CHAPTER V

THE STRATEGY OF COMMUNISM

I

SINCE the communist regards the present system of social relationship solely in terms of class-war, it is only logical that he should adapt the strategy of the movement to its making. It is, moreover, essential in considering both the theory which underlies, and the institutions which express, this strategy, to realise that it is with a world-battle that the communist is concerned. Because capitalism is a world-phenomenon, the revolution that is to secure its overthrow is necessarily a world-phenomenon also; for revolution is implied in the historic logic of capitalism.

The communist, indeed, does not say that revolution will come everywhere either at once or in the same way. Here it may arise because organised labour makes demands upon the propertied interests which the latter dare not grant; there it may be the response to an attempt at drastic and resented wage-reductions; in one State, again, it may come in resistance to an effort by the government at

imperialistic war; or, as in Russia in 1917, in the aftermath of a similar conflict. All that can be said is that a declining capitalism will present a series of possible revolutionary situations and that, whatever the failures, the ultimate catastrophe will one day come.

It is obvious, in this background, that communists must prepare themselves for the conflict in these world-terms. The pivot of their movement has, accordingly, been the Third International, and the separate national movements are built around its centre. The Third International serves a variety of purposes. Partly, and perhaps pre-eminently, it is the ultimate deciding body in the world-communist movement; its broad conclusions embody the policy which all affiliated parties must accept. It provides, so to say, the outlines of the communist way of life in a capitalist world; it decides upon the means whereby that world may be destroyed. Partly, also, it is a propagandist body. Its business is to prepare the way, by publications, by the training and organisation of agents, along which the army of communism is to move to victory. Partly, also, by giving a centralised character to the efforts of communists in different States, it prevents the dissolution of the movement into a disconnected series of particular efforts; for it is obvious that such separation might destroy the effects of the unified support which, properly organised, the movement as a whole

can bring to bear upon the activity of the parties. This centralism, moreover, is strengthened by the capacity of the International to give financial aid to its constituent branches. Finally, it has the task of preventing, within the ranks of any single communist section, that tendency to fractionalism and dissent, so fatal to the development of a united fighting front.

From its inception, and quite naturally, the residence of the Communist International has been at Moscow; the attitude to it of capitalist governments would have made its continuous activity impossible elsewhere. Its purpose is best defined by its statutes. It aims, it is there laid down, at "the organisation of common action between the workers of various countries who are striving towards . . . the overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the International Soviet Republic, the complete abolition of classes, and the realisation of socialism as the first step to communist society." Its ultimate governing instrument is the World Congress. This body meets at least once a year, and, in addition, as often as either its executive, or a demand from one-half of its affiliated members may deem necessary. It does not appear that the World Congress has any fixed system of membership. Communist parties in capitalist States are, in general, in too difficult a position in relation to

access to Russia to make a rigid structure desirable. The constitution of the International, therefore, merely lays it down that "each section shall have a number of votes which, by the decision of the Congress, represents its effective strength and the political importance of the country concerned." The Congress also elects the President of the International, the executive committee, and a special non-political body called the International Commission of Control.

The conditions of admission to the International are defined with some strictness. Every adherent party must bear the name of Communist, and in each country only one party can be recognised for the purpose of membership. The programme and the Statutes of that party and of the International must be accepted by all organisations which demand membership; and these must agree to abide by all the decisions of the party and the International. All members of parties must, in their turn, belong to organised groups in factory, or workshop, or mine, where they carry out the orders of their superiors. Discussion is free until a decision has been reached, but when this has been taken, it must be accepted by all members even if they disapprove of its substance.

The International, in fact, is built upon the basis of democratic centralisation; what that implies we shall discuss later. The World

Congress, of course, is at once too large and too occasional a body to be capable of effective leadership. It does, indeed, debate and pass resolutions; it also receives reports from its executive and the affiliated members. The Congress as it functions resembles the British Trade Union Congress more than any other body. It lives, that is to say, by trust in a number of leaders whom it chooses, and by providing them with a series of resolutions which indicate the categories within which they must work. Most of the reports it receives are documents too large in substance for effective debating in a big assembly; and the resolutions it accepts are much more the affirmation of wide principles the importance of which depends upon the method of their application. The Congress, in a word, is rather a great sounding board by which its executive learns the mood of the membership than a genuine legislative body. It indicates direction, but it cannot, from its very nature, control the movement in its passage along the road.

The effective leadership therefore belongs to the executive committee. This is a body the size of which does not appear to be constant, but has usually been some forty-five members. To the outside world, the executive committee has appeared essentially Russian in composition. In fact the Russians have only five members, the remainder being distributed

among the national communist parties according to their size and importance; if the Russians appear to dominate the other members, that is, as Zinoviev has said, the result of their special experience, and the peculiar prestige which naturally attaches to Russian views in the movement as a whole. The executive directs the Communist International between the intervals of congresses. Its directions are binding upon affiliated organisations and control their activity. There is, indeed, an appeal from them to the World Congress, but this does not act to suspend any given direction. The executive, moreover, can exclude from the International, subject to an appeal thereto, any party, group, or member which attacks or weakens the programme and decisions of the World Congress. It possesses, again subject to appeal, the right to ratify the programmes of all affiliated bodies; and its decisions and official documents must be published in their journals by all sections of the latter. It has the right to send delegates to all local communist groups to explain its views, and these, like the representatives on mission during the French Revolution, can apply executive decisions even in the face of disagreement from the party concerned. The executive meets once in each month, and, where any questions of special importance arise, it may convoke a specially enlarged executive, at least twice each year, in which representatives of the affiliated organisations may take part.

Clearly, however, a committee of forty-five members is too large for detailed work. It can discuss generally, or, as the executive does, choose men for such tasks as editing the various publications of the International. But where so wide an area has to be covered, and where so much depends upon the assessment of value in minutiæ, it is essential that administrative work be entrusted to a small number. The executive therefore subdivides itself into two more or less permanent parts. Its præsidium is a specially selected group, of which the head is the chairman of the executive, directing the international work in the intervals of meetings of the executive. The bureau of organisation deals with all questions of organisation and finance, and appeal from its decisions lies only to the præsidium. There is also a secretary, elected by the executive, who, with his staff, forms a part of the bureau of organisation. Within these organs, certain special departments exist. The executive creates a special international secretariat to deal with the women's side of the movement; and it has sections which provide materials for information and statistics, agitation and propaganda, organisation and the very important Eastern Question. It retains also the right to create any special organs which experience suggests as advisable.

The best way, probably, to visualise the composition of the Communist International is to think of it in terms of English political

institutions. The World Congress corresponds roughly to the House of Commons. It has the plenary authority which the latter in theory possesses, though, like the latter, it is, except on extraordinary occasions, guided and controlled by a body responsible nominally to itself. The executive corresponds to the Cabinet. While in theory it is carrying out the will of the Congress, as the Cabinet is carrying out the will of the House of Commons, in practice it shapes and determines that will by its superior coherency and driving power. The præsidium may be equated with the inner Cabinet; its members are the section to whom, by reason less of their titular position than the special authority attaching to their experience and capacity, guide and direct the others. The bureau of organisation is, with its secretarial branches, like a combination of the Cabinet secretariat and the Treasury.

