

Berlin

Warsaw

**UNDER the SHADOW  
of the REVOLUTION:  
Berlin, Warsaw, Ankara  
1920**

**KEMAL OKUYAN**

Ankara



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Berlin-Warsaw-Ankara 1920

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Kemal Okuyan

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**Kemal Okuyan** was born in 1962. He attended primary and middle school in Ankara and completed high school in İzmir. He is a graduate of the department of Political Science at Bosphorus University. He worked in the youth organization of Worker's Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi-TİP) between 1976-1978. He took part in the launching of *Sosyalist İktidar* (Socialist Power) magazine in 1979 and *Gelenek* (Tradition) journal in 1986. He was the vice chairman in the founding of Party for Socialist Turkey (Sosyalist Türkiye Partisi – STP) in 1992, and of Party for Socialist Power (Sosyalist İktidar Partisi – SİP) after STP was shut down by the Constitutional Court. After SİP took on the name Communist Party of Turkey (Türkiye Komünist Partisi – TKP) he assumed various responsibilities in the party. His works were published in numerous magazines and newspapers. Presently he is a regular contributor to *soL News Portal*, *Boyun Eğme* newspaper and *Gelenek* journal. His published books are: *First Years of Soviet Foreign Policy*, *The Book for "What is to Be Done?" Followers*, *Understanding Stalin*, *Socialism's Search of Power in Turkey*, *Anti-Theses on the Dissolution of Soviet Union*, *The Left Caught Between Ergenekon and AKP*, *Trial of Patriotism of the Turkish Left*. He is presently the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Turkey.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Comintern	The Communist International (or the Third International)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
GOELRO	The electrification plan implemented in the first years of Soviet Russia
KAPD	Communist Workers' Party of Germany <i>(Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands)</i>
KPD	Communist Party of Germany <i>(Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands)</i>
KUTVa	The Communist University of the Toilers of the East
NEP	New Economic Policy <i>(Novaya Ekonomicheskaya Politika)</i>
Polrevkom	Polish Revolutionary Committee
RCP(b)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)
RKKA	The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army <i>(Raboche-Krest'yanskaya Krasnaya Armiya)</i>
RSDLP	Russian Social Democratic Labour Party
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany <i>(Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands)</i>
SR(s)	Socialist-Revolutionaries
TKP	Communist Party of Turkey <i>(Türkiye Komünist Partisi)</i>
USPD	Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany <i>(Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands)</i>
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VKPD	Unified Communist Party of Germany <i>(Vereinigete Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands)</i>

## A TIMELINE OF EVENTS

<b>1917</b>		
	<b>March 8</b>	February Revolution in Russia
	<b>November 7</b>	October Revolution in Russia
<b>1918</b>		
	<b>March 3</b>	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between Germany and Soviet Russia
	<b>October 30</b>	Armistice of Mudros is signed and Ottoman Empire accepts defeat
	<b>November 3</b>	Kiel Mutiny in German Navy
	<b>November 7</b>	People's State of Bavaria declared in Munich
	<b>November 9</b>	German Revolution, Kaiser abdicates and Republic is declared
	<b>November 11</b>	Germany signs and armistice with the allies at Redonthe and the First World War officially ends.
	<b>December 30</b>	Founding Congress of KPD
<b>1919</b>		
	<b>January 6-15</b>	General strike and unsuccessful uprising to topple the SPD government in Berlin. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, among many others, are murdered.
	<b>March 2-6</b>	First (Inaugural) Congress of the Comintern
	<b>April 6 - May 1</b>	USPD declares Soviet Republic in Munich, Bavaria with anarchists, eventually KPD takes the lead. The revolt gets stuck in Munich and is subsequently crushed by the counter-revolutionary forces of the central government.
	<b>May 15</b>	Greece occupies Izmir and its environs
	<b>May 19</b>	Mustafa Kemal sets foot in Samsun in Northern Anatolia, this marks the day on which the National Struggle for Independence of Turkey begins
	<b>June 28</b>	Treaty of Versailles that outlines the losing conditions of Germany is signed
<b>1920</b>		
	<b>March 13-17</b>	Kapp Putsch is initiated in Germany and is subsequently crushed by the working class in a matter of days
	<b>April 23</b>	The Grand National Assembly (which would later be renamed as "Grand National Assembly of Turkey") opens in Ankara
	<b>April 25</b>	Poland invades Soviet Russia and the Polish-Soviet War begins

	<b>July 19 - August 7</b>	Second Congress of the Comintern, the highlights of which are Lenin's "Left Communism" pamphlet and theses on the Eastern Question
	<b>August 10</b>	Treaty of Sèvres that finalizes the losing conditions of the Ottoman Empire is signed
	<b>August 17</b>	The Red Army is defeated at the Battle of Warsaw and starts to retreat
	<b>September 1-September 7</b>	The First (and only) Congress of the Peoples of the East
	<b>September 10</b>	TKP is founded in Baku
	<b>December 7</b>	KPD and left wing of USPD merge to form VKPD
<b>1921</b>		
	<b>January 8</b>	VKPD publishes the "Open Letter" to German proletariat and all its organizations
	<b>January 28</b>	All the leaders of TKP, including Mustafa Suphi, are murdered on their journey to Ankara
	<b>March 16</b>	Trade agreement is signed between Soviet Russia and Britain [NEW ITEM] Treaty of Brotherhood signed between Soviet Russia and Turkish representatives from Ankara
	<b>March 18</b>	Peace treaty signed at Riga between Soviet Russia and Poland draws the borderline between the two countries [NEW ITEM] The short-lived "March Action" is initiated in Germany by VKPD
	<b>June 22 - July 12</b>	Third Congress of the Comintern, the dominant slogan of which is "To The Masses..."
	<b>October 13</b>	Treaty of Kars that reiterates the Treaty of Brotherhood on March 16 and finalizes the border between Turkey and the Soviets is signed
<b>1922</b>		
	<b>April 10 - May 19</b>	Beginning of the multilateral Genoa Conference
	<b>April 16</b>	Treaty of Rapallo signed between Germany and Soviet Russia
	<b>November 5 - December 5</b>	Fourth Congress of the Comintern with the main orientation "United Front"
	<b>December 30</b>	The Soviet states join together to form the USSR
<b>1923</b>		
	<b>October 21-29</b>	Unrealized "German October" starts with the unsuccessful Congress of Workers's Councils in Chemnitz and ends in the military removal of the state governments of Saxony and Thuringia
	<b>October 29</b>	Republic of Turkey is declared

## Preface to the English Edition

The fate of the whole 20th century was decided upon between 1917 and 1923. The greatest leap towards the world that humanity longs for, a world without classes and exploitation, was made in this period. The October Revolution was an unparalleled achievement of humanity. However, the same years also bore witness to great disappointments, which had historical impacts on the process of world revolution.

It is without doubt that the defeats suffered by world communist movement, or its shortcomings, between 1917 and 1923 have a bearing –even though an indirect one– on the gradual decline of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which had been the most concrete achievement of the socialist revolution in Russia, to a point where it was no longer able to defend itself, and its eventual collapse.

The difficulties that would face a socialist foundation process confined to a single country, even one with a massive amount of resources, should be obvious. The resolution of Lenin, and Stalin after him, in facing these difficulties and directing the toiling classes of the Soviet Union towards the goal of constructing the socialist order, apart from being an immense success, also meant embracing the only revolutionary alternative as the revolutionary wave had started to recede.

If one has to give an exact date for the withering away of the revolutionary wave, one must mark the year 1920. This was the year in which capitalism was finally able to pull the reins on the crisis

in main countries and deliver staggering blows to the revolutionary front in the course of relentless class struggles. It was without a doubt that the revolutionary situation was still making itself felt, but the optimism of 1917 and 1918 had been replaced with a cautious anticipation. And, it was also without doubt that all eyes were on Germany, where the flame of the revolution began to rise by the middle of 1918 and sputtered out as 1923 came to a close.

We have to discuss the Germany of that period further. Just as we have to evaluate the historical confrontation between the revolution and counter-revolution on the stage provided by the Warsaw of 1920 further. Just as we have to investigate the struggle of the eastern peoples for national liberation that conduced to a great congress at Baku, and the war in Anatolia, which was the critical front of that struggle, further.

And, we have to be courageous in doing all these. There is no reason for the communists to shy from truths. Our mistakes and shortcomings are an inseparable part of our glorious history. They would become a weapon in the hands of our enemies if we fear them and think that we can them from history. Moreover, this courage is also what we need to save ourselves from repetition, mechanical interpretation of history and theoretical sterility.

The foundations of Marxism-Leninism, which are never outdated, are our only compass in investigating historical events, and the source of courage we need. If this book, which I wrote with confidence in this source, makes a contribution to our evaluations of the period I mentioned, I would be more than happy.

With feelings of respect and gratitude to the militant communists of a century ago....

September 2020

*Author's Note: I would like to thank my comrade Nevzat Evrim Önal  
for translating this book into English in a short time.*



## An Enormous Hammer and Sickle

A hammer and sickle placed over a world map that spans five continents, topped by a red star, wheat stalks on both sides and the motto "*Workers of the World, Unite!*" in different languages... And beside these, was written CCCP in large, crimson letters; the abbreviation for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Soviet Union had one of the largest pavilions at İzmir International Fair. They had helped in its foundation, never failed in showing interest afterwards. At some point it became such that one might think one of the most important struggles of the Cold War was waged on the couple of hundred meters between the pavilions of USA and Soviet Union.

The fact of the matter was that USA was having a hard time in Turkey. The hegemonic pro-Americanism of 1950s had taken a blow in the 1960s, and the rise of sympathy towards Soviet Union in a substantial part of the population could not be prevented.

At İzmir International Fair, however, the Soviets definitely had the upper hand in competition: Photographs of Mustafa Kemal and Lenin greeted people at the entrance to their pavilion, the latest achievements of Soviet industry, documentaries, concerts, even fashion shows...

Then 1980 came about, pro-Americanist army generals initiated the deepest operation against the workers of Turkey in the whole history of the Republic. The fascist coup on 12 September was an enmity towards any person who was organized, who produced,

who questioned, who created, who thought... This was counter-revolution, and it respected no bounds.

The coup coincided with İzmir International Fair. They shut it down for one day. Then, new arrangements were made, the opening and closing hours were changed to fit the curfew.

The head putschist Evren, like all putschists, was keen to interfere in everything. He interfered in paintings at exhibitions, assumed expertise on everything, barked orders right and left.

For example, the hand of this fascist had encroached to the Prometheus created by Orhan Taylan, a famous artist, on the exterior of Antalya municipality building. It was painted over...

However, the gigantic hammer and sickle at İzmir Fair stayed where it was... The symbol that would have meant years of prison were it to become smaller and turn into a lapel pin or scrawled miniscule in a notebook kept welcoming visitors to İzmir Fair. At the same time people in Turkey who sought an egalitarian society like that in the Soviet Union were persecuted, imprisoned, even murdered.

The world map in the state emblem of the Soviet Union had Turkey and its environs at its center. This emblem symbolized world revolution, and Turkey was going through a counter-revolution.

Yet, there was no change in the relations between the leaderships of the country which had the state emblem signifying world revolution and of the country which was going through a counter-revolution.

Who knows; most probably, the revolutionaries who happened to visit İzmir Fair on those days had asked themselves "*why?*" with disappointment. "*Why aren't they giving this putschist what he deserves?*"

I for one was asking this question.

It was not a simple question, and to answer it, one must travel way back, to 1920s... To one of the most momentous turning points in human history.

Yes, we will now go back to 1920s. To the three cities that fell under the shadow of The Revolution: To Berlin, Warsaw and Ankara...

## The Russians Have Done It

Life was so beautiful for the German capital in the beginning of the First World War. It was to open up new opportunities for the German economy, which had developed immensely in the final quarter of 19th century and, as many indicators showed, had started to pretend to the throne held by British Empire in the first ten years of the 20th century. Firstly, the German monopolies were to wrest their birthright from the British and French who were skimming off the cream of colonialism. The German working class, which constituted the largest organized labor mass was also conditioned to this idea: Working class was to flourish if German state became more powerful. The social democrat leaders, who were hiding behind this idea and had become like a state within the state, decided to back the government when war broke out in the summer of 1914. "*We are all in the same boat,*" they were chanting in unison, and they would not have let the "Russian barbarians" sink it.

The two opposing blocs led by Britain and Germany had entered a belligerence that would have claimed the lives of millions. France, Russia and Japan had sided with Britain while Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary had sided with Germany. Italy on the other hand would enter the war in a year's time on the side of Britain and its allies.

The soldiers sent to frontlines were mostly oppressed, toiling men. Workers, poor peasants... Each state developed a self-styled

discourse to drag these people to their death in the bloody competition between monopolies. The French were to liberate the people living under great empires, Russians were to conquer Istanbul, Ottoman Empire was to become great again...

This was no happenstance. For years, the strong socialist parties in France and Germany had raised the consciousness in the working masses against the coming war. It would have been impossible to convince these masses with crude tales of conquer; a more subtle propaganda was needed. Sans-culottes were being sent to frontlines for freedom, democracy, human rights, even to further the revolutionary cause. The hundreds of thousands that have been chanting "we will never point a gun against one another" until three days ago were now queuing in front of conscription centers and sent to the frontline in trains accompanied with nationalist marches.

This was the end of The Second International. It was impossible to speak of an international workers' movement anymore; the trump of imperialism had promptly unmasked everyone.

Russian revolutionaries did not take part in this shameful scandal. Neither wing of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party fell in step with the Tsar who was promising new lands to the ignorant peasant masses. The Bolsheviks, taking the matter several steps further, had proclaimed their goal as "*turning the imperialist war into a Civil War.*" In quintessence, they were telling that "*everyone should do away with his own bourgeoisie.*"

In fact, this approach was not novel. Before the war, Second International had resolved that "*in case war should break out anyway*" it would have worked "*for the downfall of capitalist class rule*" that caused the war.<sup>1</sup> This resolution was forgotten, and it fell to Lenin to follow up on the idea.

Lenin was stressing that the workers should go to war against their own bourgeois, not with one another, but when war broke out no one was in a position to listen. Chauvinism had gained the upper hand and the war cries had enraptured the destitute millions.

Yet the war also brought about their disillusionment. They were dying, in thousands. Those who escaped bullets were torn apart

by bombs, those who the bombs missed choked on poison gas, those who survived poison gas breathed their last on bayonets... If one was still standing, there were the epidemics. Many contingents were struggling with hunger; the men and women of proletariat were hard pressed to produce enough clothing behind the lines for the armies, while boys in the prime of their lives froze to death in the trenches.

The war was a bloody slaughter between the imperialists but as always, those who were slaughtered were the poor. The class differences were present even on the battleground. The officers had a full belly and a soft mattress; and as things went from bad to worse, those who noticed grew in number.

As the First World War gained momentum in 1914, the organized worker masses of Europe had suffered a temporary amnesia. As it became evident for everybody that war was not about parading in step to the marching band wearing brand new jackboots, in front of young women showering them with petals, class consciousness started to reawaken. Most of all in Russia and Germany.

Russia revolted first. Mothers who wanted to bring their sons back alive and well from a senseless war, workers of Petrograd who were slaving away so that they can produce enough rifles for the infantry, university students who were coming to realize the suffering of their country, peasants who could not reap harvest since their sons are in the frontline and battling soldiers themselves; the rank-and-file...

Neither the mounted police of the Tsar or the loyal troops stationed in city centers, nor Okhrana agents could prevent strikes, boycotts and demonstrations anymore. Moreover, interesting things had started happening in the frontline; mass revolts and killing of cruel officers had started to accompany desertions.

The only response that the toppling Russian monarchy could have given to these was unmeasured violence. However, violence was also very dangerous for the rulership that has lost its legitimacy. Orders to "oppress, arrest, kill" had started to fall on deaf ears with the young officials disheartened by the news from the front. They rapidly lost their faith in the Tsar; and one morning in the month of June 1917, the authorities were dismayed to see that the

army had left its barracks, mixed with the populace, formed lines with them and distributed weapons to the workers.

The transition from Despotic to Revolutionary Russia happened in a matter of days. Tsar fell, and the vacuum was filled with two power centers: one belonging to the bourgeoisie and the other to the working class. In Russia, during the eight months between the March and November of 1917 authority was shared between Provisional Government and the Soviets. It were the Bolsheviks who cut the knot, and the working class seized power on 7 November 1917.<sup>2</sup>

## Sailors' Revolt

German-Russian front was one of the most important in the course of the War; and on one side, the demand of the soldiers who said, "*We don't want to fight*" had been met as the Bolsheviks who called for "*immediate peace*" came to power. The same sentiment was rapidly spreading among German soldiers. "*Instead of dying for the parasites do what we did, take your destiny in your hands*" was written on the leaflets thrown across the trenches. Some of the Germans who fell prisoner to Russians were released after they were introduced to revolutionary ideas and went back home after embracing the motto "*Workers of all countries, unite!*"

Besides, within Germany, anger was accumulating among the workers. It had become evident that, contrary to the claims of social democratic leaders, the toiling masses had gained nothing from the war and it had brought about a massive devastation. The German state was doing all it could to hide this fact as the war went on, but the people had begun to understand that things were going badly, particularly after 1916. Actually, it was hard not to notice. Numbers were made public afterwards; German losses in the war were 1,808,000. Over 4 million were wounded and 600,000 were captured by the enemy.<sup>3</sup> Hunger had become widespread in major cities due to war and, more importantly, British blockade. Some sources claim that animals were being taken out of zoos and slaughtered; and there were allegations about a restaurant in Dresden that elephant meat had been served to customers.

Militarism was rapidly losing ground in Germany. When the war had broken out, the most organized working class in Europe had lapsed into silence. There had not been even a single strike. One year later, in 1915, 13 thousand workers had stopped work for their claims. And, in 1917, the proletariat had come back with force: The number of strikers had reached 651,000.

War was an extension of politics, and German workers were determined to take revenge for the ravages of war by becoming politicized. Republican ideas from France in the west and socialism ideal from Russia in the east were pouring across the frontlines into the country. Germany and Republic! The idea of Republic alone was enough to shake the Imperial Germany under the rule of Kaiser to its roots. However, the empire was facing something even worse: Soviet Republic!

As the war ground into its final year the only good news for the German generals was that, with the Bolsheviks seizing power in Russia war had ended in the eastern front. With the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed on March 3 between Soviet Russia and Germany, Berlin had expanded its territory considerably and got rid of an important enemy. However, this treaty did not change the course of the war. Germany's Ottoman allies were losing ground in face of British and French offensives and USA's entry into war had shifted the balance completely in the western front. The generals, who were *de facto* ruling the country, were coming to realize that they could not win the war.

For any government, defeat abroad usually also means defeat at home. In fact, the problem of Germany was more about not winning than losing. The war was not being fought on native soil; therefore, the big monopolies fueling German militarism were looking for a way out of the war before worse things happened.

The soldiers who were actually shouldering the burden of war were also aware of this; soon they would be going home. However, when some admirals whose brains were muddled with nationalism and militarism tried to push a group of warships of the navy towards the British armada so that they will be sunk "gloriously," all hell broke loose. With this stupid decision, they gave way to events that sunk the empire instead of those warships.

The sailors, realizing that their commanders were deliberately dragging them towards death, revolted. The revolt was violently suppressed. Some sailors were arrested, some were even shot, but when those arrested were taken ashore the worst thing for the rulers happened: Workers started to act together with the sailors in the northern cities. The revolt was rapidly becoming a revolutionary movement. Kiel on the Baltic shore had become the first center of German Revolution.

When social democrat Gustav Noske, who would become one of the butchers of German Revolution in short order, arrived in the city to appease the movement, a Sailors' and Workers' Council had already been formed. Red flags were flying over Kiel. It was November 5, 1918. Noske, in a reconciliatory manner which social democracy would use frequently in the future, took the enthusiastic crowd under control. He was not face to face with a real organization. With hook and crook, using lies, honeyed words and also veiled blackmail, he deflated the movement. This talented sneak would be very useful for the generals and German reaction in the near future.

On the other hand, the die was cast. News from Kiel incited Berlin. Obviously, the masses were in need of a spark, and streets ran riot in the capital city. However, the main blow came from an unexpected quarter. Bavaria, the pride of conservatives, was boiling over. On November 7, a hundred thousand gathered in state capital Munich demanding Kaiser to step down. As the demonstration went on revolutionary soldiers colluded with the city garrison and took over all the state buildings and strategic points. Worker and soldier deputies were chosen, and People's State of Bavaria was declared.

Social Democratic Party (SPD) and some local organizations of Independent Social Democrats had played some role in all this but the movement had neither a vanguard nor an organization to speak of. Journalist and critic Kurt Eisner, who emerged as the leader of the masses that declared the republic, did not have a militant past in any sense. This is strange: German Revolution in its course produced a multitude of courageous revolutionaries of whom most were communists, but the characters that came

forward in critical turning points always had questionable identities, even as revolutionaries. History sometimes casts individuals into roles they have not planned, yet alone prepared for!

The revolution was rising without a vanguard and had struck its first blow. German capital and military command sensed what was coming and acted fast. They had realized months beforehand that the empire may collapse around their ears, and now what they had feared was coming true. They immediately sacrificed the Kaiser. Strongest representatives of the capitalist class were at the door of social democratic leaders, telling them that they were "*ready for concessions that no considerable body of German employers has ever granted before in return for help fighting Bolshevism.*"<sup>4</sup> Their pleas were answered. Ebert, the most prominent character of social democracy, had assured Prince Max von Baden who was the head of government: Order would be restored.<sup>5</sup>

The decision was made, Kaiser Wilhelm II obeyed and without further ado, he set off for The Netherlands taking a sizable portion of his wealth with him.

German Revolution had materialized.

## **The Beginning Was Similar, What About The Rest?**

In Russia, revolution arose in February 1917, toppled the Tsar and culminated in working class power in November. German Revolution broke out in November 1918, Kaiser fell and Republic was established. Now, everybody was anxiously waiting whether or not the same would follow. Would Soviet rule be established in Germany, the center of international working class movement for decades, like in Russia?

The socio-economic situation was very different between the two countries, as was the ideological and political climate. On the other hand, revolution in Germany resembled the Russian Revolution on many aspects. Let's mention the least significant and move on. The Bolsheviks had seized power in Russia on November 7, German Revolution claimed its victory almost on the same day; they were only two days late. Undoubtedly this was a coincidence but it would have a symbolic bearing in the coming years. In 1923, these special anniversaries would have been taken into account when Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was planning the uprising, and November 7 would be specifically suggested.<sup>6</sup> The idea would be abandoned but on the same day Hitler's beer-hall putsch, which became a farce, would be attempted. The counter-revolution would also be thinking that it could thus take revenge on both November 7 and November 9.

There are five similarities between the two revolutions that should be taken into account. Firstly, the developments that became an outlet for, or facilitated the success of the political energy that was bottled up in the working class happened in the army. In the February of 1917 Russian people were already in an upheaval, but what signaled the end of the Tsar was the refusal of the elite and “reliable” troops in Petrograd to restore order and their defection. In Germany dissidence was mounting but it were the sailors who delivered the fatal blow to the empire.

The second is connected to the first; the revolution created particular organizations in both countries and workers and soldiers came together in these. The Soviets of Workers and Soldiers in Russia and Councils in Germany did not only create an alliance between the working class and an armed force; it facilitated the transformation of the working class itself into an armed force.

This is precisely what should be investigated as the third: Working class had obtained the right and legitimacy to bear arms. Under normal circumstances, the state has monopoly of arms. However, in the course of the revolution that was the result of popular movement workers came to bear arms and the armed soldiers became proletarianized. The conscription of millions of workers during the war undoubtedly eased this process; but what should be kept in mind is the impossibility of drawing lines around the authority of a revolution. Disarming the social dynamics that ousted the Tsar in Russia and Kaiser in Germany was not as easy as it is supposed to be.

Four; it follows that in Germany, as it was in Russia, there were not one but two authorities. On one side, “the order” that the social democracy coming to the rescue of German capital and the reaction was trying to reestablish; on the other, “the revolution” that was composed of worker and soldier masses. As their names implied, one sought a return to order forthwith while the other demanded to push on a revolutionary road.

Five, in both countries the revolution, although it was the result of different social responses, essentially came into existence through a demand of peace against the war.

As you can see, the similarities are many between the Russia of

1917 and Germany of 1918. However, the main difference was that German Revolution was not consummated! In a way that still affects the world today, German working class failed to take the step that would open the path for world revolution.

Comparison between Russia and Germany is a fertile ground for historians. And for those struggling on the revolution front of politics, it always invokes a deep sigh and calls for lessons to be derived. I should say beforehand that I am not among those who think German Revolution was doomed to failure. Yes, Germany had some disadvantages that would affect a socialist revolution but the reverse was also true. It also had considerable advantages compared to Russia. By building on these and acting decisively, the shortcomings of Germany could very well have been surmounted.

What was the main problem? The main problem in Germany in 1918 was, undoubtedly, the absence of a revolutionary working class party that had gone through the mill beforehand. There had always been a revolutionary wing in German social democracy but this wing had never learned to fly by itself and became an independent power. The schism over differences about party's conduct during the war had not brought about organizational and political independence for revolutionary Marxists. On the contrary, a series of characters ranging from Kautsky, whom Lenin had branded as "renegade," to Bernstein, the father of revisionism had converged in The Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD). Spartacus League, of which Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were the most prominent members, was the left wing of this party founded in 1917.

Thus, Germany was entering the final year of the war with two separate social democratic parties and the foundation of a party for the emancipation of the working class had been postponed. Moreover, to call one of the two social democratic parties more revolutionary was impossible beyond a certain point. The presence of Spartacus League and revolutionary worker leaders in USPD had no effect on its political line.

Also, it was obvious that Spartacus League was not a disciplined and organizationally strong faction within this party: "[T]he group was only an informal network, it had neither an executive

*committee nor any formal membership. Anyone committed to the views espoused in Spartacus and involved in the dissemination of its content could be considered a 'member.'"*<sup>7</sup>

After the Revolution of November 1918 Spartacus League opted to become an independent power and founded The Communist Party. However, they were not entirely sure about this, either; some thought they should stay inside USPD while there were also those who had reservations about taking on the name "Communist."

We will return to KPD. At this point, it is sufficient to note that in Germany, prior to the revolution there was neither an organizationally and politically independent revolutionary working class party, nor its ripened germ.

This was a major absence, but German Revolution also had a prominent "presence": Social democracy. Of the two power centers that emerged from the February 1917 Revolution in Russia, the Provisional Government was driven by bourgeois elements that had no special hold over the working class (Kerensky included). The principal power base of Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs), who both had a deputy in the Provisional Government and carried some weight in the Soviets, was the peasantry. Mensheviks, who came from social democratic background and took a similar stance vis-à-vis the two power focuses, had gradually lost strength in the course of 1917.

Conversely, in Germany SPD, which had acted as a crutch to the militarism of large monopolies in the First World War, was assuming duty in preventing the total defeat of the same monopolies in face of revolution on one hand; while on the other hand it was deceiving the German working class by acting as if it was on the side of revolution and moving step by step towards socialism, and maintaining its hold on the toiling masses through this deception.

The generals and capitalists had no way out except by playing the social democracy card. The nationalist-fascist movement that was fermented gradually after 1918 by itself would had been squashed by the working class in short order like the roach that it was. The opium of the laboring people in Germany was social democracy, and the enormous struggle that communists gave afterwards to disperse this influence failed to come through.

The revolution could not surmount the barricade built by social democracy between itself and the bourgeoisie it sought to do away with. Actually, German Revolution had shown its soft spot right at the beginning. Let us remember that, when the revolution in Russia ousted Tsar Nicholas II on March 15, 1917 according to our calendar, a difference of opinion had arisen between the bourgeois and proletarian wings of the revolution on the fate of the toppled monarch, and Russian revolutionaries had prevented him and his family from going free. When the Bolsheviks ended the life of this man whose name had become a symbol of injustice, cruelty and tyranny, they were not motivated by revenge; their concern was stopping the imperialists from using this symbol against the revolution. They were quite right in being concerned: He was a problem even when dead. For years, monarchists waited for the return of Nicholas's soul. Some even refused to believe he was dead.

Idiocy came in all shapes and sizes.

However, in Germany, the revolutionaries were facing a bourgeoisie that was not idiotic at all, and a social democracy that was no less cunning.

Seeing the Kaiser off with his family and treasure trove to The Netherlands to enjoy freedom was their first score together against the revolution. The rest of the game was played similarly and each move was like an iteration of this first gambit.

A revolution moves forward to the extent that it remains steadfast against the social order it overthrows. While German Revolution overthrew the empire, it sent off the emperor with farewells to a nice manor, did not touch his generals, and did not treat their rule as a period of ignominy. It allowed everybody to play the part of "the revolutionary."

It was really interesting: A revolution in which those who were responsible of the war were desperately and cunningly took part was being played out. Everyone had become a revolutionary, everyone had become a republican!



## Improvised Republic

Aside from the fact that everyone had started posing as revolutionaries and republicans, how, actually, did the Republic come to exist? Bavaria had declared independence along with the Republic; but this was not a real secession from the rest of Germany. The endeavor can be defined more accurately as an attempt to assume authority over a limited territory.

Undoubtedly, capital Berlin was decisive for Germany; and on November 9, 1918, that city was having a momentous day. Hundreds of thousands were marching towards city center to celebrate Kaiser's fall and, as if in an attempt to carry the revolution to its logical conclusion, they were unfurling red banners. The working class was marching under flags that symbolized its emancipation in the face of four years of darkness, singing revolutionary songs and shouting the "Long Live Socialist Republic" slogan.

Actually, this was not an outburst of consciousness. The masses that displayed revolutionary energy mainly consisted of SPD members or sympathizers. Wasn't it the party that acted as the body for socialist idea in Germany for years? Now the day had come. They were sanguine, naïve but determined.

The crowd kept swelling. A red flag was hoisted over Reichstag, the house of the Parliament. According to one account of this historical moment, with cartridge belts across their shoulders and rifles in their hands, the sailors in the building were ready for battle.<sup>8</sup>

It was a hard day for social democrats. They had to appease and stall popular masses, which were demanding socialism for various reasons, without alienating them. This was what they would have done, because they were the agents of the existing system, not the revolution.

They were already despicable, but kept sinking lower.

When Reichstag was surrounded by masses of workers and soldiers, SPD leader Philipp Scheidemann was having his lunch. A group of soldiers and workers asked him to address the crowd. He was disinclined, but these words will be enough to convince him: *“Come along, quick, Scheidemann! Liebknecht is already speaking from the balcony of the [Berliner] Schloss.”*<sup>9</sup>

Karl Liebknecht... the prominent representative of the left wing of workers’ movement in Germany along with Rosa Luxemburg. The communist party was yet to be founded, but still, both social democrats and generals were harboring an unreasoning fear and hatred against this revolutionary, who was loved so much by the people.

Liebknecht himself had no fear at all; but he, too had no shortage of hate: His struggle against capitalism was motivated with a relentless rancor. The problem was that, his case was one of the worst among the “organization phobia” that German revolutionaries collectively had. He had a tendency to disregard the absence of a collective will and from time to time acted on his own accord.

One can imagine the feelings of someone with these character traits in front of such a massive crowd.

However, Scheidemann acted before him. Looking at the sea of heads, he sensed the imminence of danger and spontaneously declared the German Republic! There was neither a party decision, nor a collusion with the generals. The best one can say for this is “class instinct.” Other social democratic leaders, while critical at first, would have agreed over time that this improvised declaration of republic was one of the historical moves that saved Germany from the “red threat.”

With republic declared by Scheidemann, about a kilometer down the street Liebknecht had to declare Free Socialist Republic. Similarly, without a party decision. There was no official party

as of yet, but nobody from Spartacus League knew beforehand that Liebknecht would have declared Soviet power from a Palace balcony. The crowd that enthusiastically clapped Scheidemann became euphoric with Liebknecht; precious few realizing the deep, class division between the two.

Liebknecht, in his speech that alarmed German reaction, also made a point of putting world revolution to popular vote. Berliners in unison raised their hands in solidarity with world revolution!

With republic now taken care of, next came the business of setting up the provisional government that would have led the country to elections.

SPD, acting decisively, offered USPD to set up a joint government, with a note telling them that they can post Liebknecht as one of the ministers if they want. The offer itself and the note about Liebknecht proves the fact that at this point, SPD was well aware that it would not have been able to restore order on its own without enticing at least some elements on its left to tag along.

This move caused a crisis among Independent Social Democrats. While the likes of Bernstein were quite happy that the door to collaboration was now open, the left wing of the party was refusing to act side by side with SPD, which was at least as responsible of the war as the generals.

From then on, it was a retelling of the same story: The independents imposed conditions on their counterparts to put pressure on them from "left," the shrewd social democrats softened and negated these conditions with crafty maneuvers, and ultimately USPD took part in the government with three ministers.<sup>10</sup>

Liebknecht, failing the pressure from the soldiers and workers, had initially accepted the people's commissar position offered to him when he went to Reichstag for negotiations. It was Jogiches, his comrade in Spartacus League, who persuaded him the renounce this.

The fact was that, the negotiations for a coalition government that started immediately after Scheidemann heralded the Republic had caught the enthusiastic crowd by surprise. While the revolutionary workers and soldiers (that is, the actual force that made the revolution) were busy on the street demonstrating and

occupying important buildings, social democratic leaders were seeking a way to supplant them and seize power.

However, just like in Russia, a counterbalance was taking form. When Workers' and Soldiers' Councils opted to form a six man Council of People's Deputies, the diarchy situation started to become clear with traditional parliamentary forces on one side and revolutionary popular movement on the other.

It was impossible for these two power centers to coexist in peace. One would eventually have strangled the other.<sup>11</sup>

The experienced side was taking fast and cunning steps. On the day the Councils decided to establish its own power apparatus, General Groener was calling Social Democrat leader Ebert. On this call over a secure line, which would be the first of many, Groener was admonishing Ebert to "*secure the army, restore order, fight against Bolshevism.*" Ebert was a "responsible" statesman, and the alliance between the imperial army and the social democracy playing republican was strengthening.

The working class and revolutionary soldiers had taken hold of the revolution on one end while the other was left in the hands of social democracy, and through them, German capital. The problem was that, most of the workers and soldiers had faith in social democracy.

And that social democracy was, in a nutshell, telling them to "go home." Just like the Provisional Government founded after the February Revolution in Russia, as if saying, "*there, you've toppled the Tsar, what more do you want?*" Only the Bolsheviks had not risen to this bait. They had kept asking the workers "*what about peace, what about bread, what about land?*" The most incisive was the question, "*did we topple the Tsar so that the bourgeois can suck the marrow from our bones?*"

German monopolies had derived lessons from Russia. Knowing that the greatest craving of everybody (particularly that of soldiers) was for the war to end, they signed an armistice in short order. This, to an extent, provided a temporary relief, but another serious problem awaited the discharged soldiers. The whole burden of German economy had fallen of the workers' shoulders. Work and bread were hard to come by.

Under these odious conditions, the priority of the social democratic government was to do away with the other power center. This was not an easy affair because a substantial part of the SPD's political base had also joined the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils and was enjoying the freedom and workers' democracy. On the streets, Councils held sway; they had formed their own police force, were issuing decrees, and taking precautions to protect the Revolution.

By the end of 1918, Germany had entered an extraordinary phase in which the word Revolution gained some kind of political immunity. Even the hypocrite generals were talking about the interests of the revolution. The bourgeoisie had also taken a stance as if it had sided with the revolution. Actually, both have lost most of their social and political weight and their fate lied at the hands of social democracy.

They immediately played the election card. Elections forthwith, so that the "revolution" could become institutional and parliamentary democracy could be restored...

They knew that no one else was prepared for an election. The working class masses were displaying great sympathy towards Soviet Russia. Sending the people to the ballot box before that sympathy became organized and gained consciousness, before communist party emerged as an independent power, was imperative. The right-wing parties were also raising their voices tentatively to join the chorus: "We call for early elections."

They resolved for an early election but were still having a hard time in restoring order. The first rule of an order was reestablishment of the monopoly of arms. However, the army had practically been disbanded; it was unclear who was a soldier and who was a civilian. Moreover, in Berlin, the Councils had already formed their own armed forces. SPD and the general were trying to resolve this issue with small steps.

Exactly for this reason, particularly in protest of oppression against the sailors, USPD would opt to withdraw its three commissars from the government on December 29.

The bourgeoisie had to disarm the revolution. But to this end, it had to arm itself first! They found the solution in creating a

paramilitary organization. The human resources for this was the leftovers of the imperial army, which included plenty of racist elements that hated all aspects of the left-wing politics. Gustav Noske took stage again and presented the damnable *Freikorps* (volunteer squads), which had its roots in the 18th century, back to Weimar Republic. This would in time become the cesspool from which fascist movement in Germany would feed from, but the social democratic leaders had decided once and for all: They would betray German Revolution, no matter what the cost.

*Freikorps* was brought into the game on December 22, 1918. Ultimately, the idea to protect the revolution from the reds with a “counter-revolutionary” army, which hated not only communists but also anything on the left and parliamentary democracy itself, came out successful. However, many SPD members also fell victim to these butchers.

Odd, isn't it? A glorious revolution takes place. Working masses and soldiers, the true heroes of the revolution, are unaware of the power in their hands and set their hopes with all goodwill on SPD. SPD, frightened by the energy of its believers, sidles up to the generals. The generals and right-wing forces see that they need social democrats very much, and push them forward. It is obvious that eventually a dictatorship of monopolies would emerge from this complex political panorama.<sup>12</sup>

The only actor on stage who could disrupt this scenario was the communists. Even if they were still weak and yet to organize into a party, they could have broken the spell of social democracy on the working class and upset the whole balance. The *zeitgeist* was favorable, the influence of October Revolution, the persistence of Soviet Russia, disintegration of German State, the anger that economic devastation incited in working masses, the emergence of workers' and soldiers' councils...

As the calendar turned into 1919, Germany was seeking her Communist Party.

## The Communist Party is Founded

German Revolution had not come as a surprise to anybody. After what happened in Russia, in many European countries revolution was on the rise as the war continued. Naturally, Germany, with its advanced industry and organized working class, had captured all the attention. The strike against war (*Januarstreik*) that had started on January 25, 1918 and went on for a week was seen by many as the harbinger of revolution in the country. Various revolutionary groups and individuals had started preparations to ease and lead this process.

Although it is risky to give numbers when talking about such chaotic times, we can say that, those who claim the number of revolutionary socialists in Germany in the summer of 1918 was limited to 3-4 thousand<sup>13</sup> are giving a more or less accurate panorama of the situation.

A great majority of the revolutionaries was members of USPD and some of the party cells were preparing for an uprising. Moreover, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards had even set a date for the revolution: November 11!<sup>14</sup> Further developments led to a rescheduling to November 9 but these preparations, which were mainly focused in Berlin, served as no more than complementary factors to the German Revolution. Revolution was determined by the extraordinary events that happened in Kiel and Munich.

Although Spartacus League within USPD was politically animated after the release of Karl Liebknecht (who was imprisoned

for taking an anti-war stance) on October 23, they were unable to organize decisively and marshal their resources. Working together with groups and individuals from USPD and other parts of the working class movement, they were focusing on the creation of Workers' Councils and preparing for new mass mobilizations.

Rosa Luxemburg, the other prominent member of Spartacus League, had to wait until November 8 for her release. She had been incarcerated from February 1915. Even worse, her arrival in Berlin was as late as November 10 and she had missed the most critical day of the revolution.

In brief, German revolutionaries, who had worked together with social democrats (albeit with different means and ends) in the same environment to prepare for the revolution, did not have the political influence to determine its direction.

Anton Pannekoek, who with his inconsistent but original ideas soon fell out of the revolutionary movement, was right in saying that "*When German imperialism collapsed in November 1918, the working class was completely unprepared for the seizure of power.*"<sup>15</sup>

This analysis may seem unjust when the "red" character of the Revolution, and the love for Liebknecht in the working masses that far outreached the organization of Spartacus League are taken into account. However, the factors that pulled German Revolution leftwards were not "subjective." Before all, the influence of Soviet Russia must be taken into account. The quick transformation of social democracy and the failure of the workers in discerning its defection with a similar quickness was another important factor. Workers were still attributing a revolutionary meaning to social democracy and saw no harm in blending with the left identity SPD had popularized in Germany before the war.

It is not my intention to belittle German Revolution. On the contrary, I am trying to convey how ripe the objective conditions were for socialism in Germany. Yes, the shortcoming was essentially in the subjective factor, the communist party that would lead the revolution was absent.

German Revolution happened on November 9 but the process had just started to gain momentum; just like the relation between the February and October Revolutions in Russia, the revolution

that started in Germany in November could have been endowed with a different content.

Spartacus League saw this need after the revolution and started preparations to become an independent organization. They were not only galvanized by the revolutionary opportunities, there were some among them who had fairly realistic views. In a letter dated November 11 to August Thalheimer<sup>16</sup>, Leo Jogiches<sup>17</sup> (who is the most probable author of the letter), after underlining that the revolution was above all a military mutiny and actualized by disgruntled soldiers, writes that “*many or most of the working people still support the majority Social Democrats*” and stresses that they were “*not only slowing down the Revolution but directly counter-revolutionary*” in their stance. The immediate task of the Spartacus League was to expose the counter-revolutionary social democracy.<sup>18</sup>

A revolutionary party was also needed to free the working class from the influence of social democracy. Still, Spartacus League was still hesitating to secede from USPD. Clara Zetkin<sup>19</sup>, in a letter to Rosa Luxemburg on November 17, was saying, “*Given our well-known lack of leaders and resources, it would make it considerably more difficult for us to reach the masses (...) I think we should stay in the USPD for now as its relentless critics.*”<sup>20</sup>

There are also facts that show Luxemburg was confused, too. In the face of rapidly unfolding events, the reason behind the inconsistency of the Spartacus League in becoming pessimistic on some days and making overly optimistic analyses on others was obviously the tension caused by remaining quite weak in an enormous workers movement.

Luxemburg tried to pull USPD leftwards for one last time before proceeding towards an independent party. On December 14, 1918, the famous manifesto titled “What does the Spartacus League Want?” is published in *Die Rote Fahne*<sup>21</sup> in which it was demanded that USPD should withdraw from the government on the next day. This proposal, which included rejection of elections and seizure of power by the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils, got 29 per cent approval from the delegates in USPD plenum. Hilferding’s proposal, which prescribed that the party should remain in the

government, participate in the elections, and hold it congress after the elections, was accepted instead.

There was nothing left to do but to found a separate party.

What were the Russian Bolsheviks thinking as all these happened? Weren't they putting any pressure on their comrades for the creation of the vanguard party of working class as soon as possible in Germany, which was the country that was most crucial in the development of world revolution?

Truthfully, from the facts present, it is impossible to speak of a systematic relation between Spartacus League and Moscow on November 1918. If one reason for this was the reservations Luxemburg had about the Russian Revolution, the other was that German revolutionary movement had not yet realized that the axis of world revolution had started to shift towards Russia. Actually, this lack of grasp was also present in the Russian Bolsheviks, who would come to understand the decisive role the Soviets would play in world revolution as late as 1920. Some of them bore the hardships of this role, while some refused to assume the responsibility that it came with.

Yet, we know that throughout 1918, Soviet embassy was negotiating with German generals on one hand while striving to help a possible German revolution on the other. The efforts of Adolph Joffe, who was the Soviets' ambassador in Berlin between April and November of 1918, is one example. He was the official signatory of the additional protocol with German Empire of August 27, yet he was expelled from the same Empire on charges of "*taking part in the preparations of a communist uprising in the country*" on November 6.

This charge was not without grounds. It became clear shortly afterwards that Joffe was indeed meeting secretly and working on an uprising plan with some individuals belonging to the left wing of USPD.

The extent of the effort given by Soviet officials to hasten the founding of KPD is unclear. We know that Karl Radek, who had his roots in the workers movement in Poland like Luxemburg, visited Berlin more than once representing the Bolsheviks and met with the Spartacus League on many occasions. Although some

sources claim that Radek urged the Spartacus League to found a communist party on Bolshevik principles and tried to prevent an abortive uprising attempt, there is no record on any particular “Russian meddling” that played a role in the founding of KPD.

On the other hand, in Austria, right on the doorstep of Germany, the Communist Party was founded on November 3, 1918 to a large extent through Russian help and initiative.

Germany was a much larger issue, and it would have been realized in the upcoming years that some of its characteristics would make it impossible for Soviet Russia to see it just as the next step in revolution.

However, by this time Spartacus League had run out of time and excuses to keep shying away from founding the party. Through the agreement of limited group of delegates of December 29, the founding congress of KPD convened on December 30 with the attendance of Spartacus League as well as some other groups. In the argument on the name of the party during the meeting preceding the congress, Rosa Luxemburg had stated objections to the name “communist” and advocated that the name “socialist” should be preferred. This argument did not gain majority.<sup>22</sup>

Another issue on which Luxemburg (and Liebknecht with her) was left in the minority in the founding congress was the tactics that would be pursued in the upcoming elections. While Luxemburg and Liebknecht were absolutely for participation, the majority of the delegates were not: The decision was passed with 63 votes against 23; KPD would boycott the elections for the National Assembly.

Therefore, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the most influential names in KPD, were faced with a serious problem of authority right in the foundation of the party. To explain this away with “collective will” or “party democracy” is sheer nonsense. It was obvious that a party, which failed to agree on such a burning and strategic issue, would have faltered in face of the complex dynamics of German Revolution. Moreover, after this weird situation in the congress, the persistence of Liebknecht and Rosa as the leaders of the party shows that the “boycottist” cadres also did not have a comprehensive strategy. It was hard for a leadership with

such shaken authority to gain weight among the hundreds of thousands that had taken to the streets.

Interestingly, almost all the prominent names in the Spartacus League agreed that not participating in the elections was sheer madness. Jogiches, Levi... In the founding congress, Paul Levi was saying, *"If you now give out the slogan of a boycott of the elections, you will never at any time succeed in reaching that powerful throng who sympathize with us inwardly, who stand with us inwardly, and whom we could get to join with us in a short space of time."*<sup>23</sup>

Bolshevik organizational culture, which Luxemburg had never been fond of, was precisely what German communists needed in the beginning of 1919.

There was really much confusion in the meeting on December 30. All the prominent members of Spartacus League agreed that the immediate task was to lead the German Revolution towards a workers' power. Karl Radek, who attended the congress in secret representing the Bolsheviks, was also of the same mind. Still, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were not sure of the success of a final confrontation before the elections. This was their reason why they took a stance for participation. Most of them on the other hand feared that once the parliament reopened and started working, it would have spelled the end for the revolution.<sup>24</sup>

Karl Radek, who addressed the congress with an overstated revolutionary optimism, was also confused. At least so much that afterwards he said these about the Congress: *"The party conference was a glaring demonstration of the party's youth and inexperience. Its connections with the masses were extremely weak (...) I did not believe that I was looking at an actual party."*<sup>25</sup>

The fact of the matter was that KDP, through a justified distrust in the traditional cadres of the workers' movement, had organized untried, inexperienced, restless and inconsistent young revolutionaries into the fold. These youngbloods had a liking for acting like hellions and disregarded organized action. However, when it came to courage and bitter struggle, they were beyond reproach...

Thus, KPD set sail... a party that was quite weak in the workers' movement, had little influence in Berlin and in which the leadership had a hard time making itself listened to... Some four

thousand courageous human beings with their swords unsheathed among a sea of social democrats.

In the summer of 1919 their number would have swelled to more than a hundred thousand, despite the great tragedy (if not defeat) right at the outset...

The first five years of KPD history, which starts with a belated secession and foundation in December 1918, carries the weight of enormous lessons; and those lessons were written in the blood of our comrades.



## The Great Tragedy

German working class was entering 1919 with its party, KPD. Against the communist party was SPD, which by now had become one of the primary weapons of the bourgeoisie, and USPD, which was standing between it and the communists. And, on the side, racist right-wing circles still trying to recover from the shock caused by the declaration of Republic...

Yet, in the final analysis, during the first days of January it was the revolutionary working class that set the tone of the day. But that class was both in KPD, SPD and also USPD! The secession of KPD from social democracy was complete. Now the two parties represented different classes and were in conflict as the classes they represented on the leadership level. However, among the collective working class political base the dominant sentiment was "*We are all workers.*" The party identities were in the background, and this would soon have proven to be a liability instead of an asset as it was thought to be.

Berlin was both the center of politics in general and of the workers' movement, to such an extent that social democrat Ebert (whose name still lives today in many foundations that carry the ideology of the sinister German imperialism across the globe) was considering moving the capital elsewhere in January. The working class was formidable, dashing and "fearsome."

What should be done? The resistance of the working class should be broken! To this end, on January 4 Emil Eichhorn, who

had come to the head of Berlin police force with the revolution on November 9, was dismissed. Eichhorn was an upright, revolutionary man who had great sympathy for Soviet Russia. He was acting against the attacks of right-wing gangs to revolutionary workers and assisting the working class in forming its own security teams. In short, he had enough transgressions to become a target for social democracy.

However, Germany in 1919 was not a country that could have been ruled by a decree. Eichhorn refused to step down. As if pointing out the presence of dual authority, he said that he *“had been appointed by the Berlin working class and could only be removed by them. He would accept a decision of the Berlin Executive of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils, but no other.”*<sup>26</sup>

The workers, too, were not in a mind to let Eichhorn go. When the government’s decision was heard, there was an angry outburst throughout Berlin. For the first time since the Revolution, a feeling of being cheated emerged among the proletariat.

In the small hours of that very night, the representatives of Revolutionary Shop Stewards Committees, Karl Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck<sup>27</sup> from KPD, and Berlin organization of USPD had a meeting in which they agreed upon organizing a mass protest against the dismissal of Eichhorn. Next morning, these three organizations called the workers to the mass demonstration that will be held on the Siegesallee Boulevard near central Berlin. The signatures on the leaflets were asymmetrical; apart from the Shop Stewards and representatives for the major factories around Berlin, USPD was taking responsibility at the level of Berlin organization only, while KPD commitment was sealed with the signature of the Central Committee of the party.

These three organizations together had a political weight in Berlin that should not have been underestimated; but none of them could had foreseen what would happen as they called the workers to demonstrate on January 5, Sunday.

The demonstration was set to begin at 14:00. The majority of Berlin proletariat turned up to the call. A crowd that the government had to take seriously had gathered in solidarity with Eichhorn. There were many SPD members among the protesters. And,

most importantly, there was an obvious revolutionary atmosphere in the capital city on January 5.

The demonstration concluded, the Revolutionary Committee convened and decided to take a step further. Some historians think their feelings got the better of them, some others claim they were unable to assess the balance of power coherently. It has even been claimed that Rosa Luxemburg, who European left always sought to favor afterwards, did not take part in the madness.<sup>28</sup>

The “madness” was to call for the fall of social democratic government two months after the German Revolution had done away with the Kaiser. Yes, the Revolutionary Committee would have called Berlin first to a general strike, then to topple the government.

The struggle was rapidly escalating. The general strike in Berlin became a huge success on January 6. This had set an irreversible collision course with the government. At least the working masses were moving with these sentiments.

They started gathering at 9:00 in the morning. In spite of the cold and the fog, German proletariat was saying, “Damn the consequences!” This is what followed:

Deep into the Tiergarten<sup>29</sup> they were standing. They had brought along their weapons, they had their red flags. They were ready to do anything, to give everything, even their lives. There was an army of 200,000 such as no Ludendorff<sup>30</sup> had ever seen. Then the inconceivable happened.

The masses were standing from 9 in the morning in the cold and fog. Somewhere their leaders were sitting and conferring. The fog lifted and the masses were still standing. Their leaders conferred. Noon came and in addition to the cold, hunger came. And the leaders conferred. The masses were feverish with excitement: they wanted one deed, even one word to calm their excitement. But nobody knew what to say. Because the leaders were conferring. The fog came again and with it the dusk. The masses went home sad. They wanted great things, but they had done nothing.<sup>31</sup>

Other sources claim that the number of armed workers were around half a million. In any case, Berlin had evidently gone through a momentous day. In further chapters, I will try to give categorical answers to the question why German Revolution failed in the totality of this period (1919-1923). However, we are yet at January 1919, and it must be said that any individual or organization that did not take into account the spirit of intense tension among hundreds of thousands of angry workers does not deserve to be called “revolutionary” or “communist.”

The problem here is that, the communists had failed to take the lead of the process. Therefore, such being the case, was it not madness to “take action” if they were not strong enough?

A revolutionary organization may very well stand back from a confrontation when it is not sufficiently prepared and failure seems certain. We know that the motto “*We will learn to overcome through our defeats*” led to irreparable, devastating results in many cases. However, inaction is not the only alternative of suicide. Even if timing is crucial in revolutionary struggle, mastery cannot be reduced to seeking the right “moment,” at which you will win everything at the cost of nothing. If the course of a revolution is a period in which balance of power may shift rapidly, masses gain experience and act upon them in very short notice; for a party that steps forward to lead the working class, it is also bound to present suitable opportunities to eliminate its shortcomings, specialize and renew itself.

In this context, it is not sensible to say that wrong decisions made by KPD and the groups allied to it led to the tragedy that January 6, 1919 resulted in, or stress repeatedly that Rosa Luxemburg always tried to act more prudently in contrast to the adventurism of Karl Liebknecht. In the first place, one cannot speak of a wrong decision on January 6th since the Revolutionary Committee that emerged in Berlin was incapable of making any decision, right or wrong!

Both pushing forward and retreating are processes that must be managed. All witnesses to that day agree on the fact that nothing was said to the workers who waited with weapons in hand for hours. For the government that had lost the initiative up to that

point this spells only one thing: The “enemy” it faced did not know what to do.

If you stepped up to gather such a crowd, you had to lead!

If you did not, somebody else would. If you did not, some in the crowd would start to act spontaneously on different motivations and in different directions.

In Berlin, on January 6, the buildings of some social democratic newspapers were occupied, *Vorwärts* being the most important among them. Besides, “unfriendly” sources claim that train stations and some government buildings were captured and “red terror” had started in Berlin:

With the seizure by the Spartacans of the Brandenburg Gate, the government printing offices, the provision office, several barracks, and railway stations, the terror began in Berlin. Liebknecht, Ledebour, and Scholze formed a provisional communist government and sent a detachment of Spartacans to occupy the Ministry of War. Three hundred communists under the command of a sailor actually invaded the War Office and demanded its surrender. Armored cars were driven by the Spartacans into the Wilhelmstrasse and fighting broke out between them and the loyal troops who defended the government in the Chancellery. Radek, the representative of the Bolsheviks in Berlin, drove ostentatiously up and down Unter den Linden<sup>32</sup> watching the progress of the rebellion. At night the Spartacans captured the Railway Building, where a small detachment of government troops surrendered.

During the day’s battle, many government troops gave up their arms without fighting, and the marine division declared its neutrality. Had the Spartacans possessed able military leaders and abandoned their speechmaking for fighting, they could have easily overthrown the Socialist government in the Wilhelmstrasse and established the soviet system in Berlin.<sup>33</sup>

Indecision is the greatest danger in socialist struggle. Notwithstanding the amount of overstatement of the account above, which, in sum, says, “*that was close,*” one thing is obvious: Those

who got into the driver's seat of the German Revolution on January 6 had one foot on the accelerator and the other on the brake, and no hands on the wheel.

Let me reiterate: There was determination for the general strike of January 6. Within the Revolutionary Committee created to lead the struggle (it is understood from accounts that the number of chairs in this committee varied between 30 and 50 on different days) only six members had raised objections. The committee was also clear on the aim of the strike being the toppling of the social democratic government. However, this clarity was not reflected in the very brief and plain call to strike. The content of the strike was determined by the mood of worker masses.

There were those who cautioned that this mood should not be misread and optimism about the social atmosphere in general would lead to dangerous results. Richard Müller, who had assumed important roles in organizing strikes during the war, was one of these. On the other hand, Liebknecht and Pieck were chief among the optimists. The problem of these two was an inability to act in a coordinated manner with the rest of KPD leaders and develop a common standing. KPD, which had not looked like a party on the day of its foundation, was unable to act like one again under very critical circumstances.

Liebknecht and Pieck were able to meet with the other KPD leaders as late as the evening of January 6. It was too late to plan anything. The whole day was wasted with fruitless discussions within the Revolutionary Committee and inconclusive negotiations to persuade the military units in Berlin.

It later became known that the Committee, which left the worker masses leaderless, had drafted a public mandate declaring that SPD government had been annulled and the Revolutionary Committee was in power. When social democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* printed this mandate, one of the signatories of which was Liebknecht, white terror had already begun. Obviously, SPD was seeking a pretext to crack down on the communists.

The other KPD leaders did not know about this mandate until it was printed in *Vorwärts*. Because of this, the relationship between Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht was strained or even

contentious until January 15 on which they were murdered by backstabbing cowards.

Such was the enormous cost of not being able to, and not wanting to become a party.

For example, on the morning of January 6, which will witness the largest mass demonstration of the German Revolution, KPD's newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* did not display anything out of ordinary. For the organ of a party bent on a final confrontation, "The Red Flag" was exceedingly calm.<sup>34</sup>

In this panorama, the relative shares of provocation, spontaneous outburst of worker masses and deliberate actions of Revolutionary Committee in the events of January 6 become irrelevant.

On the other hand, the government was undoubtedly in fear, but this fear did not preclude a cunning deliberation for mapping a way out. They had discerned the indecision in the workers' front. Besides, there was an opportunity to launch counter-propaganda in the capital city: The reds were disturbing the peace!

Inciting petty bourgeoisie and some of the workers against revolutionaries is always an effective tool but nobody was certain how successful this would be on the evening of January 6. Rosa Luxemburg, who acted prudently up to then (and who still did not know that her comrades Liebknecht and Pieck had declared "*the government annulled and that a revolutionary government has now taken its place*") wrote a piece for *Die Rote Fahne* and stressed that the government must be toppled:

Act! Act! Courageously, resolutely, consistently – that is the "accursed" duty and obligation of the revolutionary chairmen and the sincerely socialist party leaders. Disarm the counter-revolution, arm the masses, occupy all positions of power. Act quickly! The revolution obliges. Its hours count as months, its days as years, in world history. Let the organs of the revolution be aware of their high obligations!<sup>35</sup>

However, it was not clear what Luxemburg understood from "occupying all positions of power." A revolution and a coup d'état are certainly different things, but a political revolution obviously requires a definite target. As Luxemburg tried to refrain from

stating this definite target, she painted herself into a rhetorical corner at all the critical moments of the revolution.

In this context, those who say that Luxemburg had admitted the conditions were ripe for a Soviet government, and those who claim that she stayed skeptical against the ones who said “the time is right” are both correct. The “revolution” model in Luxemburg’s imagination did not have a suitable ground, in Germany or anywhere else.

Indecision was harrowing KPD and even worse, the differences of opinion had brought the party leadership on the brink of disintegration on these hardest days. We know Jogiches demanded that Liebknecht and Pieck leave the Revolutionary Committee and Liebknecht resisted. Similarly, it has been claimed that Jogiches proposed that Spartacus League should publicly distance itself from Liebknecht in *Die Rote Fahne*.<sup>36</sup>

KPD was conceived belatedly, failed to become a real party in its foundation, and paid the heavy price of this shortcoming in the immediate historical test that followed. The problem was neither putschism nor adventurism. It is senseless to accuse January 6-7, on which hundreds of thousands of workers took up arms and took to the streets demanding the fall of the government with “putschism” or “adventurism.” KPD failed to give vent to this raw energy, simple as that.

In the three days from January 5, the workers in Berlin had ventured to break away from SPD and confront it. Yet, this did not meet with political support. When UPSD and KPD acted in a wishy-washy manner the psychology of the masses shifted dramatically. On January 9, “unity movement” had become dominant in all factories and workplaces. The workers were exerting a strong pressure on the three left wing parties to stop struggling among themselves and replace the leaders who fomented hostility with ones that would refrain from infighting.

There was more than one reason for the emergence of a unity movement. Firstly, the worker masses had not yet discerned the differences between SPD, USPD and KPD completely. They were evaluating all three as socialist parties. Naturally, SPD’s persistence in showing itself on the side of the revolution and its claim,

when put under pressure, to gradually build socialism was an important factor. Secondly, after the inconclusive attempt on January 6-7 the workers had sensed that SPD would counteract and start a white terror, and they were trying to prevent this “fratricide.”

The unity movement spread out from Berlin to other cities, started choosing representatives and demanded the resignation of the three party leaders. Moreover, they pushed for the unification of the three parties. USPD yielded to this ultimatum while SPD and KPD refused.<sup>37</sup>

While KPD’s refusal of the unification demand was not the part of a wider strategy, SPD was biding its time for attack. The media was fueling a massive anti-communist hysteria, spreading the claim that communists were subversive saboteurs. KPD failed to take initiative. On January 13, government forces had total control over Berlin.

Noske took to the stage again. Before becoming the Minister of Defense in February, he was to give the orders to spill the blood of communists and Berlin proletariat. The sinister hunt for the “reds” by the Freikorps was initiated. KPD buildings were attacked, revolutionary policemen were killed, workers were summarily executed on spot. SPD newspaper *Vorwärts* was calling for the blood of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg every day.

They did not have to wait long. On January 15, in the house of a party member in Wilmersdorf suburb, KPD leaders Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Pieck were caught. They were taken to Eden Hotel for questioning. Then...

Then, Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered on the same day. Pieck survived and many years later became the first President of the German Democratic Republic.

Social democracy had a field day on January 16. *Vorwärts* was saying that they were “*victims of the Civil War which they themselves sparked off*”<sup>38</sup> while adding numerous lies and slander to the murders that they committed.

Major Waldemar Pabst, who had questioned Liebknecht and Luxemburg and ordered their killing, would finally come clean in 1962 after years of telling tall tales, and say, “*I had decided to kill them and I stand by this decision.*” Pabst also said that the social

democratic leaders had congratulated him after the murder. He could not have been fabricating all these, for on January 16, SPD bigwig Scheidemann was openly bragging, "*You see how their own terrorist tactic had done for themselves.*"<sup>39</sup>

The worst was that the two revolutionaries had died "distanced" from one another. It is known that before they were taken into custody, Luxemburg was bitterly arguing with Liebknecht because of the decisions he made as a member of the Revolutionary Committee without consulting anybody.

These are natural, such things happen. Moreover, there are always those who appear after defeats to declare, "I said so." An example to this in the German Revolution is Karl Radek, saying, "it was all a mistake" afterwards while his position was unclear throughout.

We will discuss further, but the mistake had not started on January 6 but before that; the basic laws of class struggle had been disregarded.

The elections that took place shortly after the murder of the two prominent communists seem to support those who claim January 6 was a historical mistake. SPD, which the proletariat had taken action to topple, received 11.5 million of the 30 million valid votes. USPD got a meager 2.3 million and KPD did not participate. In Berlin, 36.4 percent of the votes went to SPD while 27.6 percent went to USPD.

However, these numbers by themselves did not explain anything. The mood of the masses were changing daily, even hourly. Ballot box is not the suitable tool to determine this mood. Leadership is, in part, about using the opportune moments in which the revolutionary energy of the masses swell and transforming that energy rapidly into class consciousness and organization.

German communists failed to do this. The rule of capital was relieved to an extent. However, shortly afterwards Councils' Republic was declared in Bremen. In Bremen government created by workers' organizations three ministers were from USPD, three from KPD and three were unaligned. It was impossible for the reactionary government to abide with such a "thorn in its side," where the first decisions of the government were about relief for

the unemployed and raising of the wages. The army moved towards Bremen, USPD did not put up any resistance and Bremen Soviet Republic was toppled by military intervention on February 4. This time, white terror was in the streets of Bremen.

As the first month of 1919 rolled by, German capital had played the social democracy card upon the working class and won the hand. According to some, the government had provoked the working class into a premature uprising by dismissing the police chief and suppressed it in blood.<sup>40</sup>

Why doesn't anybody think that it would had been even easier to crush the Berlin proletariat if it stood still while Eichhorn was being dismissed?

In fact, in the January of 1919 there were uncountable reasons for action. Moreover, the spreading strikes in March, after just a month has passed, show that the energy of German proletariat would not easily have dissipated.

True, as the social democratic government favored capital more and more in the widespread crisis, it was inciting anger in the working class; and after the massacre in January, the class conflict across the country showed no signs of abating.

On the other hand, after its defeat KPD was opting for prudence; and making another mistake by seeing the conflict that erupted between army divisions in the capital city as "*a struggle between two factions in the state.*" However, this conflict, which claimed the lives of 1500 men, was an extension of the struggle between the forces of revolution and counter-revolution. The fact of the matter was that KPD, who had been forced underground and had to leave Berlin to settle primarily in Leipzig, was desperately in need of a breather...



## Footsteps of World Revolution

When they seized power in Russia on November 7, 1917, all the Bolsheviks without exception believed that the rest would follow. Actually, there were only signs of movement in Europe, but nobody expected the revolution to be limited to Russia.

This was consistent with both the Bolshevik tradition and Marxist teaching. Marx thought that the countries which took the reins of history would pull others forward; therefore, the revolution would spread quickly. In any case, the bourgeois revolutions had followed a similar pattern. The French Revolution in 1789 had known no bounds and, although in different ways, transformed the whole of Europe.

The failed Revolution of 1905 in Russia had not assumed a socialist character but remained within the limits of a bourgeois democratic revolution. However, in his important work *Two Tactics* written during the revolution, while elaborating on how the victory of revolutionary dictatorship of workers and peasants “*will not immediately overstep the bounds of bourgeois social and economic relationships; nevertheless, the significance of such a victory for the future development of Russia and of the whole world will be immense*” and how it will “*carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe,*”<sup>41</sup> Lenin was underlining both the character of the revolution in world scale and the limits of Russia’s role in the process of world revolution.

At that time, there was no ground to assume that Russia would

have become the center of world revolution for a very long period; nobody could have foreseen that.

It was obvious that the Bolsheviks were attributing a double meaning to the struggle in their homeland. First and foremost, they sought to put an end to Russia as the hotbed of counter-revolution and liberate the downtrodden working class, poor peasantry and the oppressed peoples of Russian Empire. This way, Russia would have ceased to be the nightmare of European proletariat; on the contrary, a strong link between Russian Revolution and the workers' movement in the west would have been established. This link would have carried Russia to socialism.

