

THE POLICY OF THE COMINTERN IN THE LIGHT OF THE ‘INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE’

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I.

This paper aims to reconstruct and discuss the critique of the Comintern’s policy by the *International Council Correspondence* (ICC). The latter was a small, Chicago-based circular of the council communist movement, which was an anti-Bolshevik, but Marxist, left-wing movement. The council communists rejected the Bolshevik concept of the party as well as their fixation on the state.

Originally mainly stemming from Dutch and German left-wing groups, their ideas spread as well in the US after the migration of one of its proponents, Paul Mattick, in the late 1920s. The limits of the dissemination of their ideas were nevertheless quite narrow. As one biographer of Mattick notes, the circulation of the *International Council Correspondence* was rather limited: “As a mimeographed magazine, it was never possible to produce more than 1000 copies; otherwise it was just too much work. The norm lay in the range of 750–800.”¹

Thus, focusing on the evaluation of the Comintern’s policy by ICC might at the first glance seem quite pointless, as the council communist’s critique never had much of an impact. However, an appraisal of their critique might have some merits. Firstly, they stemmed from the same worker’s movement as the Bolsheviks did, and shared the latter’s contempt for the reformist social democracy. They also shared the writings of Marx as a point of reference and the council communists formulated their critique in terms of their reading of Marxian writings. In this sense, one can speak of a Marxian critique of Bolshevism, which, other than the critique by Trotsky and the left opposition within the Bolshevik party began already quite early in the 1920s. This rejection of Bolshevik concepts also comprised their use of the Comintern, blaming them for transforming what was originally meant to be an internationalist body into a tool of the foreign policy of a national state. In other words, they saw exactly what the topic of the conference was, in the context of which this paper was written, as a problem: The Comintern as a tool of foreign policy of the Soviet Union.

1 Roth, Gary: *Marxism in a Lost Century. A Biography of Paul Mattick*. Leiden 2015, p. 172.

II.

In its header, the ICC, founded in 1934, sketched its political stance quite plainly: “The publishers of Council Correspondence see in the acting self-initiative of the workers and in the growth of their self-consciousness the essential advance in the labor movement. We therefore combat the leadership policy of the old labor movement, and call upon the workers to take their fate in their own hands, to set aside the capitalist mode of production and themselves to administer and direct production and distribution in accordance with social rules having universal validity.”²

These views show that the ICC stemmed from the political milieu of the council communists. While the header disappeared with relaunches and changes of the title, its general impetus did not. Originally founded in 1934 as the publishing outlet of the small “*United Worker’s Party*” (which soon, in line with the rejection of the concept of party, dropped this name and operated under the moniker *Council Communists*³), it was renamed in 1938 in *Living Marxism* and again in 1942 in *New Essays*. In 1943 it was discontinued.

The history of the ICC was heavily influenced by Paul Mattick, its editor and, especially in the early phase of the ICC, often the paper’s sole contributor. The ICC was “in Mattick’s words, ‘no more than a vehicle for the elucidation of the ideas of council communism.’”⁴ As such, it soon became a central outlet for this current, with Karl Korsch, Anton Pannekoek and the Dutch *Group of International Communists* as authors.

The ideological profile of the current can be described as anti-authoritarian and Marxist. In the center of their thoughts stood the councils as organs of worker’s self-organization and self-education, as a means of direct control over the means of production. Its historical roots can be traced back to a split in the Dutch Social Democrat Party in 1907, when “the principle of radical enlightenment instead of mass organization was proclaimed.”⁵ Another important event in the movement’s history was the cycle of revolutions at the end of the First World War, which at its inception was accompanied by the spontaneous formation of worker’s councils in Germany: “The old slogans of abolition of the classes, abolition of the wage system,

2 N. N.: International Council Correspondence. Vol. 2 Nos. 3–4, 1936, p. 2. Digitalized issues of the ICC can be found at <https://libcom.org/library/international-council-correspondence> [3. 4. 2020].