The Congress, as was noted earlier, elects also an International Commission of Control. Its functions are four in number. It examines complaints against different sections of the executive and submits proposals for their remedy to the latter; it deals, secondly, with complaints referred to it by persons or parties against disciplinary measures taken against them, and once more submits proposals thereon to the executive; it controls, thirdly, the finances of the executive; and, finally, on the decision of the executive or its sections, it

supervises the finances of the constituent parties of the International. The Commission, however, has no power to intervene in any internal party conflict, or in any dispute between the executive and a constituent party. Within its allotted field it is simply a bureau for the investigation of disputes and the submission of proposals, on the one hand, and the independent auditor of finance upon the other. It is not the master of the executive, but a servant with a quasi-independent right of ultimate access, by the proposals it formulates, to the World Congress.

As a piece of organisation, the International is clearly well thought out for the purposes it has in view. It is much more closely knit, and has a far more really coherent existence, than its rival, the Second International. The latter is merely a Congress with a non-executive secretariat; and it relies upon the action of national parties, themselves of loosely federal structure, to carry out such resolutions as it makes. The Second International, in fact, is not an effectively deciding body at all; it is much more an occasional conference with no means for continous action in its composition. A new European war might find it as inadequate for its announced purposes as was its predecessor in 1914. The Communist International, on the other hand, has the advantages of federation for the purposes of conference, with those of centralisation for the

purposes of action. It has a general staff which infuses a consistent unity of thought and d ed throughout its membership. The communist in the factory, the workshop, the local government p rty, the legislative assembly, each has his orders thought out in terms of a common need. The mechanisms have been created by means of which action can be planned and carried through as a whole. As an institutional system the Communist International resembles nothing so much as the Roman Catholic Church. There is the same width and intensity of discussion before dogma is imposed; there is the same authoritarian imposition of dogma; and there is the same ruthless purging of dissident elements which show unwillingness to accept the decisions made. The expulsion, for instance, of Ruth Fischer and the right-wing elements of German communism is remarkably similar in manner to the Roman treatment of the modernists. Dogma being laid down, delation of heresy follows; there is patient inquiry into details, the demand for proof before sentence, the offer of repent nce and obedience to the accused. When, finally, recalcitrance is obvious, the sentence is carried out with exemplary severity, no matter what may be the previous services of those convicted.

The method has two obvious weaknesses. It tends, in the first p ace, to underestimate the need for flexibility in the movement. The

executive, despite its body of reports, both written and personal, is not really in a position to issue orders for so far-flung a battle-line. The shades of national temper, the impact of national institutions, the thousand distracting counter-currents which make impossible any simple picture of a given situation, all tend to mislead the International; and the fact that it is *a priori* searching for the Marxian interpretation of some given position, leads it, too often, to apply formulæ to a situation which they merely misrepresent. Mistakes like the letter of Tomsky to the British Trade Unions in September, 1926, are the kind of price centralisation must pay. And the second weakness lies in the fact that the International tends to regard itself as the custodian of a doctrinal system from which diversions cannot be permitted. Anyone who studies, for instance, the answers given to the British Independent Labour Party in 1920, when the latter was seeking a *modus vivendi* with the Communist International, will realise that the latter is not unprepared to sacrifice power to orthodoxy. The mere *ipse dixit* of the International is not likely to persuade men to action who are dubious about its substance and remote from the atmosphere in which it appears as truth too obvious to need debate. Anyone, for example, who reads the discussion between the Second and Third Internationals in April 1922, in an effort to reach a basis of joint action,

will be tempted to observe that it never occurred to the representatives of the latter to meet the minds of the Right Wing Socialists. They spoke, to use an ecclesiastical analogy once more, in much the same tone of authority that the Roman Church is accustomed to use towards the Anglican proponents of reunion; they had everything to receive, and nothing to give. They were prepared to surrender, but not for accommodation. Yet it was for accommodation that the conference had been called.

It may, in fact, be argued that the root error of the Communist International is a psychological one. It assumes that any diversity of view from its own is the proof of cowardice or crime in those who venture to differ. It applies uniform and equal solutions to things that are neither equal nor uniform. Its rejection of difference means that it comes ultimately to depend upon men whose interest it is less to analyse the facts about them objectively than to analyse them in such fashion as to make them square with a system of preconceived hypotheses. The effort, for instance, to read the problem of India in the set terms of Marxism is rather an exercise in ingenuity than a serious intellectual contribution to socialist advance. To treat the non-communist leaders of social democracy as necessarily blackguards and hypocrites, is, doubtless, convincing to communists; but it does not persuade those who have intimate acquaintance with those

leaders that it is true. The communist policy of centralisation is admirably conceived for the purpose of creating disturbance; but it is too inflexible in its assumptions to make it likely that it is equally well conceived for the making of successful revolution. Its basis is too narrow, its dogmas too rigid, to give it the malleability of direction a world-movement requires.

It is, of course, true that the Communist International secures unswerving devotion from those who accept its authority. The courage of its exponents in every country where they have sought influence has been as remarkable as that of the Jesuit missionaries in the century after the formation of the order. But the basis upon which they seek to build is too narrow to win over those who fail to sympathise with their aims; and their attitude to the latter is unlikely to secure the unity of front which they preach to their adherents as essential to success. It is difficult to see why the leaders of the Second International should co-operate with them when the purpose of communists is to destroy their allies at the first opportunity. The ordinary socialist, indeed, tends as a consequence to look upon proffered communist assistance as insincere. It was noteworthy that in the British general strike of 1926 the communists played practically no part at all. Their alliance was rejected before it had been advanced simply because the

leaders of the strike had made up their minds that it would be an alliance worked for ends with which they were not in sympathy. The net is spread vainly in sight of the bird. The allegiance of the communist to the orthodoxy of Moscow is so rigid and pre-eminent that other socialists regard it as incompatible with effective co-operation even for ends about which they are themselves eager.

That is perhaps brought out the more by a consideration of the programme, not of detail, but of principle, upon which the Communist International proceeds. It assumes that we are living in a period in which capitalism is making a frenzied effort to recover its domination. But the mind of labour is exacerbated against it, and its previous homogeneity has been lost as a result of problems, reparations, for example, created by the war. Capitalism, as a consequence, cannot rely upon the older methods; it halts between the uncertainty as to whether it should seek the immediate destruction of the revolutionary forces, or, by a policy of democracy, pacifism and petty reforms, seek the terms of survival along new lines. In the first case we have Fascism; in the second, governments like that of Branting or Ramsay Macdonald. The result of either is, however, disastrous to capitalism. The one obviously provokes revolution, the other, by its unreality, merely persuades the masses of the futility of representative government.

Revolution, then, remains inevitable from the communist standpoint, and the business of its adherents is to create great communist parties in each State to take advantage of the capitalist dilemma. The watchword of the Third World Congress, "Conquer communist influence in the majority of the working-class, and lead to the conflict the decisive part of this class" remains the key to events.