When the First World War broke out Lenin, sensing that the bloody confrontation between imperialists posed new opportunities for the revolutionary movement in Europe to act under joint purposes and slogans, was saying that the movement should immediately begin the "*propaganda for republics in Germany, Poland, Russia, and other countries, and for the transforming of all the separate states of Europe into a republican United States of Europe.*"<sup>42</sup>

However, these efforts did not produce many results. In Zimmerwald Conference, which brought together the socialists opposing the war (or, the oppositions within socialist parties), Lenin's view that the war should be transformed into a revolutionary war and a new international should be founded to this end gained only a minority support. And Zimmerwald left became history after a couple of gatherings.

The whole balance and game plan would have changed with the February Revolution in 1917. Socialist Revolution was still seen as distant, but the Tsar had been toppled and the toiling masses were now enjoying being organized and freed in the country where reaction and despotism had held sway before. Russia had ceased to be the hotbed of counter-revolution; but the war was still being fought and if the revolution was to carry an international weight, it would have to take a decisive stance against the imperialist war and immediately take steps for peace. However, the Provisional Government in Russia had no intentions of doing so. When deciding on prolonging the war, they were unashamedly declaring that

they were “*now fighting for revolutionary Russia!*”

The Russian Revolution changed course dramatically on November 7.<sup>43</sup> The rule of the bourgeois forces that came to power after the February Revolution was toppled and dictatorship of the proletariat was declared. This development had an immense international effect for two reasons. First, aside from the limited experience of Paris Commune, it was the first time in history that the oppressed, toiling masses came to power and proceeded to establish a social order without classes and exploitation. For the poor who carried the whole burden of the war, what happened in Russia was exciting. Moreover, immediately after seizing power the Bolsheviks kept their word and came to the table with Germany demanding “*immediate peace.*” Peace was the greatest yearning of the conscripted laborers across Europe and a great sympathy arose for the Bolsheviks. Across the world, from Anatolia to Britain, from India to USA, support for Soviet Russia swelled far larger than the interest in and consciousness towards socialism.

Of course, everybody was wondering how long the proletarian power was to live in a beleaguered peasant country. Nevertheless, days, weeks, then months passed by and Soviet Russia stayed upright despite all the difficulties. As it persevered, the future of world revolution came to be discussed more. Particularly in 1918, after cracks had begun to appear in German Empire, which was the country that everybody had been watching most attentively, the Petrograd-Berlin connection was contemplated upon more and more.

Indeed, the revolution was marching westward. This progress was as much a result of rising working class as the enormous political vacuum caused by the war and peace process. To such an extent that Hungary was introduced to workers’ rule on March 21, 1919 under the leadership of the Communist Party (which had very recently been founded on November 24, 1918) with the participation of social democrats. With the elections won on April 7, Hungarian Soviet Republic was declared.

After some time the imperialists provoked Romania on revolutionary Hungary. Hungarian Red Army halted the invasion, after which Serbian and Czechoslovakian armies were also mobilized to

bring down the workers' power. Social democrats quickly showed their true colors by leaving the communists alone against invaders. In spite of this, Hungarian Red Army managed to repel the invasion and advanced upon Slovak territories.

Subsequently, on June 16, Slovak Soviet Republic was declared. Revolution and counter-revolution were having a bitter struggle in Eastern Europe. However, both Hungarian and Slovak Soviet Republics had been losing strength because of internal problems and they could not be maintained; Soviet rule collapsed in Hungary on August 1, 1919.

In the course of Hungarian Soviet Republic, which had lived for 133 days, many factories, businesses and banks had been nationalized; policies that were in line with the interests of the working people had been quickly adopted. The counter-revolutionary government of Hungary, which can be seen as the first fascist government in Europe, reversed all these revolutionary policies.<sup>44</sup>

The world revolution thus took its second heavy blow in the summer of 1919.

With this blow, the discussion on whether or not world revolution will reach victory in the short term became heated. The assassination of the two leaders of German communists<sup>45</sup> and the collapse of Soviet power in Hungary and Slovakia were alarming enough. When one added to these the defeat of Munich Soviet, which we will come to in a short while, the panorama became far from reassuring.

Realistically speaking, Lenin had not come to think that Soviet Russia could be forced to stand alone for a prolonged period in 1920, as it is claimed, but as early as the second half of 1919. This was not "throwing in the towel"; but he was one of the revolutionaries with the most finely tuned instincts in history, and he had sensed the need for taking precautions. His prudence in calling European communists to be patient and refrain from adventurism in "*Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*, which he wrote next year, was as large as the risk he took in the same year during the war with Poland, which he appraised to be an important opportunity to remove the obstacles blocking the world revolution.

The strategical problems posed against communists in this

period were much more complex than is commonly thought. On one hand, the world was going through a historical revolutionary period; empires had collapsed, many new states had emerged and the order had started to crumble in all units of the system, old and new. This was a crisis of political rule and the working class had taken to the streets, either by following social democracy or with motivations that are more revolutionary. It was beyond discussion that Europe was in the grip of a revolutionary situation.

In such an environment, any initiative taken to facilitate the seizure of power by the working class is legitimate. Moreover, the task that falls to communists is to search, find and take the paths that would lead to it. No one can say that it is “untimely,” on the contrary, the time is right!

Hungarian Revolution is an example. It is obvious that in 1919 the Hungarian Communist Party led by Béla Kun was far too weak to seize power. Nevertheless, such developments happened that the ruling classes lost all their ability to rule and a massive political vacuum opened. Let us call this a power vacuum...

At that crucial moment, Hungarian communists acted without stopping to wonder “*Are we sufficiently prepared?*” or “*Can we pull this through?*” They declared Hungarian Soviet Republic in alliance with the left wing of social democrats. It was an arduous task. Arduous, but if they could have taken precautions against the treachery of social democrats, if they could have been more vigilant, if the revolutionary movement in Romania could have blocked the military intervention, if Soviet Russia could have provided armed support, the Hungarian Soviet could very well have survived.

Paul Levi, who was among the most brilliant leaders of KPD until he left the party and started drifting, displays an overly mechanical interpretation of Marxism in asserting that Hungarian communists managed to establish Soviet rule not through a proletarian uprising but because Hungarian bourgeoisie displayed an excessive clumsiness. And his thesis that KPD in Germany was not seeking such a revolution<sup>46</sup> was, no matter how morally strong it sounds, an extension of the same mechanical interpretation.

1919 was not a year in which the revolutionaries could have sat

around waiting for the working class to ripen, mature, learn and gain consciousness. Revolution was banging on all the doors; all problems had to be solved as things got ahead.

This was a revolutionary period without parallel. And it was undoubtedly initiated by The Great Socialist October Revolution.

Most western thinkers were unable to accept this fact. In Germany, at the root of many weaknesses of KPD was the aversion Rosa Luxemburg and some others had against Bolshevism. This aversion did not turn into hostility for KDP since they were truly revolutionaries; but in all of Europe, during the whole 20th century, an immense intellectual effort was made to deny the universal aspect of October Revolution. Here is an example:

There have only been two *world* revolutions. One took place in 1848. The second took place in 1968. Both were historic failures. Both transformed the world. The fact that both were unplanned and therefore in a profound sense spontaneous explains both facts - the fact that they failed, and the fact that they transformed the world. We celebrate today July 14, 1789, or at least some people do. We celebrate November 7, 1917, or at least some people do. We do not celebrate 1848 or 1968. And yet the case can be made that these dates are as significant, perhaps even more significant, than the two that attract so much attention.<sup>47</sup>

The persons who write these all have “respectable” names: Arrighi, Hopkins, Wallerstein... Their minds are befuddled by anti-communism. 1968 was a complicated process but if we are to take it in the context of this approach, 1968 was an attempt to remove communism from popular movements, not a revolution.

October 1917, on the other hand, did not spread out but was a great leap in the process of world revolution, was universal, and had done everything necessary to connect itself to other links in the process. In this sense, the formulation of Stalin is correct:

Objective: to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country, using it as a base for the defeat of imperialism in all countries. The revolution spreads beyond the confines of

one country; the epoch of world revolution has begun. The main forces of the revolution: the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country, and the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in all countries. Main reserves: the semi-proletarian and small-peasant masses in the developed countries, and the liberation movement in the colonies and dependent countries. Direction of the main blow: isolation of the petty-bourgeois democrats, and isolation of the parties of the Second International, which constitute the main support of the policy of compromise with imperialism. Plan for the disposition of forces: alliance of the proletarian revolution with the liberation movement in the colonies and dependent countries.<sup>48</sup>

The revolution and counter-revolution were locked in a deadly struggle. Soviet Russia, while seeking opportunities to spread the revolution, was at the same time holding out in a bitter war of defense against those lying in wait to destroy it. British intelligence, which dispatched a report to London on August 19, 1918 containing the information that Lenin was about to escape from Petrograd and there was a yacht waiting to take him away<sup>49</sup>, was not daydreaming. The problem was that, in those years it was impossible to distinguish dreams from facts. Everyone was chasing his or her own dream, while facing facts every day.



## Comintern Sets Sail

The Second International had abandoned its revolutionary goals completely by 1914, became turncoat and eventually turned into an imperialist organization. Lenin had started seeking “a new international” from that time onwards. However, neither the Bolsheviks had the weight to become the driving force behind this quest, nor was there a widespread sentiment in the international field for this idea.

Immediately after the October Revolution, the key points of the Bolsheviks’ interaction with the worker movements in other countries changed. Furthermore, the context of these interactions became far more complex. The authority of Lenin and his comrades was not immediately recognized as it is generally assumed. In that chaotic period, among the European section of international workers’ movement there were some who took a hostile stance against Soviet rule, and quite a few thought that the proletariat of Petrograd would suffer a swift defeat. There were also those who thought that the gravitational center of the revolution would soon shift to Germany. This category also included many of the Bolsheviks.

Nevertheless, Soviet Russia persevered. As 1919 came about it was still the only workers state present, and had to act on more than one mission in the international arena. The highest priority could had been defined as the responsibility for spreading the revolution; but the protection of Soviet rule, which was beset on

all quarters by external intervention and Civil War, was also a very important task unto itself.

Spreading the revolution relied first and foremost on creating parties that had sufficient muscle and qualities to lead the revolution. To this end, a many-faceted struggle had to be given against social democracy, which was the mainstream in workers' movement. Besides, the aspects of the Russian experience that could be generalized had to be crystallized politically, theoretically and organizationally. However, not even all these were enough; to deliver the fatal blow to capitalism the communist parties had to be coordinated, even directed, from a single center.

On the other hand, the defense of Soviet Russia relied on both finding countries with which political relations could be established, and repelling the direct and indirect military interventions of imperialism.

In the first years after the revolution, it was not understood at all how high the friction between these two missions could have become. At the bottom line, the main mission was to assist and ease the revolution in Europe. As long as this came through, the other would have become sidelined.

So it was thought...

In the beginning of 1919, as preparations were underway for the foundation of the Communist International, the priority was "offense," not "defense."

The objective conditions for the revolution were ripening and the deficiency was in the subjective condition, the party:

Europe's greatest misfortune and danger is that it has no revolutionary party. It has parties of traitors like the Scheidemanns, Renaudels, Hendersons, Webbs and Co., and of servile souls like Kautsky. But it has no revolutionary party.

Of course, a mighty, popular revolutionary movement may rectify this deficiency, but it is nevertheless a serious misfortune and a grave danger.<sup>50</sup>

Lenin tells these in October 1918, that is, as the foundation of the Communist International approaches. Still, it was the German

Revolution that started the clock for the Third International and Lenin was well aware that the fact, which he calls misfortune, had become much clearer.

The preparations that had started were accompanied with agonizing news from Germany. The news of the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht resounded a shock throughout Russia. The revolutionary front had not only lost two of its important leaders. It also had started to learn how cruel social democracy (which it had been a part of and acted together with until very recently) could be if the situation demanded.

Despite the tragedy in Germany, the invitation for the inaugural meeting of the Communist International was printed on January 24. The interesting element in this letter was the significant role attributed to KPD:

In our opinion the new international should be based on the recognition of the following propositions, put forward here as a platform and worked out on the basis of the programme of the Spartakusbund in Germany and of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in Russia.<sup>51</sup>

The first among the signatory parties was also KPD. Moreover, the invitation letter gave the good news that the Third International had already materialized and only the name of Spartacus League (KPD) was cited to give an example for the parties that represented its line.

All these were proof that the Comintern was to have two driving forces, or at least the preparations had been made with this in mind. Even the working language of the inaugural meeting was set to be German.

However, there was a serious problem. The leadership of KPD, the foundation of which had been a hesitant affair in itself, believed that the declaration of the Communist International should also not be rushed. Members of the Spartacus League were not apparently against a new International or the set of principles that had materialized in the preliminary meetings; they were just avoiding a premature foundation.<sup>52</sup> They stubbornly refused to understand that, throughout the whole modern times, the need

to act with resolve on the behalf of the oppressed had never been higher than it was in the present period that the world was going through; and they thought voluntary forcing of the conditions was a “provincial” contrivance of Russian Bolsheviks.

This, to an extent, was the reason why the inaugural meeting of the Communist International – which, naturally, was marked down in history as the First Congress of the Comintern – had been devised in the form of a preliminary conference. The set date was Saturday, February 15 but due to the difficulties (caused by financial shortcomings, bureaucratic problems and police matters) that the delegates faced in arriving at Moscow, the meetings started some 15 days late.

Finally, on March 2, 1919, 35 delegates with voting power from 19 parties and 19 delegates without voting power from 16 parties came together in Moscow. Some of the delegates were revolutionaries that already lived in Russia. As Carr wrote, “*groups in the United States, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Hungary had given mandates to nationals resident in Moscow; the one British delegate had no mandate at all.*”<sup>53</sup> Some of these were prisoners of war who had gained their freedom after the revolution.

Even if the Comintern would have become a force to be reckoned with in no more than a years’ time, the panorama in the first meeting was not encouraging at all. Apart from Russian Bolsheviks, some of the attendees had no special standing in the revolutionary struggle in their countries. Even the German communists, who had such an important place in the invitation letter, were underrepresented. Hugo Eberlein, who had been sent to Moscow with the directive to delay the foundation of the Comintern without opposing it, was politically an insignificant character despite his importance in KPD (and later in the Comintern).

Indeed, he failed in the mission assigned to him by his party and within the enthusiastic atmosphere that emerged in the meetings (owing particularly to the Austrian delegate) the foundation of the Communist International was declared. However, even an important historian who usually refrained from using such precise choice of words would later have written, “*The*

*Communist International (...) was to be finally constituted at the next congress.*"<sup>54</sup>

Apparently, the prospects were not brilliant in the inaugural meeting of the organization that aspired to be a world party. Interestingly Russian communists, of whom one would expect a clear-cut vision about the function of this organization, were also confused. This was natural; because during 1919 and the few years following it, a wide variety of strategies were emerging one after the other in the party center. Only Lenin's interventions and authority were both holding the party in a revolutionary course and preventing its disintegration. Underestimating the role of this cohesive element and telling that the Bolsheviks at that time were devising impersonal and comprehensive politics serves only to distort the facts.

The Comintern also had its share of this strategical variety. For example, Russian Communist Party was represented by a delegation that consisted of Lenin, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Trotsky and Chicherin in the inaugural congress, and there were those in this delegation who were at odds with the historical role their country assumed in the course of world revolution. This role was one that would have produced devastating results unless it was embraced and resolutely played.

While the inaugural congress laid bare without any ground for argument the gross contradiction between the grandeur of the revolution rising in the west and the limits of communist presence there, some of the Russian representatives were giving voice to perspectives that cannot be explained away as "revolutionary rhetoric" under any circumstance. For example, Trotsky:

Today Moscow is the centre of the Third International. Tomorrow – this is our profound conviction – the centre will shift westwards, to Berlin, Paris, London. The Russian proletariat has welcomed with joy the envoys of the world's working classes within the walls of the Kremlin. With even greater joy will it send its own envoys to the second congress (...) to one of the Western capitals.<sup>55</sup>

Let us not be unfair to him, for he was not alone in these feelings.

In 1919, there was an all-embracing optimism in the air about the revolution in Europe.

What I want to underline is not this optimism but the secondary role some prominent Bolsheviks attributed to the Russian Revolution in general and, Trotsky's unwillingness to see Russia as deserving of socialism in particular. I will elaborate on this further when the need arises. Otherwise, if one was to be convinced by the general atmosphere in the Comintern, the declaration of a Soviet rule in Germany was imminent. To such an extent, that Berlin was the designated capital city of the Comintern; Moscow was only a provisional center!

To sum it up, these are the points that should be noted about the foundation of the Communist International:

The Communist International, The Third International, or the Comintern was founded with a weak gathering. Apart from Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) [RCP(b)], none of the parties in the inaugural congress carried a substantial weight in the working class. Russian Bolsheviks were making haste so as to break the hegemony of social democracy prevalent among the workers' movement and also encourage and speed up the foundation of communist parties in Europe. It was obvious that the revolutionary wave would not last forever; therefore, the aim of the new international is stated clearly in the invitation letter: The seizing of power by the working class. All these considered, the criticism that The Communist International was "Russianized" further on should be questioned. While it is obvious that the weight of Soviet administration in the Comintern did not always produce healthy results, this problem does not change the fact that the Comintern was largely founded by the lead, support, determination and even imposition of Russian Bolsheviks, and later became a formidable power through their exertion.

To speak plainly, there was no other option.

Let us proceed on this... At least initially, RCP(b) had spent great effort for the foundation of the Comintern, but it had very limited resources which it can afford to spare for it. Soviet Russia had very serious cadre limitations even in vital issues. We will see the enormous problems this posed in Red Army and the Commissariat for

(Ministry of) Foreign Affairs. Under these conditions, it is hard to say that the Russian team in the Communist International was chosen from among the best cadres.

Of course I will not claim that the chairman in its foundation, Zinoviev (in both the deeds and writings of whom I see a revolutionary who is sometimes brilliant but often inconsistent), was a mediocre personality. The Bolsheviks had set aside one of their most important cadres for the Comintern.<sup>56</sup> However, let us not forget the fact that the choosing of Angelica Balabanoff (Balabanova) from Italian Socialist Party as the Secretary of the Third International shortly after its foundation may be shown as a testimony to the meagerness of resources with which it was founded. Her memoirs were later published<sup>57</sup>; Balabanoff was not a communist in any sense of the word and she would have become a determined anti-communist shortly afterwards.

Zinoviev chairs the organization for quite some time, but the Comintern was not solely its Chairman. An Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) was created in the First Congress. Most parties could not even send representatives to this board, so the Russians had to bear almost the whole workload. In time, establishing bilateral relations with parties was also left either to the Russians or to communists from other nations living in Russia. The cadres appointed to the Comintern by the Soviet government, which was short on "specialists," sometimes acted in a wayward manner or, in some cases, imposed their personal views. A variety of character defects from aspirations to prove oneself to competitiveness was also apparent.

On the other hand, one of the chief misfortunes of the Comintern was the absence of Lenin. Of course, he attended all the four congresses between 1919 and 1922, made immensely critical interventions, but it is difficult to say that he spared much time to the workings of the Comintern apart from attending these congresses held in Moscow. During the same period, Soviet Russia was locked in a "vital" military, economic and political struggle. Moreover, the flow of information in those days was not as healthy as it is today and under those circumstances, Vladimir Ilyich generally received belated and defective news about the developments within

the communist parties and the general progress of the class struggle in Europe. An attentive eye can also see examples in which Lenin was deliberately misled by Comintern officials.

However, let us return to the foundation. We can say that in 1919 the initiation of The Communist International carries a greater meaning than its material presence. Zinoviev, at the head of the organization, described it as a “*propaganda association*.” Its secretary, Karl Radek saw it as “*merely a symbol*,” while KPD leader Paul Levi defined it as an “*expression of the solidarity of the international proletariat with the Russian Revolution*.”<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, the Second Congress in 1920 that is defined as “the real foundation” had actually shouldered the burden of resolving the problems left over from 1919 and transforming the Comintern into a real headquarters of international revolution. On the other hand, 1920 was also the year in which prominent figures like Lenin and Stalin became definitely assured that revolution in Europe would not have been realized in short order. The responsibility of defending Soviet Russia, the largest achievement at hand, was becoming counterpoised to the risk of losing all while trying to win all. Consequently, in 1920 the Comintern was imposing an uncompromising bolshevization and focus on revolutionary aims on the newly founded parties while at the same time urging them to be patient and stay away from adventures! When resolutions that outlined these two incompatible tendencies were put on table in 1920, the member parties of the Comintern would have been pelted with fire and ice at the same time.

## Farce, Then Tragedy Once Again

Bavaria and its capital Munich had played an unpredictable role during the Revolution of 1918. One reason behind this had been Bavaria's perennial sentiment of "not belonging" and its tendency to act independently. This tendency would have shortly been used by the counter-revolutionary forces of the state.

However, Bavaria's relation to the German Revolution had to be played out to its conclusion; in a tragicomic manner...

In 1919, German militarism, allied with social democracy, had first crushed Berlin, then Bremen. However, nationwide discontent was still prevailing. The worker masses could live neither with SPD, nor without it. Social democratic leaders were stalling the masses with lies of "gradual transition to socialism" on one hand while branding striking workers, revolutionary soldiers and protesters trying to claim their rights as "subversives" and ruthlessly attacking them on the other.

In this weird environment, the turn to revolt came back to Bavaria in the rotation. On April 6-7, the Independent Social Democrats (USPD) of Bavaria which were led by Toller decided to declare Bavarian Soviet Republic. They also had the anarchists in tow.

Actually, an assassination had paved the way to the Soviet Republic. This time it was Kurt Eisner, who had led the movement that declared the independence of Bavaria in November 1918 and hastened the downfall of the Kaiser. His party USPD had got 2.5

percent of the vote in the elections, he had been trying to distance himself from politics, but history had one last mission for him! He was shot on April 21 and his funeral turned into a massive demonstration. Once more, the power in Munich passed into the hands of workers and soldiers.

After the events, a social democratic government was set up with Hoffmann as minister president. However, the economic situation was unbearable and working masses were swiftly becoming radicalized. Under such circumstances, representatives of SPD, USPD and KPD started the negotiations for a Councils' rule. KPD leadership thought that an isolated attempt in a state where the majority of the population was conservative Catholics and organized power of the working class was weak would have been "suicidal," and sent Eugen Leviné to discourage the Bavarians.

However, history had cast Leviné into a role much larger than merely stopping a provocative attempt.

They did not listen to Leviné's urgings and Bavarian Soviet Republic, which was "Soviet" only in name, was founded. KPD abstained from joining the government. On the other hand, Hoffmann, who had been the head of the initial republic, fled the city to form an armed force to threaten the so-called Soviet Republic. Therefore, the new republic was stuck in Munich, and surrounded internally by armed elements of Bavarian origin as well as externally by the German army contingents positioned at the border.

The counter-revolution was taking things seriously, but there was no opposing government to take seriously on the other side. The job of the Ministry of Exterior was given to Franz Lipp, who was mentally sick. No reforms were made that would have furthered the interests of the worker masses who had great expectations. Chaos was prevalent in the city.

The burden to organize the city defense against the counter-revolutionary coup was subsequently left to the shoulders of the Communist Party, which had some three thousand militants in the city. Moving swiftly, they repelled the initial coup attempt. Following this success, the worker masses started to ask Leviné, who had been sent from Berlin to discourage them from forming a Soviet Republic, to "take the lead." Leviné, who thought that the

situation had reached a point at which not only that Soviet Republic but all the achievements, even the existence of organized working class in Bavaria was under threat, accepted.

On April 13, communists were now in power. The bourgeoisie was disarmed completely, the organized workers of the city were armed, food stocks in storages were impounded and distributed to the public and some businesses were nationalized. However, Munich stood alone, the economy was bankrupt, and starvation was only days away as the troops of the social democratic butcher Noske marched on the city.

Amidst the panic, the city plunged into chaos. The communists had failed to win over the peasantry and the defeatist USPD members in the government were asking for their resignation. They got what they wished on April 27, and the situation became even worse.

Bavarian Soviet Republic, which was declared in a farce, went down in tragedy. When counter-revolutionary gangs gained the city on May 1, there was no organized force left to oppose them. Even then, they massacred 600 people.<sup>59</sup> Leviné was arrested and put to trial.

A certain part of Leviné's testimony on trial were a perfect summary of what had happened in Bremen, Munich and many other places: *"The Social Democrats start, then run away and betray us; the Independents fall for the bait, join us and then let us down, and we Communist are stood up against the wall."*<sup>60</sup>

Leviné shared the same fate with many other honorable communists of the bloody 1919; he was killed.

At this point, naturally, the argument also became heated. What should the communists have done?

György Lukács, who positioned himself far from the revolutionary ideals in his late life, sums the events up as follows:

The call to set up the Munich Soviet is a characteristic example: even though the genuine communists wholeheartedly opposed the move and declined to take any part in it at all, the first, apparently genuine, Soviet Republic of Bavaria came into being as a result of the putsch staged by the majority socialists,

independents and anarchists. And whereas, once it had been established, the communists devoted all their energy to turning this bogus sovereignty of the proletariat, this paper power, into a real dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>61</sup>

So, under these circumstances, was there an alternative to the decisions taken by KPD?

Some elements within KDP as well as some historians think that Leviné lost his cool in Munich and “fell for the bait” himself. Obviously, the only decision that can be put to question here is the decision of KPD to get the lead of the government. Apart from this, the decision to defend the city is above criticism. However, trying to keep alive a groundless Soviet Republic created and then abandoned by clowns... this is really a questionable decision. Yet, the facts at hand show that, had not the communists assumed government responsibility in Munich, the resulting power vacuum would have been immense and the laborers of the city would have been left with no protection.

Paul Levi seems nonchalant about this situation when he says, “if [the government] was revolutionary, we had to be part of it; if it was not, it might as well go to the devil.”<sup>62</sup> In addition to saying that taking up arms in defense of Munich had been a mistake, he also reminds that KPD was staying away from any armed confrontation in those days since defeat was inevitable.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, there were also other examples in 1919, in which German working class and soldiers took up arms independent of party decisions. In any case, nobody could have guaranteed that Noske’s killers would not have spilled blood if Munich had shown no resistance. In those days, workers who let down their arms, or who had not taken up in the first place were frequently stood against the wall in dozens.

Social democracy would of course resort to white terror to transform the authority of German Revolution into the authority of counter-revolution and of the social order. No kind of retreat would have completely prevented this terror.

And finally, some words about the accusations of “losing their cool” against those who took action by those who stood by as event unfolded: A most important principle in revolutionary struggle is

to feel the mood of the toiling people, not become alienated to it while also not allowing oneself to be carried away by it. The most important problem in the whole German Revolution was that steps forward remained piecemeal and local, and coordinated action across the country could not be initiated. It is hard to feel the mood of Munich in the defeated Berlin of April 1919. Moreover, for KPD, which could not rid itself of the phobia of centralism, calming down the agitation in Munich from outside was absolutely impossible.

Thus, our solemn duty today is to stand and salute Eugen Leviné and his comrades, who had to defend a peculiar Soviet Republic that emerged in Bavaria the history of which is steeped with right wing reaction. They did their duty, and paid for it with their lives.



## **Anatolian Move against Imperialist Peace**

The rule is simple: Imperialist wars end in imperialist peace.

The First World War had started in 1914 and would have ended in the October of 1918. However, the Bolsheviks who came to power with the slogan “immediate peace” did not wait for this eventual end and sat down to negotiate with Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire, with whom Russia was at war. Commissar for Foreign Affairs Trotsky’s conduct was, while sounding pleasing to ear, completely unrealistic and irresponsible in these negotiations. As a consequence, Soviet Russia had to cede a considerable territory further to Germany between the start of negotiations and March 3, 1918 on which the treaty was signed. According to the treaty signed at Brest-Litovsk the Soviets were also agreeing to make important concessions on its Ottoman front in the east. All these put together was the heavy ransom the young socialist country had to pay for a breather in its effort to build a new social order.

Interestingly, this ransom was paid to the losing side! Shortly afterwards, in seven months’ time, the turn to pay not only a ransom but a heavy price would have come around to Germany and its allies. German Empire had called for peace in October but this had not saved it, and the revolution had carried Germany off into the Republic. The first step for the new order was to sign an armistice

with the victors on November 11. Similarly, in Ottoman Empire, with the Armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918 the *İttihat ve Terakki*<sup>64</sup> era was coming to an end and the Imperial Palace and Vizier's Palace (*Bab-ı Ali* - Sublime Porte) were submitting themselves to British dominion.

The Redonthe's Armistice which declares that Germany "lost" the war is a trivial detail in history since this agreement is very brief and does not state clearly what (and how much of it) Germany had lost. The bottom line of the imperialist struggle in the First World War would have been billed to Germany in the Treaty of Versailles signed of June 28, 1919. On the other hand, the situation with the Ottoman Empire was different. The content of the Treaty of Sèvres that would have been signed on August 10, 1920 was pretty much apparent in the Armistice of Mudros. The details were vague, but the armistice had almost completely zeroed out the rights of dominion and the empire as a whole had come under threat of limitless occupation.

When the war ended, Soviet Russia, although it had become diminished in territory compared to Russian Empire, had signed no agreement which would delimit the authority of October Revolution. The fate and borders of the country would have been decided upon in the ongoing Civil War and the armed resistance against foreign intervention. On the other hand, the newly formed German Republic and the Ottoman Empire that was in the process of dissolution were face to face with impositions that would have urged even the most ruthless and unjust tyrant to say "Have a heart!"

Soviet Russia had been founded on a revolutionary strategy against the imperialist war, and when the war ended, it had not become a part of the imperialist peace but started to challenge the new balance of power it created.

On December 3, 1917, while the war was still going on and Brest had not yet been signed, the Bolsheviks (with the joint signatures of Lenin and Stalin), had relinquished all Russian claims on Constantinople in a declaration that strengthened the hand of Ottoman Empire:

We hereby declare that, the secret agreement concerning the seizure of Constantinople signed by the dethroned Czar and ratified by the overthrown Kerensky is torn up, and is null and void. The Soviet of People's Commissars that is the Republic and Government of Russia is vehemently opposed to the annexation of lands belonging to others. Constantinople should stay in the hands of Muslims.<sup>65</sup>

The problem was that, while Soviet Russia was trying to be fair towards Ottomans, Ottomans, although they did not even had the strength to defend themselves, sought to take advantage of the "peaceful" Soviet rule and tried to expand their eastern territories down to the last minute. Even after the Armistice of Mudros...

After the Armistice of Mudros, the Bolsheviks had nothing to do with the Istanbul government. The relations were severed. From that point onwards, they would have watched the efforts of those who did not yield to the imperialist peace. First, with apprehension; then, with interest. After some time, they would have ceased just watching, but sought contact, developed cooperation and established comradeship, even if on a temporary basis.

This conduct was the logical extension of Bolshevik principles; Soviet Russia had taken an open stance against annexations and imperialist division. Besides, it was quite understandable that they sought to keep the British and other imperialists away from Caucasia and strategically important Straits between Aegean and Black Seas while they were giving up a life-or-death struggle on a very large territory. The danger was clear and present: Immediately following Mudros, the British had easily gained the targets they had failed miserably to achieve in the Gallipoli Campaign and their navy had sailed into Black Sea. All kinds of assistance to the White Army fighting against Soviet government were delivered through this channel. Moreover, the British were demanding soldiers from the Istanbul government to fight against the Red Army. Mustafa Kemal had been approached with such demands before he moved into Anatolia.<sup>66</sup> Thankfully, on its deathbed Ottoman rule did not have the strength for such endeavors.

Under such circumstances, the Bolsheviks were ready to assist

even the tiniest movement in Istanbul. The city was the focal point of workers' movement and socialist ideas while there was no development worth mentioning in Anatolia. They were trying to give strength to communist and revolutionary elements in Istanbul through the Turks and Muslims in Soviet Russia. The recent foundation of the Communist International had provided new prospects; with these, channels for a regional resistance against the dividing up of Ottoman territories could also have been opened.

Precisely at this point, it would have been seen that with Mustafa Kemal's landing in Samsun on May 19, 1919 history would gain considerable momentum. Actually, what galvanized Ottoman Turkey, which had seemed reconciled to its fate up to that point, had been the Greek occupation of Izmir and its environs that had started on May 15. Charging the Greek armies with the mission to occupy Anatolia was the largest favor the arrogant and stupid British bestowed upon Anatolian Resistance. In contrast, the Italian forces already in the region was met largely with sullen indifference. However, Greeks were not an "external" element. Greek occupation had a local, social base and it was natural that Turkish propertied classes perceived this as a threat. The same propertied classes had no qualms about working with the Italians.

The Greeks, however, were mobilized with a great ambition and sought domination.

The occupation of Izmir naturally affected the strategy Mustafa Kemal had already started to formulate on his way to Anatolia. All across the country, reactions that could have been used to fuel the struggle against occupation were springing up. In addition, Soviet Russia was taking a definite stance against the occupation.<sup>67</sup>

Adding to all these the fact the Communist Party of Greece, which had been founded in 1918, also took a radical stance against the occupation of Anatolia, distributed leaflets and incited revolts in the army (even among the troops landing at Izmir), we can easily say that in the May of 1919 a multi-faceted alliance was taking shape between Moscow and Anatolia.

When Germany would have been put onto a ruthless rack just a month afterwards on June 28, 1919, another channel of opening (although not another ally) for Soviet Russia, which was

determined to resist the imperialist status quo, would have begun to appear: Germany!

German capital was not innocent in any sense but now the price for its sins were being paid by the whole of Germany, particularly by the proletariat. In addition, Britain and France, the countries that were sucking the blood of Germany, were also the two imperialist powers that were trying every despicable trick in their repertoire to strangle the newborn socialism in Soviet Russia in its crib. Their power, their arrogance and their dominion had to be repelled.

Enver Pasha<sup>68</sup>, who had caught on this dialectics, went so far as trying to broker a Turkish-Soviet-German alliance; but there was no ground for this. The focal point of the resistance against imperialism and exploitation was the Soviet Union, and in the struggle against imperialist peace, only it had the means to establish relations with the various dynamics of resistance in different contexts and towards different goals.

With the Communist International established only recently, and with both German and Turkish representatives present there, the question was this: Would communists or other elements become central as long as the policy of Soviet Union towards Germany and Turkey is concerned?

Nobody was in a position to give a definite answer to this in 1919. There were trends and approaches, but the maturing state mind in Moscow had understood that all possibilities had to be taken into account. Undoubtedly, the determining factor was the progress of world revolution.

Of course, when Mustafa Kemal landed at Samsun on May 19, 1919, he had no idea that the struggle he was about initiate would have served the interests of the World Revolution, from which he was quite removed both ideologically and in class affiliation. However, in a short while, when he realized that overturning the Anatolian part of the imperialist peace would be an immense help to Soviet Russia, he would have made a historical decision by not abandoning his aims. A very important line in the revolutionary front was being set up between Moscow and Ankara, where he will establish his headquarters.



## **Versailles, and Playing upon Imperialist Contradictions**

Before continuing with the story of the world revolution and taking 1920, its most critical year, into focus, we have to take a sidetrack to look at the details of Soviet diplomacy. It is impossible to understand one without the other.

Some prefer to go back even further and link the historical victory of the Bolsheviks in 1917 to contradictions between the two belligerent imperialist camps. It is beyond argument that Russian Revolution had been the result of the concentration of the devastation of war on Russia, which subsequently removed many barriers that stood against the liberation struggle of laborers for decades. This should be considered together with the fact that capitalism cannot exist without crises and war. No Marxist claims that the revolution will come around in a period of relative stability in capitalism anyway.

However, there are those who take this out of proportion to claim that October 1917 was a German project; that Germany had helped the Bolsheviks, who were the most “defeatist” element in Russian Revolution, in order to cripple Russia’s war capacity. It is no secret that the Bolsheviks had worked for the defeat of the tsardom throughout the war. They would not have fallen into step with the dynasty, which sought to throttle not only the Russian workers and peasants or the oppressed peoples of the Empire but

the whole revolutionary struggle in Europe. This stance of the Bolsheviks was obviously helpful to the German and Ottoman forces fighting against Russia. However, this “overlap” was a result that happens as an objective reality in all cases involving multilateral tension and conflict. The defining factor here is whether or not the Bolsheviks, in their strategies, tactics and means of struggle, had attributed a “positive” role to one or some of the imperialist powers and allowed themselves to be used.

Those who claim that the safe passage granted by German authorities to Lenin and his companions in their return to Russia in 1917 is testimonial to such a relation between the two fail to see the fact that the Bolsheviks had made no commitments in return for this transit. Lenin’s journey was far more understandable than the situation of a revolutionary who seeks political asylum in Germany or any other European country after escaping from a government that has sentenced him or her to decades of incarceration. He had neither received money from the German state, as it is claimed, nor defended any German interest. On the contrary, the generals that had allowed the safe passage wrote more or less like *“It seemed like a good idea at the time, but we see our bungle now”* afterwards.<sup>69</sup>

However, after the Bolsheviks had seized power, Germany became central to Soviet Russia’s foreign policy in another context. On one hand, as the most critical country for the World Revolution; on the other, as an imperialist power laid low which was seeking breathing space to alleviate the suffocating effect of the Treaty of Versailles...

Soviet Russia was in need of a similar breathing space while waiting for the revolution in other countries to succeed. The contradictions between imperialist powers had not evaporated after the war, but they had transformed. Conflict of interests among the victors had also emerged. Britain and France were tackling each other, Italy was disgruntled of its share and USA, who had skimmed the cream off the bloody struggle, was looking at Europe and rubbing its hand with glee. In addition, all these powers were seeking to squat on the German economy and fill the vacuum created by its defeat.

In sum, the conflict of interests among imperialist powers, coupled with the ruthlessness of the Treaty of Versailles were presenting Soviet Russia with new opportunities that had to be exploited. As the revolution stalled in the west, making use of these opportunities were becoming vital.

To make a very crude categorization, among the chief imperialist powers France was the most hostile one against Soviet Russia. However, the main source of physical threat was Britain. German capital and militarism on the other hand were ready to establish relations with Soviet Russia in spite of (and, to an extent, to diminish) the “red threat” in their own country.

Politically and economically, the Bolsheviks did not have the luxury to set aside the goal to normalize relations with Britain and USA. In the context of national security and commercial-economic needs of the country USA-Britain bloc was absolutely without a substitute. However, in London, the pragmatic circles that had their eyes on the economics prospects presented by the immense Russian geography were being blocked or impeded by a clique that still had dreams about toppling the Soviet rule.

One the other hand, it can be said that Germany had to establish relations with the Bolsheviks during those years. The effect of this mutual bond in the development of economic and military relations, and problems that were created by the friction between this and German Revolution would be taken into account in a separate chapter. An exclusive chapter will be devoted to this subject because on one hand, Germany was the key country through which the revolution could have become a world revolution; and on the other, it was the country that would have provided a breathing space to Soviet Russia, which was the sole achievement of the revolutionary process at that time. One should accept that there stood a contradiction without a solution between these two facts.

But first, let us take a closer look to how the Bolsheviks approached the conflict of interests between imperialists, and the kinds of difficulties they were facing.

Before we begin, a note... Although it is obvious that the conflict of interests among imperialists provide serious opportunities and a maneuvering space within the political arena for the working

class movement, one thing should always be kept in mind: Enmity against labor and anti-communism are constants in the equation; no imperialist country can rid itself of this basic instinct, and none of them would want any such riddance. Between them, in even the bloodiest moments of struggle, an implicit collaboration of the capitalists manifests itself.

In this sense, presenting competition among imperialists as the only reason behind the war is wrong. This is why Lenin felt obliged to underline “*distracting the attention of the working masses from the internal political crises, (...) disuniting and nationalist stultification of the workers, and the extermination of their vanguard so as to weaken the revolutionary movement of the proletariat*” as the real context of the First World War.<sup>70</sup>

Class enmity and imperialist competition went hand in hand.

This did not change after October Revolution.

As Karl Radek points out, the imperialists sought to destroy Russia not only to rid themselves of the first proletarian state, but also to prevent its emergence as an independent power.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, Russia was a great country; and none of the imperialist powers wanted its rivals to hold monopoly over the access to its raw material and oil fields, or obtain exclusive privileges to make investments there, buy grain from and sell machinery to it.

In this context, Lenin was so sure of himself as to write these:

The experience of world politics has shown that the alliance against Soviet Russia is irretrievably doomed to failure, because it is an imperialist alliance, an alliance of plunderers who are not united, and are bound by no genuine or permanent interests.<sup>72</sup>

There was neither unity between them, nor within any of them! In Britain, during the period (1918-1924) of our study, different groups of capitalists were struggling with each other in the political arena. Three names were prominent: Lloyd George, the Prime Minister in some of the years of our study; Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War and Air; and Lord Curzon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Lloyd George thought that it was

impossible to rebuild Europe and protect British interests without Soviet Russia. Churchill on the other hand was a sworn anti-communist that kept up the struggle against Bolshevism even in his nightly dreams.<sup>73</sup> Curzon was of the same mind. They did not have in-depth knowledge about the communists, but were acting on an inflexible anti-communism and convinced that isolation was the most effective method of struggle against the Soviets.<sup>74</sup>

In this panorama, the Soviet-British relations followed a fluctuating course throughout the period, affected by composition of governments, successes and blunders of Soviet diplomacy and other balances of power in Europe.

This was a complicated matter. The development of British-Soviet economic relations would have worked towards the interests of both sides, but in those years, Soviet Russia was the “dependent” party. The economy was devastated, Civil War had started, sabotages, chaos... Besides, Britain was also presenting a military threat to Soviet Russia. Apart from the assistance it was giving the White Army, there was the possibility of a direct intervention, and this possibility was sometimes becoming an actuality. True, the British also did not have much strength for another war, but it still had enough military might to threaten Soviet Russia.

The greatest weapon against this in the hands of the Soviet government was the immense sympathy it had inspired among the working classes of Europe including Britain. Any hostile conduct against Soviet Russia was met with strikes and sabotages by the workers. Besides, Moscow had become the center of world revolution, and revolution was a threat in London, too (albeit not as large as it was in Berlin). However, as time went by and the revolution turned its face eastward, another nightmare would have started to take shape for British imperialists. Beginning from Turkey and encompassing Iran, Afghanistan and India (that is, in a region that was most critical in Britain’s imperialists policies), a movement for independence that was a natural ally for Soviet Russia was rising.

Inevitably, under these conditions, British capital started to say, “*Don’t infringe on my interests and I won’t infringe on yours, we can even establish commercial relationship.*” In this vein, a *quid pro quo* was imposed in the trade agreement signed between the

two countries on March 16, 1921: The Bolsheviks were forbidden to make propaganda.<sup>75</sup>

Very logical, for them! What about Soviet Russia?

For the Bolsheviks, who had faith in world revolution and were devoted to the communist cause, the logic of the period was extremely cruel. True, they were in desperate need of a breathing space internationally, but it was obvious that this would have come at a high price. So long as the flame of world revolution kept burning bright, they took risks and played for time. However, as the revolutionary wave broke and started to recede, they would have to adapt to the new rules of the game.

This was a very taxing issue. Without Lenin's determination and creativity, it was obvious that Soviet Russia would have been dragged to ruin by the actions of some irresponsible Bolsheviks.

This is not an attempt at slander, we will investigate each example, burst the bubbles of European Marxists and liberal leftists, demystify urban legends.

Once more, it will be seen that Lenin, and Stalin after him, were very accomplished revolutionaries.

If we are looking for accomplishments, let us take the immediate issue that was at hand: The correct stance to be taken against the Treaty of Versailles. We underlined before that this treaty was the most obvious testimonial to the barbarity of British and French imperialism. Soviet Russia was struggling against the new status quo of Europe that materialized in the Treaty of Versailles.

However, the treaty was both galvanizing the German Revolution and providing a suitable ground for diplomatic maneuvers to Soviet Russia. Moreover, it was obvious that a swift dissolution of the Versailles system would have had devastating consequences for the European workers' movement and had the potential of dragging Soviet Russia into another devastating war.

In 1920, in *"Left-Wing" Communism: an Infantile Disorder* (which we will discuss in detail within other contexts below) Lenin, was pointing out the fact that some German communist were building their politics on an unconditional refusal of the Treaty of Versailles, and stressing that this was a mistake. He was asserting that if a Soviet government were to be established in Germany; it,

too, would had to submit to the treaty for some time.<sup>76</sup>

What did this mean? This was an analysis that underlined the impossibility of the imperialist status quo being destroyed in the near future. Moreover, Lenin was saying that, even if the revolution succeeded in Germany, the present balance of power might not have changed radically!

Here, obviously to pull the reins of the parties in other countries that had the tendency to dash into adventures without gathering sufficient strength, Lenin bends the rhetoric even further:

To give absolute, categorical and immediate precedence to liberation from the Treaty of Versailles and to give it *precedence over the question* of liberating *other* countries oppressed by imperialism, from the yoke of imperialism, is philistine nationalism (worthy of the Kautskys, the Hilferdings, the Otto Bauers and Co.), not revolutionary internationalism. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie in any of the large European countries, including Germany, would be such a gain for the international revolution that, for its sake, one can, and if necessary should, tolerate *a more prolonged existence of the Treaty of Versailles*. If Russia, standing alone, could endure the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk for several months, to the advantage of the revolution, there is nothing impossible in a Soviet Germany, allied with Soviet Russia, enduring the existence of the Treaty of Versailles for a longer period, to the advantage of the revolution.<sup>77</sup>

The Treaty of Versailles could have been tolerated because that treaty was keeping the unfairness, the injustice and the contradictions between imperialists from becoming submerged once more; therefore, it was creating further fragility in world capitalism. Shortly after writing "*Left-Wing*" *Communism*, in the Second Congress of the Comintern, Lenin touched on the same subject, this time showing Keynes as his witness. As a bourgeois economist, Keynes had understood the Versailles System much better than many communists. Claiming that this treaty was dragging entire Europe, or even the whole world to ruin, and warning "*what you are doing is madness*," he had resigned his position.<sup>78</sup>

Madness, or insanity... Of such a magnitude that the victors

were falling upon each other. French and Britain were falling out while USA was distancing itself from the Versailles order and refusing to ratify the treaty. Imperialist system had just left the war behind but neither the old contradictions had disappeared, not the appearance of new ones could had been prevented. Britain and USA were drifting closer against Japan in the Pacific, the victors were opening new fronts against each other. The same was true in Europe. For example, Britain was seeking to sell goods to Germany but was coming up against the unyielding walls of the Treaty of Versailles. As France impoverished Germany through war reparations, the export plans of the British were coming to naught. Therefore, the demands of British capital that the war reparations heaped on Germany be alleviated was quite logical.

All these considerations were taken into written account in 1922, at the last congress of The Communist International that Lenin were able to attend.<sup>79</sup>

The Treaty of Versailles was a source of pain, misery and contradiction in both 1920 and 1922, but there the position of the Bolsheviks had changed in the meantime. While in 1920 Lenin had said that the struggle against the treaty should not be categorical, in 1922 the Comintern resolved that “*the Communist parties – above all of Germany and France – must carry out a common struggle against the Versailles Treaty,*” underlining that “*The French Communist Party must exert all its strength against the imperialist efforts of its own bourgeoisie, against the attempt to enrich the French bourgeoisie through heightened exploitation of the German proletariat.*”<sup>80</sup>

The reason of this shift should be obvious. In the two years that passed, Soviet Russia had made considerable progress in its relations with Germany, the failure of German revolution had become a very strong possibility, and it had become evident that the weakening of the Treaty of Versailles would have strengthened the international position of Soviet Russia. Moreover, the only side insisting on the persistence of the Treaty in its present form was France and this country was the first and foremost in its enmity against the reds. Taking into account the fact that the British, who had signed a commercial agreement with the Soviets on

March 16, 1921<sup>81</sup>, were also disgruntled with the Treaty, we can conclude that the Bolsheviks had learned a lot about the intricacies of foreign policy in a very short time.

They were revolutionaries who had to take on a very hard mission under arduous circumstances...

A responsibility they had never expected, the responsibility of establishing socialism in one country, was gradually being heaped on their shoulders.



## **Socialism In One Country: Necessity, Not Choice**

Socialism in one country... What does this mean, actually? If we are to adhere strictly to the Marxist theoretical framework, and if we are referring to an advanced stage of socialism, that is, communism, even the possibility of its establishment in one country is unthinkable.

Then, was this really the argument? Was the political dispute on this issue between those who wanted to establish socialism only in Soviet Russia and those who were saying that the whole world deserves socialism?

Sheer nonsense... No, this was definitely not the argument. The argument was on what was to be done in Soviet Russia, and afterwards, in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)<sup>82</sup>, if the revolution stalled in Europe. Nobody had foreseen such a solitude or isolation from the beginning.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, "holding on to power in order to assist the revolution and the parties that would lead the revolution in Europe" had been an adequate mission definition at first and everything seemed so simple. However, with every passing day that Soviet Russia had to face alone in the capitalist world, the concord between staying alive and assisting the revolution in other countries was damaged.

Furthermore, the real problem was this: If, contrary to expectations, the revolution in the west had not realized in short order;

how would Soviet Russia have evolved apart from staying alive? Or, to put it more clearly, to what end and with which perspective would it have stayed alive? Truly, when Civil War broke out in 1918 and in the years that immediately followed, the context of “staying alive” had been trivial. However, for the Russian proletariat who had seized power with high aspirations to establish a new way of life, passing away the time by only safeguarding Soviet Russia and looking forward to the European revolution did not present a mission; and it was not possible to “stay alive” this way.

The differences between the answers that were being given to the question “how would Soviet Russia evolve?” had not carried a great importance in the burning days of Civil War and foreign intervention. These differences sometimes created serious difficulties, but the real problem would have arisen after the Civil War and foreign intervention was defeated in Russia, and when capitalism had regained stability and the revolutionary wave had broken and receded in Europe.

Among the prominent Bolsheviks, there were serious incompatibilities between their outlooks on life, their psychology, their observations and expectations concerning international workers’ movement and the progress of revolution in western countries, and the ways in which they related themselves to Russia. After revolution failed in Europe and Soviet Russia managed to stay alive; it would have become impossible to derive a common strategy from these differences.

In time, these differences came to be summarized briefly as follows: Trotsky had thought that socialism in one country was impossible and was pursuing a strategy that adhered to the interests of world revolution, while Stalin had turned his back on world revolution and focused on the establishment of socialism in the Soviet Union. Trotsky was removed, and Soviet Union betrayed the world revolution.

Do not focus on my choice of words here, other variations may also be formulated. For example, from a different point of view on the same divide, Trotsky may be shown as “an adventurist bent on exporting the revolution” and Stalin as a shrewd leader who knows about *realpolitik*.

Are these all true, really? Was Trotsky a dauntless advocate of world revolution; and was Stalin the representative of a Russia-centered, status quo seeking point of view?

Sadly, for a very long time, almost anybody who joined the ranks of revolutionary struggle have accepted this cliché regardless of the side they joined. Trotsky was evil, because he was unrealistic and chasing after a dream of world revolution; or, Trotsky was the red angel, he was the one acting according to the interests of world revolution!

This, precisely, is the urban legend.

As I noted above, in the months following October Revolution, all the Bolsheviks were expecting the revolution to spread westward. A series of developments in 1919 curtailed this expectation. Paul Levi notes that the downfall of Munich Soviet did not affect the German workers' movement much, but rattled those in Soviet Russia who had illusions about the German Revolution.<sup>84</sup>

Many documents support Levi's words. Collectively, the Bolsheviks usually failed to keep an accurate track of the German Revolution. The reason for this is simple: Information came belatedly and in a refracted way. From a longer view on the whole period, one can see that Zinoviev, at the head of the Comintern, had always overstated revolutionary opportunities while Karl Radek, who was the secretary of ECCI and the person responsible for Germany affairs, had prepared his reports according to his personal preferences in KPD. Even a fraction of what we read about Munich Soviet Republic today would have been enough for Lenin, who was a master insurrectionist, to say "*what the hell is this?*" and stay away from unrealistic evaluations.

Moreover, the adverse happenings in 1919 were not confined to the downfall of Soviet rule in Munich. The Soviet experiences in Hungary and Slovakia had failed and, worst of all, German revolution had lost its two leaders in January. We know that, as the second half of the year came around and the revolution stalled in the west, Lenin had started to think seriously about what was to be done in Russia. But one should not think that the ones losing their optimism were only Lenin or Stalin, who had not been very enthusiastic about the developments in Germany to begin with. It

is evident that from the August of 1919 onwards, Trotsky was also aware that the revolutionary wave was receding in the west. He was warning his comrades to focus on the east instead of west; the revolution could have happened in India before Paris or London.

A question inevitably arises here: What did it change for the Bolsheviks that the revolution developed in the west or the east? What should the Bolsheviks have done? Export revolutions? Apart from the Polish campaign in 1920 (which we will look upon in detail), I have not read about a single Bolshevik leader who attributed the responsibility of spreading the revolution to other countries through the use of military force to Soviet Russia. Including Trotsky. This is what Lev Davidovich Trotsky writes in 1920:

Nevertheless, if Mr Churchill and his like consider that the Soviet power is nothing other than an organisation for international revolutionary conspiracy, that is to be explained by their political illiteracy. We do not at all consider that history has imposed on workers' and peasants' Russia the duty to carry out the revolution in all countries. More precisely, we think that workers' and peasants' Russia can at present render its greatest service to the working class of the world by concentrating all its efforts upon intensive economic and cultural work.<sup>85</sup>

Trotsky also writes about the obligation of demonstrating that *"communism is not so much a destructive as a creative force"* just after these.

It was also Trotsky who, on many occasions as the head of the Red Army, pointed out the inconsistency of charging the Red Army with offensive doctrine while Soviet Russia was making concessions to foreign capital. When he was criticized for downplaying the revolutionary character of armed forces and disregarding "offense" as a basic military principle, he reminded that what Soviet Russia needed was not war but economic reconstruction.

Trotsky's problem was not about having delusions of "world revolution," it was his inconsistency. This unique revolutionary, whose almost every word contradicted the next, have started accusing the Soviet government of turning her back on world revolution only after he had taken a particularly anti-Soviet stance

following his dismissal from party duties. Otherwise, many things can be said about Trotsky but he was not stupid enough to see that the revolution in Europe had been stalled. Let me underline this again: Among the characters of Russian Revolution, Trotsky may be the most inconsistent and most complicated individual; and the one with the least faith in his country.

I can provide examples similar to the one above illustrating Trotsky's calls to reason and prudence. However, there had also been many times in which he advocated quite the opposite. One in 1918 is particularly important in the present context of our study:

Permanent, decisive successes are not conceivable for us without a European Revolution. We cannot therefore purchase partial successes at the price of such procedures and combinations as may put obstacles in the path of the European proletarian movement.<sup>86</sup>

Permanent, decisive... Past a certain point, these are subjective terms and should not be taken much into account. However, the "*we cannot (...) purchase partial successes*" part is an open admission that if situation demanded, the Russian Revolution could have been sacrificed.

If Trotsky had not played the "*betrayal of world revolution*" card afterwards in his polemics against Stalin, we could have dismissed his writings in 1918 as an "infantile disorder" because, as I noted before, there were occasions in which he said quite the opposite afterwards. However, it should be known that, both during his assignment as the Commissar of Foreign Affairs and when he commanded the Red Army as the Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs, Trotsky's conduct bespoke a complete absence of belief that Soviet Russia could have advanced towards socialism through internal dynamics. Clearly, he had never accepted the increasingly central role Russian Revolution had gradually come to play within the world revolution; and could not be affiliated to this role after it openly presented itself.

Obviously, his belittling of his assignment as the Commissar of Foreign Affairs with the bravado "*what diplomatic work are we apt to have? I will issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the*

*peoples of the world, and then shut up shop*<sup>87</sup> had not relied on a foolish belief that the world revolution would have been victorious in a few weeks. What he did was dragging his feet over taking part in the steps towards the organization of a socialist state in Russia.

Can his words “*If Russia were alone in the world, Martov’s reasoning would be correct*”<sup>88</sup> be explained otherwise? The idea he attributes to Martov is staying away from socialist revolution and defending of a minimum programme instead of a maximum programme. In these words, Trotsky is stating that Bolsheviks’ seizure of power in Russia was important only as a link in the world revolution chain.

This is correct in a way, yet completely wrong in another. One question insistently begs for an answer: What if the world revolution did not arrive at the expected time?

We have shown that Trotsky was not one to push the Red Army into suicide missions. Then, what? Then, when the whole writings, speeches and official actions of the inconsistent Trotsky are taken in their entirety, it will be seen that the way he found out of the dilemma was to somehow keep Soviet Russia alive without pushing forward towards socialism, and wait for the world revolution to make another leap forward. Particularly his policies in the Red Army bespeak this tendency, and we will come to those in due time.

In this study, we are seeking to answer the questions “*Which factors prevented the spread of the world revolution in its most critical years between 1918 and 1924, particularly in 1920?*”, “*Which of those were inevitable?*” and “*What mistakes did the communists of the period make?*” A century has passed, and the time has come to take on these questions boldly. The field is teeming not only with openly anti-communist bourgeois historians, but also with intellectuals who presume to speak for Marxism but display an attitude even more fanatical than bourgeois historians when it comes to anti-Sovietism. The way to prevent these from bending the facts of this period into whatever narrative they wish is not pumping away the rigorous, superstitious story of an “infallible party line” that becomes swamped more and more in idealism every day. An open, bold, honest approach would underline the legitimacy of

the direction taken by Lenin and Stalin much more effectively. Moreover, this approach would make the successes of the whole of Soviet history and its achievements as a part of world revolution much more apparent.

We are talking about taboos. Claiming that after 1917, particularly in the period in which there were different factions in the party, and radical differences of opinion between prominent Bolsheviks were readily apparent (and this mainly coincides with the critical 1918-1924 period of the world revolution), the Bolshevik Party and the Comintern had an "infallible" line superior to and unaffected by all these differences serves only to contaminate revolutionary struggle with idealism.

There was no such line. Lenin's hold protected the party from many swerves. However, who can claim that, apart from many others, characters like Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky, who had assumed immensely critical responsibilities, were neutral elements? The means of communication were not like as they are today, letters and reports reached their destinations sometimes weeks after they have been sent. For rapid communication, telegraph was used and because of this, a few sentences had to be sufficient in most cases. In addition, all the prominent cadres including the ones cited above had created their own factions around them. Those who thought alike had also developed collaborations and favored one another in assignments, or when one of them made a mistake that needed to be covered up. What saved Soviet Union from the hands of an inconsistent, aimless, irresponsible, overly sentimental cadre formation was Stalin who had built his own faction. All anti-communist historians write that Stalin and his companions were not "brilliant." Even if this was true, nobody can deny that many of them were responsible, courageous, hard-working communists who were undaunted by hardships and had very strong affiliations to their party.

This has a bearing on our study: In the period we take into account, The Communist International was an organization that did not exactly reflect the collective will of the Bolsheviks. We cannot understand any of the arguments concerning the period without taking this into account.

Having noted this, let us proceed. Soviet Russia was facing very serious threats in 1918. The counter-revolutionary forces had overcome the first shock and were building an army, most of the specialists of the country had either escaped abroad or shown unwillingness to collaborate with the Soviet government, and following the Brest Treaty with Germany, countries like Britain, France, USA, Japan and Poland had all made military interventions into Soviet Russia in one form or another and were threatening to make more.

Some historians claim that the Bolsheviks had overstated foreign intervention. Sheer nonsense! The strongest imperialist power was threatening them openly by saying, *"I don't recognize you and I will crush you"*, landing troops in various locations, create naval blockades around critical points and still you, as a country all alone in the world with a devastated economy, should not "overstate" things!

The British, in fact, were voicing very serious threats:

At Moscow I had repeated interviews with Chicherin and Karahan. Whole Soviet Government has sunk to the level of a criminal organisation. Bolsheviks realise that their game is up and have entered on a career of criminal madness. I repeatedly told Chicherin, with all the energy of which I am capable, that he must realise full well that Bolshevik Government was not a match for England. England had a longer wind than the Soviets. (...) Moment would come when the Soviet authorities, man by man, would have to pay for all the acts of terrorism which they committed.<sup>89</sup>

This is from September of 1918. The representatives of Britain in Moscow were supporting and harboring counter-revolutionaries on one hand while threatening Soviet officials on the other. Some of them had even got into gunfights with the Cheka. This report sent to the British government ended with the note *"In spite of persistence with which I drove those facts home, I could not obtain any definite promises from Chicherin but only a few evasive replies and some lies. Bolsheviks have burnt their boats and are now ready for any wickedness."*

Britain was openly threatening another government without showing any diplomatic courtesy (their representatives were operating in a country which they had not yet diplomatically recognized anyway). This was the dominant trend in British ruling circles. Sir Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay, the writer of this report, was warning his government that *"If an end is not put to Bolshevism in Russia at once the civilisation of the whole world will be threatened."*<sup>90</sup> And the views of Churchill, who was the most prominent man of all seasons, about Russia could roughly be summed up thus: Poisoned, infected, plague-bearing armed hordes, swarms of typhus-bearing vermin...<sup>91</sup>

France was not even worth mentioning. Prime Minister Clemenceau was at the point of saying, *"we will not even negotiate with the Soviets, let alone make peace."*

Under these circumstances, the psychology of Bolshevik leaders was naturally of prime importance. Some of them obviously could not get the question *"What good would it make, even if we stayed in power in this poor peasant country?"* out of their head; consequently, they focused on the external world (Zinoviev was in this mood in 1920). And some of them, once they grasped the fact that their expectation of immediate world revolution was groundless, started to think that Soviet Russia should only keep holding on without a collective meaning, removed from the ambition to establish socialism (this was true for Trotsky more than anybody else).

Thinking that Lenin's intention in guiding the country from war communism into New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1920 was to keep "rocking the train"<sup>92</sup> forever if the world revolution did not come to rescue is grossly unfair to this great revolutionary. Lenin always saw NEP as a temporary step back, and sought to develop Soviet Union as far as possible in socialist path, regardless of what happened in the international arena. He passed away before having a chance to cover much ground in this regard and from among the Bolsheviks Stalin became prominent. Who, unlike the inconsistencies, adventurists and those with self-confidence problems was a realist but to the same extent had not lacked faith in communism or Russia.

I want to underline this again: The argument of whether or not socialism can be established in one country is sheer nonsense. The Bolsheviks had done whatever they could to hasten world revolution and when this did not realize, some staggered and did not know what to do while others stepped forward to use the political power at hand for the communist cause. The matter is as simple as this.

However, when it came to the friction between the world revolution and defending Soviet Russia, this simple matter became exceedingly complex.

In 1922, in a resolution adopted by the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, it was written that “*the best support to Soviet Russia in the economic war is workers’ revolutionary political struggle, and increasing pressure on the government of every country around demands for recognition of the Soviet government and creation of favourable trade relations with it.*”<sup>93</sup> In the background of this formulation, which seems quite innocent on paper here, an inexorable tension between giving assistance to world revolution and protection of the workers’ power in Soviet Russia was brewing.

The precondition in understanding how world revolution developed and lost momentum within Berlin-Warsaw-Ankara triangle is to grasp the size of this grossly underestimated tension. In addition, one must observe how each Bolshevik staggered under the pressure of this tension and discern the differences between the ways in which they tried to manage it.

All the delegates in the Congress of the Comintern in 1922 must have known that, while the Congress urged the communist parties and worker movements to “*increase pressure on their governments for the creation of favorable trade relations with the Soviet government,*” those governments would have been very poorly inclined to doing business with a country if it presented a threat. They also must have known that the bourgeois states would demand of The Communist International to stop exerting “*revolutionary pressure*” on them in return of establishing economic relations with Soviet Russia.

On the other hand, neither the Bolsheviks were revolutionaries

who would give up their claim of world revolution so easily, nor there was any guarantee that the capitalist countries would not jump down the Soviets' throat once the threat of "revolution" abated. Therefore, there was a need for communist parties, which would intensify the struggle when revolutionary opportunities presented themselves or when there was an increase in hostile acts against the Soviets, but which also would not have dragged themselves and the Soviet Russia into adventures. By 1922 the opinion that world revolution would not come in the short term had become prevalent among the Bolsheviks, but this need had presented itself even before, by the beginning of 1920.

The tension we are talking about is one of such magnitude that by 1920, an obvious friction had emerged between the two organizations that had become most vital for Soviet Russia; the Comintern and the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs.<sup>94</sup> While the *Narkomindel*, which was belittled and shortly afterwards abandoned by Trotsky, was working with all the cadres at its disposal to make Soviet Russia recognized externally and establish economic relations; the Comintern was striving to bolshevize the member parties which had trouble in letting old social democratic habits go, and to assist them in seizing power when revolutionary opportunities ripened. And, as the revolution retreated, Soviet diplomacy would have become dominant.

We are talking about a process that was very hard to be handled. In 1920, when Zinoviev heralded the establishment of a Soviet Republic in France on the 50th anniversary of The Paris Commune (1921) he was not just overdoing agitation. He was very confused himself and was deriving grossly overstated results from trivial positive developments. In truth, many of the Russian communists, who had devoted their life to revolutionary struggle and now had to bear an additional burden of the role of "statespersons," were confused, and this also caused a confusion about the direction of the Soviet government.

For example Litvinov (who was the deputy of Chicherin as the Commissar of Foreign Affairs and would later become the commissar himself) had no qualms about saying that "*the U.S. was not ready for socialist revolution*" and "*Russia's target and the goal was*

to fight the militarist spirit of Germany”<sup>95</sup> when talking with representatives from USA who were ruffled about the attempts made by Russia to spread the revolution. On the other hand, Germany had already become the most important partner of Soviet Russia in economic and military affairs when he said this!

In March 1920 Karl Radek, who was one of the most important officials of the Comintern and who had responsibilities in Russia, Poland and Germany, was establishing the equation as, “*Four capitalist partners abstain from counterrevolutionary activities in Russia, the Soviet Government will abstain from carrying on revolutionary activities in capitalist countries.*”<sup>96</sup>

Radek was not only outspoken, he was also in the right wing of the international movement; and when he took a revolutionary stance, it was always the result of some pragmatic calculation. However, his words above were not prompted by his rightism but by the historical tension we have just mentioned.

The imperialists had also noticed this tension. It is obvious in hindsight that Soviet diplomat Krasin, who had been charged with the mission of breaking the commercial blockade imposed upon the Soviets, was much more interested in succeeding in his mission than in the development of world revolution; and the British had discerned this tendency. British intelligence was reporting that Krasin and the Soviet Trade Delegation were much more interested in gathering specialists from the west, persuading Russian refugees to return and putting the Russian economy back on its feet than making Bolshevik propaganda.

