minh's development as a revolutionary

41. ibid, pp 6-7.

42. Degras, Introduction to 'Extracts from a Manifesto to the Peoples of the East issued by the Fifth Comintern Congress'; op. cit., Vol. 2, p 156 (July 1924).
left him exceedingly well-placed to appreciate the pitfalls likely to be encountered during nationalist-based alliances of convenience.

When it came to the question of tactics, Ho Chi Minh was no different from Lenin (and, later, Mao Zedong) in not allowing himself to be circumscribed by rigid adherence to doctrine, particularly during the first stage of the revolution when the emphasis in a colonial or semi-colonial country had to be on political rather than economic change. Ho Chi Minh fully appreciated the importance of revolutionary theory but, at the same time, like Lenin, he also believed that the only purpose of theory was action. Given Vietnam's circumstances, the first phase of that action could best be effected by a broad-based united front of all anti-colonial factions, in which the impetus for action would come more from the degree of oppression the revolutionary factions had sustained than through the precise mode of production. Ho Chi Minh was well aware that in such circumstances the paramount question for communists was that of class interests, and here, his insistence on the pre-eminence of the party as the guide and protector of the correct proletarian line was strictly in accordance with orthodox Marxism-Leninism and Comintern directives.

The Comintern's Asian policy began to prosper in Vietnam when Ho Chi Minh returned from the USSR in 1925, ostensibly to work as a translator for the Comintern operative Mikhail Borodin in Canton, but in reality charged with the task of establishing an Indo-Chinese Communist Party (ICP). The medium he selected was the reformist, anti-colonialist organisation Tam Tam Xa, which he reconstituted as the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League, Thanh Nien.

From the outset Thanh Nien reflected Ho Chi Minh's conviction that action by a united front of all nationalist factions was the only way of effecting a Marxist-Leninist revolution in the East. Whereas most other anti-French organisations were characterised by either a narrow membership base or a crude ideology, or both, and thus were never likely to secure the necessary breadth of support, Thanh Nien's programme was consciously directed at all sections of the community. The two main elements in its programme were an emphasis, first, on patriotism, and, second, on the need for social as well as

44. Foremost among these organisations was the Vietnamese Nationalist Front (VNQDD). Its programme rested almost entirely on violent action and ignored issues such as agrarian reform and working conditions. After an ill-considered uprising at Yen Bay in February 1930 the VNQDD was destroyed by the French.
political change. The second element was indicative of the attention paid to protecting class interests. With this broadly patriotic and carefully politicised platform, Thanh Nien attracted widespread support, ultimately emerging as the 'embodiment of the national idea'.

As well as mobilising considerable anti-colonial support, Thanh Nien represented a skilful manoeuvre by Ho Chi Minh to establish a powerful communist party in Vietnam. This aspect of the League was not highly publicised by its convenors, although neither was it kept secret. Emulating a classical Leninist tactic, Thanh Nien was from the beginning guided by an elite vanguard of about six committed Marxist-Leninists, a group which Ho Chi Minh regarded as 'a future Communist Party'. Through its regular news sheet, Thanh Nien gradually introduced much of its membership to communist theory. This was done with subtlety and caution; for example, it was not until the sixtieth issue that Ho Chi Minh explicitly connected the future of Vietnam to the Communist Party by stating that 'only a Communist Party can ensure the happiness of Annam'. By gradually exposing its mass membership to Marxism, Thanh Nien's leaders hoped to further the League's objective of promoting 'the National revolution (the destruction of the French and the

45. 'Thanh Nien ... postulated a new Vietnamese society on the basis of a double revolution, both political ("national independence") and social ("land to the tiller").' Huynh Kim Khanh, op. cit., p 64.
reconquest of the country) and then world revolution (the overthrow of imperialism and the realisation of communism). 46

It is noteworthy that Thanh Nien flourished for several years despite periodic severe repression from the French. When the League did start to disintegrate in the late 1920s, it was more as a consequence of internecine divisions within the Comintern than of either action by the French or the failure of revolutionary theory.

CHAPTER IV

POWER POLITICS IN THE USSR

Comintern decision making had lived under the shadow of Soviet foreign policy since the organisation's foundation. In 1928 it was engulfed by that shadow as the Soviet hierarchy responded to a series of dramatic events. Foremost among these was the culmination of the ideological struggle between Stalin and Trotsky over socio-economic development in the USSR. This was a struggle of epic proportions, in which the central issue was that of whether or not the Soviet Union should give priority to permanent revolution internationally or to building socialism at home.