In this condition of unstable equilibrium, the obvious task of the International is to utilise the instability. If a Conservative government is in power, it must exacerbate the strife of class by fomenting and extending strikes. If a Labour government is in office, its adherents must make demands upon it of which the proletariat will approve, but which the capitalist cannot permit it to give. It must provoke suppressed nationalities to rise, and urge upon colonies the advantage of throwing off the yoke of the mother country. It must awaken the African and Asiatic races to revolt against their white exploiters. This situation of either constant, if sporadic conflict, or the instability of impending conflict, will prevent the capitalist from recovering the ground that he has lost. His difficulties will create proletarian discontent, the mood which an efficiently organised communist party will be able to utilise for revolutionary purposes.

Granted the truth of the original thesis upon which it is founded, the policy of the Com-

munist International is certainly well conceived for the end it has in view. The only situation in which it is unlikely to make headway is one like that of America, where a wave of great natural prosperity makes men unwilling to risk the obvious gains of the present for the hazards of a dubious future. It is easy, for instance, to see that the unemployed of Great Britain might easily give ear to a doctrine which promises them, with audacious certainty, the prospect of ultimate reward. It is not difficult in a country like Greece to make the nationalist claim a part of a wider social movement. The Arab, the Chinaman, the African negro excluded from citizenship by prejudice and fear, will easily lend an ear to theories which insist upon the approaching end of the white man's exploitation. Wherever there exist suffering and injustice, there exists also a territory in which communism has reason to expect acceptance.

The difficulty of the view is, however, not less clear. It underestimates the difficulties it confronts and overestimates the possibilities of its success. It assumes, in the first place, that capitalism cannot check its propaganda. That is, to say the least, a dubious thing; certainly in Italy and in parts of the Near East, like Bulgaria and Roumania, the counter-offensive of capitalism has been proportionate to the vehemence of communist claims. It assumes, secondly, that the forces of social

democracy can be persuaded to unite with its own army. Such evidence as there is indicates rather the untruth of this view. It suggests that, for at least a considerable period, the reformist parties of socialism will endeavour, in their own way, to march towards power. Whether if they attain it, they will use it wisely, it is, of course, impossible to say; but it is at least probable that not until their failure has been demonstrated will there supervene such a revolutionary mood as communists can utilise. Nor can it be said that their Eastern propaganda is likely to have the results they foresee. Undoubtedly it will exasperate the relations between East and West; but the destruction of Western influence does not necessarily mean communism. There is no special reason to suppose that the handful of Eastern intellectuals who frequent Moscow could, in a crisis, dominate India or China in the way, and with the purpose, of Lenin and Trotsky. It is much more logical, on the evidence, to admit that such propaganda would produce confusion. But what would be the outcome of that confusion no man save the boldest of prophets would venture to predict. Even if revolution came in the Western world, the prediction of victory is, after all, an hypothesis dependent upon mainly theoretical considerations. And the problem of its cost raises the not unimportant question of whether, in those terms, it could be regarded as a victory

at all. The International is doubtless right in its insistence that men will not starve quietly under capitalism; but it is at least equally logical to argue that they are, similarly, unprepared to starve quietly under a proletarian dictatorship which cannot offer proof that the ideals of communism will ultimately triumph.

II

The difficulty, in fact, that the strategy of international communism presents does not lie either in some inherent wickedness in its ideals, or some clear likelihood that its immediate predictions will be falsified. It lies rather in the purely hypothetical character of its ultimate prophecies. Therein, it partakes less of the character of scientific probability than of religious certitude. Different as it is in appearance, it offers to its adherents much the same quality of prospect as Roman Catholicism or Mahomedanism. If the believer accepts its way of life, he can rest content in the assurance of an ultimate beatitude, with the difference that while the Churches can offer it to the individual, the communist can offer it only to some remote posterity. The faith, indeed, that he can arouse is not less intense than that of the religious enthusiast, but it is engendered at the expense of a scepticism in the face of social fact which few who note

their uncertain complexity would be prepared to surrender. Faith, of course, is a powerful factor in enabling its possessors to put their dream to the proof. Yet, not seldom, the result of the test is disillusion instead of the expected confirmation.

Something of the same judgment will impose itself upon anyone who examines the strategy of communism within the confines of a national State. This appears to be built upon three assumptions. There must be built up, first, a strong communist party in each stage, firmly rooted, above all, in the trade-union movement. That party, in the second place, must co-operate with the social-democratic forces in order to convince the proletariat that representative institutions are worthless. It must, thirdly, establish an adequate influence over the peasantry in each State. Each of these aspects deserves separate consideration.

The building up of a strong communist party has been the subject of exhaustive discussion in the congresses of the International. The basis of this effort, it is argued, will be found in the individual workshops. Committees of communists must be formed in each in order that the trade-union movement may, through their influence, be increasingly orientated towards revolutionary action. Each of these committees or "cells" must act as a party in little. It must examine all questions from the angle of party policy and act as a united

whole. It must entrust a special function to each of its members, and hold him strictly to account for its performance. It must seek to enrol new members, and thus extend its influence. Since this "cellule" is the party's centre of gravity, too much importance cannot be attached to it. There must, moreover, be intimate connection between "cellules" in different enterprises, and special attention must be given to liaison with the Young Communist Party. The "cellule" must think of itself as an incipient soviet, ready, when the time comes, to assume quasi-governmental functions. It must regard itself as strictly subject to the orders of the party, and allegiance to the latter must supersede all other loyalties.

Special attention must be given to communist propaganda. "The party press," said the Second World Congress in 1920, "must be edited by reliable Communists who have proved their loyalty to the cause of the proletarian revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat must not be spoken of as a mere hackneyed formula. The facts of everyday life must be systematically recorded and interpreted by the party press in such fashion as to make the necessity for proletarian dictatorship self-evident to every worker, soldier and peasant. All periodical and other publications of the party must be under the control of the central executive of the party, indepen-

dently of whether the party is legal or illegal. Wherever the adherents of the Third International can gain access, and whatever means of propaganda are at their disposal, in the columns of the newspapers, at public meetings, within the Trade Unions and Co-operatives, it is essential that they denounce not only the capitalists, but also their allies, the reformists of every shade and colour." The party, moreover, must think out such educational institutions as will provide at least an elementary knowledge of communist principles for all its members. In the evenings and on Sundays it must organise schools and lectures, while for those with some instruction in communism it must attempt more advanced and systematic instruction. Its purpose, in this educational effort, must be to train qualified militants who can serve as party propagandists. Attention, also, must be paid to non-communist institutions like popular universities and labour colleges which can be influenced in a communist direction. Circles for the study of communism should be created, especially for the youth of the party, and an adequate literature, particularly of the works of Marx and Lenin, should be made available. Steps should be taken to bring all such educational institutions into contact, by the intermediary of the International, with similar bodies in Moscow. Above all, it is essential to put an end to the isolation and independence of communist

students who should, by appropriate direction, be organised to serve in, and take part in the practical work of, the party without exception.[1]

Propaganda, however, must go further. "Every organisation desiring to join the Communist International," resolved the Second World Congress, "must be bound systematically and regularly to remove from all responsible positions (in the party, committee, editorial staff, trade union, parliamentary group, co-operative society, and municipal council) all reformists and supporters of the 'centre' and to replace them by tried communists, even at the risk of supplanting, for a time, 'experienced' men by rank and file workmen." It is in accordance with this resolution that the British Communist Party [2] instructs its members to get elected where possible to important conferences of the Labour Party (from which communists have been expelled) and to act within their ranks upon the instructions of their own headquarters. They are to inform the latter of all resolutions at such conferences, to act there as an organised delegation, and to form secret communist "fractions" in Labour parties, trade unions and similar bodies. They are to report back upon their activity in this matter, and to

[1] The reader will find a most interesting discussion of communist propaganda and education in the resolutions of the Fifth World Congress (French edition, pp. 46–56).

