

The Communist International, its dissolution and the international struggle of communists today

International Commission of the Kommunistische Organisation

80 years ago, on May 15, 1943, in the midst of the Second World War and shortly after the victory of the Red Army in Stalingrad, the dissolution of the Communist International was announced. The dissolution of the Communist International (Comintern for short) was announced and implemented a short time later. The joint international organization of Communists, which had been founded under Lenin's leadership and had organized, supported and coordinated the struggle of the world communist movement for 24 years, no longer existed. An equivalent replacement for it was never created again. What was the Comintern? Why was it founded? How did it come to be dissolved, and how do we evaluate this experience today? These questions and what they have to do with our struggle as communists today will be the subject of this text.

The Beginnings of the International

The question of the international organization of the revolutionary working-class movement arose early, since the workers' movement was already in its beginnings an international movement. Already the League of Communists, founded in this form in 1847 by Marx and Engels, saw itself as an international association. It included revolutionaries from many European countries and the USA. The Communist Manifesto, which was published in 1848 as the program of the League, concluded with the famous appeal "Working Men of All Countries, Unite!".

In 1864, the International Workingmen's Association was founded in London, which would later be called the First International. The statute of this first world organization of the socialist workers' movement stated: "*Considering [...] That the emancipation of labor is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries; That the present revival of the working classes in the most industrious countries of Europe, while it raises a new hope, gives solemn warning against a relapse into the old errors, and calls for the immediate combination of the still disconnected movements; For these reasons – The International Working Men's Association has been founded.*"¹.

Marx himself stated shortly thereafter: "*Past experience has shown how disregard of that bond of brotherhood which ought to exist between the workmen of different countries, and incite them to stand firmly by each other in all their struggles for emancipation, will be chastised by the common discomfiture of their incoherent efforts. This thought prompted the workingmen of different countries [...] to found the International Association.*"²

Also in the Paris Commune, the first proletarian revolution in history, in 1871, foreigners such as the

¹ "General Rules of the International Workingmens Association" (1864). Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1864/rules.htm>

² Karl Marx: "Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association" (1864). Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/10/27.htm>

Hungarian Léo Frankel, the Polish-Russian revolutionary Anna Jaclard, and the Polish socialists Walery Wroblewski and Jaroslaw Dabrowski took part.

The First International struggled with the influence of anarchism from the beginning. From the beginning, the First International struggled with the influence of anarchism. The anarchist theorist Mikhail Bakunin opposed centralized organization of the working class and the goal of proletarian seizure of power as promoted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Thus, anarchism could offer no real perspective to the working-class movement; its only effect in the International was to paralyze and ultimately divide it by entrenching the opposing sides. Anarchism was able to play a central role in this early phase of the workers' movement, because, apart from the few weeks of the Paris Commune, the international working class had not yet had any experience with its own state power. The need to create the socialist state and a centralized and disciplined revolutionary party had not yet penetrated the consciousness of large sections of the movement. Moreover, the scientific socialism developed by Marx and Engels was a relatively young movement, and the influences of the various currents of utopian, early bourgeois and pre-capitalist socialism were still strong in sections of the working class. The struggles between the communist and anarchist sections of the movement eventually led to the failure of the First International.

In 1889, the Second International emerged from the First International in Paris to continue the work of its predecessor. In the Second International, too, the revolutionary Marxist line coexisted for a long time with various opportunist positions that objectively worked to make the workers' movement dependent on bourgeois policies. Opportunist and reformist tendencies had long existed in the Second International, but they broke out openly in 1914 with the outbreak of the imperialist First World War. The mutual assurances of the workers' parties that they would not allow the workers to be led into a slaughter against each other in the event of a war between the capitalist powers fell apart. Almost all the parties of the Second, supposedly "socialist" International sided with their own ruling class, justifying the war and no longer seeing the capitalists of their own countries as the mortal enemy, but the workers, peasants and ordinary people on the other side of the front. The same was true of the SPD, the former socialist party in Germany, which now became the support of Kaiser Wilhelm and Reich Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg. The Social Democracy's betrayal of its former principles and the millions of workers in its organizations was justified by constructing the horror scenario of an aggressive Russian despotism from which the German population had to be protected. Conversely, in the countries of the Entente, the enemy image of the opportunists was Prussian militarism, against which freedom had to be defended. Thus, in each country, the bourgeois current in the Social Democracy found the appropriate propaganda to legitimize its subordination to its "own" ruling class.

The revolutionary current within the Second International, led internationally by the Russian Bolsheviks and in Germany by Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring and others, was unable to assert itself in the struggle. This left the working class without an organization to represent its interests.

All of Europe became a battlefield and millions of corpses piled up before, in 1917, the Russian people were the first to rise up against the killing, first overthrowing the tsarist government in February, but then, as the new bourgeois-democratic government also continued the war, sweeping away capitalist class rule altogether and establishing the first socialist state power under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party. The October Socialist Revolution and the experience of the betrayal of the social-democratic workers parties, which had long since become parties of the capitalist system, necessitated a radical step: everywhere, the old workers parties split into a system-supporting wing, now called Social Democracy, and a revolutionary wing, mostly reformed under the name of the

Communist Party. In some countries where the movement was less developed, the communist parties emerged under the influence of the October Revolution, without prior organization with the social-democracy. The emergence of the communist movement and its break with the reformism of Social Democracy was a decisive turning point in the history of the workers' movement. The insight, already present in the work of Marx and Engels, that opportunism as a form of bourgeois politics must be fought within the working class movement, now found expression in the independent organization of the revolutionary working class. The emerging world communist movement now demanded a new form of organization at the international level.

The Founding and the First Congresses of the Communist International

This form was the III. International, the Communist International, was founded in Moscow in March 1919 on Lenin's initiative. The founding congress of the Comintern was attended mainly by small revolutionary groups; in addition to the Bolsheviks from Russia, the Communist Party of Germany was still relevant. The Comintern proclaimed in its newly adopted Guidelines:

“A new system has been born. Ours is the epoch of the breakdown of capital, its internal disintegration, the epoch of the Communist revolution of the proletariat.”

It set itself the goal of the conquest of power by the working class, the establishment and defense of the rule of the soviets as a political form of working-class power, the expropriation of capital, the socialization and centralization of production and the support of the peoples of the colonies in their struggle against the imperialist Colonial Powers³.

The Communist International, unlike the I. and II. International, was organized under the principle of democratic-centralism with a unified leading center, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI). The ECCI had a quorum between the world congresses of the Comintern. The individual parties now no longer saw themselves as organizations acting independently, but as sections of the Comintern, which meant that the decisions of the world organization became binding for them. This was done so in the view, that the international struggle against capitalism and its representatives also required an international strategy and joint action by all communists would be necessary. This organizational structure was adopted at the II World Congress in 1920 with the Statutes of the Communist International. The II World Congress also laid down 21 conditions for admission to the Comintern: in particular, the building of the party according to Democratic Centralism and, connected with this, the subordination of the entire agitation and propaganda under the Central Office, the binding nature of the decisions of the Communist International, the building of an illegal party apparatus to prepare for the revolution and the complete break with, or struggle against Social Democracy⁴.

The founding of the Comintern made it possible, in conjunction with socialist construction, which now began in Russia, and later in the Soviet Union, to develop from the small communist groups, which had often been founded by only a few dozen workers' leaders, into strong fighting parties with thousands, sometimes tens and hundreds of thousands of members. That this explosive growth of the communist movement was possible was due, on the one hand, to the revolutionary situation and

³ The Platform of the Communist International, 6 March 1919. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/1st-congress/platform.htm>

⁴ Terms of Admission into Communist International. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x01.htm>

revolutionary mood after the First World War, but on the other hand it would not have been possible without the Comintern, which had centralized training of their cadres, the development of a common strategic approach against the global domination of imperialism, money and personnel. Special attention was also given to the building of communist parties in Asia, for which in 1920 the Congress of the Peoples of the East, with delegates from numerous Eastern European and Asian countries, and in 1922 the Congress of the Communist and Revolutionary Organizations of the Far East with Communists from China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, and Indonesia were held. This laid the foundation for the communist movement in East Asia after World War II, which became a decisive challenge to imperialism.

