

Communist International, Congress (2nd : 1920)
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**The Communist International
in Lenin's Time**

WORKERS OF THE WORLD AND OPPRESSED PEOPLES, UNITE!

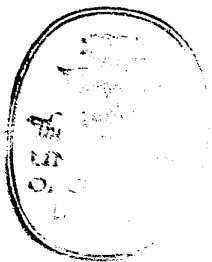
**PROCEEDINGS AND DOCUMENTS OF
THE SECOND CONGRESS, 1920**

V O L U M E O N E

Edited by John Riddell

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resolutions and motions be referred to the commission.

Wijnkoop: Not without discussion!

Levi: We will vote on ending the debate.

(Motion to end the debate is adopted with 5 opposing votes.)

Wijnkoop: I made a motion that the discussion absolutely must not be ended.

Levi: Who supports Comrade Wijnkoop's motion? Who supports opening the debate after it was just closed?

(Comrade Wijnkoop's motion is rejected with 8 votes in favor.)

Levi: The overwhelming majority rejected Comrade Wijnkoop's motion. We come to the vote on the theses as a whole. Now we are to vote on the theses; all motions will be referred to the commission. Should differences of opinion arise in the commission, another report to the congress will be brought in.

(The vote is taken on whether remaining questions should be referred to the commission. It is adopted unanimously.)

Frumkina: It has been said that the Bund participated in the Second International's counterrevolutionary agitation. The Bund did not participate in agitation against the socialist revolution. Rather, it threw all its forces into defending the Soviet government even before the Bund was communist. When the Second International crops up, someone should remind Comrade Kohn that the Poale Zion party in Palestine turned to the Second International for support and was quite pleased with it. Poale Zion's application that its representatives be admitted was turned down by the Executive Committee.

Serrati: Comrade Wijnkoop said that he wanted to conduct an investigation into the charges I made against the Dutch party. I emphasize that in no way did I raise accusations but only repeated what Comrade Levi said, which was not in any way contradicted by Comrade Wijnkoop, and what the comrades from the executive have said without evoking a protest.

Nicola Bombacci [Italian Socialist Party]: I have to state that I do not share Comrade Serrati's opinion, as expressed in his statement.

Wijnkoop: I did not ask for the floor on a personal question, but rather to make a motion. But now that I have the floor, I must explain that there is no truth in anything Comrade Serrati raised against our party on this point. Whether he is relying on

an untruth of Comrade Levi's is irrelevant. I must affirm that it is untrue and will remain untrue. The comrades from the Executive Committee did not say the same thing as Comrade Serrati. The Amsterdam bureau is not identical to the Dutch party. And this party has nothing in common with what Comrade Serrati raised, just because I criticized him. I propose that Comrade Serrati's protest also not be entered into the record, because it was not discussed here. I make this motion because Comrade Serrati can just as well make his protest, which in my opinion is a manifesto against this congress, at the Italian congress.

Pestaña: I represent no political party, but only a syndicalist organization, and do not wish to assume obligations I am not sure I can fulfill. I therefore will abstain on the vote.

Graziadei: My position is known from the statements I have made here. I will vote for the theses together with my proposed additions.

Zinoviev: We have before us Comrade Wijnkoop's motion that Comrade Serrati's statement not be entered into the record. We are of the opinion, and I ask for support for the Bureau's opinion, that such a vote is impossible.

Those who support this opinion please raise your hands. Opposed? It appears that no one is opposed. The congress will now end debate and move to a vote on the theses.

(The motion is adopted.)

Zinoviev: We now come to the vote on the "Theses on the National and Colonial Questions," which read as follows:

THESES ON THE NATIONAL AND COLONIAL QUESTIONS³¹

1. An abstract or formal conception of the question of equality in general and of national equality in particular is in the very nature of bourgeois democracy. Under the guise of the equality of individuals in general, bourgeois democracy proclaims the formal, legal equality of the property owner and the proletarian, the exploiter and the exploited, thereby grossly deceiving the oppressed classes. Claiming to uphold the supposed absolute equality of individuals, the bourgeoisie transforms the idea of equality, which itself reflects the relations of commodity

production, into a tool in the struggle against the abolition of classes. The real meaning of the demand for equality consists in its being a demand for the abolition of classes.