3 Viz. Mattick, Paul: Introduction. <http://aaap.be/Pages/International-Council-Correspondence.html#inpm> [5. 12. 2019].

4 Roth, G.: *Marxism in a Lost Century*, p. 138.

5 Behrens, Diethard: *Eine kommunistische Linke jenseits des Leninismus?* In: Pannekoek, Anton / Mattick, Paul et al.: *Marxistischer Antileninismus*. Freiburg i. Br., p. 15. All translations from German sources are by the autor.

abolition of capital production, ceased to be slogans and became the immediate ends of the new organizations.”⁶

Other than the syndicalist current, which shared some of the ideas of the council communists, the latter did not reject political organization and its adherents joined the KPD (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, Communist Party of Germany*), while rejecting the Bolshevik party concept and promoting a bottom-up approach. This led in 1920 to a split, and the KAPD (*Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, Communist Worker's Party of Germany*), was founded, where Mattick was a member. Disappointed by the course of events in Europe, Mattick left the old continent for the USA in 1926. There, he continued his political activities and founded eventually the ICC.

The council communist movement was the main target of Lenin's pamphlet "Left-Wing' Communism – an infantile disorder"⁷ and he comments on the establishment of the KAPD, implying that they would soon learn that without "a rigorously centralized party with iron discipline"⁸ success is impossible. While it is true in a sense, as the editors of Lenin's collected works duly note, that the KAPD later "degenerated into a small sectarian group without any support in the working class"⁹, this could be seen as well an advantage: "Nationwide, the KAPD began with some 38,000 members, leading Mattick to quip many years later that the organization was too small to even begin the discussion of tactics."¹⁰ Liberated from these discussions as well as from an authoritarian party discipline, an independent brand of radical theory and a critique of Bolshevism could be developed. The dynamics of mass psychology, diametral to rational thought, were kept at bay by strengthening the individual and promoting its enlightenment. Against this backdrop, and thanks to their anti-authoritarian credentials, Mattick, Korsch and other contributors of the ICC would later play an important role in the new left of the 1960s and 1970s.

III.

The critical assessment of the policy of the Comintern in the ICC in the mid-1930ies was not a completely new invention. The mainstay of its arguments can be traced back to the beginning of the 1920s.

6 Mattick, Paul: Council Communism. In: Id.: Anti-Bolshevik Communism. Monmouth 2007, p. 83.

7 Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism – An Infantile Disorder. In: Id.: Collected Works Vol. 31. Moscow 1976, p. 17ff.

8 Ibidem, p. 107.

9 Ibidem, p. 544.

10 Roth, G.: Marxism in a Lost Century, p. 30.

Lezek Kolakowski paints a quite favorable picture of the Comintern, claiming that “during the first decennium of its existence, the Third International was a place for disputes and discussions among the different varieties of communist ideology, but with time it came under the full leadership of Stalin, lost all of its autonomous functions and became an organ of Soviet foreign policy.”¹¹ As the example of the council communist movement shows, groups which disagreed with some basic tenets of bolshevism and which rejected the authority of the party, while still defending communism, could be excluded and considered proponents of an “infantile disorder” already in this early stage.

Initially, the KAPD tried to collaborate within the framework of the Comintern in the first years after the founding of the latter. The KAPD obtained the status of an observer in the Comintern, but in 1921 it was excluded, after facing an ultimatum to merge with the VKPD (the *Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, *United Communist Party of Germany*, which later on became the KPD), which was rejected. Consequently, the KAPD lost their status as ‘sympathising member’ of the Comintern. The July issue of *Proletarier*, the KPD’s press outlet, of the same year focused on these events and analyzed the situation and the development of the Comintern in various articles.

The council communists of the KAPD saw themselves as the ones who wanted to promote a purely proletarian revolution in Western Europe, and perceived the Comintern as opposed to this goal, as it turned its members into “tools to maintain the Russian revolution and the Soviet Republic.”¹² As this meant putting the revolution in the West on standby, they saw the project of a world revolution in decline.