The Bolshevization - The Transition from the Organizational Principles of the Old Social-Democracy to those of the Communist Party

At the V Plenum in 1925, the "Theses on the Bolshevization of the Communist Parties" were adopted. By Bolshevization, the Comintern understood the implementation of the Leninist line, in particular with regard to the content, strategic as well as organizational questions: *"Bolshevization is the ability to apply the general principles of Leninism to a given concrete situation in one or another country. Bolshevization is further the ability to grasp the main "chain link" by which the whole "chain" can be traced."*⁵ By this was meant, the ability of the communist party to identify the central questions in each specific situation in order to win the masses of working people for socialism and to gain a decisive momentum in the revolutionary situation for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

In order to develop these capabilities, the communist parties would have to first and foremost adopt the Bolshevik form of organization: *"The main and basic form of the organization of any Bolshevik party is the party cell in the factory. The old principle of Social Democracy, according to which the party is organized on the basis of electoral districts, taking into account the needs of the parliamentary elections is unacceptable to the Communists. A genuine Bolshevik party is impossible if the organization is not based in its foundation on the factory cells. Besides the factory cells and the work in such organizations as trade unions, workers councils, consumer cooperatives, etc., we can and should proceed to the formation of a whole series of nonpartisan support organizations that can and should be formed: Tenants', Unemployed, war participant organizations, etc. (with communist cells inside of them). The Bolshevization makes it necessary for our parties to take advantage of every opportunity to make the organizational network as dense and as finely-meshed as possible. It is necessary to exploit every important question of the day, in order to establish one or the other aid organization, no matter how loose or 'free' it may be, if it is at all viable."*⁶ In order to become true, fighting parties, the communist parties would also have to develop an apparatus from the cadres: *"One of the most important tasks of any communist party must be to chose cadres from among the advanced workers, who are distinguished by their energy, their knowledge, their skill and devotion to the party. The communist cadres of the workers' organizers must be educated in the sense of preparing for the revolution not 'beside the job', but in a full commitment to the struggle and at the full disposal of the*

⁵ "Theses on the bolshevization of the of communist parties adopted at the Fifth ECCI Plenum". Available as excerpts in Degras, Jane. Communist International: Documents, 1919-1943 (Volume 1), pg. 188-200. Routledge, 2014. Translated from the german version, available at: <https://ia902206.us.archive.org/17/items/protokolle-der-kongresse-der-kommunistischen-internationale/Thesen%20%C3%BCber%20die%20Bolschewisierung%20der%20kommunistischen%20Parteien.pdf>.

The pages refers to the german version.

⁶ p.35

party.”⁷

The endeavor to develop and strengthen the national sections of the Comintern, according to these criteria, characterized the work of the following years. Nevertheless, the Bolshevization, as was noticed later, was incomplete and many communist parties retained many structural features of the old Social-Democracy⁸. The very existence of the Comintern however, made a crucial difference - since many communist parties had developed out of social-democracy and therefore did not yet correspond to the structure and functioning of a genuine revolutionary organization, the binding resolutions of the Comintern were an important prerequisite for seriously taking up the project of Bolshevization.

It is one of the tasks of the international organization of communists to raise each of its national sections - the communist parties - to the most advanced level which the international movement has reached, to perfect its theoretical and practical level as far as possible. This is necessary because the capitalist counterrevolution internationally learns from its experiences as well and constantly updates and improves its instruments.

The revolutionary program of the Comintern in 1928

The decision on Bolshevization was followed four years later by a second high point in the development of the communist world movement on a revolutionary basis: the Decision of the new program of the Comintern. In the new program, the worldwide strategy of the communist movement in the struggle against imperialism was concretely set forth and elaborated. The program identified two main revolutionary forces, namely, the working class of the capitalist countries and the oppressed peoples in the colonies, waging their struggle under the leadership of the international working class. Capitalist countries and colonized countries were thereby juxtaposed - the Comintern thus assumed that capitalism was not yet developed in the colonies, and therefore there could be only very limited talk of a working class. The low level of development of capitalism in these countries was also the basis for classifying these countries as oppressed countries.

Overall, the program assumed that the capitalist world system as a whole was approaching its collapse, and thus was closing in on the world proletarian transition to a socialist society. The program dealt in detail with the forces of counterrevolution that would do anything to preserve the capitalist system - the main counterrevolutionary forces identified in the program were fascism on the one hand and Social-Democracy on the other hand, as different political representatives of the ruling capitalists. It set out in detail how Social-Democracy worked, in alliance with the military, for the bloody suppression of revolutions in various countries and supported reactionary dictatorships in Poland and Bulgaria against the working class. It distinguished between a right wing and a supposedly "left" wing of Social-Democracy, with the right wing being openly counterrevolutionary and in direct contact with the bourgeoisie, while the "left" wing was more pacifist and sometimes used revolutionary phrases, but was ultimately also directed against the revolution. The "left" Social-Democracy misleads the masses with its slogans, but acts against the working class, especially in critical situations. Therefore it is ultimately the most dangerous part of Social-Democracy. *"The main*

⁷ p.38

⁸ Vgl. Osip Piatnitsky, "The Bolshevisation of the Communist Parties of the capitalist countries by means of overcoming the Social-Democratic traditions," *The Communist International*, Vol. 9, Nos. 8-9, 15 May 1932, pp. 251-273. Available online at: <https://archive.org/details/0.-piatnitsky-the-bolshevisation-of-the-communist-parties/page/272/mode/2up>

function of Social-Democracy at the present time is to maintain the essential militant unity of the proletariat in its struggle against imperialism. By disrupting and splitting the united front of the proletarian struggle against capital, Social-Democracy serves as the mainstay of imperialism in the working class."⁹ Even if one can, in retrospect, question whether it was right to declare Social-Democracy the "mainstay" of imperialism, while in many countries the ruling class increasingly relied on fascism to secure its power, the assessment of Social-Democracy in the 1928 Comintern program was essentially accurate¹⁰. On the basis of the experience of the preceding years and the many examples in which Social-Democracy had acted as a prop of the capitalists and an enemy of the working class, the communists had developed the correct analysis that the social-democratic parties and leaderships were to be fought as political opponents, that they were not allies of the communists and certainly could not go "a part of the way together" with the communists, as was believed in many communist parties in later decades. It must be emphasized that the Communists at no time refrained from winning the social-democratic masses of the working class for the class struggle and that the struggle against the social-democratic leaderships served precisely this purpose, to forge as solid of a unity as possible between the communist workers with their social-democratic colleagues.

The other main support of the counterrevolution was seen in the fascist movement. *"The fascist system is a system of direct dictatorship, ideologically characterized by the 'national idea' and the representation of the 'professions' (in reality representing the different groups of the ruling class). It is a system that uses a particular form of social demagogy (anti-Semitism, occasional outbursts against usurious capital, gestures of impatience with the parliamentary 'chatterbox'), in order to garner support of the unsatisfied petty bourgeoisie, intellectuals and other strata of society (...). The main goal of fascism is the destruction of the revolutionary workers vanguard, i.e. the communist sections and leading units of the proletariat. (...) In times of acute crisis of the bourgeoisie, fascism resorts to anti-capitalist phrases, but after it has established itself at the head of the state, it discards its anti-capitalist rhetoric and exposes itself as the terrorist dictatorship of of big business.*"¹¹

Fascism, too, was correctly characterized by the Comintern as a terrorist dictatorship of big business, directed mainly against the workers' movement and using social demagogy for this purpose. This assessment is interesting above all in contrast to Georgi Dimitroff's later famous definition of fascism in 1935 (see below).

While the Comintern program at one point speaks of the fact that also Social-Democracy was showing "fascist tendencies" (which was at least misleading, since in reality the Social-Democracy in most countries prepared the ground for fascism, rather than tending toward fascism itself), nowhere in the program text does the term "social fascism" appear. Later representations, which include the "social-fascism thesis", the alleged equation of Social-Democracy and fascism as the main content of the Comintern's orientation, represent a blatant falsification of the facts. It must also be emphasized that the neologism of "social-fascism" and the attacks on social-democratic workers that are sometimes associated with it was a mistake, but that this mistake was tactical and not strategic in nature. For

⁹ Programme of the Communist International, 1929. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/6th-congress/index.htm> , abgerufen 2.5.2023.

¹⁰ A further examination of the theory of the "mainstays," their interconnection and the and the frequently voiced criticism that it has led to an underestimation of the fascist danger. will have to take place.

¹¹ Programme of the CI.

according to the theory of the mainstays of imperialism, the Communists had always to direct their main thrust against the force which at a given moment was the mainstay of capitalist rule. The mistake of the communist parties was not that they had directed the main thrust of their struggle against the Social-Democracy at all, but that they did so at a time when, in Germany and other countries, the majority of the ruling class had long since begun to rely on fascism as the mainstay of their power.