[2] Bulletin of June 24th, 1926.

realise, in the words of the British representative upon the Executive of the International, "that in whatever capacity our Party members are serving in the general working-class movement, their party allegiance must supersede all other responsibilities."

Nor must their propaganda stop there. The heart of the modern State, and the main defence of capitalism, lies in its armed forces. It is therefore essential to penetrate into its ranks by a systematic and persistent campaign. Where this is prohibited by law, it must be done despite the law. "Refusal to carry on or participate in such work," says the World Congress, "should be considered as treason to the revolutionary cause and incompatible with membership of the Third International." It was, of course, in accordance with these instructions that the British Communist Party addressed its appeal to the troops not to shoot down strikers which resulted in the imprisonment of its leaders after the famous trial of 1925. And the communist, from his angle, is clearly right in his emphasis upon this aspect of his work. "No great revolution has happened, or can happen," wrote Lenin, "without the disorganisation of the army. . . . The new social class which aspires to power has never been able and is even to-day unable, to assure and maintain its authority without the complete dislocation of the old army." The communist, moreover, argues that this is a less

difficult task than might appear. For not only are the majority of soldiers and sailors themselves drawn from the proletariat, they also dislike intensely being used in civil disturbances. Intensified propaganda in a period of revolutionary crisis may, by operating upon these impulses, go far to neutralise the influence of the government upon the troops. That is especially the case when they are themselves discontented; and it is an integral point of communist propaganda not only to promote fraternisation with soldiers and sailors, but also to put themselves behind every grievance of a proletarian character these may announce. Historically, moreover, it is important to remember that at revolutionary periods it has not always been possible to rely upon the troops—Cromwell had difficulty with them in his persecution of Lilburne and the Levellers; revolutionists were able to exploit the grievances of the sailors in the mutiny of 1797; in 1789 the citizens of Paris were able to infect the French troops with their own revolutionary enthusiasm; in the attack upon the communists in 1871 many of the troops refused to fire; and it was the propaganda among the Russian army by the Bolsheviks which secured their triumph in 1917. It must, moreover, be remembered that one of the conditions of a successful use of the army in a dispute is its confinement to a single area; if the outbreak is widespread, the power of authority is greatly

minimised. "A decentralised army," writes Mr. William Paul,[1] "during an intense industrial upheaval, is easily approached and disaffected." Clearly, also, the use of troops to quell civil disturbance would be gravely compromised if there was organised resistance to their movement by railroad and transport workers. Communists build largely upon the hope which, to an outsider may appear faint indeed, that, in a period of excitement, they will be able to pervert the loyalty of troops so that the latter will refuse to fire.

Upon one other feature of this aspect of the communist position it is necessary to say a word. It is integral to their conception of necessary strategy that every effort should be made to discredit reformist leaders. This attitude goes back to Marx himself, who advised its adoption in the period when it was necessary for communists to dissociate themselves from the right-wing socialists. It is emphasised in every communist publication. They are stigmatised as hypocrites, traitors, lacqueys, according to the mood of the moment. In the single small volume of Lenin on the *State and Revolution* Paltchinski is charged with corruption, Tchernoff and Tseretelli with being "allies of the millionaire thieves who plunder the public treasury," or "the heroes of putrid philistinism"; Plek-

[1] *Communism and Society*, p. 182. Mr. Paul's book is easily the ablest English exposition of the communist position.

hanoff, from 1908 to 1917, with being "half doctrinaire and half philistine, walking, politically, in the wake of the bourgeoisie"; Bernstein is a "renegade," and the whole English Labour Party is indistinguishable from "lower middle-class democrats." Communists have a special genius for general invective on, it appears, the principle that if enough mud is thrown, some is bound to stick. They cannot believe in the sincerity of socialists who do not accept their own views; and they hold themselves bound to do all in their power to prevent others from accepting them as sincere.

It is, then, a little curious to discover the emphasis they place upon the tactic of the united front. Nothing shows more strikingly the flexibility of the Communist International than the power of its leaders to impose this view upon their followers. They had preached so long the infamy of the reformist leaders that many of their most devoted adherents were horrified at the thought of collaborating with them. It was pointed out that the left wing of the movement would be estranged by a policy which savoured of dubious compromise, and that the revolutionary zeal of many might easily be tainted by association with men who detested that outlook. To Lenin and his colleagues, however, such a view was untenable. In the early days of the Russian Revolution, when they expected a world-revolution immediately, non-collaboration seemed essential.

But the moment for a world-revolution had gone by. The years of war had tired the masses, and they sought, above all things, a period of quiescence. That period endangered the strength of communism since it was evident to the workers that the communists everywhere promoted schism, and, by dividing the proletarian forces, strengthened the hands of the capitalist. The socialists of the right were therefore able to represent their revolutionary critics as the fomenters of dissension in the face of the enemy. They were themselves trusted by millions of working-men, and it was folly to take no account of that trust. On the contrary, it was necessary to destroy it, and that could be only by boring from within a movement to which, in essence, communists were opposed.

Complete separation from the reformist forces therefore received short shrift from the Third International; to insist upon it was, in Lenin's phrase, the "infantile malady of communism." It became the accepted policy to force upon the Right separation from the bourgeois parties, and the endeavour was made to secure terms of collaboration from those whom communists had attacked. The result, in the communist view, would be that the workers would throw the liability for defeat upon the Right if the manœuvre was rejected; while if it was accepted, since communists would not surrender their freedom to agitate

and act in their own fashion, they would be provided with an incomparable platform. To support the Right did not imply to strengthen them; "I support Henderson by my vote," said Lenin, "as the rope supports a man who is being hanged." To support the Right meant to separate the working-class from the bourgeoisie, and to force upon the former a programme which pushes its leaders continually towards more revolutionary principles. It means the formulation of demands which appear just to the workers but impossible to the capitalists; it defines, accordingly, the class-character of the differences between them. Their refusal insists upon the necessity of conflict, and conflict means the passage of leadership over to the communists. The more unified, in short, the working-class becomes, the nearer it moves to power; and even those workers who see nothing communist in united action will find, when they are engaged in it, that they have been pursuing a communist policy without knowing it. They will have had contact of an intimate kind with revolutionists and the creed of revolution which cannot but serve the end that communism has in view. What is proposed is not a union of parties but a limited collaboration which will force the right wing of socialism into the revolutionary path.

