

## ORGANIZATIONAL INTERLUDE

### CHAPTER NINE

## THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL, 1889 TO 1914

"Kant's results are made the immediate beginning of these philosophies, so that the preceding exposition, from which these results are derived, and which is philosophic cognition, is cut away beforehand. Thus the Kantian philosophy becomes a pillow for intellectual sloth, which soothes itself with the idea that everything has already been proved and done with."—Hegel<sup>145</sup>

The death of the First International came soon after the defeat of the Paris Commune. The years of the "Great Depression" that set in seemed to spell the doom of all working class organizations. In America, for instance, the severe 1873 crisis signified the collapse of the Eight-Hour Leagues. In the 1880's, however, the working class in Europe and America began to act in an organized manner on both the economic and political fronts. At its St. Louis Congress in December, 1888, the A. F. of L. decided to launch a campaign for simultaneous strikes to take place all over the country on May 1, 1890. The plan was to strike a single industry, with workers in all other industries giving it financial aid until the struggle was won. Each industry would have its turn until the eight-hour day was won for all. Delegations went abroad to see what could be done to make this an international struggle.

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Those American beginnings of the formation of the Second International have been forgotten<sup>146</sup> not only because the A. F. of L. later became the advocate of "business unionism" rather than international class struggle. When, in 1905, the very militant Industrial Workers of the World was organized it hardly got any more attention from the Second International. This happened not alone to America, where there was no established Marxist party. The Russian Social Democracy, which adhered fully to the International's program, played a completely insignificant role. It was small. When the great 1905 Revolution broke out and involved hundreds of thousands it was not on the agenda as a separate point. It had happened between Congresses. In a word, the Second International was from the beginning to the end a West European organization. It was headed by the German Social Democracy, which was the largest political mass organization of workers in the world. Bigness counted.

The Second International was established on July 14, 1889, on the occasion of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the fall of the Bastille which had opened the great French Revolution. For a quarter of a century the Second International was to experience unprecedented growth, be respected as a powerful organization and stand for established Marxism. Suddenly, and against the basis of its very existence as an opponent of capitalism, it collapsed in the face of Western Civilization's plunge into the chaos of the first World War.

Its voting of war credits certainly was a total change of front from its previous anti-militarist and anti-war manifestoes. Yet the breakup of the Second International came as the logical conclusion to strong objective forces.

With hindsight, and much systematic study of the new stage of capitalistic development, Lenin traced the double transformation into opposites: (1) of competition into monopoly; and (2) of a *stratum* of the working-class into the aristocrats of labor who gained by the super-profits of imperialism.<sup>147</sup> We will deal with this in Part IV, "The Great Divide in Marxism." The point here is that the slow poisoning of Marxism, long before the collapse, is to this day overlooked by people claiming to be Marxists. Karl Kautsky's works, written when he was a "good revolutionary

theoretician," are used as textbooks by so-called revolutionary theoreticians as well as by reformists to this day. The *methodology* of presenting the *results* of Marx's studies as if they were something to be learned by rote, and disregarding the *process*, the relationship of theory to history, past and present, in the development of Marxism, still permeates what is left of the Marxist movement.<sup>148</sup> Yet without the relationship of theory to actuality Marxism is meaningless. Learning by rote becomes, to use a Hegelian expression, "a pillow for intellectual sloth." Nowhere is that intellectual sloth more deep than among self-avowed Marxist theoreticians. The truth is that what has happened to the Second International was only the first link in a continuous chain that is by no means limited to reformists and betrayers. It is time, therefore, to begin at the beginning, even though the "Organizational Interlude" must of necessity be sketchy.