Central to the character of the program is also that it laid down the essential steps of the transition to socialism: The expropriation of all large enterprises, railroads and infrastructure, communications services and land, the establishment of workers' control in industry, the planning of production according to the needs of society, the formation of collective farms in the countryside, etc. In this way the International made clear that the laws of socialist construction are objective and the same for all countries. It clearly positioned itself against the opportunistic position that the characteristics of socialism depend on the national characteristics of different countries.

Nevertheless, depending on the level of capitalist development of a country, one assumed a different course and character of the revolution: Only in highly capitalist countries like the USA, Germany or Great Britain, the direct transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat was on the agenda. In countries with medium development (Spain, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, the Balkan countries), the rapid transition from bourgeois-democratic revolution or immediately to a socialist revolution, which also fulfills the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, is possible. In colonial (e.g. India) and semi-colonial countries (e.g. China, Persia) and "dependent" countries (Argentina and Brazil are mentioned as examples), on the other hand, must first fight against feudal and pre-capitalist forms of exploitation and systematically develop the agrarian revolution, and, on the other hand, to fight against foreign imperialism for national independence. The transition to socialism here was only possible through a series of intermediate stages of a bourgeois-revolutionary character. In even more backward countries, especially in parts of Africa, where a large part of the population lives as a tribal society and without wage relations, where there was hardly any national bourgeoisie and imperialism occupied the countries militarily, the struggle for national independence was the central task. But the national uprisings could also open the way for the direct development towards socialism and the leapfrogging of the capitalist stage of development¹².

While it is fundamentally true that the strategy of the communists depends on whether capitalist conditions have already developed in a country, the formulations of the program exhibit a problematic ambiguity: By excluding colonial and semi-colonial countries like China and India with "dependent" but politically independent states like Brazil and Argentina, the program failed to recognize that overcoming the colonial rule had brought about a qualitatively changed situation. This led to an underestimation of capitalist development in the sovereign states and left the door open for a policy of supporting the "national" bourgeoisie against the foreign capitalists. The Comintern did not state sufficiently that support for the bourgeoisie in the less developed capitalist countries would merely strengthen them within the imperialist world system and would in no way lead to a weakening of imperialism itself.

The question of strategy in the less developed countries was also then a matter of dispute within the Comintern and led to a decade of heated discussions that would merit an in-depth analysis and to which we intend to return in the future. On the one hand, from the very beginning the Communist International made a deep break with the opportunism of the organizations of the Second International, which supported the colonial policies of their own states, even though the leadership of

¹² Programme of the CI.

the Comintern had to constantly make efforts to overcome the chauvinist culture that still existed in many communist parties in the colonial powers. National liberation movements were seen as a pillar of world revolution, and this justified the alliance not only with the peasant movements, but also with at least part of the bourgeoisie in these countries. On the other hand, the organizational and ideological autonomy of the communists had to be protected. Moreover, there was a danger of ignoring the fact that colonial societies were also divided into antagonistic classes and that capitalist development and industrialization in these countries should not be underestimated. This was the predictable result of the imperialist system itself (e.g., through the export of capital), which did not act unilaterally as a brake on the productive forces in the weakly developed countries. The resolutions of the Sixth Congress largely relativized these aspects and were criticized for this by some important sections of the Comintern. Significant, for example, was the decision of the Communist Party of Great Britain, for example, not to join them because *"the theses reduced their analysis to a picture of the transformation of the colonies into an agrarian backcountry or appendages of the metropolis. While this was partly (only partly!) true for the objective conditions of the classical (competitive) stage of capitalism, it does not apply to the imperialist stage of capitalism."* In their critique, this meant that *"the role of the bourgeoisie in the present epoch is a counterrevolutionary one."*¹³

A little later, in 1931, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Ecuador, Ricardo Paredes, similarly criticized the program of the Communist International for underestimating capitalist development in these countries. He identified a group of countries in Latin America *"in which the force of imperialism does not predominate. This is due either to the political strength of these countries (Argentina, Brazil), or to the weak economic penetration of imperialism (Ecuador). Due to this lack of preponderance of imperialism, the development of capitalism advances faster than in the colonies, which generates a stronger proletariat and national bourgeoisie, and therefore a greater sharpening of the class struggle between capital-labor."*¹⁴

Despite this weakness on the question of strategy in weakly developed capitalist countries, the 1928 program as a whole was a milestone in the revolutionary, strategic development of the world communist movement. If today it is often described as "sectarian" and "left-wing radical," it should be noted that such criticism, in the face of an essentially correct development of strategy, especially for the developed capitalist countries, has no basis.

The turnaround at the VII World Congress in 1935

The erroneous assessment of the VI World Congress and the 1928 program as "sectarian left" is essentially a consequence of the decisions of the last World Congress of the Comintern, which met in 1935 and in some respects set the course for an opposite orientation.

At the VII World Congress, the General Secretary of the Comintern Georgi Dimitroff gave his famous speech on the struggle of the working class against fascism. In the meantime, the world

¹³ Declaration of British Delegation on Colonial Question at the Sixth World Congress (1928). Available at: <https://www.bannedthought.net/International/Comintern/Congresses/6/RevMovementInTheColonies-Comintern-1928-crisp.pdf>

¹⁴ Maravillo, Héctor. "El problema colonial y burguesía nacional en Lenin y la Internacional Comunista." El Machete, 2017. Available at: <https://elmachete.mx/index.php/2017/08/03/el-problema-colonial-y-burguesia-nacional-en-lenin-y-la-internacional-comunista/>

situation had changed noticeably: German fascism was no longer just one political enemy among others with which the German communists had to deal; it had been in power since the beginning of 1933, had crushed the organized German workers' movement and especially the communist party in a very short time, and had pushed them into the deepest illegality; German fascism now had to be increasingly factored in as an existential threat by the Soviet Union. Japan, which after Korea had 1931 annexed Manchuria, and Italy, which was massively rearming and would start its colonial war in Ethiopia a few months later, were also acting ever more aggressively. Whereas in earlier years the military threat to the Soviet Union had tended to come for example from Britain, it was now no longer possible to ignore that the fascist Axis powers - Germany, Italy and Japan - had become the main threat to the USSR and also to the world communist movement.

In this situation, Dimitroff called for a reorientation of the communists' struggle against rising fascism and, in this context, a changed policy of alliances: the alliance with bourgeois non-fascist parties should now also be sought. Cooperation was to be sought with the social-democratic parties within the framework of the united front, and "no one would be attacked, neither persons nor organizations, nor parties that were in favor of the united front of the working class against the class enemy"¹⁵. This meant that the "class enemy" was only fascism, and the attitude of social democracy to the united front, but not to the rule of capital in general, became the decisive criterion for whether or not the communists would attack it.

But Dimitroff went even further in his speech: "The interests of the class struggle of the proletariat and the success of the proletarian revolution make it imperative that there be a single party of the proletariat in each country"¹⁶. Although independence from the bourgeoisie and a revolutionary orientation of this party were necessary for this, it was not specified whether the ideological basis of this party should be Marxism-Leninism or something else. Nor was it clarified how it should be possible to win over Social Democracy, which a few years earlier had still been regarded - and rightly so - as a decidedly counterrevolutionary anti-socialist force, suddenly for the socialist revolution. Instead of communist youth work, there were now to be broad "anti-fascist" youth associations, and in the U.S. even an "anti-fascist" and non-socialist mass party was concretely suggested to the communists¹⁷. The resolutions on the Bolshevization of the communist parties of 1924 and the program of 1928, in which the independence of the revolutionary party and its front position against opportunism and social democracy were thus strongly relativized, without explicitly resolving this.