The reason for this change of priorities was not sought simply in an erroneous decision or treason, but is traced by the KAPD, true to their understanding of Marxism, back to the class formations of the Russian revolution: “The Russian revolution was a proletarian-communist one in apparition only. In reality, it was only in a small part proletarian-communist, in the main part it was a peasant-democratic revolution.”¹³ The alliance forged by Lenin between the workers and the peasants only was successful for both parts as long as the battles were waged against feudal big landowners. After their defeat, the different interests of both classes had to come to the fore. As in the Russian situation, in a state dominated by agrarian structures, the peasant faction of the alliance had the overwhelming

11 Kolakowski, Lezek: *Die Hauptströmungen des Marxismus*. Zerfall. München 1989, p. 121.

12 N. N.: *Die Moskauer Internationale*. *Proletarier*, Jahrgang 1 Heft 7, 1921, p. 5. Digitalized issues of *Proletarier* can be found at the Antonie Pannekoek Archives: <http://aaap.be/Pages/Proletarier.html> [15. 9. 2019].

13 *Ibidem*.

majority on their side, the Bolshevik party looked for help and masses, which she hoped to find in the Comintern. This is, in the KAPD's analysis, the reason for the opportunism the Third International.

In this light, the 21 conditions for joining the Comintern are interpreted. They are analyzed as a means of easing the entry of mass parties into the Comintern, the only real condition pledging allegiance to the Soviet Union.

Also, the anti-imperialist policy is criticized, as it seeks alliances on an international level with peasants and national movements. After describing the policy of „England, back then still the hegemonic power”, the author asks: “And what does Russia, does Lenin, does the Third International set against this? In all countries, especially in England and Germany, weak, opportunistic mass-parties, which cannot wage the fight against capital. Apart from that, Russian alliances, that is alliances of the Third International, with Turkey, Persia and the Mohammedan world. But these are all peasant countries and nationalists. And as such join the one who offers the most.”¹⁴

Other articles within the same issue of the KAPD's paper develop an analysis in the same vein. The view that „Soviet Russia, due” to the twofold character of her revolution, is sketched as a normal nation-state: “Soviet Russia no longer is a proletarian-revolutionary state, or more correct, Soviet Russia cannot be a proletarian-revolutionary state yet. She is on her way of becoming in character, but not in terms of development, a national-bourgeois state like the states of Western Europe.”¹⁵

In this context, also Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP), which replaced war communism with newly constituted small capital owners, is seen as a proof of this development of Soviet Russia: “Now she will immediately swing in the front of the other bourgeois states and will have to come to terms with foreign capital, relinquishing proletarian class struggle. What Lenin calls the ‘continuation of the struggle by other means, namely by economic means’ is nothing else than doing business together, capitalistic competition.”¹⁶

Given this economic background, the activities within the Comintern are bound to be only in the interest of the Soviet state: “The Third International is lost for the proletarian world revolution. She is, like the Second International, in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The only difference between the two is that the Second International was instead her individual national parties dependent on the individual bourgeois states, while the Third International is as a whole dependent on

14 Ibidem, p. 8.

15 N. N.: Die Zukunft Sowjet-Russlands und die 3. Internationale. Proletarier, Jahrgang 1 Heft 7, 1921, p. 12.

16 Ibidem.

one individual bourgeois state. Because of this, in future the Third International will prove successful within the limits of her strength and power where the protection of the bourgeois state Russia is concerned, and will fail all the time in those cases, where demands of the proletarian world revolution are concerned.”¹⁷

However, the different items in the issue do not assess every detail the same. Regarding the NEP, for example another author does not judge as categorically. The influx of capital will of course influence the inner development of Soviet Russia but the final outcome will depend on the party functionaries: “Whether they will succeed in keeping the European capital within its fixed limits, or whether conversely this capital will gain influence from within the Soviet authorities, has to be seen.”¹⁸

However, all of the authors agree in the regressive consequences of the Bolshevik’s mass party approach, against which they brought forward their concept of autonomous and self-educating councils. They lament the lack of political and economic education, which was substituted by authoritarian belief in leaders. The authoritarian structure of the old revisionist parties that fostered passivity, are left untouched, only the leaders change: “That was therefore the tactic: to turn completely non-communist workers into followers of the communist party, by detaching them as followership from their previous leaders.”¹⁹