Powerful domestic and international pressures bore down on the protagonists. International pressures seemed to be mounting against the USSR from the mid-1920s onwards. These originated from two main sources. In the first instance the Soviet leadership had to deal with the depressing failures of the international socialist movement, manifest most graphically in the crushing defeat of the German socialists in 1923 and the Chinese disaster of 1927. Second, and more immediately threatening, there was the re-emergence from the divisions created by World War I of a capitalist Europe seemingly united in its determination to destroy the world's only socialist state. Here, a number of events were particularly significant in raising Soviet fears of a war against socialism to a new
level. One of the most notorious incidents was associated with the victory in England in 1924 of the Tories over the first Labour Government. On the eve of the election the Daily Mail had published a letter allegedly written by the President of the Comintern, Zinoviev, which contained instructions to British communists regarding the organisation of secret revolutionary groups in the British armed forces in preparation for civil war.\(^1\) While there were doubts about the letter's authenticity the Soviets were blamed, and to some extent public hostility towards the USSR and, by association, socialists generally, was reflected in the electoral rejection of the Labour Party. The Soviet role in the traumatic general strike called by the British Trades Union Congress in support of coal miners in 1925 was seen as further evidence of a communist intention to promote civil disorder in the United Kingdom. Again, there was no reliable evidence linking either the

---

1. The Daily Mail advised its readers: 'A "Very Secret" letter of instructions from Moscow, which we publish below, discloses a great Bolshevik plot to paralyse the British Army and Navy and to plunge the country into civil war. The letter is addressed by the Bolsheviks of Moscow to the Soviet Government's servants in Great Britain, the Communist Party, who in turn are the masters of Mr Ramsay MacDonald's Government'. Quoted in Hopkirk, op. cit., p 194.

As Hopkirk notes, whether or not the letter was authentic is now academic, but at the time it made a powerful impact.
Comintern or the Soviet Government to the Trade Union Congress's action, although the strike did attract vocal public support from Zinoviev and Soviet trade unions, while a Soviet offer to assist the British strikers financially was generally not well-received. The final incident in this period of growing international tension was the extraordinary 'Arcos affair' in 1927. With the approval of the Tory Cabinet - who had been swayed by the passionately anti-communist Winston Churchill - British police forced their way into the offices of the Soviet Trade Delegation and Arcos Ltd, the USSR's official trade agency in London, in breach of the diplomatic immunity which had been granted under the trade agreement of 1921. British officials alleged that the offices were a centre of espionage and subversion, but little evidence of this was found. Nevertheless, only twelve days after the raid the House of Commons voted overwhelmingly in favour of severing all relations with Moscow.

The fear these events generated among the Soviet hierarchy was exacerbated as the normalisation of diplomatic relations gradually reunified Western Europe. In 1924 the French withdrew from German territory in the Ruhr, and in October 1925 the Locarno Treaty was formalised. Both of these actions were perceived by the USSR as 'turning' the Germans eastwards, away from Europe and against the USSR; and, indeed, in this respect, the Locarno Treaty, which recognised Germany's western
boundaries but remained non-committal over the east, was less than subtle. Germany's admission to the League of Nations in September 1926 appeared - not unreasonably - to be one more step along the path to a united capitalist attack against the Soviet Union. War fears in the USSR were high.

On top of this international pressure, the Soviet hierarchy was still grappling with the domestic socio-economic crisis which was a legacy of World War I, the 1917 revolution, the Civil War and the famine of the early 1920s: the leadership knew that eventually the complex theoretical and practical issue of what to do about NEP and the peasants had to be faced. In short, the USSR was under enormous pressure on all fronts, and it was in this intense political atmosphere that the ideological struggle between Stalin and Trotsky took place.

Two distinctly different responses to meet their challenges seemed available to the Soviet leadership. They could either turn inwards and seek to build the strength of socialism in the Soviet Union alone, or they

2. Participants in the Locarno Agreements included France, Britain, Italy, Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

3. NEP had reintroduced capitalism to Soviet Russia on a widespread, albeit controlled, basis; while, in the Marxian analysis, the peasants who had been the Bolsheviks' allies in the 1917 revolution were inherently petty-bourgeois.
could look outwards by attempting to export their revolution. The latter strategy had, of course, been the *raison d'être* of the Comintern and, as has been discussed in previous Chapters, for various reasons had resulted in a series of distressing reverses. Clearly, whichever line was now adopted would be of the utmost significance for the Soviet-dominated Comintern.

Trotsky was a committed internationalist who constantly emphasised the importance in backward states of permanent - i.e. continuing - revolution. In principle this should have made him an advocate of the Comintern and its efforts to promote world revolution, particularly in colonial and semi-colonial states. He did in fact strongly support the notion of Comintern, but he gradually became one of the most vocal and effective critics of the organisation's tactics, to the extent that to be guilty of 'Trotskyism' eventually became the most heinous crime within the Third International. Trotsky's attacks on the Comintern centred on his belief that its leaders had failed to adhere to the essential practice, clearly identified by Marx and Lenin, of always defending the class interests of the progressive revolutionary forces. It was, he argued, precisely that failing which

---

4. See, for example, 'The Program of the International: Revolution or a Program of Socialism in One Country?' in Trotsky, *The Third International after Lenin*, pp 3-73.
precipitated the Chinese fiasco; on one occasion he derided Stalin as 'the gravedigger of the Chinese Revolution' because of the Georgian's support for the CCP-Guomindang alliance.

