

# HISTORY IN PERSPECTIVE

## Zimmerwald: Some Contemporary Echoes

By William Korey

Reflecting the curiously perverse manner in which the Muse of History works her will, the international Communist movement is celebrating a half-century of its existence by recapitulating the polemics which raged at its founding and which today threaten to rend it asunder. The 38 delegates from 11 countries who assembled, under a blanket of tight secrecy, in the obscure Swiss mountain town of Zimmerwald, on September 5-8, 1915, wrote a manifesto and created a movement that were to constitute the cornerstone of the Communist International, established four years later. In the process, the conferees had to resolve, at least temporarily, sharp differences over strategy and tactics—differences that find a clear echo in the current Soviet-Chinese dispute.

Among the issues that were debated at Zimmerwald, while “hot” war gripped most of Europe, were: What type of strategy should the left wing follow to succeed in its effort to end the war? Was peace—or revolution—the transcendent objective of socialists? Had the old organizational form of inter-

national struggle become outdated and was a new one needed? Were compromise and the unity of the left wing essential for the conduct of an effective international struggle, or would splitting be more appropriate? Strikingly, even today’s throbbing issue of “wars of national liberation” was fleetingly touched upon in the preliminaries to the conference.

The background to Zimmerwald was the collapse of the Second International upon the outbreak of World War I. When the major constituent socialist parties of the International rallied to the support of their respective national “bourgeois” governments by voting war credits, participating in coalition cabinets, and demonstrating other forms of active patriotism, the fundamental socialist assumption that class allegiance transcended national allegiance was violently shattered. Destroyed, too, was the basic socialist principle that had been adopted at the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International in 1907 (and restated at later prewar international meetings): that a new general war must be the occasion for the socialist parties to rally the working class against capitalism in general.

The patriotism of leading socialists of the West at first stunned Lenin and other militants of the international working class movement. But the

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initial shock soon turned to bitter anger, and in September 1914 Lenin gathered a few of his supporters in Berne to denounce "the treason to socialism of the majority of the Second International."<sup>1</sup> Two months later he called for "the transformation of the present imperialist war into a civil war" and demanded the establishment of a new Third International which would undertake "the task of organizing the forces of the proletariat . . . for civil war against the bourgeoisie of all countries. . . ."

Other anti-war socialists, far greater in number than the small group that surrounded Lenin, were less violent in their demands and hopes. Basically, they sought to restore the torn fabric of international socialism with the object of promoting an immediate peace without annexations and indemnities. The Italian Socialist Party provided the biggest bulwark of support for this viewpoint. In April 1915 the Italian party, with the concurrence of the Swiss Socialist Party, sent its popular parliamentary deputy, Odino Morgari, to England, where he proposed to E. Vandervelde, the Belgian Chairman of the Executive Committee of the non-functioning International Socialist Bureau, that a full session of the Bureau be called. The Bureau "should have been convoked the day after war was declared, in spite of the dissensions in the camp of the International," Morgari chided the Executive Committee Chairman. But the latter told the Italian that "as long as German soldiers are billeted in the homes of Belgian workers, there can be no talk of convening the Executive." When Morgari asked whether "the International was a hostage in the hands of the Entente," Vandervelde replied, "Yes, a hostage!" The Italian warned that his party would proceed without the Bureau to call an international conference of all parties and groups faithful to socialism.

**T**hus profound dissatisfaction with the war policy of the belligerent governments and with the collaborationist actions of the patriotic socialists provided the common ground for the Zimmerwald Conference. It was reflected in the enthusiasm which greeted the reading of a joint declaration of the French and German delegations at the opening session. The war is "not our war," the joint declaration said, and a "struggle among our countrymen against this horrible calamity"

must commence. "Prolonged cheers" followed at the emotion-packed session.

But almost immediately a note of sharp discord erupted in the proceedings when a letter sent to the conference by the militant German leftist, Karl Liebknecht, was read. "Civil war, not civil peace," Liebknecht demanded. Instead of "class harmony," socialists must demand "class war" and "social revolution." For Lenin and his supporters comprising the so-called Zimmerwald Left (which numbered eight delegates), the letter provided an effective device for promoting the objective of violent revolution. Over and over again he repeated the passage—"civil war and not civil peace."