The central points of attack by the KAPD can thus be summed up as follows: firstly, the character of the revolution in Russia is seen as twofold, as anti-feudal as well as anti-capitalist, with the masses being the peasants. This will, secondly, lead to the creation of a bourgeois nation-state, to which the Comintern will serve as an alternative tool of diplomacy only, and will exclude revolutionary forces. That this critique aimed at a vulnerable spot in the concept of the Comintern can be seen in a discussion between Lenin and Chicherin, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the young Soviet State on the question of who should be allowed to join the Comintern: “The alternative, which was not mentioned by name by the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, was this: An international of the revolutionaries of the world or an international of the Bolsheviks. Even if the latter acted under the name of ‘communists’, this did not change the core problem. It is no coincidence that Chicherin’s reply mentions those groups that did not fit in Lenin’s pattern of ‘with us or against us’. These included the left social revolutionaries, as well as the syndicalists and the English socialist that were organized within the Labour Party.”²⁰ While the council communists had no problem per se with the

17 Ibidem.

18 N. N.: Die westeuropäische Politik der 3. Internationale. Proletarier, Jahrgang 1 Heft 7, 1921, p. 15.

19 Ibidem.

20 Hedeler, Wladislaw/Vatlin, Alexander (Ed.): Die Weltpartei aus Moskau. Der Gründungskon-

goal of soviet, that is council power, they fell as well into Lenin's pattern of rejection, for wanting autonomous councils that delegate power from bottom up, and for being cautious against a dictatorship of the party.

In a similar vein the Dutch-German council communist Herman Gorter criticized Lenin's attempt to export the Bolshevik policy of forging an alliance between peasants and workers. As the situation in Western Europe with its more developed capitalist system and more numerous proletariat differed from the situation in Russia, a prevalent agricultural country, for him the "radicalism" of relying on worker's self-organization that Lenin rejected, was a reasonable tactic in Europe. In turn, trying to force the 'Russian solution' on the other communist parties by means of the Comintern, would prove fatal.²¹

This close relation between the Russian state and Comintern has, thirdly, as well consequences for the concept of the parties that should act in each country: the concept of the mass party prevails, with all its authoritarian consequences. Thus, the KAPD sketches its own mission as follows: "At the same time, the KAPD will have to root out, without any consideration, the fatal and dangerous illusion of communism in Soviet Russia from the head of the proletariat, not by insulting leading Russian communists, but with all objectivity of the Marxist method of inquiry."²²

IV.

In the ICC, exactly this fight with arguments against the Leninist conception continued, as it had been unsuccessful in the 1920ies. On the occasion of publishing a reprint of the collected issues of ICC, Paul Mattick noted in an introduction, that much space "was given to analyses of both the theory and practice of bolshevism, (...), and bringing this criticism forward by following the history of bolshevism down to World War II. This criticism was all-inclusive, philosophical, political, economical, and organizational, and expressed at an early date what became, only much later, a more widely accepted recognition of the true nature of bolshevism."²³

Consequently, in the mid-1930ies, a number of items appeared on the pages of the ICC that focused on the Comintern. In terms of content, the fundamen-

gress der Kommunistischen Internationale 1919. Protokoll und neue Dokumente. Berlin 2008, p. XXVII.

21 Viz. Wallat, Hendrik: Staat oder Revolution. Aspekte und Probleme linker Bolschewismuskritik. Münster 2012, p.149.

22 N. N.: Die Zukunft Sowjet-Russlands und die 3. Internationale. Proletarier, Jahrgang 1 Heft 7, Juli 1921, p. 13.

23 Mattick, Paul: Introduction. <http://aaap.be/Pages/International-Council-Correspondence.html#inpm> [5. 12. 2019].

tal objections were similar to those voiced by the KAPD, but they were further developed and the authors tried to prove their validity in empirical examples of Comintern's activity.