¹⁵ G. Dimitrov 1935: "The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle of the Working Class against Fascism". Main Report delivered at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Communist participation in government within the framework of the "proletarian united front" (i.e., together with the Social Democracy) or the "anti-fascist popular front" (i.e., with the Social Democracy and other bourgeois parties) was now also declared necessary under certain conditions. Such governments could develop into a "transitional form" toward socialism. Even though Dimitroff declared that this was not to be understood as a "democratic intermediate stage" or as a peaceful transition, it still fostered hope by some in a participation in bourgeois government and a gradual transition to socialism within the bourgeois state. This hope was nowhere fulfilled. The Comintern has to be criticized for the slogans of "united" or "popular front", for fueling illusions in peaceful transition through participation in bourgeois government

The new alliance orientation was understood more as a change in tactics, not as a new strategy. The program and strategy of 1928 were not abrogated, so formally they continued to apply. Nevertheless, the focus of the Communists' political struggle was now quite different, and it was not made explicitly clear that the new decisions were merely a temporary tactical adjustment in the face of the fascist threat to their existence. It became possible nonetheless to maintain the essential guidelines of the Popular Front policy even beyond the Second World War and the military crushing of fascism¹⁸. The fact that the rejection of government participation, apart from very rare cases, must be a matter of principle for the communist party, just like the fundamental position against social democracy. During this "tactical" alliance it was however no longer regarded as principal. The decisive difference here is not, as was often criticized on the part of the Trotskyists, whether the communists relied on the popular front (alliance with social-democratic and other bourgeois parties) or merely the united front (alliance just with the social-democratic parties) for social democracy, too, was and is in its class character a party of the bourgeoisie defending capitalist exploitation. The decisive difference in strategy lies in whether the united front with the workers of bourgeois worldviews (social-democratic, religious, etc.) is sought "from below," that is, without and against the leaderships of their parties, or whether the communists enter into a collaboration with bourgeois political forces, that is, ultimately with the bourgeoisie.

The Comintern's new orientation was also based on a changed understanding of fascism itself. Dimitroff's famous definition of fascism in power as "the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinist, most imperialist elements of finance capital" stood out clearly from the previous understanding of fascism as a dictatorship of the monopolies as a whole. The distinction of the bourgeoisie into a fascist and a supposedly "anti-fascist" part now also made possible a policy of cooperation with the latter.

¹⁸ And this, although the slogan of the Popular Front was withdrawn again in 1939 after the non-aggression treaty with Germany. In fact, however, the Comintern's policy after the German invasion of the Soviet Union was again based on the Popular Front policy.

The Comintern made the mistake here of omitting the fact that fascism resulted from the laws of the capitalist mode of production as a whole and ultimately had to rely on the entire bourgeoisie as a form of rule. For even if it is possible that in the bourgeois state certain sections of the capitalist class can preferentially assert their interests, the state nevertheless secures the property and thus the rule of the entire class. This is no different in fascism, so even in the fascist state the bourgeoisie as a whole is in power and must be fought as a whole by the communists.

The VII World Congress was altogether a turning point in the development of the Comintern. The Communists faced the enormous challenge of finding an appropriate approach in the face of extremely dangerous fascist dictatorships. Dimitroff's paper, which dominated the entire congress, shows very clearly the effort to make certain tactical concessions, on the one hand, in order to draw the broadest possible forces into the struggle against fascism, but on the other hand, to hold on fundamentally to the goal of proletarian revolution. Again and again the revolution is affirmed as a necessity, again and again conditions are set for the compromises made to the bourgeois forces - though mostly conditions whose fulfillment was unrealistic (such as the joint struggle against the offensive of capital or, within the framework of a united proletarian party, even the joint struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat) and which therefore inevitably had to evoke the dilemma of either making further concessions to bourgeois politics or abandoning the effort to form an alliance.

The situation in which the communist movement found itself in 1935 must be taken into account: With the KPD, one of the most important parties of the Comintern had been almost completely destroyed by the fascists within a very short time. A war against Germany and Japan would have posed an immediate threat to the Soviet Union's existence. Not to react to these changes would not have been an option. Nevertheless, the decisions of the World Congress, in the form in which they were taken and justified, were bound to encourage the emergence of false strategic conceptions.

The years after the VII World Congress

In the following years, the fascist threat grew steadily. In Spain, the Republic's war against the fascists began a year later with the fascist coup by the military, which the Republic lost despite massive support from the Soviet Union and the Comintern. In East Asia, World War II broke out as early as 1937 with the Japanese invasion of unoccupied China, and in 1938-39 there were repeated battles between the Red Army and the Imperial Japanese Army on the Soviet-Japanese border. Nazi Germany, meanwhile, annexed Austria and the Sudeten territories and then subjugated the rest of the Czech Republic.

Until 1939, the Soviet Union tried by all means to win over Great Britain and France for a system of collective security in order to stop the aggressive expansion of Germany. But the British and

French governments hoped to use the German fascists as a battering ram against the Soviet Union, for which they even threw their ally Czechoslovakia to Hitler rather than accept the Soviet offer to jointly defend Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union pursued the negotiations with the highest priority and seriously, while the French and British sides pursued them only as a sham and as a stalling tactic, with no intention of really concluding an agreement. They thus forced the Soviet Union, finally after years of futile efforts, to abandon its tactics and conclude a non-aggression treaty with Germany in order to delay the war with Germany at least for a short period of time.

The Non-Aggression Treaty, which today in anti-communist propaganda is called the "Hitler-Stalin Pact" and in a complete distortion of the facts is interpreted as an "alliance of totalitarian dictators," was an emergency measure that could hardly have been avoided and gave the Soviet Union additional valuable months to prepare for war. The communist parties in many countries, however, faced difficult challenges in explaining and justifying the Soviet Union's new foreign policy after years of stressing the need to combine all forces against fascism. It must be emphasized, however, that the Comintern maintained its anti-fascist policy even after the agreement. For example, Dimitroff's diary shows that in 1940, after the German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece, the Comintern instructed the CPs there to organize propaganda against the German occupation and to organize armed resistance. The French CP was also assisted in organizing resistance to the German occupation¹⁹. If it is sometimes claimed that after the "Hitler-Stalin Pact" and until the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Soviet Union and the communist parties had in the meantime abandoned their opposition to fascism, this does not correspond to the facts.

The Non-Aggression Treaty thus marked not only an about-face in Soviet foreign policy, but also in the political line of the Comintern. The slogan of the Popular Front was now abolished. Whereas the Comintern had previously pursued cooperation with bourgeois forces against fascism, it now assessed that *"The current war is imperialist and unjust. The bourgeoisie of all the warring states is to be held responsible for it. This war cannot be supported by the working class of these countries, not to mention its communist parties. (...) This war has radically changed the situation: the division of the capitalist states between fascist and democratic is not in force any longer. As a result it is necessary to change tactics. The tactics of the communist party of the belligerent countries at this point is to expose its imperialist character, have communist deputies vote against war credits, tell the masses that the war will give nothing but privation and suffering."*²⁰.

The new orientation contained correct assessments in essence, namely that it was a war between imperialist countries and that the bourgeoisie of France and Great Britain had played a large part

¹⁹ Georgi Dimitrov 2003: "The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933-1949", Yale University, pp. 136, 147, 155.

²⁰ "ECCI Secretariat Directive on the Outbreak of War", 8 August 1939. Available at: <https://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv6n2/dimitrov.htm>

in bringing it about - above all through their appeasement policy and de facto support of fascist Germany in the fight against the Spanish Republic and as a battering ram against the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the danger posed to world communism by the fascist Axis powers seemed to be underestimated, because the Comintern's orientation could be understood as meaning that it was irrelevant for the communist movement which side would win the war.

On June 22, 1941, troops of the German Wehrmacht crossed the border with the USSR on a broad front. The Non-Aggression Treaty was broken by Germany and the Great Patriotic War began, the bloodiest part of World War II in Europe, which finally ended with the military annihilation of fascism. The Comintern was now faced with the task of organizing the struggle of the communist parties against German aggression in all the belligerent countries. In the occupied countries, this meant advancing organized resistance to the occupation. Almost everywhere, the communists were the most active, largest and most propelling force of the anti-fascist resistance. In Italy, Yugoslavia, France, Greece, Albania, Poland, China, Korea, Indochina and the occupied parts of the Soviet Union, among others, partisan units were formed under communist leadership, which in the following years succeeded in building up mass popular support and sparking an effective war against the fascist occupiers, inflicting constant losses on them, tying up large contingents of troops and repeatedly disrupting their supply lines. The communists of various nationalities and continents made enormous sacrifices in the process and accomplished the unimaginable, waging the struggle against the fascists under the most difficult conditions and in the deepest illegality, which in most cases the social democrats and other bourgeois forces were unwilling or unable to do.