This key theoretical point was made with characteristic vigour in Trotsky's 'Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution', which he prepared as a critique of the draft programme for the Comintern's Sixth Congress in 1928. Trotsky argued that the Comintern had been derelict through its careless endorsement of nationalist alliances. He accepted the basic efficacy of the 'nationalist' strategy, but insisted that it had to be circumscribed by precise limits, which the Comintern had failed to observe. In a passage reminiscent of Lenin's essay on 'The Tasks Facing Russia's Social Democrats', he stated that:

The sole 'condition' for every agreement with the bourgeoisie, for each separate, practical, and expedient agreement adapted to each given case, consists in not allowing either the organizations or the banners to become mixed directly or indirectly for a single day or a single hour; it consists in distinguishing between the Red and the Blue, and in not believing for an instant in the capacity or readiness of the bourgeoisie either to lead a genuine struggle against


6. See p 16 above.
imperialism or not to obstruct the workers and peasants. 7

As was said long ago, purely practical agreements, such as do not bind us in the least and do not oblige us to do anything politically, can be concluded with the devil himself, if that is advantageous at a given moment. But it would be absurd in such a case to demand that the devil should generally become converted to Christianity, and that he use his horns not against workers and peasants but exclusively for pious deeds. In presenting such conditions we act in reality as the devil's advocates, and beg him to let us become his godfathers. 8

This analysis was consistent with the theses Trotsky had presented to the ECCI's Eighth Plenum on the Chinese Question in which he had placed the blame for the Chinese fiasco squarely on the inept 'bureaucratic leadership' of Stalin and the Comintern.9 In Trotsky's opinion, the continuing promotion of world revolution by the Comintern was essential, but, in the process, far more attention had to be paid to protecting the class interests of the proletariat.

The same 'leftist' approach was manifest in Trotsky's proposals for dealing with the USSR's domestic


8. ibid, p 169. Emphasis in original.

problems. In concert with his associates of the so-called 'ultra-left triumvirate', Kamenev and Zinoviev, Trotsky had for some years been calling for the introduction in the Soviet Union of rapid industrialisation and the collectivisation of agriculture. Stalin had opposed this proposal, taking a more moderate stance by arguing for a continued degree of independence for middle and poor peasants, and opposing in principle at least the scale of industrialisation advocated by the triumvirs.

However, by about mid-1927 Stalin had come to the realisation that dramatic changes were needed if the Soviets were to meet their international and domestic challenges. The course he decided on was precisely that of his opponents: rapid industrialisation and the collectivisation of agriculture. Stalin was turning to the left, for industrialisation would lead to a rapid growth of the proletariat, while the collectivisation of agriculture would...

10. This change of direction received its most important and forceful expression in Stalin's addresses to the Fifteenth Congress of the CPSU (B) in December 1927. In 'The Success of Socialist Construction and the Internal Situation in the USSR', Works, Vol. 10, p 299, Stalin spelt out the new line:

'... the party's policy should promote the acceleration of the rate of development of industry and ensure for industry the leading role in the whole of the national economy ... [while] ... the socialist forms of economy should be ensured ever-increasing relative importance at the expense of the private-commodity and capitalist sectors ...'
agriculture of necessity demanded the expropriation of the inherently petty-bourgeois peasantry. However, in contrast to Trotsky's vision of international socialist development, Stalin's intention was to look inwards. Trotsky wanted permanent revolution internationally and Stalin wanted its antithesis, socialism in one country.

Once Stalin emerged as the dominant figure in Soviet politics at the end of 1927, it was certain that this seminal change in his strategy would flow on to the Comintern: in particular, alliances with the bourgeoisie clearly would become ideologically questionable. Before turning to that issue, however, a brief comment on Stalin's extraordinary actions vis a vis Comintern policy between April 1927 and early 1928 is worthwhile. As was mentioned above, Trotsky had been calling for a radicalisation of Comintern policy on nationalist alliances for some years. Stalin was now faced with the embarrassing problem that his new, leftist domestic policy was inconsistent with the types of alliances - viz. between communist parties and almost any national bourgeois movement - which he had to date been ratifying for the Comintern.

As long as Trotsky remained on the scene the dictates of the power struggle made it impossible for Stalin to change the Comintern policy, for this would amount to an admission that his rival had been correct all the time. Once Trotsky was exiled in December 1927
Stalin was able to promote his 'new' radical theses without embarrassment, and this he did. In the intervening period, however, he found himself in the awkward position of having to defend existing communist party/bourgeois-nationalist alliances.

Thus, only three weeks after the Shanghai massacre Stalin argued for a continuation of the alliance with the Guomindang by suggesting that Jiang Kaishek's party still contained a credible left-wing faction:

The Opposition considers it inexpedient for the Communists to participate in the Kuomintang ... This means to abandon the field of battle and to throw our allies in the Kuomintang at the mercy of the enemies of the revolution ... [of] giving away the banner of the Kuomintang, the most popular amongst all the banners in China, into the hands of the Right-wing Kuomintang elements.

Thus it turns out that by speaking in favour of the withdrawal of the Communist Party from the Kuomintang at the present moment the Opposition is playing into the hands of the enemies of the Chinese Revolution. 11

In a subsequent address he went to some lengths to give credit to the anti-imperialist objectives of the Guomindang, while notably failing to make any comment regarding the party's anti-feudalism. 12 So it was that


even after the massacre, China's communist leaders found themselves being pressured, solely because of power politics within the USSR, to continue in the alliance with their Guomindang persecutors.