In one of its first issues, the ICC presented in December 1934 the "Theses on Bolshevism". This analysis of Bolshevism had been devised by the Dutch *Group of International Communists*.

In these theses many ideas from the analysis from 11 years ago can be found. Central for the analysis is again the twofold class character of the revolution. In the context of international policy, the propagation of the Peasant International is underscored, which duplicated the Russian situation on an international level: "As the final guiding thought of this international double-class policy there appeared the idea of the world revolution in which the international (European-American) proletarian revolution and the national (mainly Oriental) peasant revolution were to be riveted into a new international unity of bolshevik world policy under the strict leadership of Moscow. Thus, the concept of 'world revolution' has for the Bolsheviks an altogether different class content."²⁴ The debacle of this concept led to the slogan of building socialism in one country and to a general nationalist turn.

In the analysis of the class constellation in the Soviet Union, recent developments were taken into account. While the KAPD simply said the peasants, being only anti-feudal, would force the new state into bourgeois forms, now the mode of production is characterized as state capitalism. As the production of commodities and wage labor still prevails, "Bolshevist economy is state production with capitalistic methods."²⁵

This state capitalism is forced to subordinate the foreign policy to the needs of the economic buildup within the country and calls for co-operation with the other capitalist states. "The entire foreign policy of the Russian government took on the stamp of a typically capitalist diplomacy and thus, in the international sphere, definitely tore bolshevist theory loose from bolshevist practice."²⁶

The Dutch communists also criticized the slogan of the encirclement of the Soviet Union by the imperialist powers, as "such a phrase did not harmonize in the least with the complicated lines of imperialistic conflicts of interests and their continually changing groupings."²⁷

The result of raising the specter of impending war was creating an obedient followership within the international proletariat. The domestic use of this alleged

24 Group of International Communists: Theses on Bolshevism. ICC Vol I No. 3, 1934, p. 13.

25 Ibidem, p. 15.

26 Ibidem.

27 Ibidem, p. 16.

threat was “justifying the intensified militarization of labor and the increased pressure on the Russian proletariat.”²⁸

The Comintern is used just as an organ for the national interests of the Soviet Union, and the theses' authors point out that the Soviet Union has no qualms in having good relations with fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany. The call for peace has not purely economic reasons though. The Dutch communists argue that there are military reasons as well. As the state developed a momentum of its own, it has to balance between peasants and proletariat. War, connected with the arming of masses of peasants and workers, would endanger this balance.

The final conclusion of the theses focusing on the international policy of Bolshevism paints the Comintern as “a tool for the misuse of the international working class for the opportunistic aims of national glorification and the international security policy of the Russian State.”²⁹ That the analysis was not totally off the mark can be deduced from a report of the Czechoslovak diplomatic representation to its Ministry of Foreign Affairs from December 1931. The referents report on dissensions between the leaders of the Comintern and Stalin: “The Comintern reproaches Stalin that he has nothing else in mind than the Five-Years-Plan and that for his Five-Years-Plan he is resolved to sacrifice the world revolution.”³⁰ They also note, however, that Stalin is in the stronger position.

Apart from this discussion of Comintern's function on an abstract level, the ICC also ran polemical pieces against the Comintern. In one, the ICC satirizes the speech of Wilhelm Pieck at the 7th Congress of the Comintern, and shows, based on the earlier analysis, the contradictions of the Comintern's policy, castigating the empty phrases in which this policy is clothed: “Of course there was also to be had cheap some genuine ‘bolshevist self-criticism’ in spite of the ever correct line. ‘We neglected the opportunity’ Pieck explained, ‘to give out at the proper time fighting slogans against the price policy of monopoly capital by which the peasants were ruined, as well as against ‘interest slavery’” (one of the most fetching fascist slogans). ‘In many countries the petty bourgeoisie did not find in the communist parties sufficient understanding for effective support in its resistance to the trusts and the banks by which it was being bled white. The German communists did not consider in due time the significances of the yoke of Versailles, and enabled the bourgeoisie to turn to its own account the hatred of the masses for that yoke.’ In a word, Pieck complained that the communists had been such poor fascists, that they conducted such wretched competition.”³¹