The decision to dissolve the Comintern

During the war, the Comintern had lost importance in practice, since many communist parties now had to work in illegality, the Soviet Union itself was involved in a life-and-death struggle, and therefore the regular structures of the International no longer functioned as before. But at the VII World Congress there had already been a shift in the relationship between the world organization and its national sections. Already at that time, the ECCI wrote in its report that it was a matter of assisting "*the Communist Parties in making use of their own experience as well as the experience of the world Communist movement, avoiding, however, the mechanical application of the experience of one country to another country and the substitution, of stereotyped methods and general formulations for concrete Marxian analysis*"²¹. It was further stated that the ECCI must "*to proceed from the concrete situation and specific conditions obtaining in each particular country and as a rule avoid direct intervention in internal organisational matters of the Communist*

²¹ "Resolution of the Seventh Comintern Congress on the Report of the ECCI", 1 August 1935. Available as excerpts in Degras, Jane. *Communist International: Documents, 1919-1943* (Volume 3), pg. 350-355. Routledge, 2014

Parties."²². Thus the Comintern had already adopted to a certain extent the logic that the class struggle is determined above all by national conditions and that the communist parties of the various countries would already know best what to do. Already the VII World Congress therefore implicitly questioned the necessity of the International. The decision to dissolve in 1943 thus did not come out of the blue.

In bourgeois accounts, it is common to portray the decision as a concession by the Soviet leadership to the Western Allies to consolidate the alliance of the anti-Hitler coalition at the height of the Great Patriotic War. This was certainly a motivating factor, as Stalin's reply to Reuters' Moscow reporter on May 28, 1943, shows: "*The dissolution of the Communist International is proper and timely because it facilitates the organization of the common onslaught of all freedom-loving nations against the common enemy—Hitlerism. (...) It exposes the lie of the Hitlerites to the effect that "Moscow" allegedly intends to intervene in the life of other nations and to "Bolshevize" them. (...) It facilitates the work of patriots of all countries for uniting the progressive forces of their respective countries, regardless of party or religious faith, into a single camp of national liberation—for unfolding the struggle against fascism.*"²³ Thus Stalin openly stated that for the duration of the common struggle against fascism it could not be a question of advancing the revolution in the Western capitalist countries.

This orientation is at first understandable in a situation of life-and-death struggle - a defeat of the Red Army by Nazi Germany would not only have meant immeasurable suffering, but would also have set back the world revolutionary process enormously. But problematic was the creation of a notion that there was a "freedom-loving" camp that included, in addition to the Soviet Union, some of the most powerful imperialist states, which in the past had themselves committed countless barbaric crimes and genocides, brutally repressed communists and the labor movement, etc. This opened the way for a later opportunist policy of alliance with bourgeois forces, even when the front against the capitalist powers of the former "anti-Hitler coalition" (1946/47) was resumed.

However, the account that the dissolution of the Comintern was a concession to the capitalist allies ignores the fact that there had already been internal discussions in the leading circles of the International since 1941 about whether the organization was not now obsolete - at a time, that is, when the Soviet Union was not yet at war, let alone in an alliance with the USA and Great Britain. Thus, as early as April 1941, Stalin held corresponding talks with Dimitroff and the leaders of the French and Italian Communist parties, Thorez and Togliatti, in which it was unanimously stated that the CPs had to be independent, had to have their own programs, and should not "looking over

²² Quoted in the "Resolution of the ECCI presidium recommending the dissolution of the Communist International", 15 May 1943. Available online:

<https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/dissolution.htm>.

²³ J. Stalin 1943: "The Dissolution of the Communist International. Answer to Reuter's Correspondent". Available online: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1943/05/28.htm>

their shoulders at Moscow. ²⁴ Even earlier, in November 1940, the Communist Party of the USA had withdrawn from the Comintern for tactical reasons. Obviously, no alliance tactical considerations of Soviet foreign policy were decisive in these events, but rather the idea, already developed at the VII World Congress, that due to the different national conditions a common organization of the Communists would be counterproductive.

It was therefore to be taken seriously, and certainly in no way dishonestly, when the Presidium of the ECCI, in its decision to dissolve on May 15, 1943, formulated: *"But long before the war it became increasingly clear that, to the extent that the internal as well as the international situation of individual countries became more complicated, the solution of the problems of the labor movement of each individual country through the medium of some international centre would meet with insuperable obstacles. The deep differences in the historical roads of development of each country of the world, the diverse character and even the contradiction in their social orders, the difference in the level and rate of their social and political development and finally the difference in the degree of consciousness and organisation of the workers' conditioned also the various problems which face the working class of each individual country. The entire course of events for the past quarter of a century, as well as the accumulated experiences of the Communist International, have convincingly proved that the organisational form for uniting the workers as chosen by the First Congress of the Communist International, which corresponded to the needs of the initial period of rebirth of the labor movement, more and more outlived itself in proportion to the growth of this movement and the increasing complexity of problems in each country, and that this form even became a hindrance to the further strengthening of the national workers' parties."*²⁵

The substantive connection to the VII World Congress was obvious, emphasizing the diversity of tasks in the different countries and continuing to propagate the policy of the popular front of all anti-fascist forces in the non-fascist countries.

This second motive for the decision to dissolve the Comintern can be regarded as the more decisive one, since, unlike the motive of making concessions to the West in the war, it had already been indicated since 1935 and since then steps had in fact already been taken in the direction of the dissolution of the Comintern (by strengthening the autonomous action of the CPs and the withdrawal of the CPUSA). This reflects a fundamental rethinking on the part of the leaders of the world communist movement, who increasingly no longer assumed the necessity of a leading center.

²⁴ Dimitrov 2003, p. 155n.

²⁵ 25 "Resolution of the ECCI presidium recommending the dissolution of the Communist International", 15 May 1943.

The dissolution of the International was discussed in a small leadership circle, which was hardly possible otherwise under the conditions of the World War, but it was by no means forced upon the communist parties, but was welcomed by many of them. Officially, even all national sections agreed to the decision to dissolve, and no objection was raised by any of them. Many communist parties justified it even many years later²⁶.

As an example, we quote Palmiro Togliatti, who later formulated the view that it was "*absurd that they thought they could exercise, from a single center, true leadership action. Communist parties had to become by their own strength a political factor in their country and thus be able to move independently, depending on the course of events, turning points, successes and failures. Thus already implicit in the decisions of the Seventh Congress was, in a sense, the decision to disband that was made in 1943, when it was openly declared that the previous centralized form of organization no longer corresponded to the situation and state of the movement.*"²⁷ Mao Tse-tung also welcomed the decision to dissolve²⁸ and Zhou Enlai, as Premier of the People's Republic of China, later stated, "*It was necessary to establish the Communist International and it was also necessary to dissolve it.*"²⁹

How is the dissolution of the Comintern to be evaluated?

There is no doubt that the dissolution of the Comintern was a disastrous and momentous mistake of the communist leaders of the time in the medium and long term. The decision negated and ignored the experience of the revolutionary workers' movement since the 19th century, which had repeatedly shown the need for a common organization of the working classes of all countries against the common enemy. The existence of the III. International had been one of the greatest achievements of the world communist movement, which was now abandoned by its leaders. Through the International, the building of the communist parties and the class-oriented trade union movement did not have to be laboriously undertaken in each country entirely by its own efforts; instead, the communists received enormous and varied support. The idea that now, due to the increased strength of the CPs in many countries, such support would no longer be necessary was a fatal mistake, because there could never be a guarantee that the world communist movement, after its flights of fancy, would not also have to struggle again through difficult times of crisis, in which a world organization would be vital. This was actually already shown by the history of the

²⁶ "Statement of the Presidium of the ECCI on the Dissolution of the Communist International", 8 June 1943.

Available online at: http://ciml.250x.com/archive/comintern/dissolution_1943.html

²⁷ P. Togliatti 1949: "Alcuni problemi della storia dell'Internazionale comunista" (Some Problems in the History of the Communist International). Available online at: https://www.associazionestalin.it/IC_5_togliatti.html.

²⁸ Mao Tse-tung: "The Comintern has long ceased to meddle in our internal affairs" (26 May .1943). Available online at: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/mswv6_36.htm

²⁹ Zhou Enlai 1960: "The Communist International and the Chinese Communist Party". Available online at: <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/CI60.html>.

communist parties at that time: The KPD, for example, was characterized by internal directional struggles until the end of the 1920s, and it took a long time before the direction advocated by Ernst Thälmann prevailed, which corresponded to the line of the Comintern. Even at the beginning of the 1930s, the Comintern itself had noted that Bolshevization had never been sufficiently carried out, that is, that even despite the existence of the International, its directives had not been comprehensively put into practice.³⁰ To believe that the communist parties had sufficiently experienced and steadfast cadres was obviously an illusion.