Engels was still alive when the Second International was founded, and at its birth, predicted its end. "You (Karl Kautsky) put abstract political questions in the foreground and hide thereby the most immediate concrete questions, the questions which the first great events, the first political crisis itself places on the order of the day."<sup>149</sup> This was true not only politically of the *Erfurt Program* but theoretically. In his correspondence with Kautsky on his books, the *Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*, and on the *Erfurt Program*, Engels put his finger on the Achilles' heel. He wrote in his criticism of Kautsky's identification of planlessness with capitalism: "When we go over to trusts which monopolize and rule over whole branches of industry, then not only private production but also planlessness ceases." There, in a nutshell, was the theory that dominated the Second International, revolutionary and reformist alike, throughout the span of its life. Engels could do no more than criticize and wait for events to bear out his criticism. Meanwhile, what was on the order of the day was the organization of the working-class—trade union organization and political organization. In this, the German Social Democracy could show enough gains to impress Engels in his last days.

1) *Achievements of the Second International: Trade Union and Political Organization of the Proletariat*

The German Social Democracy was the greatest party of the Second International, both numerically and in theoretical stature. It was the first modern mass organization in the world. It was founded in 1875, led by Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel in a merger between the Lassalleans and the Marxists.<sup>150</sup> Karl Kautsky became its outstanding theoretician. In 1887, two years before the formation of the Second International, Kautsky published the *Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*, which became the standard popularization of Marxism. If the reduction of Marx's "economic principles" to a catechism was done without any of the underlying philosophic concepts, it made up for this lack in sufficient lip service to "the dialectic." The Second International became the titular heirs of the Marx-Engels writings. They never published Marx's *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts*. But Kautsky's heavy standardization of Marxism became the foundation for all sorts of "concrete studies" on slums, juvenile delinquency, and other "crimes of capitalism." In 1892, Kautsky wrote the *Erfurt Program*, and this also became the model for all Social Democratic Parties on the political, programmatic front.

The key word, in theory as well as in practice, was: Organization, organization, organization. It lived entirely in the realm of the difference between immediate demands and the ultimate goals of socialism. The ultimate goals of socialism could wait. Meanwhile, there was the "practical" struggle and in that they could show phenomenal gains.

During the twelve years of their existence, the German Social Democracy had to work under the handicap of Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws. Their meetings and publications were prohibited. Their leaders were harried and often thrown into jail. The publications were published abroad and smuggled into Germany. Bismarck tried to win the workers away from socialism by some welfare-state features such as old-age and sickness insurance. The workers, on the other hand, were determined to build up their own organizations with their own aims and methods. They struggled

for a shorter workday and better wages; for popular education and freedom for the press. They kept growing despite the persecutions. By 1890, when the Anti-Socialist Laws expired, it was the Iron Chancellor who had to resign. In the very first free election, the German Social Democracy received 1,427,000 votes, or fully twenty per cent of the vote. By 1903, twenty-five per cent of the German population voted Socialist and sent eighty-one Social-Democratic deputies to the Reichstag (Parliament). By 1914 the Party had a million members and another three million trade union members were under its control.

This was indeed the most elaborately organized socialist movement the world had ever seen, not alone in its mass political party and trade union organizations, but in cooperatives, among the youth, among women. They published an impressive array of newspapers, journals, books, and pamphlets. They were a world unto themselves, even having "socialist" rituals for births, weddings, funerals, as well as sponsoring organized sport, travel, recreation. They began to believe that their organized strength, in and of itself, would make capitalistic war impossible, and would assure Social-Democratic power. When capitalism "inevitably" and "automatically" fell, they fully expected their ruling cadre to be ready to replace the capitalist managers who were "mismanaging" the productive forces and embarking upon colonialism and burdening the population with military expenditures.

This belief in organizational strength, which would "automatically" insure the world against war, became characteristic not alone of the German Social Democracy, but of the whole International. Keir Hardie, for example, the founder of the Independent Labor Party of Britain, and a left winger at all the sessions discussing militarism, stated: "A strike of British coal miners would suffice by itself to bring warlike activities to a stand." The Austrian, Adler, spoke of how the "crime of war" would "automatically" bring the downfall of capitalism. No words were more popular in the Second International's lexicon than "inevitable" and "automatic." All this was possible because of organization, organization, organization.

No word was used with greater contempt than "unorganized."