The tactic of the united front is, then, a Machiavellian manœuvre dictated by the

necessities of the international situation; it is the policy which the French socialist, Longuet, not inaptly described in the famous line of Racine: "I embrace my rival, but it is the better to choke him." Since the policy was first adumbrated, in 1920, it cannot be said to have progressed rapidly. Most of the right-wing parties have refused, in England by enormous majorities, to admit the communists within their ranks; and the Second International in 1926, rejected by 247 votes to 3 a proposal of the Independent Labour Party of Great Britain for a joint conference with the Third International "to explore the possibilities of the formation of an all-inclusive International." Communists have therefore, as in Great Britain, been compelled to fall back upon expedients such as the formation of special conferences and minority movements to maintain contact with the right wing of Socialism.

But it cannot by any means be said that the strategy has been a failure. An appeal from Russia, in the first place, naturally exercises an immense psychological influence upon working-class mentality; its rejection even causes discussion, and that, in itself, is a stimulus to the understanding of communism. The workers, moreover, as the communists quite rightly see, are sick to death of the endless schisms in the ranks of socialism. They realise that the communists are among

the most energetic and ardent of themselves; and there are many who resent their exclusion from the movement as a wasteful handicap. That attitude, moreover, is intensified, whenever the forces of capitalism secure a victory over labour. Division in the labour ranks is always a contributory cause of defeat; and the emotional satisfaction of closing up the ranks cannot easily be estimated. The antagonism to the communists, moreover, is certainly stronger among the leaders and officials of the right wing than it is among the rank and file. The weakness of the communists' case lies, of course, in two directions. They have, firstly, too obviously insisted upon the fact that by co-operation they do not mean co-operation. The eager party man in the social democratic ranks resents the proffer of aid which is avowedly given with the tongue in the cheek. And, secondly, he finds collaboration difficult with men who have treated a social democratic State like Georgia in the same high-handed fashion as France treated the Ruhr or Poland Lithuania; while the continued imprisonment and oppression of socialists in Soviet Russia not unnaturally makes him suspicious of suggested collaboration elsewhere. The general sense of social democrats seems to be that the communists are "too clever" and that no association with them could possibly be sincere.

That does not mean that association may not be forced upon the right wing. The communists, after all, are a working-class party. They predict that reforms are impossible within the ambit of capitalism. If, over a period, there is a general worsening of the standards of labour, the demand for collaboration will inevitably grow simply because their insight will have seemed superior. And any effort at prosecution, as in the British trials of 1925, and in the aftermath of the general strike of 1926, will, they believe, have the same effect. Nothing makes more for sympathy than martyrdom in a cause akin to one's own. Attempts by governments to suppress communism only compel the rest of the socialist movement to defend its adherents in the name of freedom, and such defence, on any united scale, would necessarily lead at least to some loose form of united action. Nor must one omit the other side. Few English miners are likely in this generation to forget that in their struggle against the owners and the British Government in 1926 they received aid from Russian trade unions upon a scale unprecedented in labour history. The gift may not have been without ulterior motives. But what impresses men in their hour of trial is the fact rather than the sources of aid. The generosity of Russia to the miners is not unlikely to create in the latter the sense that, whatever the difference of outlook, the

ultimate community of interest has been solidly demonstrated. That is an important prospect; for it is unnecessary to dwell upon the pivotal position the miners occupy in the British Labour movement.

The problem of the peasantry has always played a special part in the strategy of communism; from the time of Engels' book on the agrarian question it has been realised that special attention must be given to the need for enlisting his support. "The proletariat," resolved the Fifth World Congress of the International, "can neither conquer power, nor build the Soviet régime, unless it has, over a long period, sought to neutralise certain elements of the peasant class, and win the sympathy of others. . . . Communist parties which have not been able to organise revolutionary action among the peasants cannot be recognised as mass-parties seriously aiming at power."

That emphasis is a very natural one in the light of the history of the Russian Revolution. For what was a primary cause of the Bolshevik victory was the insistence of the party, and especially of Lenin, that the land must be given to the peasants. The Cadets, in their brief period of power, gave no attention to the problem of the land; while the Kerensky régime was so hesitant that peasant revolts broke out all over Russia, and the government sought to repress them by military force.

Lenin was quick to see that this was the turning-point in the revolution. "A peasant rebellion in an agrarian country," he wrote, "against the government of the socialist—revolutionary Kerensky, of the Mensheviks, and of other ministers representing the interests of capital and of the landed seigneurs! A repression of this rebellion by a republican government by means of revolutionary force! In the face of such facts, can any partisan of the proletariat deny that the crisis is about to burst forth, that the revolution is at a decisive turning-point, that the victory of the government over the peasant rebellion now would sound the knell of the revolution?"

Into the brilliant use of this position by the Bolsheviks to manipulate their own victory, it is not possible here to enter; nor can we discuss the effort of the communists, when in power, to control the peasant power they had brought into being. It must suffice to point out, first, that they discovered that the resistance of the peasants to a policy of socialisation is insurmountable. And, secondly, that the absence of a communist mentality among the poorer peasantry makes it impossible, save over a period too long to contemplate, to bring the rural districts into the categories of the communist society.[1]

[1] This is admirably brought out in the second part of Mr. Michael Farbman's *After Lenin* (1925), which gives an excellent résumé of the history of the peasant question.

It is probably this experience which explains the agrarian policy of the International. It seeks for an alliance between the poorer peasantry and the working-class. So long, it argues, as the former are dominated by the large landowners and their agents, a victory is impossible. Communists should therefore seek to drive a wedge between the peasant organisations and the rich agrarian class. They should assist, by all means in their power, the claims of the poorer peasants. They should demand the expropriation of all large estates and their free distribution to the peasantry. They should incite the small farmer to fight for the reduction of taxes, and even their abolition, while the taxation of the large farmer is rigorously insisted upon. In season and out of season, they should endeavour to show the peasant that their demands can only secure full satisfaction by a policy of confiscating the large estates. They should support all agrarian strikes, and preach incessantly the solidarity of interest between the worker without capital and the peasant without land. By thus driving a wedge between the rich and poor peasants, by bringing it home to the latter that the class-structure of society has the same results in agriculture as in industry, there can be formed a block of peasants and workers which will be of vital import when the day of reckoning comes.