By the time the Sixth Congress of the Comintern convened in Moscow in September 1928 Stalin was in firm control in the USSR. The foreign policy implications of socialism in one country were now made clear. Stalin had abandoned any hope of world revolution in the immediate future, and the survival of the USSR had become the main imperative for the world communist movement. Delegates endorsed a resolution on 'The Soviet Union and its Obligations to the International Revolution', the contents of which were in fact a direct contradiction of the title, for the only obligations recognised were those to the USSR:

As the country of proletarian dictatorship and socialist construction, of tremendous working-class achievements, of the alliance of proletariat and peasantry, as the country of a new civilization advancing under the banner of Marxism, the Soviet Union was bound to become the base of the international movement of all oppressed classes, the centre of the international revolution, the most significant factor in world history ... The Soviet Union is the most powerful centre of attraction for the colonial peoples fighting for their liberation.

The Soviet Union is the true fatherland of the proletariat, the strongest pillar of its achievements, and the principal factor in its emancipation throughout the world. This obliges the
international proletariat to forward the success of socialist construction in the Soviet Union and to defend the country of proletarian dictatorship by every means against the attacks of the capitalist powers. 13

As far as the East was concerned, delegates gave the revolutionary movement in the 'colonies and semi-colonies' a fair degree of attention, eventually adopting a lengthy thesis on the subject. 14 The proletarianisation of the Soviet Union was reflected in this thesis, particularly in relation to revolutionary alliances.

After noting events in the colonies in recent years, the thesis arrived at its central conclusion in a section entitled 'Need for Communist Independence'. This passage identified the dangers which might arise if, in concluding nationalist alliances, socialist revolutionaries incorrectly estimated the character of the 'big national bourgeoisie' and the 'petty-bourgeois parties'. The Comintern's assessment was that, as a general rule, bourgeois parties would at some stage during an alliance against imperialism and feudalism shift from the course of revolution to that of reform. 15 Not only was this tendency of the bourgeoisie to retreat into the camp of


15. ibid, p 34.
'national-reformist parties' inconsistent with the struggle against the rule of the feudal-imperialist bloc, but it also placed them 'in critical contradiction' to the class interests of the proletariat.

The Comintern here was identifying the root cause of its failure in the East. It then went on to present its answer to that failure - the proletarianisation of the revolutionary movements in the colonies and semi-colonies:

It is absolutely essential that the Communist Parties in these countries should from the very beginning *demarcate themselves in the most clear-cut fashion*, both politically and organisationally, from all the petty-bourgeois groups and parties. In so far as the needs of the revolutionary struggle demand it, a temporary co-operation is permissible, and in certain circumstances even a temporary union between the Communist Party and the national revolutionary movement, provided that the latter is a genuine revolutionary movement, that it genuinely struggles against the ruling power and that its representatives do not put obstacles in the way of the Communists educating and organising in a revolutionary sense the peasants and wide masses of the exploited. In every such co-operation, however, it is essential to take the most careful precautions in order that this co-operation does not degenerate into a fusion of the Communist movement with the bourgeois-revolutionary movement. The Communist movement in all circumstances must unconditionally preserve the independence of the proletarian movement and its own
independence in agitation, in organisation and in demonstrations. 16

The repetitive use of the adjective 'genuine' in this passage is instructive. Having ignored Marx's and Lenin's strictures regarding the crucial importance of both leadership and the need to protect class interests, the Comintern was now, after eight years, abandoning the Marxist-Leninist strategy for revolution in the East of class cooperation within nationalist alliances. It could be argued that, in a belated attempt to rectify years of inept leadership, the Comintern was throwing out the baby with the bath water.

* * * * *

The radical change of direction by the Comintern was one thing; whether or not that change was of any consequence was another. Given the organisation's lamentable record, its continuing relevance and credibility must have been questioned. The matter of the Comintern's relevance must be examined from two different perspectives: that of Moscow's, and that of Asia's. As far as the ruling clique of the Soviet Union was concerned, the Comintern was a dead letter after 1928. That is not to say the organisation was totally ignored; on the contrary, instructions and advice were still

16. ibid, p 35. Emphasis in original.
transmitted to colonial revolutionaries under the
imprimatur of Comintern, and agents were still despatched
to provide leadership in accordance with the prevailing
doctrine. Further, as will be discussed in more detail
shortly, some leading Asian revolutionaries continued to
pay the utmost respect to the Comintern's tactical
guidance. Notwithstanding all that, the fact remained
that the Third International no longer enjoyed the -
perhaps visionary - status originally conferred upon it by
Lenin in 1919 as the highest expression of the struggle of
the world-wide socialist movement.

With Lenin as its patron the Comintern had
convened four times in the period between 1919 and his
death in January 1924. Once Lenin had died, however,
there was a gap of four years between the Fifth and Sixth
Congresses, and seven years between the Sixth and Seventh.
Perhaps the Congresses were delayed in the mid-1920s by
the internal political machinations then occupying much of
the Soviet hierarchy's attention, but that would not have
been the case subsequently. The Seventh Congress in 1935
was the last formal gathering of the Comintern.