However, in the Politburo, Bolshevik leader Lev Kamenev had proposed that the Trade Delegation should focus on propaganda and exposing the ruling classes of England in the eyes of the workers. It was Lenin that stopped his fantasies: “*Comrade Kamenev’s plan is fundamentally incorrect. With England business is only trade. We must send only ‘a merchant’ to England.*”<sup>97</sup>

The imperialists were trying to discern who would have come ahead in these arguments. USA representative Buckler was reporting to his president Wilson that not all the Bolsheviks had wanted reconciliation. He even stated that some in Russia wanted a foreign intervention and warned that the leaders with these

tendencies were playing on a rekindling of the flame of revolution in the west in response to a military intervention. Therefore, it was in the interest of the great powers to disregard the hawks and deal with the doves.<sup>98</sup>

The tension between the defense of socialism in one country and the perspective for world revolution had also divided the imperialist capital cities. Warmongers, merchants, those who thought that Soviet Russia would have been brought to heel with hunger...

However, the hands of those who sought a "final confrontation" were weak on both sides. Nobody knew in what way Soviet Russia could have further helped the revolution in the west. The imperialists, on the other hand, had been let down in their expectation that the Bolshevik government would have been short lived; and they had neither the military prowess, nor the favorable public support to facilitate a strong intervention. It was becoming clear that socialism and capitalism would have to coexist for some time before they tried throttling one another in the future...

We have already said that the notion of Trotsky being "*the unerring and unconditional advocate of world revolution*" was an urban legend. On the other hand, claiming that it had been Stalin who devised the policy of protecting Soviet Russia and doing whatever had been necessary in order to establish socialism in one country would be bestowing an honor too great on Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin grasped this policy and excelled in doing whatever had been needed; but from 1920 onwards, it had been Lenin who insisted that as the revolutionary wave died down, Soviet Russia should stay away from adventures and focus on her own problems.

Initially, the emphasis was on "*world revolution would be delayed, we must hold on.*"

We have always known and shall never forget that ours is an international cause, and until the revolution takes place in all lands, including the richest and most highly civilised ones, our victory will be only a half-victory, perhaps still less. At present we are gaining the upper hand in the fighting against Wrangel; we are expecting news that will bear out our expectations. We are confident that if we do not succeed in capturing the Crimea

within the next few days, we shall do so several days later, but we have no guarantee that this is the last effort against us on the part of the world bourgeoisie. On the contrary, facts in our possession show that this effort will be repeated in the spring. We know that their chances of success will be negligible, and we know too that our military forces will be more powerful than those of any other country. For all that, however, the danger is not yet over; it still exists and will continue to do so until the revolution is victorious in one or in several advanced countries.<sup>99</sup>

However, even at this point, Lenin was talking about policies that would overcome Russia's backwardness. Moreover, let us not forget the fact that NEP had just been initiated. NEP, which meant "shaking the train" until the world revolution came around for some, and a means to obtain the necessary infrastructure for the construction of socialism under even the worst international conditions for others!

What about the possibility that the world revolution would be stalled... How did Lenin take this into account? After criticizing bourgeois economists of belittling the revolutionary crisis as "unrest" he was turning to his own side and saying that the "*revolutionaries sometimes try to prove that the crisis is absolutely insoluble.*"<sup>100</sup> He was well aware that the revolutionary wave was receding and thought that those who would not resign to this fact would drag the international workers' movement off the cliff alongside themselves, and in doing so, leave Soviet Russia defenseless.

The world revolution might not have been consummated, yet Soviet Russia might have remained standing. On the military side, the Red Army had proven that it could give blow for blow, and with each passing year its strength would have multiplied tenfold.<sup>101</sup> Lenin was stressing that in 1917 (that is, three years before he wrote these), when the workers of Petrograd stood side by side with the Bolsheviks in numbers that nobody had foreseen, he had believed that Soviet power would last only with the assistance of world revolution: "*When we began working for our cause we counted exclusively on the world revolution.*"<sup>102</sup>

However, from then onwards another unforeseen development happened and Soviet Russia stayed alive even if no further successful revolutions happened in other countries:

None of us, of course, expected that such an unequal struggle as the one waged by Russia against the whole of the capitalist world could last for three years. It has emerged that neither side –the Russian Soviet Republic or the capitalist world– has gained victory or suffered defeat; at the same time it has turned out that, while our forecasts did not materialise simply, rapidly and directly, they were fulfilled insofar as we achieved the main thing –the possibility has been maintained of the existence of proletarian rule and the Soviet Republic even in the event of the world socialist revolution being delayed. In this respect it must be said that the Republic’s international position today provides the best and most precise confirmation of all our plans and all our policy.<sup>103</sup>

The revolution could not spread further west, but neither could the counter-revolution take Russia down. This is what Lenin says in a nutshell. Then, what is his deduction? In the absence of international victory, which had been the only development that could have guaranteed success, they would have to coexist with the capitalist countries, enter into commercial relations with them and, in this process, win the right to an independent existence.<sup>104</sup> This was not only a breathing space, it was something much more significant.<sup>105</sup>

In 1921, Lenin speaks more openly. The workers and peasants of the West European countries had failed to strike in a swift revolution.<sup>106</sup> The world revolution was still in progress and the economic crisis in Europe had not abated; “*but in any case, it would be madness on our part to assume that help will shortly arrive from Europe in the shape of a strong proletarian revolution (...) In these last three years, we have learned to understand that placing our stake on the world revolution does not mean relying on a definite date, and that the accelerating pace of development may or may not lead to a revolution in the spring.*”<sup>107</sup>

In this uncertainty, Lenin attached a great importance to the

establishment of trade relations with Britain, and with the USA. He was asking, “*is it right for the Soviet government to invite foreign capitalists after expelling the Russian landowners and capitalists?*” and answering himself: “*Yes, it is, because, seeing that the workers’ revolution in other countries is delayed, we have to make some sacrifices in order to achieve a rapid and even immediate improvement in the condition of the workers and peasants.*”<sup>108</sup> Therefore, the hunger problem of working class in Russia was closely related to the delay of the world revolution; and if it would have been delayed further, the Soviet order in Russia had to fend for itself. For this, there was no alternative to NEP, and certain concessions had to be made to both foreign capital and rich landowners.

Some Bolsheviks saw this step back as a necessary policy until the consummation of the world revolution. However, for Lenin and Stalin, it was *also* a period for accumulating the necessary energy that would be used in the leap forward, towards socialism.

October Revolution was going through a very hard trial. Lenin was very open and honest in his words:

When we started the international revolution, we did so not because we were convinced that we could forestall its development, but because a number of circumstances compelled us to start it. We thought: either the international revolution comes to our assistance, and in that case our victory will be fully assured, or we shall do our modest revolutionary work in the conviction that even in the event of defeat we shall have served the cause of the revolution and that our experience will benefit other revolutions. It was clear to us that without the support of the international world revolution the victory of the proletarian revolution was impossible. Before the revolution, and even after it, we thought: either revolution breaks out in the other countries, in the capitalistically more developed countries, immediately, or at least very quickly, or we must perish. In spite of this conviction, we did all we possibly could to preserve the Soviet system under all circumstances, come what may, because we knew that we were not only working for ourselves, but also for the international revolution. We knew this, we repeatedly

expressed this conviction before the October Revolution, immediately after it, and at the time we signed the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty. And, generally speaking, this was correct.

Actually, however, events did not proceed along as straight a line as we had expected. In the other big, capitalistically more developed countries the revolution has not broken out to this day. True, we can say with satisfaction that the revolution is developing all over the world; and it is only thanks to this that the international bourgeoisie is unable to strangle us, in spite of the fact that, militarily and economically, it is a hundred times stronger than we are.<sup>109</sup>

Stalin, who was the first among Lenin's comrades to accept that Soviet Russia would have to stand alone for a prolonged period of time, was also in this mindset by the end of 1921:

The struggle has shown that we (the workers) are *not yet* strong enough to put an end to imperialism forthwith. But the struggle has also shown that they (the bourgeoisie) are *no longer* strong enough to strangle Soviet Russia. As a consequence of this, the "fright" or "horror" which the proletarian revolution aroused in the world bourgeoisie when, for example, the Red Army was advancing on Warsaw, has disappeared, evaporated. At the same time the boundless enthusiasm with which the workers of Europe received almost every bit of news about Soviet Russia is also disappearing. A period of sober weighing up of forces has set in, a period of molecular work in training and accumulating forces for future battles.<sup>110</sup>

Some may think that Stalin had betrayed the revolution. However, the approach here is completely Leninist and is towards preparing the party, working class and the country, with realistic evaluations, for an ordeal. Stalin was warning that as stability slowly returned to Europe, the working masses would lose their interest in the revolution in Russia. People tend to look at what is closer at hand instead of what is on the horizon.

My quotations from Lenin and Stalin should be sufficient. From 1920 onwards, the idea that world revolution would develop slower

than expected and the revolution in Europe would be delayed became prevalent in Moscow. However, every prominent Bolshevik derived a different conclusion from this idea.

What about the communists struggling in western countries? What were they to do? Lenin were warning them constantly. We will see further down, he condemned the thesis of permanent crisis, insulted those who insisted on this, and from time to time had to say, "You have a very long way to climb for revolution." However, just a couple of years ago, the Comintern had been pointing towards the seizure of political power to small groups that had climbed only a few steps towards the revolution.

Thus, the revolution had not been realized and now Lenin, as he presented the communist parties with a long, arduous period of struggle and preparation, was also stressing that they should not neglect the task of defending Soviet Russia. Defense of Soviet Russia required establishing "good" relations with western countries. And one condition for the establishment of "good" relations was that, the Soviets had to stop fanning the flame of revolution there.

Lenin was having a hard time in answering his comrades who protested "*but you were also a small party in 1917*," but was presenting very convincing arguments with his acumen:

When the revolution has been sufficiently prepared, the concept "masses" becomes different: several thousand workers no longer constitute the masses. This word begins to denote something else. The concept of "masses" undergoes a change so that it implies the majority, and not simply a majority of the workers alone, but the majority of all the exploited. Any other kind of interpretation is impermissible for a revolutionary, and any other sense of the word becomes incomprehensible. It is possible that even a small party, the British or American party, for example, after it has thoroughly studied the course of political development and become acquainted with the life and customs of the nonparty masses, will at a favourable moment evoke a revolutionary movement (Comrade Radek has pointed to the miners' strike as a good example). You will have a mass movement if such a party comes forward with its slogans at such a

moment and succeeds in getting millions of workers to follow it. I would not altogether deny that a revolution can be started by a very small party and brought to a victorious conclusion. But one must have a knowledge of the methods by which the masses can be won over. For this thoroughgoing preparation of revolution is essential. But here you have comrades coming forward with the assertion that we should immediately give up the demand for “big” masses. They must be challenged. Without thoroughgoing preparation you will not achieve victory in any country. Quite a small party is sufficient to lead the masses. At certain times there is no necessity for big organisations.

But to win, we must have the sympathy of the masses. An absolute majority is not always essential; but what is essential to win and retain power is not only the majority of the working class—I use the term “working class” in its West-European sense, i.e., in the sense of the industrial proletariat—but also the majority of the working and exploited rural population.<sup>111</sup>

Lenin was an extremely principled revolutionary, but he was never mechanical or just a blueprint man. Nobody should doubt this: he would never have said these in 1919. These were not “truths” that should have been voiced when the footsteps of the “revolution” were being heard everywhere in Europe.<sup>112</sup> However, now the revolutionary wave was receding, and Lenin took the risk of being rough against hardheadedness when situation demanded:

“Dynamic tendencies”, “transition from passivity to activity” — these are all phrases the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries had used against us. Now they are in prison, defending there the “aims of communism” and thinking of the “transition from passivity to activity.”<sup>113</sup>

The language he chose in dealing with those who failed to see that revolution was receding in Europe shows how pressed and anxious Lenin was. He was right to be anxious because communists were repeatedly making mistakes, swinging rightwards and leftwards in Europe, particularly in Germany. In addition, the influential names in the Comintern were clumsy in managing the

process. As if all these were not enough, the passing years had brought another fact concerning the defense of Soviet Russia to light: A considerable portion of the workers who stood against hostilities towards the Soviets and resisted the militarist ventures of their own governments were still under the influence of social democratic parties. They were hesitant or unwilling when it came to a revolutionary uprising, but they were also disgusted with the attempts to destroy Soviet Russia. Moscow had to take this “friendly” popular base, which was particularly apparent in Britain, if it was to remain standing.

Both Lenin and Stalin were well aware that two opposing social systems could have coexisted only on a temporary basis. War was inevitable but now they both had to play for time and make the most of that time.

Of course, the “enemy” had also noticed this strategy that took shape in Soviet Russia, but its hands were also tied. Pavel Miliukov, who had been one of the most cunning members of the provisional bourgeois government toppled by the Bolsheviks in 1917, was writing that “*Communism’ was reserved for the next stage—that of world revolution, and for more advanced industrial countries. In Russia they were satisfied to remain Bolshevik, in order to keep in power until that second stage should come, and to use Russia’s enormous resources and state machinery in order to hasten the advent of that World Revolution.*”<sup>114</sup> He was not anticipating the great push for constructing socialism that the Soviets would have made some years later, but he had grasped the temporary nature of their retreat.

Lenin passed away from active political life at the most critical point (1923) in this transitory period. And for Stalin, both for the next leap in world revolution and to be victorious in the inevitable war, fortifying Soviet Russia was a necessity. The others, including Trotsky, would have accepted the strategy up to this point. However, Stalin believed that the fortification of the Soviet Russia should have been towards socialism; otherwise, the weakness would have remained and defeat would have become inevitable.

There were two strategies here; the strategy of those who attributed a special importance to the political power in Russia within

the world revolution, and that of those who did not.

It is beyond argument that with NEP, the seeds for the establishment of socialism in one country had been sown. The call of restraint made to the communist parties of the west also becomes impossible to understand without the strategy of “socialism in one country.” The theorization of these backward steps by Gramsci at that time, and the almost absolute prevalence of “*what happened in Russia is irrelevant here*” motto in European left afterwards was either been due to a misunderstanding of 1917-1924 period, or to a deliberate twisting of the facts.

[In certain texts] Gramsci examines the specific conditions for communist revolution in the ‘socially’ developed Western countries. The existence in such countries of a compact “civil society” which serves as a base for the “state-government” leads him to propose a new revolutionary strategy which corresponds, in the art of politics, to the passage from the war of movement to the war of position in military art. Since there is every chance that a revolutionary offensive aiming to overthrow the governmental apparatus will fail and come to grief on the “trenches” and “fortifications” of civil society, the working class must gain control of “civil society” before the offensive and exercise its hegemony over it: “*A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to ‘lead’ as well.*”<sup>15</sup>

Gramsci is a great theoretician and a very valuable Marxist, but this strategy attributed to him had no counterpart in the west, or in the east, north or south for that matter.

Finally, the banning of factions in the Bolshevik Party in 1921 should also be linked to the transition to the process of “socialism in one country.” The party, in which everybody was dancing to his or her own tune, which shifted every which way in its relations with world revolution and, most importantly, which carried completely contradictory ideas about what was to be done inside

Soviet Union had to be pulled together immediately. Lenin was pointing in his warnings to the fact that the party was presenting a fragmented image to the enemy:

Communists have become weak; press hard, seize the opportunity, take advantage of their weakening. This has become the slogan of the hostile world. We must not forget this for a moment. Our task now is to show that, to whatever extent we have allowed ourselves this luxury in the past, whether rightly or wrongly, we must emerge from this situation.<sup>116</sup>

Lenin was determined to keep Soviet Russia upright under any circumstance. In a letter dated August 28, 1922 to Stalin and Kamenev he was saying that he wanted not one unnecessary word against Germany, and that France and Britain should not be disturbed. These countries were not to be threatened.

By now, defense of Soviet Russia was shown as the basic task of the world revolution also in the Comintern:

Soviet Russia's work and struggle for existence, for the gains of the revolution, is a struggle to liberate the proletarians, the exploited and oppressed of all countries, from their chains and subjugation. The Russian proletarians have done more than their duty as revolutionary vanguard fighters of the world proletariat.<sup>117</sup>

The last sentence did not mean "that's all from us." Soviet government was preparing for the final confrontation. The electrification (GOELRO) plan overseen by Lenin was one of the steps that would have provided the material substructure in the upcoming war. Stalin, who had grasped the size of the ordeal that awaited the country, was writing these about the plan to Lenin:

During the last three days I have had the opportunity to read the [book of the] symposium: *A Plan for the Electrification of Russia*. My illness made this possible (it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good!). An excellent, well-compiled book. A masterly draft of a really single and really state economic plan, not in quotation marks. The only Marxist attempt in our time to place the Soviet superstructure of economically backward

Russia on a really practical technical and production basis, the only possible one under present conditions.

You remember Trotsky's "plan" (his theses) of last year for the "economic revival" of Russia on the basis of the mass application of the labour of unskilled peasant-worker masses (the labour army) to the remnants of pre-war industry. How wretched, how backward, compared with the Goelro plan!<sup>118</sup>

Lenin was saying that peace was temporary and war will return. Capitalism and socialism could have existed side by side, but could not have lived in peace. One would eventually have triumphed over the other.<sup>119</sup>

Soviet Russia, and Soviet Union after that, perceived the issue of staying alive from the perspective of the interests of world revolution, and placed her existence in the center of those interests. Mikhail Frunze, who had succeeded Trotsky as the Commissar for Military after entering into countless polemics with him and who unfortunately passed away at a very early age, was warning very clearly when preparing the Red Army to the upcoming war:

The external form of those internal relations which depend on the changing conditions and course of the struggle may undergo a modification; the state of open warfare may yield its place to some sort of contractual relations which permit, up to a definite level, the peaceful coexistence of the warring sides. These contractual forms, however, do not change the status of the fundamental character of these internal relations. And it is necessary fully to realize and openly to admit that the common, parallel existence of our proletarian Soviet state with the states of the bourgeois-capitalist world for a protracted period is not possible.<sup>120</sup>

According to him, the upcoming war was bound to have a class content and two opposing worlds would have come into a conflict to the death. The history of Soviets after Lenin developed around this foresight. As Stalin was fulfilling his duty of leadership in building a country that was both powerful and had a socialist character, his inconsistent or unfaithful comrades were dropping

out of the struggle one by one. Those who found themselves without aim with the temporary defeat of world revolution, and those who sought to strengthen the Soviets for the next trial in world revolution were parting ways.

## Diplomats: The “Defective” Heroes of Soviet Defense

Without a doubt, the first diplomatic test of the Bolsheviks was Brest-Litovsk. In 1918, they had sat down to negotiate with the greedy German militarists in order to get out of the war as soon as possible. For the Bolsheviks, who had come to power over the slogan “immediate peace,” it was natural, logical and “revolutionary” to sign the treaty after a hard negotiation. However, quite a few people in the party leadership thought that declaring “revolutionary war” against Germany would have served the interests of German Revolution. Lenin was thinking just the opposite and wanted the treaty signed as soon as possible, but he only had a minority support. Apart from these two sides, there were those who supported the “creative” formula of “neither war nor peace,” and one of these was the head of the delegation in Brest. Trotsky thought that making propaganda as the Commissar of Foreign Relations to representatives of Germany and its allies would have provided a psychological advantage in the eyes of German proletariat and this, in turn, would have increased the momentum of the world revolution. After making the bizarre declaration that they would “*neither agree nor fight*,” he had stood up from the table saying that the argument was over, and when his opponents asked him bewilderedly “*How are we supposed to continue negotiations?*” he had

answered “*As we did before, through the wireless.*” He was witty, dashing and irresponsible as always.

Trotsky’s bravado, into which he had dragged the whole Soviet Delegation, cost Soviet Russia an additional territorial loss that amounted to hundreds of thousand kilometer squares. The initial demands of the Germans were also ruthless, but all things aside, the delaying of the agreement had almost resulted in the fall of Petrograd and in the end, Soviet government had to agree to even worse conditions.

It is doubtless that the personal responsibility of Trotsky here is limited. The Soviet government had not yet matured; the party and government rule was still deficient. In the votes concerning Brest-Litovsk negotiations, Lenin represented the minority. Nevertheless, one must say that Trotsky’s claims of defending “almost” the same line as Lenin and his attempts at covering his eccentricities, particularly in the many passages in *My Life*<sup>121</sup>, do not correspond with the facts at all. “Neither war nor peace” formulation could have been meaningful as a practice of foreign policy under other circumstances, but negotiations with an enemy which was at a far more advantageous position called for a more serious approach than that. If the Germans corrected the “neither war nor peace” formula as “if not peace, then war,” and eventually managed to snatch away more Soviet territory, many Bolsheviks, and particularly Trotsky, was culpable.

Soviet diplomacy failed in the Brest test because there was no “diplomacy” to speak of. To begin with, before the arrival of Trotsky, the Soviet delegation had lost its head over Germans’ shows of “amicability” and, according to one claim, Adolph Joffe had shared all the weak points of Soviet power with the enemy over drink. Trotsky put an end to this foolish informality but then he appeared before the German and Austrian delegation posing as a commander who looked down upon everybody else. In addition, he had developed a habit of distributing propaganda material to the German officers and soldiers he encountered.

On the other hand, Lenin was making every effort to prevent the usage of peace negotiations as a chance of revolutionary propaganda. In foreign relations, propaganda should have been made by the

content and direction of policy, not through gestures and bravado.

Eventually, Brest was signed. The commissariat of Trotsky ended, and left SRs were disgruntled. For them, signing a treaty with Germany was the betrayal of revolution. They were also among those who had their heads in the clouds, and in a short while, they would have done desperate things to reignite war between Germany and Soviet Russia.

Let us put the SRs (and the Cheka that put some sense into them) aside and return to the matters of Soviet diplomacy.

The Bolsheviks had been acting in line with the slogan “No to annexations and imperialist agreements” even before the revolution. Therefore, one of the first things they did after the revolution was to expose the secret diplomatic correspondence and agreements of Tsarist Russia during the war. They declassified 130 documents. This was a revolutionary stance that sought, not only in Russia but also in all countries, to enlighten the oppressed about the real reasons behind the imperialist war. Denial of secret diplomacy was undoubtedly a reflection of their trust in world revolution. However, the Bolsheviks were not able to foresee that in a very short while, they would have to resort to “secret diplomacy” in the defense of Soviet Russia.<sup>122</sup> The choices made in a period in which world revolution appeared as a close possibility and the needs in a period of socialism in one country would have to be different. However, one thing remained constant: Soviet foreign policy never put the interests of the people on the table of negotiations, acted in a way that was as principled as possible, did not seek annexations and, in the final analysis, shaped itself according to the needs of world revolution.

Then, what about the prominent names of Soviet diplomacy? How should one evaluate them?

It is needless to talk further about Trotsky, who had been the first commissar; he also had not understood at all why he was appointed to this mission, anyway.

On the days when there was a general consensus around the idea that revolution would have spread quickly in Europe, it had been no surprise that Trotsky found it hard to sit still in the chair of the commissar. Soviet government as a whole had no intention to

adhere to traditions of diplomacy in the beginning. Initially, they tried similar practices to what they did (and later had to abandon) in the army. They removed all diplomatic hierarchy and titles. Ambassador, attaché, consul, scribe etc. was to become history, or so they assumed. Moreover, the Soviet administration had also declared its refusal to observe diplomatic hierarchy when in relation with foreign diplomats. This practice, which quickly turned into a drawback as the revolution stalled in Europe and the Soviets sought to establish relations with the imperialist countries, was abandoned in 1924.<sup>123</sup> Soviet Russia was revising her stance “against” diplomacy in line with the aim to construct socialism in one country. After this, the job would have been to produce principled adepts in the field.

Just like titles, the attires of the officials also bespoke of the changes in Soviet diplomacy. Initially, Soviet diplomats had attended meetings in very plain clothes as if to prove their status as rank and file members of a “proletarian order.” The condescending stares of imperialist misters were met with similar condescending stares against the exploiters. However, these staredowns were not helping Soviet Russia in becoming accepted in the international arena at all.

Then, Kollontai... I did not use the expression “imperialist misters” above out of a habit to use masculine language. The diplomatic world up to that time had been almost exclusively masculine. Almost... If we are to put aside Rosika Schwimmer, who had been the representative of Hungary in Switzerland between 1918-1919 –and almost all sources agree that as a diplomat she had a very low profile– the first woman to become an ambassador (although Soviet Russia did not use that title yet) was Alexandra Kollontai, who had been appointed in 1923 as representative in the Norwegian capital. In truth, the Bolsheviks had appointed Kollontai to the diplomatic mission to change the “rough” outlook of Soviet diplomacy. Kollontai came from an aristocratic family, knew etiquette, but on the other hand had pledged her life to revolutionary struggle and was known to all as a reliable and creative communist. She fulfilled her mission exactly as befitted her reputation as an upright, free, alluring pioneer woman who was

conscious of her responsibilities and who allowed nobody to interfere in her private affairs.

Although the Soviets did not attach a particular importance to Oslo, it was a bustling capital city and unlike today, Norway was home to one of the largest communist parties in Europe. Soviet Russia had this place covered with an experienced revolutionary. Yet, many other mission remained...

There were very few Bolsheviks in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before the revolution. Immediately after the revolution, the first name that came to mind concerning Soviet diplomacy was Krasin, who had done unbelievable things, including selling out gold, to take care of the pressing monetary problems of the country. Everybody agrees that he was an extraordinarily resourceful person. Krasin was a man of mission, and although he had little interest in world revolution and problems that are connected to it, he is known for his effort in establishing good relations in the imperialist world for the survival of Soviet Russia against all odds. From time to time, he also had to admonish his comrades "*Do not put us into difficulty*" when they did things that incited "the Red Scare." It can be said that he had been the first to whisper into British ears, "*there is a struggle between hawks and doves in our country*" as a diplomatic tactic. We can see him as a revolutionary who had been a forerunner of "socialism in one country" policy. It is hard to call him a diplomat, since he undertook almost all his actions without a formal title and frequently worked outside the law.

In almost any field, Soviet Russia had no specialists at all. Most of the scientists had left the country, and most of those who remained behind were distant to Soviet regime. It was no surprise that most army officers were in the counter-revolutionary ranks; the Bolsheviks had a large army when it came to privates and other men of low rank, but they were short on commanders educated in military science. The situation in the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs was likewise, but worse. It had practically become a desert.

As revolution stalled in Europe and importance of diplomacy came to fore in the defense of the Soviets, the need for experienced staff was increasing. There are many reasons to think that

this need was satisfied in part, as it is claimed, through the employment of those with Menshevik background. It is a known fact that until 1917, the Menshevik wing of Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) had been more numerous and had more sympathizers in the bureaucracy than the Bolsheviks. Besides, the thesis had to be taken seriously that at that time, Marxist but “less revolutionary” characters were more suitable for the diplomatic maneuvers the Soviets had to make.<sup>124</sup>

On the other hand, two names that became prominent immediately after the period of expecting the world revolution to happen any day was over deserve a far more detailed attention: Chicherin, who became the second Commissar of Foreign Affairs of Soviet Russia after Trotsky, and Litvinov, who had been one of Chicherin’s deputies and afterwards became the Commissar himself.

These two Commissars had been of unparalleled service to Soviet Union. Chicherin was one of the few party members who had Foreign Affairs experience. Notwithstanding the fact that, as we will see later on, he was among those that created difficulties in the dealings with Kemalist movement; he was also one of those who objected to the use of diplomacy as a means of spreading the revolution after 1923. He had made a harsh speech in the 12th Party Congress voicing the opinion that adventurism in foreign policy would have been of no use to the revolutionary cause. Despite being the Commissar of Foreign Affairs, he had no particular political weight in the party. He had become a member of the Central Committee in 1925, but never a member of the Politburo.

Chicherin and his successor Litvinov made an immense effort throughout 1920s in the defense of Soviet Union so that the blockade against it could be broken and her influence be raised in the international arena. They had worked together for quite some time, yet remained distant to one another. This was not about a personal grudge; they had quite contrary views about how Soviet Russia should have opened up to the world. This is a gross injustice, but since many historians codified the matter like this and since it summarizes the situation adequately, we may also say that Chicherin was quite the “German” while Maxim Litvinov was at least as much, maybe even more “British.” Moreover, both had

friends in their country of interest. For example, the relationship between Chicherin and German Ambassador Brockdorff-Rantzau was no secret.<sup>125</sup>

In this sense the Treaty of Rapallo, which was the first diplomatic victory of the Soviets, had been the product of the separate efforts of the two diplomats. We will see below; Rapallo was a surprising agreement between Moscow and Berlin that came as a historical response to the arrogance of the British and French who shunned the Soviet delegation in the Genoa Conference. "British" Litvinov did accept this eventuality but would not have acquainted as easily to the Soviet-German rapprochement. Chicherin, on the other hand, was harboring an extreme hatred for the British imperialism like many other Bolsheviks. Therefore, with Chicherin being the Commissar and Litvinov as his deputy, there was an interesting equilibrium. The Soviets had very special relations with Germany throughout the 1920s but both Lenin, and Stalin after him had known right from the beginning that relations with Britain and the USA (although they could not be trusted) would be vital for the survival of Soviet power. Chicherin had focused on Germany, Litvinov on Britain, and both of them, two really capable diplomats, had been assigned with a vital mission.

However, when it comes to the general, integral interests of Soviet Union and world revolution, it becomes hard to speak as positively, particularly about Litvinov. Although he never, ever took a stance that betrayed the party, and even if he had been a member of the Bolshevik wing of RSDLP right from the beginning; we must say that Litvinov did not have any special faith in the construction of socialism in Soviet Union or any particular interest in the development of international communist movement, and maintained a correct stance in the argument between Trotsky and Stalin not because he had agreed with the line of Stalin and the party but because he saw an adventurist in Trotsky. However, this trait was not detrimental to his performance; on the contrary, under those circumstances, Litvinov's distance to Bolshevik culture presented an obvious advantage. A diplomat who maintained his belief in communism, but who had become closer to the west in current politics instead of pursuing that belief...

There is no reason for us to doubt the fact that Stalin said, “[he] *does not see and is not interested in the revolutionary aspect of policy*” about Litvinov.<sup>126</sup> It is also without doubt that there were grounds for even harsher evaluation. Indeed, Litvinov had shared his “different views” with foreign journalists and diplomats time and again, both as Commissar and after he was removed from this post in 1939. The evaluation in biographical studies on him that “*he was pro-western but he never betrayed his country*” is significant in the sense that it reflects on a particular aspect of Soviet history, which communists today should accept: Soviet Union was a country of immense proportions in which, a party with cadres conditioned exclusively on seizing political power had embarked on the task of establishing socialism with extremely meager human resources, and obtained remarkable achievements. This country had to rely on the help of and struggle with great threats caused (knowingly or unknowingly) by many “specialists” who could not be seen as communists in the true sense of the word, although they were members of the Party. Contrary to belief, Stalin managed this whole process with great patience and skill while accepting the necessity to act decisively when problems accumulated.

Maxim Litvinov is the best example to this. Even if had been married to a British subject, and furthermore became one himself shortly before the revolution, he had been given responsibilities of the first order in Soviet Foreign Affairs for 20 years. The reason behind the kind of immunity he enjoyed in a period in which removals from the party and political life was very common was his commitment to his mission and the diplomatic contributions he made to the struggle of socialism in one country. His lack of faith in world revolution undoubtedly played a positive part in this. He had no qualms about telling his friend, journalist Louis Fischer, that he believed “*the prospects for world revolution disappeared on November 11, 1918.*”<sup>127</sup> This date corresponds to the German Revolution and if these words, which are quoted in many sources, are real, then Litvinov was among the first in seeing the direction German Revolution had been taking.

However, sometimes foresight about the direction of a process can be a stance that is not just, legitimate or revolutionary. As I

said before, Litvinov successfully served the interests of Soviet Union because he had lost his revolutionary claims. His mission was to prevent the Soviets from being surrounded in an imperialist world and he carried this through mostly with an attitude and discipline befitting a Soviet citizen. His mission was concluded in 1939 when the Soviet-British alliance against fascist Germany he wanted so much failed to come through. After Litvinov left his position to Molotov, Soviet Union reversed the deadly trick Britain had been trying to pull on it and proceeded to sign the well-known treaty with Germany. This treaty would have been completely unsuitable for Litvinov.

In spite of all these, there are numerous brilliant successes in Litvinov's career. The Soviet-British treaty of March 16, 1921 was mostly his achievement, although it was finalized by Krasin since he had been expelled by the British government in spite of his friendly connections in the country. He had played an important role in the advances made by the Soviets on the topic of disarmament as the world slipped inexorably towards a new war. From time to time, he made needless, unsanctioned concessions and angered the party leadership but he managed to stay as an indispensable person for quite a long period. One reason for this had been the impression of being "*the friendly man among the Soviets*" Litvinov left on westerners.

By westerners, I am not referring to Germany. The relations with Germany were maintained by Chicherin and Red Army generals for years. And there, too, were a series of problems to which "a blind eye has been turned." As I said, we will come to all these in good time...

The primary factor that drew Soviet Russia and Germany together had been the "revolution" while the secondary factor was the Treaty of Versailles. The first factor had established a relationship in the direction of the world revolution while the second established a relationship in the direction of socialism in one country. From 1919 onwards, Soviet Union stood undecided between these two and did not make a definite choice. However, in both directions, Germany became the main window of the Soviets to the outside world. Contrary to popular acceptance, Treaty of Rapallo

(1922) was not the beginning of this relationship but an occasion in which it came to surface.

Treaty of Rapallo was a product of Genoa Conference. This conference was the first occasion in which Soviet diplomats attended a multilateral meeting of this size. Before that, diplomats of “old Russia” had been representing Russia through Britain and France. Since the October Revolution, the toppled bureaucracy of the toppled Tsar had been living in European capitals and counting the days for the liberation of their country from the reds. In Genoa Conference, the imperialists cast these miserable characters aside. The fact of the matter was that, as Lenin said, communism had failed to triumph over imperialism but imperialism had also failed to destroy Soviet Russia. All sides arrived in Genoa with the understanding of this reality but the arrogance of the British pushed the Soviets towards Germany – besides, the two countries already had covert collaboration in some fields.

First, Lenin was to be the head of Soviet delegation to Genoa. Some objections arose within the party to this prospect; there were some who thought that even participating in the Conference was improper. In April 1922, as the delegation led by Chicherin set out for Genoa, Joffe was looking for propaganda opportunities as always, and Krasin only sought an agreement with the British, to the point that he thought Soviet Russia should pay compensation to imperialists for losses incurred by the revolution.<sup>128</sup>

However, the whole Soviet delegation was making a show of accepting the rules of the game in this first big test. Their attires were suitable for diplomacy; they refrained from aggressive manners in arguments. On the contrary, the general impression they gave was one of reconciliation. They had the power in Soviet Russia and they had given up squabbling with imperialists over trivial matters as long as that power was not threatened. To the point that, Pope Pius XI’s approval of their manners and behavior was noted down in history.<sup>129</sup>

Soviet diplomacy was gradually becoming accepted in the international arena but there was a problem: Comintern! While *Narkomindel* progressively became focused on the defense of the Soviet Union, the Comintern naturally devoted itself to seeking

revolutionary opportunities and strengthening its affiliated communist parties. Therefore, in a nutshell, the Soviet diplomats were falling out of the grace of the Communist International as they came into the grace of The Pope!

The reverse was also true. For Soviet diplomats, the Comintern was an institution that always created trouble since it justifiably wanted some of its personnel to be able to move under the protection of diplomatic immunity, meaning that it demanded positions in Soviet embassies specifically for its operations and even appealed to party leadership to facilitate the assignment of “dangerous” missions to diplomats. “Normal” activities like transportation of propaganda materials by diplomatic couriers or cash transfers to some communist parties were dreaded by the Foreign Affairs. The Politburo eventually managed to alleviate the friction on every specific issue, but tension accumulated as time passed and some steps taken for the defense of Soviet Russia did not coincide with the interests of the revolutionary struggle in some countries. The greatest confusion was about Germany, but the Comintern and Foreign Affairs also had frequent run-ins on the relations with Britain. This conflict had become so intense that in 1930, in a letter written on his last days as the Commissar, Chicherin would have branded the Comintern as the primary domestic enemy of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, and accused the organization of repeatedly harming Soviet diplomacy.

Everyone was right from his or her point of view! Soviet Union did not see any contradiction between world revolution and the strategy of socialism in one country. She had chosen to remain standing and strengthen herself, but on the other hand, world revolution had to keep accumulating energy. Precisely at this point, the Comintern apparatus and Foreign Affairs each tried to go about its own business and inevitably started to tackle one another. This was such a contradiction that, a high-ranking diplomat like Litvinov became indifferent to the official and absolutely consistent thesis of Soviet Union during Stalin’s term that war was inevitable and the two systems would eventually mobilize to destroy one another...

And, to some extent, he owed his success to this indifference!



## German Working Class Keeps Calling

The defeats German working class suffered in 1919 at Berlin, Munich, Bremen and other cities had weakened the power base of the 1918 Revolution. At least German militarism thought so, and was impatient to rid itself of the present undisciplined social order, which it perceived to be as humiliating as the defeat in the war. Ultimately, many rights gained by the working class during the revolution were still in effect (although only some on paper), the toiling masses had achieved a level of organization that was incomparable with the time before November 1918 and, worst of all, idea of the “Revolution” was excessively legitimate. It was just like the situation in Portugal after the Carnation Revolution of 1974, when being a “right-wing” supporter was a shameful thing and the political spectrum was refracted as social democrats, socialists and communists. Counter-revolutionaries and right-wing gangs were let loose in the streets but the ideals of Revolution and Republic still had a powerful immunity across the country.

After winning through in 1919, the generals and some German monopolies had started to think that this was a situation they no longer had to abide. It was true that they still needed social democracy, but they had also realized that there was no limit to its treachery against the working class. Therefore, they were sensing that Ebert, Scheidemann, Noske and the other lot would not resist, even support a move that would reinstate monarchy. If these

leaders acquiesced, the public would eventually have to resign itself to its fate.

Many things can be said about the qualities of German “state mind.” One can say that it is rational, systematical, traditionalist, militant... but one must also say that this mind made many miscalculations throughout history. All the driving instincts that cloud the minds of propertied classes, monopoly magnates and imperialism were also present in German Empire and its remnants. In 1920, those who still represented that mind thought themselves to be all-powerful and shrewd. This was a gross miscalculation.

To perform a *coup de grâce* on the revolution and sweep away whatever remained of it, they designated racist journalist Wolfgang Kapp the leader of a putsch. In a strictly military sense, it was to be a clockwork operation. The troops raised by the social democratic butcher Noske would topple the government in which he was a minister!

There was neither a military or police force, nor a political will that could have stood in the way of this putsch, which would end the republic and resurrect the monarchy. Kapp putsch was initiated on March 13, and when Ebert and his associates fled Berlin leaving Reichstag undefended, it seemed to be consummated successfully. However, a couple of hours later, developments that nobody could have foreseen happened. Around noon Carl Legien, who was the union leader of the right wing of the SPD, called the working class for a general strike against the putsch without consulting with the party leaders and its parliamentary group. “*Men and women!*” the call said, “*the military reaction has raised its head again (...) They intend to restore absolutism, both in the state and in the factories (...) We are therefore calling on all workers, office employees and civil servants to go on strike everywhere immediately. All factories must be brought to a standstill (...) Victory will be on the side of the working people.*”<sup>130</sup>

Legien, despite being a conservative, had become the voice of conscience of the working class and sounded the first battle cry, which proved that German proletariat was yet to be done away with. This cry reached the ears of worker masses all across the country; however, KPD’s ears were still ringing. It had not been

able to recover from what had happened in 1919, and having burned itself drinking hot milk, it was blowing on cold water. On the day of the putsch, KPD analyzed the situation as “*a conflict between two counter-revolutionary factions of the bourgeoisie*” as if saying “no more adventures.”

KPD had turned its back on it, but from the evening of March 13, the working class brought life in Germany to a standstill. Next day water was not running, there was no electricity and trams were not working. The putschists could not find a working press to print the posters displaying their threats, could not even withdraw money from banks.

When they resorted to violence, they were given a good beating by militant workers. In some states Red Army brigades were formed by workers and revolutionary soldiers, and putschist officers were arrested by armed workers.

The workers were organized, but on the other hand, without a vanguard. KPD, on seeing the massive success of the strike, had immediately changed its position but did not have the strength to lead such a movement. Besides, it was late in its arrival on scene.

It is practically impossible to say “Yes” to the questions “Is there any other general strike in history that had been this effective and this swift in gaining results?” and “Is there any other counter-revolutionary putsch in history that had been crushed and humiliated as thoroughly as this?”

Foreigners were the first to leave Kapp putsch out in the cold. On March 16, British government announced that it would not recognize the new government. On the next day, Kapp promptly left the country! He fled to Sweden, where he would pass away from this life two years later.

With this, German working class, which crushed the putsch absolutely (yes, *absolutely*) single-handedly, had become the sole authority in the country. It did not want to go on with the current government, which had responded to the putsch by taking to its heels and fleeing the capital; yet it was also disinclined to cut ties with the traditional social democratic parties. Once again, the “*unity of labor parties*” demand, which made itself felt in 1919, became the voice of the streets. Unions, Legien who led the strike,

SPD leadership who are appalled at the idea that the working class could sweep away their positions in the blink of an eye, one wing of the USPD... all were in favor of a workers' government, which would include KPD. In any case, the workers that repelled the putsch were keeping on with the strike, demanding that a government to which they could trust be formed.

There are times in which history is written by decisions taken within a very short time bracket. And nobody can deny that the inability of the proletariat to make a political breakthrough after its immense display of power in March 1920 had been one of the most critical turning points in the history of Germany.

KPD approached the "workers' government" demand from a disputable but reasonable angle. They would not take part in but support the workers' government from outside. Chris Harman, who draws a parallel between this tactic and Lenin's approach to the possibility of a Menshevik-SR government without the Bolsheviks in 1917, is right to an extent, but he is also overstating the parallel.<sup>131</sup> The two situations had been very different, and besides, German working class had moved against the Kapp Putsch with an indomitable energy that went far beyond the relatively calm mood that Russian proletariat had displayed during some months of 1917. Dictatorship of the proletariat was frequently being voiced as a desired precondition to the three party workers' government and signatures were being collected in support of this.

At this point, we can say that KPD was face to face with two problems, or tasks. The first was obvious: It had to gain the initiative even if belatedly, and lead the working class, which practically had the run of the country, towards a target. However, the second pressing issue was complicating the first: What was to be done to break the hold of SPD over the worker masses in the fastest way possible?

The hesitant way in which KPD supported the workers' government formula did not provide any initiative. SPD was caught in the vise, the masses were demanding a government which supported the Revolution and which had cut all ties with the German bourgeoisie and militarism. Under these circumstances, a "why not?" stance concerning the workers' government was not sufficient.

And when, on the top of all these USPD said “we are out,” SPD, which had appeared as one of the losers of March 1920 alongside the putschists, got a chance to regroup.

Kapp, the head putschist, had escaped but almost all the others were still at large. When SPD got its hands free, the demand of the proletariat for a workers’ government was cast aside and transformed into its opposite. A right wing government was formed in the face of the demands on the street for a proletarian cabinet. In this government, it fell to social democrats to declare that the ongoing strike was a threat to public order. The workers were disarmed once more, *Freikorps* were left untouched, and order was restored.

KPD was paying the price of strategic ambiguity that had plagued it right from its foundation. It had no internal unity. Of the leaders who were in prison, Levi thought that the stance the party took when the general strike broke out had been contemptuous. Even after giving a belated support to the strike, the party had been unable to show a practical target to the working class. In the chaotic environment of the party, even the suggestion to “*avoid armed conflict but not lay down arms*” made with a revolutionary discretion by the likes of Wilhelm Pieck went unheard.

Any decisive stance (regardless of its direction) would have produced better results. SPD was backed into a corner, if somebody could have loudly said “*Yes, let’s form a workers’ government; let’s disperse Freikorps and all troops that are enemy of the people. Let’s leave the matter of maintaining public security to workers’ organizations, put all those who took part in the putsch on trial, and build a government on the basis of Workers’ Councils!*” maybe this would not have spelled the end of SPD, but it would have prevented it to act like a labor party.

I am telling all these despite being categorically against the collaboration of communist parties with bourgeois parties and taking part in governments within capitalist order. I am able to tell these, because in March 1920, for a few days German working class had toppled the capital in its guise as “the putsch,” and cornered it in its guise as “the social democracy.” We are talking about a very particular situation. Moreover, the worker masses had achieved

what could not have been achieved in 1919, 1921 and 1923; it had succeeded in a collective uprising. The oppressed class had taken the matter in hand all across the country at the same moment: In Ruhr basin, in Saxony, in Berlin, even in Frankfurt...

If one is without a clear target in such a critical moment, the resulting vacuum would be filled by others. Consequently, in a matter of days SPD gained the freedom to establish a government with right-wing elements by accusing the “extremists” for not being able to establish a workers’ government. Maybe they were not able to suppress workers’ organizations with a new wave of white terror like in 1919, but the working people was rapidly pacified and pushed to a secondary role in politics.

KPD had missed another train with the Kapp putsch. However, even this had been enough to excite Lenin. The communication channels of the Comintern were once again misguiding Moscow to the point that, even days after the bourgeoisie had pulled through the crisis in Germany, Lenin was devoting almost the whole of his short speech in the opening of the 9th Congress of RCP(b) to the reemergence of revolution in Germany with great enthusiasm.<sup>132</sup>

Unfortunately, on March 29, 1920, there was no “*irresistible spreading of proletarian Soviet power in Germany.*”

Interestingly, right by that time Lenin, taking into account the foresight that revolution would be stalled in Europe, was starting to work on the study that would have been hardest for him to write: “*Left-Wing*” *Communism: an Infantile Disorder*, in which he would try to convince European communists to calm, alertness, patience and concessions and steps backwards when necessary. Obviously, more accurate facts were put before him afterwards so that he did not display a similar enthusiasm on the situation in Germany during the rest of the congress. Yet, one can say that the excellent response of the working class to Kapp putsch had been one development in 1920 that made Lenin hesitate as a great insurrectionist in his resolution on the contradiction between the world revolution and socialism in one country. The other, which would shortly follow, would have been the difficult conflict with Poland.

Still, these did not stop him from writing the “*Left-Wing*” *Communism* pamphlet.

## **The Left and Right Wings of Communism: Infantilism and Maturity**

Throughout his life, Lenin was a consistent and self-conscious communist. However, he had never been a “scrupulous” Marxist who did not take risks, avoided attempts and hid under the umbrella of mediocrity in fear of failure. Particularly between March 1917 and 1923, in which his illness drove him away from active politics, there were days in which decisions he signed and statements he made numbered up to dozens, even hundreds. There had been occasions in which he had to display very different tendencies on the same subject in a very short time. Because new information kept flowing, he had to think some issues over and over and sometimes he came up with different and much more effective solutions to matters. All these were natural. Lenin was great because, amidst all the turmoil, he was able to remain a revolutionary leader who knew his goals, principles and priorities, and who had an unparalleled discipline of purpose.

Otherwise, he was not perfect or infallible; nor can anybody be like that. With such a claim or expectation, one cannot engage in politics, one can at most form a cult.

Lenin wrote a lot and spoke a lot. Books, pamphlets, interviews, articles, notices, short orders, two-sentence telegrams, speeches... Volumes of material.

For those who try to follow the lead of European left to understand Marxism, it is impossible to understand this material. Because, since 1960s European left, including almost all variants and excluding its prior history, has been busy with abusing the theory. In the progress of class struggle, it is of course possible and necessary to derive theoretical conclusions from the interactions between thought and action. However, no Marxist framework can be built upon a series of consecutive abstractions removed from concrete, objective reality and devoid of a will to change this reality.

In the course of this study, I read through everything Lenin wrote and said after the October Revolution (most of them not for the first time), saw with horror how these were twisted out of their meaning and taken out of their context. Most of the perpetrators were “colorful” personalities who accused Soviet socialism and Stalin in particular of vulgarizing Marxism and degrading it into simple mechanics; and they were using Lenin in whichever way that suited their purpose. I understood that, apart from some historians who are honest to historical facts and themselves, only those personally involved in the struggle for socialism can establish a healthy relationship with Lenin. The others may as well not read, since they only read to abuse.

Because Lenin did not write for the sake of the struggle, he was writing as he struggled, and he was struggling via writing and speaking. Sometimes, as you read him, you had to look not only at the date but also at the hour of a given material to understand him thoroughly. We know that he thought fast and rapidly acted, he was an impatient person in this sense.

Yet, in 1920, he was calling the communists in Europe to be patient. “*Left-Wing Communism*” pamphlet, which is one of the most interesting works of Lenin, was prepared for the Second Congress of the Communist International. Lenin was writing *against* the basic documents that reflected the enthusiasm and pointed philosophy of the foundation of the Comintern in March 1919, *against* the texts that took more than a year to finalize (and in the writings of which he was directly responsible).

The *Twenty-one Conditions of Admission to the Communist International* is a very special and uncompromising document.

Everything aside, it is a text that defines in the most comprehensible manner the characteristics that should be present in a party that would be the vanguard of revolution: A complete secession from reformism and parliamentarist deviation. In addition, it was a basic document that drew the line against those who approached the Third International and Soviet Russia only because of the prestige it swiftly gained; in a nutshell, a text which said “*saying one is a communist is not enough to be one.*”

Somebody who reads “*Left-Wing*” *Communism* and *Twenty-one Conditions* at the same time is bound to be confused. “*Left-Wing*” *Communism* is a text that says to European parties “*the revolution is quite distant, work hard, prepare*” and voices a warning: “*Do not condemn yourselves to sectarianism and isolation.*”

Of course, here Lenin displays his worries about these parties, their potential mistakes and their future. However, the thing that was truly preying on his mind was something else. 1920 was the year in which tension between the perspective for the world revolution and the goal of founding socialism in one country reached its peak. One can say that this was the year in which these two strategies collided. They collided, but did not drift apart, even sometimes mingled with one another. The Comintern, as per its nature and logic of establishment, was putting the emphasis on “world revolution” and was seizing upon every possibility to spread the leap forward initiated by the October Revolution. Lenin, on the other hand, was saying that new Octobers could not be achieved by willful decisions only, and parties that did not have a weight in the working class would not be able to seize power just because they had “Bolshevik” characteristics.

This is not a contradiction in itself. The root of the contradiction is in the year 1920, which was following a serpentine course, which hinted one day that world revolution was going to spread further and the next day that the Soviets would have to live in isolation for some time. Under these circumstances, Lenin had to take every possibility into account.

One of these was that a revolution in the west might not be a precondition for the workers’ rule in Russia to survive and proceed towards the establishment of socialism. How? 1920 was the year in

which Lenin realized that, the position and mood of the workers' movement in Europe was such that it would not be able to seize power, but would also prevent its own bourgeois from attacking Soviet Russia, and this would have provided the Soviets with the breathing space it needed even if not as much as the revolution becoming victorious in one or more countries.

The rapidly developing alliance between Soviet Russia and the anti-imperialist force created by the rising nationalist-revolutionary movements was another advantage of this period.

Yes, these two facts would have partially made up for the failure of the world revolution, which had been a nightmarish possibility in 1918. I want to say one thing plainly: If Lenin had not sensed this opportunity, he would never, ever have written *"Left-Wing" Communism*. I will quote only one witness of the period: Herman Gorter, a Dutch "left-wing communist" who had been in Moscow and spoke with Lenin, said that Lenin was thinking constantly of Russia. Not in the sense of Russian interests, but he was seeing things only from the Russian point of view.<sup>133</sup>

We know that Lenin had already decided to warn some "left-wing" tendencies in Europe in 1919. For example, those who had started to advocate their indifference towards parliamentary elections as a "principle" were really angering Lenin. Parties that had some four or five thousand members were playing the revolutionary against social democratic parties that controlled hundreds of thousands of militant workers with high-toned speeches like *"parliament is the pigsty of the bourgeoisie; we have nothing to do with the elections."* One can see traces of struggle against these reductive tendencies even in the foundation year of the Comintern. For example, an ECCI circular dated September 1, 1919 openly condemned boycottist tendencies.<sup>134</sup>

Still, nobody in the Comintern could have foreseen an intervention of such magnitude as in the *"Left-Wing" Communism* pamphlet. Lenin did not want to allow the Communist International, which had shown great development in one year, to be represented by farcical parties in many countries. Because these parties were about to come face to face with extremely complicated tasks, and some of these tasks would have had a direct bearing on Soviet Russia.

The adjective Lenin used to define his pamphlet was “modest,” and he stated that his intent in writing it was “*to study Russian experience in connection with certain topical questions of international communist tactics.*”<sup>135</sup>

As a reader, I can say that this remark can be turned upside down. “*Left-Wing*” Communism was an *intervention in the burning questions of international communist movement in the light of, and more importantly, with the authority of Russian experience.* And it was *not* modest at all...

In 1920, most of the Bolsheviks, including Lenin, were troubled with the thought: “*Communism became the latest fashion, people who are not communists are applying for membership to communist parties and parties which are not communist parties are applying for membership to the Comintern.*” As I underlined above, *Twenty-one Conditions* was a warning, asking, “*Do you understand what kind of an organization you are applying to?*”

There was a flow, a tendency towards the Comintern; that was certain. However, this was not sufficient because social democratic parties in Europe (particularly in the two most critical countries, Germany and Britain), were predominant in the working class by far despite this flow and tendency, and this predominance did not show itself only in elections. If only that had been the case, Lenin would not have given it much consideration. The problem was that, in many European countries, the worker masses who could not break away from social democracy were at the same time in a revolutionary mood; they were going on strikes, erecting barricades and sometimes guarded their actions with arms.

The task was really complicated. The communist parties were to vitiate the influence of social democracy over workers, pull revolutionary workers away from it and at the same time keep their ranks pure. This in itself did not present a great contradiction. However, it was obvious that there were serious differences between drawing a line in the sand and exposing social democracy to vitiate its influence over workers, and maintaining a tactical affinity with its political base to pull workers away from social democratic leadership. The theoretical and practical problems created by these differences would have extended far beyond 1920. The Comintern

would have branded social democracy as “social fascist” and with “Class Against Class” slogan seek to consolidate the working class against the front of capital, which included social democracy in 1924. However, after the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, it would have adopted the tactic of united front against fascism (which would have been internalized by many parties as a permanent strategy) with social democracy.

If we take both “*Left-Wing Communism*” and some of the basic documents of the Comintern into account, it becomes clear that the international communist movement in 1920 was face to face with two opposing pressures acting upon it.

These complicated tasks would have to be managed carefully. Some decided to shirk this hardship. Pannekoek was one... He told that strengthening of reformist tendencies in the Comintern was inevitable under conditions in which the revolution stalled in Europe against the strong obstacles erected against it by capital, but at the same time Soviet Union proved that it was capable of standing against imperialism. He was assessing the situation correctly, but inferring wrong conclusions.<sup>136</sup>

Of course, by saying wrong I am not denying the fact that reformism was becoming a historical and lasting phenomenon in European communist movement. What I am objecting to is the proposition that this result had been inevitable. The process could have been handled better. Besides, I must add that one should not underestimate the value of the assemblage that broke from the communist movement with “left-wing” theses, and then drifted in unsavory directions or became disorganized. Those who discarded them all too easily, and the capricious “left-wing” elements who could not overcome their petty bourgeois egocentrism all together share the guilt of reformism in the international communist movement.

Then, didn’t Lenin considerably strengthen the hands of those who used his name and the invaluable legacy of Bolshevism to justify a reformist line by writing “*Left-Wing Communism*”?

He did!

He did, but this is not Lenin’s problem! It is certain that, anybody who allowed the obscuring of the fact that this pamphlet

had been written in a specific period in which the defense of socialism in a single country had become a basic strategy, anybody who did not make an effort to underline the context and purpose of this pamphlet is responsible of this result. First and foremost among them were the theoreticians of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) after the period of Stalin; who reduced the Soviet history to a dull monotony without arguments or sides while putting notes in the sidelines which condemned a certain period of “the Communist International” with sectarianism. Of course, there were all kinds of adventurism, sectarianism, tactlessness and infantilism in the Communist International. What could have been more natural? However, when compared to the damage caused by the reformist, class collaborationist tendencies in later periods (which are beyond the scope of this book), isn't it obvious that the “left” deviation had been a quite lesser evil?

Lenin could not have foreseen this. He was writing in response to current needs, because the master insurrectionist had realized that the grafted Bolshevism would not have taken hold in every party body. Moreover, he had seen the impossibility of success with young and inexperienced “red parties” which had their roots in intelligentsia and were distant in this sense to the working class, and he was worried. Above all these were the needs that arose in defense of Soviet Russia...

The value and purpose of what Lenin wrote can only be understood in this context:

(1) [T]he possibility of linking up the Soviet revolution with the ending, as a consequence of this revolution, of the imperialist war, which had exhausted the workers and peasants to an incredible degree; (2) the possibility of taking temporary advantage of the mortal conflict between the world's two most powerful groups of imperialist robbers, who were unable to unite against their Soviet enemy; (3) the possibility of enduring a comparatively lengthy Civil War, partly owing to the enormous size of the country and to the poor means of communication; (4) the existence of such a profound bourgeois-democratic revolutionary movement among the peasantry that the party of the proletariat was able to adopt the revolutionary demands

of the peasant party (the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, the majority of whose members were definitely hostile to Bolshevism) and realise them at once, thanks to the conquest of political power by the proletariat—all these specific conditions do not at present exist in Western Europe, and a repetition of such or similar conditions will not occur so easily.<sup>137</sup>

Is it possible to object to any of these? No. Nevertheless, who can say that Europe did not have any advantages? Advantages that had frequently been underlined by Lenin himself in the past, no less. Furthermore, many other Bolsheviks had also voiced the opinion that the basic problem in Europe was the absence of a vanguard party, with laments like *“If only they were organized like us.”* However, here, after citing one objective constraint after the other, Lenin was almost saying, *“It is almost impossible, even with a truly revolutionary party.”*

This was an unequal debate; Lenin was roughing up his opponents with his years of experience. Polemic against Lenin was not within the means of everybody, since nobody was able to back his or her words with a resolution like him in that period. He had started to think that they could keep Soviet Russia alive even in the absence of a revolution in the west. Moreover, this was not only a thought; it was a challenge and strategic orientation. In time, of those who had tried to stand against this orientation, none would have been able to stay within revolutionary politics.

Lenin was calling his European comrades to creativeness, to concrete analysis of concrete conditions, and to using their brains:

It would be absurd to formulate a recipe or general rule (“No compromises!”) to suit all cases. One must use one’s own brains and be able to find one’s bearings in each particular instance. It is, in fact, one of the functions of a party organisation and of party leaders worthy of the name, to acquire, through the prolonged, persistent, variegated and comprehensive efforts of all thinking representatives of a given class, the knowledge, experience and—in addition to knowledge and experience—the political flair necessary for the speedy and correct solution of complex political problems.<sup>138</sup>

In time, “*of course we can reconcile, even make concessions if the situation demands it*” became the slogan of reformism in communist movement across the world. However, Lenin was writing about the concessions Soviet Russia had to make to survive in the imperialist world, and that the communists had to appreciate the balance of power in class struggle every day in the ups and downs of world revolution. He definitely wasn’t advocating forsaking the aim of seizing political power indefinitely!

The “*Left-Wing*” *Communism* pamphlet is a connecting bridge to the conclusions Lenin would have reached three years later in 1923 in his last political evaluations. In the November of 1917, the precondition for the survival of Soviet rule and establishment of socialism had been the success of world revolution in advanced capitalist countries. In 1918 and 1919, as world revolution stalled, “*Soviet power can only survive through a concord with the peasantry*” was added as an additional condition to this. This had been one of the aspects (not the whole, as some claim) of NEP. In 1920, Lenin, in his work we are discussing, was now saying that the isolated socialist power could only have survived “*by exerting the utmost effort, and by the most thorough, careful, attentive, skillful and obligatory use of any, even the smallest, rift between the enemies, any conflict of interests among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries,*” and he was writing about the importance of “*taking advantage of any, even the smallest, opportunity of winning a mass ally, even though this ally is temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional.*”<sup>139</sup>

And maybe he was most vexed to say “*retain your independence but join the Labour Party which gave you this right, this freedom, and support it in the upcoming elections*” to the communists of Britain, who were just trying to unite and form their party. “*We would put up our candidates in a very few but absolutely safe constituencies, namely, constituencies where our candidatures would not give any seats to the Liberals at the expense of the Labour candidates*” was also one of his advices.<sup>140</sup> There you go, a hand from Lenin to all those who for years have been nagging us not to “split the vote.” Nevertheless, social democrats be warned: Lenin is

uncanny even at the best of times; you can be jinxed!

Then, what was making Lenin say all these? The problem was that, Britain was of immense importance to the Soviets. Even if the first window for breathing space had been Germany, in a prolonged situation of “standing alone,” commercial and diplomatic relations with Britain was an absolute necessity. On the other hand, the British Revolution had not been able to attain the desired strength, and the masses who made sporadic revolutionary outbursts and harbored sympathy towards Soviet Russia were enrolled in the Labour Party. This party had encompassed almost all the unionized workers and was allowing factions and separate organizations within itself.

In the foundation of the Comintern, and in the *Twenty-one Conditions* a “secession from social democracy” was advocated, but this advice had not produced a result in Britain at all. Lenin was suggesting another way, which would both save the British communists from being crushed in the elections or turning into a non-factor in British politics, and retain a good standing with the millions of workers who would force the capitalist class to establish good relations with Soviets.

What he suggested was not a new strategy of revolution in stages; it was a way of defending Soviet Russia in the west as the revolution was stalling.

British communists, who had just gotten themselves out of the quagmire of the Second International and turned their face towards communism, vehemently objected to Lenin. And Lenin’s response to these objections speak volumes: “*This temper is highly gratifying and valuable; we must learn to appreciate and support it for, in its absence, it would be hopeless to expect the victory of the proletarian revolution in Great Britain, or in any other country for that matter.*”<sup>41</sup>

Desperate times, desperate measures...

If one is to understand the “*Left-Wing*” *Communism* pamphlet, an understanding of the *zeitgeist* is necessary; that is, an understanding of the prominence of Soviet Russia’s struggle for survival in spite of the stalling of revolution in Europe...

Otherwise, like Žižek (whom I never warmed up to despite his

obvious intelligence, since I think his works show an obvious tendency to have fun by mocking his readers) you will not understand anything at all, and fabricate:

Lenin's critique of "Leftism as the Infantile Disorder of Communism" has been more than pertinent over recent decades, when the Left has often succumbed to the terrorist temptation.<sup>142</sup>



## Confusion Sets In: The Poland Hope

Comrades: You know that, instigated by the Entente, the Polish landowners and capitalists have forced a new war on us. Remember, comrades, that we have no quarrel with the Polish peasants and workers; we have recognised Poland's independence and the Polish People's Republic, and shall continue to do so. We have proposed peace to Poland on the basis of the integrity of her frontiers, although these frontiers extend far beyond the purely Polish population. We have agreed to make all concessions, which is something each of you should remember at the front. Let your attitude to the Poles there prove that you are soldiers of a workers' and peasants' republic, that you are coming to them, not as aggressors but as liberators.<sup>143</sup>

This is from Lenin's speech on May 5, 1920, which he finished with the slogan "*Long live our Red Workers' and Peasants' Army!*" and was received with cries of "*Hurrah.*" The Polish invasion had started ten days before, on April 25. In truth, Poland and Soviet Russia had come into a permanent state of war shortly after the revolution. The first thing that should be taken into account is that, for quite some time after October Revolution the borders of Soviet Russia had ebbed to and fro; and the workers' government, in its struggle against dozens of different powers, lost control of some regions. All in all, the multi-national Russian Empire had transformed into the multi-national Soviet state, and a

complicated struggle that would determine the dominant class on a very wide geography had started.

Poland was not an object of this struggle. As Lenin underlined, the Bolsheviks had already recognized the independence of Poland. However, Ukraine, Byelorussia, and the Baltic States, which were the areas of expansion for the Soviet rule, were also drawing the interest of the Polish nationalists. Ukraine especially had been squeezed between Poland and Russia, and the anti-Soviet Ukrainian forces were a big thorn in the side of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War. The Poles, who had strong nationalist sentiments and whose anti-communism was fueled and mingled with their hatred for the Russians, were an important trump card in the hands of Allied Powers who sought to bring Russian working class to heel. Britain and France had a limited capacity to intervene directly in the Civil War in Russia. The soldiers did not want to fight; besides, the working class in these countries had the power to hamstring any direct move against the Soviets. "Young" Poland, on the other hand, had an expansionist energy; nationalism there had also conquered social democracy and internationalist communists had become a small minority. Moreover, the best communist cadres of Polish descent were in active struggle in the parties of Germany or Russia (among many others, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Radek and Felix Dzerzhinsky are the first that come to mind).

It was obvious that, attacking Poland would have been suicidal for a country that sought commercial and political relations with Britain. The only possible aim of a Red Army operation against Poland could have been securing Ukraine and Byelorussia against provocations and annexation.

However, Poland was now invading with an obvious aim of occupation. Among militarist circles in Warsaw, dreams about establishing a federation with the counter-revolutionary elements of Ukraine and Byelorussia, even extreme ideas like striking into the heart of Russia and conquering Moscow were being discussed. It was obvious that this venture had also excited the imperialist powers and they would have given open or covert support to Poland.

Yet, there were obstacles other than the Red Army that stood against Poland in this venture. Firstly, Poland had become an

invader in public opinion all across the world and the fact went undisputed that Soviet Russia was the wronged party. Second, the conflict of interests between Britain and France, who were both helping Poland, and from whom the nationalists in Warsaw expected more support, had intensified. Moreover, the British were worrying that the Polish nationalists, who were disinclined to make alliance with the White Army against the Bolsheviks due to their "hatred of Russians," would have upset the balance in the Civil War in Russia. And, above all, the possibility of a rapprochement between the Soviets and Germany, which detested the idea of an independent Poland (to whom it had to concede territories that it deemed as its own in the Treaty of Versailles), was scary to the victors of the First World War.

However, it was an undisputable fact that international reaction, as a counter-revolutionary international was behind the Polish invasion that started on April 25, 1920. The Red Army did not present a particular resistance; on May 7 Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, fell without any serious conflict. The Poles were achieving a quick success, but in fact becoming more vulnerable to a counter attack of the Red Army as they advanced.