In the colonies and semi-colonies, the Comintern made an important contribution to winning the national liberation struggles of the oppressed peoples for an alliance with the communist movement and to propagating the struggle for socialism in them. All this now fell away or had to be accomplished by other, worse means, mainly through the official diplomacy of the USSR as the strongest socialist state.

Above all, however, by abandoning the joint development of program and strategy, the door was opened to opportunism. From then on, all kinds of (usually right-wing) deviations from revolutionary strategy were introduced under the guise of taking “national characteristics” into account. A common struggle against these deviations on an international level and attempts to correct misorientations took place only to a limited extent, at least no longer as a structured, collective discussion process of the world communist movement. Instead, such corrections were now made only in the individual communist parties themselves (for example, in the CP of Greece, whose General Secretary Zachariadis moved to reject the previous strategy of intermediate stages in 1949³¹) or in bilateral exchanges (for example, in Stalin's criticism of the CP of China and its concept of a "socialism with Chinese characteristics"³²). The absence of a leading center and a systematic collective reflection of the world communist movement weighed all the more heavily, because the last World Congress of the Comintern had opened some doors to right opportunism and these would now never be closed by a renewed Comintern decision.

As a result, the decisions of the VII World Congress on the Popular Front, which Dimitroff had actually declared to be tactical changes, in fact functioned as strategic, as permanent decisions. Since there was now no longer a recognized, designated place to discuss these decisions again, to evaluate them critically and, if necessary, to revise them, only selective and tactical corrections were still made on them. Popular Front policy thus became, partly unconsciously, an integral part

³⁰ O. Piatnitsky 1932.

³¹ Skolarikos, K. “Ευρωκομμουνισμός’ Θεωρία και στρατηγική υπέρ του Κεφαλαίου” (“Eurocommunism’ Theory and Strategy for Capital.”) Athens, 2015, p. 127.

³² J. W. Stalin: “From the Conversation with the Delegation of the CC CP of China in Moscow”, 11 July 1949. Available at: Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties .

of the political culture of the world communist movement and its questioning was often treated as sacrilege.

When we judge the decision to dissolve the Comintern today, we should be aware that a judgment in retrospect is always something different from a judgment from the point of view of contemporaries. The comrades who made the decisions at that time necessarily had a more limited horizon of experience and, above all, they did not have the advantage of knowing the further historical course. We must never forget that, first, the Soviet Union and the communist movement were in an extremely cruel struggle for survival, and that in this situation they had to grasp at every straw they could. Secondly, today we can see retrospectively how certain actions played out in the long run and what unforeseen negative consequences they had. It therefore cannot be a matter of condemning our past, of renouncing it, or of denying the revolutionary character of the Comintern in its later years, but of naming and analyzing the mistakes made as such, in order to correct them where possible and to avoid them in the future.

One such mistake was the dissolution of the Comintern. In the end, this decision cannot be justified. By 1943, all the Western Allies were already at war with Nazi Germany and the military situation had turned in favor of the Red Army after the battles for Moscow and Stalingrad. In the months that followed, the Red Army was able to inflict another stinging defeat on the Wehrmacht at the Battle of Kursk. If there was any hope in the leadership of the Comintern and the Soviet Union that the Western imperialists would abandon their fundamentally hostile attitude toward the Soviet Union and communist movement in return for the Comintern's dissolution, this was a dangerous illusion. Immediately after World War II, bourgeois forces everywhere resumed fighting the communists, in some countries militarily (Greece, Vietnam, Korea, Malaya), and prepared to fight the Soviet Union. Even before the end of the war, parts of the U.S. state made plans for a separate peace with Nazi Germany, which were thwarted thanks to the intervention of Soviet intelligence ("Operation Sunrise"). As early as 1945, immediately after the end of World War II in Europe and while the war in East Asia was still raging, the British General Staff developed concrete plans for a war of aggression against the Soviet Union ("Operation Unthinkable"), which were not put into action only because of the strength of the Red Army - and not because of concessions to the British imperialists.

Most importantly, the argument that different conditions of struggle would be a valid argument against joint international organizing and strategy development must also be rejected. Having a common strategic orientation means having a unified approach in determining the enemy, the target and the forces on which to rely. It does not mean ignoring national peculiarities or becoming tactically inflexible, so that one would have to respond to every concrete situation with the same scheme - as the Comintern had also repeatedly emphasized in its resolutions. Today, the necessity of a unidirectional strategic orientation results from the fact that everywhere in the world imperialism, i.e. monopoly capital, has asserted itself as the dominant social relation and has

subsumed all social relations. This stage of development leaves no more room for intermediate stages between capitalism and socialism or for national liberation struggles that would be detached from the struggle for socialism. And even when this was different in the 1920s and 30s, when the world was still dominated by the colonial system and large semi-colonial territories, the Comintern was able to take into account the widely divergent preconditions, conditions of struggle and tasks ahead for communists in the colonies, semi-colonies, independent countries with only beginning capitalist development and developed imperialist countries. The Comintern's 1928 program, often maligned as "left sectarian," did not envisage exactly the same course of action for all countries, but took as its starting point the different conditions in order to develop in each case a policy appropriate to the situation.

If the justification for the decision to dissolve also suggested that the Comintern - like the International Workingmen's Association - had a right to exist only for a limited time, this too is problematic. It is not evident why the need for the international unification of the working class should expire at a certain point; after all, the goal continued to be a world socialist revolution. Moreover, the decision to dissolve gave no indication whatsoever of how the coordination of the world communist movement might look in the future, and it was some years before a new instrument for this was even created in the form of the Communist Information Bureau.

However, the wrong decision to dissolve the Comintern was not a "betrayal of the world revolutionary cause" in favor of national interests of the Soviet Union, as is often argued today, and not only by Trotskyists. What is particularly contradictory is that often the same forces accuse the Soviet Union of having turned the Comintern into a compliant instrument of its state interests. If this had been the case, however, the question would arise all the more in what way it would have been in the Soviet Union's "national interest" to abandon this instrument.

In fact, the interests of the Soviet Union and the goal of world revolution were inextricably linked, because long-term survival of the Soviet Union, as Stalin had also repeatedly emphasized, could only be ensured by further socialist revolutions. The relationship between the two aspects was complicated primarily by the rise of fascism and the need to fight it and delay war against the Soviet Union. This led to some tactical compromises and twists in which the goal of protecting the Soviet Union was given priority over immediate fighting goals of the communist parties in the capitalist countries. This was also understandable and correct in principle, since a destruction of the Soviet Union would have meant a world-historical defeat for the communists of the whole world as well - as the experience after 1990 has shown. However, it would have been necessary, in the relationship between the interests of the Soviet Union and those of the world communist movement, to give greater prominence to the latter once the immediate danger of the destruction of the Soviet state had passed. In other words, the favorable situation for the spread of the revolution, which existed in 1945 and also later at various points, should have been exploited more offensively.

With the dissolution of the Comintern, the world communist movement embarked on a polycentric path, allowing opportunism great room for maneuver in each country. The independence of the communist parties became a tool to shield any opportunist deviation from outside criticism in the name of non-interference. All this was ultimately to the detriment of the USSR, which was thus forced to intervene by force on several occasions, because in some communist parties even openly counter-revolutionary currents asserted themselves (as in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968), which, if they had been allowed to do so, would not only have liquidated socialism in their countries within a short time, but would also have drastically shifted the balance of power between the imperialist and socialist camps in favor of the former. The Soviet Union now had to intervene to protect existential interests and paid a high price for it politically - the alternative would have been to prevent such situations from arising in the first place by developing a common strategy for the world communist movement.

With the takeover of power by counterrevolutionary forces in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the USSR's internationalist involvement also ended. The end of internationalism also meant the end of "interference" in the affairs of other states: The revolutionary government of Afghanistan was dropped and thrown to the aggressive counterrevolution of the Mujahideen, which was highly armed by the United States, while the other allied countries were also denied their previous generous economic support, accelerating the victory of counterrevolution in most countries.

The Communist Information Bureau (Cominform)

In contrast, in the years immediately following the dissolution of the International, that is, 1944 and the following years, the lack of a common strategy for socialist revolution became painfully apparent. A number of communist parties made serious mistakes in this phase, postponing the struggle for socialism to an indefinite future³³ or joining so-called governments of "national unity"- a continuation of the Popular Front governments-and in the process, in effect, backing the bourgeois parties for the consolidation of capitalist rule.