28 Ibidem.

29 Ibidem, p. 17.

30 Masarykův ústav a Archiv Akademie věd ČR, fond Edvard Beneš I, sign. 998, kart. 229.

31 N.: The Last Congress of the Communist International. Vol I No. 11, 1935, p. 21.

But the ICC not only points at the attempts of the KPD to mobilize nationalist and antisemitic sentiments, it also underscores that this attempt is at odds with other policies of the Comintern: “While on the one hand, however, the C.I. regrets that it has not proceeded sharply enough against Versailles, on the other hand, by its support of France, it wants to maintain the Versailles policy.”³²

But while this policy is seen as full of contradictions, the opposition within the party is criticized as well: “‘Back to Lenin’, or ‘back to Trotsky’ for ‘a new Zimmerwald’, for ‘better leaders’: that is the beginning and the end of their cry, which loses itself in its own wind.”³³ According to the ICC’s appraisal of the Comintern, these calls have to be in vain, as the problems have their roots in the original Bolshevik concepts, which are now presented as remedy.

Another one of the more polemical pieces is, under the title “The Third International in Opinion of the Bourgeoisie” a reprint of a critical commentary from the “bourgeois-liberal Manchester Guardian”³⁴. The British author scathingly criticizes the actions of the Comintern. After having failed to take over the trade unions, the communists tried to create their own organizations – and failed. All attempts of armed rebellions also failed, and not even in all of them the Comintern had been involved, despite of its big words about armed struggle. Also, in Germany, the well-organized party succumbed to National Socialism. But the liberal author points out, that the worst of all is the total incapability of self-reflection: “One might have thought that this week’s congress of the Third International in Moscow would take some stock of the ruin it has brought about, but not at all; the congress explains amid much cheering that despite minor errors – there must, of course, be some ‘Leninist self-criticism’ – the Communists were always fundamentally right and everybody else always fundamentally wrong.”³⁵ With this piece, the ICC wants to ridicule the Comintern by showing how submissive to authority and detached from reality its functionaries are – and that even liberals take note of this fact.

A final and central piece in the ICC’s critique appeared in the March 1936 issue. It bears the title “The Development of Soviet Russia’s Foreign Policy” and gives an overview of the historical function of the Comintern. Given the brewing crisis in international policy and the helplessness of the Comintern, the article wants to show that the recent developments are not a turning point, but have their logic based on the development as whole: “When the phraseology of the Comintern is disregarded and only the essence of its activity is considered,

32 Ibidem.

33 Ibidem, p. 22.

34 N. N.: The Third International in the Opinion of the Bourgeoisie. ICC Vol. I No. 12, 1935, p. 14.

35 Ibidem, p. 15.

it becomes evident that the present action of the Comintern is a logical step in a process that was initiated in the first stages of the Russian Revolution by Lenin himself.”³⁶

Again, the author draws from many of the central theses already developed by the KAPD and the Group of International Communists and tries to put them in context with the historical development. Central is again Lenin’s attempt to copy the Russian strategy of an alliance of workers and peasants on a world-wide scale. With the failure of this strategy in the first years after 1917, “Russia had to establish herself as a nation-state in the midst of her capitalist surroundings.”³⁷

In this situation, the Second Congress of the Comintern was convened, and the 21 conditions to join the Comintern were formulated. The authors quite clearly point out what the function of the 21 conditions was in this context: There was no “fundamental struggle on the question of tactics. Parliamentary, trade-unionism and the ultimate demands for a proletarian dictatorship brought Centrists and Bolsheviks together. These twenty-one conditions, however, served the Russian leadership with regard to the mass parties of centrism that were to join the Comintern. The old leadership was to be disposed of, the centrist-democratic traditions within the organizations were to be destroyed.”³⁸