As one German study<sup>151</sup> put it, "the unorganized worker became a low species of human."

Monopoly was "organized capitalism" and looked upon as "the necessary stage to socialism." They had contempt not alone for small scale enterprisers but for the great mass of peasantry, and not only for the artisans but for the great mass of unorganized workers. Even "colonialism," which was fought officially, was not looked upon with such revulsion as anything or anybody that was "unorganized." The conception seemed to be: the trade unions would organize the proletariat on the economic field; the Party would organize it on the political field; and the youth would be organized on an anti-militaristic basis.<sup>152</sup> Then, when they had won sufficient votes, the world could be theirs.

At the highest point of the International's development, in 1907, the Congress voted for the anti-war amendment of Luxemburg-Lenin. Yet it is at this high point that we can discern the beginning of the end of the International. This Congress of 1907 was the first to take place after the 1905 Russian Revolution. That great event, however, was not on its agenda, much less did it make a point of departure for theory.

The left revolutionaries (Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky) who did make this event a new departure for their theory did not ask the Congress to do the same. None challenged the *West European* character of the international gathering at a time when the Russian working-class had "stormed the heavens." None asked that the point be put on the agenda. None challenged the dominance of the German leadership in theory as well as in practice. Luxemburg, Lenin, and Trotsky<sup>153</sup> differed quite fundamentally among themselves. Their failure to draw a sharp line between themselves and other political tendencies was, however, not due to their differences. They were all more conscious of the similarity of views with those of the International than of the dissimilarity.

The spirit of 1905 entered the Congress only insofar as it was an outgrowth of the Russo-Japanese war. Luxemburg and Lenin moved an amendment to the anti-war resolution to the following effect: (1) that they were duty-bound to do everything to prevent war by all means; and (2) in case of war "to intervene in order to bring it promptly to an end, and with all their strength to make

use of the economic and political crisis created by the war to stir up the deepest strata of the people and precipitate the fall of capitalist domination." That was general enough to gain unanimous acceptance.

There is no such thing as Marxist theory that does not link the *specific* stage of workers' revolt to the *specific* stage of capitalist development. The 1905 Revolution gave birth to an unheard-of new form of workers' organization called the Soviet (Council). If such a new phenomenon was not even put on the agenda it could mean only one thing—the theoreticians were not receiving the impulses from these deepest layers of the revolutionary proletariat. The whole concept of theory as Marx *lived* it flowed from the proletariat as its source. The *concrete* struggles of the workers in his day produced the break in Marx's concept of theory. It isn't that intellectuals must work out "ideas." But, as we saw, the actions of the workers created the conditions for Marx to work out theory. No such thing happened as a result of the 1905 Revolution. 1905 did not do for the theoreticians of the Second International what 1861-71 did for Marx's theory. In that could be seen the fact that the Second International as an organization was beginning to go off the Marxist rails. Despite their adherence to Marxist "language," *there was no organization of Marxist thought.*

2) *The Beginning of the End of the Second International: New Form of Workers' Organization: the Soviet*

The very first Soviet in Russia seems to have arisen in May during a general strike in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, the great textile center two hundred miles south of Moscow. It was made up of workers' delegates from factories and similar informal groups, drawn from all types of industry. None of the socialist underground groups paid any attention to it. Trotsky, who was soon to head the most famous of these Soviets, the St. Petersburg Soviet, was then in Finland. He was busy writing about the possible development of the Russian revolution, and his theory of permanent revolution which he then elaborated certainly paved the way for his tremendous activity later. But the Soviet, as the specific form of workers' rule that was so totally new, did not fructify that theory.

In June, after the Cossacks fired on a workers' demonstration in Lodz, Poland, and put down an attempted insurrection, the great strikes spread to Odessa and the enlisted sailors aboard the battleship *Potemkin* mutinied. In August, there was a general strike in Warsaw where martial law was proclaimed. In that same month, there was a printers' strike in Moscow, which spread to the railways and postal workers. It was October before the strike movement spread to St. Petersburg, where a Soviet of Workers' Deputies was formed to direct and coordinate the strikes. It was this Soviet which Trotsky came to head. But Trotsky joined it; he did not create it. The workers created it. The workers went searching for socialist organizations with which to collaborate.