The lack of coordination among the communist parties was increasingly perceived as a deficiency in the following years, even if the mistake of dissolving the International was not recognized as such. In September 1947, the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) was founded in Szklarska Poreba, Poland, but unlike the Comintern, it included only a few selected parties: In

³³ For example, the KPD, which declared in June 1945: "We are of the opinion that the path of imposing the Soviet system on Germany would be wrong, because this path does not correspond to the present conditions of development in Germany. On the contrary, we are of the opinion that the decisive interests of the German people in the present situation dictate another path for Germany, namely, the path of establishing an anti-fascist, democratic regime, a parliamentary-democratic republic with all democratic rights and freedoms for the people,". "Appeal of the CC of the KPD to the German People for the Construction of an Anti-Fascist-Democratic Germany, 11 June 1945". Online in german at: https://www.1000dokumente.de/pdf/dok_0009_ant_de.pdf.

addition to the CPSU, the CPs of the Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, the GDR, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary) and the French and Italian CPs. The resolution establishing the Cominform stated *"that the lack of liaison between the communist parties participating in the present meeting is a serious disadvantage under the present condition. Experience has shown that such a lack of liaison among the communist parties is wrong and harmful."*³⁴

A few days earlier at the meeting Andrei Zhdanov, the leading Soviet politician in the establishment of the Cominform, had criticized in a famous speech: *"Some comrades understood the dissolution of the Comintern to imply the elimination of all ties, of all contact, between the fraternal Communist parties. But experience has shown that such mutual isolation of the Communist parties is wrong, harmful and, in point of fact, unnatural. The Communist movement develops within national frameworks, but there are tasks and interests common to the parties of various countries. We get a rather curious state of affairs: the Socialists, who stopped at nothing to prove that the Comintern dictated directives from Moscow to the Communists of all countries, have restored their International; yet the Communists even refrain from meeting one another, let alone consulting with one another on questions of mutual interest to them, from fear of the slanderous talk of their enemies regarding the 'hand of Moscow'."*³⁵

The return to organized exchange among the communist parties was undoubtedly a step forward, but it could not replace the Comintern. Firstly, the Cominform was a comparatively arbitrary association from which most, even some very important, communist parties were excluded. And second, it was explicitly not organized as a centralized organization with national sections, but rather as an exchange forum between parties that were independent of each other.

The Cominform was nevertheless useful in countering the opportunism that took hold in the practice of various communist parties after World War II. The Italian CP (PCI), for example, was already in the process of effectively abandoning its revolutionary goal and its mode of organization as a Party of the New Type. As early as April 1944, Togliatti declared, *"I know, comrades, that the problem of doing what was done in Russia does not arise for Italian workers today. [...] We shall propose to the people to make Italy a democratic republic, with a constitution that guarantees all freedoms to all Italians: freedom of thought and that of speech; freedom of the press, association and assembly; freedom of religion and worship; and the freedom of small and medium-sized property to develop without being crushed by the greedy and selfish groups of the plutocracy,*

³⁴ Cominform: "Resolution on exchange of experience and coordination of the parties represented at the meeting," 27 September 1947. Translated from the German version, available online at: https://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_ru&dokument=0029_kim&object=context.

³⁵ A. Zhdanov: "The international situation. Speech delivered at the Informatory Conference of representatives of a number of Communist Parties", 22 September 1947. Available online at: <https://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/archive/zhdanovRD.pdf>.

that is, of monopoly big capitalism. [...] The character of our party must change profoundly [...] we can no longer be a small, narrow association of propagandists of the general ideas of communism and Marxism. [...] We must be the party closest to the people [...] It is the duty of communists to be close to all popular strata."³⁶ And again the argument of "national peculiarities" appears: *"International experience tells us that under the present conditions of the class struggle in the entire world, the working class and the vanguard working masses can find new paths to socialism, different from those, for example, that were followed by the working class and workers of the Soviet Union. I draw your attention to a great example: that of Yugoslavia. [...] In each country [...] in relation to national traditions and characteristics [...] the march towards democracy and socialism takes particular forms."*³⁷

At the founding conference of the Kominform, Zhdanov criticized the PCI and PCF for their inertia in the revolutionary struggle, for collaborating with the bourgeoisie, and for their willingness to compromise with Catholic and social-democratic parties³⁸. Then the Yugoslav delegation, in consultation with Zhdanov, detailed its criticism of the Italian and French comrades. They were accused of servility to Gaullism and the Vatican, illusions in the peaceful parliamentary struggle, disarming the partisan armies. The idea that a people's democracy could be achieved through the participation of the Communists in a bourgeois government was criticized, as was the way in which the PCF was organized, which had turned into a broad mass party concerned only with quantitative growth. There was talk of a *"tendency towards revision of Marxism-Leninism, towards a deviation [...] there was a deviation towards opportunism and parliamentarism in the French Party, the Italian Party, as in other Parties"*³⁹

A year later, at the second conference of the Kominform in June 1948, relations with the CP of Yugoslavia had deteriorated massively, since that party now also held right opportunist positions, and to an even greater extent. The CPJ was now accused of a hostile attitude toward the Soviet Union, of basing its policies primarily on the peasantry rather than the working class and, in this context, of tolerating the development of private property, of relativizing the leading role of the party and effectively dissolving it into a broad "popular front," and of disregarding democratic centralism and transforming itself into a bureaucratic and authoritarian organization⁴⁰. As a result, the CP of Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform.

³⁶ P. Togliatti: "La politica di unità nazionale dei comunisti", Report to the cadres of the Neapolitan communist organization. 11 April 1947. Available online at: https://www.associazionestalin.it/PCI_5_unita.html

³⁷ P. Togliatti: "Verso la democrazia, verso il socialismo", Rinascita, vol. 7, 1947, p. 193. Available online at: <https://www.archivipci.it/mirador.html?manifest-url=https://iiif.fondazionegramsci.org/manifest/iiif-gramsci-0014/654e4ee91bec04857f05a451/manifest.json>

³⁸ B. Bland 1998: "The Cominform fights Revisionism", p. 4. Available online: <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.postww2/bland-cominform.pdf>.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 9fn.

However, these important interventions against the emerging revisionist tendencies were not sufficient; moreover, there were already problematic aspects in the strategic ideas of the Soviet leadership at that time. Thus, in 1950, in talks with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) Harry Pollitt, Stalin criticized on the one hand its compromising attitude toward social democracy: "*The English Communists in the programme of their party should openly say that the Labourites are not at all socialists but in fact are the left-wing of the Conservative Party. It is necessary to say more clearly that under a Labour government the capitalists feel very good and their profits go on increasing and that this one fact itself tells that the Labourites are in no way about to build socialism.*" Moreover, he said, the British Communists were skirting around the question of the anti-colonial struggle. In addition to these criticisms, however, Stalin agreed with the CPGB's tactics for a parliamentary road to socialism. If the English Communists were accused of wanting to establish the Soviet system in Britain, they would have to reply, "*that they do not want to weaken the Parliament, that England shall reach socialism through its own path and not through the path traversed by Soviet power but through a democratic republic that shall be guided not by capitalists but by representatives of peoples' power i.e. a coalition of workers, working intelligentsia, lower classes of the cities as well as farmers. Communists must declare that this power shall act through the Parliament.*"⁴¹ Such positions, however, were not new precisely in relation to the tactics of the British Communists. Lenin, too, had already recommended that they support the reformist leaders to some extent in order to beat the Conservatives in the elections. It was necessary "*in the interests of the revolution, working-class revolutionaries should give these gentlemen a certain amount of parliamentary support*" Lenin said⁴². Stalin (and Lenin, of course) defended a revolutionary strategy toward socialism at its core. However, they both made tactical concessions to reformism that were not helpful in later years in combating opportunism in the communist movement. The CPSU's right opportunist turn at the XXth Party Congress in 1956 could thus appear to be a less abrupt break than it actually was, because it could be based on the tactical concessions that had already been made in the past.

Institutionalized cooperation within the framework of the Cominform was insufficient, but it was better than nothing, or merely informal bilateral contact between the communist parties. The goal of fighting opportunism in the world communist movement was no longer shared by the Soviet leadership after Stalin's death. After the XXth Party Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, the CPSU clearly adopted right opportunist conceptions regarding strategy (the conception of peaceful parliamentary transition to socialism), the conception of socialism (the conception of the "state of the whole people" and the increased use of the law of value under socialism), and foreign policy (peaceful coexistence with imperialism now understood as friendly relations with it). Under Khrushchev's leadership, the CPSU spread these views to the world communist movement as well.