It is also telling that the author deems the Geneva Conference of 1922 more important than the Third Congress of Comintern, as it “opened the road towards closer connection with Germany and soon afterwards the two governments signed the treaty of Rapallo. Germany recognized Russia *de jure* and thereby won an ally in her fight against the Treaty of Versailles.”³⁹

The fight against the Treaty of Versailles was also one of the main topics of the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. This was also the time when the policy of national bolshevism was executed by the KPD. The author underscores: “It is worthy to note that this ideology resembles to a hair the one expounded by the national communists, Wolfheim-Lauffenberg, in 1919.”⁴⁰ These two had actually been members of the KAPD, but were expelled in August 1920. Back then, their nationalist leanings had been used by the KPD against the KAPD, but with the growing importance of the “suppressed nations” within the policy of the Comintern and the recognition as Germany as a victim of imperialism, this had changed.

In 1923 the Peasants International was founded, which should give Moscow influence in eastern countries. In the Fifth Congress (1924) calls for the organiza-

36 N. N.: *The Development of Soviet Russia’s Foreign Policy*. ICC Vol. II No. 3&4, 1934, p. 1.

37 *Ibidem*, p. 6.

38 *Ibidem*, p. 8.

39 *Ibidem*, p. 11.

40 *Ibidem*, p. 13.

tion of respective movements were issued, as well as to form ‘workers and peasants blocs’. Especially in China the communists were ordered to co-operate with the nationalist party. The focus shifted from Europe to the East, hoping that anti-imperialist movements would, “as Stalin declared – (...) spring the decisive initiative for the world revolution.”⁴¹ But these collaborations with the nationalist forces proved to be fatal, as they bloodily suppressed the communist party, as soon as they were in power. The author shows this in detail in the Chinese case.

In 1928, after a leap of four years, the next assembly of the Comintern convened. The defeat in China was officially recognized, but the focus on organizing peasants was not criticized.

Within the Soviet Union, 1928 was a turning point. When the NEP was replaced by the first five-year plan, state capitalism was fortified according to ICC’s analysis. This was also reflected in the Comintern’s slogan of the ‘third period’: “In harmony with this intensified course of action, the sixth congress proclaimed the famous theory of the ‘third period’, which was to lead to war between the imperialist powers and to war against the Soviet Union as well as to the utmost sharpening of the general crisis of capitalism.”⁴² In accordance to the earlier “Theses on Bolshevism”, the bogey of a threatening war against the Soviet Union is seen as a means of rallying international proletariat behind Russia as well as enforcing domestic control. Actually, the relations with capitalist countries bettered, the next logical step was the attempt to enter the League of Nations. Step by step, the role of the Comintern was getting less and less important in the rationale of the Soviet Union: “But, true to the very methods of imperialist diplomacy, Bolshevism from the earliest times of its existence has had two irons in the fire. For a long while the Comintern was this second iron. That, however, is past. Today the Russians are concerned with keeping their hands free for new readjustments of their foreign policy, for broadening and altering their alliance front between the imperialist Powers themselves.”⁴³

The author also tries to derive the changes in the last phase of foreign policy from changes in the class structure of the Soviet Union: Earlier, the workers had been the most important class within the structure, but now, the party governed by trying to balance working class and peasants and to play both ends against the middle: “This preponderance, however, compels the absolutist regime of the Bolsheviks to draw up the agrarian class as its main support, to shift the center of gravity of the state apparatus to the weaker side, so as to maintain the equilibrium of the two classes and thereby, for the absolutistic peak of the pyramid,

41 *Ibidem.*, p. 17.

42 *Ibidem.*, p. 19.

43 *Ibidem.*, p. 25.

the possibility of governing.³⁴⁴ The party still rules, but uses the peasants as its main basis. This change in inner structure made the existence of the Comintern superfluous, as “the last traditional restraints have fallen which had previously still existed with respect to bolshevist foreign policy by reason of the existence of the communist parties in Europe.”³⁴⁵ With the military pacts with France and Czechoslovakia, even the only potentially revolutionary role of the communist parties in these countries became a problem. Written before the official dissolution of the Comintern, its end is already predicted.