There is little doubt that, from at least as
early as the struggle to succeed Lenin began, Stalin
simply was not interested in the Comintern, for by its
very nature it was likely to provide allies and support

17. See, for example, O. Braun, A Comintern Agent in
China, St. Lucia, 1982.
for Trotsky. Stalin's main concern therefore was to suppress its activities and turn it against Trotsky. Unlike Lenin, who spoke at every Comintern Congress during his lifetime, Stalin never once formally addressed delegates. Trotsky on various occasions noted Stalin's contempt for foreign communists, while, according to Boris Souvarine, the Georgian was once heard to remark that 'the Communist International represents nothing and only exists by our support'. If Stalin did perceive some value in the organisation after he assumed power, it was at best as a tool of Soviet foreign policy.

Asian revolutionaries retained a much more respectful attitude towards the Comintern, continuing to defer to its directives in appearances at least. Appearances were not, however, all that they sometimes seemed, as events in China showed. Following the Guomindang coup the numbers of Comintern agents in China dwindled from scores to a handful and it became extremely difficult for the USSR to maintain direct contact with the CCP. The Soviets' appreciation of the situation in China became even less informed than before. Nevertheless the titular leadership of the CCP continued to defer to Moscow

and the Comintern: on one notable occasion Li Lisan, head of the CCP's Politburo, hastened off to Moscow to 'recant' numerous tactical errors committed by his party - even though the CCP had in most instances simply been following Comintern instructions. Chinese leaders apparently found it difficult to criticise their Soviet forebears, for even the comparatively independent Mao Zedong never openly attacked the Comintern. 21

Mao Zedong's actions were, however, far more eloquent than the public face he presented to Moscow. It was in the period immediately following the Guomindang counter-revolution that the power base of communism in China gradually started to shift in concert with the emergence of Mao's creative revolutionary genius. The catalyst for this shift was the development under Mao's guidance of an independent communist force structured in accordance with his analysis of China's specific circumstances. Mao's strategy for revolution in China was based, in the first instance, on the 'colossal' force of the peasantry, which would 'rise ... like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, [would] be able to hold it back'. 22 A protracted war would be fought: rural


guerilla actions would be superseded by larger conventional military actions as the communists grew in strength; eventually, the urban-based Guomindang would be isolated in their cities and then 'strangled' by the rural-based CCP.23 Victory would be followed by the establishment, not of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, but of the People's Democratic Dictatorship, a four-class alliance incorporating the 'working class, the peasant class, the urban petty bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie'.24 The People's Democratic Dictatorship was a political form particularly suited to both the united front concept and realities in China, as Mao subsequently explained:

this new-democratic (Chinese) republic is also different from the socialist republic of the type of the USSR ... the republic of the dictatorship of the proletariat [which is] ... not yet


While those essays were not published until the late 1930s, the concepts they presented had been developed some years before. In relation to the first essay, the editor of the Selected Works commented: 'Comrade Mao Tse-tung wrote this work to sum up the experience of the Second Revolutionary Civil War [defined by Mao as the period 1927-1937] and used it for his lectures at the Red Army College in northern Shensi'.

suitable for revolutions in colonial and semi-colonial countries ... [Following] revolutions in colonies or semi-colonies the form of state and political power will ... be a new-democratic state under the joint dictatorship of several anti-imperialist classes. 25

This analysis and its strategy brought Mao into conflict with Li Lisan, who had complied with the directive of the Comintern's Sixth Congress on 'proletarianising' the revolution by planning a campaign of urban insurrections. Because of his deviation from the Comintern line, Mao was expelled from the CCP's Central Committee, and may even have been expelled from the party for a period. 26 Disciplinary action did not chasten Mao. While the CCP's politburo tried to reconstruct the remnants of the Red Army into a regular (i.e. non-guerilla) unit in order to launch a major conventional offensive against the Guomindang, Mao continued to build his new revolutionary force in areas remote from the cities.

It was of course precisely Mao Zedong's independent action, pursued even while he was paying lip service to Moscow, which laid the foundations of the eventual triumph of the communists in China. The essence


of Mao's attitude towards the Comintern was captured in an interview he gave to Edgar Snow in 1936. Responding to a question on the political relationship between 'Soviet China' and the USSR and Comintern, he stated:

The Third International is an organization in which the vanguard of the world proletariat brings together its collective experience for the benefit of all revolutionary peoples throughout the world. It is not an administrative organization nor has it any political power beyond that of an advisory capacity. Structurally it is not very different from the Second International, though in content it is vastly different. But just as no one would say that in a country where the cabinet is organized by the Social Democrats the Second International is dictator, so it is ridiculous to say that the Third International is dictator in countries where there are Communist parties.

In the USSR the Communist Party is in power, yet even there the Third International does not rule nor does it have any direct political power over the people at all. Similarly, it can be said that although the Communist Party of China is a member of the Comintern, still this in no sense means that Soviet China is ruled by Moscow or by the Comintern. We are certainly not fighting for an emancipated China in order to turn the country over to Moscow! 27

As Mao Zedong slowly established his hold over the entire CCP, so the Comintern began to lose its authority. Indeed, by the mid-1930s the Comintern's main

claim to relevance in China was the entirely negative one that it was partly because of its inept leadership during the 1920s that Mao's alternative revolutionary strategy had evolved.