2. As the conscious expression of the proletarian class struggle to shake off the yoke of the bourgeoisie, the Communist Party, in line with its basic task of struggling against bourgeois democracy and exposing its lies and duplicity, should not base its policy on the national question on abstract and formal principles. Instead, it should first be based on an exact appraisal of specific historical and above all economic conditions. Second, it should clearly differentiate between the interests of the oppressed classes, the toilers, the exploited, and the general concept of the so-called interests of the people, which means the interests of the ruling class. Third, it should with equal precision distinguish between the oppressed, dependent nations that do not have equal rights and the oppressor, exploiting nations that do, in order to counter the bourgeois-democratic lies that conceal the colonial and financial enslavement of the immense majority of the entire world population by a narrow minority of the richest, most advanced capitalist countries—a characteristic feature of the epoch of finance capital and imperialism.

3. The imperialist war of 1914 revealed with particular clarity to all enslaved nations and oppressed classes around the world the deceitfulness of bourgeois-democratic rhetoric.³² The war was justified by both sides with platitudes about national liberation and self-determination. Nonetheless, both the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest and those of Versailles and St. Germain showed that the victorious bourgeoisie ruthlessly sets even “national” borders according to its economic interests.³³ For the bourgeoisie even “national” borders are objects of trade. The so-called League of Nations is nothing but the insurance policy with which this war’s victors mutually guarantee their loot. The attempts to reestablish national unity, to “reunify with detached portions of land,”³⁴ are for the bourgeoisie nothing but attempts by the vanquished to assemble forces for new wars. The reunification of nations artificially torn apart is also in the interests of the proletariat. However, the proletariat can achieve genuine national liberation and unity only through revolutionary struggle and by overpowering the bourgeoisie.

The League of Nations and the entire postwar policy of the

imperialist states expose this truth ever more clearly and sharply, strengthening everywhere the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of the advanced countries, as well as of all toiling masses of the colonies and dependent countries, and hastening the collapse of petty-bourgeois illusions about the possibility of peaceful coexistence and the equality of nations under capitalism.

4. It follows from these principles that the entire policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial questions must be based primarily upon uniting the proletarians and toiling masses of all nations and countries in common revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landowners and the bourgeoisie. Only such a unification will guarantee victory over capitalism, without which it is impossible to abolish national oppression and inequality.

5. The international political situation has now put the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day. All events in world politics necessarily focus on one single central issue: the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Russian Soviet Republic, which rallies around itself both the soviet movement of the advanced workers of all countries and all national liberation movements of the colonies and oppressed peoples. These peoples are learning through bitter experience that their only salvation lies with the revolutionary proletariat and in the victory of soviet power over world imperialism.

6. Consequently, we cannot limit ourselves at this time merely to recognizing or proclaiming the friendship of the toilers of various nations. Rather we must pursue a policy of implementing the closest possible alliance of all national and colonial liberation movements with Soviet Russia. The forms of this alliance will be determined by the level of development of the Communist movement within the proletariat of each country or of the revolutionary liberation movement³⁵ in the backward countries and among the backward nationalities.

7. Federation is a transitional form toward full unity of the toilers of all nations. Federation has already shown its usefulness in practice—in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic’s relations to the other soviet republics (the Hungarian, Finnish, and Latvian in the past, the Azerbaijani and Ukrainian at present), and also within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist

Republic itself toward the nationalities that formerly had neither a state nor self-government (for example, the autonomous Bashkir and Tatar republics in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic created in 1919 and 1920).

8. The task of the Communist International in this respect consists not only in further perfecting these developing federations based on the soviet order and the soviet movement but also in studying and testing their experiences. Recognizing the federation as a transitional form toward complete unification, we must strive for an ever closer federal association. We must take into consideration first, that the soviet republics, surrounded by imperialist states of the whole world that are considerably stronger militarily, cannot possibly exist without close association with each other. Second, a close economic alliance of the soviet republics is necessary, without which it is impossible to restore the productive forces destroyed by imperialism and ensure the well-being of the toilers. Third, that there is a tendency to create a world economy unified according to a common plan, controlled by proletarians of all countries. This tendency has already begun to appear quite openly under capitalism and is bound to develop further and be completed under socialism.