Consequently, the counter move of the Soviets was not late in coming. On June 5, the Red Cavalry under the command of Semyon Budyonny forced the Second Army of Poland into a rapid retreat. The lost settlements were retaken one by one, including Kiev on June 11. The invading armies of Piłsudski, who had played with high stakes, were not able to hold against the troops of Budyonny, which were mainly composed of belligerent Cossacks.

Now the shoe was on the other foot. The Poles were on the run from the Red Cavalry known for its ruthlessness and the Red Army was advancing with a shocking speed.

However, the Polish Army was only one among the many enemies Red Army was fighting. White Army under the command of Wrangel had managed to hold out in Crimea and had to be uprooted. It was not an easy affair, since the British navy was waiting in Black Sea to lend any assistance necessary so that the last hope of counter-revolution was not crushed. Stalin had assumed responsibility in this quarter.

Trotsky was commanding the Red Army as the Commissar of Military Affairs. The commander-in-chief was Sergey Kamenev (not to be confused with Lev Kamenev, one of the prominent figures of the Party). As the Red Cavalry advanced on the south and swept the Poles out of Ukraine, the Red Army units positioned in the north moved towards Byelorussia and Lithuania on July 5 with the same objective. These troops were led by Mikhail Tukhachevsky, a former officer in the armies of the Tsar who had risen and shone during the Civil War.

Soviet troops moved with an unbelievable speed. By July 12, Minsk had been taken and in a short while after that, they were at the Polish border. This was the decisive moment for the Bolsheviks; they would have either kept advancing, or paused and waited. However, stopping and allowing the Polish army to regroup would have been suicide in a military sense. Poland was a large country and only a portion of her army had received the blow from the Red Army.

Nevertheless, the decision that faced Lenin and his friends was not only a military but also a political one. Advancing into the heartland of Poland, maybe even taking Warsaw would mean that the revolution has spread westward. The Bolsheviks were quite disinclined to impose a revolution with the Red Army. However, the bourgeois Poland had attacked first, her army was the army of the enemy class and if it was routed, the Polish workers would have seized power. Therefore, in a sense, the Red Army could have created the conditions necessary for a Polish revolution. More importantly, Poland was what stood between Germany and Soviet Russia, and the famous formula of the times was Red Army + German Proletariat = World Revolution. With Poland pulled aside, this formula could have been realized.

All these were being discussed with great excitement. Yet, Lenin had just decided absolutely to “focus on the internal problems of Russia.” But now he had to consider whether or not the miscalculation of the Polish nationalists presented an opportunity to revive European Revolution.

It was a tough question, and the answer the Bolsheviks gave was hard to understand. They entered into Poland and advanced on

Warsaw but their main objective was unclear. Ensuring the security of Soviet Russia, helping the German Revolution, establishing a workers government in Poland, negotiating with the British... any of these could be cited as the main objective as there is ample evidence supporting each. This means that confusion had set in. The prominent Bolsheviks already had different strategies, but it is evident that each and every one of them was also quite confused about the Polish campaign.

It was not easy. The war with Poland was an opportunity. However, it was also an opportunity for others, for the counter-revolutionary international!



## **As the Counter-revolutionary International Musters Its Forces**

Most sources on the war between Soviet Russia and Poland in 1920 are written by anti-communists. There are volumes of material written by the Poles boasting about how they stopped the Red Army on the outskirts of Warsaw and “saved the western civilization from the scourge of Bolshevism.” We can add to this the books and articles written by those of Polish extraction in the USA, who have always been a strong lobby force, as well as by other bourgeois historians.

On the “left,” however, the Polish campaign is still a taboo. Particularly the Soviet official history, which subsided into silence on many other topics after Stalin, had immediately consigned the topic of Warsaw campaign to oblivion right after 1920. Naturally, defeat has a “humiliating” side to it. However, one must not see this as the only source of the silence. Even if every single prominent character in the Russian Communist Party later tried to redeem himself, it is obvious that a strategic confusion on the issue of Poland had pervaded the whole party, including Lenin. If a “culprit” was to be sought, everyone could have said something about everybody else, which means that nothing decisive could have been said!

The Polish-Soviet War is an area that is also avoided by the new leftist and Trotskyist writers who, seizing the opportunity

presented by the general reticence of communist parties in later times, made a habit of writing texts full of errors and fabrications on almost every issue in the history of international workers' movement. Luckily, the minutes from party meetings and speeches of Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek and Tukhachevsky remain, so that it is possible to make headway by comparing these with the writings and documents presented by bourgeois historians.

The consensus among the majority of those bourgeois historians is that the Soviet government made a mistake right at the beginning by assuming "*Poland was incited by France and Britain and attacked Soviet Russia on their orders.*" Therefore, they had underestimated the internal dynamics of Poland and the influence of nationalism that had taken hold of the whole nation.

Apart from anything else, I can say the Bolsheviks had understood very well that Piłsudski and the other bourgeois politicians in Poland were not mere puppets on strings; that on the contrary, they were acting on a *sui generis* strategy and motivation. This was what made Poland an effective actor against Soviet Russia in the first place. However, all actors must act with a freedom that matches their wealth, strength and position in the imperialist hierarchy. Poland would have never dared to invade Soviet Russia without approval and encouragement of France, Britain, even USA.

The motivation of those accusing Soviet administration of paranoia is to belittle the support given to Poland in order to obscure the rampant and ruinous policies of the chief imperialist countries and, by linking the defeat of the Red Army only to Polish patriotism, add a few more numbers to the scoreboard in favor of anti-communism.

However, one of the leading roles in the Polish-Soviet War in 1920 had been taken by the counter-revolutionary international.

I have already mentioned above that Poland had been pushed into active warfare against the Bolsheviks in Byelorussia and Lithuania as early as the beginning of 1918. In fact, nobody feels any need to deny the involvement of Poland in the foundation of the counter-revolutionary Belarusian People's Republic on March 25, 1918.

This republic would have been short lived. However, despite the establishment of Soviet rule in Byelorussia on January 1, 1919, remnant forces of this republic would have fought alongside Polish forces against the Soviets.

At this point, it would be helpful to touch upon the relations between Poland and Germany. For the victors of the war, Poland was both a rampart that prevented Bolshevism from infecting Germany and a safeguard that would preclude any revival of German militarism. If there would have been a contest among nationalisms, Russians and Germans had been conditioned to hate the Poles while the Poles had been conditioned to hate both.

Therefore, using the Poles against the Bolsheviks both as a military and as a political-ideological force was the joint agenda of British, French and American imperialists. On the other hand, even though Germany joined in the anti-Soviet ventures in Baltic States from time to time, the prospect of Germany taking up the fight against Bolshevism outside its own borders in collaboration with Poland was out of question after the Treaty of Versailles.

If Poland was to become a useful actor against Soviet Russia in the post-war environment, first a new state, and particularly a new army had to be created. The Poles had fought on both sides in the First World War; and had been dispersed among armies of different nations after peace had been made. It fell to the French to gather them into a modern Army. 1500 French officers took action in the spring of 1919 to create a Polish army modelled on their own. Among these were also young Charles De Gaulle.<sup>144</sup>

Even in its primary stages of development, Polish army was being used against Soviet Russia in continuous harassing attacks across the border against the Red Army, which had been fighting to end the Civil War. The weight of the French in the military issues of Poland would have increased over time. All these should be sufficient to prove that the French were directly responsible of Poland's invasion into Soviet Russia. This was not a paranoia of the Bolsheviks.

On the other hand, in Britain, the differences of opinion on the policy against Soviet Russia were widening daily. While the shouts of those who said, "*Bolshevism must be destroyed forthwith!*" had

been drowning all other voices in 1919, as time passed and it became obvious that this was impossible, the deliriums of this faction headed by Churchill lost their impact. Once the Red Army repelled the Polish invasion and proceeded to march on Warsaw, Britain hastened its efforts to bring the Soviets to the negotiation table, and the presence of warmongers served as a bad cop routine to frighten the Soviets. Otherwise, compared to previous year, the inclination of British capitalist class to send its army against Russia had decreased considerably.

British imperialists were also daunted. Throughout 1920, dockworkers had displayed an unbelievable determination on refusing to load ships with the ammunition that would have been shipped to the army of Poland. Strikes and demonstrations had become a common occurrence. If one is not strong behind the frontline, it is impossible to fight for long. British bourgeois were well experienced to know this. Once they had seen that bringing down Soviet Russia by means of a military intervention was impossible, they started to care more about not leaving the prospect of establishing economic relationships with it and making money out of trade to their imperialist competitors.

However, this does not diminish the role of the British in Poland's attack on the Soviets at all. Indeed, when the Red Cavalry retook Kiev in June 1920, they seized wagons full of weapons manufactured in Britain.

This was class struggle and everything was out in the open. On the other hand, the imperialists were also confused. It was not only the conflicts of interest among them that caused problems. Polish nationalism was a problem in itself. The Poles were an effective weapon against the Bolsheviks; but the basic stock of the White Army fighting against the Bolsheviks was Russian nationalism. It was a very difficult affair to bring together the Polish and White Armies in a common strategy since nationalist Poland sought an expansion far beyond her ethnic homeland, with Ukraine being the first step. On the other hand, the aim of counter-revolutionary generals who were being taken out one by one by the Bolsheviks was to revive the Russian Empire. If it had been up to them, they would have destroyed the right of Poland to exist

as an independent state, which they saw as a “red” fabrication, in the blink of an eye.

Under these conditions, the French and the British were encouraging Poland while at the same time had to restrain it. As we will see further on, this hesitation on the part of imperialists had a direct influence on the decision processes of Soviet government and particularly exacerbated the confusion there.

By the beginning of 1920, the intention of Britain to attribute more importance to Warsaw in the White Army-Poland balance had become obvious. The repeated successes of the Red Army had shown that workers’ Russia was establishing dominance over the Russia of the bourgeois and landowners. Therefore, adding a “nationalist” energy to the war would have been beneficial on many accounts. It was apparent that the Poles were more motivated than the White Army. Besides, the front that would have been opened by Poland against Soviet Russia would ease the pressure on the counter-revolutionary Russian forces and force the Red Army to fight on two fronts.

When the Red Army had torn apart the last defensive line of Denikin’s counter-revolutionary army on March 27, 1920 amidst peace negotiations between Poland and Russia, only Baron P.N. Wrangel had been left as a threat against the Bolsheviks in the Civil War. He was entrenched in Crimea and was able to hold out with the help of British navy. However, those in London knew that an actor pushed so much into the periphery would not be able to wrest the central control in Russia, so they were trying to keep Wrangel at his current position as a force that would stop the Bolshevik spread and could be used in Caucasia. This was the reason why they were pressuring Wrangel to start ceasefire negotiations with Moscow. They were sure that the Red Army would eventually destroy the remnants of the White Army otherwise.

It can be seen that, as Piłsudski was counting his days to attack the Soviets with sanction from Britain and especially France, the Red Army was about to end the Civil War. The failure of the White Army in toppling the Bolsheviks were easing the dilemma of the two imperialist countries between Poland and counter-revolutionary Russian generals whose bargaining power had been

diminished. Besides, an attack by Poland on the Soviets would have eased the pressure against Wrangel isolated in Crimea.

Throughout this period, both France and Britain were torn between the problems that would have resulted from the creation of a strong, bourgeois, counter-revolutionary Russia and the problems that sliding of a very wide geography into chaos would entail. They were certain that a strong bourgeois Russia would never have allowed independent states like Poland around it, and this did not sit well with them at all.<sup>145</sup>

However, they had not yet played their last trick on the Bolsheviks; they would have made one more attempt. When Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs Chicherin displayed an ungratifying attitude to the British on the issue of ceasefire with Wrangel, his counterpart Curzon seized on this as an opportunity to mobilize the navy to support Wrangel. At the same time, the French government were deciding to help Wrangel, too.<sup>146</sup>

The Polish government was sure that this was the fine moment to attack. Confident of French support, Warsaw was putting forward propositions that would have been impossible for the Soviets to accept. Neither Paris, nor London could have lent an open support to a Polish invasion as the peace negotiations were being held; however, the main sponsor of an army in which French officers held positions at every level and more than half of the cannons and rifles were made in France was obvious. As was the identity of the prospective source, which would provide the necessary funding that would be needed in a fight against the Bolsheviks...

When Poland invaded at the end of April, the statements from western capitals were in the vein of "*Do not escalate the tension.*" And the Poles openly paid no heed to these.

France was egging Poland on, and at the same time sending weapons to Wrangel; even more, they went so far as to recognize this power locked in Crimea as the *de facto* government. However, there was a disturbing side to Poland's taking of Minsk and Kiev. The overly politicized international public opinion had started to perceive the Bolsheviks as the wronged side and, more importantly, Poland as an expansionist power which sought to dominate lands that it had very poor ethnic claims on. The counter offensive

of the Red Army which liberated Kiev, and the subsequent entry of Soviet troops into Poland removed this problem. Now, Poland was “protecting the western civilization from barbarian hordes!”

When the tide of war turned again and the Poles took the upper hand in the outskirts of Warsaw in August, the French made a great effort to establish a collaboration between the Poles, Romanians and Wrangel. However, all these efforts would not have been enough to destroy Soviet Russia. As the negotiations between Warsaw and Moscow were resumed, the Red Army finished off Wrangel. The time had come for the French to resign themselves to the existence of Soviet Russia.<sup>147</sup>

Miliukov displays an excessively one-sided opinion in asserting that the French support to Wrangel had been only to prevent the Red Army from focusing on the Polish front, and that they abandoned him once this was no longer needed.<sup>148</sup> We will return to the question “*which was the bigger threat to the Soviets, the Poles or Wrangel?*” in later chapters. However, it is worth noting that Wrangel was much more than a pawn for the imperialists to sacrifice for the sake of Polish nationalists.

Ultimately, just like the “*Soviet administration overstated the extent of and the threat caused by foreign intervention in the Civil War*” thesis, the proposition “*there is a paranoid side to the Bolsheviks’ thinking that France and Britain were behind the Polish invasion*” is part of the effort to obscure the counter-revolutionary international. It is true that sometimes Soviet government drew wrong conclusions from developments in the heat of events. However, we are bound to say that Poland did not act on her own in this complicated environment, and took advantage of contradictions between imperialist countries as well as among the ruling class within each of them.

In this sense, the Polish-Soviet War had been between the international revolution and international counter-revolution. The ruling circles in France and Britain spared no effort in the beginning of 1920 to prevent the signing of a peace agreement between Poland and Soviet Russia. It had been obvious that the two influential capitals were guiding Piłsudski’s hand in putting forth unacceptable conditions for an agreement in March. Alexandre Millerand,

who had been Prime Minister of France at the time, was not acting irresponsibly in saying “*do not trust the Soviets, they can attack you in a moment’s notice, in such a case France would assist you by all the means within its power*”<sup>149</sup> to the Polish government, he was acting as a cunning representative of an imperialist country.

On the other hand, as I stated above, contradictions were accumulating within imperialism and even state institutions within the same country came to oppose each other. In this period, the internal actor who tried to resist France’s support policy of Polish nationalism was French General Staff. The army officers were putting forth arguments based on intelligence reports that the Soviets had shifted towards a policy of “socialism in one country” and all they wanted was to make peace with their neighbors to focus on internal problems. They had also realized that Soviet Army was being rapidly mobilized for economic restoration. For them, the notion that the Soviets would attack Poland or Romania was nothing more than a rumor.<sup>150</sup> French General Staff also added reasonably that the mobilization at the border was because of Polish provocations.

So, was French General Staff suddenly infiltrated by fairies of peace, friendship, fraternity and honesty?

It is one of the most ruthless, blood soaked armies we are talking about. No, it was infiltrated neither by fairies nor by doves of peace. It only had reached the conclusion that a strong and stable Russia, even one in the hands of the Bolsheviks, was essential in preventing Germany from becoming troublesome again. Britain as an island state had less to fear from Germany, but French capital had to do all in its power to keep Germany on her knees while it still had the upper hand.

French General Staff had another argument that had to be taken into account: The generals were warning that Germany could have also invaded Poland when Poland attacked the Soviets and the Red Army retaliated.

Was it possible? We will see later on that there were some in Berlin who had such plans; that some influential persons there had even shared this idea with the Soviet representatives. So, the French military intelligence was not fabricating. Obviously, some

of the irredentist German generals were considering that it would be a smart move to deliver the first blow against the Treaty of Versailles by eliminating Poland. This would also have been helpful in more than one way to eliminate the Bolshevik threat inside Germany. On the other hand, another part of the generals and rulers in Germany saw that when Poland fell Germany and the Soviets would have become neighbors and feared that this might have caused Germany to fall into the “clutches” of communism.

French General Staff had naturally outlined a worst-case scenario for itself. However in 1920 the foreign affairs of France was not run by generals, it was run by cadres of the Ministry. They opted for war. France, after urging the Polish and Romanian governments just before the Polish invasion to participate in the all-out assault which Wrangel would initiate, has nowhere to run to from this responsibility.

They provoked, they supported.

During the war, despite all the sabotages and resistance of European workers, many trains full of ammunition made their way to Poland. According to one source, one particular train contained 20 thousand French, 40 thousand British rifles and 13 million bullets for these. 100 bullets for each Red Army soldier!<sup>151</sup>

The British, on the other hand, carried out their part successfully by maintaining diplomatic pressure on the Soviets throughout the war. Britain provided arms to both Poland and Wrangel and determined its policy daily by testing whether or not the Soviets would be able to resist the pressure on both fronts. When it witnessed the successes of the Red Army, it said “peace”; in contrary situations, it fanned the flames of “war” and it never ceased threatening Moscow in both circumstances.

As the Soviet Army advanced into Poland, Lloyd George was openly threatening Kamenev and Krasin as “*Britain will intervene*” and was holding the Soviets responsible of the stalling of peace negotiations. Actually, Lloyd George belonged to the wing of British imperialism which thought Britain should establish relations with the Soviets; but he was unable to evade the pressure of influential names from his own cabinet like Lord Curzon and Winston Churchill, who thought Bolshevism must have been wiped

from the face of the earth. That pressure was repelled by the resistance of the Red Army, Soviet workers and the anti-war stance of British proletariat.

Since we are talking about imperialism, what about the USA? It seemed removed from these troubles, it wanted to stay away from Europe; but as one of the countries that profited most from the First World War, had the USA remained indifferent to the Polish-Soviet War?

Many Polish émigrés lived in the USA and had an influence. Throughout 1919 aid campaigns were made to help Poland in its struggle against the Reds. The most prominent name in these campaigns was that of pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski, who had always been very outspoken about his hatred of communism. Great amounts of money was gathered. There had been some 200 thousand men of Polish descent already conscripted in the US army. Some of these volunteered and went to Poland. The 20 thousand strong army of General Haller was created in this way.

Some American officers not of Polish descent were also sent to Poland. They were particularly assigned to artillery units. However, the most interesting were the pilots.

During the First World War, the role of the planes had undergone a rapid change. First, they had only been used for reconnaissance; but after a short while, it became clear that they could also carry bombs. Ultimately, once all sides had understood the importance of owning the skies, fast fighter planes with high maneuverability were developed for dogfights. However, the air forces were still in development everywhere and all countries had a need for trained pilots.

The Red Army had very few planes; they also had problems with maintenance and spare parts, and they had precious few pilots. The Polish army had received new planes but they also did not have enough pilots.

Therefore, we can assume that the Kościuszko's Squadron, which had been composed mainly of American pilots, became a great thorn in the side of the Red Army.

The squadron got its name from Tadeusz Kościuszko, who had been a military engineer that fought in the American War of

Independence and also led the 1794 uprising in Poland against Tsarist Russia and Prussia. The 21 USA citizens who took part in Kościuszko's Squadron saw service in every stage of the war.<sup>152</sup>

Apparently, and according to record, all of these well-trained officers had gone to Poland of their own volition. As if speaking in unison, all had been saying that "*they hated Bolshevism*" and "*wanted to protect the world from the Red threat.*" While there is no need to doubt their anti-communism, what sent them to Poland obviously was not their "noble sentiments" but the government of the USA, who also had imperialist interests in feeding such sentiments.

We learn about the extent of the damage caused by the Kościuszko's Squadron from the Soviet records of the war. In both the Civil War and the war against Poland, the greatest asset of the Red Army was the cavalry under the command of Budyonny. These troops had been created by Stalin and Budyonny, and with a synthesis of traditional and guerilla tactics had become the nightmare of counter-revolutionary war bands. The Red Cavalry had turned the tide of the Civil War with charges of great speed and ruthlessness that divided the enemy forces and then used tachankas (machine guns mounted on the back of horse drawn chariots) to mow them down.<sup>153</sup> Now, these troops were the greatest threat to Polish army.

However, there was one thing that frightened the horses that carried forth these fearsome troops: The roar of the plane engine! The flying monsters in the sky did what neither cannon blasts nor the whiz of bullets could. Even the mastery of Cossack horsemen was not enough to control the horses that bolted madly from the noise of planes. Budyonny was reporting that on August 17, which had been a decisive day in the course of the war, some of the attacks had been made only by planes and caused great losses, and he was urgently demanding anti-aircraft guns.

Isaac Babel, who wrote his famous work *Red Cavalry* while he was with the troops of Budyonny during this war, frequently mentions this squadron:

At noon we brought the bullet-riddled body of Trunov, our squadron leader, to Sokal. He was killed this morning in a battle with enemy planes.

(...)

And the squadron leader showed us four dots in the sky, four bombers sailing through the radiant, swan-like clouds. These were planes from the air squadron of Major Faunt Le Roy, large armoured planes.

(...)

By now we, the fourth squadron, were in the forest. There in the forest we waited for the end of the unequal battle between Pashka Trunov and the American airforce major, Reginald Faunt Le Roy. The major and his three bomb-throwers displayed great ability in this battle. They descended to three hundred metres and blasted first Andryushka and then Trunov with their machine-guns. None of the many cartridges discharged by our men caused the Americans any harm.<sup>154</sup>

The French, the British, Americans... Is there need for any further proof to define the power behind the Polish army? This power was the counter-revolutionary international. We should also count the Romanians, and the anti-Soviet Ukrainian troops under the command of Symon Petliura, and the counter-revolutionary Byelorussians. And there were of course the Russians: Popular figures, like the once-revolutionary SR member Boris Savinkov, ex-Duma deputy Fedor Rodichev, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, had all flocked to Warsaw to proudly stand side by side with the bourgeoisie in the international class struggle.

Yes, this was class conflict, but it was overshadowed by the nationalist division between the Russians and the Poles. And unfortunately, Soviet Russia, partly because of her own mistakes, crashed into the wall of Polish nationalism just as it was about to defeat the imperialist coalition. Crashed hard, and stopped...

## Once Nationalism Gains a Foothold in the Working Class

Even former tsarist generals consider Poland's claims unjust and are helping us.<sup>155</sup>

The conflict between Soviet Russia and Poland was class conflict but it was being overshadowed by nationalism! For the Polish side, nationalism was the greatest weapon. On the other hand, for the Soviets, it was of course acceptable as long as they were defending their own territory.

However, in 1920 the matter became terribly complicated. It became progressively unclear whether this was a war of defense or a war to spread the revolution westward; and once the Red Army crossed the border into Poland, the discrepancy between its "internationalist" and "Russian" characters benefited Polish nationalists more than anybody else.

The quote above is from Lenin. I want to underline the "*even*" emphasis. Of course Lenin, who was always a meticulous and shrewd revolutionary, could not have guessed in May, when Soviet Russia was still in defense that his choice of words were stemming from a strategic mistake that would later have cost maybe the chance of a workers' government in Poland.

Not "*even*" the tsarist generals were considering Poland's claims were unjust, "*of course*" they were considering so. Because they

have been raised and seen service in Russian Empire. Maybe Russian nationalism was not as notorious as Poland's, but nationalism was nationalism!

Even if the Reds were in power, it was Russia that was being threatened; they had to lend a hand to the Bolsheviks who did not understand statecraft, advise them, maybe even put on their cavalry boots and ride to the field...

They were indifferent when the Germans came, excited that "the Bolshevik order was about to collapse" when the British landed in Murmansk, did not turn a hair when the Japanese tried to invade from the east; but when it came to the Poles, suddenly things took a different turn.<sup>156</sup> Because Poland was not a distant power and propertied classes of Russia had not yet given up hope that the Bolshevik order would eventually collapse. Therefore, they were in competition with the Polish landowners. So, under these conditions, it would have been a good thing to work with the Bolsheviks to crush the Poles. Those upstarts had even taken advantage of the crisis in Russia to invade Moscow in the 17th century. It had been the Revolution that gave the idea to the Poles in the first place. It had been the Provisional Government, which came to power after Tsar had been removed, that recognized Polish independence. Now that independent Poland was threatening Russian sovereignty.

This was their line of reasoning...

So, the situation was not that *even* the tsarist generals were considering Poland's claims were unjust; some of the tsarist generals were so nationalist that they would have helped *even* the Bolsheviks against Poland.

Now, the nationalism in Poland... Poland owed her independence in 1918 to the three revolutions which shook the three empires that dominated it. Social democracy had come to power in Germany, Austria and Russia; and although (at least in the beginning) all three had respected their claim to independence, the rulers in Poland (where the social democrats had a serious power, too) had turned to Britain, France, Italy and the USA as the victors of the war. Naturally, this had historical, ideological and cultural roots, but this choice was also in accordance with the zeitgeist:

The victorious states had realized that they needed Poland, while Polish nationalists were not *that* nationalist! They had been infected with cosmopolitanism enough so that they had volunteered to become militants of the counter-revolutionary international.

The Poles were conscripted into the armies of three empires in the First World War: Austria-Hungary, Russia and Germany... It had been estimated that there some 500-600 thousand of them were in the Russian army, and Germany had sent 200 thousand of them forward to kill or be killed. They killed each other throughout the war.<sup>157</sup>

However, this did not mitigate Polish nationalism. The fact of the matter was that, there was no difference between Germany and Russia for the majority of the Poles. When the war ended, there was a scramble between the Bolsheviks and Polish nationalists to win over the Poles conscripted into Russian army. Polish nationalists were trying to create autonomous Polish units within the Russian army while also trying to add the Poles there to the newly formed army of Poland. Eventually an important number of Polish soldiers remained in the Red Army, but some of these were elements that were holding tightly on their national identity.

The Soviet rule had a hard time in its struggle against Polish nationalism, and they failed to do so during the war in 1920. Of the 24,000 soldiers taken prisoner by the Russians in the course of the war, only 239 volunteered to serve with the Soviet forces, while only 123 joined the Polish Communist Workers' Party.<sup>158</sup>

The Red Army propaganda had much better results among the German prisoners of war, and many among them had become militants of German Revolution after they were released and returned home.

Piłsudski, the leader of the Polish nationalists, had socialist roots. According to hearsay, he had been the one who supplied Lenin's elder brother Aleksandr Ulyanov with the bomb that would have been used in the attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander III in March 1887, on the sixth anniversary of his father's assassination.<sup>159</sup>

However, it later became clear that class was not an issue in Piłsudski's hate of the Tsardom. He (rightfully) desired the liberation of Polish people but this desire was tainted with nationalism.

After independence, he would have coveted Russian territories whether or not they were under the control of Soviets. He claimed that the Red Army, driven by a desire to spread socialist revolution westwards, would launch an offensive into Polish lands as soon as the White forces were defeated in the Russian Civil War.<sup>160</sup> However, there was not even a hint of this thought coming to fruition among the Soviet leaders.

Piłsudski sought war. As the peace talks went on, he had told Kossakowski, who attended the negotiations as the representative of the Red Cross, that “*there can be no question of any diplomatic relations or negotiations*” with the Bolsheviks. He openly stated that once Polish hostages, prisoners, refugees, and national treasures had been taken out of Russia, there would have been left nothing more to talk about with the Soviet government.<sup>161</sup>

Still, one must acknowledge that, the claims that the Red Army marched on Warsaw to assist the Polish working class were not entirely fabrication. One of the first decisions of Polish Communist Workers’ Party after it was established in December 1918 had been to ask for the armed help of Russian proletariat. The resolution had underlined that the revolution did not know any boundaries and a prospective advance of the Red Army into Poland would not have been branded as an invasion or an expression of imperialist tendencies; such a development would simply have been an embodiment of the principle of solidarity of the international proletariat.<sup>162</sup>

About a year later, Polish communist Edward Kowalski was saying, “*If we can arm the peasants, next year we will rule in Warsaw.*” This was not an invitation to the Red Army, it was a demand of weapons from Moscow.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, in any case, it was obvious that by the end of 1919 the Polish communists had begun to make unrealistic assessments. Radek, who was of Polish descent, was trying to balance the overly optimistic views about revolutionary opportunities in both Poland and Germany so that these were not taken seriously.<sup>164</sup> As I stressed before, by the end of 1919 Lenin had already arrived at a position in which he set aside all optimism about the revolution in Europe.

Moreover, there were also some among the Polish communists who were not very enthusiastic at all. Chief among them

was Julian Marchlewski, one of the most influential names in the party. Marchlewski was defending the view that revolution would have come by the development of Polish economy and the strengthening of Polish proletariat, and particularly saying that Silesia region would become the link between German proletariat and Polish workers. He was not only warning against an attempt to establish Soviet rule in Poland through an outside intervention; but also stressing that the entry of Red Army into Poland would be ruinous for communism in Poland.<sup>165</sup> Marchlewski had therefore focused on peace between Poland and Soviet Russia, which Piłsudski wanted to sabotage partly due to the same reasoning.

We know that Lenin had similar worries in 1919, and shared with Marchlewski his thoughts on the possibility of the Red Army not being welcomed into Poland.

Still, it is apparent that by the summer of 1920 the Bolsheviks had set these worries aside and got into a “why not?” kind of mood. The optimism and revolutionary enthusiasm had affected even Marchlewski. He was so excited that, during the Second Congress of the Comintern, he told other delegates that the proletariat of Poland had awakened and the advance of the Red Army would hasten the revolution in Poland.<sup>166</sup>

It was obvious that the working class of Poland had become active and was accumulating a revolutionary energy. However, it had been forgotten that nationalism was gaining a much greater momentum. Moreover, Polish nationalism was fueled not only by anti-Russian sentiments but also by anti-German sentiments. There was an atmosphere in Germany that provided fertile ground for this; it could have been said that almost all the political parties and most of the people were united in the desire “*Poloniam esse delendam*” (Poland must be destroyed).<sup>167</sup>

As the Red Army marched into Poland, it was not only communists that received the news of Russian success with open cheers and enthusiasm in the streets of Germany. Germans from all classes and ideologies were excited about the possibility of Poland’s downfall. Moreover, the German nationalists did not even bother to hide their sentiment “*once Poland has fallen, then it be the turn for the British...*”

Nationalism breeds nationalism. The hatred was mutual; the Polish workers and poor peasants had ample historical and contemporary reasons to bear grudges against Russia and Germany.

Although we will touch upon the relations of Germany with the Soviets later, we should point out here that the government did not allow ammunitions to be transferred to Poland from Germany. In any case, workers were stopping the trains they became suspicious of, and refused to load the ships. In addition, interestingly, while wanting the downfall of Poland in the hands of the Red Army, the German generals were also polishing themselves off to the British as “*Only we can stop the Bolsheviks.*” Just so that the British put some restraint on the French greed that came to dominate the German nation!

It is the heat of this conflict between nationalisms that had led the Polish Socialist Party to set up its own military organization under the leadership of Tomasz Arciszewski, who was one of its deputies in the Parliament. This was a very important indicator of how the working class in Poland came to back up nationalism. The existence of *Workers’ Regiment for Defense of the Capital* was a testimony to the fact that, contrary to the expectations in Moscow, the majority of the working class of Poland would have sided with the counter-revolutionary international. This regiment would also assume the function of a “militia” in protecting the factories against pro-Soviet internal forces.

Polish bourgeoisie was trying seizing on every opportunity to pull the working people to their side. To curtail pro-Soviet tendencies of landless peasants who had been fed up with the cruelty of Polish landowners Sejim (the Polish Parliament) unanimously passed a law of land reform on July 15. Land would have been distributed to peasants.

However, weapons were distributed before land! The army of Poland continuously enlisted volunteers from the moment the Red Army had crossed the Polish border. In Białystok, where the Soviet rule (Polish Revolutionary Committee – *Polrevkom*) was declared, a similar campaign initiated to enlist people into the Red Army of Poland met with a very limited success. By mid-August, as the tide of war turned once again in favor of Poland, the ranks of the

Polish army had swelled to 737 thousand soldiers.

The Bolsheviks had known that Polish nationalism would have been the greatest problem the Red Army would face. In the beginning of war, while it was still on Russian soil, Lenin had said to the Red Army *"Let your attitude to the Poles there prove that you are soldiers of a workers' and peasants' republic, that you are coming to them, not as aggressors but as liberators."*<sup>168</sup>

As the war moved into Polish soil, the problem Lenin had pointed at asserted itself. On the first day of August, a leaflet entitled "Comrade Red Army Men" was distributed at the frontline. This leaflet said that "[You are] *entering onto Polish territory, on territory covered in the blood of Polish workers (...) for the sins of the Polish landowners and capitalists you will not subject the unfortunate Polish people.*"<sup>169</sup>

It was obvious that at this point the stance of Polish workers and peasants would have defined the outcome. The expectation was that, with the success of the Red Army, the toiling masses of Poland would have revolted against the bourgeoisie and established a Soviet rule after toppling their government. If this did not happen, the Red Army would have become an occupying force in Poland.

Lenin was trying to incite a revolutionary and internationalist mood among the Red Army soldiers while at the same time looking for ways to make the propaganda towards Polish workers and peasants more effective. Soviet air force, which had not been very effective in fighting, dropped more leaflets than bombs on Polish cities and villages. The "Manifesto to the Polish Working Peoples of the Towns and Countryside" penned by the newly established *Polrevkom* was delivered in large numbers to the working people of Poland.

However, the problem was that in a military sense the Red Army was racing against time. In a two-pronged assault, the Soviet troops had entered westwards into Poland with a speed that far exceeded the normal means of the time; and Warsaw had to be taken before the enemy regrouped and more support arrived from France and Britain. Besides, Soviet troops were lacking the logistic support that would have been crucial in a prolonged campaign; it was becoming harder and harder to deliver food and ammunition

to the fighting units. However, on the political side of things, organizing Polish workers into a revolutionary stance would have taken time. Dropping *Polrevkom* leaflets by aircraft was a useful method of agitation, but did not have enough time to make an impact.<sup>170</sup>

For a short while, *Polrevkom* was designated to act as a provisional government and Felix Dzerzhinsky (who was also in charge of Cheka) had taken its responsibility. He was making a great effort to increase the number of Polish units in the Red Army, because an issue that had not caused any trouble in the “defense of Russia” part of the war had turned into a major problem: There were thousands of tsarist officers in the ranks of the Red Army! Moreover, one of them, Tukhachevsky, was the commander of the troops approaching Warsaw. Polish people had hundreds of reasons to hate the army of the Tsar and now the officers of that army were attempting to invade their country once again, this time under the Red Flag.

On July 15, Polish Socialist Party made a statement titled “Manifesto to Socialists of the World.” In this statement, it was said that Russian army was being led by Tsarist Generals and it was claimed that it was imperialist militarism, not social revolution that was approaching. The most striking element in the Manifesto was the part which said “*We are masters in our country and that we ourselves will bring about the Socialist reconstruction of our country and that we will not allow Tsarist Generals to introduce into Poland a pretended sham Socialism*” on behalf of Polish workers and peasants.<sup>171</sup>

It must be conceded that, in spite of the popular-proletarian fear they had struck into the heart of White Army back home, the backlash caused by the “barbarity” of Red Cavalry on foreign soil, topped with the image of “Tsar’s New Army” had not helped the Red Army at all.

So, to what extent did this image represent the truth, or what was the developments in the Red Army that provided the basis of these accusations?

The creation of Red Army and the arguments during this process require a closer look, and we will devote the next chapter to

this. However, the primary source of indignation in Poland had been the campaign in the beginning of the war, in which tsarist generals had been called to duty for “defense of the motherland.” This was partly natural since the new order had been unable to find the time to train military specialists. Commanding troops required a certain training and experience, therefore enlistment of ex-officers who pledged to serve Soviet government in the Red Army was something that could not have been avoided.

However, this was a delicate process. If it were conducted in an uncontrolled and irresponsible way, not only the security and reputation of Red Army would have been damaged, but its very class character, even the foundations of Soviet order would have been put into jeopardy.

And they were...

It was Aleksey Alekseyevich Brusilov, a famous general who had achieved a certain success against the Germans in the First World War, that cast the first stone. He called on the Soviet General Staff to increase the patriotism of the masses, and also invited the tsarist generals to join the Red Army.

It was Trotsky as the Commissar of Military Affairs who managed this process. A military advisory committee was created, with Brusilov as the chairman. Tsarist officers like Polivanov, Klembovsky, Baluyev, Gutor, Verkhovsky, Zayonchkovsky and Aki-mov were appointed to this committee. In fact, if there had not been angry objections within the Soviet government, some other title higher than “advisor” would have been found for Brusilov. In any case, the gates had been opened wide for the tsarist officers, who up to then were only “handpicked” for the Red Army.

Trotsky was exaggerative as ever. He was saying, *“In this period everyone in our country who is honourable, thoughtful and decent, even if he does not agree with our social programme and our methods of action, must recognize that the only force that now defends the independence of the Russian people and the future of Russia is the Russian working class, is of the Russian people and the future of Russia is the Russian working class, is the government of that class, the Soviet Communist power”* and he was right in this. But then, he was failing to step lightly in the dangerous area he wandered into

by saying, “*and that, comrades, is why many who were yesterday our enemies, and who today are still our opponents on grounds of principle where social, religious and other questions are concerned, feel obliged to bow before the great role that the working class is now playing, as the pivot on which our country depends and without which it would fall into the abyss.*”<sup>172</sup>

While Trotsky was saying, “*When representatives of other social classes, which have already been deprived of their advantages and privileges, recognize the leadership of the working class and come to its aid, we say that we shall accept such aid*” there was still a bitter Civil War between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces in Russia. This was a contradiction, and naturally, it begat more contradictions. Just after saying with an exaggerated hospitality that they have opened the ranks of Red Army to Tsar’s generals, he went on to say that the war against Poland was a war between classes and they sought to create a free and independent workers’ and peasants’ Poland.

Therefore, arm in arm with the cadres of Tsardom who had been called to duty in defense of Russia, they would have paved the way of world revolution!

Trotsky was even vouching for them. On May 7, he was saying, “*Brusiov recognises as absolutely correct the Soviet policy expressed in unconditional recognition of the independence of the Polish republic.*”<sup>173</sup>

The war with Poland was showing the Soviet leaders that the tension between the defense of socialism in one country and the goal to realize the world revolution as soon as possible was much higher than expected; but Trotsky was not in no mood to be able to discern this. He was unable to associate Russia with socialism or socialist construction. If they were to create an internationalist army of the working class from ignorant peasant masses that made up the rank and file of the Red Army, they might just as well have no qualms about installing some Tsarist officers to command that armed force!

The genie was out of the bottle. On one side, Polish government was enlisting volunteers into the army by saying that “new Tsars are coming,” on the other the Red Army was drawing elements

that aspired to fight “for Russia.” (And of course, this was not the *only* motivation of tsarist officers in joining the Soviet army.)

At one point things became so complicated that Soviet diplomat Krasin could say, “*You are making a mistake, even Tsar’s officers and nationalists are supporting the Soviet government today*” to the British during negotiations. This was true in the sense that the upright standing of Soviet power in the face of foreign intervention was increasing its legitimacy. Nobody could have argued against this. However, once the issue shifted from national defense to the conquering of Warsaw in the name of Polish working class, this outlook was no longer helpful. On the contrary, it was greatly harmful to the Soviet cause.

Besides, the poor rank and file of the Red Army were weary of battle. They had literally fought with tooth and nail to save their land and country, but once they had entered Poland, they had started to become alienated to the struggle. Thousands left their rifles and vanished.

This contradiction was confirming the analysis “*Russia had always united during the course of its history to repel any invasion of its soil, a powerful reaction of the Red Army could be expected*” made by French intelligence in the beginning of the war.<sup>174</sup>

It must be noted that particularly in the poor regions near the border where Jewish peasants lived, the people were embracing the Red Army. This increased the optimism of Soviet leadership so that on July 28, when Białystok was captured, *Polrevkom* was declared.

However, as the Red Army neared Warsaw, the situation completely changed. Dzerzhinsky was to write, “*Strange feelings were growing inside of me upon nearing Warsaw*” in his letters. They were too late to take the capital city and the experienced, revolutionary leader of Cheka was noting, “*Perhaps [Warsaw] will greet us not as we desire.*”<sup>175</sup>

The Poles had come out as winners in the game played upon nationalist sentiments. Later, Lenin was to write, “*By the time our troops had got within reach of Warsaw they were too exhausted to press home the victory, whereas the Polish troops supported by a wave of patriotism in Warsaw, and with a feeling that they were*

*now on their own soil, found encouragement and a fresh opportunity to advance.*"<sup>176</sup> According to Lenin, the Poles had not seen their brothers or liberators in the Red Army but their enemies, and had not felt as revolutionaries, but felt and acted as nationalists.

The Red Army, which was created upon the victories in the Civil War, had lost the war with Poland in which class conflict had become mingled with "national" strife.

Really, what was happening in the Red Army?

## What is Happening in Red Army?

Revolutions are social upheavals in which, as a general tendency, the oppressed come up with armed forces that are suited to unequal struggle against the army, which is the organized apparatus of violence and coercion of the oppressors. It is typical for the army to experience a dissolution in this period just like all the institutions of the old and failing order. Against this superiority of the “ruling class” in firepower, organization and total number of soldiers, the revolutionary front relies on troops that are more mobile, can use hit-and-run tactics and enjoy popular support and protection; and holding the advantage of superior morale, tries to win over the soldiers fighting on the side of the oppressors.

Every revolution is also the emergence of a new power center against the old one. In the process of many revolutions, two opposing centers of power existed simultaneously for some time, passing decisions and declaring the other as illegitimate. The most critical moment in any revolution is the liquidation of the old and establishment of the new political power.

At that stage, revolutions create new institutions and proceed to construct the new order. As the name implies, this is “order.” The revolutionary front also reorganizes armed forces after the moment of transition from “organized disorder” to “organization of order.” First of all, it declares monopoly of arms within its borders, and from that moment it has to be “powerful” enough to preclude the existence of any element that could threaten this monopoly.

Life does not allow a vacuum.

In this sense, it is not a coincidence that one of the first items on the agenda of any revolutionary government is the transition to a regular army.

German Revolution on November 1918 had facilitated the transition from Empire to Republic. However, after that, the Revolution was caught between the workers who wanted to carry it forward into socialism and the bourgeoisie who enjoyed support from forces of the toppled Empire. Once capital started to seek a rapid reinstatement of order, the first item on its agenda became disbanding the armed workers' militia. The counter-revolutionary paramilitary forces (*Freikorps*) that had been introduced to facilitate this became a part of the regular German army after their mission was done.

In Anatolia, when National Struggle openly created its own axis of power in April 23, 1920<sup>177</sup>, the main burden of armed struggle against occupation had been shouldered by National Forces (*Kuvayı Milliye*), the Mobile Forces (*Kuvayı Seyyare*) of Ethem the Circassian<sup>178</sup> and by the emergent gangs fighting for independence in many provinces. The efforts in 1921 for transition from this disorganized militia into a regular army can be explained neither by vagaries of Mustafa Kemal, nor only by military necessities. A new order and a new authority within the borders defined by the National Pact<sup>179</sup> had to be established forthwith since this would have eased international recognition. It was obvious that the existence of militia forces, which naturally presented certain difficulties when they were to be positioned with a common hierarchy and under a General Staff, was detrimental to the political weight Ankara needed. It can even be argued that Mustafa Kemal risked some temporary military setbacks and imposed the transition to a regular army.

On the other hand, the revolutionary power in Soviet Russia, which had helped Mustafa Kemal's cause with money, weapons and political support, had taken transition to a regular army into its agenda by the beginning of 1918.

The October Revolution had overturned the Russian army. The Bolsheviks had millions of supporters in the low ranks of the army,

particularly among privates; and the war against Germany until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was waged with a large armed force that had a scrambled command center but an immense revolutionary energy. Volume-wise this was an army, but on many other aspects, it had ceased to be one. Red Guards, which had been organized as the paramilitary force of the Bolsheviks, were striving to hold this great armed mass together.

There had been steps towards democratization in the Russian army even just after the February Revolution, and the pressure from the Soviets of workers and soldiers had resulted in ordinances against the officer caste. New ones were added to these after the October Revolution. In that chaotic period, there existed no hierarchy in the common sense of the word, neither were there any ranks.

The state of the Soviet army was pitiful when the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany was signed on March 3, 1918. It was obvious that the new order needed a new army. Actually, steps in this direction had been taken from the month of January. The Red Army had been established on January 28, 1918 with the full name of The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (Raboche-Krest'yanskaya Krasnaya Armiya – RKKA) and was followed by the establishment of the Red Navy on February 11, 1918.

The new assignment of Trotsky on leaving the post of the Commissar of Foreign Affairs was to hasten the creation of the regular army of Soviet government. Coming into office with the full title of People's Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs, he had achieved success with his organizational prowess in transforming the Red Army rapidly into a real army. However, since he did not care at all about the value of Soviet government itself and the possibility that it might have to face the responsibility of constructing socialism in one country; he also underwrote many practices that jeopardized the proletarian revolutionary character of the Red Army.

Transition to a regular army was a necessity all Bolsheviks agreed on. However, the reforms Trotsky exercised during his seven years as the Commissar of Military created great differences of opinion. The party was sometimes locked into these arguments

and the aftershocks of these reforms persisted until 1937-38 when, on the brink of the Second World War, the Red Army had to undergo an extensive purge.

Although the thesis that Trotsky was the founder of the Red Army is correct from an angle, it is also wrong in the sense that the transformations he defended in the Red Army had removed its Red character to a large extent.

On March 21, the practice of soldiers electing their own officers was abolished. Officers of the Tsarist Army were called to duty in the Red Army around the same time. On April 22, the decree that brought compulsory military service to everybody between 18 and 40 years of age was issued. This decree had a clause that said, "*In the immediate transition period military training and the bearing of arms must be restricted to workers and peasants who do not exploit the labor of others.*" This was an attempt to protect the class character of the Red Army. However, the risk taken by drawing the rank and file from proletariat while installing military elite remnants of the monarchy as officers was creating a bizarre contradiction.

It is obvious that all these steps were taken out of necessity. However, the problem with Trotsky was that he took these steps in an uncontrolled way, without precautions and at the expense of destroying the ideology of the Red Army. In 1920, when the army marched to help Polish Revolution with its command center left uncontrolled in the hands of Tsarist officers, the assets and liabilities of the Red Army came to light, but the reasons of failure were not argued properly.

Not everybody was thinking like Trotsky on military matters. His assignment as the Commissar of Military had caused discontent among military circles in the Party, and among the party in general. Some of the objections were of a conservative nature. Trotsky had been distant towards Bolshevism until 1917 and his assignment to a critical positions were disturbing some of the party cadres who approached any kind of change and any new person with distrust. On the other hand, healthy reactions against Trotsky's extreme measures, which suspiciously looked like an abuse of the transition to regular army and distanced the Red

Army from its proletarian character, had also begun to surface.

I have to write all these, because afterwards Trotskyism twisted the history to such an extent that Stalin came to be accused for bureaucratization of the Red Army and its distancing from revolutionary values. Moreover, the “undemocratic” practices, oppression, purges, one-man rule and similar facts were also shown as if they were the vagaries of Stalin. Western historians liked this approach quite a lot since all that mattered was damaging the reputation of the Soviets.

On the contrary, the Soviet government exercised great effort after 1925 to strengthen the ideological references and class character of the Red Army, to recreate its strategic outlook with a revolutionary perspective and, ultimately, to diminish the absolute weight held by officers from the Tsarist period. These efforts were prolonged into bloody purges that became a frenzy in 1937-38; and immediately afterwards, in 1941, the Red Army was held to test in the desperate war for survival of the Soviet Union.

Trotsky had made a great contribution to the effort of creating a real army out of a confused mass, but had also made some unnecessary, even harmful arrangements alongside necessary ones while doing so. As I said, he was acting irresponsibly since he did not think that Soviet Russia or Soviet Union was important in itself on the road to socialism.

From the time of his assignment onwards, objections on many issues were raised by the Bolsheviks who were disturbed by the manner in which Trotsky administered and reorganized the Red Army. Among these were establishment of rules unfit for human dignity, the transformation of army life so that oppression and duress came to be dominant and the summary executions of those who incurred displeasure. These measures were being taken both by himself and by the officers transferred from the Tsarist army; and the fact that there were communists among the mistreated who questioned the authority of officers was increasing the anger in reactions.

People had started to say that some form of Bonapartism was becoming dominant in the Red Army. The hold of patriotic-nationalist officers was getting stronger and threatening the ideological

hegemony of the party. It had come to be widely accepted that steps taken by Trotsky for the sake of modernizing the army had reached the point of undermining Soviet rule.

Trotsky, on the other hand, abided no limitations and sought to overcome any resistance by using his popularity and personal relationship with Lenin. As early as March 28, 1918, in an interview in *Pravda*, he was saying that he had taken every possible step to remove the obstacles mounted against specialists from the Tsarist army.<sup>180</sup>

Moreover, Trotsky had a peculiar understanding of military. According to him, military issues fell into the realm of “technical” problems. As long as the political power remained with the party and Soviet rule, there was no reason to worry.

This was the point of view Trotsky towards the armed forces, one of the most basic institutions of the dictatorship of the proletariat!

The necessity of transition to regular army on one hand, unnecessary pushes of Trotsky and the reactions they caused on the other were causing long arguments over military matters in the government as well as in the congresses and conferences of the party. It was only through the personal efforts of Lenin that these congresses and conferences ended with balanced resolutions instead of splitting divisions.

However, apart from misgivings about the practice, there were also differences of opinion among the Bolsheviks on what should have been understood from the concept of a regular army. October Revolution, in the final analysis, had been achieved by the armed working class and it had included the organization of armed militia in its program. This organization would have been different from a traditional army, and it would have prevented alienation between the working people and its armed force. Therefore, there were many who thought that the regular organization of the Red Army should also include a militia class. In addition, there was also a minority completely against the existence of a regular army. In the congresses that I have mentioned, the problem was solved with the formula “*Regular army is a necessity today, but in the future there will be a transition to the militia system.*” However, it

was also underlined that, precautions like keeping the exploiting classes out of the Red Army and strengthening of its proletarian-communist character would have provided the greatest safeguards against the adverse effects of a regular army.

The creation of the Red Army had been at a time of civil war and foreign intervention. If we add the all-out war against Poland in 1920 to these, we can easily conclude that the Red Army had been created on the battlefield. The problem was that, "irregular elements" had played an important role in some of the successes of the Red Army in these conflicts. In many areas, guerilla warfare had prevailed. It was obvious that the Red Cavalry, of whom everybody, including Trotsky spoke in high regard, did not resemble a regular army in the common sense of the term. When they came against the cavalry units in the Polish army, the Red Cavalry commanders sometimes challenged the enemy commanders to single combat; the ranks, which were mostly composed of Cossacks on both sides, charged into each other after their commanders hacked each other to pieces with their swords.<sup>181</sup>

Besides, units that waged guerilla warfare under the command of trusted party members were also prominent in the Civil War alongside the Red Army. In fact, they had played an important role in many critical victories. In Tsaritsyn, which would later have been named Stalingrad, a team under the command of Stalin was proof that the first red commanders of the Soviet rule were coming forth. Kliment Voroshilov, who would soon have become famous, was a member of this team. This group, which had mobilized a force of 15 thousand partisans, had shown that a different form of relation could have been created between civilians and soldiers, and party and army. Semyon Budyonny was also a part of this team, which had formed these partisan groups into a regular army without any help from military specialists. On July 29, the cavalry was used as an independent force for the first time in an operation to free five thousand soldiers surrounded by counter-revolutionaries in the town of Martynovka near Tsaritsyn. The 1st Socialist Cavalry Division was thus formed under the command of Budyonny, who had been an officer of the lowest rank in the tsarist army before he joined the Bolsheviks.

Therefore, the importance of partisan or militia forces in the creation of the Red Army was impossible to downplay. Those who showed a great resistance against the attempts to destroy this spirit in later years reintroduced the militia reality back into the Red Army after 1925.

For Trotsky, who by then had come to oppose the established order, this would have been proof that Soviet Union had forsaken world revolution. He believed that a serious war could not have been waged with militia forces.

However, the actual confrontation was not between those who wanted a regular army and those who wanted militia. The majority of those opposing Trotsky were stressing that the Red Army, as a regular army, should have been different from other regular armies.<sup>182</sup>

They were right. They won the war of 1941-1945 by this difference. I am not only talking about the extent of partisan warfare that no other nation was able to wage in that period. The Red Army, from the command echelon (which sometimes made strategic mistakes) down to the smallest units won the victory through its different form, different motivation and its hinterland which assumed completely different functions.

However, in the first days of the Red Army, Trotsky was insistent that military had some properties that remained unchanged under any class rule. The military needed a completely oppressive, hierarchical structure while the party was the organization in which an ideal form of democracy was realized. The party worked by voluntary action while the military worked by coercion. The principle of "iron discipline," which was changed to "revolutionary discipline" in the 9th Congress of the Party, was the appropriate principle in military.<sup>183</sup>

Interestingly, in the same period the counter-revolutionary generals were also trying to unite the forces struggling against the Bolsheviks into a single regular army.<sup>184</sup>

However, the unity between Party and Army, which Trotsky defined as a relation of "contrast," was one of the largest assets of the Soviet government against the counter-revolution. Many of the Bolsheviks, including Stalin, argued that as a matter of principle,

the commanders in the Red Army should have worked together with relevant party units; and they resisted Trotsky's attempts of keeping the party out of military matters. Thanks to this resistance (which had come to be known as "*military opposition*" due to some cadres that went to extremes), the importance of party cells in the army and the importance of party organization in military matters was underlined in many party documents at that time.

At this juncture, I need to touch upon the myth that Trotsky was the next person with highest popularity in the party after Lenin. Trotsky was a talented, sophisticated individual who became prominent on any platform. He had led the Petrograd Soviet, quickly became the Commissar of Foreign Affairs and then the Commissar of Military. None of these three was an ordinary task. However, those who link Trotsky's loss of reputation in the party to Stalin's conspiracies are completely mistaken. Trotsky was not liked very much, not only because he had joined the party belatedly and from the top, but also because of his excessive arrogance, inconsistent behavior and distance to collective effort. Most of the hardworking party members felt themselves distant to him. Surely, the reactions against his manner of directing the Red Army had also played a part in this lovelessness.

Example? In 1919, in the vote to elect the Central Committee, only 51 delegates out of 301 had found Trotsky suitable to this body.

The party was devaluing those who did not value it.

Undoubtedly, the most frequent topic of argument under the heading of regular army was the Tsarist officers who had joined the Red Army as "military specialists." As I mentioned before, as early as the beginning of the Polish campaign on May 2, 1920, the most famous among these, Aleksey Brusilov became the chairman of the Advisory Committee of the Red Army and opened the way for other Tsarist officers who joined the Red Army in unprecedented numbers. Until 1919, some 30 thousand tsarist officers had joined the Red Army, while after Brusilov's call their number swelled to 314 thousand.

If the numbers are astonishing, the ratios were downright terrifying. When Civil War ended, one third of the officers in the

Red Army had tsarist background. And, at the top of the hierarchy, they held full sway: 82 percent of all infantry regiment commanders, 83 percent of all division and corps commanders, and 54 percent of all commanders of military districts were former tsarist officers.<sup>185</sup>

They were called *voyenspets* (short for *voyenny spetsialist*) and at every critical point in the army, they were in command.

Brusilov was explaining his own mood, and the process which the Red Army underwent thusly:

Above all one should stress the enormous energy and the colossal task undertaken by Comrade Trotskii, at the head of the Commissariat for War. Personally, I hold that Russia, whatever its political regime, cannot survive without a strong army, and I therefore think that the development and strengthening of the Red Army is thoroughly desirable for the Russian cause. I think that the Bolsheviks, whether consciously or unconsciously I would not know, have accomplished a great deal in this direction: i.e. they have not allowed our martyr Russia to fall to pieces altogether, and, apart from a few frontier areas, they have held united those pieces that were beginning to fall apart. I believe that this has been a great state accomplishment. But without the assistance of the army, this could certainly not have come about. As a result of the propaganda campaign to promote the idea of the International, the Soviet government, in my view, has succeeded in bolstering the national consciousness of Russians, and has raised the spirit of patriotism which –to our shame– they possessed in such slight measure...<sup>186</sup>

Brusilov is not saying anything bad, this was a fact the Soviet government was willing to face up to. Ultimately, they could not have called military specialists to the Red Army for the sake of the interests of world revolution.

The problem here was the suppression by Trotsky of elements that would have balanced the “nationalist” officers. Once he separated military and political matters completely, he even attempted to downgrade the position of the commissars in units, which was a product of the February Revolution. According to him, the

authorities and responsibilities of the commander and the commissar, who had to work together in all military units, had to be separated clearly from one another. The commander should have had full authority in military matters while the commissar should have had a say only in political issues. Therefore, in the Red Army, all command was being centralized in the officers, most of which had come from the Tsarist army.

One can easily recognize from the military writings of Trotsky how he was criticized for these reforms and how he employed his full intellectual capacity to defend himself. He was defending the *voyenspets* tooth and nail and warned the rank and file “*not to expect the kind of freewheeling democracy extended to the old army in its last days to apply in the Red Army as well.*”<sup>187</sup>

I hope that by now, the extent of injustice done to Stalin with the accusations of “*flirting with nationalism*” just because he mentioned the names of old Russian commanders Kutuzov or Suvorov in the hardest moments of Second World War, which had been the most ruthless of all modern wars, is understood.

Oh yes, there was also the “surrender is treason to motherland” order, shown as an example of his despotism...

In 1920, Trotsky was saying, “*death to deserters.*” Special “anti-retreat detachments” were created just for this purpose. It was also his idea to confiscate all the property of those civilians who harbored deserters regardless of whether or not they are brought before a tribunal.<sup>188</sup>

The masses of soldiers were weary, ignorant, and frequently selfish. Yes, they were deserting and radical measures were needed to maintain discipline in the army. But what about the ideological defections of officers, who were not ignorant at all, and their abuse of authority, their summary execution of communists under their command for trivial reasons?

As such cases accumulated, the argument also intensified. So much that Lenin started to say the officers were totally unreliable. He was saying, “*we must train our own commanders as soon as possible.*” He also suggested adopting “*the example of the French Revolution*” and holding the most senior officer answerable with their lives for failed operations. This was impossible to

put into practice under present conditions. So was his proposal to replace the general staff officers with communists, due to lack of resources...

Trotsky was responding to Lenin that, "*sabotage is also occurring on the railroads, yet no one believes communists could replace locomotive engineers.*" According to him, the test of battle and the concentration camps would have fostered rapid improvement by making it possible to detect and get rid of the unreliaables.<sup>189</sup>

Trotsky was downplaying the threat caused by the military specialists but examples kept accumulating. In June 1918, before things started to get out of hand, he had personally attended the court martial of Baltic Fleet Commander Alexey Schastny and used his execution as an example to say, "*See how tight we are keeping the reins.*" However, as the number of traitorous officers mounted, so did the criticisms directed against Trotsky.

At some point during the Civil War, Stalin was sent to Petrograd since it was about to fall into the hands of counter-revolutionaries. He claimed that the commanders were in a conspiracy against the Soviet regime, personally took over the defense of the city and averted the danger after putting the military specialists out of the loop. Afterwards, it was revealed that some of the commanders had really been working with the counter-revolutionaries.

Was the reverse possible?

We are talking about more than 300 thousand officers. Calling them to help was a necessity but Trotsky had removed all the circuit breakers of the Soviet state. Some of these officers were really honest individuals that had become integrated into the Soviet order, but very few among them were sincerely communists. For some, it did not matter either way, while others were professional types who were ready to do their "solemn duty" under any circumstance. However, apart from these, there were also dedicated counter-revolutionaries, opportunist careerists biding their time and adventurists who saw the Soviet rule as a tool to realize their dreams. And with the passing of each day these became harder to detect since they blended into the great apparatus of the Red Army.

The person truly responsible of the bloodbath and lawlessness that ensued when Stalin struck at this mass of accumulated

residue with all the means at his disposal in 1937 was Trotsky. It was he who had made all the decisions that shaped the Red Army and its command echelon for years and who imposed on the party practices that disregarded the security of the socialist country between 1918-1925.

In 1925, he left his position to Mikhail Frunze. In the same year, the distinction between military specialists and red commanders was abolished. The specialists became a normal element of the Red Army while red commanders would no longer have been treated as “ignorant laymen who did not understand military matters.”

Moreover, Trotsky’s successor Frunze had very different thoughts about the military; he had given voice to these thoughts on many platforms during Trotsky’s term as the commissar, and had frequently come into opposition with him.

Frunze thought that a theoretical framework should have been created that would apply to all armed forces of the Soviets in every period. This would have been called Unified Military Doctrine. He had put the main points of these thoughts to paper. Apart from technical details, Frunze was stipulating that a socialist country could not have fought like a capitalist country and therefore had to organize its army in a different way. Trotsky was of course no fool, he had not refused this need outright; but he was saying, “That will come later.” For him this was a matter that should have been tackled maybe 15, even 20 years later!

Frunze was arguing that the Civil War had created a body of experience that would be sufficient in the creation of a Soviet military doctrine; Trotsky’s reply was “*It would be different when large armies come against one another.*”

Frunze was stressing that military was a scientific area; Trotsky was refusing this outright.

Frunze was asserting that the Soviet army should have been designed with a decisive class character and with an offensive focus; Trotsky was saying “*you cannot attack all the time*” and pointing out the inanity of talking about offense at a time in which the country was striving to break its diplomatic isolation. Besides, the world communist movement as a whole was not on a revolutionary offensive, and while great effort was being made towards

winning the masses, developing a military doctrine built on offense was ill-advised.

As we said before, the thesis that Trotsky was the dauntless advocate of world revolution is an urban legend. Trotsky had given up on the world revolution after 1920. He had focused on the defense of Soviet rule, but did not believe that socialism could have been established only in Russia. His accusations of “*betraying the world revolution*” against party leadership under Stalin was a campaign he initiated *after* he had been sidelined, and this accusation was the only trump card left in his hand after the great leap towards the establishment of socialism in Soviet Union.

It is clear that Frunze had been insufficiently prepared on some points in the arguments before 1925; however, it is also obvious that he had a far more consistent and revolutionary perspective than Trotsky, who claimed that war as a channel of politics had a supra-class character, and there could have been no “military science.”

From 1922 onwards, Frunze had been insistently analyzing wars according to the development of international class struggles, and arguing that in the future wars between states would have been accompanied by Civil Wars. In this framework, he was saying that the Soviets had to prepare for war not only in military but also in political and moral sense, and advising that the military training should be based on “offense” in a way that focused on mobility instead of “position.”

Throughout the whole period of 1918-1938, Tukhachevsky thought like Frunze on some of these issues and like Trotsky on others. However, according to him, there could have been no such concept as a “proletarian war.” Frunze on the other hand believed that the proletariat should leave its mark on the battlefield. In the 11th Party Congress on March, 1922 he had quoted Engels on military against Trotsky. “*The emancipation of the proletariat, too, will have its particular military expression, it will give rise to a specific, new method of warfare*” were the words of Engels; and as befitting his nickname “General,” his view was crystal clear on the subject: “*Napoleon’s magnificent discoveries in the science of war cannot be wiped out by a miracle. The new science of war must*

*be just as much a necessary product of the new social relations as the science of war created by the revolution.*"<sup>190</sup>

When Frunze came into office as the Commissar of Military in 1925, these words were elevated to the status of "official thesis" on military, and remained so until the dissolution of Soviet Union. This Ukrainian revolutionary, by taking into account Lenin's warnings from some years before, also facilitated the establishment of the "total war" approach as the basic military principle of Soviet Union.

These are important, because Frunze was taking the fact that it was impossible for two different social systems to coexist indefinitely as his point of departure. Therefore, he reminded that Soviet Russia would eventually have to wage war against the imperialists, and the Red Army should be prepared for a protracted state of war in which none of the sides would be in a position to achieve a quick victory through fatal blows.

Therefore, the gap between defending Soviet Union and preparing for a war that would develop with a class struggle essence was to be bridged by strengthening the socialist character of Soviet Union and her Red Army.

Despite all the complexity of the events that transpired in the international arena between the second half of 1920s and the Second World War, and the fact that the war developed both as a conflict between imperialist countries and as the invasion of one imperialist bloc (with encouragement from the other) into Soviet Union, Soviet leadership never gave up this approach outlined by Frunze.

To summarize, Soviet policy went through these evolutionary stages:

Seizing of power by the working class in Russia as an internationalist task... Seeking of this working class to spread the revolution to other countries... Straining internal and external resources for the survival of Soviet Russia as the possibility of failure becomes stronger for the revolution in Europe... With the consolidation of Soviet power, watching for and assisting possible emergence points of world revolution on one hand while creating breathing spaces to alleviate the pressure of a prolonged isolation in international relations on the other... Realizing a leap of

economic development on an egalitarian basis that would ensure the independence, sovereignty, and security of the country while satisfying the expectations of Soviet peoples who have been waiting with great patience for the economic and social benefits of revolution... Creating a strong, socialist country and preparing for the final international confrontation between revolution and counter-revolution.

These were the steps of the strategy pursued by the party under Stalin's leadership, and those who did not believe in this strategy fell by the wayside.

All the arguments about the Red Army were essentially about these strategic choices.

The consensus before Frunze took over the Commissariat of Military was that the Red Army had been hollowed out. It was being said that there was an immense psychological divide between the top and bottom, a collapse was inevitable unless the central organs underwent a radical change of cadres and that the party should once more establish a hold over the army. In arguments at the Central Committee, Stalin had cut to the chase and said, "*We would be routed in the event of a war.*"

Although it was obvious that this dark and exaggerated appraisal was voiced to hasten the removal of Trotsky, no one could have defended the current situation because the majority to the critical positions in the army were not held by party members!

On the other hand, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, who had rapidly become one of the most important commanders in the Red Army after his talent was discovered by Trotsky, stood by Stalin and left Trotsky alone in this divide in the Bolshevik party (which he had joined in 1918). Although he had been a former officer in the tsarist army and had many squabbles with Stalin in the past, it was obvious that he would have followed the one who had claims about the future of Russia, and Trotsky was quite hopeless in this regard.