The strike *began* with the printers' demand for shorter hours and higher wages. The strike spread. The nucleus of the Soviet was formed by fifty printing shops which elected delegates and instructed them to form a council. They were soon joined by other trades. This was the first elective body of the heretofore disfranchised Russian working class and it immediately assumed an authority which overshadowed the centuries-old autocratic Tsarist regime. In fact, the Tsar seriously considered fleeing. The power and authority and political character of this new council came from the fact that the deputies represented no fewer than 200,000 workers. That is to say, fifty per cent of all workers in the capital had taken part in the elections. After further elections, the number of deputies grew to 560 and the Soviet decided to publish its own paper, *Izvestia*.

The workers demanded constitutional freedom as well as better wages and shorter hours. It was clear that the Soviet of Workers' Deputies was something never before seen in Russian history; and it was on a higher historic scale than the Paris Commune. No one then knew it was the dress rehearsal for 1917. It was considered a form of trade union federation.

The general strike had reached its peak in October. The principal slogan was for the eight hour day and for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly. The workers were joined by the sailors. *Kronstadt* mutinied. On October 17th, the Tsar was sufficiently shaken to issue a Manifesto promising a constitution, civil liberties, and universal suffrage. But, while the liberal Prime Minister, Count

Witte, composed that Manifesto, General Trepov gave police orders to "spare no bullets." It was then that Trotsky addressed the crowds: "Citizens, now that we have put our foot on the neck of the ruling clique, they promise us freedom. . . . Is a promise of freedom the same as freedom? Our strength is in ourselves."

The workers, through the Soviet, had indeed instituted freedom of the press by requisitioning printing offices to print their own papers and those of the Socialist parties and groups. They acted as if indeed they were an alternative government. They issued permits for indispensable work to be done; they countersigned municipal orders and maintained their own discipline. The Soviet asked the workers to enforce the eight-hour day on their ships. It was strong enough to prevent the summary execution of leaders of the *Kronstadt* mutiny and, before that, to secure amnesty for many political prisoners who were simply released from jail. Only in mid-December did the Autocracy dare to hit back and arrest the Executives of the St. Petersburg Soviet.

The St. Petersburg Soviet lasted fifty days. During that time it (1) took charge of the general political strike; (2) proclaimed freedom of the press; (3) proclaimed the eight-hour day and called upon the workers to institute it by refusing to work more; (4) organized the November strike in defense of the arrested *Kronstadt* sailors and of revolutionary Poland where martial law had been declared; (5) assisted in the creation of trade unions and took the initiative in organizing and supporting the unemployed; (6) issued the Finance Manifesto in which it called upon the population not to pay taxes; (7) called for a Constituent Assembly and autonomy for national minorities, as well as a peoples' militia instead of the standing army. In the general tide of revolution it was joined by waves of liberation movements of oppressed nationalities.

It was the only democracy and civilization that Russia had ever known. The brutality and ferocity with which it was put down was because it had, in such a short time, done so much to undermine the hated Tsarist regime. Indeed, when the members of the St. Petersburg Soviet were arrested in mid-December, the Moscow Soviet first reached its climax. It called for a general strike and the Socialists<sup>184</sup> were determined to make this the actual

beginning of an insurrection. Barricades were erected and pitched battles took place in the streets. The whole city of Moscow was in the hands of revolutionaries for several days before it was put down in blood.