9. In the field of relations between states, the national policy of the Communist International cannot stop at the bare, formal recognition of the equality of nations. Such lip service, carrying no obligation to act, is the limit to which the bourgeois democrats confine themselves—both those who frankly admit to being such and those who call themselves “Socialists.”

Both within parliament as well as outside it, the Communist parties must incessantly expose in their entire propaganda and agitation the continually repeated violations of the equality of nations and guaranteed rights of national minorities in all capitalist countries despite their “democratic” constitutions. In addition, it must be explained persistently that only the soviet order can ensure true national equality by uniting first the proletariat and then the whole mass of the toilers in struggle against the bourgeoisie. Moreover, all Communist parties must directly support the revolutionary movement among the nations that are dependent and do not have equal rights (for example Ireland, the Negroes in America, and so forth), and in the colonies.

Without this last, especially important condition, the struggle against oppression of the dependent nations and colonies and recognition of their right to a separate state remains a dishonest facade, such as we see in the parties of the Second International.

10. Recognizing internationalism in word only, while diluting it in deed with petty-bourgeois nationalism and pacifism in all propaganda, agitation, and practical work, is a common practice not only among the centrist parties of the Second International but also among those that have left that International, and often even among parties that now call themselves Communist.

The fight against this evil, against the most deeply rooted petty-bourgeois, nationalist prejudices (which are expressed in all possible forms, such as racism, national chauvinism, and anti-Semitism)³⁶ must be given all the more priority as the question becomes more pressing of transforming the dictatorship of the proletariat from a national framework (that is, a dictatorship that exists only in one country and is incapable of carrying out an independent international policy) into an international one (that is, a dictatorship of the proletariat in at least several advanced countries, capable of exercising a decisive influence on all of world politics).

Petty-bourgeois nationalism declares that internationalism consists of the mere recognition of the equality of nations (although this recognition is strictly verbal) and considers national egoism to be sacrosanct. Proletarian internationalism, on the contrary, requires subordinating the interests of the proletarian struggle in one country to the interests of this struggle on a world scale. It also requires that the nation that has overthrown its bourgeoisie has the ability and willingness to make the greatest national sacrifices in order to overthrow international capitalism.

Therefore, in the already fully capitalist countries that have workers' parties truly constituting a vanguard of the proletariat, the first and most important task is the fight against the opportunist and petty-bourgeois pacifist distortions of the concept and policies of internationalism.

11. With respect to the states and nations that have a more backward, predominantly feudal, patriarchal, or patriarchal-

peasant character, the following points in particular must be kept in mind:

a. All Communist parties must support with deeds the revolutionary liberation movement in these countries. The form the support should take must be discussed with the Communist Party of the country in question, if there is such a party.³⁷ This responsibility of most energetic assistance applies above all to the workers of the country upon which the backward country is colonially or financially dependent.

b. A struggle absolutely must be waged against the reactionary and medieval influence of the clergy, the Christian missions, and similar elements.

c. It is necessary to struggle against the Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian movements³⁸ and similar currents that try to link the liberation struggle against European and American imperialism with strengthening³⁹ the power of Turkish and Japanese imperialism and of the nobles, large landowners, clergy, and so forth.

d. It is especially necessary to support the peasant movement in the backward countries against the landowners and all forms and vestiges of feudalism. We must particularly strive to give the peasant movement the most revolutionary character possible, organizing the peasants and all the exploited into soviets where feasible,⁴⁰ and thereby establishing the closest connection between the western European Communist proletariat and the revolutionary peasant movement in the East, in the colonies, and in the backward countries in general.⁴¹

e. A resolute struggle is necessary against the attempt to portray as communist the revolutionary liberation movements in the backward countries that are not truly communist. The Communist International has the duty to support the revolutionary movement in the colonies and the backward countries only on condition that the components are gathered in all backward countries for future proletarian parties⁴²—communist in fact and not only in name—and that they are educated to be conscious of their particular tasks, that is, the tasks of struggling against the bourgeois-democratic movement in their own nation. The Communist International should arrive at temporary agreements and, yes, even establish an alliance with the revolutionary movement in the colonies and backward countries. But it cannot merge with this movement. Instead it absolutely must

maintain the independent character of the proletarian movement, even in its embryonic stage.