How far this strategy is realistic it is impossible to say. Certainly in Russia itself, the working of the thesis laid down by Lenin in his proposed "Platform for the Proletarian Party," has been only very partially applied; and its results are not in accord with communist expectations. Indeed there is much to be said for the view that because communism itself is a theory evolved from the conditions of industry, it does not apply, even with the modifications upon which Lenin insisted, to the mentality which operates in agrarian life. The peasant is interested in revolution up to the point where he obtains the land. Once he has got it, and can work it, the aftermath of revolution does not seem to win his interest. It is probable, accordingly, that communist agitation might go far towards winning the support of the poorer peasants against any system which either divorces them from security of tenure or treats them oppressively. That was true in the agrarian revolution in England in the sixteenth century; it was true, also, of France in 1789; and it was demonstrated once more by Russian experience in 1917. But whether, having won the soil, the peasant can be induced to pool his interests with those of the townsman, is a question upon which we have no real knowledge except the empirical fact that no amount of force will induce him to do so. For his answer to force is the effective one of diminish-

ing cultivation, and the townsman is compelled to surrender in order that he may get food. No social class has the same unending power to wait that the peasant possesses. His proximity to Nature breeds an endurance different in kind from every other class in society.

To the communists, the problem of nationality is a part of the general problem of imperialism. The latter system being a method whereby capitalism retains its power over the masses, it is essential to free the national groups which seek autonomy from their bondage. "All colonies and subject territories," writes Stalin, "have the right to separate completely from the State with which they are connected, and to form an independent State; in the same way the possibility of territorial annexations is ruled out." So Macedonia and Thrace ought to be aided by communists in their effort towards independence; the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes ought to be disunited into separate republics; and the Lithuanian population of Poland should have the right to self-determination. For so long as the national question remains, a barrier stands in the way of unity between the proletariat of different countries; and this issue is exploited by the bourgeoisie to the detriment of the revolution. Obviously, for example, so long as the Irish worker was depressed by his subjection to the British

people, he could not give adequate attention to the essential, that is, the economic, situation; remove the first issue, and the true problem will assert itself. So, also, with the exploitation of India by Great Britain. It is futile to believe that a hold can be obtained there for communist propaganda unless it is built upon sympathy with the Indian demand for self-determination. Aid for that movement serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it weakens British imperialism in a vital spot, and, on the other, it brings communist propagandists into contact with the discontented by support of whom they are able to find a place for their own views.

"The bourgeoisie in each country," writes Bukharin, "exploits and oppresses the proletariat of its own land. But it does its utmost to convince its own proletariat that the latter's enemies are not to be found among bourgeois fellow-countrymen, but among the peoples of other lands. The aim of this is to switch off the class-struggle of the workers against their capitalist oppressors into a struggle between nationalities." To support, accordingly, the movement for self-determination is to oppose a serious barrier to the safety of capitalism and to help the working-class of an oppressed country to maintain sympathy even for the working-class of the country by which they are oppressed. For when they realise that the workers sympathise with their demand for

freedom, and that it is the master-class which opposes it, they will see that their struggle against national oppression is only a form of the struggle against capitalist oppression. They will be ripe for the reception of communist ideas, willing to join with the workers of other lands for deliverance from a common yoke. National self-determination, in fact, is a stage in the development of international working-class solidarity. And the same argument applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the problem of oppression in creed or colour or race. Take anti-semitism, for example. "The Russian bourgeoisie," writes Bukharin, "raised the hunt against the Jews not only in the hope of diverting the anger of the exploited workers, but also in the hope of freeing themselves from competitors in commerce and industry. . . . Anti-semitism is one of the forms of resistance to socialism."

The rise of communism has coincided with an intense growth of national and racial feeling all over the world. The Peace of Versailles put an end to many national oppressions, but it created almost as many as it destroyed. The position of Japan in world-politics, moreover, the growth of national feeling in China, the plea for self-determination by Indian and Filipino, these, and things like these, have combined to give an importance to the communist thesis which cannot be gainsaid. Wherever a national minority feels

itself outraged, there will be found a seed-ground for communist propaganda; and wherever there is exploitation of race by race—as in Africa, for example—it is easy to see that communist insistence on racial equality provides an impetus to accept its coincident hypotheses. That it should have made progress, accordingly, in India and China, and, more slowly, in the Near East is not remarkable; and, in the Near East, a White Terror has been sufficiently general to make communism the antithesis it is natural for opponents to accept. Strategically, therefore, it is very difficult to doubt that the weapon evolved has been used by communists with great skill. And no one who reads the record of such bodies as their Far Eastern Congress, can doubt either that they are great dramatic artists who know how to exploit to the full the situations they discover.

But it is necessary to distinguish between the communist strategy of self-determination and the theory and practice of that principle. Georgia, for example, was a Menshevik community, and the Soviet Government overran it, partly for military, and partly for economic purposes, exactly as a capitalist government might have done. The reasons advanced for so doing have at least the merit of simplicity. "We do not only recognise," wrote Trotsky,[1] "but we give full support to,

[1] *Daily Herald*, April 3rd, 1922.

the principle of self-determination, whenever it is directed against feudal, capitalist and imperialist States. But wherever the fiction of self-determination becomes, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, a weapon directed against the proletarian revolution (as in the case of Georgia), we have no occasion to treat this fiction differently from the other 'democratic principles' perverted by capitalism." The principle, in fact, is a tactic, and it must be applied only in relation to other principles which may countermand its application. It is, moreover, obvious that the communists gravely overestimate the economic factor in nationalism. True though it is that nationalism may be exploited by governments for economic purposes, it is yet also true that the consciousness of a separate existence implied by nationalism would have to receive recognition in the business of government even if a world-revolution everywhere enthroned communism in power. For that consciousness, with all it implied, existed long before industrialism had effected the class-division against which communism is a protest. The removal of economic injustice would, doubtless, largely mitigate its intensity; but there would remain problems of language, culture, religion, which would not easily yield to international control. Since, moreover, the international character of communism is very largely the response to the international character of

capitalism, the interesting question arises whether the destruction of the latter would leave communism its international character. There would still be the problem of raw materials and their disposition, and an inability on the part of a World Soviet to agree with a Russian Soviet about the use of the oil deposits in Caucasia might easily lead to intense conflict in which the Russian sense of nationalism would be passionately aroused. And, in any case, it is obvious that a civilisation like our own could not exist (as Trotsky has seen) if self-determination were carried out whenever any national group happened to want it. No one need doubt the value of local autonomy; but no one, either, can doubt that the habit of the small nation to push its demands into the region of sovereign statehood has been little less than a disaster to the world.[1]

III

One of the main problems by which any party is confronted is the question of the limits within which it exacts obedience from its members to the programme it has formulated. It exists, in the phrase of Burke, to promote a body of principles upon which its members are agreed. But, obviously, enough, some measure of divergence must be permitted. In the Roman Catholic Church,

[1] Cf. my *Grammar of Politics*, Chap. VI.

which is probably the most centralised organisation in the world, there are many matters upon which members may take a divergent view. The Conservative Party in England contains people with views so different from one another as those of the Duke of Northumberland and Lord Henry Bentinck. The Liberal Party contains extreme individualists at one end and collectivists at the other. The Labour Party contains monarchists and republicans, men who, like Mr. J. H. Thomas, believe profoundly in the British Empire, and others, like Mr. Bertrand Russell, who disbelieve emphatically in the assumption that it has a mission. The Church of England is divisible into Broad Church, Evangelical, and Catholic parties. The Republican party in America contained strong advocates of governmental control and equally strong believers that industrial regulation was no concern of government. In general, clearly, the average organisation draws fairly widely the limits of orthodoxy; for expulsion for heresy, as distinct from self-expulsion, is one of the rarest occurrences in modern times.