There are philistines who are now busy explaining the definition of the word "Soviet," or "Council," after which they go on to draw the conclusion that "if" the Russian workers had had unions (and thus a Labor and Trades Council) the word "Soviet" would never have been charged with all the political and revolutionary overtones. They forget only one thing—the stubborn facts: (1) No "vanguard groupings" "invented" these councils nor embellished them with revolutionary phraseology. Quite the contrary. The Socialist underground was caught completely by surprise. The Bolsheviks were suspicious of these new forms of organizations as rivals to their Marxist party. (2) These councils were spontaneous outbursts of the broad masses of people. No one had told the workers to build such organizations. No one had seen the role they would play. The Mensheviks may have joined them faster than the Bolsheviks, but they joined what had already been created spontaneously by the proletariat. (3) The Soviets of Workers' Deputies were not just a "name" for a Labor or Trades Council, though they had grown out of the need to coordinate the strikes that spread all over Russia toward the end of the Russo-Japanese war. The revolutionary "overtones" expressed the natural revolutionary content that dared not only to challenge the Tsarist Autocracy, but to act as if they were indeed an alternative government. Years later Lenin first summed up the significance of the Soviets:

"These organs were created exclusively by the revolutionary strata of the population, without laws or norms, in an entirely revolutionary manner, as the product of the inborn creativeness of the people, which had freed itself or was freeing itself from the old police shackles. These were precisely organs of power, notwithstanding their embryonic, spontaneous, informal and diffuse character as regards composition and method of functioning. . . .<sup>185</sup>

"They (philistines) shout about the disappearance of sense and reason, when the picking to pieces of parliamentary bills by all sorts of bureaucrats and liberal 'penny-a-liners' give way to a period of direct political activity of the 'common people' who

in their simple way directly and immediately destroy the organs of oppression of the people, seize power, appropriate for themselves what was considered to be the property of all sorts of plunderers of the people—in a word, precisely when the sense and reason of millions of downtrodden people is awakening, not only for reading books, but for action, for living human action, for historical creativeness."<sup>156</sup>

But this "sense and reason of millions of downtrodden people" not only was no part of the theory of philistines; it was no part of the theory of the German Social Democracy.

The 1905 Revolution had the "misfortune" of having taken place between Congresses. "Therefore" it was not germane to the agenda of 1907. No one gave any serious consideration to the phenomenon of the soviet. Luxemburg spoke of the general strike and tried to build her theory on that phenomenon. Lenin did no more than join Luxemburg in an amendment to the anti-war Resolution.

Revolutionary theory is a hard taskmaster. It does not evolve out of good will. It has no source but that of the proletariat in revolt—the ever deeper and lower layers of the proletariat that remain true to its revolutionary being. "The proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing," said Marx to Lassalle. The theoretician who is not permeated with this concept to the very marrow of his being is fatally drawn to the "solution" posed by the radical intellectual which, in essence, is the *bourgeois* solution. Lassalle was neither the first nor the last of the Marxists who was willing to settle for much less than this concept. When the Second International did not steep itself in the new impulses from the Russian working class revolt, it of necessity left itself open to impulses from the opposing force—capitalist production. That was so in 1907. It was so in 1914. Indeed, the proof is not limited to the phenomenon of betrayal but includes the revolutionary Bukharin who wanted to blame the working class *as a class* for that betrayal. He thus anticipated the next stage of development, the development of bureaucracy *after* the Revolution, 1917-23. For the period after Lenin's death Trotskyism is the phenomenon to watch. Trotsky was compelled to create a forced identification between workers' state and statified property that did violence to the very concept of social-

ism. Abstractions have ever been the refuge of ultra-leftists as for idealists. As a result, they can no more penetrate the dialectic in *action* than they can penetrate it *in thought*. Instead, these theoreticians create "new Notions" out of their own brain waves, freed from the dialectic of the objective movement and subjective proletarian aspirations. (We will return to this subject later.)

### 3) *The End of the Second International: New Stage of Capitalist Production and Stratification of the Proletariat*

The twentieth century opened with the first billion dollar trust (United States Steel). The age of steel followed the age of steam. Heavy industry preponderated over light industry. Large-scale production began to take on new forms: cartels and trusts. Free competition was being transformed into its opposite, monopoly. With cartels and trusts came imperialism; and with imperialist superprofits a stratification took place in the working class itself, between the aristocrats of labor (the craftsmen) and the great mass of poorly paid and unorganized workers.