f. It is necessary continually to expose and explain to the broadest masses of toilers of all countries and nations, and especially the backward ones, that the imperialist powers, with the help of the privileged classes in the oppressed countries,⁴³ are perpetrating a fraud. They are creating state structures that pose as politically independent states but are economically, financially, and militarily totally dependent upon the imperialist powers. The Palestine affair is a crass example of Entente imperialism and the bourgeoisie of the relevant country working together to swindle the working classes of an oppressed nation. Under the cover of creating a Jewish state in Palestine, Zionism actually delivers the Arab working population of Palestine, where the toiling Jews constitute only a small minority, to exploitation by Britain.⁴⁴ In the present international situation, there is no salvation for the dependent and weak nations other than in alliance with soviet republics.

12. The age-old, ongoing enslavement of the colonies and weak peoples by the imperialist great powers left the toiling masses of the enslaved countries with feelings not just of bitterness but of mistrust toward the oppressor nations in general, including against the proletariat of these nations. Socialism was despicably betrayed during the years 1914-19 by the majority of the official leaders of this proletariat, when the social patriots used "defense of the fatherland" to conceal the "right" of "their" bourgeoisie to enslave the colonies and plunder financially dependent countries. Such a betrayal could only reinforce this completely justified mistrust.⁴⁵ Abolishing such mistrust and national prejudices can proceed only very slowly. They can be eradicated only after imperialism is destroyed in the advanced countries and after the entire basis of economic life of the backward countries is radically transformed. The class-conscious Communist proletariat of all countries therefore has a responsibility to give particular care and attention to the survivals of national feelings in the long-enslaved countries and peoples,⁴⁶ while making concessions to overcome more rapidly this mistrust and these prejudices. The victory over capitalism cannot be successfully accomplished without the proletariat and with it all working people of all countries and the nations of the

entire world voluntarily coming together in a unified alliance.

(A vote is taken. The theses are adopted unanimously with 3 abstentions. Applause.)

Zinoviev: All pending questions will be referred to the commission. If the commission is agreed on its decisions, the congress is to be informed of them; otherwise they must be submitted to the congress for decision. I will put the motion to a vote. *(The motion is adopted.)*

A plenary session will take place tomorrow at eleven o'clock to discuss the conditions for admission to the Communist International. These discussions must be expedited, since the French delegates leave Moscow tomorrow.

(The session ends at five o'clock.)

Session 6, July 29, 1920 (Morning)

Conditions for admission

(PART 1)

(Serrati opens the session. Discussion is on the conditions for admission to the Communist International. Zinoviev gives the report.)

REPORT ON CONDITIONS FOR ADMISSION

Zinoviev: We come to one of the most important questions on our agenda, the question that will determine what we, the Communist International, really are and what we want to be.

First, a short formal report on the work of the commission. It was, as you know, expanded to include the representatives of the USPD and the Socialist Party of France. Both delegations attended its sessions and took an active part in the discussions.

Much has been changed in the theses, but the overall content remains as before. We will, of course, present them to you with the changes, and you will have the opportunity to decide on them. Wherever we could take particular comrades' recommendations into consideration, of course, we were accommodating and adopted them.

Point 2, which is included in the French edition, is missing from the German text. It reads: "Every organization wishing to join the Communist International must consistently and systematically remove reformists and centrists from all positions of any responsibility in the workers' movement (party organizations, editorial staffs, trade unions, parliamentary fractions, cooperative societies, local governments) and replace them with reliable Communists without being deterred by the prospect that, especially at first, ordinary workers from the masses will replace 'experienced' opportunists."

Next, an important change was made in thesis 7, which previously said, "The Communist International cannot accept that notorious reformists such as Turati, Modigliani, and others have the right to be considered members."