The communist theory of party discipline is built upon quite different assumptions; its theory of discipline seems midway between that of an army and the Roman Catholic Church. Like the latter, it has a body of doctrine, the teaching of Marx and Lenin, which indicates the broad dogmas, the class-

war, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the like, which its members must hold. Upon the application of doctrine to any given position, differences and discussion are permitted until a decision has been taken; but, after that has been done, an absolute and loyal obedience from those who dissent therefrom is expected. As in an army, that is to say, even the commander who doubts the wisdom of attack must carry it out exactly as though he was convinced of its rightness. There cannot be conflict of direction, nor, once the decision has been made, can there be permitted attacks upon, or groups to reverse, that decision. The party has been everywhere rigorously consistent in imposing these limitations upon its members. It has carried out "purgings" of the party; members whose enthusiasm has not been proved in action have been dropped from its ranks. It has expelled men like Paul Levi in Germany for doubting the tactics of the united front. Zinoviev and Trotsky have been penalised equally with the humblest members. Warnings and exhortations have been addressed even to the authors of articles in the party press which might be suspected of lukewarmness to the official policy. There cannot, it is argued, be a united strategy against capitalism if every group of dissenters is to form a faction for the propagation of its own ideas. The Communist Party is the general

staff of the proletariat; if its members remained free to obey or disobey its orders at will, it would soon degenerate into a mere debating society. Hence the elaborate provisions in the statutes of the Communist International for the enforcement of discipline and the punishment of disobedience.[1]

It should be emphasised that the imposition of penalties does not prevent the most vivid discussion before a policy is adopted. Theses, reports, programmes, speeches, are accumulated upon one another almost to the point of exhaustion; it does not appear that, prior to defeat, any defeated group can claim that it has not had its day in court. Internationally, moreover, there is a system of appeals to the World Congress which gives it, even when the decision has been applied, the right to attempt its reversal by discussion. And one of the outstanding features of the system is the large part taken by the leaders themselves in meeting and making attacks. An Englishman would be astonished if Mr. Baldwin or Lord Oxford went to a party conference for the purpose of taking an intimate and daily part in its proceedings; but Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Clara Zetkin, Radek, do so as a matter of course. It is, indeed, remarkable to note, in the record both of national and international congresses, the care with which

[1] Reprinted in the *Proceedings* of the Fifth World Congress (French Edition, p. 38 f.).

preparation has been made to deal with criticism and attack. To some extent, perhaps, the British Labour Party's Annual Conference displays a similar situation, but its proceedings reveal, not seldom, an effort by the machine to repress the discussion of inconvenient questions very different from the boldness with which they are faced in Communist Congresses.

The advantage of the method is, of course, obvious. It enables every member of the party to know what he is to believe, and its directors to tell him, with the sanction of ultimate penalties at their disposal, what he is to do. For the purpose of the offensive in attack, this is a great merit. For the average member of the party, it probably dispenses with the problems of conscience in much the same way as an *ex cathedra* pronouncement from Rome controls the attitude of its adherents. Its weaknesses, however, are not less manifest. Few able men, whose advice has been rejected, are able to carry out a policy in which they disbelieve. In this respect, the analogy of an army breaks down; for there is no real comparison between, say, an order to a commander to attack a trench and an order to an English or French communist to pursue the policy of a united front. It may, moreover, be doubted whether the loyalty produced by the system is as real as it is apparent; certainly, at least since the

death of Lenin, the factionalism it is supposed to suppress seems rather to be driven underground than to disappear. If suppression is thoroughgoing, it deprives the party of those whose sincerity prevents them from offering an artificial conformity; while if it is inadequate, it is absurd.

Nor is that all. Thought cannot, in any system, be destroyed by penalties, even if it can be hampered; the roots of loyalty are internal and not external. The system attempts to impose an intellectual dictatorship in the one region of effort where dictatorships are invariably, if ultimately only, unsuccessful. And it seems, further, to have the great demeric of hampering the work of thought in the party. A French communist, for instance, who is convinced that the united front is an erroneous strategy does not fight the executive of the International on equal terms. It would be factionalism on his part to discuss it in the press in order to obtain a decision on his behalf; and a single debate at an annual or biennial congress, in which he can make a long speech to a congress inevitably dominated by the executive—which, by definition, is committed to an alternative view—does not give him any great opportunity of producing conviction; and this, in its turn, assumes that he would be allowed by the national party to go to Moscow with such an intention. Communists are not less

skilful than other parties in the art of manipulating delegations.

It is therefore probable that this theory of party discipline produces an artificial uniformity purchased at the expense of intellectual creativeness; and this, it may be suggested, is borne out by a certain heavy inflexibility in communist literature—such masters of the controversial art as Lenin and Trotsky being exceptions—which makes it too often palatable to the reader who already accepts communism than to the one who is still awaiting conversion. It has, moreover, one other weakness. On the one hand, it insists that victory can only be won by iron discipline within its own ranks; on the other, it asks for a united front with men from whose doctrines and methods it avowedly disagrees. It announces that the primary loyalty of its own members is, on pain of exclusion, to the orders of the Communist International; within that body it prohibits any sort of faction. Yet it urges its members, as in England, to enter the Labour Party, the trade unions, the trade councils, the organised unemployed, and there to form factions for the purpose of weakening the authority of the accepted programme. Quite intelligibly and logically the Labour Party looks with suspicion on proffers of alliance from communists on the ground that they propose to do within its ranks what they would not permit within

their own. Their policy, in brief, of an allegiance which does not admit of open-minded co-operation with alternative views, naturally promotes distrust of the very united front they hope to secure. And any action they take to promote a rigorous obedience in their own ranks only strengthens that mistrust by emphasising the dubious sincerity of the co-operation they offer.

IV

Upon one final question a word should be said. Because communism is a doctrine of revolution, its adherents are often attacked, especially for tactical reasons, on the ground that they are anxious, at any possible moment, to make an attack upon the established order. That is not, of course, the case. There have been revolutionists, notably the Frenchman, Blanqui, of whom this could be said with truth; but of the modern communists, and above all, of Lenin, it is grotesquely erroneous. They take their stand by the classic words of Marx that insurrection is an art, and they are anxious that it should not be practised save under promising conditions. Marx himself, as is well known, was opposed to the Commune in 1871; and the defence of it was built upon admiration of its courage rather than recognition of its timeliness. So also, the com-

munists of our own time considered the Hamburg insurrection of 1922 a mistake. Time and conditions were unsuitable and that unsuitability is a grave error because it compromises the future.