Once the Second International cut itself off from the new impulses arising from the year 1905—not alone the Russian Revolution but the I. W. W., not alone the "advanced" countries but backward Africa and the Zulu Rebellion—whose impulses could they attune to but those of the aristocrats of labor?

No one was in the least mistaken about the rapid transformation of the American Federation of Labor from a militant fighting organization to undiluted "business unionism." *Everyone, including Lenin*, was led astray when the same happened to the German unions "under Socialist influence" because the manifestoes and pronunciamentos kept coming in full force and in "traditional" language. In truth, it was not the German Social Democracy that "set the line" which permeated them through and through, but the labor aristocracy. It could not have been otherwise since only the latter had an *objective* base. The upper stratum of the working class began to have a stake in the super-profits of German imperialism.

Where Marx spoke about the "bourgeoisification" of part of the British proletariat and the need to go to "lower and deeper"

layers of the working class, the leaders of the Second International said: "Since" there is only one proletariat, "therefore" there must be only one Social Democracy in each country. Where Marx wrote, "the proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing," Bernstein wrote that to him "the movement," (that is to say, the Socialist Party,) was everything, "socialism nothing."

That was a harsh statement, and "revisionist." Nevertheless it characterized not only the Revisionists, who were a minority, but "the orthodox" Marxists who were in the majority. Indeed, the German Social Democracy was never able to make as sharp a line against the right as against the ultra-left. Anarchists were expelled in 1896; not only were the Revisionists not expelled, but the "censure" of them meant nothing since they were allowed to remain as authoritative leaders. They corrupted the whole Party.<sup>157</sup> When Bernstein criticized and revised Marx's analysis of the law of motion of capitalist society, he was only the open example of what was corrupting the inner core of the German Social Democracy in its adaptation to the capitalist milieu.

Not only Bernstein, but the orthodox theoreticians—from Kautsky, who wrote "pure" theory, to Hilferding, who made the concrete study, *Finance Capital*—gave expression precisely to this new stratification in the working class. This passed for "Marxist theory." Yet Rudolf Hilferding's, *Finance Capital*, is hardly distinguishable from the liberal study of *Imperialism* by Hobson. They are equally pedantic and filled with statistics. Hobson's book is a pioneer work in its field. It was written in 1902. Hilferding's, written in 1910, is a follow-up, with "Socialist conclusions" tacked on. Hilferding is "for" the dictatorship of the proletariat. *But the proletariat in both studies is just an inert mass.* Indeed, Hilferding's book describes monopolistic control as if it overcame anarchy instead of deepening the contradictions of both "control" and "anarchy of the market." His theoretical conceptions are of a smooth, well-oiled mechanism of events. Contradiction has been eliminated. As monopoly capitalism brought "order" into the national market, he argues, so the workers will "take over" and bring order out of the anarchy of the international market.

All, in fact, would be *organized*. The unions would manage industry while the political party would take over the State appara-

tus. There is no longer any sense of breaking the chains of the ubiquitous capitalist machine, nor is there the faintest glimmer of the idea that "the dictatorship of the proletariat" or "the workers organized as the ruling class" means the total reorganization of the relations of men at the point of production *by the men themselves*. The underlying assumption seems to be that a ruling cadre—the labor organizers—would replace the financial oligarchy and do on an international scale what the bourgeoisie did only on the national level.

Missing from their picture of organized capitalism and no "great wars" was the dialectic of the minor "incidents," from the imperialistic carving up of Africa to the Balkan cauldron. They were blind to the inner necessity and drive toward imperialist expansion, and the irreconcilable breakdown of Western Civilization.

It could not have been otherwise for what was missing from the "trustified" concept of "socialization of production" was the *fragmentation* of the worker to a cog in a machine, the actuality of capitalist progress as *dehumanization*. The German Social Democracy had become part of the very organism of "progressive capitalism" and was bound to fall with it.