⁴¹ J. Stalin & H. Pollitt: "The British Road to Socialism", 1950. Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.postww2/stalin-pollitt.pdf>.

⁴² V. Lenin: "'Left-Wing' Communism: an Infantile Disorder", 1920. In "Collected Works", Volume 31, p. 81. Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/index.htm>

Shortly after the XXth Party Congress, the Cominform was unilaterally dissolved in April 1956 by a decision of the CPSU Central Committee, thus liquidating this instrument that had remained for unifying and coordinating the world communist movement.

With the Sino-Soviet split (the division of the world communist movement into the pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet camps), later supplemented by the split between the Party of Labor of Albania and the Chinese CP, and the conflicts between Yugoslavia and Albania, serious disputes arose among the communist parties in the following decades. The lack of a common organization in which these conflicts could have been settled and the opportunist positions, which can be found on all sides of these inter-party conflicts without exception, could possibly have been fought, weighed heavily. These conflicts deserve further study, as does the question of whether the absence of the Comintern did not actually tend to reinforce the preponderance of the major CPs in power over the other communist parties.

The Reorganization of the World Communist Movement since the 1990s

After the counterrevolution destroyed socialism in the Soviet Union and the other Eastern European countries, the world communist movement entered its deepest crisis yet. Numerous communist parties dissolved, effectively transformed into social-democratic system parties, lost most of their members, or sank into disorientation and disorganization. The counterrevolution proved once again how closely linked the communist movement continued to be in reality, even without a common organization - almost all socialist countries fell in one quick swoop, and in all the capitalist countries of the world the communists abruptly lost influence.

In this situation, the Communist Party of Greece took the initiative in 1998 to launch International Meetings of Communist and Workers' Parties and to create a common Internet presence with the website solidnet.org.

The international meetings played an important role in the reconstitution of the world communist movement and the political-ideological development of the movement. However, from the outset, they involved parties with very different orientations - from openly bourgeois-capitalist parties such as the PCF of France, the "Party of Communist Re-establishment" (Rifondazione Comunista) of Italy or the CP of China, to parties such as the CP of Greece, which sought a revolutionary reorientation of the world communist movement. These differences have deepened in the two and a half decades that have passed since then.

In 2009 and 2013, again on the initiative of the KKE, the International Communist Review, as a joint publication organ of the Marxist-Leninist parts of the international communist movement, as well as the Initiative of Communist and Workers' Parties was founded by European communist

parties. Both advances were aimed at deepening the union and exchange among the communist parties adhering to Marxism-Leninism. Some parties, such as the Portuguese CP (PCP) and a German CP (DKP), did not participate from the outset because they saw in the closer coordination of Marxist forces a "splitting" of the movement - and this despite the fact that even the Initiative and the International Communist Review never consisted solely of anti-revisionist parties.

It became apparent that the political-ideological development of the world communist movement was in constant flux, that often the reference to Marxism-Leninism was lip service without proper insight, and that the minimal consensus of rejection of the European Union served to exclude the openly pro-imperialist "Eurocommunist" parties but, conversely, was by no means sufficient to unite the truly communist forces.

Some of the parties that initially contributed to the International Communist Review and the "Initiative" degenerated into right-opportunist parties in the following years, such as the Party of Labor of Belgium, which developed a reformist strategy and de facto acceptance of the EU, or the Russian Communist Workers Party and the Hungarian Workers Party, which now clearly place themselves under the banner of Russian imperialism. Major splits occurred in the CP of Turkey (TKP) and the CP of the Peoples of Spain (PCPE), with a right opportunist wing splitting from the party in each case, whereupon in Spain the anti-revisionist part of the party renamed itself the Communist Party of the Workers of Spain (PCTE). All these processes have shown that the understanding of imperialism and the strategic orientation of a party are decisive criteria for its character. Within the context that today sees itself as a world communist movement, a revolutionary, Leninist current is emerging on the one hand, and various opportunist currents are emerging on the other, which are predominantly oriented either toward Western imperialism (especially the EU, as in the case of the so-called "Eurocommunists") or toward the imperialist pole led by Russia and China. The policies of parties that side with the Russian, Chinese, Brazilian, Indian, etc. bourgeoisie, that seek to strengthen the position of these countries *within the* imperialist world system, or that seek a "national" or "democratic" revolution instead of the socialist one, are ultimately not simply different from the policies of the parties of the revolutionary pole, but opposed to it.

The process of the division of the world movement into the opportunist and the revolutionary part, the separation of the chaff from the wheat and thus also the formation of own forms of the organization of the revolutionary parts of the communist world movement are not yet finished.

What next? Do we need a new Comintern?

The answer to the question follows fundamentally from what has already been said - since the reason for the existence of the Comintern, namely, imperialism ruling the world and the

international organization of the class enemy to maintain its domination, not only continues today just as it did then, but has unfolded on a much larger scale than was the case in the past, the need for a new Communist International is obvious.

This does not mean, however, that it would be immediately possible or correct to launch this International as well. For the theory of "national characteristics" has for decades promoted the spread of opportunism and led numerous communist parties of the world astray: alliances with their own bourgeoisie in the sense of "anti-fascism", "anti-imperialism", "national independence", "social progress" or other objectives are entered into unquestioningly by many communist parties. The idea that it is possible or necessary to move to socialism by a path other than proletarian revolution, for example, through "anti-monopolist democracy," "national democratic revolutions," or the like, implies a false, reformist strategy and leads to disastrous political choices. Legalism, i.e., the subordination of communist parties to the legal framework dictated by the bourgeois state, makes revolution impossible. Flirtation with bourgeois nationalism in supposedly "oppressed countries" up to powerful imperialist states like Russia or France prevents the development of a consistent internationalist line of class struggle.

All these manifestations of right opportunism show that in today's world communist movement there are not simply "different approaches" coexisting with each other, resulting automatically from differences in the conditions of struggle, but that it is a struggle between Marxism-Leninism against various forms of revisionism which results in opportunism, which must be defeated in order to avoid the ultimate destruction of the communist movement.

The liquidation of the Comintern today has the unfortunate consequence that some communist parties with serious opportunist deviations refuse to discuss their policies and denounce public or even non-public criticism as "interference in internal affairs". This is accompanied by an unjustified and unfounded polemic against those communist parties that - such as the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Communist Party of Mexico (PCM) - have in recent decades engaged in a critical and productive discussion of opportunism in their own history, renewed and strengthened themselves as a result, and rightly want to take the discussion to the international level. It is unworthy of a communist party to shy away from discussion of its policies and to hide behind the principle of "non-interference", when in reality it is not about "interference" at all, but about honest criticism and self-criticism among communists.

In view of this problematic situation, the restoration of a world organization of all communist parties is not immediately possible at the moment, unless such a step is preceded by theoretical clarification and the elimination of the major substantive differences within the world communist movement. An International in which revolutionary and opportunist, even bourgeois, positions coexist would be an impossibility: either it would be unable to develop a revolutionary orientation

for the world movement, or this orientation would not be accepted by some parties, or they would not be able to implement the revolutionary strategy, due to their organizational structure, which often corresponds more to that of a social-democratic mass party than a Bolshevized party.

Therefore, the process of reconstituting a Communist International, urgent as it is, is a long-term and complex process, consisting first of all in the fact that the communist parties, holding to the goal of socialist revolution and interested in a revolutionary clarification of the decisive questions, must gradually find closer coordination and exchange of content, find an ever closer relationship and concrete cooperation. At present, this concerns only a small number of parties. In many communist parties or even communist youth organizations, this struggle has not yet been decided and must be continued. At the same time, new communist organizations and parties are emerging in some countries, making a break with revisionist and opportunist traditions and striving, usually with very limited forces, to rebuild the movement. From our point of view, a closer exchange between all consistent Marxist-Leninist forces, also with small organizations, is necessary and must be striven for. At the same time we should not impede the open dialogue with those organizations which hold divergent attitudes on some questions, but at the same time adhere to essential principles of Marxism-Leninism (the fundamental affirmation of democratic centralism and the Party of a New Type, the necessity of revolution, the understanding of the socialist economy as central planning and socialization of the ownership of the means of production, etc.) and proletarian internationalism (rejection of nationalism, opposition to imperialist wars, etc.).

We (Kommunistische Organisation) also stand for such a process and to this end we seek exchange and cooperation with other communist organizations and parties in order to make our contribution to the restoration of an international Communist movement, fully aware that we are a small organization that can only bring limited resources and experience to this great undertaking.