What, then, are the conditions of strategic success? "Armed insurrection," wrote Lenin, "is a special form of political struggle. It is subject to special rules which must be deeply reflected upon"; and Trotsky, in a most suggestive analysis of the Revolution of October,[1] has explained the need for a careful study of revolutionary insurrection and the construction of a code of rules out of the lessons implicit therein. From a study of Marx, Lenin lays down five rules as the guiding principles of the act. It is important, firstly, never to play with insurrection; once it has commenced, it must be carried through to the bitter end. When, secondly, the revolutionists have chosen the decisive time and place, they must mass there forces superior to those of the enemy; otherwise, the latter, being better prepared and organised, will destroy them. Having begun, in the third place, it is essential to act with determination and, whatever the price, to assume the offensive; "the defensive," said Marx, "is death to the insurrection." The element of

[1] See his most suggestive pamphlet *The Lessons of October*, 1917 (English translation by A. Susan Lawrence, 1925).

surprise is, fourthly, fundamental; and the moment must always be seized when the forces of your opponent are scattered. Keep, finally, whatever happens, moral superiority; successes must be won daily and even hourly, if the theatre of war is small. That depresses your opponent and consolidates your power of keeping the offensive. Above all, each of these maxims must be read in the background of Danton's great phrase, "*L'audace, encore l'audace, et toujours l'audace!*" [1]

Such rules, of course, are general in character; and it will be helpful to supplement them by certain lessons impressed by experience. It is essential to smash the machinery of the State that is assaulted; revolutionists must not repeat the mistake of Louis Blanc in 1848 and accept institutions devised for a non-revolutionary purpose and functioning as such. Only new institutions will confer proper and full initiative upon the revolutionists. In the civil war that revolution provokes, moreover, the communists should "fearlessly display their final objective before the people." They can be certain that in so doing they will win support; they can be certain also, if the degree of class-consciousness in the masses be adequate, that the bourgeoisie will, in this aspect, have difficulty in rivalling them. It must be remembered,

[1] Lenin, *On the Road to Insurrection* (English translation, 1926), p. 112.

further, that revolution is a drastic educator; to begin an insurrection successfully is to attract waverers, the *petite bourgeoisie* for instance, and to free the poorer peasantry from bourgeois influence by showing them that alliance with you is the direct road to the realisation of their own demands. Moreover, to show unshakeable decision oneself is a factor in transforming the natural inertia of the masses into active sympathy; it transforms their complaints into demands. On the other hand, to hesitate when the moment has come, is to create vacillation not only amongst one's followers, but among the masses also, and thus to destroy the opportunity. It is important to remember that the act of insurrection itself creates confusion and anxiety everywhere. The workers are undecided and your opponents do not know what is in your mind. Your possession of the initiative, because you know your own mind, is the secret of your striking power.

Neither Lenin nor his followers conceal from themselves the difficulty of estimating whether the assumption that the hour has struck is accurate. It is well known, for instance, that from April until October 1917, Lenin stood almost alone in insisting that the Bolsheviks must rise against the Kerensky Government; even followers so eminent as Zinoviev and Kamenev were passionately convinced of his error. But, for Lenin, the

conditions of October fulfilled the hypothesis upon which, in his view, the success of any effort depended. "In order to be entirely victorious," he wrote, early in September 1917, "insurrection must not depend on a conspiracy, or a party, but on a revolutionary class. That is the first point. Insurrection must depend on the revolutionary pressure of all the people. That is the second point. Insurrection must break out at the apogee of the rising revolution, that is, at the moment when the activity of the vanguard of the people is greatest, when fluctuations among the enemy *and among the weak and indecisive friends of the revolution are strongest.* That is the third point. It is in bringing these three conditions to the consideration of the question of insurrection that Marxism differs from Leninism."[1]

Roughly speaking, it is clear that, in this analysis, the conditions of a successful revolution reduce themselves to three: there must be a revolutionary class-consciousness, there must be a strong communist party to take advantage of that situation, and it must, in its turn, be directed by leaders who have the courage to will, the eye to see, and the resource to manœuvre. These assumptions are extraordinarily interesting, but their very character indicates the problems to which

[1] *On the Road to Insurrection*, p. 57. The letter, which is an extraordinarily brilliant analysis, should be read in its entirety.

they give rise. It is clear, in the first place, that they are an admirable summary of the Russian situation. There the machine of government had broken down; the angry masses were making demands the Government could not satisfy; the Bolsheviks proclaimed with the vigour of a concentrated and trained band their willingness to satisfy those demands; they seized the initiative and never lost it through the division and bewilderment of their opponents; and they had in Lenin—on any showing one of the supreme political strategists of modern history—the ideal leader for the situation.

But the real inference from this experience is that such strategy will only be successful in a kindred environment. The essential fact is that, in Russia in 1917, two parties confronted each other, both of them minority parties, and that one only had the insight to voice the aspirations of the people. The success of Lenin, in other words, was built on the fact that the purposes he embodied for the people were the purposes the people themselves passionately desired. He won because public opinion supported him. And, in such an environment, any strong party that is greatly led will win. If a bourgeois government outrages the people; if, in the midst of unsuccessful war, the army becomes mutinous, if a communist party, at that moment and under an inspired leader, passionately pledges itself to redress the outrage; then it is likely

to repeat the victory of 1917. Yet the lesson of October is also a warning not less than an example. The inspired leader is rare; Lenin, and to some extent, Trotsky, had to dominate their party as few parties will agree to be dominated. Few governments are as outrageous as that of Tsarist Russia or as confused and incompetent as that of Kerensky. Few armies are likely to suffer such disorganisation and ill-treatment as the Russian Army during the European War of 1914. And if communists can learn how to organise revolution from experience, from the same experience bourgeois governments can also learn how to organise against it. "Political ends," as Lord Morley wrote, "miscarry, and the revolutionary leader treads a path of fire." The adventure is dubious in any event, and, in most conceivable instances, it is so hazardous that it can hardly hope to overcome its difficulties.

It is not argued here that the Marxian view of the insurrectionary art is incorrect; on the contrary, it is suggested that its substance is entirely accurate. But it is suggested that the environment for which it is suitable is of extreme rarity in history; and that even when such an environment is afforded, only a supreme genius will be able to take advantage of it. The lesson it teaches is, indeed, the lesson which all governments must learn on pain of ceasing to be governments: that no authority can resist deeply felt and wide-

spread demands from the people. If they do, it is not improbable that an attempt will be made to give substance to the communist theory of insurrection, and, under adequate leadership, it might well succeed. An English government, for example, that sought to reduce trade unions to impotence; a French government which attempted to reconstitute the monarchy; these might easily reproduce a situation in which the Marxian strategy would be successful. But either government, in this view, would by its attitude have revealed its complete lack of any sense of values, and it would have amply deserved its fate. Nor must it be forgotten that the lessons of the Russian Revolution are not merely applicable in communist terms. The dictatorship of Mussolini is merely their transference to the service of the bourgeoisie; and they indicate the important truth that once the floodgates are opened, none can surely prophesy who will emerge from the disaster as leader. That is the risk men run when they desert the path of reason and choose to prove for themselves by force not their desire for truth, but the truth of their desires. There are occasions, doubtless, when the situation they confront leaves them no alternative save violent protest. But its conscious choice as the path of salvation seems likely, save in the most rare of instances, to lead to disillusion rather than to success.