Then, who was this Tukhachevsky? Who was he, and why was he suddenly court martialed on accusations of "treason against the motherland" and stood against the wall in 1938 even if he had been the most famous marshal of the army?

I do not think there are clear-cut answers to these questions.

However, it is obvious that the matter is not just a “surgical hit” of the German intelligence aimed to create disarray in Soviet army just before the war, as some claim it to be.<sup>191</sup>

As we will see below, what is really interesting about Tukhachevsky’s career is that he had not been removed earlier.<sup>192</sup>

When examining Soviet diplomats before, I have pointed to their occupational deformation and implied that some had no interest in the program and traditions of the Bolshevik Party, while some others were poor revolutionaries who were only good at what they did. This was inevitable; the Soviet Union had set out with very limited human resources, and although it trained its own cadres in time, it was never able to completely get rid of the dead-weight caused by the “specialists” or “intelligentsia” unfit for the communism ideal, until its dissolution in 1991.

It is a frequent argument that the alienation of cadres to revolutionary goals caused the decay of Soviet Union and the party lost its vanguard character in the hands of these cadres. Here, I am suggesting a slightly different version of the same story: In 1920, Soviet Union understood that world revolution will be stalled for some time and USSR would remain to be its central and decisive element. After this, it tried to consolidate itself with whatever resources it had. It called to duty human resources that were not communists, even not progressive in areas like economy, science, foreign policy and armed forces.<sup>193</sup>

Stalin was well aware that without these resources, the construction of socialism in Soviet Union would have become impossible, but he was also certain that these “professionals” were presenting an ideological and political threat born out of class antagonism to working class power. This was not a potential but actual threat and the only way to mitigate it was to narrow down the action radius of these professionals. This could only have been achieved by a dynamic, revolutionary, target-oriented party. Current specialists would have to be kept under control until new specialists would have been trained from among the sons and daughters of the working class and the future of Soviet Union would have been secured. In 1930s, this tough process was successfully managed even if the costs were great. However, the Second World

War not only caused a break in this process but also destroyed the human resource of Soviet Union to a large extent. 25 million (and more) people died. This was a maddening quantity that precluded any qualitative assessment of the loss. However, we must state clearly that a great majority of the “specialists” trained by the Soviet Union lost their lives while doing their duty to humanity in the fight against fascism. Another phenomenon that went hand in hand with this desertification here was the mingling of the surviving resources into a common mediocrity, in which all the differences vanished and the “specialist” could now hide behind the ideology of the average USSR citizen. In the war weary country, the leadership was also weary, and Stalin could not develop the tools to advance on this problem.

What I am saying is this: There had always been alienation and those who worked in critical institutions in Soviet Union were not all communists. If we are to speak in ideological terms, in this immense country with continuously growing needs, nationalism and liberalism always found niches in which they could hide and camouflage themselves under the auspices of Soviet Union.

As Lenin said, when they seized power in 1917, they could not have foreseen that they would have to face the task of establishing socialism all alone by themselves. This was not their choice; they stepped forward and nobody else followed. Those who faced up to this task persevered. And it’s a great thing that they did, because humanity saw for a fact that an actual egalitarian social order can be established.

Now, we can return to Tukhachevsky... He had a great record in the military school. He fell prisoner to the Germans in the war and met De Gaulle in prison camp. He knew several foreign languages and could play the violin. He regained his freedom shortly before October Revolution and returned to Russia. He met Trotsky in the beginning of 1918 and told him that he wanted to serve Soviet Russia. Although his aristocratic background and record of past service in imperial guard contingents were not desirable traits in the Soviet order, being the classmate of the Soviet leader Valerian Kuybyshev’s younger brother Nikolay in cadet school and joining the Communist Party on April 5, 1918 made things easier. He was

quickly appointed as the military commissar of the Moscow defense area by Trotsky.<sup>194</sup>

He was 25 years old at the time.

This was a special period in which people's ideological preferences and political positions changed rapidly. Therefore, there is nothing amiss in Tukhachevsky's story.

However, once we rewind this story a bit, the tune changes. We understand that before mingling with the Bolsheviks, in 1917, he had peculiar ideas. Rémy Roure, his French friend from the German prison camp in Ingolstadt, later wrote a book about him under the pen name Pierre Fervacque. In this book, Roure states that in 1917 Tukhachevsky was a fanatical Russian nationalist who hated Jews and did not defend any socialist views whatsoever. This Tukhachevsky was a young officer who said Poland belonged to Russia and that it did not matter whether Istanbul was conquered by the army of Tsar or a revolutionary army. Tukhachevsky was still alive when Roure published these, even visited his friend afterwards but never denied these allegations that any writer on the subject cites as reference.<sup>195</sup> Apparently, nationalism, racism or antisemitism did not bother him.

Anyway, we can continue... Upon joining the Red Army, Tukhachevsky found himself in the middle of the Civil War. He rapidly rose and shone, not only in battle, but also through his speeches about the war and the Red Army, his suggestions and his ambitious behavior...

His thought was "*Soldiers must believe in something, no matter what.*" In this sense, he saw a great weapon in Marxism, one that was far more effective than the Tsar or religious references. Because according to him, the Russian army was a "horde." The masses it included and the element that kept these together and drove them onwards were, naturally, essential. Next, there was the target of "world revolution":

Our Red Army must be the nucleus of a world proletarian army, the nucleus to which the insurgent masses of other countries and the disintegrating armies of the bourgeoisie shall flock.<sup>196</sup>

He went so far as to suggest that the Communist International

should have had a General Staff.

Apparently, Tukhachevsky had perceived a great vacuum in Russia and thought that by positioning himself into it and filling it, he could have realized his racist hatred against the Jews, his “let the whole world be Russian” style nationalism and his fantasy (undoubtedly shared by many other young military officers) of creating and commanding an invincible army. Russia’s prominence in the process of world revolution was gratifying to his nationalist sentiments. He had embraced the secular Russia of the Bolsheviks since he thought that Christianity was a Jewish fabrication. He had noticed the great potential of Marxism to mobilize masses. And he believed that the Communist International would be the perfect leverage in the strategic maneuvers of Russia.

Later, when Stalin and Trotsky stood in opposition to one another in the argument around the question “*What would become of Soviet Russia?*” he did not stand by Trotsky, who had no concrete answer to this question, but by Stalin, with whom he differed with almost every day after 1918. Actually, he stood by the will to make Soviet Union great. What interested him was not the progress of Soviet Union towards socialism, but a great Russia that rose by the driving force of communism.

Undoubtedly, past a point the summary above becomes “intention-reading.” However, when one takes Tukhachevsky’s behavior, writings and speeches as a whole, it is hard to draw any other conclusion.

Trotsky, who opened the gates of the Red Army to Tukhachevsky and systematically facilitated his rise in the ranks until 1925 would later have written about him that he had made “*an over-rapid leap from the ranks of the Guards Officers to the Bolshevik camp,*” and was trying to “*create a military doctrine by means of hastily adapted Marxist formulas.*”<sup>197</sup>

What we have here is a very particular situation. Tukhachevsky was not a counter-revolutionary who had been hiding himself. He faithfully served the Red Army; because he had been able to find an opening for his worldview there, even the chance to widen that opening. The success of the Soviets was also his success.

Then, why did he keep rising after the Trotsky period in the Red

Army came to a close in 1925?

Because, in spite of all his peculiarities, he was a successful officer, and reliable communists could not have been trained in a day. In any case, most of the officers in critical positions of the Red Army were from the Tsarist army. The most brilliant “communist officer” at hand had been Mikhail Frunze, but he died suddenly before the end of 1925 at the age of 40, only months after endowing the Soviet Army with a permanent direction. When his death was followed in nine months by Felix Dzerzhinsky’s (who was in charge of Cheka, another institution that maintained the security of Soviet Union) the Soviet government, which was already short of reliable and trained communists, would have found itself in a very difficult situation.

An intensive program to train “red commanders” was being taught in the Military Academy, which had been named after Frunze, but it still needed time to produce results. The position of the “military specialists” were hard to fill, and Tukhachevsky was not just any commander, he was a brilliant one with his novel approaches and knowledge in military theory.

Tukhachevsky, along the lines of Frunze, had developed the theory of “Deep Operation” (*glubokaya operatsiya*, sometimes called “Deep War” in the west) together with other commanders, some of which (Isserson, Triandafillov and Svechin, among others) were former tsarist officers like himself. He was trying to create an order of battle that was compatible with the ideology, economy and class structure of Soviet order. Although many western historians claim that Tukhachevsky almost single handedly developed the Deep Operation theory, it should be said that the whole Soviet General Staff had been working on this theory and it remained in effect without any interruption until the dissolution of the Union.<sup>198</sup>

At this juncture, we should make another note on Tukhachevsky. The story of his personal career had been the element that encouraged many tsarist officers to join the ranks of the Red Army; and in many cases, these officers had joined the Red Army through channel opened personally by him. In this sense, Tukhachevsky was both a role model and sponsor of military specialists.

After all these, we can clearly state that Stalin, who would have refrained from entering the war with the army in the hands of officers who had also served the Tsar, would have required no forged document from German intelligence to remove Tukhachevsky, who had been the most famous of the five field marshals of Soviet Union at the time of his arrest and execution. Moreover, we also know that there were appraisals about him in briefs presented to Hitler that he was the only actor that could have replaced Stalin, and that Hitlerists saw “*an actor who could be a Trojan Horse*” in Tukhachevsky, who played an important role in Soviet-German relations from the second half of 1920s until 1933. All these have been documented.

Ultimately, a widespread purge took place in the Soviet Army in 1937-1938. Some of the arrested officers (the most famous among these being Rokossovsky, who was later decorated as Marshal) were later released and joined in the command of the Red Army in the war. Many others, including Tukhachevsky, were shot. Most of the latter were officers transferred from the army of the Tsar. There are many who think that these removals had been a major blow to the army of the Soviet Union. Her sworn enemy, Winston Churchill, thought otherwise. According to him, Soviet Union had been the most sterilized country against Fifth Column activities when Germany invaded. When that country routed Hitlerists in 1945, all prominent commanders of her army were either those who had been at very low ranks in the Army of Tsardom, or they were “Red Commanders” who had rose from the ranks of the Bolshevik Party: Budyonny, Voroshilov, Jukov, Timoshenko, Rokossovsky, Konev, Malinovsky, Chuikov, Vatutin...

And, 25 years before this victory, the Red Army had suffered a defeat that could have been called “absurd” on the outskirts of Warsaw. Mikhail Tukhachevsky was the commander of the Red Army in the war with Poland. If we are to trust his French journalist friend as witness, he had an additional motivation in this war. Indeed, throughout 1920 Tukhachevsky said that the Red Army should carry the revolution into Poland on the end of its bayonets. He was one of the most vocal among those who argued that Polish workers would support the Red Army: “*On our bayonets we*

*shall bring happiness and peace to toiling humanity. To the West! The hour of attack has struck. On to Vilno, Minsk and Warsaw! March!*"<sup>199</sup>

Tukhachevsky also never bothered to hide his desire during the war that the staggering peace talks had failed altogether. These were exactly what had been written in one order he had prepared and signed together with commissar Smilga:

It is obvious that peace can be concluded only on the ruins of White Poland; only having dealt a complete and utter defeat to the cause of White bandits will we be able to secure for Russia peaceful work. A victoriously begun offensive ought to be victoriously ended. Shame on those who think of peace. To Warsaw! (...) The Western Front is the front of world revolution (...) Not one step back! Victory or death!<sup>200</sup>

The interesting fact was that, this order was issued *after* the defeat of Warsaw, during the negotiations at Minsk. Tukhachevsky was either not accepting, or hiding the fact that the tide of war had turned. Moreover, the sides at the table were not yet aware of the Red Army's defeat on the outskirts of Warsaw! The Polish side learned about the military situation about a week later, and the progress of the negotiations changed dramatically.

Tukhachevsky, on the other hand, had to take not one but hundreds of steps back!

Following the liberation of Kiev by the Red Cavalry, troops under the command of Tukhachevsky advanced with great speed into Poland. As they did, breaks occurred in the supply chain of the Red Army and the communication between units. Since Soviet intelligence was in its infancy, the speed of Tukhachevsky's advance was increasing the risks.

As he prepared for the final battle in the outskirts of Warsaw, Tukhachevsky did not know where the Polish army prepared its defenses.<sup>201</sup> It was doubly strange that Piłsudski had also been unable to estimate where Tukhachevsky will attack.<sup>202</sup> The side that benefited from this double blunder was the Poles. Many military authorities, including Polish officers involved in the battle, are joined in the opinion that from the turning point of the war on

August 17 onwards, the movements ordered by Tukhachevsky became erratic. Most probably, the commander of the Red Army was no longer in command of the developments in the field. Consequently, even at the hour of definite defeat before Warsaw, Tukhachevsky was busy with plans of storming the city. He resigned himself to facts days later.<sup>203</sup>

Even this was not the full extent of peculiarities. Some units of the Red Army were surrounded and thousands of soldiers were taken prisoner, but there had been no substantive fighting on the outskirts of Warsaw. Piłsudski as the victorious commander would later state his disappointment as “*We looked for the Red Army for days.*”

The Polish campaign ended in a fiasco. The military command of the war had been conducted by two commanders under Trotsky and Kamenev: Tukhachevsky and Yegorov. Both had risen in the ranks of the Tsar’s army and had later joined the Red Army and the Party. The General Staff during the war had also consisted completely of Tsar’s generals: Kork, Sollogub, Sergeyev and Lazarevich!

The political responsibility was upon the Politburo. Stalin also had to get involved with the Polish war just as he was about to repel the danger presented by White Army under the command of Wrangel. The Red Cavalry advanced of Kiev, and later into the south of Poland at the expense of increasing the threat presented by Wrangel.

Trotsky openly, Tukhachevsky implicitly, and western historians gleefully claimed that the Soviets lost the war with Poland due to Stalin’s disinclination to help Tukhachevsky. However, on the contrary, the most intense fighting in the war had not been along the northeastern axis of Tukhachevsky’s advance but during the sallies of the Red Cavalry in the south. Budyonny’s troops fought uninterruptedly for 43 days without any support, were surrounded several times and narrowly escaped annihilation. At the moment that they are said to have refused going to Tukhachevsky’s help in front of Warsaw, they had neither time nor strength to do so.

“*Dayosh Varshavu!*” This had become the motto of the troops under Tukhachevsky’s command. It meant, “*Give us Warsaw!*” Warsaw held out, and the Red Army rapidly retreated.

Of course, defeat is never inescapable in military matters. Even more, on paper the Red Army had been the side that was superior in the military sense. However, the problem was mainly political. The uncertainty in the goal of political authority was also affecting the military operation.

The true goal behind the Polish campaign remains unclear today. It seems so that, even the most prudent ones among the Bolsheviks, who were distressed on many accounts by the stalling of world revolution, had lost themselves in a wave of optimism that caused rapid and radical changes in the political strategy.

The political consequence of defeat would have been similarly radical.



## World Revolution Stumbles at the Warsaw Hurdle

Russian advance units were less than twenty kilometres from Warsaw, and rumour saw Cossack patrols in the suburbs. Communist sympathizers and workers gathered expectantly, and there were a number of acts of sabotage. Haller and Rozwadowski [Polish generals] were so worried that they telegraphed Pilsudski pressing him to go into action, and he agreed to bring forward the start of his offensive by twenty-four hours.<sup>204</sup>

Ultimately, the Polish calculation came out correct, Soviet army was defeated on the outskirts of Warsaw, and the westward advance of the revolution stopped. Then, let us ask: Why did the Red Army fail?

1. The Red Army was badly commanded. Sergey Kamenev at the head of the army could not succeed in establishing communications and authority.
2. Tukhachevsky did not have any option but to advance, and he tried this; but he fell behind the plan by some days and this gave a chance to the Poles to regroup.
3. Tukhachevsky's logistic support and reserve units were depleted.
4. Stalin was disinclined to send help from south, he was afraid of weakening his forces against Wrangel.

5. Polish working class was not organized enough to seize the initiative and could not yet rid itself of nationalist ideology as the Red Army marched.
6. There was competition among the Red Army generals; none of them wanted any other to gain the glory of victory.
7. The Red Army intelligence was in shambles while Poland was aware of almost the whole of Soviet communication.
8. The Poles had the air superiority.

More items can be added to this list and all these have some part in the outcome. Indeed, those who voice any one or more of these items also show ample evidence. However, this much is obvious: The Red Army had been a hair's breadth away from taking Warsaw, and if some mistakes had not been made, or if fortune had favored the Red Army a little bit, the government of Poland would have been toppled on the 16th or 17th of August and a Provisional Revolutionary Polish Government would have been established. Therefore, there is of course a purely military side to the whole issue, and if the events had not unfolded as they did but as the "possibility" I outlined, the things I will write below would have been of no consequence.

What I will write is this: From a military point of view, the Red Army could have won the war with Poland. However, this does not mean that the root source of defeat was of a military nature. In the war of 1920 the real problem of the Soviets was at the strategic level. On the eve of the Polish campaign Lenin had decided to focus on internal issues while even Zinoviev –the Bolshevik leader who had always placed the greatest stock on world revolution– had had started to give up and turn his face eastward. In the initial phase of the Red Army's counter offensive, the military objective had been sweeping the invaders out of Ukraine and Byelorussia. The Workers' Poland emphasis made by some leaders had only been the reflection of an expectation that, as the Polish army was forced to retreat the working class would have gained initiative and toppled the bourgeois government in Poland.

When rapid advance and brilliant successes of the Red Army exceeded all expectations, Soviet government fell into a confusion.

Everybody started to consider whether or not this was an opportunity to clear the way for the revolution to spread westward. Yet, there is also ample evidence which indicate that the actual calculation of Soviet government (including Lenin) was to force the Polish government into peace negotiations. At that exact point, Tukhachevsky's will to ignore the peace negotiations and push onwards came into the equation and defined the outcome. As I mentioned before, since Soviet communications were crippled to a point even beyond the limitations of the period, the situation had become such that actors in positions of authority were able to act far more autonomously than normal.<sup>205</sup>

The general enthusiasm in Soviet government at this point should be seen as natural. Ultimately, the revolution, which had been seen as "stalled" by everybody, suddenly had the chance to achieve victory in another country.<sup>206</sup> Still, even when it became the dominant disposition, taking of Warsaw in the name of world revolution had never been the only option. How could it? There was a Soviet delegation in Britain, Lloyd George was threatening with war, and the Soviet representatives were in a state of uninterrupted negotiations with the Prussian generals who were standing against the German Revolution, which would have been assisted through Poland after victory.

Obviously, there was a strategic confusion here. This was not a differentiation of options because each option was weakening the other. Therefore, we have to conclude that the Red Army lacked the support of a willful and resolute political power. If we add the internal threat presented by Wrangel to these, we can safely say that the Soviets had been in a situation of serious strategic disarray.

I do not agree with those who draw the conclusion from this disarray that Lenin never wanted the Red Army to march on Warsaw in the first place, and was even glad when it was stopped in front of Warsaw.<sup>207</sup> However, I also will never be convinced that Lenin saw the war from the "world revolution" point of view from its beginning to its end. Moreover, almost all Bolsheviks were suspecting that this was a trap and the Polish nationalists were trying to draw the Red Army towards Warsaw to provide the imperialist

countries with a pretext for invasion. This was their explanation to the strangely rapid advance of the Red Army and the attitude of the Poles in the peace negotiations, who were continuously trying to sabotage the talks despite their precarious situation. If Warsaw had been conquered, such a development would have depended on a lot of parameters; but for the Soviet government, which had to take any military or political contingency into account, it was impossible to ignore the possibility of such a trap.

I do not want to bore the reader with military details. I know from firsthand experience that with a limited military knowledge, reading page after page of military documents, memoirs and analyses is not productive at all. However, sometimes the devil is in the details.

Trotsky had laid the blame of defeat against Poland on Stalin, and in time, most of the western historians came to accept this thesis as “historical fact.” The distance of Stalin towards Trotsky and Tukhachevsky was no secret, and moreover, all of it was mutual. However, explaining away the defeat against Poland by vagaries of Stalin is an exceedingly subjective approach.

The devil is in the details. Because mostly, the job of defining what is detail, trivial or secondary is also the prerogative of the historiographer.

The war against Poland was not initiated to “spread the world revolution.” The war started with an invasion into Soviet territories and the Red Army was mobilized to force the enemy to retreat. On those days, the Red Army was busy with the menace of Wrangel, who was backed by the British and the French. The Red Army did not have the resources to fight with Poland and Wrangel at the same time, or at least, “two fronts” would have meant tremendous risks.

There were active negotiations between Soviet government and the British that had a bearing on both fronts. The British were trying to play the Wrangel card to maximum effect, including the possibility of separating Crimea from the Soviets. To this end, they tried to wrest concessions on Wrangel from Soviet Russia in return of using their influence on Warsaw government to persuade it to a sham peace. Although the erratic behavior of the Polish

side, like abruptly leaving some sessions or coming belatedly to others, had provided Soviet government with an opportunity to strengthen its hands in a military aspect, this “opportunism,” as Chicherin said, was also like playing with fire.

On July 12, when a note arrived from Curzon containing suggestions on the peace negotiations, Lenin had written to Stalin asking for his opinion and said “*For my part, I think that all this is a piece of knavery aimed at the annexation of the Crimea.*”<sup>208</sup> He had also requested in the same telegram that the attacks on Wrangel be intensified. However, the situation was far from reassuring; the war with Poland had weakened the Soviet forces.

This telegram shows that Lenin (at least during those days) was focused more on the security of the Soviets. Stalin shared this opinion and was frequently asking for reinforcements to the front against Wrangel.

Soviet government seemed to be locked in the argument on which front was more important.

I am sorry, but I must once again bring the matter to Trotsky. I wrote above that in 1920 he had lost his faith in world revolution, but another point on which I insist is that he was, on almost any topic, an exceedingly inconsistent person. Many western writers are convinced that during the war against Poland Trotsky was the most moderate member of Soviet leadership and he frequently tried to warn Lenin. This is just how Trotsky wanted to present himself. However, being his direct superior as the Commissar of Military, Trotsky was the first person who should have pulled the reins on Tukhachevsky. In addition, he was not moderate at all; on the contrary, he had completely lost himself...

Let us go step by step and witness both his inconsistency and how he had lost himself:

From the very start we frankly and honestly recognised the independence of Poland. (April 29)

Death to the Polish bourgeoisie. Over its corpse we shall conclude a fraternal alliance with workers’ and peasants’ Poland. (April 29)

But we are striving toward the West, to meet the European workers, who know that we can meet them only over the corpse of White-Guard Poland, in a free and independent workers' and peasants' Poland. (May 5)

We said to Poland: "What do you demand? Poland's independence? We recognize it. Do you fear that we will overthrow the bourgeois government of Warsaw? No, we will not meddle in your affairs. The Polish working class will overthrow you when it thinks it necessary. (May 10)

It would appear that it is the policy of Polish governmental circles to compel us to take Warsaw, because this ought, in its turn, in the view of the Polish Government and of all those who stand behind it, to provide favourable conditions for military intervention by the Entente. The provocation being practised by the Polish Government is perfectly obvious. (August 11)

We want peace now, just as we did on the first day of the war. But precisely because of this we must wean the government of Polish bankrupts away from playing hide-and-seek with us. Red forces, forward! Heroes, on to Warsaw! (August 14)

On the front against Wrangel we cannot boast of success. This was a subordinate, secondary front. (August 17)

Which front is the more important? That is what we ask, and we decide that the Polish front is the front of life and death for the Soviet Republic. (August 17)

The Polish front will decide, in the full sense of the word, the fate of the Republic, the fate of the revolution. (August 17)

Only idiots can suppose that Wrangel can possess any independent importance and can actually take power in Russia. (October 13)<sup>209</sup>

This is how Trotsky was. Stalin, on the other hand, makes this appraisal on June 24:

But it would be a mistake to think that the Poles on our front have been disposed of.

After all, we are contending not only against the Poles, but against the whole Entente, which has mobilized all the dark forces of Germany, Austria, Hungary and Rumania and is providing the Poles with supplies of every kind.

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the Poles have reserves, which are already concentrated at Novograd-Volynsk, and their effect will undoubtedly be felt within the next few days.

It should also be borne in mind that there is as yet no mass demoralization in the Polish army. There is no doubt that more fighting is still to come, and fierce fighting at that.

Hence I consider the boastfulness and harmful self-conceit displayed by some of our comrades as out of place: some of them, not content with the successes at the front, are calling for a "march on Warsaw"; others, not content with defending our Republic against enemy attack, haughtily declare that they could be satisfied only with a "Red Soviet Warsaw."

I shall not demonstrate that this boastfulness and self-conceit are entirely at variance both with the policy of the Soviet Government and with the strength of the enemy forces at the front.<sup>210</sup>

Trotsky's claims which more or less boil down to "*I was the prudent one, Lenin, Stalin who supported him, and the others did not listen to me*" are groundless. Ultimately, the general strategy was decided upon in the Party, which during the war with Poland corresponded to several Central Committee and Politburo meetings. The decisions taken there were final. Yet, it is evident that the Soviets were hesitating between "security concerns" and "world revolution," and in this tense situation some people in critical positions took various initiatives, even misguided their comrades.

Obviously, Tukhachevsky was for pushing the march on Warsaw all the way to the end, and he averted the attempts to stop him by the help of Sergey Kamenev and Trotsky. In the beginning of August, Soviet Russia, although it was suffocating under pressure from the British, mobilized the army irreversibly towards Warsaw.

Past that point, Lenin and the others had to hope for “victory.” They wanted it, but were anxious.

Because they also wanted peace. In 1920, with a realistic assessment, they had concluded that world revolution would not have happened as early as they expected; but they had suddenly come face to face with the hardships and opportunities presented by the war against Poland.

Hardships and opportunities... Security concerns, and the prospect of establishing a Soviet government in Poland.

It was a tough decision.

On August 1, to mitigate the increasing threat presented by Wrangel, transfer of units to the internal front was decided upon and Tukhachevsky was notified. We know that Tukhachevsky responded negative to this decision and said “impossible.” The development that eased Tukhachevsky’s position had happened on August 3; the Polish side had left the negotiation table and returned to Warsaw. However, on the same days, the pressure upon the Soviet delegation from Britain, which was saying “*Stop the offensive or we will intervene,*” had become unendurable.

Stalin and Yegorov reminded the decision on the transfer of forces to Tukhachevsky on August 4 but it was pointless. Tukhachevsky was insistent that there would be no transfer.

As you can see, there is a serious dispute between the internal front (Wrangel) and the external front (Poland) on the use of limited military resources; and this dispute is not a technical but a strategical problem.

Upon this deadlock, on August 5 the Polish front and Southern front (Wrangel) were completely separated. Lenin had notified Stalin of this decision with telegram three days ago.

We have just decided, in the Political Bureau, that the Army Groups shall be separated, so that you will deal exclusively with Wrangel. Following the uprisings, especially in the Kuban and then in Siberia, the Wrangel danger is becoming enormous, and the opinion is mounting in the Central Committee that peace with bourgeois Poland should be concluded immediately. Please study the Wrangel situation very carefully and let us know your conclusions.<sup>211</sup>

This means that by August 2, Lenin's security concerns had become predominant and signing of a treaty with bourgeois Poland had become a strong possibility.

The withdrawal of the Polish side from negotiations upon trivial reasons, while strengthening Tukhachevsky's hand, evidently was also seen as an "opportunity" in the party; and a new balance emerged between security concerns and the efforts to spread the revolution westward. Since developments on the field all indicated that Warsaw would definitely be conquered, the prudence in the party became redundant.

Therefore, in the first week of August, a "compromise" had been reached, according to which the Red Army would keep advancing in two vectors: in the south towards Lvov and in the north, towards Warsaw. At the same time, the hawks in Britain had realized that Prime Minister Lloyd George, who had been accused of "making too many concessions towards the Soviets" had finally "decided on military intervention" and were rubbing their hands with glee. Lev Kamenev, who was the head of the Soviet delegation ceaselessly negotiating with the British, had understood by then that he would not have been able to convince Lloyd George. Therefore, he decided to deceive both him and his comrades!

This is how:

On August 11, Lenin sent another telegram to Stalin:

We have just received a dispatch from the head of the Soviet delegation in London. Great Britain has flinched from a general strike, and Lloyd George has declared that he advises Poland to accept our armistice terms, including disarmament, the handing over of weapons to the workers, land distribution, etc. Our victory is a great one, and will be complete if we smash Wrangel. (...) The Poles are temporising, and have not arrived in time [to negotiations]. This is of tremendous advantage to us.<sup>212</sup>

British imperialism have accepted complete disarmament of Poland, and moreover, the distribution of arms to Polish workers!

When the Red Army had entered Polish lands, these were the exact two arguments that had been pursued. Through these, Soviet rule would have been established in Poland. This was not an

export of revolution; it was assisting the Polish working class in toppling their bourgeoisie. Now, according to news from London, this had been achieved, and the British had resigned themselves to the situation.

However, this was a lie. There had been nothing about distribution of arms to workers in the list of demands Kamenev presented to the British on August 10. The wording was this: Poland would have been disarmed just as Germany was disarmed according to the Treaty of Versailles, and civilian militia would have been formed for security matters. There was a big difference. Besides, Lloyd George had not accepted these conditions. He had just found them “worth working upon.” Kamenev, while extending a hand to Lloyd George by desisting from the “workers militia” demand of the Soviets for ceasefire, was announcing good news to his comrades instead of notifying them properly.

In reality, Kamenev had deceived his comrades to stop the Red Army’s advance (and therefore the British intervention).

Soviet government was enthusiastically issuing press releases, Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs was declaring that “*Armed workers would be the greatest safeguard of peace.*” When what really happened came to light afterwards, it is known that Commissar Chicherin admonished Kamenev as “*You have disgraced us.*”<sup>213</sup>

Information is essential. Correct information. For decisions, good use of resources... They misguided Lenin so much in 1920 and the couple of years before and after. False information from Germany, Italy, Poland, sometimes with all the best intentions, sometimes with selfish motives, drove Lenin to mistakes on many occasions.

We can thus conclude: The Polish-Soviet War of 1920 was a parenthesis opened and closed by the Soviet government for the sake of the revolution in Europe. The same parenthesis would later be opened once more in Germany and then be closed forever. This was a period for socialism in one country.

By October 15, the Polish had once more conquered Byelorussian capital Minsk and started to threaten Moscow. Soviet government had to appease them in the peace negotiations and then focus of the economic and social issues of the war-torn country.

Ceasefire was declared on October 16 and the troops were immediately sent to crush Wrangel.

At that time, although admitting failure, Lenin was saying “*Anyone who examines the map will see that we have won.*”<sup>214</sup> Later, in February 1921, when taking an account of the Poland campaign in hindsight, he would have admitted their mistake as “*We advanced too far.*”<sup>215</sup>

In the treaty signed at Riga on March 18, 1921, the Soviet-Poland border was drawn. Although gaining some territory, Poland conceded Byelorussia and Ukraine to the Soviets, and left counter-revolutionary Petliura to his fate.

With the treaty, prisoners of war would also have been exchanged and it would be realized that of the 130 thousand Soviet prisoners of war, 60 thousand had been killed.<sup>216</sup> Polish nationalism kept breeding enmity and acting on vendetta.

The entry of Red Army into Warsaw was off the agenda “for the moment.” This would happen 25 years later, under completely different circumstances. However, a very tough period now lay ahead, and in the beginning of 1920s, Poland was not the only problem of Soviet Union.



## The Soviet Card of German Generals

The attempt of Soviet Russia to bring the bourgeois and nationalist Poland to heel backfired in mid-August, and by the end of the month, defeat had become inevitable. The Poles advanced for some time, then negotiations resumed and a treaty was signed at Riga.

We have told before that several answers can be given to the question "What was the motivation behind sending the Red Army to Warsaw?" Among the possible answers we counted, one was naturally linked to the German Revolution. There had been a number of reasons for the Bolsheviks to think that once Poland fell, the increasingly desperate revolution in Germany would have become easier.

Then, what did the Germans think about this? For the revolutionary front, a workers' rule in Warsaw would have been a tremendous opportunity; this is beyond argument. Not only the communist workers, but also those with social democratic tendencies thought so. However, Germany was ruled by the leaders of SPD (which, by the virtue of its latest experiences, had become the most precious political party of the monopolies), by the generals who retained their power after the collapse of the empire, and by counter-revolutionary organizations which would eventually become Hitlerists. Therefore, their words were decisive.

German ruling circles were under a great revolutionary threat. Moreover, this threat was originating from KPD, which was the representative of the Communist International in Germany. Which, in turn had been founded through the efforts of the Soviets. Therefore, was it not normal for the German ruling circles to desire the worst defeat of the Red Army in Poland?

Normal! There is no “normal” in the imperialist world. There are class interests, profit seeking, and an expansionist urge that sometimes borders on mindlessness. And, because of these, there is a great competition.

If Soviet Russia survived after the October Revolution in 1917 despite all the efforts of strong imperialist countries like Britain, France, the USA, Japan and Germany to strangle it, this had been to some extent due to conflicts of interest among them and the skill of the Bolsheviks in taking advantage of those conflicts.

The First World War ended in 1918, but the conflicts of interest among imperialists did not; on the contrary, they intensified. The new world order created by victors was coming apart at the seams right at the beginning. Versailles and Sèvres treaties were not harbingers of “peace,” but of new wars.

German monopolies and those who conducted politics in their interests were determined to destroy Bolshevism. This was the consensus among social democrats and nationalists. They were exploiting every opportunity in the internal politics of Germany to this end, and attacked using every method from state terror to provocations, lies and trickery. However, things were more complicated when it came to foreign affairs. France and Britain had decided to surround Berlin economically, politically and in a military sense, and “a strong Poland against Germany” was the formula related. Germany, on the other hand, could not have existed without opening eastwards. Moreover, it was burdened with conditions that were impossible to accept for an imperialist country of such caliber. Its army was being disbanded, its war industry was being dismantled and its economy was being transformed into a cash cow which would have to pay war reparations to Britain and France for decades. German monopolies would not have resigned to this.

They drew these conclusions: The threat of Bolshevism had to be averted; Poland had to be transformed into something other than an instrument of the British and French; and ways had to be found in which Germany would effectively circumvent the conditions imposed on it. These were the goals of the German state. The problem was how to achieve these. There were several different orientations.

For example, one section was proposing to convince Britain and France to forego the heavy impositions by citing the threat of Bolshevism as reason; and to circumvent the military conditions of the Treaty of Versailles by coming to an agreement with the Allied Powers and assuming a military role against the westward advance of Soviet Russia.<sup>217</sup>

An alternative to this was a sleight of hand trick with the Soviet Russia card! That is, making not even the smallest concession to the Reds inside, but breaking the international isolation by establishing a military and economic collaboration with the Bolsheviks in foreign policy, partly with the help of the historical legacy of Russian-German relations. Britain and France would have needed Germany against Bolshevism anyway.

None of these two alternatives could have been realized without the presence of the other. German capital played it beautifully through experienced actors, and by employing certain variations.

In fact, beyond the argument between these two strategies, the situation can be summarized for the German state as follows: Germany would of course have preferred a non-Bolshevik Russia under any circumstance, and attempts had been made in this regard; but once it had become evident that Soviet Russia was there to stay, steps were taken to turn the present status quo to advantage.<sup>218</sup>

The Polish-Soviet War broke out while ventures that served as overtures to both policies were being conducted. However, since the Berliners knew that, at least at that stage, France and Britain would not give up hope of a strong Poland and come to terms with Germany; they appeared neutral during the war but internally hoped for the success of the Red Army.

German general Hoffmann, who was known for his boundless

anti-communism, was saying that Germany would rather have Russia, even a Bolshevik one, as a direct neighbor; and that if the Soviets swallowed Poland, it would have been possible to for Germany to regain some of the territories that were conceded to Poland under the Versailles regime.<sup>219</sup>

Lenin was not speaking in vain when he said in September 1920 that an unnatural bloc had emerged between the Black Hundreds (here Lenin is reminding the nationalist counter-revolutionary forces in Russia and establishing a similarity) of Germany and the Bolsheviks.<sup>220</sup>

Furthermore, Lenin was saying: *“Even the most backward sections of Germany’s peasant population have declared that they are for the Bolsheviks, that they are allies of the Bolsheviks; that is quite natural, for, in its struggle for existence, the Soviet Republic is the only force in the world which is combating imperialism—and imperialism now means an alliance of France, Britain and America.”*<sup>221</sup> He also did not shy away from saying that Germany had been enslaved.<sup>222</sup>

These were bold words, particularly when one took into account the fact that his opponents had accused the Bolsheviks of “serving” the Germans right from the very beginning. For example Martov, who had been the shrewdest leader of Mensheviks, were putting the pressure on his old friend Lenin with these words during the negotiations at Brest:

If this treaty is signed, the Russian proletariat will make war on the government that signed it. This treaty is the first partition of Russia; Japan is preparing for the second; and the third will not be long in coming. By this treaty we obligate ourselves not to carry on propaganda against the governments of the Quadruple Alliance. In return these governments obligate themselves not to do anything against the Soviet Government. I congratulate Lenin. From now on he is under the protection not only of the Red Guard but also of Kaiser Wilhelm.<sup>223</sup>

Martov had misunderstood everything about the struggle for socialism and was rapidly sliding towards an anti-Soviet position. He did not want to grasp the meaning that workers’ power in

Soviet Russia had in the process of world revolution, and was attacking the new order established in Moscow from a “social democratic” position favored by Britain and France.

But now, more than two years after the negotiations at Brest, German Revolution had swept away the Kaiser, victorious imperialist powers had imposed the Treaty of Versailles on Germany, and the Bolshevik rule, which no one expected to live for more than three months, had come to send its army to conquer the heart of Poland.

Almost all Germany waited with a bated breath for the red flag to be unfurled over neighboring Warsaw. It was as if class differences had evaporated. Yet, at the same time, a bloody struggle went on between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in Germany, a struggle in which Soviet Russia was directly involved through the Comintern. Because of this involvement, which was not only moral or ideological but also had material aspects, Moscow was sending money, advisors and propaganda material to Berlin, and had turned his places of representation into “headquarters for the proletarian revolution.”

Not for the sake of appearance but with belief and desire; saying, “*Even if there is the slightest opportunity*” in the face of diminishing hopes...

However, the necessity of protecting the achievements at hand, the survival of Soviet Russia, was imposing itself. Its survival depended of poking holes in and alleviating the isolation imposed by imperialists by establishing economic relations with capitalist powers. They virtually tried every door, but saw that there was a prospect of deepening and lucrative relationship only with Germany.

Undoubtedly, Lenin knew that the rapprochement between Germany and Soviet Russia could never have achieved the level of alliance or have meant the formation of a bloc, and openly wrote this. The issue was, namely, a policy of exploiting the contradictions between imperialist countries.<sup>224</sup>

Germany is one of the most powerful and advanced of the capitalist countries. She cannot put up with the Treaty of Versailles. Although she is herself imperialist, Germany is obliged to seek

for an ally against world imperialism, because she has been crushed. That is the situation we must turn to our advantage.<sup>225</sup>

German bourgeois government has an implacable hatred of the Bolsheviks, but such is its international position that, against its own desires, the government is driven towards peace with Soviet Russia.<sup>226</sup>

Counter-revolutionary German capital and revolutionary Soviet proletariat had met at a crossroads.

At first, the crossroads was the prison cell of Karl Radek in Germany! He had been locked up for engaging in “subversive” activities; and in 1919, he was visited by KPD representatives on one day and German military officers on the next. Radek later wrote about this peculiarity in a humorous way, and the party knew about all the meetings; but still, helping the German revolution and maintaining diplomatic relations with those who wanted to strangle it were two very different missions.

The assuming of both of these missions by the same person undoubtedly reflected a very primitive understanding of division of work. However, nobody knew in 1917 or 1918 that Soviet Russia would need a very complicated diplomatic network. Joffe, the representative in Berlin, acted more like the uncovered leader of an illegal organization than a diplomat, and frequently came into collision with German authorities. Radek on the other hand had been able to internalize his diplomatic identity only to the point of saying “*struggle against the putschists is not our business, it is the business of German working class*” during the Kapp putsch!

Lenin was well aware that the affinity German militarists felt towards the Soviets, particularly on the issue of Poland, was complicating the problems concerning the future of German Revolution even further. We are definitely able to say this today in hindsight that these problems should have been solved by KPD. However I believe that Lenin could have said “*they could not resolve [these problems] because at the time they were sitting here in Moscow and resolving the most primitive question of how to create elements of a real communist party in Germany*” about the German communists in a closed session in September 1920.<sup>227</sup> Because German

communists (yes, to some extent because of the mistakes of the Comintern officials) were unable to take tough decisions without first consulting with Moscow. Moreover, their indecisions and internal disputes were fueling an open lack of trust in the Bolsheviks.

Soviet government had started to approach German Revolution with a sincere but pessimistic attitude, and was grasping the importance of maintaining relationships professionally with Germany more and more every day.

After a while, a division of work between Soviet Foreign Affairs and the Comintern became unavoidable. This was explained with the thesis that the Comintern was an international institution and Soviet State was not directly bound by its actions. Of course, this was not persuasive at all, but it had also become a historical reality that the two institutions had started to dance to different tunes and, in time, started to step on each other's toes. Soviet diplomats were trying to establish relationship with bourgeois governments while the Comintern was giving advice and material assistance to communist parties so that they could topple the same governments. It came to such a point that the Comintern started to covertly place militants into Soviet Foreign Affairs, which did not want any "adventures." Commissar Chicherin, on the other hand, was busy appealing to Lenin to shut down the German radio of the Comintern broadcasting from Moscow.<sup>228</sup>

Their counterparts on the other side of the border were not faring any better. The primary mission and goal of German Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to persuade Britain and France to cooperation and to lighten their pressure on Germany. Therefore, a circle organized within German General Staff became the driving force behind the relations with Soviet Russia. This circle was strong enough to sideline the fascist generals (Ludendorff being the most important one) who did not think anything but "seek and destroy" when the subject came to Bolshevism. It also had the advantage of being in cahoots with the prominent German monopolies. There was no way to separate German monopolies from German militarism, or the "civil" industry from arms industry. In this context, they were in a desperate need of new investment and production areas, let alone of new markets.

The most influential person in the policy of rapprochement with the Soviets was Hans von Seeckt, one of the most brilliant names of the German army. The Treaty of Versailles that was signed on May 7, 1919 had made clear that Britain and especially France would not ease the pressure on Germany in the near future, and strengthened the hand of this general who had been known for his intellectual disposition. His formula was very simple: Crush the Reds inside, collaborate with the Red Army outside!

Seeckt and others were trying to conduct this policy under the radar of both the Allied Powers and the German politicians that argued for a rapid reconciliation with them. However, this was not always possible. Sometimes, social democrats that wanted to put pressure on KPD, or different factions within the state tried to ask, "*What is this? Right-wing generals are flirting with Red Russia!*" Even sometimes, some generals were called to give information to the Parliament at special sessions. However, the generals, who had always enjoyed a considerable autonomy in Germany, were not ruffled at all.

Soviet government was eyeing opportunities for German Revolution while trying to fathom what it could have done with the generals that wanted to collaborate with it inside the German State. The generals, who were for giving no breather to KPD in internal politics, had become convinced that for averting the internal Soviet threat, they needed to establish relations with Soviet Russia. So that in political meetings with their Soviet counterparts they were stressing that German Revolution was a desperate affair which they would not allow, and warning them against "going on a wild goose chase."

At one point, KPD leadership would have asked Moscow to use more right-wing elements as mediators instead of USPD, which was the leftmost party with the established order. They did not want the social democrats in competition with KPD to be able to use their affinity with the Soviets as a source of propaganda.<sup>229</sup>

These are such hard matters that even writing about them a hundred years later is depressing. Lenin was saying, "*We are conducting business with German counter-revolutionaries and therefore helping the world revolution.*" It was true that, since world

revolution was receding, this had become a necessity for the survival of Soviet Russia, which would have allowed socialism to stand stronger against imperialism in the next revolutionary wave. However, life was going on, and German communists were still trying to fan the diminishing flame of revolution by making sometimes mindless, sometimes hopeless, and sometimes masterful attempts.

The Bolsheviks stood by them, but the divide between German Revolution and the survival of Soviet Russia was widening with each passing day.

The same was the problem with German capital. They were also confused. On one hand they thought, "*Let the Red Army crush Poland,*" while on the other they were trying to gauge the extent of the radical shift this would cause in Germany's internal balance of power. There were even some among them that thought they could carry a Soviet-German alliance as far as a military operation against France and Britain, a confrontation that would topple the Versailles order. Fantasies were voiced, in which the Russia of the Bolsheviks would have served the interests of German monopolies through a German nationalism painted in the colors of socialism, seriously... To the extent that intelligence reports to Paris and London had started to include this as a possibility.

The "deep" German state mind did not want to curtail the rumors, since a fear in France and Britain about the possible extent of a German-Soviet collaboration would have forced them to capitulate. However, the first condition for a possibility to be convincing is that some people should really believe in it and want it to happen. Moreover, every policy naturally creates its extremes. The notion of Nationalist Germany and Socialist Russia embarking hand in hand on a crusade against France and Germany was frivolous nonsense, but the relations were real!

Radek as a prisoner had become a mediator, and the employment of another mediator was decided upon in his "cell," which had become his unofficial office.<sup>230</sup> Enver Pasha, who had been declared a war criminal and was wanted by the victorious states, would have traveled back and forth between Germany and the Soviets assuming false identities, and would have assisted in the

building of bridges between Berlin and Moscow. One foot of that bridge would have been in Anatolia.

Enver's role as a mediator had also been documented in American intelligence reports:

Sources that I cannot ignore informed me that *Enver Pasha* is in *Berlin* but would shortly leave by plane. *British chargé d'affaires* officially protested to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry declared that it was completely unaware of Enver's presence in Berlin and that it would investigate. A source I cannot confirm informed me that *Enver* is in close relationship with the Bolsheviks here, and met yesterday with *Kopp* [Soviet representative in Berlin]. Still, the British are of the opinion that Enver may collaborate with the Bolsheviks to instigate turmoil in *India, Afghanistan*, and particularly *Egypt*.

*Talat* has also been in Berlin for several weeks, he is now departing for Switzerland. It is believed that he is directing a secret service bureau there, and is in contact with *Bolshevik* agents.<sup>231</sup>

Hans von Seeckt had become acquainted with Enver in Turkey during the First World War. He was the person who encouraged Enver and *Talat*<sup>232</sup> to visit Radek in prison. Therefore, just as the Soviets infiltrated Germany with communist militants to help the communists there, Germany was also infiltrating Soviet Russia with characters who represented the armed forces of the establishment that communists strove to bring down.

As seen here, the economic and military relations between the two countries had started to develop before the German-Soviet Treaty of Rapallo in 1922. However, these relations were being conducted on a somewhat peculiar ground. German Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not know much about the extent of the matter. As I underlined above, the hands that pulled the strings were in the General Staff. In this sense, Rapallo would have meant a partial legalization of the relations that were already present.

The surprise at Rapallo created a panic in the imperialist world. They developed a new strategy to prevent Soviet Russia from winning Germany over, and they had a partial success. The Locarno

Treaties in 1925 between the victorious states and Germany were seen as a response to Rapallo. However, this did not result in a real setback in the Soviet-German relations, as was seen in the fact that the German-Soviet Trade Agreement was also conceived in the same year. German imperialism had stopped thinking small and started betting large. They were quite disinclined to forego the returns on their relations with Soviet Russia.

The result was a substantive collaboration.

We know that the Red Army received rifles and bullets from Germany during the Civil War. We know that, after the defeat at Warsaw against the Polish army, some of the retreating Red Army units passed into Germany and therefore avoided capture or annihilation. We know that German companies, with Krupp and Junker in the lead, ventured to produce in Soviet Russia, that some of these projects were actually realized and at one point the center of Krupp's activities shifted to the Soviets. We know that some of the weapons of German army that were supposed to be handed over according to the Treaty of Versailles were sent to the Soviets. We know that later, weapons were dispatched from the Soviets to Germany, and many of these had been weapons produced by German companies in factories set up in Soviet Union. We know that German and Red Army officers took joint courses in aviation schools in the Soviet Union. We know that Soviet aviation and tank technologies were improved a great deal through this close collaboration in the 1920s, even until 1933. We know that German help had been taken in the venture of modernization of Soviet navy.

Some may say, "*There, these are all evidences of Stalin's betrayal of world revolution.*" Let me promptly add that this process was conducted with the approval of the Bolshevik Party and encouraged by Lenin. The political responsibility was collectively on the Party. However, those who conducted the actual relations were the two relevant commissars: Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Chicherin, who had always been for strengthening relations with Germany, and Commissar of Military, Trotsky! Trotsky, who later accused Stalin of "*selling out the world revolution,*" also developed his private relationships with the German generals and took

personal initiatives with these relationships; it was certain that his private conversations with his counterparts were not about the questions of “world revolution.”

For the historiographers who later raced with each other in defaming Stalin and whitewashing Trotsky, the issue was almost like resorting to a bitter pill to prolong the life of a terminal patient:

What was the impact of the failure of the German Revolution? For Soviet Russia, it certainly meant disaster. If it was impossible to build socialism in one country, then the defeat in Germany ultimately resulted in the failure of the revolutionary project in Russia. Yet, we do well to remember that in the short term, [the German Revolution] did give Bolshevik Russia breathing space. As Trotsky admitted, the German Revolution, incomplete as it was, “was still strong enough to trim the claws of Ludendorff and Hoffmann. Without this operation the Soviet Republic could hardly have avoided destruction.”<sup>233</sup>

Wrong! Soviet Union did not gain a couple of months or years as “short term” implies, it gained a much longer period, and used this period for the establishment of socialism in spite of the objections of Trotsky and some others. All the while, it lent a hand to the German Revolution at every opportunity; and in 1945, it swept the capitalists away from half of this country and paved the way for German Democratic Republic.

Trotsky, on the other hand, had lost his hope in socialism and was playing a dangerous game with Tsarist military officers and German generals.

“Stalin sabotaged world revolution, therefore the revolutionary project in Russia failed...” Sheer nonsense...

The period in which “military” content was the driving element in Soviet-German relations continued until 1933. The two countries did not drift apart, even though they were also (to an extent by the virtue of their collaboration) making headway in their relations with the Britain-France-USA triumvirate and breaking their isolation.

When Hitler came to power, the process immediately became unmanageable. The German military and civilian specialists in

Soviet Union, which had been there for quite some time, had become officials of the Nazi government overnight. Moreover, the number of cadres of the German state who provided the continuity between the fascist period and the preceding one were not small at all. German specialists in Soviet Union had developed friendships with Soviet citizens in critical positions; some had become lovers. Soviet officials already knew that some of these specialists were intelligence personnel and kept track of them. However, the fascist coup had drastically changed the rules of the game. The world was obviously sliding towards a new war and the chief warmonger among the imperialist countries was Germany, in which a political movement that had "*Communism must be wiped off the face of earth*" among its tenets had come to power.

And in 1933, that Germany had detailed information on the advantages and disadvantages of Soviet arms industry, the personal traits of prominent generals, strategic preparations of the Red Army, relations between the Party and the army, and the tensions in these relations.

The Red Army had undoubtedly benefited much from the military collaboration with Germany. Despite the secretiveness of Germany, Soviet engineers rapidly assimilated the technical accumulation of German industry on the production of tanks and airplanes, which required advanced technology. The Soviets also amassed a substantive equipment pool, and, most importantly, Soviet intelligence also gathered lots of information on German army.

One major problem was the relations between the German state and the military officers transferred from the Army of Tsardom to the Red Army in 1918 and particularly 1920. We should keep in mind that the visits to Germany by high-ranking Soviet officers (Tukhachevsky being the chief among them) were of an uncontrollable character and open to every kind of misconduct.

In 1933, Soviet-German relations rapidly declined after a short period of wait-and-see, and Soviet Union started to make a great effort towards the creation of an international security system against the Germany-Japan-Italy trio. At the same time, they were trying to sever the ties Hitlerists had inside the country. Starting from 1934, such connections were also investigated in the

removals from the party and state ranks. With the final hit on the command echelon of the Red Army, Soviet Union would have become very much like a black hole for Germany.

To such an extent that, when fascist armies invaded Soviet Union in the June of 1941, they were struck with horror by the T-34 and KV-1 tanks that received them; and German soldiers were cursing German military intelligence, which “*assured them with the information that the Soviet tanks were quite primitive.*”

The military collaboration that had started in 1919 between the two countries beset by the same powers was disrupted in the wink of an eye in 1933. In 1941, enmity brought German soldiers all the way to the outskirts of Moscow. And in the May of 1945, a new era dawned with the planting and unfurling of the Hammer and Sickle at the heart of Germany.

What we are investigating here is not just a period in the history of relations between two countries. We should focus on the multi-faceted nature of the interaction between the emergence point of world revolution and its next most possible point of contingency. There was undoubtedly an ideology, a class-based point of view that linked Moscow and Berlin to one other. The actors of this link were the communists of the two countries. However, other elements were also heaped upon this link. If one of these was being opposed to the Treaty of Versailles that shaped the system of Europe from 1918 onwards, then the other was the distress caused by nationalist Poland.

There was friction between each of these layers.

The Bolsheviks never denied their rapprochement with Germany. Lenin was openly writing about this. However, there were some aspects of this relationship that had to be kept secret. Both countries were bypassing the Treaty of Versailles via their military collaboration. Even this was enough reason for discretion. Moreover, the Soviet government, while doing business with the German state, was looking for ways to exploit even the smallest opportunity in the working class struggle in Germany through KPD at the same time. None of these activities could have been announced with trump and drum.

The difficulties of maintaining relations with two separate actors

in a single country from the same point soon came to surface. It would have produced healthier results in the long run if decisions concerning the German Revolution were ultimately taken by German revolutionaries, even if these decisions were incorrect. It was an immense misfortune that the Bolsheviks, who had the demands, advices and information from the Commissar of Foreign Affairs on one hand and reports from the Comintern on the other, had the final say on what should have been done in another country; regardless of the prowess and depth of the said Bolsheviks. Cooperation in comradeship, assistance, criticism and advice when needed... All these were internationalist obligations, but when the time had come to take decisions, they should have stopped and left the final say to the communists of the relevant country.

These are lessons that shed light on today and tomorrow. At that time, Soviet communists, with all good intentions, tried to solve the problems presented before them. Supporting the German Revolution and maintaining semi-covert relations with German militarism at the same time had been one of the hardest among these problems.

The worst had been the propaganda campaign of German SPD, murderous enemy of the working class, in which it exposed the transportation of weapons from the Soviets to Germany in pamphlets that said, "*Behold, the true face of KPD and Soviet Union!*" Soviet Union, having foreseen such an occurrence, had put an article in the agreement, which stipulated that the weapons sent to Germany would have been inventoried and locked in depots until "a state of war," and this was how Chicherin alleviated the concerns of the Comintern.<sup>234</sup> However, the tension between the kind of external relations that defense of socialism in one country necessitated and helping the communist party in another country had far surpassed the point at which it could have been mitigated by such precautions; and Germany was not the only example.

The Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), which sought to gain prominence in Anatolia, would have been born amidst a similar tension in the Moscow-Berlin-Ankara triangle that Enver Pasha was trying to connect, and would have suffered a tragedy in its first year similar to the one that happened in Germany.



## Russian Steppes Seek Alliance with Anatolian Prairies

The October Revolution in 1917 toppled the state apparatus of the old regime and created an entirely different state based on councils (soviets) in its stead. There was an immense opposition between the old and new order, one had been based on exploitation while the other was based on equality; they were different in form, and different in content. In spite of this, after a short while the Soviet rule had to resort to help from specialists of the old regime. This was not an affair limited to a handful of people; hundreds of thousands of “state officials” including high-ranking military and civil bureaucrats were “transferred” to solve the emergent problem of human resources.

Let us not forget that we are talking about a socialist revolution, the most radical, deepest upheaval in history. We should keep this fact in mind, so that we do not make the mistake of belittling the liberation-foundation process in Anatolia that was ventured only a few years later based on the background of its cadres, most of whom were either from the Palace, or somehow associated with *İttihat ve Terakki*. Bourgeois revolutions cannot be as radical as socialist revolutions in their secession from the old social order since, ultimately, the rule of the propertied classes continue and the revolution is a realignment of the internal balance between those classes that remove the barriers in front of the development

of capitalism. In this sense, 1919-1923 was the most critical period of bourgeois revolution of Turkey.

Young Ottomans, Young Turks, İttihat *ve Terakki* and the Kemalists were, in a very broad ideological and political definition, the vanguard cadres of the bourgeois revolution of Turkey. This was a chain, a political line. In spite of the blurring at the edges and frequent defections, there is no problem with defining all those who positioned themselves against this line during the last stages of Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the republic as “reactionaries.”

All the political actors of the period came to be shaped as a part in one of these two fronts that were stuck in a narrow political arena, some frequently changed sides, but eventually all positioned themselves with reference to İttihatist ideology. There is nothing astonishing about the fact that those took themselves out of these two fronts and said “*another world is possible*” after the October of 1917 had similar and frequently inconsistent background stories. Naturally, the first communists of Turkey would not have dropped from the sky...

These past associations would undoubtedly have created some problems; but it could not have happened any other way in a country in which the working class did not have a history of organized political movement. It was a historical fact that in parts of the world in which capitalism was less developed, the intelligentsia that embraced communism was composed of personalities who had made (usually insufficiently internalized) transitions to Marxism from nationalist, religious and sometimes liberal ideologies.

Soviet government had realized in front of Warsaw that its “journey westward” was at an end. They had already started to give weight to the “East” before the defeat; and after it, they started to take the matter very seriously. One primary item on the agenda of the Second Congress of the Communist International was the “Eastern Question.”

And in that direction, they were facing a very different problem than the one in Petrograd or Moscow. In these centers of revolution there was a shortage of specialists but there was also enough Bolshevik militants to make up for this shortage both in a quantitative

and qualitative sense. The Communist Party, which had its roots deep in the working class, was at home in these centers. Also in other western countries, although there had been problems with the foundation of communist parties, a fertile ground obviously existed and the working class movement that had the experience of decades was presenting plenty of resources within this context.

On the other hand, in the east, the working class was small in numbers and ineffective in politics. The peasantry could take on revolutionary aspects in some places but it was impossible for it to become a consistent and driving vanguard force. Just like the hegemony of *İttihat ve Terakki* ideology in Turkey, in less developed parts of former Russian Empire, nationalist or Islamist circles held sway in politics. Soviet order had to forego its ideological rigor as it turned towards these lands, to the point that in some settlements it started to concede the rule to Mensheviks. And the Bolshevik Party in these places were created almost completely out of people coming from nationalist backgrounds or circles of enlightened mullahs.

In most of the republics that later united in the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Bolshevism had gained a corporeal existence through transfer operations.

However, the real "East" was outside Soviet territory. Apart from many others, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran, India and China were matters of great importance to Soviet government. In the consolidation of its own, internal East, it looked at this geography and made a decision.

1920 is the most critical year concerning this decision and the priority of Soviet government was Turkey, which was of vital importance to it.

During the whole liberation and establishment process, 1920, with all the tensions and even risk of conflict it contained, was the year that defined the character of relations between Soviet Russia and Turkey. In the November and December of this year, Moscow and Ankara hesitated between enmity and friendship, even came to the brink of war; and for both sides, the Treaty of Brotherhood that was signed on March 16, 1921 was, as the saying goes, "taken from the lion's mouth."

We will examine all these, but first, we need to make a note about the “ignorance” that left its mark on the initial period of relations between the Soviets and the movement in Anatolia.

It is obvious that the cadres from the *İttihat ve Terakki* school that had to focus on managing the vast empire after 1908 knew next to nothing about the ideological and political positions of revolutionary movements in Europe and the arguments among them. The business of keeping an empire (that was in the final stage of dissolution) upright in a world which became a jungle where imperialist tigers prowled, without leading a popular mass movement, necessitated an exceedingly realpolitik attitude. The eagerness shown towards socialist ideas by those who spent some time in Germany or France for education or assignment was often of a temporary character. Moreover, the First World War had levelled Marxism in both of these countries and plunged the working class movement into a deep crisis. The Ittihatist ideology that became a magnet to Turkish intelligentsia was rather focused on “great” matters; they were “in power” and had found themselves an exceedingly “powerful” ally: Germany.

In this environment, it was natural that they did not have a proper knowledge of the Bolsheviks who seized power with October Revolution in 1917. In any case, the Bolsheviks had not been a mainstream actor in Russia until that moment; and it is absurd to expect an understanding of a political movement, whose success is still explained by nonsense arguments, happenstances or as a freak occurrence of history today, in the declining Ottoman Empire of that time, which had a very limited intellectual wealth. This ignorance was naturally left as a legacy to the National Struggle that came later.

Moreover, this ignorance was not one-sided! Soviet government also had very limited knowledge on movements (all of which were somehow related to *İttihat ve Terakki*) that emerged in Anatolia from 1919. But naturally, they had followed the progress of the Revolution of 1908 and Young Turks, and more or less placed them into a historical framework.

The Bolsheviks did not take sides in the wars between the Ottoman and Russian armies. They had even won the sympathy of

Ittihatist generals to the extent of their defeatism in Russian army. On the other hand, during negotiations at Brest, which were chiefly conducted with Germany, the Bolsheviks had the chance to see up close how opportunist these generals could be. Just like the Germans, these were also trying to snatch away whatever they could get their hands on from the Bolsheviks.

By the end of the same year, those generals had fallen to the position of the toppled leaders of defeated side, and Istanbul was left in the hands of the British and their Ottoman servants. This was an immense threat to the Bolsheviks. The Straits between Aegean and Black Seas had fallen into the hands of the powers that sought their doom; moreover, a risk of Caucasia (which was also of great strategic importance) coming under British dominion had emerged.

In the November of 1918, after the Armistice of Mudros, The Straits were opened to navy forces of Britain and France; and transfer of arms and reinforcements to White Army positions in Ukraine and Kuban region across the southern front of the Civil War had started. The Bolsheviks thought that Britain would not stop and press forward seeking to regain the power it lost in its colonies, spread its overbearing influence to the lands which were occupied by Tsarist Russia and complete the annexation of Near East. Turkey on the other hand was a target in the imperialist plans of occupation and could have become a springboard for the annihilation of Soviet government. The Bolsheviks were thinking that the success of the independence movement in Turkey could have erected an obstacle to imperialist aggression against Russia.<sup>235</sup>

Therefore, for the Bolsheviks there could have been nothing more natural than seeking and trying to establish contact with elements in both Istanbul and Anatolia that would create difficulties against British interests. Communists, those who thought they were communist, those who acted like communists, Germanists, Turkish nationalists, Islamists, even those who liked Britain but were against colonialism... This was a (by no means complete) list of potential allies and separation of all these into proper categories

was almost impossible. The same was the situation with those who travelled from Russia to Anatolia. For various reasons, the ideological and political orientations of pro-Soviet Turkish-Muslim elements in Russia or regions like Crimea were far from being clear.

However, one thing was clear for Soviet government: Ottoman Empire was over. The Bolsheviks were looking for their counterpart in Anatolia.

Were they seeking the establishment of another Soviet government there? It was obvious that they were questioning the possibility of this. However, another thing was also obvious: After their focus shifted from world revolution to the establishment of socialism in one country and defense of Soviet Union, or even just before this shift in 1919, the Bolsheviks were not acting with the goal of a socialist Turkey. What they sought was a resistance and a government that would have become a thorn in the side of British imperialism. Ittihatists, *Karakol* society<sup>236</sup>, socialist-communist groups, Mustafa Kemal were all becoming valuable within the context of this concern, and Soviet government was establishing relations with every one of these elements. The resourcefulness, sincerity and effectiveness of a given actor with reference to the main concern was more important than its ideological motivations.

The change in the direction of revolution from the west to the east did not mean that the revolution, which did not happen in the west, would have happened in the east. Others aside, Lenin and Stalin, who were the prominent Bolsheviks on Eastern Question, were shrewd (and Marxists) enough to grasp the limits, class background and ideological direction of the anti-imperialist anger and Soviet sympathy that emerged in the east. They did not intend to embark on any baseless adventures.

The core of their strategy was bolshevization of the “East” which fell within the confines of former Russian Empire, while creating “nationalist” states as friendly as possible towards the Soviets, in which imperialism would not be able to create threats to Soviet order, in the rest of the East. The task of the communists in these countries would be to become independent forces and support this process, and prepare for future struggles. Lenin was saying this in 1920:

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.<sup>237</sup>

When it came to the east, it was impossible for Soviet government to take into its agenda an assistance similar to that given to the workers' movement in the west. The proletariat was still weak, elements that rapidly became communists had very loose ties to Marxism and, most importantly, Soviet government's own East was still weak due to same reasons. A revolutionary alliance with a large rural (and Muslim) population might have caused a shift in the axis of the "new order" that had found its material base in Petrograd. In this sense, it can be said that, the theses presented on this issue by Lenin to the Second Congress of the Comintern and accepted after much argument were appropriate to the spirit of "socialism in one country" policy on two aspects. First, Soviet Russia had to resist the international blockade against it and proceed with a realist international policy in accordance to its own interests; and second, it had to base itself on a minimum level of social development so as not to make concessions from communism, which was a very modern social cause.

Another reminder... In 1919, there was no single "centre of power" in Anatolia that the Bolsheviks could have taken into account. Moscow was making attempts, establishing contacts, trying to understand and get to know the actors. This problem was not completely solved even with the establishment of Grand National Assembly on April 23, 1920. It should also be kept in mind that a similar problem was also present to an extent from the Turkish direction. Everybody knew that there were various orientations within the Bolshevik Party. Moreover, it was also obvious that different orientations were representing Soviet order in different regions. For example, in Caucasia, which was utmost interest to Turkey, those who spoke for Soviet government were usually voicing their "own" policies instead of Moscow's.

On the other hand, Turkey did not have much chance in affecting

the political balance in Soviet Russia but Moscow had an influence (although a limited one) in Anatolia. Therefore, a support from the Soviets was necessary to come to power in Turkey.