Prior to the conference Lenin had made clear, in a note to Alexandra Kollontai, that the "slogan of peace" must be denounced as "superconfused, pacifist, philistine, and an aid to governments. . . ." What was needed was a "program of revolutionary actions." His advocacy of civil war followed logically from his characterization of the "epoch" of imperialism: wars inevitably result from the competition of capitalist monopolies for markets and sources of raw materials. Thus, "the idea that democratic peace is possible without a number of revolutions is profoundly erroneous," he said.

Consequently, Lenin argued at Zimmerwald that socialists must not only withdraw their ministers from war cabinets and vote against war credits; they must engage in a multi-faceted class struggle—the organization of economic strikes and demonstrations, the transformation of these strikes into political strikes, fraternization at the front lines and in the trenches, and finally, all-out revolutionary struggle for political power.

The majority of the delegates at Zimmerwald (some 20 comprised the right wing of the conference while a group of five or six straddled the center) found Lenin's arguments anathema to their orientation and philosophy. If peace was the fundamental objective, it could hardly be achieved through advocacy of further (albeit a different kind of) war. Morgari, himself the principal organizer of the conference, argued that violence had been rejected by the Second International as alien to the socialist tradition. It was hardly surprising that Zinoviev would later caustically observe that the conference was composed of too many "comrades who had not settled accounts with pacifism."

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 3rd ed., Vol. XVIII, Moscow, 1935, pp. 44-46. Other sources upon which this article draws are O. H. Gankin and H. H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War*, Stanford University Press, pp. 309-70; M. Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War*, Harvard University Press, 1935, pp. 61-74; A. Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel*, London, 1938, pp. 152-56; J. Maxe, *De Zimmerwald au Bolchévisme*, Paris, 1920; G. Shklovsky, "Tsimmerwald," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, Moscow, No. 9 (44), 1925, pp. 73-106; and "Liebknecht and die III Internationale," *Die Rote Fahne* (Berlin), Jan. 15, 1925, pp. 1-2.

For Lenin's views concerning Zimmerwald, see *Lenin'skii sbornik*, Vol. II, Leningrad, 1924, pp. 231-36, Vol. XIV, Moscow, 1930, pp. 161-87. The views of G. Zinoviev are in his *Sochineniia*, Vol. V, Leningrad, 1924, pp. 218-25, pp. 463-65. Lenin's post-conference evaluation is in *Sotsial-Demokrat* (Geneva), Oct. 11-13, 1915.

**B**y a curious irony, the successors of the Zimmerwald Left now in power in the Kremlin reject the Leninist notion that wars are “fatalistically inevitable” under imperialism. Today they hold that wars may be “eliminated from the life of mankind” even before imperialism passes from the historical scene. The latter-day emphasis from Moscow has been upon “peaceful coexistence,” with the classical conflict between capitalism and socialism reinterpreted in terms of economic competition. The international duty of the socialist countries is not immediate revolution but the building up of their domestic economies, with the end of establishing models that will attract—and thereby “revolutionize”—the working classes abroad. In the meantime, the “fight against war” must remain a basic objective, for “the nature of modern weapons” would make a world war “a monstrous calamity” (as *Pravda* observed, interestingly enough in an anniversary article on Zimmerwald.<sup>2</sup>)

The stress on “peaceful coexistence” has been accompanied by a downgrading of the role of violence as a means to achieve social revolution. Since 1956, the Soviets have accepted the formula that fundamental changes in class and power relations can be achieved in individual countries by “peaceful” and “parliamentary” roads, not only by the resort to violence.

In Peking, the views of the Zimmerwald Left still hold validity; the pronouncements from Moscow are considered “erroneous” and a “clear revision of Marxist-Leninist teachings.” As once the Zimmerwald Left characterized the moderate socialists, so today China charges that Soviet policy is but “compromise and capitulation” before “imperialism.” In a recent article the Chinese Defense Minister called support of revolutionary war the “touchstone for distinguishing genuine from fake revolutionaries” and characterized war as “a great school” to “temper the people and push history forward.”<sup>3</sup>

In their militant ideological posture, the Chinese have focused particularly upon urging maximum support for “wars of national liberation.” Since the “storm center of world revolution” and the “main focus of global contradictions” is no longer to be found in the capitalist world but rather in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where “wars of national liberation” are emerging, support of such wars must be a “primary concern.”