A different sequence of events unfolded in Vietnam in response to the Sixth Congress's directives on tactics. Ho Chi Minh faithfully implemented the Comintern's instructions to disband the hitherto successful nationalist alliances and, as a consequence, led the rising Vietnamese communists into a period of unmitigated disaster.

The proletarianisation of parties at all levels in colonial countries was intended to prepare the way for the establishment of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat immediately after political power had been won. This created profound problems for Ho Chi Minh, for, given his united front policy, the post-revolutionary political form of the state in Vietnam was more likely to approximate Mao Zedong's concept of a People's Democratic Dictatorship than the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Further, the radical direction taken in the Sixth Congress's resolutions exposed deep factional differences within Thanh Nien, in which an ultra-left group had for some time been agitating against the united front concept. Ideological differences were brought into sharp relief, and the organisation began to disintegrate. By narrowing the definition of 'proletarian internationalism' the
Comintern had exposed the heterogeneous nature of Thanh Nien's membership, thus precipitating the eventual collapse of the League in 1929. 28

In an attempt to resolve the schisms existing in Vietnamese communism after the Comintern's Sixth Congress, a (subsequently renamed) 'Unification Conference' was held in Hong Kong in February 1930, under the chairmanship of Ho Chi Minh. During the course of this Conference the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) was founded, which seemed to indicate that most differences had been settled. However, the Comintern remained dissatisfied, particularly in relation to the need it perceived for greater proletarianisation of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement. Consequently, the First Plenum of the VCP's Central Committee, held eight months later, was instructed by the Comintern to redress the 'serious errors' of the Unification Conference. The VCP was also instructed to change its name to the Indo-Chinese Communist Party (ICP) in order to remove any connotations of nationalism. These changes, which were supported by the ultra-left faction of the ICP, effectively nullified nationalism as a revolutionary instrument for the Vietnamese Marxist-Leninists and, at the same time, undermined Ho Chi Minh's authority. Throughout the 1930s Ho held no known official position in either the Comintern or the ICP,

while his political views and role in the early development of Indo-Chinese communism were severely criticised by some erstwhile colleagues.\textsuperscript{29}

Shortly after the founding of the ICP the Nghe Tinh revolt took place, bringing in its wake a number of important consequences for the communists. Nghe Tinh was essentially a spontaneous peasant uprising, having as its genesis the adverse effects on the Vietnamese countryside of the world economic crisis. A degree of politicisation was, however, evident, especially in the formation by the insurgents of regional governing councils which they called 'soviets'.

The revolt exposed the weakness both of the ICP and the Comintern's proletarianisation strategy. Nghe Tinh created a quandary for the Comintern hierarchy, who were dubious of the revolutionary circumstances existing in Vietnam - particularly in relation to the relative inactivity of the urban workers - but who also did not want to miss an apparently promising opportunity. Comintern officials further appreciated that the feeble state of the communist party in Indo-China inhibited its capacity for leadership. Nevertheless, the Comintern instructed the ICP to lend active support.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, under the Comintern's somewhat diffident directions, the ICP

\textsuperscript{29} ibid, pp 181-184.

leadership tried to guide the insurgents in the correct revolutionary direction. However, now lacking substantial ties to the masses, the party was largely ineffectual, particularly in its attempts to get other factions - such as the urban bourgeoisie - to support the movement. Without the necessary centralised leadership (which in many circumstances one might have expected a strong communist party to provide), the inchoate uprising inevitably collapsed in the face of the savage French reaction. So severe were the reprisals exacted by the French that it was many years before Vietnamese nationalists regained the capacity to mount a mass insurrection.

The outcome of this affair serves to illustrate the difficulties which can arise for active communist revolutionaries when Marx's somewhat mono-factorial theory is interpreted rigidly. Here, the Comintern's insistence on defining revolutionary forces solely in terms of their relationship to the means of production precipitated the disintegration of vigorous anti-imperialist forces in Vietnam.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Under Stalin's influence the Comintern was formally dissolved on 8 June 1943,\(^1\) ostensibly to promote united action between the communists and their Western allies of convenience in the war against fascism. Stalin received unanimous support from the Presidium of the ECCI: various communist party central committees claimed that dissolving Comintern would 'facilitate the union [against Nazi Germany and its allies] ... of all patriots' and 'cut the ground from under the feet of the German fascists, who [had] alleged that Moscow [had] interfered in the affairs of other States'.\(^2\) The Comintern, it was agreed, had 'fulfilled its historic mission ... [and] in its organizational form ... had now outlived itself'. There may have been some truth in that last assessment. More to the point, however, was the fact that Stalin had no interest in the organisation and considered that there were greater gains to be made, in terms of propaganda in the West, by terminating the notorious revolutionary body than were likely to accrue from its continued existence.