It can be said that Ittihatists, particularly Enver had a greater chance in the beginning. They still held the most important positions in the remnants of Ottoman Army, the authority of Talat and Enver persisted, and, most importantly, they had assumed a part in a very important alliance project between Germany, Russia and Turkey.<sup>238</sup>

However, Enver also had a very tarnished record for the Bolsheviks. They were looking for ways of establishing relations with Germany themselves, but would not have trusted somebody who was manipulated by the German state in Anatolia very much. Moreover, Enver had embarked on an adventure that also included the eastern regions of Soviet order and the risks presented by this was obvious. Besides, we also know that Lenin did not attach a great importance to Enver.

On the other hand, they quickly came to understand Mustafa Kemal. A careful observation concludes that in 1920, Lenin and Stalin had reached several conclusions on Mustafa Kemal.

He was pragmatic...

He thought that Ottoman Empire was over...

He would have stood close with the Soviets until the British were resigned to a sovereign state in Anatolia...

He was the most resolute among the cadres in Ankara on collaboration with the Soviets...

He was an anti-communist...

He had great leadership skills...

He was secular...

They had no particular expectations. With such a leadership, Turkey was bound to become closer with Britain eventually. However, the struggle of Soviets for the establishment of socialism in one country was in need of a friendly movement in Anatolia that would have kept the British busy as long as possible.

We observe that between 1919 and 1921, until the signing of the March 16 treaty, the Bolsheviks had gradually become decided on Mustafa Kemal in the chaos in Anatolia. Among those who

thought otherwise was the Commissar of Foreign Affairs. This is not surprising. Chicherin, who was far too keen on the rapprochement with Germany, was objecting to the monopoly that was allowed to Kemalists in relations with the Soviets even after the signing of the treaty. He was warning the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party on April 22, 1921:

Monetary assistance to Enver's group is an issue separate from his publishing of newspapers in Moscow. The assistance is necessary for the survival of the organization of non-Kemalist Turkish nationalists. These elements, who are the remnants of former Young Turk rulers, have widespread relations in all Central Europe as well as influential groups and relations in Egypt, Algiers, Morocco etc. They need money to upkeep their ventures in several countries, to send their men to Egypt etc. The necessary amount is an annual 15 thousand Liras and this is not an unreasonable sum. I think we can manage this. They have relations and areas of activity that Kemalists do not have. Moreover, maintaining relations with an alternative Turkish group other than Kemalists would be beneficial.

It is true that Enver belongs to a more imperialist camp, but being a more meticulous politician, he is assessing the contemporary reality better than Kemalists and understands our position better. It is without doubt that we will employ his political assistance and support in the future. Therefore, we should maintain out fellowship and maintain his affiliation with us.<sup>239</sup>

Some doors were carefully opened to Enver, he also tried to circumvent those that were not, but Soviet government never placed any trust in him. This unique conspirator and bourgeois revolutionary of Turkish history found himself fighting against the Red Army in the end, and there he met his own end...

However, it should not be forgotten that Enver, in his journey from Berlin to Moscow, and then to Baku, played a part in strengthening the National Struggle (say, delivery of German weapons to Anatolia over Russia or joining some Ittihatist cadres to the struggle) by vouching for Mustafa Kemal and saying "*he's connected to us*".

Enver's problem was acting without grasping the immediate needs of Soviet government, underestimating the Bolsheviks and being unable to come to terms with the Ottoman downfall.

Mustafa Kemal on the other hand had realized the needs of the Bolsheviks, and took steps to prevent that they did not seek anything beyond these needs by both sidelining other actors and preventing Bolshevism from becoming an independent and actual power in Turkey.

At this point, it is worth underlining that the popularity of Bolshevism in Anatolia never reached a level at which it became a defining movement in the National Struggle, the class base of communist movement remained extremely weak and, moreover, an actor which could have brought together the scattered groups that felt sympathy towards Bolshevism (some of them without understanding it at all) never emerged. It is also worth mentioning the role of inconsistent and calculating Ittihatists in this widespread sympathy.<sup>240</sup>

Frankly, the formations that could be seen as rivals of Mustafa Kemal, from the Green Army<sup>241</sup> to the People's Group in Grand National Assembly, although they merit attention with their egalitarian discourses, did not have a long enough existence in which we can historically test their political orientations. However, it should be noted that the liquidation of these formations resulted in a regression of the ideological coordinates of the Republic.

All these events were naturally of importance to groups more directly linked to communism, particularly TKP and its first leader Mustafa Suphi. They were in great need of this authentic and drifting socialist energy in Anatolia. However, history and fortune were not on their side, as we will see further on...

Mustafa Kemal was determined to let no movement persist on his left, neither in Grand National Assembly, nor on the field. He had started to take steps to weaken the People's Group in the Assembly, which was advocating "*an eclectic mixture of Pan-Islamism and egalitarian populism.*"<sup>242</sup> Ethem the Circassian and his Green Army would have been dealt with in a similar way.

It was a very opportune period for such policies. The defeat of the Red Army in Poland had increased the security concerns of the

Soviets; therefore, they would have been inclined to accept whomever held the authority in Anatolia. Moreover, since the Bolsheviks had been disappointed in the west, they had to focus on the Eastern Question. They would have found new partners, or created these. Therefore, it would have been prudent to hurry and remove one's alternatives.

The greatest advantage of Mustafa Kemal in the eyes of Soviets was that he was not affiliated with pan-Turkist or Islamist groups like Enver and others:

On March 16, 1920 (that is, the day on Allied Powers occupied Istanbul), Mustafa Kemal ordered Kazım Karabekir<sup>243</sup> to mobilize his forces forthwith to assist in the sovietization of Georgia and Azerbaijan. On the next day, Kazım Karabekir sent a telegram to Halil Pasha in Baku, telling him the help the Bolshevik forces to topple Musavat Party government and prevent anti-Soviet activities of other Ittihatists in the region. This was not an undue demand. Although Nuri Pasha (younger brother of Enver Pasha) seemed allied to the Bolsheviks in organizing Muslims in Dagestan into the Green Army against Denikin, he was covertly trying to facilitate the annexation of the region by Turkey for the establishment of an "Islamic Unity."<sup>244</sup>

Here we should make a particular note: There is no ground whatsoever for thinking that Ankara deceived Moscow by acting like a leftist force, or betrayed its fellowship. It was obvious right from the beginning that the alliance between the two countries and movements was a temporary one. Soviet Russia was very certain about the class character of the power in Anatolia and furthermore, it was obvious that this power would have come to terms with the British at an opportune moment. This was a partnership, in a particular historical period, built upon mutual interests between one socialist and one bourgeois revolutionary movement, which had been very beneficial to both. In the final analysis, with this partnership, the revolutionary front opened in October 1917 had come to include the National Struggle in Turkey.

This was, on every aspect, a marriage of convenience.

In addition, the factor that pushed Mustafa Kemal towards the

Soviets was the greed, arrogance and mindlessness of Britain, which were displayed on more than one occasion.

Firstly, it had destroyed the authority of Palace government in Anatolia by turning it into a vassal and degrading its power, therefore created a power vacuum, which could have been filled by an alternative power (1918).

Secondly, it greenlighted the occupation of Western Anatolia starting from Izmir by Greece and incited a nationalist reaction that was never inflamed so much against Italy, France or itself (1919).

Thirdly, it renewed and consolidated the occupation of Istanbul to the disappointment of those seeking an early agreement with it (1920).

All three steps were obviously damaging to British interests. The first allowed Mustafa Kemal to use the authority and cadres of the Palace for accumulating power with which he challenged the same Palace.

The second incited resistance in Anatolia and deepened the contradictions between imperialist occupiers, dropping first the Italians, and then the French out of the equation. Moreover, with the occupation of Izmir, the seeking of the Soviets for an ally in Anatolia intensified since Moscow appraised the military presence of Greece in Anatolia as a direct threat to itself.

Lastly, the occupation of Istanbul for a second time annulled the position of those who considered taking a common stance with the British against the Soviets (particularly in Caucasia), and destroyed the last shreds of legitimacy that Ottoman Empire had. Mustafa Kemal would have appraised the situation as, *“today, by the occupation of Istanbul by force, the seven hundred years long life and rule of the Ottoman State has been ended. Therefore, today, the Turkish Nation has been called to the defense of its right of civilization, right of existence, its independence and its whole future”* and later write in his *Great Speech* that *“In truth, at that moment in history, the foundations of Ottoman state had crumbled, and its life was done.”*<sup>245</sup>

Besides, the occupation of Istanbul had also annulled the arguments against the moving of Grand National Assembly to Ankara.

Lenin was evaluating the British mindlessness as “*the Entente countries have done everything they could to render impossible any more or less normal relations [with Turkey].*”<sup>246</sup>

Britain and France had invited revolution in Germany by strangling it, and now Britain was creating a room for maneuver for Ankara by strangling Istanbul.

As I mentioned above, the Bolsheviks were under no illusions about the government in Ankara; they were well aware of the motivations Mustafa Kemal had in seeking their collaboration.

The points he made in his letter to Kazım Karabekir on June 23, 1919, apart from some emphases made to convince Karabekir, were quite reflective of Mustafa Kemal’s strategy; and by the beginning of 1920 Soviet leadership had unraveled this strategy and started to develop policies that were appropriate to it:

To force the Allied Powers out of our country it would be appropriate to claim that their presence creates the threat of a Bolshevik occupation of our country and take actions accordingly. On the other hand, it would be appropriate to send some respected persons from that region incognito, and through them proceed with negotiations to come to an agreement with the Bolsheviks without waiting for them to make the first move. Therefore, there will be no ground for the Bolsheviks to enter into our country with force. To this end, it would be appropriate to claim that the national power is already established in this country, and receive some delegates (albeit undercover for the time being) to negotiate our future prospects and issues like exchange of weapons, ammunition, technical equipment, money and personnel when needed. With your acumen, you would undoubtedly agree that, coming to an agreement with them in this context, keeping them at the border and using their presence as a means to force the Allied Powers out of the country would be very much appropriate.<sup>247</sup>

This telegram is important since it was dispatched right after a meeting in which Mustafa Kemal received a delegation from the Soviets (it is unclear whether this was a delegation of Soviet representatives or Turks coming from the Soviets) in the town of

Havza in Samsun province. From that moment onwards, in spite of all the ups and downs, we observe a Mustafa Kemal who was determined to establish close relations with the Bolsheviks until the end of Allied occupation.

It was this Mustafa Kemal who found the option of making an alliance with the British to fight against the Bolsheviks “unrealistic,” but instead of refusing this indecent proposal outright, named a price that Allied Powers would not be able to pay:

There are two options before us. For the Allied States to hope for us to take up arms against the Bolsheviks, they must make many compromises and at least concede us the non-Arabian territories that they have kept under occupation for at least a year. They would opt for such a conclusion, which would mean a fundamental concession for Britain, France, Italy and Greece, only under most dire circumstances. And it is obvious that the Allied States do not see themselves in such a situation today. If they do not choose to appease us, they must opt to destroy us, and to this end, first they would have to break all our means of resistance.<sup>248</sup>

The plan [of the British in Caucasia] is being executed with great seriousness and excessive haste. If this plan is succeeded, and our land becomes surrounded with the formation of a definite barrier against us by the nations of Caucasia, the reasons of resistance for Turkey will be fundamentally demolished. From that point onwards, Anatolian Turks would lose all political existence and form armies under the command of military officers of Allied Powers, to shed blood to keep the Caucasian nations under Allied yoke and stop Bolshevik expansion.<sup>249</sup>

Mustafa Kemal was trying to keep the faction (headed by Rauf Orbay) that was for an agreement with the British under pressure. In fact, there was also a difference of opinion in Britain on its Turkish policy. Prime Minister Lloyd George was devising a disintegrated country that is crammed into a narrow space in Anatolia, while Churchill, who was obsessed with Bolshevism, was insisting on using Turkey against the Reds.

The conflicts, differences of opinion and competition within imperialism, which helped the Soviets to gain a breathing space, was also providing the National Struggle in Anatolia with a room for maneuver.

On November 2, 1918, before deciding to embark on occupying Izmir, Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos was writing, "*the primary obstacle against Greek expansion into Anatolia is the Italian objection*"<sup>250</sup> to the British Prime Minister. Apparently they altogether disregarded this objection since the occupation was initiated shortly afterwards. The result, however, was as conveyed by the US ambassador in Izmir:

The foreign merchants and privilege holders that form most of the foreign colony here are so against Greeks that they would prefer the Turks to Greeks. Anybody who sees the dilapidated tramway system of Izmir that consists of one-horse carriages, or the urban lighting layout that is a remnant from the middle ages would understand why these gentlemen, who get rich by peddling their bad services at high prices under protection of Turkish government, would be against the Greeks. Since almost all these companies made outrageous profits and enjoyed exclusive privileges with their Turkish partners and through their collusion with Turkish officials, they were not pleased at all with the arrival of the Greeks, who are their greatest competitors in the Orient.<sup>251</sup>

Interestingly, Italian and French presence in Anatolia did not disturb the Soviet government, which was focused on Britain, either. On the other hand, they were aware that Greece had embarked on its occupation on behalf of Britain, and were hoping for a resistance (even if a temporary one) in Anatolia that would damage British interests.

As the resistance made itself felt, the Bolsheviks started to act in a more calculated manner so as not to take a step that would force Kemalists towards an agreement with the British. This possibility became strongest during the tension in Armenia in 1920 that brought relations on the brink of collapse. The solution to this problem was a testimony to how dominant the policy of

establishment of socialism in one country had become in Soviet Russia. However, prior to that, in July, the ECCI, under the influence of Zinoviev, had released an Appeal on the Forthcoming Congress of the Peoples of the East at Baku. The Appeal, while proving that the Bolsheviks were under no illusion about the class and ideological character of the government in Ankara, is also important since it shows that there were some among them who were not very keen on collaboration with the movement in Anatolia:

Some of the Effendis and Beys have sold themselves to the foreign capitalists; others have called you to arms and are organizing you for the fight against the foreign invaders; but they do not allow you to take the government of your country into your own hands, to take for yourselves the fields which the Sultan presented to his parasites; to grow corn in these fields and to feed yourselves. And tomorrow, if the foreign capitalists should grant your masters better peace terms, your present leaders with the help of the foreigners, will again put you in chains just as the large landlords and the former officials are doing in the areas where the foreign armies are in command.

Peasants and workers of Armenia! For years you have been victims of the intrigues of foreign capital, which protested loudly against the massacres of the Armenians by the Kurds, and stirred you up to fight against the Sultan only in order to get greater profits from your struggle. During the war they not only promised you independence, they incited your merchants, your teachers and your priests to demand the land of the Turkish peasants so that there should be unending hostility between the Armenian and Turkish peoples, a hostility from which they could draw unending profits. For so long as there is enmity between you and the Turks so long will the English, French, and American capitalists be able to keep the Turks on a leash, threatening them with the danger of Armenian revolt and intimidating the Armenians with the danger of a Kurd pogrom.

(...)

Peasants of Anatolia! You have already been called to the standard of Kemal Pasha, to fight the foreign invaders, but at the same time we know that you are trying to form your own people's and peasants' party, which will be able to fight on alone even if the Pashas make peace with the Entente despoilers.<sup>252</sup>

Soviet leadership knew that Turkey would eventually come to an agreement with Britain. They wanted to stall this for some time and consolidate their own power in Caucasia, and force the British to take some steps backwards by supporting anti-imperialist movements from Turkey to India, from Iran to Afghanistan. At least this was what Lenin and Stalin had in mind.



## As the Revolution Turns to Face East

The Second Congress of the Comintern was convened with a much more serious preparation than the first. The delegates had a greater representative power and, more importantly, some of the member parties had become real political actors in their countries. The Congress convened on July 19, 1920 in Petrograd, and concluded on August 7 in Moscow.

The Second Congress was, basically, Lenin's "*Left-Wing Communism*" pamphlet, and his very prudent theses on the Eastern Question, which were completely in line the pamphlet, and which take the policy of socialism in one country as their point of departure. When these two are taken together, it becomes evident that Soviet Russia had "given up hope of world revolution for the time being."

However, one large map put on the congress hall was singing a different tune! The map showed the advance of the Red Army troops into Poland and the red arrows on it were updated every day. As Lenin, with all his authority, was speaking for patience and moderation from the lectern, the minds of the delegates were on the anticipated good news from Soviet army under the command of impatient Tukhachevsky. At that moment, Lenin was theory while the Red Army was a great practice; everybody knew that if the red flag was unfurled above Warsaw, it would have dispelled the ill fate of world revolution.

Interestingly, the Poland campaign was just a map in the Second

Congress of the Comintern. It was not taken into agenda by explicit orders from Lenin, and it is absurd to think of this as a military-strategical secretiveness. Lenin would of course have taken steps to prevent his theses, which he had prepared with great care and advocated with all his acumen for their approval by the Congress, from being sidelined by a shift in the direction of the meeting.

The Red Army was marching West, but Lenin was pointing the East!

In the next Congress, he would have said, *"It is perfectly clear that in the impending decisive battles in the world revolution, the movement of the majority of the population of the globe, initially directed towards national liberation, will turn against capitalism and imperialism and will, perhaps, play a much more revolutionary part than we expect."*<sup>253</sup> However, the critical point here was what he implied with "revolutionary part." Lenin did not share the opinion that the center of socialist revolution had shifted east at all. His point was that, the revolutionary energy accumulating in the east could have been used against imperialism. There were others who wanted more and thought that socialist powers might have emerged one after the other in Asia; but Lenin was not only a "communist" but also a very qualified Marxist, and he was keen on using the energy accumulating in the east in the only real (and in this sense the only revolutionary) goal possible:

The second basic idea in our theses is that, in the present world situation following the imperialist war, reciprocal relations between peoples and the world political system as a whole are determined by the struggle waged by a small group of imperialist nations against the Soviet movement and the Soviet states headed by Soviet Russia. Unless we bear that in mind, we shall not be able to pose a single national or colonial problem correctly, even if it concerns a most outlying part of the world. The Communist parties, in civilised and backward countries alike, can pose and solve political problems correctly only if they make this postulate their starting-point.<sup>254</sup>

Can there be a clearer narrative for the strategy of socialism in one country? With these words, Lenin was saying in 1920 that

they would have put the defense of Soviet power in their central focus on taking any question into consideration, in both the east and the west! This approach was different from the suggestion that the anti-imperialist movement in the east had been more important and more revolutionary in the eyes of the Comintern than the workers' movement in the west. Moreover, it was a stern warning to those who did not stop at that point and developed the thesis that the poor people of the east provided a more solid foundation for the communist cause than western proletariat.

If this had been the way Lenin thought, then where would we place the First Congress of the Peoples of the East at Baku that was convened right after the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920?

The Congress of the Peoples of the East convened on September 1 by Narimanov representing ECCI, with an emphasis on its being the "First" and the good news in the opening speech that it would have been convened annually. This did not happen, and the Congress of the Peoples of the East was convened only once; nevertheless, it surely carried importance since it proved that the Comintern could mobilize a considerable force and establish widespread alliances in Asia. Şevket Süreyya, who attended the Congress from Turkey, noted later that playful clash of blades and outbursts of sentiments had been frequent. The whole interesting affair had been conceived more like a rally than a congress, and evidently the demonstration had been intended as an address mainly towards Britain.

Britain was of course following and watching. Curzon had said back in the beginning of 1920 that "*The Bolsheviks had come to an agreement with the Muslims on attacking the East when they could not stir up Europe.*"<sup>255</sup> The frightening thing for London about the crowd in Baku (which actually could not have developed a joint strategy) was that their common denominator had been their hatred against Britain. In the speeches made on the behalf of Russian Communist Party, the enemy was reduced to four countries; and the leading role had been reserved for Britain with France, Japan and the USA mentioned only in passing.

There were some in the Comintern who did not take this

Congress seriously, but it has to be underlined today that the Congress in Baku was an important event, and should be seen as so. Its value was not in the debates, and in any case, someone looking at the minutes would not be able to discern a common direction in the speeches. However, the Congress was an effective and stern ultimatum against British imperialism, and it was successful in that regard.

There are some who link the fact that a second Congress of the Peoples of the East was never convened with the Soviet concession to not engage in anti-British propaganda in the East in the agreement reached with the British in 1921. The Soviets really made such a compromise in the said agreement but there was no need for a second congress anyway, the first one had been sufficient to fulfill the intended purpose.

Lenin was especially emphasizing after the Congress that the British had no right to complain since the Congress had been convened in independent Azerbaijan, not in Soviet Russia.<sup>256</sup> Soviet government was careful not to present any opportunities for the British. This had been another reason why there had been almost no one from the Soviet government in the Congress and the responsibility of the process had been left to Comintern officials.

The Congress at Baku was organized by the Comintern but the appeal was somewhat in the lines of "*Come one, come all; anyone who is against British imperialism is welcome.*" The prominent figures of the Third International were present as the communist wing. Then there were those who made a rapid shift from nationalism or Islamism to communism, those who acted like communists, and those who did not bother to act but directed their nationalist anger towards British imperialism... Also Enver, and representatives of Kemalism...

The Congress at Baku could have produced neither an international organization nor a common strategy; and there is no evidence that the Bolshevik Party was acting with such expectations. There might have been some fantastic plans of opening in the east the way of the revolution that was stalled in the west flying around in the mind of the Comintern chairman Zinoviev; but neither he, nor Radek or Béla Kun (who became prominent within the

Comintern team at the Congress) had any weight in the Eastern policy of the Soviet power in 1920.

We should remember that the Soviet order had called military officers from the tsarist army to its help in the Civil War and foreign intervention, and Trotsky as the Commissar of Military had carried this process to extremes without taking any precautions. The Bolsheviks had a shortage of cadres, everywhere...

In its expansion towards the east, the main shortcoming of the Soviet power concerning human resources was "political." The Bolsheviks had always created brilliant cadres from Caucasia, the first and foremost among these had been Stalin, but most of these were deployed according to the needs of class struggle in critical western cities. And now, as this power expanded towards the wide geography of the east, particularly towards the lands of Muslim peoples, it was faced with an ideological and cultural atmosphere quite alien to it.

East of the Ural Mountains, mostly local powers had stepped in to fill the power vacuum created by the toppling of the Provisional Government and dissolution of the authority of Tsardom. The fact that some of these represented the authority of the Soviets did not solve the problem; because in the chaotic environment that emerged after the October Revolution, power groups of all shape and size were striving to lay an anchor to the windward.

Soviet rule, which was acting with the goal of establishing its own authority within the borders of the collapsed empire, could not have achieved this without a "party." However, in many parts of the geography there was not even a single Marxist. Stalin embarked on the business of filling this vacuum by drawing segments of the nationalist, even Islamist intelligentsia that affiliated themselves with the revolutionary front into the party. Some naturally came with their own agendas and waged an implicit struggle against the Soviet order; some others managed to stay within the party for quite some time even if they never became communists. Some of the Soviet Republics were ruled by these people; some became involved in the conspiracies of the opposition in 1930s and were removed between 1936-1938. Some suffered the same fate not because they were involved in any conspiracy but because they

only pretended being communists.

Producing Bolsheviks out of pan-Turkists and pan-Islamists had started in 1918 out of necessity, but unlike the uncontrolled manner of Trotsky in the Red Army, Stalin had decided right at the beginning to shape these persons rigidly into form and limit their room for maneuver.

Among the Bolshevik leaders, it had been Stalin, who understood the revolutionary opportunities and difficulties presented by the Muslim population to the struggle of power given by the Soviet order in the east; and he developed realistic, inclusive policies. He was loved among Muslim revolutionaries in this aspect. He had been the one who intervened and stopped the removal of many “made” Bolsheviks right at their first misstep and approached them with patience. One of his protégés had been Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, and when his anti-Soviet activities came to light, Stalin would have testified before the party as, “*had we not tolerated such for a while, we would have been left without a single cadre.*”

Soviet order’s policy in its own east had been shaped by Lenin and Stalin.

This duo was absent in the Congress at Baku. The keynote address of the Congress was made on the first day by Zinoviev, who claimed that proletarian revolution was at hand in Iran, Turkey, India and China. Although a more sensible position when compared with the later, stagist strategies; this thesis was quite meaningless when brought before the delegation of 1920, the majority of which were not communists. Besides, it was in opposition to Lenin’s theses that had been adopted after bitter arguments in the Second Congress of the Comintern.

He had also given the good news in the inaugural ceremony on the day before saying, “*do not be troubled by the defeat of the Red Army at Warsaw, not months but only weeks will have to pass before our red flag will be unfurled above Warsaw.*”

Zinoviev was one great misfortune for the Comintern.

There were many variations to the theme, but quite a few of the delegates attending the Congress at Baku –and some of these were members of the RCP(b)– were seeking some kind of an Eastern

Union. "The unity of poor peasants and downtrodden peoples" was an exciting concept at first sight, and this was supposed to be achieved in the name of Communism.

However, it was out of question for Lenin and Stalin to become part of the atmosphere at Baku. They knew that what had not been achieved on the basis provided by the advanced proletariat of the west could not have been achieved in the east. The Soviets and world revolution needed an East in which the influence and dominion of Britain was curtailed. This was one aspect of their objection.

However, there was another, more important side to the issue. Almost all those who were arguing for an Eastern Union, whether they were pan-Turkists or pan-Islamists, wanted to include the eastern geography of the Soviets in it. Any Marxist who more or less thought rationally would have understood that this would not have meant an expansion, but a disintegration for the Soviet rule. Under those conditions, it was impossible to link the expansive geography that contained Caucasia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and India without a radical change in the class foundations and ideological references of the Soviet country.

Besides, it should not be forgotten that, although it became coagulated and started to degrade after 1950s, the Soviet government had a completely doctrinarian structure and all its strategic calculations were conceived within a Marxist-Leninist perspective. The concept of an Eastern Unity, although it appealed to romantic revolutionary sentiments, was a goal that could have only been realized through a synthesis of Marxism and nationalism.

Stalin, on the contrary, was trying to prevent the emergence of unions on the basis of ethnicity or religion while he was attracting non-communist elements to the Bolshevik Party. Therefore, he blocked the foundation of an autonomous Muslim Communist Party, and the declaration of a single large Turkestan that would have gathered many ethnic communities together.

The First Congress of Muslim Communist Organizations had convened in 1918. It had been as early as this point that Stalin started to take steps to prevent an autonomy based on religion.

However, as I noted above, he was also making a patient and systematic effort to channel the emerging revolutionary energy into correct channels in an environment where the foundations of communism were almost nonexistent. First, he created the Central Bureau of Muslim Organizations of the RCP(b). In addition, the Committee of Muslim Socialists (MUSCOM), which was chaired by Sultan-Galiev, came into effect as an executive body. In 1919, this was replaced by Tatar-Bashkir Commissariat, and the Central Bureau of Muslim Organizations of the RCP(b) was renamed as Central Bureau of the Communist Organizations of the People of the East.

The ambitious project conceived by Enver did not have a theoretical chance in the eyes of the Soviet leadership within this complex panorama. However, the real reason behind the failure of his presentation, which was eclectic and full of small tricks, to create an excitement among the delegates at the Congress at Baku was his past record. Otherwise, the fantasy of an Eastern Soviet that would somehow overshadow Soviet Russia had a substantial backing in the Congress.

The Congress at Baku had served as a warning for the realist wing of the Soviet government. Moreover, Lenin and Stalin were coming to understand the resistance of both pan-Islamist and pan-Turkist ideologies against communist ideology and the risks involved in transferring cadres from these quarters.<sup>257</sup>

The place where they had the most luck was Azerbaijan, where the Hummat (Labour) Party that had its roots in the Revolution of 1905 had provided the basis for the Communist Party. It is beyond argument that the personal efforts of Nariman Narimanov played an important role here. Narimanov, although he had his controversial aspects, had been one of the most valuable cadres of Soviet government in the Muslim lands until his early death in 1925.

Here I once more have to stress that, the extent of problems caused for the new order by the lack of cadres was beyond all conception. Narimanov assumed many important duties in Soviet Azerbaijan, including that of the head of government, and one must accept that all these happened very rapidly. This had been the case with all the prominent politicians (which were also few

and far between) in the Soviet East. For example, we would arrive at wrong conclusions if we try to gauge the historical importance of Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev (who have come to be promoted as an almost “ground-breaking” revolutionary in Turkey) by the size of the duties he assumed, or attach a special importance to his assistance to Stalin at the Commissariat of Nationalities. People that became prominent in Kazan like Galiev and Mollanur Vahidov were among the revolutionaries who took steps to fill the power vacuum created by the establishment of Soviet order in regions that Bolshevism had not touched at all before 1917. Undoubtedly, they made great contributions; but they were also so deluded as to see the impossibility of shaping the Soviet power according to their nationalism that was vested in pseudo-Marxism. Sometimes dialectics work in quite ruthless ways...

However, this was all they had to work on. The only problem was not about the expansion of Soviet order into its own east. From 1918 onwards, the Muslim settlements had also become an important source from which the Red Army conscripted soldiers, and collaboration with the local leaders was a precondition for keeping this source available.

You had to be either Red, or White. However, the White Army held no attraction for the nationalist or Islamist circles. They were commanded by generals who thought they were the representatives of the superior Russian race, and they did not even see the downtrodden peoples as human beings. The disdain displayed by the White Army towards local forces was pushing more Muslims towards the ranks of the Red Army; and those who entered the ranks also assumed political representation of Bolshevism in their own manner. The defection of Crimean Tatars as a reaction to Denikin was a typical example.<sup>258</sup> Similar secessions had also happened in Kazakhstan.

Among the Bolshevik leaders, the person who managed this complex and arduous process and undertook the tough job of separating those who can sincerely be won to the communist cause from those who sought personal gains, or the traitors who saw Bolshevism as a springboard for their nationalist agenda from among the local leaders was Stalin.

This effort had at least resulted in keeping the Muslim communities neutral during the critical period of 1919-1920. Afterwards, as the new order proceeded with a more meticulous shaping of the country, those who could not have been a part of this process were eliminated one by one.

There were also interesting particularities. We can count Bashkir Sharif Manatov as a prominent example. Manatov had been a nationalist right wing politician close to Mensheviks until the end of 1917 but became a loyal and relatively consistent Bolshevik from 1918 onwards. He travelled to Turkey in secret between 1919-1920 and worked to create a communist organization. Manatov presents a good example to the nationalist cadres who affiliated themselves with the new order until his expulsion from the Communist Party of Soviet Union in 1935.

Now, let us make a summary of the political threats presented by the east-centered thinking that made themselves felt in the Congress at Baku:

1. In a stagist approach, some nationalist elements were seeing the October Revolution as a step towards liberation from Russian dominion. Eventually, they would have proceeded with their “national” project.
2. There were those who had set their mind on moving the center of the world revolution to a geography that had no proletariat and therefore cause the communist cause to fade among local particularities.
3. Some had plans of burdening the Red Army, or Red Armies with the struggle against British imperialism and collaborationist local forces that are fattened by it across a vast geography with very weak class foundations, and carving local positions of power for themselves from the power vacuums that would have resulted.
4. If credence would have been given to the presented conditionality between communism and Islam, the strategy of the Soviet power, which had based itself on an alliance between the proletarians of the west and the downtrodden people of the east, would have taken a heavy blow; moreover, this

would have demolished the foundations upon which a secular social order would have been built.

The groundless revolutionary optimism of Zinoviev would not have worked against these threats that had become apparent in the Congress at Baku. The Soviet government was proceeding on the strategy of socialism in one country.

Contrary to various claims, the differences of opinion in the Second Congress of the Comintern, especially those between Lenin and Indian revolutionary Roy, were not about how the revolutionary process would have developed in the Eastern countries, it was about whether or not the center of world revolution would have shifted eastwards. A correct approach to Roy's (who himself had become a communist "very rapidly" while in Mexico) position, which appears as a "revolutionary" one at first sight, would discern the exceedingly weak connections established with Marxism instead of seeing it as just a hasty left deviation. Consequently, Roy, after assuming some important duties in the Communist International for a while, proceed to become something that he called a "radical humanist." All my life, I tried to refrain from leaving books unfinished, but at some point in my effort to read Roy's two-volume book *Reason Romanticism and Revolution*, I started jumping from chapter to chapter and eventually gave up.<sup>259</sup> It is really hard to believe that Roy, who obviously understood nothing about Marxism, had been a communist in 1919. The only good mark that can be given to him is that he makes quite an effort not to take a hostile stance towards the Soviet order...<sup>260</sup>

This was really a perplexing situation. Most of the eastern revolutionaries who were unhappy that "*Lenin did not ascribe socialist revolution to Asia; he only foresaw an alliance with bourgeois nationalism,*" were motivated by nationalist tendencies themselves. For example, Enver, Galiev and Roy had their different traits but all were keen on "playing big" and in this sense, they were on the "left"; but the fact of the matter was that, Nationalist Communism, Muslim Communism, Local Communism etc. were all "right" tendencies on a class basis. Some may object to my placing Enver's name among these but we are not making a

distinction here between who was sincere and who was not. In the final analysis, in his presentation at Baku, Enver was taking the mission of spreading the “world revolution” eastward as his point of departure.

What I want to point out is that, despite all the differences among them, a majority of those who attended the Congress at Baku were circling around a program that would have been divisive and subversive to the Soviet order with its rhetoric of spreading the world revolution.

It was obvious that Galiev and others, who had started to assert that “*all classes in Muslim society are proletarians*,”<sup>261</sup> were using the thesis that the working class had been “bought off” in Europe (they were twisting Lenin’s writings to provide a reference to this) to develop a strategy under the banner of “Communism” or “Bolshevism” that would have only resulted in the strengthening of a new propertied class. Lenin and Stalin, on the other hand, had devised a roadmap in which they would have accepted the bourgeois nationalist movements in this geography as they were, supported them in their struggle to diminish the presence and influence of Britain, and promoted the establishment and empowerment of independent communist parties by preventing these movements from playing the “communist.”

There really was a great energy in the East but the “most revolutionary nation is mine” nonsense was also prevalent. The claim “*the Tatars objectively are more revolutionary than the Russians, because they have been more heavily oppressed by czarism than the Russians*”<sup>262</sup> was being echoed by every national movement in some form or another. Indeed, if all this competition had not been present, the Soviet order would have been really hard pressed to keep a pan-Islamist or pan-Turkist movement in check!

There were even some among the nationalist communists (who had also started to advocate that the class struggle should be postponed) who said that materialist thought had been conceived first during the reign of Genghis Khan in Mongolia.

Historical consciousness is essential. We don’t have to abide with this orientalist romanticism because of the presence and cruelty of western imperialism.

The feeling of responsibility against world revolution in the Soviets in 1920 was calling for realism, not romanticism:

The line we in the Central Committee are following is one of maximum concessions to Britain. If these gentlemen think they will catch us breaking promises, we declare that our government will not carry on any official propaganda and that we have no intention of infringing on any of Britain's interests in the East. If they hope to derive some advantage from this, let them try; we shall not be the losers.<sup>263</sup>

These frank, unceremonious words are Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's. Interestingly, at the time they were voiced, Soviet Russia was helping the National Struggle in Anatolia against the occupation supported by Britain. This implies that the Soviets' support to the Kemalists did not mean breaking the word given to the British!

The three political powers of different ideological orientations in Ankara, London and Moscow were all certain that, relations between Turkey and Britain would have rapidly improved once the occupation was over. The problem was that, there was a faction in Britain that still believed another way was possible. The Soviets, who wanted to annul the ventures of this circle, had more than one reason to support the Kemalists.



## Handshake on the Border: Caucasia

Uniting even all of the Turks across the world into one state is a target impossible to attain. This is a reality proven by centuries, and by the people that lived through painful, bloody events that transpired in those centuries. There is no moment in history that pan-Islamist and pan-Turanist<sup>264</sup> politics achieved success and imposed its practice upon the world.<sup>265</sup>

It is easy to understand almost completely why Soviet Russia supported the National Struggle in Anatolia by these words taken from Mustafa Kemal's *Speech*. I am not interested in the ethnic and religious aspects of the matter; the issue here is a complex political question that had become an element within the imperialist conflicts and struggles. Some parts of the geography of the eastern reaches of Russian Empire, where Muslim and Turkic populations lived, were areas of competition that had brought about the war in 1914. The uncertainty of the situation in these parts increased to the extent that the two critical chapters of the Russian Revolution (February and October), each in turn, found it hard to reestablish its authority in these regions. Then, after Brest-Litovsk and Mudros, a hard struggle, which included decisive divisions and confrontations, happened between 1920-1921, particularly in Caucasia.

The long hand of Germany had been broken and it was no longer a decisive actor in Caucasia. However, its partner in the war, the

Ottoman Empire, had not yet abandoned the dreams of increasing its gains at Brest even further after Mudros. It was trying to rebuild the empire it lost in the west towards its northeast. In this context, three great powers (Soviet Russia, Britain and Ottoman Empire), were coming into an unrestrained struggle over the control of three Caucasian countries (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia). On the other hand, the “local” forces of the struggle could have roughly been counted as the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks and nationalists of every size and shape.

And naturally, the central question of this struggle was Baku, the economic, cultural and political heart of the region.

The Ottoman state, even on its deathbed, was not letting go of its intentions to mobilize the nationalist and Islamist forces in the region against the Soviet government and create “tribal states” which it would then have dominated. Apart from the question whether or not this was feasible in the long run, it was obvious that the Soviet rule, which had been unable to eliminate the counter-revolutionary threat in the west until the end of 1920, had also been unable to create a strong defense against the moves of the Ottomans. The Red Army was hard-pressed, Crimea that neighbored Caucasia was already under British pressure, and the social and ideological basis of Bolshevism was quite weak in the three contested countries. Moreover, with the end of the First World War, the Ottoman State had broken away from Germany and come under the control of Britain, and a new balance of power that was exciting to expansionist elements had emerged.

The most organized and active sections of the Ottoman army were in the east, on the Russian front. Anatolia was occupied from the west and south but the Ottoman forces in the eastern front had retained a relative mobility. Moreover, the prospect of these forces taking control in Caucasia through establishing a collaboration with the British was theoretically possible. It was beyond doubt that there were influential characters in the civilian and military bureaucracy who sought to put this theoretical possibility into practice.

In sum, when Soviet leadership looked towards Anatolia 1918, what they saw was the Straits under British control and the

Ottoman-Turkish forces oriented towards the already chaotic Caucasia, and they were extremely worried.

We can say this clearly today: if this panorama had not changed radically, the Soviet rule would not have been able to consolidate itself.

Mustafa Kemal was almost the only person who acted with a resolution of relieving the Bolsheviks of this pressure. Even though the status quo reached on the Straits was not exactly what the Soviets desired, they were freed from British dominance; and Caucasia was pushed through a rapid process of Bolshevization. The Soviets, in return to these, helped the Kemalists in establishing their political monopoly and therefore enabled them to sit down in negotiation with the British "on better terms."

This is the essence of the matter.

This matter cannot be understood without putting the strategy of socialism in one country into the center of the focus. Moreover, evaluating the Moscow-Ankara relationship only through an "anti-imperialist" rhetoric, without grasping that the strategy of socialism in one country had been the sole revolutionary strategy of the period that was also in line with the interests of world revolution would result in wrong conclusions.

The Soviet power had no business with the Ottomans anymore. The Palace had come under British domination, represented a backward social formation and was a decayed structure. Besides, when the Bolsheviks seized power, they had declared that they had cast aside the ambitions of the old Russia by saying "*We have no claim upon your lands,*" then started to assess which forces would be decisive in the future of Turkey and which among these they should support.

When the resistance emerged in Anatolia, it was easy to distinguish it from the Ottoman forces in the west. However, as the eye moved eastwards, the authority of the Istanbul government diminished and the civilian-military bureaucracy came to represent both the Ottoman State and the National Struggle. This transitivity was especially strong concerning the policies on Caucasia.

In truth, the emerging new power in Anatolia was turning its face towards a new Republic when it tried to delimit itself, and

back towards Ottoman Empire when it sought expansion. Many things can be said about Mustafa Kemal, but it is an undisputable truth that he thought Ottoman State was over and wanted to keep the newly emerging power out of areas of competition. He had arrived at this clarity in 1920, which had been the same year in which the Soviet order nearing the end of its third year had also arrived at a similar conclusion after the delay caused by the parenthesis created by the affair with Poland. This resonance was precisely what oriented the two actors towards an agreement with one another.

The borderline would have been drawn at Caucasia.

Concerning 1918, Yerasimos says:

In this period that was shorter than a full year, the last İttihat ve Terakki government used the opportunity that was provided by the sudden weakening of Russia and tried to put its Turanism plans into practice. However, in doing this, it paved the way for western imperialism by creating counter-revolutionary groups and governments in Caucasia and beyond. Later, the first independent Turkish government would have to work with Soviet Russia to remove these powers created by the last independent Ottoman government against it.<sup>266</sup>

This is correct, but it must be noted that not everyone in Ankara were this clear on the issue. There were quite a few elements among those who had a voice and influence in new Turkey that were still developing expansionist strategies towards Caucasia and beyond, in accordance to their dreams of an Ottoman revival, Turanist fantasies, collaborations with the British or rabid anti-communism. Mustafa Kemal protected the revolutionary front that was taking (moreover, *had to take*) shape on the Moscow-Ankara line and kept Turkey out of Caucasia by sometimes stalling, sometimes threatening and sometimes deceiving these elements.

It is beyond argument that, had a similar meticulous care not been taken by the Soviets, if Lenin and Stalin had acquiesced to “*What business do we have with the bourgeois Kemal?*” pressures, drifted away from “realist” solutions on Armenia which was a contested area of influence between the two newly established states,

and made abortive moves in Anatolia despite the weak class base of the region to push the bourgeois revolution beyond its limits; then Moscow and Ankara would have had to face each other across the frontline between revolution and counter-revolution and engage in a ruthless struggle to destroy on another.

There had been times that the two countries were only steps away from such a fate.

It should be known that, if Ankara had come against the Soviets in confrontation in 1920, it might still have cut an “advantageous” deal with the British. However, the new Turkey would have been bereft of all the progressive steps that we call “the achievements of the Republic” today. The foundation process would not have been a historical break from the Ottoman state at all, instead it would have been something like what the liberals of today sing “only if...” laments about.

In 1920, the litmus test that defined the character of any political movement was its stance against the Soviets.

Caucasia was rife with problems, but the ones that were most “problematic” for Moscow and Ankara were Armenia and Azerbaijan. If we take the borders of today (or the borders before the dissolution of Soviet Union) into account, Armenia was the shadow cast by Soviet Union upon Turkey, while Azerbaijan was the shadow cast by Turkey upon Soviet Union. Undoubtedly, only a Soviet government could have discouraged Armenia from its claims upon a quite large territory within the borders of Turkey. It was a difficult political result to achieve; the demand that referendums should have been held in contested regions according to “the right of nations to self-determination” had a substantial backing in the Soviet government.

Starting from 1920 and until the Treaty of Turkish-Soviet Brotherhood that was signed at Moscow on March 16, 1921, the balance in the Armenia question shifted many times, and both sides made radical changes in their tactics. To such an extent that, at one point Turkey became allied with the nationalist Dashnaks that seized power at Yerevan against the Soviet government. It was a period in which distrust was mutual and, more importantly, both sides were considering more than one option. However, some of

these options were groundless.

Example: It was impossible for the Soviet government to resign to a bourgeois Armenia and coexist with it in peace. Similarly, it was impossible for Turkey to become neighbor with a nationalist Armenia (with or without the borders today) and coexist with it in peace. Another example: It was quite impossible for the Soviet government to maintain its security if a Bolshevik Armenia expanded its borders into Turkey. A further example: It was altogether impossible for Ankara to surrender certain territories to Armenia yet still retain its power.

This is impossible to understand for those who look at the world only through the lens of the right of nations to self-determination. In 1920-1921 period, the most advanced, most forward possible result had been reached with the establishment of the Soviet Armenia... Ankara was appeased, and Soviet order had averted the pressure that would have been caused by unending ethnic quarrels in a region where its power was weak.

Of course, both sides attempted contrary moves first, but each subsequently backed down.

In the November of 1920, things were at a breaking point. However, by mid-December, the question seemed to have been resolved. In February, the crisis once again intensified, and even if the Treaty was signed on March 16, the problem was finally solved in April 2 when the Bolsheviks retook Yerevan (once again) from the Dashnaks.

During this whole period, the “argument” continued both in Moscow and in Ankara. Both sides were trying to rid themselves of the Dashnaks, but each side was also trying to keep its room for maneuver as wide as possible and hold onto the option of collaborating with the Dashnaks. It was a time in which the internal dynamics of Caucasia became greatly mobilized and the competition between Armenia and Azerbaijan was reflected even in the Bolshevik Party.

The indignation in the international community about great tragedy suffered by the Armenian people and the crimes committed by the Ottoman generals undoubtedly had an influence on the Bolsheviks. Still, the prominent Bolsheviks were approaching the

problem (to the extent that this was possible) from a class perspective, and were aware of the fact that Armenian nationalism was a very effective tool for the imperialist countries.

Ultimately, we can tell that they evaluated Armenian territorial claims by looking at the whole picture. And apparently, the position of the Kemalists was becoming blurred in that picture as 1920 was drawing to its close, and the Soviet government was having a hard time gauging the roadmap followed by Ankara.

How the Entente's flirtation with the Kemalists will end, and how far the latter will go in their swing to the Right, it is difficult to say. But one thing is certain, and that is that the struggle for the emancipation of the colonies, begun several years ago, will intensify in spite of everything, that Russia, the acknowledged standard-bearer of this struggle, will support those who champion it with every available means, and that this struggle will lead to victory *together with* the Kemalists, if they do not betray the cause of the liberation of the oppressed peoples, or *in spite of* them, if they should land in the camp of the Entente.<sup>267</sup>

On November 30, the day on which this evaluation by Stalin was published in *Pravda*, news arrived in Moscow that Soviet rule in Armenia had been declared. On December 2, Dashnak rule was toppled in Yerevan and the capital city came under Soviet rule. Stalin wrote an article evaluating the new situation to be published in *Pravda* on December 4: "*The age-old enmity between Armenia and the surrounding Moslem peoples has been dispelled at one stroke by the establishment of fraternal solidarity between the working people of Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaijan.*" The last sentence of the article repeated its title: "*Long Live Soviet Armenia!*"<sup>268</sup>

This was a period in which Ali Fuat<sup>269</sup> was appointed as ambassador to Moscow and Mustafa Kemal blocked the attempts of Ottoman government in Istanbul to become closer to the Soviets. The relations were extremely tense and both sides were implicitly threatening the other with the alternatives they had. However, both were also calculating the costs and risks of these alternatives and holding on to one another as the first option. The Soviet breakthrough at Armenia eased the situation and the tension

dropped a little. However, after that came the problem of the borders of Armenia and the relations became strained once again.

Mustafa Kemal thought that the only way out of this dilemma was the establishment of order by the Soviet government in Caucasia, and was trying to hold back his cadres from other attempts and adventures. At the same time, a similar argument was afoot in the Soviets. Commissar of Foreign Affairs Chicherin, who always had qualms about collaborating with Mustafa Kemal and sometimes acted stubbornly in this regard, was causing serious problems in the negotiations (that would eventually have led to the Treaty on March 16, 1921) by insistently demanding some provinces on behalf of Armenia from Turkey. It is not surprising that Stalin, who had solved the difficulties that came up when the Soviets decided to send material assistance to Anatolia, once again stepped in as the arbiter. In his note to Lenin on February 12 he wrote, *"I learned yesterday that at one point Chicherin delivered a foolish (and provocative) memorandum demanding the abandonment of Van, Muş and Bitlis provinces (where Turks are the absolute majority) in favor of Armenia. This Armenian-imperialist demand cannot be our demand. Chicherin must be prohibited from sending such memorandums that contain the imposition of nationalist Armenian sentiments."*<sup>270</sup> He was not only acting as a realist politician, but also with the decisive understanding that the most appropriate policy on Anatolia for the strategy of socialism in one country was a collaboration with the Kemalists.

Around the same time, an interesting letter from Narimanov had reached Lenin:

Dear Vladimir Ilyich,

A delegation from the Turkish Grand National Assembly accompanied by our representative Beibut Shakhtakhtinsky is on its way to Moscow. I had a rather in-depth conversation with the Turkish delegation here. I have no doubts that the Turks sincerely wish to connect their fates with us against Britain. The most troubling question for them is the Armenian question. They are making a great effort to resolve the question in their favor. I talked about Batumi and Akhaltsikhe. However,

they say, "Armenia is a matter of life or death for us. If we cannot achieve favorable results, the people will not support us. Therefore its resolution in our favor would strengthen our popular position."

They are undoubtedly against the Entente; they are ready to fight together with us against Britain until the very last man. But, if Moscow repels the Turks because of the Armenian question, they will be offended and troubled, and they may look for ways to come to an agreement with Britain. What could happen then?

In the Muslim Eastern world, the Turks who rose against the subjugation of European imperialism are fighting for their freedom and their glory is increasing. We ourselves also supported them by declaring Holy War (Jihad). If we abandon the Turks now, we will lose all our influence with the Muslim eastern nations and also would open an eastern front that may have disastrous consequences for us. If Britain takes advantage of this situation and reopens the western front with the help of Poland and Romania, there will be no telling what would become of us in these already dire circumstances.

(...)

Frankly, we have lost much in Bukhara, Khiva and Iran after the revolution. But in spite of all these the peoples of the east continue to believe in you and are waiting for your initial thought about self-determination to finally come true. Under this most tense situation in the east, if we go to war against the Turks, it would mean a complete failure of our eastern policies. If our situation was stronger in the west, we would not have been afraid of this consequence.

I also feel obliged to warn you on another matter. Comrade Chicherin is complicating the eastern question. He attaches too much value to the opinions of Armenians on the Armenian question, and does not take into account the things that could happen in case we break up with the Turks just because of the Armenian question. I categorically assert that if we want

to absolutely keep Azerbaijan in our hands in the present situation in Caucasia, Georgia and Dagestan, we must establish a strong alliance with the Turks, no matter what. Let me tell this once again, this alliance would give us the complete Muslim East. And through this, the general discontent caused by our benighted eastern policy will be alleviated, and we will take the weapon of incitement out of the hand of Britain.<sup>271</sup>

Although Narimanov's approach is both nationalistic and adventurist, it was quite helpful in showing the potential costs of losing Turkey. In a period when Lenin and Stalin were working together with a shared wisdom to avert the disintegration risk of the Moscow-Ankara axis, there is no reason to doubt that they were "encouraged" by Narimanov's letter.

On a side note, Lenin and Stalin, who had absolute control over the Caucasia (therefore, Turkey) policy of the Soviets, were seen as the "central faction" within the Bolsheviks by the whole Turkish delegation that had arrived in Moscow for negotiations. We know that western historians never got tired of claiming that Stalin was a second, even third grade official (these claims were mostly based on the eyewitness accounts of Trotsky), to such an extent that Stalin and his colleagues had to add unnecessary overstatements to "official history" to mitigate this falsification. However, the notes sent to Ankara by Ali Fuat, Rıza Nur and others were very clear on the subject: Stalin was the closest colleague of Lenin and the two of them had become prominent in the political balances within the Party.

It is essential for them to have understood this. Because in 1920, about the Bolsheviks, Karabekir was writing these:

We have not yet read the actual political program of the Bolsheviks, nor the program they employ in the Muslim world. Lately, a Russian program has been delivered in Trabzon. It is being translated. When this is complete, it will be presented to you verbatim and ciphered. Nevertheless, we are resolute on our preliminary evaluation on this issue. Our country is not capitalist. It is a land of peasantry. Nor do we have factories. Britain and France, who are imperialists, have put a stranglehold

on the Islamic world in Asia and Africa and enslaved it everywhere. Therefore, as long as the principles and goals of the Bolsheviks include refusing the annexation of the lands of one nation by another, and bringing down the destructive imperialism to enable all the nations to live in a fraternal existence; we are enemies of these imperialist states and principally of Britain, and are together with the Bolsheviks on these issues to the very end.<sup>272</sup>

It is obvious from these evaluations that Kemalist cadres were quite ignorant about the tenets of Bolshevism. Their quick grasping of the general situation and the importance of socialism in one country strategy in the Bolshevik political conception can only be explained with a powerful political intuition.

From Ankara's point of view, the political line of Soviet Russia was defined by Lenin and Stalin.

Consequently, the Treaty on March 16 was secured through the advances of these two communists. Even if Ankara caused another crisis after the treaty had been signed by establishing relations with the counter-revolutionary Dashnak government that had recently conquered Yerevan, this was quickly resolved. On April 2, the Red Army marched into Yerevan and the Bolsheviks and the Kemalists mutually secured the border between one another for the last time.

With the Treaty of Kars on November 13, 1921, the tensions about Caucasia was completely settled.

However, all these are not enough to explain the whole picture. Particularly, Ankara's decision in the Sovietization of Azerbaijan and its consequences should not be taken lightly. Kemalists did not make this decision only because the Bolshevization of Azerbaijan greatly eased the solution of the border dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia. As Kazım Karabekir (who usually took a realist stance in the relations with Soviet Russia despite being an undoubtable enemy of communism) notes, it was almost impossible for the Soviet government to remain intact without controlling Baku. If a fraternal relationship or even a temporary alliance was to be forged, they had to accept that Baku would have remained in

the hands of the Bolsheviks. Moreover, the rest of Azerbaijan had to be Bolshevized so that the Soviet government created in Baku would not have been isolated.

Baku in 1920 was a cosmopolitan city densely populated by petroleum workers. The presence of Georgians, Armenians and Jews besides Turks had resulted in a particular political and cultural climate in this city, which was by far the most developed in the region. Of course, it is absurd to say that this climate would have worked only in favor of the communists by itself. It was hard to create a joint proletarian movement because of ethnic and religious reaction. Moreover, the murky shadow of the international monopolies, which had large investments in, Baku had fallen on this city. This was why Stalin felt the need to underline the fact that Baku was not the natural result of Azerbaijan reality.

Baku did not spring from the womb of Azerbaijan; it is a superstructure erected by the efforts of Nobel, Rothschild, Whishaw, and others.<sup>273</sup>

Baku had to be perceived as a “lonely” city in a backward region. It could have been controlled by its proletariat, the number of which had reached hundreds of thousands, but its loneliness could only have been broken by the sovietization of Azerbaijan. This fact had been confirmed in near history of the city: Baku had been the only Soviet presence in Caucasia at one point but had not been able to protect this character. It had fallen to the British, who had been backed by Turks, and the communists in the city had been slaughtered.<sup>274</sup>

Therefore, it was of enormous value regarding the revolutionary goals of the period that Azerbaijan, which would have been the first point of expansion for Turanist strategies, was left out of the foundation and liberation scope of Mustafa Kemal, regardless of the reason behind it.

This was undoubtedly a decision taken within the rationale of the struggle in Anatolia. It is obvious that there were elements among the “Turks” on the Soviet side, even among the first cadres of TKP, who would have liked to take the matter further. This is also natural... We underlined this before, revolutions tend to

spread, revolutionaries want to lend energy to this process; however, sometime the fact is forgotten that the force of revolutions are frequently limited.

The cadres that Bolsheviks affiliated with themselves in the Muslim-Turk regions were not content with a Soviet power centered in Moscow and Petrograd, and sincerely desired the revolution to spread eastwards. However, their ideological and political depth was not sufficient for them to have managed this desire appropriately. Some wanted to take steps for a Great Azerbaijan and lobbied for a bolder look towards Iran with this perspective within the Soviet government. It was unclear where the interests of world revolution ended, and where nationalism posing as internationalism started. There was a serious confusion on the issue of the forces that could be trusted in Anatolia in the event of an Eastern Revolution that would have covered Iran, Afghanistan, India and China. In this context, besides those who focused on Mustafa Kemal, there were also those who relied upon Enver, and finally there were those who thought that they should place their trust in a communist movement completely independent of generals with Ottoman background. In any case, 1921 was a year in which both Ankara and Moscow resolutely pulled the reins on their respective expansionists.

The interesting fact was that, expansionist ideology was of a Turkish nationalist character on both sides.

First, they collaborated on the Bolshevization of Azerbaijan. It can be said that without the active involvement of Kemalists this would have been impossible. The things that Kazım Karabekir, who was a master of covert operations, wrote in his letter to Ankara on April 13, 1920 are quite illuminating on the subject:

In response to this movement by the Reds, we guarantee to move over Armenia and incite rebellion in Azerbaijan for the establishment of communist ruling power (...) As these preparations are made and the communications outlined in the second (b) article are maintained, the preparations for a violent mobilization of the communist party in Azerbaijan should start. These undertakings should sufficiently include,

for example, assassination of some officers and the newly arrived Russian admiral, breaking down the influence of the British through violent means, and threatening some other officers so that they change their political position.<sup>275</sup>

The collaboration resulted in the establishment of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan on April 27, 1920. Meanwhile, a similar struggle was also afoot in Georgia, where the situation was more complex because of the disputes between the Soviets and Turkey on certain points along the border and particularly on Batumi, which was a strategic location. The letter from Mustafa Kemal to Soviet Government sent only a day before the Sovietization of Azerbaijan merits attention within this context:

The Turkish government pledges to command the military operation against imperialist Armenia and facilitate the entry of Azerbaijan Government to the union of Bolshevik states, provided that the Bolshevik forces undertake a military operation unto Georgia, or, through their influence and dominance, facilitate Georgia's entry into the union of Bolshevik states and incite the local forces of Georgia to move against the British forces here and remove them.<sup>276</sup>

Many conclusions can be derived from this short passage, but the bottom line is *"solve our Armenian question, and you can establish Soviet order in Caucasia."*

The Soviet power was therefore established in Azerbaijan. Lenin and Stalin on one side, Mustafa Kemal and Karabekir on the other were following a practice in line with the strategy of socialism in one country. However, some had other, larger goals. Sultan-Galiev was one of these. He was appraising the Sovietized Azerbaijan as a great springboard for communism into Asia. He thought that communism would approach China, Tibet, India and Afghanistan on one hand, while advancing into Iran, Turkey and the Arabian lands from Azerbaijan on the other.<sup>277</sup> In other words, while Lenin and Stalin was trying to consolidate the revolution, which lost its ideological power as it expanded eastwards, within a limited hinterland that would sustain Soviet Russia; others were trying to

carry it as far as Indochina. Even ex-nationalist Bolshevik Nari-manov, who was an avid supporter of the collaboration with the Kemalists, was seeking an “eastern revolution” the center of which would have been Azerbaijan; going so far as to advocate its “independence” for this function.<sup>278</sup>

Long story... However, it is not a coincidence that most of the leaders transferred from nationalist movements were removed between 1934-1937. The extent of their connection to the names like Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek, who were the main actors that were removed from the center of the party, is a different matter; however, the history of political struggles show that an obsessively oppositionist position can provide the basis for even the most unlikely collaborations. Ultimately, we must say that the removals in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and other republics in 1930s was unavoidable regardless of the theses of the “united opposition.” As it was making great leaps towards the establishment of socialism, Soviet Union could not have left a large population and wide geography of itself in the hands of nationalist cadres, to whom it had to rely on due to the shortcomings of the foundation years. Within this context, the *de facto* rule of Hummat Party in Azerbaijan was abolished through these removals.

However, in March 16, 1921, Treaty of Moscow was signed “*under extremely difficult conditions, when the tension between the two sides had come on the brink of transforming into a military conflict,*”<sup>279</sup> and the Caucasian chapter of Turk-Soviet relations that had been opened with Azerbaijan was closed with the resolution of tensions on Georgia.



## The Soviets Reach a Decision on Anatolia

*In memory of Maria Suphi...<sup>280</sup>*

The Soviet government settled its borders in the west with the treaty that was signed with Poland at Riga on March 16, 1921, and the uncertain situation in the east was largely resolved with the agreement that was reached with Turkey on March 16, 1921. With these, socialism in one country had secured its right and left. By putting away the hopes of spreading the revolution for some time...

Was there really such a hope?

In the west, most definitely... The revolution spread excitement, rose, started to descend and petered out. It left the scene to policies that are more realistic.

But, what about the East, and right across the border in Turkey?

Those who considered socialist power as an immediate option in Turkey never had a weight within the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks were revolutionaries, and undoubtedly, the possibility had crossed their mind at one point; however, there is no period or moment in 1919 or 1920 in which we can observe such a political push or inclination in the Soviet government. It is even possible to say that the Kemalists had taken the possibility more seriously as a threat. This was natural since Ankara had been the center of

a struggle for hegemony. However, Mustafa Kemal's fear of communism should not be exaggerated. Particularly in his correspondence with Kazım Karabekir, Mustafa Kemal displayed a greater apprehension about the possibility of a turbulence in relations with Russia due to of an increasing expectation in the Soviet government for the Bolshevization of Anatolia, than about the actual spread of Bolshevik ideas and organization in Anatolia.

However, by the end of 1921, it was obvious that there was a mutual understanding. Ankara and Moscow had recognized the authority of one another, and focused upon their respective missions of "foundation." It is evident that the attitudes different from this mainstream that were observed from time to time were just tactical maneuvers. For example, when the activities of Kemalists increased in Caucasia in 1922, particularly after their military and political success against Greece, the Caucasian Bureau of the Bolshevik Party advised the Party leadership to strengthen its support to the communist movement in Anatolia in return.<sup>281</sup> We know that Soviet communists used similar tactics later, and urged TKP to more aggressive political activity whenever they felt the need to increase the pressure on the Turkish government.

However, Soviet Union never developed a resolute and studiously prepared strategy for a "Soviet Anatolia" during the period of National Struggle between 1917-1923, which had also been the period in which the rising revolutionary movement left its mark on Europe. The fact of the matter was that, there had never been a projection about a socialist Turkey in Soviet foreign policy from 1923, until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. We can say that at some point, Soviet Union abandoned the "revolution" idea in almost the whole capitalist world; but it is worth noting that it had "abandoned" Turkish Republic to capitalism in the whole 70 years of its existence. Even if we put aside all the whys, wherefores and results of the prudence of Soviet government about Turkey in the long period after the foundation of the Republic; we still do not have the luxury of making light of and offering half-baked explanations to this strategic decision, which had been taken during the period in which the whole world was shaken with revolutionary developments.

The fundamental answer to the question is obvious... Soviet Russia, in its struggle to establish socialism in one country, saw Turkey under Mustafa Kemal's rule as a factor that would have kept British imperialism away from intervening in the Soviets, and acted accordingly. Moreover, it sensed that Turkey could have been helpful to it in establishing and consolidating its authority over the Muslim regions of Soviet geography. In return for these, it gave military and economic support to Ankara government in its struggle against occupation, and political support in its establishment of political hegemony.

For a better understanding of this support, some frequently disregarded details should be brought into the light.

Even though he had some "unfathomable" aspects, Mustafa Kemal obviously had some facilitative qualities for the Bolsheviks, who had crammed a century's worth of political experience into the year 1917. Above all, he had defined the geographical boundaries of his "fight" from the beginning and made clear that he would not overstep those lines. Apart from some sporadic attempts to strengthen his hand, Mustafa Kemal was refraining from an expansionist practice and it should be easy to understand how relieving this was to the Bolsheviks in a period in which the borders had become blurred and authority frequently changed hands in many regions. Almost none of the actors that engaged in politics in Anatolia or had been inclined to do so had given such "reassurance" to Moscow.

In connection with this, the distance Mustafa Kemal kept from Islamism and pan-Turkism, which would have forced him into an expansionist practice, was strengthening the hand of the Soviet government not only against anti-communist Turkish nationalist or Islamist elements, but also against those who were trying to introduce nationalism and Islamism to Bolshevism. It should be noted that Stalin had not been just whistling in the wind when he warned about a tendency of ignoring class basis and "*deviation from communism towards bourgeois-democratic nationalism, which sometimes assumes the form of Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turkism.*"<sup>282</sup> Stalin was talking about the ranks of the Bolshevik Party. About those who had set their eyes on "the whole Turkic

world,” and those who asserted that there was an organic bond between Islam and communism...

We noted this before. The revolution had to rely on such elements in the wide expanses of the East.

Had to rely on, but also had to control and transform...

Just think what would have happened if Mustafa Kemal had been a character like Enver! We can be sure that the Soviets would have hesitated to support such a person and they most probably would have sought alternatives. The danger was clear and present; the Soviet East was so weak that it had come on the brink of collapse as it was trying to expand. Mustafa Kemal was helping the security of the Soviets as he was confining Turkey to its present borders with a resolve that left pan-Turkism out in the cold.

Another factor that urged the Soviets to focus on Mustafa Kemal was his refusal to contact with the counter-revolutionary elements that were the opposing side of the Civil War. It was true that Ottoman Empire had been weary of war, and sending troops into the Russian Civil War had been out of the question; however, on the other hand, the Russian counter-revolution had a quite formidable political and military weight. There had been times in which a Bolshevik “defeat” had become a distinct possibility. Mustafa Kemal did not approach the black barons even in these times, and we can guess that Lenin and Stalin never forgot this.

There had been examples in Caucasia in which Mustafa Kemal did not display such prudence; but these can be seen as tactical, not strategic steps. Moreover, even the Soviet government had to collaborate with some bourgeois elements in Caucasia when it had been pressed hard on the western front.

Another easing factor from the Soviet side was that, Mustafa Kemal had a far more clear-cut agenda than others. Moscow had also established connections with other actors like Karakol Society or Enver and his associates for some time, but the perspective of these actors and the forces they associated with were dubious. For example, there were allegations about the actual leadership of Karakol, and these had cast a shadow on this organization. Mustafa Kemal had an obvious superiority to other actors in this regard since he had removed himself from Istanbul and settled in a city

(Ankara) where the influence of external powers was very weak.

The Bolsheviks had immediately grasped that Mustafa Kemal had no affinity towards communism and did not press the issue in vain. However, they were also aware of the adamancy of his stance against imperialist occupation and Istanbul government. Although he had been hiding his views on the future of the Caliphate and the possibility of the declaration of a Republic at that time, his secular revolutionary character was impossible to miss. Years later, Mustafa Kemal would have said in his *Speech* that the political power that had been taking shape in Ankara was characterized by “a unity of power.” There may be those today who find him wanting as a revolutionary, but it should not be forgotten that the foundation process of Turkey was being advanced through revolutionary methods and the Bolsheviks, who were acting upon a different class basis but with similar methods, were not so inexperienced as to misread what was happening in Anatolia.

Moreover, trying to perpetuate the Ottoman dynasty and reign would undoubtedly have amounted to committing the greatest ill upon the Turkish nation. Because, although the nation had won its independence by braving great hardships, as long as the sultanate continued this could not have been called a true independence. How could we have tolerated a host of madmen, who had no connection to the nation in their thoughts or consciences anymore, to remain in the position of the guardians of the independence and dignity of our state and nation?<sup>283</sup>

This is Mustafa Kemal’s assessment of the issue in the *Speech*. It would be cruel to explain these away as posthumous historiography. Besides, it was not so hard to understand what was coming from the general direction of events in Turkey.