Interestingly, Lenin had initially wanted to have the issue of “national wars of liberation” raised at Zimmerwald. To a colleague he wrote, just prior to the conference, that it was essential to distinguish

between various types of wars, adding that “national wars of liberation” should be supported: “And in case of war in India, Persia, China against England and Russia? Would we not be *in favor* of India against England, etc.?”<sup>4</sup> Those who “reject war in general” are “not Marxians,” he emphasized. Lenin proceeded to include reference to the national liberation struggles in the draft manifesto that he offered to the Zimmerwald Left caucus, but the caucus decided to replace his draft with one prepared by Karl Radek that carried no such reference.

Lenin’s reluctance to press the issue no doubt reflected the lower priority which he attached to revolutionary movements in colonial and semi-colonial countries. Not until the Second Congress of the Comintern in July 1920 did “national wars of liberation” become an important item on the agenda of the international Communist movement, and even then primary concern was focused upon the revolutionary activity of the Western proletariat.

Moscow continues to give national-liberation wars a secondary priority, all the more so since it recognizes that the risks of escalation of such wars might not only jeopardize “peaceful coexistence” but unleash thermonuclear war. A single spark in any part of the globe might touch off the nuclear conflagration that could bring mankind’s destruction. In contrast, Peking, in its April 1960 documents, stressed that national-liberation wars must be supported without regard to the risks of escalation. And the Soviet view is said to have “completely betrayed the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory of war.”<sup>5</sup>

**O**nce the majority at Zimmerwald had concluded that the struggle for peace—and not civil war—was the principal objective of international socialism, its members were determined to embrace as broad a movement as possible, so that maximum public pressures might be exerted upon governments to bring them to the peace table. Consequently the majority of delegates were reluctant to advocate steps that might cause a further splintering of existing socialist parties and organizations. Even a proposal that the conference go on record demanding that socialists vote against war credits was rejected (at the urging especially of the German delegation, since such a demand would have immediately split the socialist parliamentary bloc as well as the party). Moreover, logic was buttressed by a sentiment that continued to cling to the traditions and institutions of the Second International.

<sup>2</sup> *Pravda*, Sept. 5, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> The text of Marshal Lin Piao’s article is in the *New York Times*, Sept. 4, 1965, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Leninskii sbornik*, Vol. II, pp. 235-36.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, Sept. 4, 1965.

The postulates of Lenin concerning the need for social revolution led ineluctably in another direction. Commenting upon the slogan of unity, he wrote: "Frankly, I am more afraid at the present time of such indiscriminate unity than of anything else." He demanded a "ruthless struggle" against "social chauvinism," an uncompromising split away from the patriotic socialists and centrists, and the creation of a new, Third International.<sup>6</sup>

Today, it is Moscow that clamors for the unity of the international revolutionary movement which once the Zimmerwald majority championed. Rejecting the tactics of splitting, the Soviets have even been willing to forego the role of doctrinal "leadership" in the world Communist movement in order to maintain a pragmatic unity of the contending national elements that comprise the movement. In a key editorial in *Pravda* last June, entitled appropriately "Unity of Action Is an Imperative Requirement of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle," the Soviets appealed anxiously and repeatedly for a halt to ideological attacks by the Chinese and for a united effort, "even given the existence of disagreements concerning the political line and many important problems in theory and tactics. . . ."<sup>7</sup> In *Pravda's* anniversary article on Zimmerwald, "unity of action" was again underscored, lest "atom bombs begin to fall."<sup>8</sup>