Notwithstanding Stalin's indifference and the general lack of interest in the Comintern during its final

---

1. 'Statement of the Presidium of the ECCI on the Dissolution of the Communist International', Degas, \(\text{op. cit.}\), Vol. 3, pp 480-481 (8 June 1943).
2. \textit{ibid}, p 480.
years, the organisation was not entirely moribund during the period between the Sixth Congress in 1928 and its dissolution in 1943. Indeed, the Seventh and final Congress in 1935 had in some respects been a watershed for certain Asian revolutionaries, particularly those of the ICP. The reason for this lay in Stalin's rather belated recognition of the seriousness of the threat posed to the USSR by the rise of fascism: by 1935 the military strength and political ambitions of Germany and Japan were obvious, and both countries held a profound hatred of communists. The Comintern became one of a number of mediums through which the Soviets acted to try to forestall the fascists. Stalin's response may have been belated, but the magnitude of the perceived threat was clearly recognised in the scope of the Seventh Congress's call to action. It was clear that fascism endangered the very existence of the Soviet Union; thus, if the threat was to be met all resources had to be marshalled. Accordingly, the 'proletarianisation' strategy of 1928 was abandoned. There was no equivocation in the Seventh Congress's resolution on 'Fascism, Working-Class Unity, and the tasks of the Comintern':

3. In November 1936 Germany and Japan concluded an Anti-Comintern Pact, directed against their mutual political opponent, the USSR. The Pact was subsequently joined by Italy in January 1937 and Spain in March 1939.
... fascism [is] the bitterest enemy of all the toilers ... it is imperative that unity of action be established between all sections of the working class, irrespective of what organisation they belong to ...

Without for a moment giving up their independent work in the sphere of communist education, organization and mobilization of the masses, the communists, in order to render the road to unity of action easier for the workers, must strive to secure joint action with the social-democratic parties, reformist trade unions and other organizations of the toilers against the class enemies of the proletariat, on the basis of short or long-term agreements. At the same time, attention must be directed mainly to the development of mass action in the various localities, conducted by the lower organizations through local agreements. 4

This 'new' line was of course nothing more than a resurrection of the Marxist-Leninist analyses and strategies of the early 1920s: it is noticeable that the prose and sentiments of the Seventh Congress's resolution bear a striking similarity to Lenin's tract on 'Left-Wing Communism' and his addresses on the National and Colonial Question to the early Comintern Congresses. 5 Indeed, the Comintern's Secretary-General, Georgi Dimitrov, reminded Congress delegates that the Popular Front strategy was a Leninist inspiration.


5. See p 31 and pp 34-35 above.
The particular conditions obtaining in the East received attention from the Congress, which included in its anti-fascist resolution special reference to the tactics to be adopted in the colonies:

In the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the most important task facing the communists consists in working to establish an anti-imperialist people's front. For this purpose it is necessary to draw the widest masses into the national liberation movement against growing imperialist exploitation, against cruel enslavement, for the driving out of the imperialists, for the independence of the country; to take an active part in the mass anti-imperialist movements headed by the national reformists and strive to bring about joint action with the national-revolutionary and national-reformist organizations on the basis of a definite anti-imperialist platform ... 6

As Huynh Kim Khanh has noted, the increased support which communist parties attracted around the world during 1936-1939 was indicative of the success of the united front policy. 7 It was particularly effective in parts of Asia. In China, notwithstanding Mao Zedong's polite disregard for most directives from the Comintern, the change was useful in legitimising a second nationalist alliance between the CCP and the Guomindang. By the mid-1930s the invasion of China by Japan had reached the stage

---


where the ideological differences which split the two parties were less important than the need to form a nationalist alliance to oppose the invaders. This time, however, the coalition was formed in accordance with Marx's and Lenin's strictures regarding anti-imperialist alliances. Under Mao's guidance the CCP remained aware of the necessity to protect class interests. Thus, even though the Chinese Soviet Government was officially dissolved in 1937 once agreement had been reached regarding a joint Nationalist-Communist war of resistance against Japan, it in fact continued to function as an autonomous regional regime; while this time Jiang Kaishek's authority over Red Army units was nominal only. There was no question of the CCP allowing itself to 'merge' with the Guomindang as it had in the mid-1920s, and there was never any doubt that civil war would resume as soon as the imperialist invasion had been dealt with.

Perhaps more important in the long-term for communism in Asia, the Seventh Congress's strategy for revolution in the colonies was no longer inconsistent with Mao Zedong's analysis of the class relationships existing in the East as expressed in his concept of the four-class alliance of the People's Democratic Dictatorship. Thus, when Mao's blueprint for revolutionary political organisations in China, 'On New Democracy', was published

in 1940, the Chinese Communist leader was in a far more comfortable theoretical position than would have been the case had the Sixth Congress's proletarianisation strategy still prevailed.

The Comintern's change of policy also saw the local communists prosper once again in Indo-China. Following the Seventh Congress Ho Chi Minh eventually re-emerged as the dominant figure in Vietnam. Just as he had done prior to 1928, Ho implemented most successfully a nationalist alliance as the primary means by which the anti-French - i.e. the anti-imperialist - stage of the necessary two phase socialist revolution would be effected. Ho instructed the resurgent ICP that the first goal of national independence could only be achieved through a 'broad Democratic National front'. The Democratic Front strategy typified Ho Chi Minh's willingness to take a short step now to facilitate a long step later, and in its general thrust was a reiteration of the basic Marxist-Leninist tactics he had been propounding for 15 years.