The English text reads, "only when the working class maintains its own class lines."

28. Wijnkoop's interjection and Serrati's response are missing from the German edition; the translation here follows the French edition and the 1921 Russian edition.

29. This sentence is taken from the 1921 and 1934 Russian editions. The French edition reads, "It expresses its concrete and active sympathy to all oppressed and exploited peoples, provided that it is directed against all the exploiters." In the German edition there is no corresponding passage.

30. When the Italian Socialist Party's national council met in Florence in January 1920, Serrati and the party's executive committee came under much criticism. Ultimately, however, a motion approving the leadership's conduct was adopted by a wide majority.

31. The original draft version of the "Theses on the National and Colonial Questions" was written by Lenin. See Lenin, *CW*, vol. 31, pp. 144-51.

32. The remainder of this paragraph is not found in the draft of the resolution submitted to the congress by the Executive Committee. Instead, the draft resolution reads, "by practically demonstrating that the Treaty of Versailles of the celebrated 'Western democracies' is an even more brutal and foul act of violence against weak nations than was the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of the German Junkers and the Kaiser." Lenin, *CW*, vol. 31, p. 145.

33. The March 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was imposed on Soviet Russia by the Central Powers. The Treaty of Bucharest between the Central Powers and Romania followed two months later. Both treaties were annulled following the collapse of the German army in November 1918. The treaties of Versailles (June 1919) and St. Germain (September 1919), in turn, were imposed upon Germany and Austria by the victorious Allied powers.

34. By the Treaty of Versailles, East Prussia was separated from the rest of Germany by a band of Polish territory.

35. Here and subsequently, in place of "revolutionary liberation movement," Lenin's original draft reads, "bourgeois-democratic liberation movement of the workers and peasants."

36. The words in parentheses are not found in Lenin's original draft of this resolution.

37. This sentence is not found in the original draft submitted to the congress.

38. The words *and Pan-Asian movements* are not found in the original draft.

39. In the original draft the balance of this sentence reads, "the

positions of the khans, landowners, mullahs, etc." Lenin, *CW*, vol. 31, p. 149.

40. The preceding eleven words are not found in the original draft.

41. The draft theses contain a further sentence at this point, which reads, "It is particularly necessary to exert every effort to apply the basic principles of the soviet system in countries where pre-capitalist relations predominate—by setting up 'working people's soviets', etc." Lenin, *CW*, vol. 31, p. 149.

42. The German edition reads at this point, "support the revolutionary movement in the colonies and the backward countries only in order to gather the components of the future proletarian parties . . ." The translation here follows the 1921 and 1934 Russian editions, which coincide with the wording in Lenin's draft theses.

43. The words, "with the help of the privileged classes in the oppressed countries," are not found in the original draft.

44. The preceding two sentences are not found in the original draft.

45. At this point the original draft contains the sentence, "On the other hand, the more backward the country, the stronger is the hold of small-scale agricultural production, patriarchalism and isolation, which inevitably lend particular strength and tenacity to the deepest petty-bourgeois prejudices, i.e., to national egoism and national narrow-mindedness." Lenin, *CW*, vol. 31, p. 150.

46. The German edition reads at this point, "national feelings that in themselves are outdated." The translation here follows the 1921 and 1934 Russian editions, which coincide with the wording in Lenin's draft theses.

Session 6: Conditions for admission, part 1

1. Lenin's amendment proposed that a two-thirds majority of the leadership of parties joining the Comintern must consist of those who favored affiliation prior to the Second Congress. This proposal was ultimately adopted as thesis 20 of the conditions for admission (see session 16).

2. Rationalizing the Second International's collapse in August 1914, Kautsky wrote, "The World War has divided Socialists into different camps, for the most part into different national camps. The International cannot prevent that. In other words the International is not an effective tool in wartime; *in essence it is an instrument of peace.*" (Emphasis in original.) Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, pp. 147-48.

3. The February 1920 open letter to the USPD appears in *Kommunistische Internationale*, no. 9 [April 1920], pp. 152-65.

4. Most of the best-known leaders of the Second International—for