But the appeal has fallen on deaf ears, as the Chinese have pursued a policy that does not stop at criticizing Soviet "revisionism" but attempts to lay the actual groundwork for a separate international. Since 1963, as the July "Open Letter" of the Soviet party then charged, the Chinese have been encouraging the splitting of Communist parties and the formation of anti-revisionist splinter groups in various countries.<sup>9</sup> Translations of the *Peking Review* in various languages and the appearance of a new monthly, *Revolution*, established in Paris with Chinese funds for mass distribution in underdeveloped areas, have accompanied the use of Chinese diplomatic offices to foster the Chinese "line" among revolutionaries in underdeveloped countries as well as among established parties in the West. In October 1963 the deputy head of the Chinese party's propaganda department declared in a speech in Peking (published two months later) that the splitting of revisionist-led parties is an "inexorable law" of Marxism.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Leninskii sbornik*, Vol. II, pp. 231-32, 235-37; Lenin, *Sochineniia*, Vol. XXIX, Moscow, 1937, p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> *Pravda*, June 20, 1965.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 5, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, July 14, 1965.

<sup>10</sup> The details are presented in R. Lowenthal, "The Prospects for Pluralistic Communism," *Dissent* (New York), Winter 1965, p. 116.

A seven-man commission set up by the Zimmerwald Conference to prepare a manifesto expressing the consensus considered three separate drafts—one prepared by Radek, on behalf of the Zimmerwald Left, another by Leon Trotsky, and a third by the German delegation. After examining the various draft manifestos, the commission requested Robert Grimm, the Swiss Social Democrat, and Leon Trotsky to prepare a final text. This text turned out to be almost identical with Trotsky's draft.

Trotsky's centrist position, prior to and during the conference, uniquely qualified him for the assignment. While agreeing with the Left on many points, he refused to endorse Lenin's revolutionary defeatism, as it was in the interest of socialism, he said, that the war should end "without victors or vanquished." More pertinently, he maintained that the differences at the conference should be transcended so as to enable it to condemn the war unanimously. At the same time, however, he would have liked the final text to demand a vote against war credits, and he and Mme. H. Roland-Holst submitted a proposal along these lines. But when it became evident to him that this proposal "might endanger to some extent the success of the conference," he and his Dutch colleague withdrew their proposal "under protest."<sup>11</sup>

The Zimmerwald manifesto accepted the Leninist thesis that the war was the result of "imperialism, of the endeavors of the capitalist classes of every nation to satisfy the greed for profit by the exploitation of human labor." When the capitalist governments say that "the war is for national defense, democracy and the liberty of oppressed nationalities, they lie!" The socialist international had "disregarded the obligations" that followed from its pre-war congresses in Stuttgart, Copenhagen and Basle. Instead, the socialist parties had "invited the workers to suspend the working class struggle," voted "the ruling classes the credits for carrying on war," and offered their governments socialist ministers "as hostages for the observance of the national truce. . . ."

The solution offered by the manifesto was a mild one mirroring the majority view. The fundamental objective of the working class was to be the "fight for peace . . . a peace without annexations or war indemnities." No radical proposals were suggested, and the manifesto said nothing about civil war or intensified class struggle, in terms of either parliamentary action or strikes. And there was no reference to the creation of a new international; indeed, the manifesto spoke of the need "to join anew the broken ties" that had linked the workers together.

<sup>11</sup> Gankin and Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 334.



Still, important concessions had been made to the Left. Aside from the adoption of Lenin's characterization of the war, the manifesto made it clear that the socialist international had shirked its responsibility, and it further specified the forms of irresponsible action taken by the various socialist parties (*i.e.*, on war credits, coalition ministries, etc.). With this biting criticism, the manifesto paved the way for the later establishment of a more militant international movement. Finally, by implication, if not explicitly, it rejected civil peace in favor of an active struggle for the cessation of hostilities.

If the Zimmerwald Left was partially appeased, it was far from completely satisfied. In a declaration, the group pointed out that the manifesto was marked by "opportunism covered up by radical phrases." And, more significantly, it contained "no clear characterization of the means of combatting the war."<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the Left agreed to support the manifesto, making the vote for it unanimous (except for an abstention by the Socialist Revolutionary V. Chernov on the ground that it made no reference to his favorite subject, agrarian socialism).