Ho Chi Minh's programme for a Marxist-Leninist 'dual' revolution in Vietnam received formal endorsement at the ICP's Eighth Plenum, held in Pac Bo in May 1941.

---


A letter written by Ho immediately after the Plenum clearly articulated the nature and purpose of the united front which was to complete the first stage of that revolution:

Rich people, soldiers, workers, peasants, intellectuals, employees, traders, youth, and women who warmly love your country! At the present time national liberation is the most important problem. Let us unite together ... National salvation is the common cause to the whole of our people. Every Vietnamese must take part in it.

Significantly the letter did, however, conclude with a reminder that there were two stages in the uprising:

Victory to Vietnam's Revolution!
Victory to the World's Revolution! 11

Pac Bo set the scene for the eventual triumph in August 1945 of the communist-led nationalist forces in Vietnam. Writing some years later, the authoritative Vietnamese revolutionary and theoretician Le Duan described that achievement as 'a victory for Marxism-Leninism creatively applied to the conditions of a colonial and semi-feudal country'.12

* * * * *


This sub-thesis has suggested that the Marxist-Leninist analyses of revolutionary circumstances in the East, and the strategies which were developed from those analyses, provided the basis for a number of successful Asian socialist revolutions. The assessment that socio-economic conditions in the colonial and semi-colonial states were those either of Oriental despotism or, at best, semi-feudalism, led Marx and Lenin to two seminal conclusions. First, they determined that any socialist revolution in Asia would have to consist of two phases: initially, there would be a nationalist revolution as a means of overthrowing imperialism and feudalism; and then there would be a socialist revolution. Because of those distinct requirements, during the first phase of the revolution at least, nationalist alliances and class cooperation would be acceptable strategies; indeed, because of the existing class forces, it was unlikely that the first phase could be effected without some sort of alliance. This latter conclusion was not only reflective of circumstances in Asia, but also was a prime example of the activist element existing in Marxism, and which later was so clearly understood by Lenin, Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh.

For the strategy to succeed, communist leadership had to be informed, positive, flexible and, most important, responsive at all times to class interests. It was primarily in this crucial area of
leadership that the Third International failed. The formality of the adoption of the Marxist-Leninist strategy by the early Comintern Congresses was one thing; putting it into practice proved to be another. Once it became apparent that the Bolshevik triumph of 1917 was not going to ignite the hoped-for European socialist revolution and that Soviet Russia was going to have to stand alone, then, despite Lenin's best intentions, the Comintern increasingly became little more than a tool of Soviet foreign policy, in which the paramount consideration for all communists became the survival of the socialist 'fatherland'. Moscow's revolutionary prestige was such that, despite the dreadful defeats which communist parties in the Near East suffered in the early 1920s as a consequence of Comintern decisions and actions, their counterparts in the Far East continued obediently to follow instructions.

By the time the focus shifted to the Far East, political decisions in the Soviet Union - and, therefore, in the Comintern - were being made against the backdrop of the intense ideological struggle between Stalin and Trotsky. The machinations of that struggle played no small part in the ill-advised Comintern instructions, issued in the face of clear danger signs, to the CCP to continue in its nationalist alliance with the Guomindang. Following the massacre of the Chinese communists the gradual rise of Mao Zedong saw the CCP move to a far more
independent position: in future, while deference was always ostensibly paid to the Comintern, Mao quietly followed his own revolutionary course, in which the class alliance of the People's Democratic Dictatorship was a key factor.

While Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary perspectives for the East were similar to Mao's, the Vietnamese leader faithfully effected Comintern directives and, as a consequence, his movement suffered a major setback following the instructions from the Sixth Congress in 1928 for all revolutionaries to proletarianise their organisations. This directive, as it happens, arose largely as a result of Stalin's victory over Trotsky and the implementation in the USSR of 'socialism in one country': little, if any, consideration was given to the circumstances of Eastern revolutionaries. The resurrection by the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935 of nationalist alliances and class cooperation as acceptable revolutionary tactics proved most successful for Asian communists, even though the Comintern's decision was made, not in response to conditions in the East, but rather to counter the emerging threat, particularly to the USSR, of fascism.

The Seventh Congress's resolution on class alliances was the last decision of any real moment taken by the Third International. Stalin had no interest in the organisation and eventually dissolved it in 1943 in
order to score a few propaganda points in the West. For most of its life the Comintern had endorsed theories and tactics for revolution in the East which, if applied as intended by Marx and Lenin and with a clear understanding of local circumstances, seemed sound in theory and realistic in practice; while for a shorter period the organisation had promoted strategies which were unquestionably inimical to the prospects of those who followed them. Regrettably for Asian communists, whichever strategies the Comintern adopted were almost invariably impaired by the organisation's inept or disinterested leadership.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Truong Chinh, Primer for Revolt, New York, Praeger, 1963.