Yes, Mustafa Kemal was also connected to the Bolsheviks through his secular approach. When Lenin had said that communists should “*assist bourgeois-democratic liberation movements*” he had also underlined “*the need for a struggle against the clergy and other influential reactionary and medieval elements in backward countries.*” Pan-Islamism was particularly dangerous, and the communist movement had to remain vigilant against those

who wanted to use the struggle against imperialism to increase the influence of mullahs, khans and landowners.<sup>284</sup>

I stressed before that this vigilance was important not only outside but also inside the Soviets; and Mustafa Kemal was also different from his contemporaries in Anatolia in his approach to the Islamic clergy: A struggle in Anatolia without some collaboration with them was impossible, but he was always taking precautions against them and eliminating those that became too bold.

Besides, it could not have been said that the evaluation of Bolsheviks were becoming unrealistic. It was obvious that Ankara would eventually have come to an agreement with the British, and this would not only have been the result of the class character of the National Struggle or the ideological tendencies of Mustafa Kemal. The international balance of power allowed no other alternative. In a period when Soviet Russia itself was making every attempt to come to terms with the British, there was nothing surprising in bourgeois revolutionaries doing the same. The important goal was to lessen the damage this agreement would have caused to the interests of the Soviets.

Economically, neither Turkey, nor USSR could have depended on one another anyway; both were bound to develop economic relations with the western countries. Not seeing this would have been a political blindness. In short, the reins in both Ankara and Moscow were in the hands of "political masterminds" and there was no such misunderstanding.

It is also quite clear that the Soviet government paid no heed to the overstatement of "*We too believe in Bolshevism*" that from time to time blew in the winds of friendship from Ankara. One example of this is the coolness of Moscow about the excessively "left" presentation of İbrahim Tali at the Congress of the Peoples of the East at Baku. According the Tali, the movement in Anatolia was absolutely not of a bourgeois character and it had tied its fate to the Third International. In truth, Ankara did not have to resort to such absurd charades for the friendship of the Soviet leadership; all the influential Bolsheviks, including Lenin, had made their decisions on the subject. The thing that really scared them was "nationalism disguised as Bolshevism!"

Undoubtedly, the language chosen by Ankara in some moments had a diplomatic significance. For example, the content of the December 14, 1920 dated letter sent by Mustafa Kemal to Stalin in a period in which the Turk-Soviet relations had become extremely tense was greatly enhanced by its rhetoric:

When the exploiters throughout the world are no longer able, as they now unfortunately are, to counterpose these two groups of toilers [European proletariat and enslaved colonial peoples] politically and economically, their reign will end. The liberal policy that you are pursuing towards the Muslim peoples will, I do not doubt, have favorable results. Russia will overcome all the misunderstandings that our common enemies are sowing between us, and achieve the downfall of Western imperialism, the necessary prelude to the destruction of capitalism.

In this hope, dear Comrade, I remain sincerely yours.<sup>285</sup>

The obnoxiousness of the thesis of liberals (who set out with the claim of correcting the official historiography in Turkey just to rapidly substitute another twisted understanding of history for it) that pictures the division in Ankara as “authoritarian Mustafa Kemal vs. the unyielding democrats” is painfully obvious. However, it is still worthy of note that this had been the least of “concerns” in the approach of Soviet government to Mustafa Kemal at that time. On the contrary, the Bolsheviks were anxious about a weakening of this authority!

It should be clear that the rapprochement between the Bolsheviks and the Kemalists had been a result of the conditions of the period. However, “conditions of the period” implies a temporary, fickle phenomenon. The period we are investigating is a “historical” one, in which developments that would have come to influence a whole century had been crammed into a few years, and many actors of varying sizes had taken (and had been forced to take) sides. Therefore, the rapprochement between the Bolsheviks and the Kemalists was far beyond a mere product of happenstance or “mistakes”, it had an unavoidable historical meaning.

One point of view asserts that Britain’s lack of foresight caused

the Ankara-Moscow line to be established. For example, Bristol, who was High Commissioner of the USA in Turkey, sent a note to the US Secretary of State:

According to the information I gathered, the Turks hold no sympathy towards Bolshevism. They do not want to join the Bolsheviks, but seek Bolshevik help as a last resort to protect themselves against Greek and European aggression. It is my opinion that, if Bolshevism spreads in Turkey, the blame for this would chiefly be on Great Britain and Greece, and to a lesser degree on France and Italy.<sup>286</sup>

It was true that the British had made not one but many mistakes that strengthened Mustafa Kemal's hand and moreover, pushed him into a rapprochement with the Bolsheviks. Nevertheless, this is the unchangeable character of imperialism. British and French barbarity (and mindlessness) had also been one of the principal causes behind the unabated threat of socialist revolution breathing down Germany's neck between 1919-1923. Imperialists and capitalists cannot avoid miscalculations, because there is nothing rational about the domination of monopolies. In this context, it follows that a thought process which departs from an assumption like "*If the British had not done this, that would have happened in Anatolia*" would inevitably bring us to a preposition like "*If there had not been such a thing as imperialism.*" I have given enough examples in previous chapters of how the British incited the National Struggle in Anatolia; such mistakes are inherent to imperialism.

Moscow naturally knew that the factor which forced Turkey into a rapprochement with Bolshevism was imperialism. They also knew, as I underlined, that the British would eventually have shaken hands with the new authority in Ankara. What they cared about was preventing the damage such a resignation and agreement could have given to the security of Soviet Russia. Interestingly, the faction of the international workers' movement that was distant towards the Soviet government had been telling, "*The Kemalists will come to an agreement with imperialism, and Soviet Russia will end up being duped*" in its propaganda. Radek was more or less saying "we are aware of this" in his report to the Fourth

Congress of the Comintern: “We do not entrust ourselves to this or that nationalist clique, but to the stream of history which unites the labouring masses of all countries against the perils threatening them from international Imperialism.”<sup>287</sup>

This was the correct approach. However, the fact of the matter was that, had the issue been left to the Comintern administration, many back cats would have jumped between Ankara and Moscow.<sup>288</sup> Zinoviev and his team were far from understanding the essence of the matter. Worse, there was also confusion at the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, which had been directly involved in the matter. It is obvious that it had been Stalin who saved the Treaty of March 16, 1921 from the needless insistences of Chicherin, and that Stalin, together with Lenin, had built the policy on Turkey and Caucasia step by careful step.

It is claimed that Lenin had “crossed off” the name of Stalin from the list because of his “boorish” approach in Caucasia. This is sheer nonsense. There had not been a single day that passed by without an argument among the Bolsheviks; they criticized and took stances against one another. The essential thing was the direction. And, in the hardest political climate that had ever been witnessed in history, the consistency and collaboration between Lenin and Stalin on the Eastern policy of the Soviet Russia was not something that could have been broken by just “boorishness” or “vulgarity.”

The Turkish-Soviet Treaty was signed. Lenin was saying “*our conference with Turkish delegates which has opened here in Moscow (...) is an especially welcome fact, because there had been many obstacles to direct negotiations with the Turkish Government delegation, and now that there is an opportunity of reaching an understanding here in Moscow*” and specifically stressing that they had no hidden agenda.<sup>289</sup> He also said that they attached a special importance to coming to an agreement with Turkey since it had not yielded to even the strongest representatives of imperialism. Chicherin, on the other hand, had been so inconsiderate as to ask, “*Why have you come?*” to Turkish delegates, and to say, “*We would at most sign a peace agreement, there will be no Treaty of Friendship.*”

It was hard, and immensely so... If it had been only Trotsky who was confused about the establishment of socialism in one country, his "lack of faith" could have been overcome. However, those who did not believe, did not understand, chased after dreams, engaged in petty calculations, succumbed to arrogance were legion, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were marching towards socialism arm in arm with these.

Revolution had stalled in the West, and East was in turmoil. The question was what should have been understood from the East. According to Lenin and Stalin, the revolution would have influenced a great geography in the East, but the Soviet order would have been limited to a living space that corresponded to the collapsed empire and the revolution would have mainly taken on a national liberation character in other regions.

However, there were others who thought differently. I put Zinoviev, who had always been confused, aside; for many party members who the Soviet government had transferred from among nationalist and Islamist intelligentsia there were no borders in the East at all. The Soviet order had run up against the wall in the West, and the proletariat there was not revolutionary anyway; while in the East, the class contradictions had not yet strictly materialized and almost everybody was poor and downtrodden. A Soviet rule with all its merits and demerits had been established, and the revolutionary Red Army, in which Muslims carried a great weight, had been victorious on every front. The journey of Bolshevism, which had started with a class emphasis in Petrograd, could have led to a Great Eastern Soviet with a more unifying attire. With this, the "Russian-centered" character of the revolution would have vanished, and the enslaved masses of the East who were subjugated to imperialism would have taken the reins!

Certainly, this is a summary and an average... However, with all their variations, any actor that fell within the Easternist camp could be evaluated within this framework.

The Soviet government was aware that nationalist and Islamist actors were trying to use the authority of Bolshevism and the Third International to advance their own agendas. One typical example had been the establishment of a Sharia Commission within

the Commissariat for Justice of Republic of Tatarstan (where Sultan-Galiev had a great influence) in an attempt to synthesize Soviet laws with Koranic law in 1922.<sup>290</sup> This cannot be explained away as misunderstanding, and this was no naïve goodwill either; some people were openly trying to change the direction of the Soviet rule.

At one point the Bolsheviks, who had benefited from and tried to convert these elements, gave up, and instead of carrying them as a liability proceeded to remove them. The citing of “*the communist colouring given by the Eshil-ordu [Green Army] party in Turkey to its pan-Turanianism*” as an example to how the political authority of the Comintern was being exploited is sufficiently illustrative.<sup>291</sup>

It should not be forgotten that the same exploitative mindset was trying to fit the nationalist and Islamist perspective into a rhetoric of “saving the world revolution.”<sup>292</sup> It was claimed that the great revolution in the colonial east would have also dragged the west behind it, and the socialist revolution that was thought to be stalled would once again have materialized. However, a discerning eye notices at once that the thinking of the Easternists had been marked with a purblind nationalism, and that they were in competition with one another.

Internationalism is an ideology that can only be fostered by the working class. The fantasy of casting the backward countries into the role of the steamroller of world revolution was causing irreparable political, ideological and moral defects.

The dual task of benefiting from the emergent energy of the Eastern peoples on one hand, and keeping these defects in check on the other was very hard to achieve. As I stressed frequently above, the human resources got increasingly meager as one travelled east. Moreover, it was also quite hard to find reliable leaders to control the cadre wellsprings. For example, the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTVa)<sup>293</sup> had great influence and prestige. It was giving education to revolutionaries from the four corners of Asia, the first generation of leaders of the newly established communist parties emerged from the student body of this institution, and yet, actually it was not controlled by the Bolshevik Party! People like Nâzım Hikmet, Vala Nurettin

and Şevket Süreyya had attended this university, and the teaching staff included Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, Fayzulla Khodzhayev, Turar Ryskulov, Nariman Narimanov, Nazhmuddin Efendiyev-Samursky, Akhmet Baitursynov and Mir Yakub Dulatov. I must say that all the names of the lecturers I counted here could have been defined as Turkists.

Starting from 1924, a countless number of operations were made to the administration of the university. Many investigations and arrests were made. During the period of 1936-1938, a connection was established between the Moscow trials and those who tried to dilute Bolshevism with nationalism and Islamism. The Communist Party of Soviet Union had been trying to secure itself on a very unstable ground and it was realized only later that it had been only partially successful. At the bottom line, the pan-Turkist, pan-Islamist circles, who had tried to organize in clandestine parties like *İttihat ve Terakki*, *Milli İstiklal* (National Liberation) and Socialist Party of Turkestan ERK both inside and outside (particularly in Turkey and Iran) Soviet Union in the East throughout the 1920s managed to weaken the foundations of Soviet power in a very wide region by muddling the influence area of the Bolsheviks.

We know that Soviet rule saw the solution to this in strengthening the physical existence of the proletariat in the eastern reaches of the country. On one hand, the party radically altered the social fabric of the region by rapid industrialization and sent many skillful communists from Russia and Ukraine to these regions. On the other, it was trying to break the “nationalist” resistance by encouraging Russian workers to settle in the region.

At the bottom line, this was a “left” deviation in the sense that it claimed to spread the world revolution further and an excessively right deviation because it sought to dilute the political essence of Soviet Union and drag it away from socialism. Mustafa Kemal was really a great safeguard that prevented this deviation from finding fertile ground and gaining a foothold in Turkey. Consequently, the nationalist and Islamist Bolsheviks never liked Mustafa Kemal very much.

Those who claimed that the East had become the center of world revolution would also have been sidelined in the Comintern. In

1920, the question of colonies was argued in detail and Lenin had put his foot down in the Second Congress with his theses that were in line with the spirit of socialism in one country perspective. In Asia, the communists were advised to support the national liberation movements started by bourgeois nationalists. This approach had quite problematic aspects when each country was considered as a separate case in itself, but found its true meaning with the context of the holistic interests of world revolution.

Those who sought to incite in the East the socialist revolution that had stalled in the West would have become disappointed shortly after the loud but hollow Congress at Baku. In 1921, Indian Roy protested the indifference in the Comintern and in the western communist parties to the developments in the East from the lectern, but this was ineffective.<sup>294</sup> It is true that one reason for this indifference was the Eurocentric arrogance of the western parties; but another reason was their rightful reaction against the efforts of Eastern communists to incite the Comintern with childish tactics.

Where would the Communist Party of Turkey have fit in this picture? After Mustafa Suphi as the leader of the party had embraced Bolshevism, he had become part of the Turkic-Muslim section of the Soviet order, worked closely together and developed friendship with the other prominent actors there. Notwithstanding this, he entertained no fanciful expectations about an Eastern Revolution. He had grasped the logic of Moscow-Ankara rapprochement, supported the much-argued theses of Lenin on the question of colonies in the Second Congress of the Comintern and, most importantly, was not distant to the policy of socialism in one country which was becoming dominant.

One should not look for an absolute overlap here since, as I frequently underlined, there was no single "Bolshevik strategy" in that period. There was an obvious angle between the directions of Lenin and the Comintern chairman Zinoviev. Other pairs that danced to different tunes were Trotsky and Stalin, Caucasian Bureau and Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Affairs and the Central Command of the Red Army. It was a strong possibility that different RCP(b) officials in touch with TKP gave Mustafa Suphi quite

different advices. However, we have TKP's documents from the period as well as Mustafa Suphi's speeches and writings. If we are taking the line of Lenin as reference, it cannot be said that Mustafa Suphi was distant to that line.

Yet, it is also worth noting that, although Mustafa Suphi had understood the task of supporting another class power in his own country, he was not exactly at ease with it. There are clues that point to this, too.

And, an addendum to this note: Mustafa Suphi had been active and had organized people on a wide geography under the rule of Soviet government. Through this, he had been able to regard the "Turkic world" from a wide perspective. Therefore, the scale he had in mind was quite wider than the borders outlined by Mustafa Kemal in the National Pact. Was this important? From one angle, no. From another, definitely! After all, a mutual settlement on "scale" was the essence of the agreement between Soviet Russia and Turkey.

The Bolsheviks had accepted the authority of the Kemalists in Anatolia while the Kemalists had accepted the Soviet rule on a wide geography that would later come to be called USSR, including Caucasia. So, was the establishment of a "Soviet order" impossible in Turkey, just next door to the socialist revolution?

We must clearly say that the Bolsheviks considered this question by looking at both Turkey and the Soviets, and their answer had been "impossible." Their conclusion that the balance between the classes in Anatolia would not have allowed anything further than a bourgeois revolution was coupled with their assessment that Soviet Russia was quite weak for the "external" push that would have been necessary for anything further. In sum, the Soviet government did not want to carry the burden of a push in Anatolia that was doomed to failure.

One should not give much credit to the assessments, which claim that revolutionary possibilities in Anatolia were much greater than they had been supposed to be. The occupation of Istanbul and Izmir should be seen as a great misfortune. These two cities were the hotbeds of working class and progressive ideologies, therefore they were the centers that would have provided

suitable ground for communist movement. An occupation by external forces can only be “advantageous” for a communist movement that is already on the rise; in which case the communists may become the vanguards of a patriotic resistance and therefore become a hegemonic force. However, it was quite hard for the communist organization, which existed mostly as a germ, to collect itself under conditions of occupation. Therefore, TKP had to be organized and set out from Baku.<sup>295</sup>

In addition, a reminder: Bulgarians, Armenians, Jews and especially Greeks had played a large role in the emergence of workers’ movement and socialist and communist organizations in Istanbul. It would have been quite hard for a revolutionary movement containing “Greek” elements to become influential in the “National Struggle” which had become inflamed when imperialism pushed Greece as an occupation force into Anatolia. Internationalism, the stance of the Communist Party of Greece against occupation... All these were assets, but the conflict on Anatolian soil was, to an extent, nationalism vs. nationalism. Overcoming this would have been much easier said than done. For an example, just consider what had happened with Poland!

The Soviet government was trying to draw the borders of the working class power in a region that was quite transitional concerning its ethnic, cultural and social character, and confine itself to breaking the British influence across the border. They had sensed that, as long as that border remained unclear, the weakening in the material base of socialism would lead to a disintegration of the Soviet lands.

Soviet Armenia had claims in Turkey; Soviet Azerbaijan had claims in Iran, and vice versa... Leaving these issues unclear, or expanding the Soviet order across the border would have meant confrontation with the nationalists in Turkey and Iran, and the endless conflict it would entail would have spelled the destruction of the loose alliance against British imperialism.

Moscow acted in a very resolute manner on this issue, and drew the borders with very thick lines. The movement that had sprung up during the First World War in the forests of Gilan region of Iran on the shores of Caspian Sea had declared the Soviet Republic

of Gilan with the help of the Red Army in 1920. Soviet Russia withdrew from this region in 1921 as it sought a treaty of friendship with Iran, and said nothing while Iran established its authority with violence and bloodshed. At the same time, support given to the movements under the lead of Khodaverdi Khan and Sheikh Mohammad Yabani was also withdrawn, and effectively, the rule of Pahlavi dynasty that would have lasted decades was instated with Soviet assistance. The Bolsheviks were quite disinclined to push for a socialist establishment with Islamist and nationalist elements.

Yes, there was a strategic consistency here, which we do not see in 1920. The Polish campaign in the west and the attempt for a Soviet government in northern Iran in the east were quite experimental examples, both in their manner of initiation and their development.

So, the devastating blow TKP suffered in 1921 just months after its foundation, and the bloody suppression of a series of revolutionary movements in Iran happened at the same time. The nationalist bourgeois of Turkey and Iran wanted to consolidate their authority and eliminate internal movements that were allied to the Soviets before signing a treaty of friendship with the Soviets; and Soviet Russia had almost no instruments to prevent this from happening.

This is the issue we will now investigate...

We know that Mustafa Suphi made plans for passing into Anatolia shortly after TKP was founded. "Why did he want to?" is an absurd question; you cannot be a communist party by staying out of the geography you seek to exist and struggle in. It is true that in those years there were several opinions about where the exact borders of "Turkey" or Turkestan were. However, there was a struggle in Anatolia. The movement that sought to create a new Turkey had created an Assembly in Ankara and had become its authority. Moreover, quite some ground had been covered in the negotiations between this authority and the first socialist country on defining the border and accepting one another.

TKP had to step in. This is beyond argument. Subtexts can be read, "tactical" reasons for the decision to pass into Anatolia could

be discussed; however, whether these assessments are right or wrong (and most of these are really intention-reading) is immaterial. Because it is obvious that, what Mustafa Suphi was trying to do was moving the party onto a real, material ground through a *strategic* decision.

The problem was the discrepancy between this strategic decision and the strategic choices made by Soviet Russia. We see that in moments of extreme tension in the relations between Ankara and Moscow in 1920, particularly in November the Bolsheviks came to the point at which they asked themselves "*Why don't we support our comrades instead of generals of the Ottoman army?*" However, this "sentiment" never became a determining factor. Therefore, it was not a surprise that the decision of TKP leadership to pass into Anatolia did not sit well with the Soviets.

It was not, because the move by TKP had the potential to scare Ankara government into approaching the British. It was not, because if TKP's move was countered with violence and the Soviet government did not receive this with silence, a break in the collaboration with Ankara government would have been unavoidable. It was not, because if Ankara responded in a positive and inclusive way, the risk of young TKP gradually coming under the control of a bourgeois government would have to be taken into account. It was not, because TKP's move could have led to a premature Sovietization attempt that could even have merged ideologically with nationalist or Islamist tendencies. It was not, because TKP's move was bound to stir up the pan-Islamist, pan-Turkist movements inside the Soviets.

Both the Soviets and TKP were right from their own point of view. On a more general view, there had always been strategic discrepancies at the root of tensions between Soviet foreign policy of individual parties all throughout the history of the Comintern. These tensions were unsolvable, but manageable. Ultimately, the main decision maker on the issues concerning the struggle in a country should always be the communists of that country.

When it comes to Ankara, which was the other "decision maker" in the events initiated by the attempt of Mustafa Suphi and his associates' to pass into Anatolia; the period around the end

of 1920 and beginning of 1921 was when Mustafa Kemal decided to remove all competition. The political rationale of this decision should be clear. TKP was also a quite “formidable” competitor because it was a member of the Comintern, which was the representative institution of communism that had caused great excitement all across the world and (although not understood much) had garnered much sympathy in Anatolia. Although it had declared its resolution as “joining the National Struggle,” it was clear that the ultimate goal of the party was social emancipation and would have mobilized in this direction when the conditions were ripe. If we add to this the claims of acting as the intermediary to the money and weapons support coming from the Soviets (notwithstanding the fact that these claims were not truthful), we understand that Mustafa Kemal had plenty of reasons not to want the existence of a real communist party in Ankara. The proposal TKP had made to Ankara about giving assistance to National Struggle with a military regiment was naturally another cause for concern. This proposal had been immediately turned down, but we can safely guess that the capacity of TKP to form an army (on which, we have to say that the voiced numbers were exaggerated) had also made the Kemalists anxious.

The channels of correspondence at the time were both unreliable and unbelievably slow. Some letters reached their destinations in months. And, there were also some clauses in the correspondences that were quite open to misinterpretation. Therefore, it is healthy to draw conclusions by taking a step back and looking at the whole picture presented by the documentation from afar.

The telegram sent by Mustafa Kemal to Kazım Karabekir just after Mustafa Suphi and his companions set foot in Kars on December 28, 1920 openly shows his displeasure of their presence in Anatolia. However, Ankara was in dire need of Soviet support and overt enmity against Mustafa Suphi was risky. Besides, Mustafa Suphi and others were resolute in their attempt to travel to Ankara. Therefore, in the Kars-Erzurum-Trabzon journey, TKP’s will to reach Ankara and Mustafa Kemal’s will to “deport” them clashed.

Reactionary elements were ordered to contrive occasions to discourage and frighten the members of TKP along the way. The

source of these orders were Ankara and it is evident that Mustafa Kemal was completely aware of the proceedings. The shameful details can be summarized as “*do not kill or cause physical harm, but humiliate and frighten!*”

All these made Mustafa Suphi and his associates doubtful, and after hearing rumors in Erzurum of a planned assassination they requested assurance to their safety from officials, but they did not back down from their insistence to travel to Ankara. Ankara government on the other hand sought to push the delegation towards Trabzon and from there, send them back to Batumi.

The things we have said on this matter up to now are beyond argument; all these have been documented. The physical assault against the delegation in Trabzon was also obviously ordered from Ankara. Mustafa Suphi and his comrades were forced onto a boat, and the boat sets out for Batumi. From then on, we do not exactly know what happened. It is a strong possibility that Mustafa Suphi and his associates refused to return to Batum, resisted and started a confrontation on the boat. It can be guessed that this possibility had been calculated beforehand and a mob prepared for this murdered Mustafa Suphi and his comrades on board.

Beyond any argument, the political responsibility of this murder is on Mustafa Kemal. I am not saying he ordered their murder; it is a strong possibility that he ordered their deportation. However, anybody would have known that a sea voyage between Trabzon and Batum on Black Sea in January with a ramshackle boat would have resulted in a shipwreck. Indeed, Ankara insistently told the Soviet government “*They died in an accident at sea.*” Besides, no one can escape the responsibility of somebody’s murder after ordering a lynch mob to “*demonstrate, frighten, intimidate, humiliate*” them all along their journey. Past that point, claims that things got out of hand, Kazım Karabekir took the initiative, some thugs of Enver (who hated Mustafa Suphi’s guts) stepped in etc. are just police matter. We do not need detectives in such events; we seek those who are politically responsible.

Our comrades lost their lives in the struggle between working class and bourgeoisie that was implicitly waged within the revolutionary front. They could have been insufficiently prepared,

unrealistic, too self-confident... we can discuss all these. However, I will not be silent against accusations levelled against Mustafa Suphi like “he had fallen into step with his own bourgeoisie”, “he was ideologically confused” or “he was not a revolutionary but a reformist.” It is shameful how easily people write things off and pass judgment.

First, one has to grasp the soul of the historical period before trying to pass off nonsensical cosmopolitanism as internationalism. One has to look at the Comintern, to the Bolsheviks, to the arguments in these circles, to the critical link in the Revolution, to priorities... Some say that they had turned their backs on Armenians. How could there be an Armenian question separate from the vital struggle between the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary fronts between 1919-1922?

Mustafa Suphi’s tale of becoming a communist is of course a rapid one, and full of holes. But whose isn’t? I have written above in detail about the ideological situation as one travelled east. In this sense, Mustafa Suphi was far, very far ahead from many others; he had covered a lot of ground in getting rid of nationalist and Islamist sentiments.

He is our beloved comrade. And he went down fighting, in glory.

## German Communists Attempt an “Offence”

The revolution was reinforcing its bourgeois character in Anatolia. However, in Germany, the proletariat was resisting this pressure; it was upstaging the bourgeoisie (sometimes quite unexpectedly) whenever it found an opportunity and was striving with every means at its disposal to further the revolution that the bourgeoisie was trying to extinguish towards socialism. When it had prevented the putsch in 1920 and became the sole authority in the country for some days, KPD had stalled and failed to lead it. Actually, this was the greatest problem of the German Revolution throughout the period between 1918-1923; the proletarian masses and their vanguard failed to synchronize. KPD hesitated in the moments when the working class became mobilized, and a great majority of the laborers opted for inertia when KPD decided to make a stand. Undoubtedly, social democracy, which had placed itself between the working class and the communists, played some part in this lack of synchronicity; but the real problem was that the steps taken by the Comintern and KPD were far from masterful concerning the “timing” factor, which is one of the most important aspects of revolutionary struggle.

KPD leadership was heavily criticized during that period and afterwards. This was one of the chief reasons behind the frequent changes in the party leadership, yet the “bad timing” problem

remained unchanged! Still, one has to hand it to KPD that, even when openly right wing tendencies became distinct and apparent, it never lost its “revolutionary” character, always displayed a militant stance and never, ever gave sidled up to the bourgeois order by giving in to “cowardice.” Apart from its later years, the period of KPD between 1919 and 1933 in which Hitler came to power is a glorious chapter of our collective history. It sought the revolution, paid the price for it, and became a very sharp thorn in the side of German monopolies. It had been this party that, after every failed move oriented itself in the “opposite” direction; and failed again!

In 1920, KPD had failed to take the initiative. On the other hand, in 1921, in a period in which the working class was in a completely different mood from 1920, it decided to mobilize, maybe to make up for its mistake in 1920. It was without doubt that the revolutionary wave was still in motion, but the proletariat was not very receptive to the idea of seizing power. KPD leadership was hoping that the workers would engage in a final confrontation that would have culminated in a Soviet rule. The party would have sounded the clarion call, and the rest would have followed...

Actually, in 1920, after the suppression of Kapp putsch, capitalist class had regained control of the situation without allowing the working class to gain ground; but still, 1920 had been a quite fruitful year for KPD.

Most importantly, the party had become legal. In the elections held in June 1920, KPD had garnered the support of about half a million votes. This may seem a small number for an advanced country in which the whole of the working class had taken to the streets; however, by the end of the year, when KPD merged with the left wing of USPD (partly through the mediation of the Comintern) and took on the name Unified Communist Party of Germany (VKPD) its weight in the working class had started to increase rapidly. The number of party militants, which had been 78 thousand before the merging, had swelled to 450 thousand by the beginning of 1921. The new members were not only from USPD; the “unification” had created great excitement in the German working class, which had unificationist tendencies.

The capital on the other hand was trying everything to restore

order. It was utilizing every conceivable method from oppression to provocation and lies against VKPD, which had become a much greater threat to the hegemony of SPD after USPD had been pulled aside.

The Communist Party resorted to a questionable and risky method after the unification to put some pressure on the social democratic leadership, and made a call of “unity” to the working masses through an “Open Letter.” The call was completely consistent with Lenin’s *“Left-Wing” Communism* pamphlet and the spirit of the Second Congress of the Comintern. VKPD was following a political line under Paul Levi’s leadership that was “not hasty” and took initiative to pull the working masses away from social democracy.

On the other hand, this line was obviously creating a fertile ground for “reformist” transgressions. As Lenin was developing a prudent policy consistent with the perspective of socialism in one country, this was naturally making the international communist movement more susceptible to right deviations. Moreover, the “left” actors that displayed a revolutionary will (or thought they did so) had to work without the guidance of Lenin, who was conducting the orchestra. As I said before, it is meaningless to look for Lenin’s prompting in every step the Comintern had taken between 1920 and 1923; in a period of very limited means of correspondence the Bolshevik leader learned about and reacted to many decisions subsequently.

However, Lenin had found the “Open Letter” plausible so that later, in the Third Congress of the Comintern he declared that it was “*a model political step*” and said, “*In Europe, where almost all the proletarians are organised, we must win the majority of the working class.*”<sup>296</sup> The “Open Letter” was shown as a model regarding this goal, and those who did not understand this goal had understood nothing about the revolution at all...

The events that had transpired in the six months between the publishing of the “Open Letter” (January 8, 1921) and Lenin’s speech in the Comintern Congress (June-July 1921) attaches a special importance to his discourse.

First, there had been the resignation of VKPD leader Paul Levi from party administration. Levi had been the person behind the

“Open Letter,” and his resignation had been in protest of the Comintern administration’s interference in the communist-socialist movement in Italy, and its granting observer status to Communist Workers’ Party of Germany (KAPD) in the Third International.<sup>297</sup>

After this, VKPD had taken a step that cannot be considered consistent with the “Open Letter” and starting from March 18, called the working class to a general strike and armament. In 1920, the opportunity had been missed and now the party was trying to create an opportunity of its own. However, neither had the party made a sufficient preparation beforehand, nor was the working class in a suitable mood to answer this call. The call resounded for only one week and the party had to back down. The results were heavy, dozens of party militants had been killed, and more than four thousand people had been arrested, with quite a few party members among them.

In the weeks following this “attempt” that the working class did not follow, at least half of the members of VKPD left the party. In plain numbers: Somewhere around *200 thousand members*. Almost all resources agree that by the beginning of August the number of the party members had shrunk to around 180 thousand.

We cannot know whether those who left the party had become anxious of the revolutionary initiative taken by the party, or had lost faith in its political wisdom. The only thing we know is that in the March of 1921, KPD had not shown a particular “prowess.”

As with all defeats, retreats and failures, the center of the party was plunged into a turmoil. With the arrest of the current leader Heinrich Brandler, Ernst Meyer assumed responsibility. On the other hand, Paul Levi, who had resigned this position in “protest” of the Comintern administration, used the March Action as an opportunity to openly accuse the party of putschism. A strategic debate within KPD and about KPD as the most important party in the capitalist world started just before the upcoming Third Congress of the Comintern.

The person that Paul Levi criticized most in the Comintern administration was Hungarian Béla Kun. He claimed that the push in Germany had been devised by him. According to Clara Zetkin, who was giving voice to similar criticisms at the time, Lenin was

also distraught about March Action. Moreover, she was agreeing with Levi's criticisms.<sup>298</sup> However, Levi's turning his criticisms into a public matter and condemning the party with a pamphlet also angered Lenin immensely. It was partly because of this that the March Action was both criticized and revered in the Comintern Congress!

Paul Levi was expelled from the party on April 15 with the charge of "breaching revolutionary discipline." ECCI had already condemned Levi and congratulated VKPD for its initiative in the March Action, and the dominant emphasis in the Comintern Congress would have been "defeated armies learn their lesson."

Lenin was saying, "*The March Action was a great step forward in spite of the mistakes of its leaders.*" He condemned Levi for publicly attacking a struggle to which hundreds of thousands of workers joined, and asked the delegates "*Had we really prepared for an offensive?*" Radek's shouted answer was "*We had not even prepared for defense*" but Lenin's own assessment was more thought provoking. He said, "*Only newspaper articles talked of an offensive.*" In this case, an ill-fated decision had been taken, but a revolutionary offense could not have been ruled out in general.<sup>299</sup>

By the way, the actual scale of workers' participation in the March Action had also been an argument in the Comintern Congress. Zinoviev had made an estimation of 500 thousand in his report while the German delegates decreased this to 200 thousand.

Lenin was sure that the whole affair had been gravely ill-timed. However, giving any credence to Levi's defeatism would have shaken the authority of the Comintern. Besides, this had been the first time that the German communists had taken a real initiative and this important display of courage should not have been put down, since this would have opened the door to a very sterile form of revolutionary politics that avoided any risks. On the other hand, it was also true that the German party had surely taken a risk far too great regarding the strategy of socialism in one country, which Lenin had been trying to posit in the world revolutionary movement, and it had lost considerable ground.

This time, Lenin outlined the framework more clearly. The Third Congress of the Comintern brought forward the "United

Front” tactic to win over the majority of the working class. This foresaw a unity in the political base between social democratic and communist workers and requested that no “sectarian” moves should be made that would have severed this relationship. The slogan was chosen as “*To The Masses...*” VKPD had no problems with this. Meyer was a person who was completely suitable to a “United Front” policy. He was inclined towards “forgetting about” the March Action and sought to implement a general policy in line with the “Open Letter” of Levi’s term. Thus, Levi, who had crossed the line by trying to pass judgment on the March Action, was sent off and Meyer, who had abandoned the political line of the Action, took the reins!

In hindsight, the Comintern’s stand behind March Action had been absolutely to the mark. When we cast a general look at the revolutionary period between the end of 1918 and the end of 1923, we see that KPD suffered much heavier blows when it did not take initiative compared to the moments at which it did. Aside from some local moves, the uprising attempt in 1921 was the only moment in which KPD plunged forward. It was ill-timed; they were extremely ill-prepared (to such an extent that the military leadership of the uprising was assumed by a non-party member); but compared to the confusion of January 1919, inertia of 1920 and indecision of 1923, 1921 has plenty virtues that should be embraced. Miscalculations can happen, but let us not forget that in the Germany of 1921, contrary to some claims, a revolutionary situation was present.

Under revolutionary objective conditions, one should think twice before defaming an “uprising” as adventure.

Lastly, a note on Paul Levi... Lenin thought that Levi was in the right until the pamphlet in which he bashed the party was published. What happened after?

Afterwards, Levi also took leave from the ranks of communist thinking and settled into the ranks of social democracy. Therefore, what had been behind his “putschism” accusation was not only an analysis of the concrete situation but also Spartacus League’s traditional phobia of Bolshevism; and the general rule that somebody who despised Bolshevism in 1920s would have come to no good in the end held true for Levi, too!

## German October and Withering Away of the Revolutionary Wave in Fiasco

The Communist International had started to posit the “socialism in one country” strategy in 1920. In this context, the Polish campaign of the Red Army and suppression of the Kapp putsch by the working class in Germany (during the course of which KPD had stalled dramatically) had been brackets of optimism that had been opened and closed contrary to the general strategy. We observe that in March 1921, the bracket had been opened despite the fact that KPD had been developing policies in line with this strategy, which was counselling prudence to communist parties.

It was closed in a week.

From that moment on, KPD remained defensive, accumulated force and gained ground incrementally.<sup>300</sup> It was indicative that, to prevent the offensive tactics of 1921, the strong emphasis at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922 was on “defense.” It was the capitalists’ turn to attack. And this attack would have come from an expected quarter: the rights that the working class achieved from November 1918.

The question was noted in the congress documents as “*The capitalist offensive grows more fierce every day. The main attack is against the eight-hour day.*”<sup>301</sup> To repel these attacks, the defensive line must be organized by bringing together widest range possible

from among the working class. The success of the defense would have provided the conditions for offense in the future.

KPD was already following this line in the period following March 1921 and particularly in 1922. And nothing was changed as the new year rolled in; that is, except for the worsening of the economic conditions.

1923 was a nightmarish year for the German worker. Hyperinflation, which the capitalists were using as a channel of capital accumulation, became a real social tragedy. German Mark lost 30 percent (sometimes even more) of its purchasing power daily. The scenes of people pushing wheelbarrows full of paper money, banknotes and stamps that were surcharged by hand were common in the Germany of 1923 –these would later become the norm across the capitalist world during the Great Depression.

The correspondences written to the organ of the Comintern by Victor Serge, who was sent to Germany for observation and intelligence, provides an illustrative panorama of the situation.<sup>302</sup> Reading these, one feels deeply the immense misery suffered by the working masses, and bewails the opportunity to strangle German capitalism that the proletariat missed in the period of 1918-1923.

This was capitalism at its most despicable. In 1923, if a person at the head of a queue for potatoes bought a kilo for five thousand marks, the person at the end would have to buy a kilo for seven thousand. The purchasing power of workers' money shrunk as they waited in queues. The daily wage of some workers was only enough to buy a single tramway ticket. In many cities, the shopkeepers shut up shop when the workers received their wages in the evening and opened up next day to sell at higher prices. This was a sinister alliance between large capital and petty bourgeois shopkeepers. The same petty bourgeoisie was using the bathtubs in their houses not to wash themselves but to hoard potatoes. If you sat down for a coffee, you had to drink it fast because the price for a cup may rise by 80 percent during the course of your stay. Even on rainy or stormy days, children went barefooted and without hats to school. In 1923, German workers had only half of the bread and meat they had before the war.

The big bourgeoisie really made a killing, the monopolization

process gained speed and naturally, social discontent came to a head. The working class was paying the price for failing to seize power. Workers were starving while bosses were ruthlessly attacking their basic rights and pushing forward with the motto "*longer days, less pay.*"

Ruhr crisis came on the top of this. On January 11, 1923, France suddenly invaded and occupied the region of rich coal mines citing Germany's failure to pay war reparations as the reason. German capitalists perceived this as an opportunity to point to the "external enemy" and incite a nationalist mood in the working class, so that they would no longer be the target of its ire. Nevertheless, the violence inflicted by the French occupiers on the workers in Ruhr, coupled with the (sometimes overt) collaboration between French and German capitalists also made a sudden shift from "national" to "class-based" contradiction possible.

Meanwhile, the Comintern was proving to be a good mentor. The German and French socialist movement, which had stood by while the workers throttled one another in the First World War after penning volumes of internationalist word mongering and lengthy speeches delivered at conjoined demonstrations, was this time acting in unison with a revolutionary stance. French Communist Party was standing against the occupation.

In this complex environment, KPD, instead of leaving its "defensive" position, added the Ruhr issue as an item to its general agenda of struggle for economic rights. It was a hard case; ultimately the Versailles system represented the injustice and ruthlessness of the imperialist world, but the victim was not clear. Was it the German nation, or the German proletariat?

For German capital, "external enemy" provided a perfect opportunity to demand further sacrifices in the country. They were using the same old song of "being on the same boat." However, combatting this ideology contained a pitfall of acting indifferently in the face of an annexation of some part of the country. KPD did not make this mistake; and found it in itself to speak for the German nation. However, the ideological confusion within the party showed itself in the great mistakes made during the exercise of this right.

In the Party Congress convened in 1923, the thesis that Germany was a victim of French imperialism was brought forward. This was not very problematic, particularly when the occupation was taken into account. However, if this had come to mean a suspension of the struggle against German bourgeoisie, KPD would have been in an impasse. Indeed, this had been the concern voiced by the party opposition as a criticism in the congress.<sup>303</sup>

However, the actor with which KPD failed to determine a correct distance on the Ruhr issue was the German nationalists. German nationalism had materialized in several organizations at the time and collectively, they were the sword arm of the counter-revolution; this fact had been proven beyond any doubt in every rising moment of the working class struggle. Nevertheless, German nationalism had its own peculiar dynamics. The connections between its organizations and the capitalist class were established with mechanisms that were impossible to simplify; and the nationalist ideology would have lost its influence if it failed to appeal to more than just the daily needs of the capitalists.

In this context, there was nothing surprising about the “radical” actions pursued by right extremist organizations in the struggle against occupation of Ruhr region by French and Belgian troops. Nazi Party, which was one of the chief among these organizations, was using some of its armed elements (which had been trained in the struggle against the revolutionary working class) against French occupiers. When one of them, Leo Schlageter was killed by the occupiers on May 26, German right found the hero it had long sought for. Schlageter was part of a team of saboteurs that demolished railroads, which were used to transport coal from the occupied region to France; and suddenly, he had become the “martyr” of everybody.

KPD was also among those that hailed Schlageter. Karl Radek was referring to him as “*an honorable soldier of counter-revolution*” in the meeting of ECCI in June. He was perceived as a faithful, honest, committed man who had chosen a wrong path. Radek’s article on the subject was published in *Die Rote Fahne*. An article by Ernst Graf zu Reventlow, the founder of the right extremist German Völkisch Freedom Party (DVFP) was also published in the

same issue. In many political gatherings, the communist speakers were sharing the lectern with the nationalists. KPD was trying to pull young people with fascist tendencies, most of whom came from poor families, towards the struggle of the working class. Naturally, this did not prove to be particularly effective, but the accusations of backstabbing the nation levelled by the German right against KPD seriously decreased; at least for a time...

While the difference between patriotism and nationalism is clear for Marxists, fraternization around the concept of "nation" between movements that represent different classes or the revolution and counter-revolution is always like a walk through a minefield for the revolutionaries. The same was the case with KPD's contact with the nationalists in 1923, and when Ruth Fischer, who had been a "leftist" opposed to this contact, hailed everybody who struggled against "Jewish capital" in a conjoined meeting with right extremists, all hell broke loose. The social democrats printed the speech with much clamor in their own newspapers. In her speech, Fisher had especially underlined the "Jew" emphasis, and stressed that one (The Communist) of the two enemies declared by German fascism right from the very beginning was also seeing the other enemy (The Jew) as its own.

Such an approach was naturally impossible to justify by categorizing the Jews according to their class characteristics.<sup>304</sup>

Politics is a ruthless business. Ruth Fischer had first come forward as a representative of the left wing of KPD, where she tried to pull the party towards an adventurist line by developing theories of "continuous offensive." Then, she tried to sidle up to the German fascists by acting the anti-Semite although she was a communist from a Jewish family. It was obvious that Ruth Fischer would not have stopped at that... Although her star shone briefly there, she could not remain in KPD for long, and from there she jumped directly to anti-communism. In further years, she would have resurfaced in the USA as a snitch during the witch-hunt of McCarthy against communists. Her real name was Elfriede Eisler, and she was the sister of communist musician Hans Eisler... Hans Eisler went down into history as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century. For German Democratic Republic, our most

precious memento of Germany in 20th century, he composed *Auferstanden Aus Ruinen*, its national anthem. Hans of the Eislers lives on in the many songs on our tongues and in our hearts, and nobody remembers Elfriede!

Whatever... KPD's journey in the Ruhr storm did not last long. Although the Cuno Cabinet had initially been quite successful in turning the crisis to its advantage, the "national sentiments" did not prove sufficient to protect it. The economy was bankrupt. Past a certain point, hyperinflation blew any nationalist sentiment away.

However, for KPD, social democracy was still the factor that stalled the masses. As I noted above, after 1921, the Comintern had started to advocate a policy of unified struggle in the political base to break the influence of social democracy. The most important area for the implementation of this policy was Germany.

The Comintern, which had been founded with a focus on "seizing power" in 1919 was now devising its strategy by calculating more than one parameters, placing the existence of Soviet Russia to the center of that strategy and warning the communist parties in the west not to neglect the "defense."

In this context, the thesis of the Fourth Congress (November-December 1922) that capitalism was on the offense is of a particular importance. This was the last Comintern Congress that Lenin was able to attend, and in the call addressed to "The Working People of Russia" in the opening session, there was an emphasis of particular importance:

Class contradictions are sharpening, and there is every indication that Europe is becoming entangled in a fierce clash between proletariat and bourgeoisie. But, the darker the night in Europe, the brighter shines the star from the Soviet North, that of the proletarian dictatorship that is yours and also ours.<sup>305</sup>

There were more remarks in the same direction. The Congress reminded that the working class would suffer more casualties in the struggle, emphasized that the workers of all countries should take precautions for their self-defense and stated that the "*To The Masses...*" slogan of the Third Congress had become even more vital in the past year.

The objective revolutionary conditions were still present in Europe. However, the working class that had been unable to seize power up to that point was now trying to protect its achievements so that it could once again gain the initiative against capital, which had embarked on an offensive to crush it. The revolution and counter-revolution had become intertwined, and the internal balances of the revolutionary situation had changed against the working class in the three years from 1919. The success of the Fascist Party of Mussolini, who was an ex-socialist, was evaluated exactly in this context by the Fourth Congress:

The occupation of the factories by the Italian workers in the autumn of 1920 was a decisive moment in the development of the class struggle in Italy. The Italian workers moved instinctively towards a revolutionary solution of the crisis, but the absence of a revolutionary workers' party decided the fate of the working class, sealed their defeat, and prepared the present victory of fascism.<sup>306</sup>

The general evaluation of the Congress was this: A great revolutionary opportunity presented itself. Russian working class seized this opportunity, and subsequently, the power. The main reason why socialist revolution did not spread to Europe was the absence of a vanguard party to lead the working masses. Capitalists, in turn, exploited this as an opportunity and launched a counter-offensive. Now, the tasks of the international movement were, defending the Soviet power and sabotaging the imperialist blockade against it on one hand, while protecting the achievements of the working class and waiting for an opportune moment to strike forward on the other.

Since the crisis had not yet been resolved, this opportune moment could have ripened within a week, or maybe never at all within the period of the present crisis!

Lenin was preparing for the worst. He knew that the key to defending Soviet Russia and protecting the achievements of the working class in Europe at the same time was finding a way not to alienate the social democratic social base and not becoming detached from it.

However, in many countries, particularly in Germany, social democracy had become the most important tool in the protection of capitalist domination through the resolute position of its leadership. It was unthinkable that their policies should be exempted from opposition and exposure. Yet therein lied the problem; the social democratic workers could not have developed a sympathy towards communist parties that continuously criticized and labeled the leaders that they were following. Moreover, the working masses had never let go of the “unificationist” mood that they had in the beginning of the revolutionary wave. They seemed to have a disinclination to acknowledge the fact that the communists and social democracy were defending different class interests.

When the frontal assault against social democracy in 1919-1920 did not produce the desired results and it became evident that self-preservation ability of capitalism was far better than it had been supposed to be, the Comintern started to pursue a different path to expose the true nature of social democracy. They stayed away from closed diplomacy and made open calls to joint action so that the whole working masses could see. These calls would naturally have been turned down, but it was supposed that the workers in the political base would have pressured their party administration and some would have broken away from the hypocrite social democratic leaders. The “Open Letter” of KPD in 1921 was written with this need in mind.

Other attempts were also made. In April 1922, the three Internationals that claimed to “represent the workers’ movement” came together. When the Bolshevik leaders gave the necessary answer to the arrogance displayed by social democratic delegates that bordered on interfering with the internal affairs of the Soviet Russia, this meeting ended without producing any concrete results.

In any case, it was not possible for the communists and social democracy to meet on a “common” political ground. However, the discussion took a quite different turn when it came to the trade union movement. The issue was not only the “unificationist” mood in the working class. The attempt at founding red unions in 1919 had not produced the desired results, and insisting on establishing revolutionary trade unions as the capitalist offensive

intensified could have weakened the working class. The Comintern Congress of 1922 did not only advise against such attempts, but also demanded that efforts for a (re)unification of trade union movement be made in countries where a secession had occurred.

The Comintern Congress was discussing around concepts like trade union unity, united front, unity at the political base etc. However, the event that made the relationship with the social democrats particularly delicate was the assassination of Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau on June 24. Political murders had become commonplace in Germany at that time; generally communists, politicians that were known as “leftists” and prominent Jews were targeted. Nevertheless, the targeting of the Foreign Minister incited a wide public scorn.

Working masses were inflamed; even bourgeois politicians had to confess the threat presented by “right extremism.” According to various sources, the demonstrations across Germany on the next day were the largest in the history of Germany. In some settlements, the bourgeois democrats were among the organizers of the meetings.<sup>307</sup>

The massive anger that manifested itself in the large demonstrations, which were said to have swelled to 800 thousand in Berlin and 200 thousand in Leipzig, provided KPD with an opportunity to push forward once more with the “united front” policies. Only hours after the killing of Rathenau, KPD took the initiative and called upon SPD and USPD for a conference on the preventive measures to be taken against right-wing terrorism.

SPD continued to refuse the “united front” proposal, but the pressure from its political base would have forced the social democratic leaders to sit down and negotiate with the communists.

The communists brought demands that were consistent with the legitimacy of the German Revolution that had risen on the November of 1918. Among these were; investigation of monarchist and counter-revolutionary state officials, amnesty for the imprisoned workers, armament of the workers, creation of proletarian supervisory committees. The communists were also demanding open negotiations while the social democrats insisted that the negotiations be kept secret since they did not want to refuse these

demands publicly.<sup>308</sup>

The material result of the negotiations was the Berlin Accord signed by the three parties and trade unions on June 27. A call was made for a law to protect the Republic, which would include a ban on monarchist or anti-republican propaganda, and dissolve and outlaw all organizations that acted in this direction. The most important demands of the communists (armament of workers and creation of proletarian supervisory committees) were refused by the social democrats. However, the worst was that an indefinite concept like “anti-republican” could have easily been used against the communists, too.<sup>309</sup>

Indeed, the social democrats were loath to stand side by side with the communists. Shortly afterwards, on July 8, KPD was officially notified that it was removed from the accord! After this, on July 18, the parliament passed the “Law for the Protection of the Republic” which included anti-communist articles besides articles against the far right. The dissenting votes of KPD did not change the result.

The United Front tactics, which were supposed to have a stronger basis after the killing of Walter Rathenau, had instead provided the basis for a sordid plot in which the communists were deceived.

However, the social democrats, without realizing this, were pushing KPD towards an independent and revolutionary line.

The social democracy did not act together with the communists in taking effective preventive measures against fascism, but neither could it prevent KPD from acting on its own. The party started to create defense organizations of the working class under the name Proletarian Hundreds. In many settlements, workers who were members of social democratic parties were organizing together with KPD against high cost of living and creating Supervisory Committees in complete disregard of the policy of staying away from KPD pursued by their leaders. KPD’s number of members was rapidly increasing.

On the other hand, the “division” in the party persisted. Some perceived United Front tactics as a strategic decision and acted with the hope of carrying this towards a class collaboration, while others were longing to sound the charge without grasping

the outline and reasons of the socialism in one country strategy. However, there were also people like Ernst Thälmann, (who would later become the leader of the party and would lose his life in a Nazi death camp) that perceived the policies of 1922 as an accumulation and preparation process, and were looking for opportunities for a new leap forward.

By 1923, KPD had become a formidable power. More than 80 municipalities were completely governed by communists while KPD was the strongest party in 170 municipalities. In many settlements KPD and SPD were together in the local government. With help from Soviet Russia, the party press had reached a very high level of influence. They had more than 30 daily newspapers with a total circulation of 388 thousand. Among these, *Die Rote Fahne* was published 60 thousand in Berlin, and on many days sold more than *Vorwärts*, the legendary newspaper of the social democrats.

The air was full of optimism, but the party leadership could not develop a clear-cut strategy. The claim that KPD had the support of the majority of working class was being voiced. This claim, which was quite hard to verify, was of great importance since Lenin had stipulated that in countries like Germany, where the whole working class was organized, acting without support from majority of the working class would have been adventurism.

So, was the time right?

The party was unable to say so resolutely. It was true that hyperinflation alone provided fertile ground for revolutionary action but the shadow of the trauma suffered in 1921 had still not lifted. There were serious differences of opinion among party organizations; for example, the committee of the most important city, Berlin, was singing a quite different tune than the party center.

When the period of 1923 until the month of June is studied, it becomes obvious that KPD did not have a current plan for an uprising. There was not even the sign of such a mood in the Comintern. The idea of an uprising became rapidly prominent in the party by the developments of July and especially August.<sup>310</sup>

The Central Committee of KPD made a statement on July 11 and called the working class to a mass demonstration on July 29 with the context of an Anti-Fascist Day. The party was once again

putting the armament of the working class on its agenda. Organs of KPD were reiterating the “*preparation for a final confrontation*” theme. Bourgeois press hooted and hollered, and the Ministry of Interior declared a ban on the July 29 demonstration. Obviously, bourgeoisie wanted to catch KPD while it was still unprepared and crush it. After taking the counsel of ECCI and the Bolshevik Party KPD backed down but did not fall completely silent and arranged demonstrations in many places.

These gatherings had been encouragingly crowded. The workers, who were struggling with hunger, were looking for a way out and were progressively becoming more daring. This time, the party was not belated in sensing the stirring within the working class. Indeed, shortly before July 29 the widespread discontent started to shake the Cuno Cabinet. In any case, it was unthinkable for a government to remain “comfortable” under such high rates of inflation. Cuno tried to fight back, even got a vote of confidence from the Parliament in a critical session, but a government that did not have the “confidence” of the working class in Germany in the summer of 1923 could not have stayed in power. The general strike hit hard and the government fell in a few days.

The anger that fueled the general strike was incited by high cost of living, particularly high prices of foodstuffs, many of which became inaccessible for proletarian families. This time, KPD was not left behind by the process, became prominent from time to time in the organization of the strike; but it was also not the defining factor. With the fall of the Cuno Cabinet, German capital once again called the social democrats, whom it had put on leave, and a wide coalition was formed under the leadership of Stresemann.

It would shortly be seen that this was not just a change of government, and that the German monopolies had decided to stop the increasingly risky game they had been playing with high inflation.

However, KPD not only failed to foresee the changes that the new government would bring about in the economic situation of the country, but also underestimated the effects of the presence of social democrats in the coalition. After the fall of Cuno Cabinet, it called for the continuation of the general strike and tried to confront directly the capitalist order itself. However, the influence

that the social democrats had on many of the workers was not broken yet. For many workers, SPD becoming part of the government was a sufficient achievement. The general strike died out in a few days despite all the efforts of KPD. However, this did not mean a devastation for KPD and the hundreds of thousands (actually, by this time, millions) of workers under its influence. It was just that the violent river that tore down Cuno had slowed down, and its flow had decreased a little.

Compared to both 1919 and 1921, KPD was now much more organized in the working class, and it had also consolidated its inner organization. Its expectation was that, the new government would have created a widespread disappointment in the masses, and this time, there would have been no lack of synchronicity between itself and the revolution.

It was no surprise that capital turned against KPD once the general strike came to an end. However, KPD was no longer a force that could be crushed easily. Even some workers who were deceived by the tricks of social democracy were standing against the oppression against KPD. Calling the far right to duty was also not feasible since it could have sparked a “comradship” between the social democratic workers and the communists. The government had no other policy choice then to surround KPD and wait for an opening.

However, KPD decided not to wait. The German workers had repelled a putsch in 1920 and had just brought down a government. The weapon of general strike had been effective in both occasions. It was true that the strike had died out but the discontent in the working masses was still strong and KPD’s propaganda had serious echoes in many cities.

The situation was exhilarating, and the rest only depended on good preparation and planning... This was what they (or at least some of them) thought.

At the end of August 1923, two antagonistic classes, two antagonistic masterminds were working day and night against one another. One would have eventually brought down the other. The revolutionary front set up its headquarters in Moscow. Some of the KPD leaders had put their heads together with the experienced

rulers of the first worker power to define the most effective strategy to strike the deathblow to German capitalism, and also to plan the details of technical preparations.<sup>311</sup>

As I underlined before, for KPD, the process had started with the perspective of “struggle against fascism” in July. The party body was ordered to retaliate in the strongest way possible to any assault on the party by counter-revolutionary forces:

Their violent coup can only be stopped by meeting white terror with red terror. (...) If they put every tenth striker up against the wall, the revolutionary workers will kill one fascist in five. The fascist associations have arms and military equipment. Those workers who are not yet in possession of arms must know where and when they can obtain them if they are needed.<sup>312</sup>

Naturally, the witnesses to this period has different evaluations about the echo of this revolutionary mood in the political base. However, although it was obvious that a large portion of the working class was under the influence of reformism, the fact that the communists had prepared a sizable section of the proletariat for a “sharp” confrontation was also obvious.

There was great excitement at Moscow. Apart from Lenin, who was bedridden, everybody was engrossed by the fate of German revolution. They were ready to open another bracket in the strategy of socialism in one country. Trotsky was saying “as soon as possible.” Zinoviev, being one of those responsible for the failure in 1921, had focused all his attention on news from Moscow, thinking that only a victorious German revolution would absolve him. Even Stalin, who had never placed much faith in the European revolution, was wondering, “can this happen?”

Yes, in Moscow, the day for the uprising was being discussed!

It is even said that a “Commission for International Affairs,” which included Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek, Chicherin, Dzerzhinsky, Pyatakov and Sokolnikov, was created in August to observe and interfere in the developments in Germany.<sup>313</sup> Trotsky’s suggestion of November 7 was refused, or rather, the idea that setting an exact date would have been wrong gained prominence. However, some sources claim that November 9 was

decided upon eventually. Officers from the Red Army were sent to Germany to handle the military organization of the revolution. In October, Radek, Pyatakov and Sokolnikov travelled secretly to Germany to help KPD.

Commissar of Foreign Affairs Chicherin, who was obsessed about maintaining amicable relations with Germany, and Commissar of Military Trotsky, who had covered considerable ground in the collaboration with the German army, were developing strategies for the success of German Revolution!

On the other hand, the bourgeois Germany was coming down hard on the organized working class and KPD, but KPD leadership, who had decided not to wear the party down with unnecessary confrontations, met all oppression, provocations and bans with silence.

The date on which the working class would have seized power was set eight-nine weeks beforehand, but daily life went uninterrupted in Germany. As KPD withdrew into its shell and continued its preparations, the new government largely solved the food problem, pulled the reins on the inflation for a while, and introduced the gold standard that would limit the real depreciation of workers' wages. This was a real relief for the working masses weary of war and revolution. Naturally, the demands from the bosses to "harder work" came alongside this relief, many achievements were abolished but now the German worker could put bread, milk and butter on the table. This was the carrot at the end of the stick.

The stick itself was not only held by the government but also by the fascist movement which was its covert arm, and fascism was growing larger and larger in Bavaria. A horde had been created, who freely ranted and raved against Versailles, and declared itself the enemy of the Republic, the Parliament, Jews and Communists. Supposedly, this counter-revolutionary horde also threatened the government in Berlin, but actually, it was a great asset for the central power. It was possible to use this force to oppress the working class, even crush it when necessary. However, the real utility of the fascist movement at the time was that, it enabled the government to disguise itself as the "moderate" center against the extreme elements on right and left.

Berlin represented the center; Bavaria represented fascism.  
And Saxony represented the reds!  
Victor Serge summarizes the situation thus:

On one side white Bavaria is arming, on the other red Saxony is working. Between the two, Hilferding and Stresemann are printing more paper money.<sup>314</sup>

Bavaria was talking about marching on Berlin. But they would have to pass through Leipzig, Dresden and Chemnitz, the revolutionary centers of Saxony and the militant cities of neighboring Thuringia.

One strategic calculation of KPD was inciting the rest of Germany by an armed uprising in Saxony against the physical threat forced upon it.

However, this strategy (which had been decided upon) had holes that showed very few lessons had been learned from past years. This strategy was discussed in Moscow, and met with objections from both KPD and Bolshevik Party ranks. The truth of the matter was that, the action plan relied more on assumptions than actual information.<sup>315</sup>

The communists entered the government in Saxony and Thuringia in a coalition with the social democrats. These states would have responded against any step taken by the central government against the working class or threat of intervention in the “red” states with a call to general strike, and after that, arms would have been distributed to the workers from the state inventory in these two states. This, supposedly, was the calculation behind foregoing the earlier decision taken in the Comintern to “remain in opposition” and entering the government in the states where KPD was strong.

Concerning the part about the government, the plan proceeded like clockwork! Stresemann, after declaring on September 26 that he had ended the passive resistance in occupied Ruhr to take inflation under control, moved onto the next point in his agenda, which was a legislation that would have cropped all the achievements of the working class during the German Revolution. The government disintegrated on October 3, and he set up a new one on October 6

by sacking Hilferding whom he found to be “too leftist.” On October 13, the bill that abolished eight-hour day was passed by the Parliament with the votes of social democrats.

Meanwhile, Berlin kept threatening the two red states of Saxony and Thuringia using Bavaria, which was accusing Berlin of submitting to the impositions of Versailles and betraying the German nation, and military units were crossing the border into Saxony.

In the face of these developments, it was not sensible to wait for November. The Revolution was rescheduled to an earlier date!

On October 21, a conference of worker representatives was convened in Chemnitz for a call to general strike. A heinous attack was launched on the working class, its organizations and the states in which it was in power; and this should not have gone unanswered. Either Brandler, or Zinoviev whom he accused later, had thought of everything carefully beforehand, but somehow forgot how social democracy always betrays the working class at every critical turn!

“No” said the social democrats, *“If you insist on a general strike, we will withdraw from state government.”* This was the “left-wing” of social democracy. Thus, the hands of KPD were tied in Chemnitz, the reddest city of Saxony. The reins and fate of the revolution were handed over to social democracy, and social democracy pulled sharply on those reins. “German October” which had been planned upon a series of assumptions was sabotaged by the “resolute” stance of a handful of social democrats. KPD leadership desisted from the uprising.

Ernst Thälmann had been among those who objected to this plan right from the beginning. He had insisted that the social democrats were not to be trusted; therefore, the party should not enter the state governments. He had asserted in the discussions in Moscow that the level of armament among the revolutionary workers was being overstated, and warned that the plan to overcome this shortcoming by using the government of Saxony could have failed. He had been unable to convince them.<sup>316</sup>

The military marched into Saxony and Thuringia without encountering any resistance, and brought down the governments. The social democrats in coalition with the communists once again

formed the governments after this coup. Their mission had been accomplished!

On the other hand, the city that would have cleared the name of German October was Hamburg. Many sources claim that the decision to cancel the uprising did not reach the city. In this seaport town of the north, a few hundred communist militants took control of the critical points of the city with a professionally planned “military” operation, believing that “the working class was mobilized all across the country.” In Hamburg, a very limited portion of the working class actually joined the action, but many more embraced these courageous revolutionaries, protected them, and hid them in their homes.

This is the tale of the legendary uprising, which Larissa Reissner recounts in *Hamburg at the Barricades*. A surrendered uprising, and a city that did not know it should have surrendered!

And one of the militants that commanded the Hamburg barricades was Ernst Thälmann, who had objected to the “uprising plan.” After hopelessly waiting for a few days for news and help from other cities, he was able to achieve a controlled withdrawal.

People like Chris Harman explain the emergence of the “Hamburg 1923” legend in later years by Thälmann’s “Stalinism.” Trite... In 1923, Thälmann was among the very few KPD leaders who knew what he was doing. In the course of the preparations for the uprising, he had made predictions that were later verified, and had criticized the strategy of Brandler and his circle. However, once this strategy had been decided upon, he acted in accordance and with the meagre resources at his disposal, and took control in Hamburg, which was his area of responsibility. Would it have been preferable if he had become part of the shameful inaction?

Yes, the “German October” which was backed not only by KPD but also by the Russian Bolsheviks, failed. When the “center” learned that Hamburg rose by itself, it decided not to lend a hand. Trade union leader Solomon Lozovsky was another Bolshevik who was there, he had chaired the meeting in which this decision had been taken, and his words of the subject was “*If one does not come to the aid of Hamburg that is not a betrayal. We sacrifice a division to save an army.*”<sup>317</sup>

He was right; past that point, KPD had nothing left to do for the German Socialist Revolution, and it was rational to pull through this failure with the smallest damage possible. However, he was also wrong, since the Hamburg division had saved the whole army from a shameful surrender. To an extent!

The Revolution in Germany, after the episodes of 1919, 1920 and 1921, came down with the (I shudder to use this word, but unfortunately, it is fitting) fiasco of October 1923 and died out. A party, which had hundreds of thousands of members<sup>318</sup> (some of which were armed), and at least that many workers ready to act in unison with it, was immobilized, and the excuse to this was the insistence of seven social democrats in Chemnitz. This was a fiasco regardless of whether or not the uprising decision had been realistic. A serious party should not back down from a decision so easily. KPD was a serious party, but because of a series of reasons, unserious elements had a way of gaining weight in it.

We have many reasons to say that Brandler never believed in a workers power as he devised the German October as a process that would have been developed together with the social democracy. This lack of faith would have been completely legitimate if it was the result of a realistic evaluation of the material conditions. However, we know that Brandler and his circle were generally distant to a revolutionary leap forward.<sup>319</sup>

KPD was never consisted only of the likes of Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer. This is why I am distraught to use the word "fiasco" about a moment in which hundreds of thousands of communists were poised to leap forward like a steel spring. But it is what it is...

The revolutionary period was now drawing to a close. In Turkey, On October 29, 1923, the most critical stage of the bourgeois revolution was achieved and the Republic was declared. On the same days, in Germany, the Republic was strangling the revolution that created it, and embarking on a journey that would have ended in 1933 with the most cruel and bloody dictatorship in world history.



## Why... Why did it Fail?

1923... This was the year in which the working class would have seized power. In October, in November at the latest. The result was quite the opposite. The “red” cities of Germany fell, “order” was restored, and the achievements of the working class were lost one by one.

What else?

Social democracy had done its duty exceedingly well and there was no reason for the presence of a party that paid lip service to “rights and justice” anymore. The social democratic ministers were left out of the government on November 2.