Lenin's explanation for the favorable vote of the Zimmerwald Left makes instructive reading. Aware that his group was yet in a minority, it would be, he said, "bad military tactics to refuse to move together with the growing international movement of protest against social chauvinism because this movement is slow. . . ." Clearly, he was anxious to avoid becoming isolated from a peace movement just beginning to develop. The manifesto, he observed, with all its weaknesses, is nonetheless a "step forward," and it would be "sectarianism for us to refuse to take this step forward *together*" with the other delegates, especially since "we retain full freedom . . . of criticizing inconsistency and of endeavoring

to achieve greater results."<sup>13</sup> Given this freedom, the Left would work "patiently," his alter ego Zinoviev explained, until "all honest socialists will exclaim with us: *The Second International has died, riddled by opportunism. Hail the Third International purged of opportunism.*"<sup>14</sup>

The Chinese, too, have thus far avoided the formal establishment of a new Maoist International. Like the Zimmerwald Left, they have accepted the present common framework of the international Communist movement, noting that they themselves are at present a "temporary minority."<sup>15</sup> But that they intend to continue their challenge to Soviet "revisionism" until their views acquire majority acceptance has been made crystal clear. The Soviet-dominated Communist movement has responded by characterizing as "radically fallacious" the Chinese view that the majority of the world Communist movement is wrong and that there exists a minority who are the bearers of Marxist-Leninist truth who eventually will become the majority.

The vigor of the reaction no doubt reflects Moscow's recollection that representatives of the minority Zimmerwald Left would ultimately—in March 1919—declare that the Zimmerwald alliance had "outlived itself," and therewith permit its dissolution and absorption into the Third International. Hints that Peking is striving to become the new doctrinal center of world revolution strike the chords of memory ever more resoundingly.

<sup>12</sup> *Sotsial-Demokrat*, Oct. 13, 1915, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1915, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> G. Zinoviev, *Sochineniia*, Vol. V, p. 225.

<sup>15</sup> The concept is elaborated in *People's Daily* (Peking), Dec. 15, 1962. The pro-Soviet criticism of the concept is in *World Marxist Review* (Prague) No. 2, 1963, p. 3.

# NOTES & VIEWS

## *A Traveler in China*

By Michael Futrell

I left London on Tuesday morning and arrived Thursday afternoon in Moscow where I had to spend one night in a hotel. Memories of my stay in Moscow several years earlier immediately became vivid when I entered the cathedral-like hall of the Ukraina Hotel, filled with hundreds of foreigners in different stages of frenzy, all struggling to get some sense out of officials of the hotel and of In-tourist. To sort out a minor uncertainty in my arrangements took me one hour's strenuous arguing. By then I was hungry. Entering the dining room, I inquired where I might sit. With dreadful glee, a

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lugubrious waiter deigned to tell me that just then the vast room was entirely reserved for groups. Appealing to the seemingly most effective of the officials with whom I had been dealing, I was advised to out-flank the dining room by means of one of the snack-bars on the upper floors. The attendant on the floor where my room was located promised that the snack-bar there would open soon.

Time passed. Eventually the door was opened by a waitress. Was the snack-bar open now, I asked. Yes, she replied. I went in and sat down. The waitress stared at me. I stared back. Could I please have something to eat, I asked. No, she replied. But you are open, I pointed out. Yes, she agreed. But you have no food to serve, I asked again. No, no food at all, she repeated. When might the food be delivered, I asked. She really couldn't say, but of course, she insisted brightly, the snack-bar was open.

By now I felt I was indeed in Russia. Leaving the waitress with a merry quip, I eventually suc-

ceeded in tracking down a snack-bar on another floor that not only was open but even had some food. Perhaps I was unlucky. The hotel was exceptionally crowded. Enormous groups of Italian sports fans had just arrived for some international match; they could be seen wandering everywhere with enthusiasm and incredulity, and the hotel organization was under heavy strain.

However, a good deal of the clumsiness and improvisation of former years persists. For example, the absurd system of coupons for meals, each coupon worth an arbitrary sum, so that one always has to be adding up the cost of what one eats and fiddling with money as well as coupons. Then, just before leaving for the station, as a final check I showed my train ticket to a girl who seemed one of the more efficient of the lot. She was horrified. "But that's not a ticket at all!" she exclaimed. This was too much, and as the only alternative to saying something rude I burst out laughing. But this was serious, for the