V.

While in many aspects very clear-sighted and striking, some other aspects of the ICC's critique of the Comintern's policy have to be scrutinized and criticized on their part. The ICC's anti-authoritarian impulse, their critique of a Manichean anti-imperialism and of the mobilization of nationalism has its merits, but one has to agree with Hendrik Wallat, who points out that the “nearly paranoid suspicions of the peasant's power in the Soviet Union” negates “the exceptional harm, that was done unto the Russian peasants in the name of the proletarian revolution”³⁴⁶. Apart from making the victims of the collectivization the bulwark of Bolshevik policy, the thesis is simply not convincing and underestimates the new form of domination. The blaming of the peasants by the authors of the ICC is mirrored by their general fetishization of the working class, which seems intrinsically revolutionary, a view that is ironically shared by their opponents' ideology. The authors of the ICC more or less suppose the existence of classes in the same way they existed in liberal times. They ignore what Hannah Arendt tries to grasp with her notion of the “classless society”³⁴⁷ of atomized individuals that form a mass which is the premise of total domination. The authors of the ICC criticized that one of the main tools of Bolshevism was the concept of the mass party, which fostered blind obedience, but it never occurred to them that this might go as far as negating the individual interest in its own wellbeing, which is Arendt's conclusion.

Connected to this is as well a poor differentiation between liberal and authoritarian societies. Still in 1939, Paul Mattick wrote that “there is actually no such thing as a fascist society just as there is no such thing as a democratic society. Both are only different stages of the same society, neither higher or lower, but simply

44 Ibidem, p. 27.

45 Ibidem, p.29.

46 Wallat, Hendrik: Staat oder Revolution. Aspekte und Probleme linker Bolschewismuskritik. Münster 2012, p.165.

47 Arendt, Hannah: Totalitarianism. Part Three of the Origins of Totalitarianism. San Diego/New York 1976, p. 30.

different, as a result of shifts of class forces within the capitalist society which have their basis in a number of economic contradictions.”⁴⁸ This reduction of societies to their basis blocks the view to the differentiations. The notion, that capitalism can spawn even worse forms of domination than the liberal is pushed aside. In this sense, everything is the same, and all differences fall victim to abstraction. This also makes the ICC’s appraisal of the Soviet policy before 1939 so problematic. While the council communists had to be among the few communists who were not shocked by the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty, as they judged the Soviet Union as a nation-state which has sometimes to change allegiance, Mattick saw it as a problem when in 1939 “New York’s Proletarian Gemeinschaft, within which the councilist subset functioned, began to differentiate between the bourgeois democracies and fascist states, with the former deserving the left’s support in times of conflict. This was the pro-war stance that would soon become generalised throughout the left.”⁴⁹ But perhaps it is exactly this mixture of clear-sighted critique of foreign policy and blindness that makes an examination of the thought of the council communists worthwhile.

48 Mattick, Paul: Council Communism. In: Idem: Anti-Bolshevik Communism. Monmouth 2007, p. 84.

49 Roth, G.: Marxism in a Lost Century, p 179.

Politika Kominterny ve světle „International Council Correspondence“

Článek analyzuje posudek „International Council Correspondence“ (ICC) o Kominterně. ICC byl časopis malého, nedogmatického, protibolševického hnutí Marxistů kolem Paula Matticka, spojený s tzv. radovým komunismem (Rätekommunismus). V souvislosti se svou kritikou pojetí strany Bolševiků prozkoumali činnosti Kominterny a chtěli ukázat, že s utvářením ‚normálního‘, národního státu v sovětský svaz, Kominternu se proměnila v jeho pouhý nástroj. Analýza se zakládala na zhodnocení, že ruská revoluce nebyla čistě proletářská, ale především protifeudální. Odvodili krizi Kominterny ve 30. letech od tohoto základního protikladu. Po vysvětlení této úvahy jsou též tematizována problematická hlediska jako fetišismus dělnické třídy a jistá slepota vůči fašismu a nacismu.

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