The fascist party had also done its duty perfectly. It helped as being a stick to be waved against the working class and also provided the chance for the government to say, “*We are opposed both to far right and far left.*” However, the Nazis were not lenient as the social democrats, when they were told that their mission was done, they did not back down but pushed forward. They insisted on marching on Berlin. They had also chosen November 7, to spite the communists. Berlin was saying, “*don’t*” while large capital was whispering “*no need.*” Hitler opted for a putsch instead of a march, and was arrested in an attempted “uprising” at a beer hall in Munich on November 8, where tragicomic things happened. The German monopolies wanted no more stirring.

In red Saxony, the social democrats retook their position in local governments after helping the military in bringing down the

worker governments they had been a part of. It was hard to govern Saxony without some “left-wing resembling” elements, because there would have to be somebody around to deceive the workers!

A multitude of KPD members were murdered in custody in November, as well as many honest social democratic workers who had sided with the communists. KPD’s party centers were seized, newspapers were banned, and on November 23, the party itself was outlawed.<sup>320</sup>

Social democracy, on the other hand, kept blaming the communists. They were claiming that the United Front policy and calls to cooperation with the social democracy had been the part of a hidden agenda: that is, to seize power. However, this had been no secret; KPD had been openly declaring this goal. The nonsense was that, SPD was using this to denigrate the communists while it still had the goals of socialism and workers’ power on its party program.

KPD had failed to mobilize to seize power, but it stood tall in the face of attacks against it. It organized a mass demonstration in Berlin five days after it had been outlawed in spite of all police attempts to prevent it, and showed the government that there were limits to its power. That government had taken away the right to an eight-hour day of the workers, toppled leftist state governments by military force and had arrested tens of thousands of workers. KPD could have used the anger these have caused to seize the initiative, so the government had to be careful. Therefore, the communist party managed to hold on as a semi-legal power during the five months it had been outlawed.

All this was well, but why had the party become immobilized in an uprising attempt for which it had prepared for weeks, even months in advance? Why had KPD failed to turn the deep crisis of German capitalism in the period between the beginning of 1919 and the end of 1923 to its account, and achieve a common success with Soviet Russia, which would have completely changed the course of history? Was it completely impossible for the working class to seize power in Germany in the October of 1923, as some claim? Or, had an historical opportunity been missed because of the mistakes of KPD leadership?

The conclusion I have derived from my study is this: Despite all the difficulties, it was not impossible for the working class to seize power in 1923. It should not be understood from this that I lay the whole blame of the issue to deficiencies in the subjective factor, that is, the party which would have led the working class. In revolutionary periods, success or failure depends on a multitude of objective and subjective factors. Moreover, in critical moments, events that can be defined as happenstance can cut the knot one way or the other.

In periods in which the revolution is on the rise, explaining away every failure of the working class with mistakes made by "The Party" or insufficient ripening of the objective conditions frequently fails to grasp the quirks of history. Undoubtedly, objective and subjective factors would have different weights in every example, but still, it is always healthy not to explain success or failure with just one factor. It should not be forgotten that, in a given country, even a party that does far more than all that is in its power has no guarantee of success.

It is true that in this sense KPD obviously did not do all that was in its power; however, when studied closely, it becomes apparent that the failure of German Revolution had been the combined result of far more complex factors.

Let us start with those that are not related to KPD.

In Germany, the collective wisdom, organization, economic power and political experience of the capitalist class were developed to an extent that was incomparable to the Russian bourgeoisie prior to the October Revolution. On every critical moment, German monopolies set the stage well; when they made mistakes, they mitigated these by opening new doors of collaboration and they never lost the initiative. Most importantly, they had derived many important lessons from what had happened in Russia.

The factor that brought the Bolsheviks to power had been their correct evaluation of the desire of peace among worker and peasant masses, and transforming this desire into a social momentum to be used as a means for a concrete political end. The Revolution of 1918 in Germany had risen with the same desire of peace and had toppled the Kaiser just as the Russian Tsar was toppled. The

Provisional Government in Russia, by opting to continue the war after the February 1917 moment of the Revolution, had foregone (one may even say *conceded*) the demand of peace, which had then become the revolutionary dynamo in the hands of the working class. German bourgeoisie, on the other hand, had already made its decision when the Revolution broke out in November 1918. The signing of a treaty of peace with the rival imperialist countries facilitated a reduction in the revolutionary energy of the working class, regardless of the dishonorable terms of that treaty. The anger incited by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles did not make up for this loss of energy; moreover, it once more made the mind of the poor people susceptible to the virus of nationalism.

It should be noted that the capitalist class displayed a similar cunning in rapidly taking the hyperinflation under control when it realized in 1923 that the working class, after it toppled the Cuno Cabinet, were ready to do much more. Had the Stresemann government insisted on the same economic policies, the social dynamics might have gained qualities which would have also shaped KPD itself and covered for its deficiencies and shortcomings.

This is just the place to add social democracy to the collective wisdom of capital. The presence of a social democratic movement that had a serious weight in the working class, that could play the part of a working class party while having no qualms about collaborating with and serving German monopolies and militarism had been such a misfortune!

It is nonsense to compare SPD to Russian Mensheviks. Above all, the power of Mensheviks in the working class was radically decreasing as the October of 1917 approached. Besides, when the boundless treachery of the German social democratic leadership is considered, it is obvious that comparing Mensheviks to them would be an injustice. I advise all those who find the Bolsheviks "sectarian" because they branded this movement, which had successfully carried out the part of the executioner of German Revolution, as "social fascist" in 1924, to study the Germany of 1918-1923 with patience and seriousness. In the future, humanity will remember Ebert, Scheidemann, Noske and other social democratic leaders with the same hateful feelings with which it would

remember the politicians like Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Yakovlev and Shevardnadze, who signed off the death warrant of USSR. These acted as such serviceable tools to German monopolies that we are unable to refrain from lamenting, "*Were it not for them...*"

In the words of an enemy of the revolution, "*when the power had slipped from the hands of the nerveless generals, [Ebert] had snatched it from the street where the Communists were about to seize it, and handed it back to the generals.*"<sup>321</sup> This was written about 1919, but they did the same thing at every turn, in 1920, in '21, in '23, and afterwards...

What was the reason behind this deep animosity of social democracy against the revolution?

Actually, it was quite simple... They loved the established order, order was their bread and butter, and their fetish. In 1914, when the war broke out, they had 1 million 86 thousand members, the trade unions it controlled had an annual income of 88 million marks. They were publishing 90 daily newspapers and employing more than 3 thousand people in these organs.

The German Social Democratic Party became a way of life. It was much more than a political machine; it gave the German worker dignity and status in a world of his own.<sup>322</sup>

For the German worker, a fake prestige. For the leaders, a very real material and spiritual fulfillment, a sizable plot of land in the world of bourgeoisie that they would not want to lose!

After the revolution dethroned the Kaiser in 1918 and the Republic was established, social democracy systematically struggled against the possibility of a workers' power. Let us remember that in the very beginning, as German bourgeoisie was trying to find a way to prevent the establishment of a Soviet government, it had been Ebert who colluded with the generals to crush Bolshevism. The same generals had convinced the Kaiser to abdicate; moreover, had said to him and the most powerful capitalists of Germany "*only social democrats can save us from the revolution.*" The social democrats hastened and took up this sinister assignment with an enthusiasm beyond the call of duty.

They disguised themselves with left, even revolutionary rhetoric

while doing these. In 1919, SPD was plastering the walls with posters that said, “*Socialization is on the march.*”<sup>323</sup> Coming soon! The article that allowed the socialization of private enterprises was added to the constitution by social democrats. The average worker was unable to shake of the feeling “*If socialism would come effortlessly like this, why do we need the pushes of communists which require so much sacrifice?*”

Being unable to break the influence of German social democracy was one of the main problems of KPD. Almost every method was tried to no avail. Apparently, KPD could not instill trust in the working masses and lacked the necessary consistence, self-confidence, maturity and creativity to pull them away from sheltering presence of the state party SPD. Moreover, the presence of USPD between SPD and KPD complicated the matters further by blurring the line between the communists and social democracy even more. The merging of USPD’s left wing with KPD gave some additional energy to the revolution but did not alleviate this problem.

The absence of the soviets, which had emerged in both of the revolutions (1905 and 1917) in Russia as the self-organization of working class, peasant and soldiers, is frequently underlined as a great handicap for German Revolution. To say that the Workers’ Councils made up for this absence would undoubtedly be an exaggeration. Nevertheless, the councils, as their name implied, more or less took on the same function with the soviets, and acted not only as a defensive organization but also as an organ of decision-making and power.

It is senseless to claim that the working class lacked the ability to organize and act together in Germany, where 14 million workers were unionized. One should not expect to find a working class in a capitalist country that is more organized and mobile than that of Germany in 1920s.

The absence of a single proletarian center like Petrograd which, when dominated, would have changed every balance of power in the country is another frequently underlined shortcoming in Germany. Undoubtedly, it made things easier for the Bolsheviks that the fate of class struggle was almost completely decided upon in a single city in the vast expanse of Russia. However, the presence of

many proletarian cities in which the revolution could find a foothold should be seen as a different advantage. In the industrialized Germany where the social weight of the peasantry had weakened considerably, a synchronized uprising would have curtailed the intervention capacity of the state forces, which already had serious deficiencies. One of the greatest problems of the German Revolution had been its "fragmented" and "local" character in its almost every critical moment. Indeed, the forces of order never cracked down on the revolutionary working class everywhere at the same time, but chose to take care of problems state by state. They did not have the sufficient strength to do otherwise. From the other side, German militarism would have been hard pressed to suppress a simultaneous uprising in several regions.

When evaluated carefully, it is seen that the Germany of 1919-1923 provided many objective advantages and disadvantages to the revolution. Such advantages and disadvantages were also apparent in the Russia of 1917. Therefore, it is absurd to say that the objective conditions were not ripe in Germany, with its developed industry and organized working class, to pass through the gate opened and held by the Russian working class.

Therefore, it is impossible to answer the question "was it possible or not?" without evaluating the other aspect of the matter, that is, the condition of the vanguard party which, in the event of a rising revolution, would have been the subjective factor that would carry the working class to power.

Indeed, almost all the Bolshevnik leaders of the period, including Lenin and Stalin, defined the problem of Germany as the lack of a real communist party. Therefore, it will be helpful to start with those who made this assessment.

Although the revolution in Germany was primarily the problem of the communists of this country, it is grossly unfair to put all the blame on KPD in the presence of the Comintern, which had set out with very rigid rules as a world party. The Comintern and the Russian Bolshevnik Party must be added to the "subjective factor" in the period of our investigation into Germany. They must be added to this, because they did not only play a "supporting" role. The Comintern and the Russian Party played a central role

in both strategic and organizational matters just as the inner dynamics of KPD.

Let us start with the Bolshevik Party. It should be clear by now that, aside from their internal differences of opinion, the defense and protection of Soviet Russia replaced the world revolution as the central factor in the policies of Russian Bolsheviks after 1920. There are no ifs and buts about this. They had come to this position not out of their indifference to the revolution in other countries, but through desperation and the necessity to be realistic. The staggering blow that the communist movement suffered in Germany in 1919, the collapse of Soviet power in Hungary, the defeat of the Red Army on the outskirts of Warsaw in 1920 (we also know how hesitant they were about the whole Poland issue in the first place) and similar setbacks forced the Bolsheviks to another strategic option. Any development in Germany that pushed at the boundaries of this decision was a particular event that did not cause an update in the overall strategy. When KPD took the initiative in 1921 and (more importantly) in 1923, the Bolsheviks did not shelve the strategy of socialism in one country, but made an attempt in a “different” direction within the confines of this strategy. Let us not forget that in 1923, while the German October was on the agenda, the Soviets had ongoing relations with the German state, and were warning all the other parties to implement policies consistent with the defense of socialism in one country. Moreover, the German state, although it knew that Moscow was behind the uprising, did not make a particular fuss over the issue; the new government and its chairman Gustav Stresemann took a stance for the continuation of the rapprochement with Soviet Russia.

This becomes particularly interesting when the role that the Bolsheviks assumed in the preparations of the uprising in Germany is considered. It would not be wrong at all to say that a party which had a strong Plan B in case the uprising failed would be particularly risk-averse. Especially if the Plan B was actually Plan A!

Another problem the Bolsheviks had in 1923 was the situation of Lenin. The great revolutionary leader had made his last contributions in the beginning of 1923 and left the political arena. The presence and authority of Lenin had so far protected the

Bolshevik Party from the adverse effects of the different tendencies and groupings in it to an extent. For example, thanks to the commanding presence of Lenin, the Comintern had not completely succumbed to the inconsistent policies of Zinoviev. However, Lenin only had a strategic control over the Comintern; Zinoviev and other Comintern officials had a quite wide area of freedom when it came to tactical and operational decisions. Because of this, the steps that Comintern took in particular countries did not always conform to the general direction determined in the Congresses.

On the other hand, everything was uncertain in the Bolshevik Party in 1923. To begin with, the struggle between prominent Bolsheviks had become severe and temporary affinities and alliances were taking form. The Bolshevik party lacked a center that could have managed the possibility of a socialist revolution in Germany in a rational and revolutionary manner in the middle of NEP and socialism in one country.

Let us put it like this: The Bolshevik Party had all the different tendencies KPD had, and more. Radek's rightism, Zinoviev's leftism, the inconsistencies of Bukharin and Trotsky... Therefore, the inputs from the Bolshevik Party into KPD came in several directions. The reverse was also true; the information, assessments and suggestions from KPD to Moscow were various.

It is not surprising that the culprits were sought within KPD when the German October turned out to be a fiasco; and that the blame was laid on Brandler and Thalheimer at first hand. However, there were some in the Bolshevik Party who thought like them and encouraged this right-wing faction within KPD. Indeed, when the confrontation came to a head in the Bolshevik Party, the accounts concerning Germany in 1923 were reopened one by one. Past a point, the different opinions and stances of different individuals are not important. The important thing was that, the Bolshevik leaders did not have a single, unified direction in 1923, and moreover, the lack of trust between them was painfully apparent.

Everybody started to criticize one another openly on Germany after 1924. For example, Trotsky had been one of the three Bolsheviks who prepared a report that said, "*the decision was correct,*" in

the course of the investigation into the retreat without a struggle in October 1923. Yet, in September 1924 he said, “*A great opportunity was missed*” and accused KPD administration and Zinoviev as the chairman of the Comintern.<sup>324</sup>

After all was said and done, nobody backed up the right-wing faction that led KPD at the time; yet, it would have been impossible for Brandler and his clique to rule the party unless that had the assent of Comintern. As I said, the essential issue was the inconsistencies of the Bolsheviks, who had lost the ability to act in unison as a party in 1923 themselves. The question “who was the culprit?” was not important. Starting from 1924, Stalin made a great effort to restore the party and, in my opinion, accomplished a task that included almost impossible hardships. However, this too was a process and neutrally, it progressed within the party through complicated balances and alliances.

The assertion that German Revolution had been prevented by Stalin and his companions who did not want a revolution in Europe is a bald-faced lie. Among the prominent Bolsheviks, Stalin had been among those with the least influence on Germany and the relations with KPD.

My opinion is that, the Bolshevik Party collectively failed the test about Germany in 1923.

And, about the Comintern... The situation in the Bolshevik Party had affected it, too; however, there was more to this issue. I do not want to make a scapegoat out of Zinoviev but he was an exceedingly wishy-washy individual to have chaired the Comintern. At times, he obviously had breakdowns. Radek was openly a rightist who sometimes made unnecessary leftist attempts to mask this. Béla Kun was somebody who angered Lenin greatly from time to time with the initiatives he took after the devastation in Hungary on 1919, but he might also have been the official who had the greatest room for maneuver in the Comintern for some time.

Comintern’s apparatus also worked erratically. The quality of the information that reached Moscow was insufficient to make sharp decisions. We can observe this fact from the correspondences of Victor Serge, who was sent to Germany with this mission. Serge was a deep, creative individual and his writings always had

an aesthetic quality, but he was far too passionate when it came to the concrete analysis of the concrete situation. His correspondences were not very helpful in making decisions; they were only ideal for increasing motivation after the decision have been made.

Above all these, the main problem was the outside interference of so many individual minds in an uprising in Germany. This was plain, outright wrong! Solidarity is a good thing, coordination also... However, the critical decisions were taken not in Germany but in Moscow and we cannot explain this with internationalism. A party that sought to seize power in a country like Germany should have been able to make its own decisions. We cannot jump over this just by saying that "*this was Comintern's modus operandi.*" The Bolsheviks made a mistake by interfering this much. Moreover, they had a different strategic preference, even if some of them did not understand this!

KPD administration also made a mistake by allowing so much "outside" interference. If the communists of Germany could not stand upright with character, nobody else could have! With the correspondence limitations of that time, how could they have expected to follow up on and make decisions about daily events happening thousands of kilometers away? An actor may have an international weight in strategic or theoretical issues; indeed, this had been the reason behind the Comintern's foundation in the first place, and every party had accepted the presence of this collective authority when joining the institution. However, in a historical moment when hours would have been critical, let alone days, you would have been immobilized if you established the headquarters outside the country.

Indeed, they were...

Is it not thought provoking that, when asked for their opinion some Bolsheviks had abstained by saying they did not have sufficient information? How could they have that information?

In revolutionary struggle, information, evaluation and decision-making processes make up an indivisible whole. However, the set up was supposed to work like this: Information would have come through the KPD hierarchy; then a structure outside that hierarchy would have evaluated that information and made the

decisions; and lastly, those decisions would have been implemented again by the KPD hierarchy!

So, how could such an irrational set of relations come to exist?

It did, because the communist party of Germany, which had been the central country of international workers' movement for decades, was established with the indecisions and inexperience that I elaborated on at length during the course of this study. In critical moments, they either made the wrong decisions, or not decided at all. Inevitably, this caused the Bolsheviks, who had been extremely successful in their own trials and tribulations, to look down on KPD.

I have noted more than once that KPD was a militant, revolutionary, courageous party; and I want to stress this again, the problem was not on this issue. The root of the problem lied in deeper soil. The root of the problem was that, Rosa Luxemburg had been unable to control her disdain for the bureaucratic structure of SPD and had sown the seeds of disorganization. This in turn resulted in a scattered organization in KDP at every critical turn. The same sickness showed itself in the doubtful approach to the success of Bolshevism at transforming itself from a small, rigid organization into a party that seized power within a year. Karl Liebknecht and particularly Rosa Luxemburg, even in the moments that they took the initiative, always felt the need to say, "*We would not make a putsch, we will not seize power unless we have the majority on our side.*" They were still saying this when they were murdered.

It was inevitable for a Marxist to take a wrong stance in the founding of the vanguard party, which would have led the revolution when he or she failed to understand the dialectics of the revolutionary process. Rosa Luxemburg was an extraordinary revolutionary, and she will always hold a glorious place in our history; but we must make objections to the aura of "immunity" and the "legend" that is created around her. One of the root causes beneath the failures in Germany up to 1923 had been the birth defects of KPD, which it was unable to shake off afterwards. Because of these defects, the party leaned either to the left or to the right. In this sense, what Lukács wrote at the time are to the point:

*Putschism can only flourish on soil prepared by opportunism.* Consequently, the existence of putschist tendencies in the working class must compel every true communist to undergo *self criticism*, to examine whether in fact his own tactics do not at some point contain opportunistic elements.<sup>325</sup>

We must acknowledge the fact that there had been a serious confusion on this matter in Germany. The Spartacus League had already been labelled as “sectarian”, “bigoted” and “adventurist” when they decided to split from the USPD to establish a separate party. The problem was that, since the revolutionary Marxist movement in Germany never tried to become an independent entity up to then, it had to breathe in the poisonous air of mainstream social democracy until the end of 1918. In these conditions, a reactionary type of politics became inevitable and also the accusations and criticisms of that world drove the movement to error. To such an extent that, even though Rosa Luxemburg said numerous times that “*we will not seize power unless we have the majority on our side*” before she was murdered, the movement was repeatedly accused of putschism. On the other hand, they were levelling the same accusation against others!

The greatest advantage of Bolshevism was that, it had attempted to find its own way as a “free” movement as early as 1902-1903. It was hard, but they learned never to be anxious about “what others would say.” Nobody could dictate anything from outside to Lenin’s party.

Naturally, KPD also made an internal evaluation after the failure of 1923. Everybody was right on some aspects of the matter. After all, we are talking about a period in which several decision making mechanisms had become entangled. In this context, it is both incorrect and morally problematic to lay all the blame on the rightist KPD leadership. Still, it is really surprising to read Brandler and Thalheimer, and impossible not to lament the misfortune of KPD.

The pamphlet that Thalheimer wrote later to clear himself (*A Missed Opportunity? The German October Legend and the Real History of 1923*) is evidence to the extremely mechanical nature of the relation KPD leadership established with the idea of

“revolution.” However, the evidences that Thalheimer discloses in this pamphlet on the inconsistencies of the prominent characters of the Comintern and the Bolshevik Party cannot be ignored.

Indeed, the clearest evidence to how unsound this process had been managed was the increasing influence of Ruth Fischer and her cronies in the party after Brandler and his company had been removed. Fischer and her faction were no more Bolshevik than Brandler and the like. Consequently, her term of leadership also did not last long.

On the other hand, there was a very important item of self-criticism in the “official” evaluation of KPD, which had also been accepted in the Comintern. It was stressed here that the party had made a big mistake in staying away from any struggle during the two months in which it had prepared for “the last fight.”<sup>326</sup>

Although it seems like the KPD had been obsessed with the “technical preparations,” this was not the case. Two interrelated reasons of immobilization are observed here. The first had been the worry to not wear down the party or suffer a blow just days before the revolution. For the second, we can note that the scenario written for uprising required a period of silence beforehand. KPD had joined the local governments in Saxony with a plan to seize the initiative with a call to general strike in the face of threats from capital, and arm the workers using the advantage of being in the government. As can be seen, the crux of the “technical preparations” of the uprising had been the armament of workers by the government of Saxony.

I wrote above that social democracy disrupted this setup. However, there were other peculiarities in the whole scenario that should have been unacceptable in revolutionary struggle. In a revolutionary period, the things that help the working class party acting with the goal of seizing power to set the rhythm and choose the means of struggle are the fluctuating dynamics of the process. These must be tested daily, even hourly. The party makes a move and, if there is no favorable response, redetermines its own coordinates. For example, if the working masses take an initiative as the party is on standby, the party reviews its own position and takes a more offensive one. The evaluation of party agitation and

propaganda to separate the effective elements from the worthless ones can only be done in the course of daily struggle.

Harman's book, after discarding his Stalin animosity, is one of the most important sources on what happened in Germany. There, he rightfully writes, "*All these views have the same basic fault. They see consciousness as a fixed property of individuals. (...) We can hold different, often quite contradictory, notions at the same time.*"<sup>327</sup> against those who claim that the German working class was not in a revolutionary mood in that period. The mood of the toiling masses can change daily since it really is full of contradictions. The continuity of the struggle is essential to understanding that mood and changing it towards a more revolutionary one.

One must look for a far more mechanic conception of reality than Brandler's reformist tendencies in the contrivance of the party to seize power through a game of hide and seek in a country as great as Germany. If the party had not withdrawn into its shell in August, but made small attempts with the working class and kept the struggle and the streets lively, a much larger revolutionary energy might have been garnered. Or, at least it would have been seen that the attempt to escalate tension was futile, in which case the retreat would have been more orderly.

Instead, they adopted such a plan that the whole "*KPD is going to do something*" expectation of hundreds of thousands of revolutionary workers, and of several million laborers under their influence was completely led astray.

And they retreated without a fight.

However, what could have been made differently with that set-up? There was no ongoing struggle and the whole calculation had been turned upside down. The error had been in the planning. It was incredible that the nitpicking Comintern officials accepted (or, if we are to believe Brandler, devised and imposed) this plan in the first place.

Here we are faced with another question: If defeat is certain, should the party still go to battle against all odds to leave a glorious legacy to posterity?

The "left" wing (or, more accurately, the wing that deemed itself "left") of KPD was answering this question affirmatively by taking

the “*We will win through our defeats*” philosophy to its extreme. The frequently forgotten fact in this matter is that the party in question is claimed to have as many as 400 thousand members at the time. Even when defeat is certain, a serious party of this size had to mobilize all its resources in the matter of a sharp confrontation if it had any self-respect. In this case, the devastation would have been far greater and fascism might have become a political alternative in Germany before 1933. Victor Serge rightfully notes that defeats do not always serve a future victory, and that the Paris Commune is a typical example to this.<sup>328</sup>

Seeking a moment in which victory is certain for a revolutionary leap forward, not taking any risks is cowardice. Besides, the history would never, ever present the oppressed with such an opportunity. However, thinking that committing suicide to “be remembered in glory” in a situation when defeat is certain, and assuming that this would leave a “positive example” to posterity is idiocy. The history is full of illustrative examples, which show that such devastating defeats usually strengthen the hand of reformism.

When Brandler’s (or Comintern’s) setup was upset, there was nothing much left to do. The local uprising in Hamburg, although it had been an unfortunate happening at that moment, became a positive historical memento in time. However, KPD had no political instruments with which it could have initiated a final confrontation across the whole of Germany. Nevertheless, if it had taken initiative during the strike movement against the Cuno Cabinet, or even before when the Anti-fascist demonstrations were banned; if it had not become obsessed with a “fetish of preparedness;” if it had foreseen that the new government would pursue a different economic policy to curb the high inflation, had prepared for this change of tune and used its all strength against the policies that destroyed the achievements of the working class; if some, even if not all of these had been done, the struggle in 1923, even if it had failed to seize power, would have left a lasting mark. Moreover, nobody would have been able to question its legitimacy. Its legitimacy would not have been questioned because in 1923, capitalism in Germany was coming apart at the seams. The same had been the case in 1919 and 1920.

However, this panorama lacked a communist party, which knew what it was doing, which could have overcome the treachery of the social democrats and taken down the German capital. If you look at the panorama by grasping this shortcoming, the revolution had been almost impossible in Germany. However, is this not what we are always discussing, here and elsewhere? How would the communist party reestablish itself when the revolution rises and carry the working class to political power? Germany at the time had the fertile ground, but lacked the party.

There is a quote that I love: *"In warfare there is not one plan, but two; not one operation order, but two. In a battle someone's plan, someone's order remains unfulfilled."*<sup>329</sup>

The socialist revolution was undoubtedly possible in Germany. A combination of objective and subjective reasons protected the capitalist order. And today, the humanity is still paying the price for the things that could have happened otherwise in Berlin and Warsaw. In spite of everything, the events could have turned out differently. On the other hand, in another capital city of the revolutionary period, in Ankara, the revolution remained within bourgeois limits since it had been extremely difficult to say, "A socialist revolution is possible" at the time. This revolution was successful; its success provided a far greater help to the one socialist country, the Soviets, than it is thought to have done, and eventually, what happens to every bourgeois revolution also happened to it: The bourgeoisie rapidly becomes reactionary and endowed the Turkish working class with the task to bring down this reactionary class. This task, unfulfilled as of now, will surely be fulfilled in the future.

*For the memory of all the communists who fought in Berlin, Warsaw, Ankara and everywhere else so that the "great humanity should live in an egalitarian society." And for the great humanity...*

*Izmir, August 2019*



# NOTES

## 1. The Russians Have Done It

- <sup>1</sup> Resolution adopted at the Seventh International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart, Date accessed: 5 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1907/militarism.htm>.
- <sup>2</sup> The story of the October Revolution falls outside the scope of this book. However, in studying the historical and theoretical roots of “revolution” for the book that will be a companion to this one (*Bringing Together the Land and The Revolution*), one of the strongest references naturally came to be the Russia of 1917.

## 2. Sailors’ Revolt

- <sup>3</sup> Rudolf Lindau, quoted in William A. Pelz, *A People’s History of the German Revolution 1918-19*, London: Pluto, 2018, p.41.
- <sup>4</sup> William T. Ham, quoted in *ibid.*, p.58.
- <sup>5</sup> Maximillian, Prince of Baden, quoted in *ibid.*, p.63.

## 3. The Beginning Was Similar, What About The Rest?

- <sup>6</sup> The suggestion was Trotsky’s.
- <sup>7</sup> Ralf Hoffrogge and Norman Laporte (eds.), *Weimar Communism as Mass Movement 1918-1933*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2017, p.46.

#### 4. Improvised Republic

- <sup>8</sup> Peter Hans Hanssen, quoted in Pelz, *ibid.*, p.64.
- <sup>9</sup> Philipp Scheidemann, quoted in *ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> With the foundation of the republic, the influences of Russian Revolution in Germany become readily apparent. One among these was that the ministers were now called “commissars.”
- <sup>11</sup> One on the most frequent ploys of capital when attacking labor is making concessions when necessary to representatives of the working class and asking them to help in restoring order. The Stinnes–Legien Agreement on November 15 between 28 organizations representing workers and capitalists is a perfect example. In days of revolution, the bosses were making important concessions while finding ways in which they can assure compliance.
- <sup>12</sup> An anecdote that amply summarizes this complex panorama: A band of revolutionary soldiers somehow get their hands on a truckload of money. The revolution had smashed the state mechanism and money that belonged to certain state institutions were left around. They think what to do with it and eventually decide to bring the money to USPD, which, for them, signifies the revolution. They pile the money in front of USPD headquarters. However, USPD does not know what to do with the money just as it does not know what to do with the Revolution. They, in turn, deliver the money to the Central Bank. Order is restored!

#### 5. The Communist Party is Established

- <sup>13</sup> Chris Harman, *Lost Revolution – Germany 1918 to 1923*, London: Bookmaks, 1982, p.38.
- <sup>14</sup> Pelz, *ibid.*, p.52.
- <sup>15</sup> Anton Pannekoek, *World Revolution and Communist Tactics*, e-book, Date accessed: 7 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1920/communist-tactics.htm>.
- <sup>16</sup> One of the founders of KPD, for some time its de facto leader, dismissed in 1928 for his right-wing views.

- <sup>17</sup> One of the important thinkers of Spartacus League, companion of Rosa Luxemburg. Was murdered two months after her, on March 10, 1919, by Noske's gangs.
- <sup>18</sup> Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*, p.50.
- <sup>19</sup> Founder of Spartacus League, member of KPD from 1919 onwards, and member of the Central Committee of KPD afterwards.
- <sup>20</sup> Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*, p.53.
- <sup>21</sup> The organ of Spartacus League published from November 9, 1918 onwards. Later, it became the daily newspaper of KPD.
- <sup>22</sup> Hermann Weber, quoted in Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Paul Levi, *In the Steps of Rosa Luxemburg*, (D. Fernbach, ed.), Boston: Brill, 2011, p.41.
- <sup>24</sup> Ralph Haswell Lutz, *The German Revolution 1918-1919*, California: Stanford University, 1922, p.93.
- <sup>25</sup> Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*, p.54.

## 6. The Great Tragedy

- <sup>26</sup> Harman, *ibid.*, p.74.
- <sup>27</sup> One of the prominent leaders of KPD. President of the German Democratic Republic between 1949-1960.
- <sup>28</sup> Pelz, *ibid.*, p.77.
- <sup>29</sup> The largest park in central Berlin.
- <sup>30</sup> One of the important generals of German militarism.
- <sup>31</sup> Eric Waldman, quoted in *ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> The main street of Berlin, which connects almost all the strategic points, plazas and monumental buildings.
- <sup>33</sup> Lutz, *ibid.*, p.95.
- <sup>34</sup> Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*, p.56.
- <sup>35</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *Selected Political Writings*, (R. Looker, ed.), London: Cape, 1972, p.294.
- <sup>36</sup> Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*, p.59.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

- <sup>38</sup> Victor Serge; *Witness to the German Revolution*, Haymarket Books, Kindle Edition.
- <sup>39</sup> Quoted in Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution 1917-1923*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, p.257.
- <sup>40</sup> Chris Harman is among those who think this way.

## 7. Footsteps of World Revolution

- <sup>41</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th printing, Moscow: Progress, 1977, V.9, p.57.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, V.21, pp.15-19.
- <sup>43</sup> The revolution was called “October Revolution” since there was a 13-day difference between the Julian calendar used then in Russia and the Gregorian calendar we use today. The revolution had taken place on November 7 according to the Gregorian calendar, which was also adopted in Russia on February 1918.
- <sup>44</sup> For a general panorama of Hungarian Soviet Republic, see Ernie Trory, *Hungary, 1919 and 1956: The Anatomy of Counter-revolution*, Crabtree Press Limited, 1981.
- <sup>45</sup> Although it is clear that the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht carry a special importance, it is sad to see today the lack of attention towards the many other KPD member and leaders killed during 1919.
- <sup>46</sup> Levi, *ibid.*, p.71.
- <sup>47</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Antisystemic Movements*, London: Verso, 1989, p.97.
- <sup>48</sup> J. Stalin, *Works*, Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1953, V.5, pp.158-159.
- <sup>49</sup> *A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia (Presented to [British] Parliament by Command of His Majesty)*, London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1919, p.1

## 8. The Comintern Sets Sail

- <sup>50</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.28, p.113.

- <sup>51</sup> Jane Degras (ed.) *The Communist International 1919-1943 Documents*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1955, V.1, p.2.
- <sup>52</sup> We know that Rosa Luxemburg objected to the foundation of the Communist International on the grounds that it would have come under the sway of Russian Bolsheviks. At least this is what her close colleagues say.
- <sup>53</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Russian Revolution: From Lenin to Stalin*, New York: The Free Press, 1979, p.14.
- <sup>54</sup> A.I. Sobolev et.al., *Outline History of the Communist International*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p.58.
- <sup>55</sup> Quoted in Thomas C. Fiddick, *Russia's Retreat from Poland, 1920: From Permanent Revolution to Peaceful Coexistence*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990, p.71.
- <sup>56</sup> I do not find it meaningful to depart from mental health of historical personalities to arrive at political deductions. Besides, I am not an expert on the subject. Still, I find myself obliged to note here the claims that Zinoviev had frequently shown manic-depressive behavior, was intensely agitated by good news while succumbed to panic and had to lie down immobile when faced with failure. This may provide an explanation to his inconsistencies that are most exasperating in hindsight. Yet, since one of the holders of these claims is Trotsky, who cannot be called a model of mental balance himself, it is prudent to approach the whole matter with reserve.
- <sup>57</sup> The book in question is titled *My Life as a Rebel*.
- <sup>58</sup> All quoted in Norman La Porte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley (eds.), *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization 1917-53*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p.105.

## 9. Farce, Then Tragedy Once Again

- <sup>59</sup> Some sources cite this number as more than a thousand.
- <sup>60</sup> Account of Rosa Leviné-Meyer, quoted in Harman, *ibid.*, p.140.
- <sup>61</sup> Georg Lukács, "Opportunism and Putschism", in *Tactics and Ethics 1919-1929*, London: Verso, 2004, eBook.

<sup>62</sup> Levi, *ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50.

## 10. Anatolia Move against Imperialist Peace

<sup>64</sup> İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Committee of Union and Progress): The bourgeois revolutionary organization, and later party that emerged from the Young Turk movement in 19th century. They came to power in 1908 and ushered in the Second Constitutional Monarchy of Ottoman Empire. During their rule, the Sultan and the traditional Ottoman state apparatuses became mostly symbolic while the actual rule was through the Parliament of Deputies (*Meclis-i Mebusan*) and the cabinet of ministers. İttihat Terakki is important within the context of this book since it is also the political background from which almost all the Kemalist cadres of the next era of Turkish Revolution come from (TN).

<sup>65</sup> Stefanos Yerasimos, *Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri 1917-1923* [Turkish-Soviet Relations during the War of Independence], Istanbul: Boyut, 2000, p.36.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102.

<sup>67</sup> There is ample evidence suggesting that the first contact between Mustafa Kemal and the Bolsheviks happened in the town of Havza in Samsun province. Whether or not the negotiators were communist Turks from Russia or Bolsheviks in person is trivial in the final analysis.

<sup>68</sup> General Enver (Enver Pasha) was of the most important members of İttihat Terakki. He was the most important counterpart in Ottoman Empire who brokered German-Ottoman alliance. He was the Minister of Naval Affairs and Vice Commander-in-Chief of Ottoman Army during the war. More important within the context of this book, he was the commander in Caucasian front (TN).

## 11. Versailles, and Playing on Imperialist Contradictions

<sup>69</sup> Ludendorff, the most prominent among German generals would later write in his memoirs: "*I could not doubt that the*

*disintegration of the Russian Army and nation involved an extraordinary risk for Germany and Austria-Hungary. All the greater was my anxiety when I thought of the weakness of our Government and theirs. By sending Lenin to Russia our Government had, moreover, assumed a great responsibility. From a military point of view his journey was justified, for Russia had to be laid low. But our Government should have seen to it that we also were not involved in her fall. The events in Russia gave me no cause for complete satisfaction. They considerably eased the military situation, but elements of the greatest danger still remained.*" General Ludendorff, *My War Memories 1914-1918*, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1919, V.2, p.509-510.

<sup>70</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.21, p.27.

<sup>71</sup> Karl Radek, *The Winding-Up of the Versailles Treaty*, (Report to the IV. Congress of the Communist International), Date accessed: 15 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/radek/1922/versailles/part1.html#intro>.

<sup>72</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.325.

<sup>73</sup> It is an irony of history that it was the same Churchill who accused his own government of not cooperating with Soviet Union before the Second World War and regarded Soviet-British-American alliance as an indispensable asset in the war against Germany. Still, let's not forget that when the war ended he immediately reverted to his normal and dug up the hatchet against the Soviets.

<sup>74</sup> Stephanie Salzmänn, *Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union: Rapallo and After, 1922-1934*, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2003, p.24.

<sup>75</sup> Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of Versailles Order, 1919-1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.46.

<sup>76</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.75.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.76-77.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.219.

<sup>79</sup> Fourth Congress of the Communist International, "Theses on

Comintern Tactics”, Date accessed: 15 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/4th-congress/tactics.htm>.

<sup>80</sup> Fourth Congress of the Communist International, “Resolution on the Versailles Treaty”, Date accessed: 15 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/4th-congress/versailles-treaty.htm>.

<sup>81</sup> Their official recognition of the Soviet Union would come as late as February 1, 1924.

## 12. Socialism in One Country: Necessity, not Choice

<sup>82</sup> The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or The Soviet Union was established on December 30, 1992.

<sup>83</sup> When employing these terms, one should also take into account the vast geography and the multi-national quality of USSR and refrain from underestimating the “one country.”

<sup>84</sup> Levi, *ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>85</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Military Writings*, Vol.3, online version, Date accessed: 16 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/military-pdf/Military-Writings-Trotsky-v3.pdf>, p.276.

<sup>86</sup> Leon Trotsky, *What Next?*, online version, Date accessed: 16 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1917/next/ch06.htm>.

<sup>87</sup> Leon Trotsky, *My Life*, online version, Date accessed: 16 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/1930-lif.pdf>, p.268.

<sup>88</sup> Trotsky, *What Next?*, *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia*, p.5.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6

<sup>91</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis Vol.4 - The Aftermath 1918-1928*, New York: Scribner & Sons, 1929, p.274.

<sup>92</sup> This is a reference to a well-known Russian anti-communist political joke in which the Brezhnev period was portrayed as “closing the curtains of the wagon, ordering the workers to rock the train and pretend that the train is moving.” (TN)

- <sup>93</sup> Fourth Congress of the Communist International, “Resolution on Proletarian Aid to Soviet Russia”, Date accessed: 16 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/4th-congress/proletarian-aid-to-soviet-union.htm>.
- <sup>94</sup> Alastair Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900-39*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p.66-67.
- <sup>95</sup> Hugh Phillips, “Maxim M. Litvinov and Soviet-American Relations, 1918-1946”, Occasional Paper, The Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, 1996, p.4.
- <sup>96</sup> Quoted in Fiddick, *ibid.*, p.29.
- <sup>97</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p.154.
- <sup>98</sup> Hugh D. Phillips, *Between the Revolution and the West - A Political Biography of Maxim M. Litvinov*, Oxford: Westview Press, 1992, p.36.
- <sup>99</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.399.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.226.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.327.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.397.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.411.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.412.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, V.32, p.116.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, V.32, p.180.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, V.32, p.368.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, V.32, p.479-480.
- <sup>110</sup> Stalin, *ibid.*, V.5, p.119-120.
- <sup>111</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.32, p.476.
- <sup>112</sup> It should be noted that Lenin places an emphasis of philosophical importance on the term “masses.” In revolutionary struggle numbers are always relative and therefore never the determinant.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, V.32, p.472.

- <sup>114</sup> Paul N. Miliukov, *Russia To-day and To-Morrow*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922, p.46.
- <sup>115</sup> Jacques Texier, “Gramsci, Theoretician of the Superstructures”, in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (C. Mouffe, ed.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p.66.
- <sup>116</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.32, p.168-169.
- <sup>117</sup> Fourth Congress of the Communist International, “Resolution on the Russian Revolution”, Date accessed: 16 May 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/4th-congress/russian-revolution.htm>.
- <sup>118</sup> Stalin, *ibid.*, V.5, p.50.
- <sup>119</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.457.
- <sup>120</sup> Quoted in Walter Darnell Jacobs, *Frunze: The Soviet Clausewitz (1885–1925)*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, p.101 (footnote 4).

### 13. Diplomats: The Culpable Heroes of Soviet Defense

- <sup>121</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, pp.285-310.
- <sup>122</sup> Kocho-Williams, *ibid.*, p.47.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.
- <sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99.
- <sup>126</sup> Phillips, “Maxim M. Litvinov and Soviet-American Relations”, p.1.
- <sup>127</sup> Phillips, *Between the Revolution and the West*, p.34.
- <sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51.
- <sup>129</sup> Alastair Kocho-Williams, “Soviet Diplomacy and Foreign Propaganda in the 1920s”, unreviewed paper, University of the West of England, Date accessed: 16 May 2020, [https://www.academia.edu/download/4091794/a\\_kocho-williams\\_soviet-diplomats1920s.pdf](https://www.academia.edu/download/4091794/a_kocho-williams_soviet-diplomats1920s.pdf).

### 14. German Working Class Keeps Calling

- <sup>130</sup> Ben Fowkes, *The German Left and the Weimar Republic: A Selection of Documents*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, p.113.

<sup>131</sup> Harman, *ibid.*, pp.175-176.

<sup>132</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, pp.441-442.

## 15. The Left and Right Wings of Communism: Infantilism and Maturity

<sup>133</sup> Degras (ed.), *ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.66-70.

<sup>135</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.62.

<sup>136</sup> Pannekoek, *ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.64.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, pp.68-69.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.70.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.89.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.79.

<sup>142</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Afterword: Lenin's Choice" in *Revolution at the Gates*, London: Verso, 2002, p.270. (I remember the claim that Lenin wrote "*Left-Wing Communism*" as a polemic against terrorists from our discussions in the university cafeteria; maybe I had also talked similar nonsense in those discussions myself. But what of terrorism, of temptation? Get your head a little bit out of Lacan, man!)

## 16. Confusion Sets In: The Poland Hope

<sup>143</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.127.

## 17. As the Counter-revolutionary International Musters Its Forces

<sup>144</sup> Adam Zamoyski, *Warsaw 1920: Lenin's Failed Conquest of Europe*, London: Harper Press, 2008, p.18.

<sup>145</sup> Michael Jabara Carley, "The Politics of Anti-Bolshevism: The French Government and the Russo-Polish War, December 1919 to May 1920", *The Historical Journal*, 19(1), Mar. 1976, p.165.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p.183.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p.189.

- <sup>148</sup> Miliukov, *ibid.*, p.183.
- <sup>149</sup> Carley, *ibid.*, p.172.
- <sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.172-173.
- <sup>151</sup> Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War 1919–20 and ‘The Miracle on the Vistula’*, digital edition, London: Vintage, 2011.
- <sup>152</sup> Janusz Cisek, *Kościuszko, We Are Here! American Pilots of the Kościuszko Squadron in Defense of Poland, 1919–1921*, Kindle Edition, London: McFarland, 2017.
- <sup>153</sup> Actually, the first to use the tachanka had been the anarchist troops of Nestor Makhno, who had been a Bolshevik ally in the early stages of the Civil War and fought against the Soviet government afterwards.
- <sup>154</sup> Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry and Other Stories*, London: Penguin, 2005.

## 18. Once Nationalism Gains a Foothold in the Working Class

- <sup>155</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.137.
- <sup>156</sup> This is very similar to the nationalist struggle in Anatolia, where the British, Italian or French occupation had not been taken into much account but the Greek occupation of Izmir fanned the flame into a conflagration.
- <sup>157</sup> Harold H. Worrell, Jr., *The Battle of Warsaw, 1920: Impact on Operational Thought*, monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, Kansas, 1994, p.16.
- <sup>158</sup> Fiddick, *ibid.*, p.81.
- <sup>159</sup> Zamoycki, *ibid.*, p.10.
- <sup>160</sup> Kirsteen Davina Croll, *Soviet-Polish Relations 1919-1921*, doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2008, p.121.
- <sup>161</sup> Jerzy Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe*, London: Yale University Press, 2008, p.42.
- <sup>162</sup> Quoted in Fiddick, *ibid.*, p.57.
- <sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

- <sup>164</sup> Clara Zetkin notes in her memoirs that Lenin eventually said “*Radek predicted how it would turn out.*” (Klara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, London: Modern Books Limited, 1929, p.20.) Radek had persisted in his warnings not only before but also during the war, and had been accused of being a “defeatist” by Lenin
- <sup>165</sup> Quoted in Adam Miodowski, *Polish Revolutionary Formations in the Red Army Structures*, Białystok: Wydawnictwo PRYMAT, 2017, p.181.
- <sup>166</sup> Quoted in Fiddick, *ibid.*, p.120.
- <sup>167</sup> Cecil F. Melville, *The Russian Face of Germany: An Account of the Secret Military Relations between the German and Soviet-Russian Governments*, London: Wishart & Co., 1932, p.41.
- <sup>168</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.127.
- <sup>169</sup> P.V. Suslov, quoted in Kirsteen Davina Croll, *ibid.*, p.154.
- <sup>170</sup> Neil Harvey Croll, *Mikhail Tukhachevsky in the Russian Civil War*, doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, p.311.
- <sup>171</sup> Quoted in Kirsteen Davina Croll, *ibid.*, p.158.
- <sup>172</sup> Trotsky, *Military Writings, Vol.3*, pp.109-110.
- <sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.
- <sup>174</sup> Carley, *ibid.*, p.179.
- <sup>175</sup> Quoted in Fiddick, *ibid.*, p.181.
- <sup>176</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.302.

## 19. What is Happening in Red Army?

- <sup>177</sup> The date of establishment of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara (TN).
- <sup>178</sup> Ethem the Circassian (Çerkes Ethem) was one of the prominent leaders in the first years of the struggle against occupation of Anatolia. His forces were called “Green Army” of “Mobile Forces.” His ideology was considerably different from Mustafa Kemal’s and may be called a more “left” one. He refused to become a part of the regular army and revolted. Grand National Assembly conducted a military operation against his forces

which ended in a surrender without much fighting. His forces were assimilated into the regular army while he and his comrades had to flee the country.

- <sup>179</sup> *Misak-ı Milli* (National Pact) was the manifesto of the Turkish National Struggle. The most important content of it was the definition of the boundaries of the new state, which were quite modest when compared to the Ottoman Empire. Apart from some amendments, they correspond to the boundaries of Turkey today (TN).
- <sup>180</sup> Quoted in Francesco Benvenuti, *The Bolsheviks and the Red Army 1918-1922*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.29.
- <sup>181</sup> Zamoyski, *ibid.*, p.119.
- <sup>182</sup> One of the biggest problem of the Bolsheviks who maintained that the Red Army should not abandon the term “militia” altogether at the time had been the anarchist opposition of left SRs to a regular army and their demand of an armed force based on people’s militia.
- <sup>183</sup> Benvenuti, *ibid.*, p.176.
- <sup>184</sup> A.I. Denikin, *The Russian Turmoil - Memoirs: Military, Social, and Political*, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1922, p.343.
- <sup>185</sup> Jacob W. Kipp, *Mass, Mobility, and the Red Army’s Road to Operational Art 1918-1936*, Kansas: Soviet Army Studies Office, 1987, p.9.
- <sup>186</sup> Quoted in Benvenuti, *ibid.*, pp.210-211.
- <sup>187</sup> Earl F. Zimke, *The Red Army 1918-1941: From Vanguard of World Revolution to US Ally*, London: Frank Cass, 2004, p.35.
- <sup>188</sup> Trotsky, *ibid.*, pp.128-129.
- <sup>189</sup> Zimke, *ibid.*, p.58.
- <sup>190</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, V.10, pp.553-554.
- <sup>191</sup> It is a common claim that German intelligence forged documents showing that Tukhachevsky had been working for Germany, and arranged that these found their way to Stalin over several channels.

- <sup>192</sup> This sentence does not imply that I condone the extent and manner of the widespread removals in Soviet Union in the 1930s. It is an eventuality in political struggle, particularly in emergency situations that those who are damaging to the common cause are pulled aside. However, I do not think that this has to be done through bloodshed. The frenzy that these removals were conducted in had caused a shadow to fall over one the proudest periods in our history, in which substantial achievements have been made and a great victory over fascism was won.
- <sup>193</sup> It was only in the area of arts that a great resistance against the “old” emerged. It was seen that the results of this resistance were sometimes tragicomic, but sometimes extraordinarily progressive. Eventually, the achievements of this period were left as a legacy to the synthesis created by the ceasefire of 1930’s (socialist realism).
- <sup>194</sup> Zimke, *ibid.*, p.36.
- <sup>195</sup> Quoted in Neil Harvey Croll, *ibid.*, p.44.
- <sup>196</sup> Quoted in Benvenuti, *ibid.*, p.199.
- <sup>197</sup> Quoted in Fiddick, *ibid.*, p.73.
- <sup>198</sup> In many languages, there is a clear distinction between battle and war. In the Turkish of today, the term “war” (*savaş*) is used for both levels of “armed conflict.” However, a war is a sum of battles. The “operation” term in the original name of the theory that is more widely known as “deep war” in the West is closer to the “battle” level. However, the term “operation” carries another meaning in Soviet military terminology. The operational level links the tactical level and strategical level to one another. Because of this, the theory was also called “operational art.”
- <sup>199</sup> Quoted in Fiddick, *ibid.*, p.72.
- <sup>200</sup> Quoted in Borzecki, *ibid.*, p.102.
- <sup>201</sup> Actually, Tukhachevsky had seen all of Piłsudski’s plans for defense and counter-offense from a document found upon the body of a dead Polish officer. However, he thought that this was a ruse and missed a great opportunity.

<sup>202</sup> Davies, *ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> At this point, the coordination and communication among Soviet units had deteriorated so much that Budyonny and his troops, who were fighting to death in the South, had no idea that the war was lost in front of Warsaw. Days later, they realized that they were fighting on Polish soil all alone, and had to suffer terrible losses in their retreat.

## 20. World Revolution Stumbles at the Warsaw Hurdle

<sup>204</sup> Zamoyski, *ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>205</sup> As Tukhachevsky floored the gas and drove the Red Army towards Warsaw, articles were published in German news claiming that the politicians were unable to restrain the generals. Obviously, the disorganization of Soviet administration had also captured the attention of others.

<sup>206</sup> It was claimed that there was unpublished letters and messages of Lenin in the archives that were opened after the dissolution of Soviet Union. Some of these were later collected in a book called *The Unknown Lenin* by Richard Pipes. Unlike the sensation created during the advertising of the book, there was nothing striking or astonishing in the published documents and almost all of them are completely in line with what we know from already published material. Among these documents, there are also some correspondence, which show that Lenin was quite enthusiastic about the Polish campaign. Particularly his message to Stalin on July 23, in which he expresses belief that the war with Poland may pave the way not only for the German but also for Hungarian, Romanian and Czech revolutions, may be noted. Still it should also be noted that in his speeches and private conversations with the delegates during the Second Congress of the Communist International there is no hint of a new optimism towards revolution in Europe. Richard Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin*, London: Yale University Press, 1996, p.90.

<sup>207</sup> For example, Thomas C. Fiddick thinks so.

<sup>208</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.204.

- <sup>209</sup> All quotes are taken from the third volume of *Military Writings* except the one on May 10, which is from an article titled *Sovetskaia Rossiia i burzhuaznaia Pol'sha* (Soviet Russia and Bourgeois Poland). Although relevant chronologically and according to content, this one is curiously missing in *Military Writings*. Quoted in Fiddick, *ibid.*, p.70.
- <sup>210</sup> Stalin, *ibid.*, V.4, pp.344-345.
- <sup>211</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.264.
- <sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.266.
- <sup>213</sup> Eventually, Polish workers *were* armed, but in the opposite direction. Volunteer worker battalions were formed, and these took part in stopping the advance of the Red Army.
- <sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.321.
- <sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, V.32, p.152.
- <sup>216</sup> Robin Higham, *The Military History of the Soviet Union*, New York: Palgrave, 2002, p.48.

## 21. The Soviet Card of German Generals

- <sup>217</sup> The fact that there were very similar arguments in Ankara in those years is further proof that the Berlin-Warsaw-Ankara line was linked together with very different dynamics.
- <sup>218</sup> Melville, *ibid.*, p.30.
- <sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.
- <sup>220</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.276.
- <sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.306.
- <sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.326.
- <sup>223</sup> James Bunyan and H.H. Fischer, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1918 - Documents and Materials*, California: Stanford University Press, 1934, pp.532-533.
- <sup>224</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.440.
- <sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.450.
- <sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.476.
- <sup>227</sup> Pipes, *ibid.*, p.102.

- <sup>228</sup> Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, *Making Common Cause: German-Soviet Secret Relations, 1919–22*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, s.114.
- <sup>229</sup> Levi, *ibid.*, p.46.
- <sup>230</sup> Vourkoutiotis, *ibid.*, p.36.
- <sup>231</sup> Orhan Duru, *Amerikan Gizli Belgeleriyle Kurtuluş Yılları [The Years of Liberation in Secret American Documents]*, İstanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2001, p.77.
- <sup>232</sup> General Talat (*Talat Pasha*) was another important leader of İttihat Terakki. He had also left Ottoman Empire after its defeat in the First World War and the downfall of İttihat Terakki rule.
- <sup>233</sup> Pelz, *ibid.*, p.107.
- <sup>234</sup> Vourkoutiotis, *ibid.*, p.125.

## 22. Russian Steppes Seek Alliance with Anatolian Prairies

- <sup>235</sup> Gözde Somel, “Kararsız Bir Dostluğun Başlangıcında”, in *Yüzüncü Yılında Büyük Ekim Devrimi* [“In the Beginning of an Uncertain Brotherhood”, in *The Centennial of the Great October Revolution*] (N.E. Önal and E.Z. Güler, eds.), İstanbul: Yazılama, 2017, p.92.
- <sup>236</sup> *Karakol* [Outpost] Society was a secret society established in İstanbul after the defeat in the First World War that acted as an intelligence and resistance network against occupation by Allied Powers (TN).
- <sup>237</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.150.
- <sup>238</sup> I am aware that using Turkey as a name here might be erroneous. Enver, unlike Mustafa Kemal, was thinking “big”; what he had in mind was not Turkey but an Ottoman Empire that was transformed into Turan.
- <sup>239</sup> Rem Kazancıyan, *Bolşevik-Kemalist-İttihatçı İlişkileri [Bolshevik-Kemalist-İttihatist Relations]*, İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2000, p.37.
- <sup>240</sup> Emel Akal, *Milli Mücadelenin Başlangıcında Mustafa Kemal*,

*İttihat Terakki ve Bolşevizm [Mustafa Kemal, İttihat Terakki and Bolshevism in the Beginning of National Struggle]*, İstanbul: TÜSTAV yayınları, 2002, passim.

- <sup>241</sup> Armed forces under the command of Ethem the Circassian (TN).
- <sup>242</sup> Bülent Gökay, *Soviet Eastern Policy and Turkey, 1920-1991*, London: Routledge, 2006, p.20.
- <sup>243</sup> Kazım Karabekir was one of the most important commanders (in both a military and political sense) during the National Struggle. According to some, he represents the “reactionary element” of the Turkish bourgeois revolution (TN).
- <sup>244</sup> Somel, *ibid.*, p.99.
- <sup>245</sup> Gazi Mustafa Kemal, *Nutuk [The Speech]*, İstanbul: Kaynak, 2015, p.38. *The Speech* was the six days long speech of Mustafa Kemal given between October 15-20, 1927 outlining the actions of Kemalist movement from 1919 up to that time. It was later published and is considered to be the central text of the Turkish bourgeois revolution (TN).
- <sup>246</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.491.
- <sup>247</sup> Kazım Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz [Our War of Independence]*, Ankara: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1960, p.58.
- <sup>248</sup> Yerasimos, *ibid.*, p.135.
- <sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.
- <sup>250</sup> İzzet Öztoprak, *Kurtuluş Savaşı ile ilgili Yunan Belgeleri [Greek Documents Concerning the Turkish War of Independence]*, Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 2006, p.26
- <sup>251</sup> Duru, *ibid.*, p.30.
- <sup>252</sup> Degras, *ibid.*, pp.107-108.

### 23. As the Revolution Turns to Face East

- <sup>253</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.32, p.482.
- <sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, V.31, p.241.
- <sup>255</sup> Yerasimos, *ibid.*, p.112.

<sup>256</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.473.

<sup>257</sup> The emergence and of all nationalist tendencies from their self-induced hibernation with the dissolution of Soviet Union shows the extent of this resistance.

<sup>258</sup> Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p.25.

<sup>259</sup> Manabendra Nath Roy, *Reason Romanticism and Revolution*, Calcutta: Renaissance Publishers, 1952.

<sup>260</sup> On a side note, it is a known fact that Roy had also objected to the Congress at Baku because of its predominantly “Muslim” character.

<sup>261</sup> Quoted in Bennigsen and Wimbush, *ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>263</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.474.

#### **24. Handshake on the Border: Caucasia**

<sup>264</sup> Turan: The (somewhat mythical) expansive land-country between Arctic Ocean and Anatolia, upon which the whole Turkic nations will supposedly be united (TN).

<sup>265</sup> Gazi Mustafa Kemal, *ibid.*, pp.336-337.

<sup>266</sup> Yerasimos, *ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>267</sup> Stalin, *ibid.*, V.4, p.425.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, V.4, p.427.

<sup>269</sup> Ali Fuat Cebesoy was one of the most prominent figures in Kemalist revolution. He had been classmates with Mustafa Kemal during their years in the military school and later served as an officer under his command in the First World War. He was appointed as ambassador to Moscow between November 21, 1920 and June 2, 1922 and interestingly, his last assignment before that was fighting the Greek occupation at Gediz together with the forces of Ethem the Circassian. It can be said that, although he later fell out with Mustafa Kemal politically, at this junction Ali Fuat was a trustworthy aide to him and he had firsthand experience with the “communists” of Anatolia (TN).

- <sup>270</sup> Quoted in Somel, *ibid.*, p.110.
- <sup>271</sup> Hüseyin Adıgüzel, *Atatürk, Nerimanov ve Kurtuluş Savaşımız* [*Ataturk, Narimanov, and Our War of Independence*], Istanbul: İleri Yayınları, 2004, s. 103.
- <sup>272</sup> Karabekir, *ibid.*, p.623.
- <sup>273</sup> Stalin, *ibid.*, V.5, p.47.
- <sup>274</sup> The British occupied the city on November 17, 1918. The first thing they did was to reprivatize the nationalized land and businesses. Meanwhile they were hunting down and killing the Bolsheviks in the city.
- <sup>275</sup> Karabekir, *ibid.*, p.622.
- <sup>276</sup> Yerasimos, *ibid.*, p.223.
- <sup>277</sup> Bennigsen and Wimbush, *ibid.*, p.54.
- <sup>278</sup> In this sense, it should not come as a surprise that much later and posthumously Narimanov became a figure revered by the Turkish nationalists.
- <sup>279</sup> Somel, *ibid.*, p.121.

## 25. The Soviets Reach a Decision on Anatolia

- <sup>280</sup> She was a communist... She was among the cadres of TKP that took the journey into Anatolia. She was not let onto the boat in Trabzon because she was Mustafa Suphi's wife. The rabid reactionary mob had set her aside for their barbaric amusements. It is said that later she went insane and either died, or was killed. This woman, who had been deprived of the right to die alongside her comrades, was also deprived of the right to be remembered with them by the influence of a "feudal" culture. After a whole century, with respect, shame and anger, comrade...
- <sup>281</sup> Gökay, *ibid.*, p.35.
- <sup>282</sup> Stalin, *ibid.*, pp.28-29.
- <sup>283</sup> Gazi Mustafa Kemal, *ibid.*, p.39.
- <sup>284</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.31, p.149.

- <sup>285</sup> Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk'ün Bütün Eserleri* [Complete Works of Atatürk], Istanbul: Kaynak, 2003, V.10, p.160.
- <sup>286</sup> Duru, *ibid.*, p.101.
- <sup>287</sup> Radek, *ibid.*, Date accessed: 10 June 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/radek/1922/versailles/part2.html#s4>.
- <sup>288</sup> In both Russian and Turkish folklore, apart from being an omen of ill luck, it is believed that if a black cat jumps or runs between two persons, they would have an argument (TN).
- <sup>289</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.32, pp.147-148.
- <sup>290</sup> Bennigsen and Wimbush, *ibid.*, p.51.
- <sup>291</sup> Degras, *ibid.*, p.387.
- <sup>292</sup> It is particularly interesting that the majority of the cadres that resorted to such political Islamist tactics were atheists themselves.
- <sup>293</sup> This institution had been established in 1921 through a resolution of the Comintern.
- <sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p.226.
- <sup>295</sup> The foundation of TKP at Baku on September 10, 1920 is our historical genesis. However, this does not in any way mean that other ventures and “foundations” are worthless (apart from the ones that belong to the “fake” category).

## **26. German Communists Attempt an “Offence”**

- <sup>296</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.32, p.470.
- <sup>297</sup> Lenin had initially supported the observer status of KAPD but would have later said that this had been a mistake.
- <sup>298</sup> Degras, *ibid.*, p.215, 218.
- <sup>299</sup> Lenin, *ibid.*, V.32, p.473.

## **27. German October and Breaking of the Revolutionary Wave in Fiasco**

- <sup>300</sup> At the end of 1921 KPD, which took the name VKPD after the merging at the end of 1920, reverted to its original name. Therefore, the history of communist movement in Germany

from 1918 to the defeat of Hitlerists in 1945 is the unbroken history of *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*.

<sup>301</sup> “Telegram to the Congress of Factory Councils” in John Riddell (ed.), *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, p.705.

<sup>302</sup> Serge, *ibid.*, *passim*.

<sup>303</sup> Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>305</sup> Riddell, *ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>306</sup> Degras, *ibid.*, p.434.

<sup>307</sup> Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p.74.

<sup>310</sup> It is unclear whether the initiative came from KPD or the Comintern, but not because the documents are insufficient. Obviously, the Comintern and KPD had completely different opinions on what was to be done. When the differences in the Bolshevik Party are added to the equation, the panorama of the decision making process becomes even more complex.

<sup>311</sup> There are varying dates given for the arrival of KPD delegation at Moscow. Some sources claim that the KPD leaders were in Moscow as early as June, while some others say that they arrived in the second half of August. On the other hand, Otto Kuusinen, who was one of the Comintern officials at the time, complains that they had not yet arrived in Moscow until mid-September. O.W. Kuusinen, “A Misleading Description of the ‘German October’”, Date accessed: 12 June 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kuusinen/1925/05/german-october.htm>.

<sup>312</sup> Serge, *ibid.* Harman quotes a similar statement with different wording by Brandler, Harman, *ibid.*, p.260.

<sup>313</sup> Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>314</sup> Serge, *ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> In the aftermath, both Brandler and Thalheimer claimed that

they had objected to the plan of taking part in Saxony government, and this plan had been imposed upon them by the Comintern. Even though a decision without the consent of the Comintern was impossible at that junction, we have plenty of reasons to think that Brandler would have been quite willing to enter a government with the social democrats. However, in an interview made by Isaac Deutscher in 1948 and printed in *New Left Review* in 1977, Brandler insists that this “ridiculous” strategy was imposed upon him by Moscow. Zinoviev put his foot down, Trotsky talked all through the night to convince him and in the end, he acquiesced, out of respect to them! (Isaac Deutscher, “Record of a Discussion with Heinrich Brandler”, *New Left Review*, 105, September-October 1977.

- <sup>316</sup> Thälmann was not objecting to the uprising in general but to this specific plan, and the expectation of “an easy victory” created by Brandler who suddenly changed his tune after he had objected to the idea of an uprising for months. Thälmann was among those who thought that the revolution would have been achieved by escalating the struggle of working masses, and not through cunning ideas.
- <sup>317</sup> Hoffrogge and Laporte, *ibid.*, p.142.
- <sup>318</sup> Different sources cite numbers ranging between 250 and 400 thousand for the size of KPD membership in the October of 1923.
- <sup>319</sup> Heinrich Brandler was removed from his post after October 1923, and was expelled from KPD in 1928. This process was narrated in Trotskyist literature as a confrontation between Brandler, who insisted on the punishment of a corruption in the party, and Thälmann, who sought to sweep it under the rug. After this, they tried to create a constructive, well mannered “mentor” who defended the unity of the communist movement out of him. However, until 1967, Brandler remained a militant in the efforts to create an anti-Soviet line in the international communist movement.

## **28. Why... Why did it Fail?**

<sup>320</sup> This ban would have been lifted on March 1, 1924.

<sup>321</sup> Joseph King, *The German Revolution: Its Meaning and Menace*, Kindle Edition, Lume Books, 2016.

<sup>322</sup> Ruth Fischer, quoted in Boru e, *ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>323</sup> Pelz, *ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>324</sup> Kuusinen, *ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> Luk acs, *ibid.*

<sup>326</sup> Serge, *ibid.*

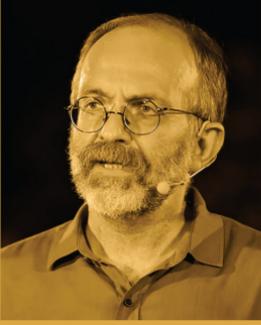
<sup>327</sup> Harman, *ibid.*, p.148.

<sup>328</sup> Serge, *ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> Alexander Bek, *Volokolamsk Highway*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969, p.153.







Why didn't revolutions in other countries follow the socialist revolution that took place in Russia in 1917? Why didn't humanity use the great opportunity of the 1920's, to get rid of capitalism eternally?

In order to come up with the answer to this question, we are going to the three cities, upon which the shadow of the revolution was cast; and back to year 1920, which was as long as a century. In order to understand and derive lessons...

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