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PARTY DISCIPLINE IN THE LIGHT OF THE DECISIONS OF THE
XII. PLENUM OF THE E.C.C.I

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Very little attention has been paid recently to the question of Party discipline in the documents of the Communist Parties and in the Party press. This is a serious omission. In Party circles there is a widely-spread opinion that discipline is something which comes of itself, that there is nothing to explain, that every Party member knows that he has to carry out the Party directives. This idea is deeply mistaken. In reality Party discipline is very unsatisfactorily arranged in the Parties of capitalist and colonial countries with very few exceptions, and this unsatisfactory Party discipline is the direct result of the fact that the Party committees do not take up the systematic explanation of the principles of Bolshevik Party discipline among the members and do not carry on a stubborn struggle for the establishment of Bolshevik discipline in the every-day practice of Party work.

The Second Congress of the Comintern gave the following directives on the question of Party discipline in the Twenty-One Conditions of acceptance into the Communist International:--

"12. All the Parties belonging to the C.I. should be formed on the basis of democratic centralism. At the present time of acute civil war, the Communist Party will only be able fully to do its duty when it is organised in a sufficiently thorough way, when it possesses an iron discipline bordering on military discipline, and when its Party centre, who are to endow this centre with complete power, authority and ample rights, enjoys the confidence of the members of the Party."

The Comintern had to put forward this demand because the European Social Democratic Parties, from the left wings of which the Communist Parties in capitalist countries were formed, had no firm discipline. The Social Democratic Parties were chiefly adapted to the parliamentary struggle, and had no need of iron discipline in their ranks. From the very first days of its existence, the Comintern was compelled to declare a merciless struggle against these social democratic traditions. The situation of the relative stabilisation of capitalism assisted a renewal of Right opportunist, social democratic traditions in the ranks of the European and

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American Communist Parties. In these circumstances of the end of the revolutionary wave and the weakening of the mass revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, discipline became definitely weaker in all European and American Communist Parties.

The XII. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. established the fact that "the international situation sharply raises the question of the fulfilment of the task which is fundamental at the present time -- the preparation of the working class and the exploited masses in the course of the economic and political struggle for the impending fights for power, for the dictatorship of the proletariat." These changing international circumstances evidently require from all Communist Parties, and above all from the Communist Parties which are acting on sectors where a revolutionary situation exists (China, Spain) and in which a revolutionary crisis is rapidly maturing (Poland, Germany, Japan), should rapidly and definitely strengthen their Party discipline and require the establishment of iron discipline "bordering on military discipline" in the ranks of the Communist Parties as an absolutely compulsory organisational prerequisite for the preparation for decisive revolutionary fights and the final triumph of the working class in each country and on an international scale.

The concrete question of Party discipline at the present juncture stands as follows:--

At the XII. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. it was continually stressed in the speeches of all the delegates that one of the chief causes why the Communist Parties were lagging behind the growth of the revolutionary activity of the masses was the neglect of the organising rôle of the Communist Parties in the revolutionary mass movement. But a necessary condition for carrying out the leading rôle of the Communist Parties is the strengthening of iron discipline in them and simultaneously the increasing of the revolutionary initiative in the localities. But in both respects, there are great shortcomings in the Communist Parties.

What does such a situation show?

It shows two things:

(1) Among the masses of the Party members, including among them the leading Party activists, there is not yet the necessary clear understanding that the victorious liberating struggle of the working class is impossible without a strong centralised leadership and that a necessary prerequisite for carrying out the centralised leadership is the ability of the Party organisations to carry out rapidly and consistently the directives of the Party committees above them.

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(2) On the part of the organs of Party leadership, on the part of the Party committees, there is no correct arrangement of systematic verification, instructions and a stubborn struggle in the matter of carrying out of the directives of these Party committees and other higher organs of Party leadership by the lower Party organisations. These two points, however, require in turn to be concretised.

The liberating struggle of the proletariat inevitably bears an international character. One of the chief causes why the C.P.S.U. was and is able to build Socialism in one country is the assistance given to the toilers of the U.S.S.R. by the workers and peasants of other capitalist and colonial countries. The Comintern is the international Party of the proletariat. It leads the revolutionary struggle of the workers and peasants of all countries, giving instructions on the forms and methods of the revolutionary struggle of the toilers in every country on the basis of a study of the international situation.

Therefore, an important component part of the iron discipline of the Communist Parties is their readiness to carry into practice the political line and the various concrete directives of the Communist International. This international discipline of the Communist Parties obtains particular importance at the present juncture, in the present circumstances of the end of capitalist stabilisation, when the ruling classes are using innumerable provocations to impel the working class to undertake a premature advance, and when, on the other hand, international actions of solidarity are particularly important without a single hour of delay, and finally when the question will rise with increasing intensity before the communist Parties as to their readiness to support some particular form of the revolutionary struggle of the working masses of another country or countries. The great strike of the English miners in 1926 was broken partly because it was not supported by the workers of other countries. The strike of the Belgian miners in 1932 did not meet an international response. The international campaign of struggle in defence of the Chinese revolution is unsatisfactory at present. A particularly great responsibility lies at present on all Communist Parties in the matter of making real preparations for civil war in case the ruling classes should begin imperialist war or intervention against the U.S.S.R. The Communist Parties can only successfully pass the test of civil war if they have iron discipline in their ranks.

The readiness of the Communist Parties of capitalist countries to carry out the directives of the Comintern is of tremendous importance from another point of view. In the Executive Committee of the Comintern are concentrated the best forces of the international workers' movement, the whole experience of the Marx-Leninist leadership of

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the revolutionary class struggle. The whole historic path travelled by the Communist International shows the extent to which the Communist Parties of all countries need the aid of the leading organs of the Comintern, both when solving their own internal national questions, and above all in the struggle against social democratic and anarcho-syndicalist traditions, which are still extremely tenacious of life in the Communist Parties of capitalist countries, traditions which drag the Communist Parties into the morass of open Right and "left" opportunist waverings and and vacillations. It is sufficient to remember the rôle of the E.C.C.I. in the struggle against the Right opportunist Brandlerite leaders of the C.P. of Germany and later in the matter of liberating the C.P.G. from ultra-"left" "leaders," Ruth Fischer and Maslov, to realise clearly the whole significance of strict international discipline by the Communist Parties for the rapid and genuine bolshevisation of their ranks, and consequently also in the matter of their general preparations for the decisive struggles for power.

At present the Comintern sets before its sections as most important tasks which ensure the winning over of the majority of the working class and the preparation for decisive struggles, to strengthen the influence of the Party in the big factories, in all mass proletarian organisations, especially in the trade unions and the organisations of the unemployed, by the capable application of the tactic of the united front from below, combining legal methods of Party work with semi-legal and strictly illegal methods; to destroy the mass influence of social fascism and prepare the broad masses of the employed and unemployed proletarians for the higher forms of class struggle, on the basis of the struggle for their immediate demands. Thus in the near future a measuring rod of the good discipline of the Communist Parties will be the successful fulfilment of these demands which are put forward by the XII. Plenum of the E.C.C.I.

With this aim, the E.C.C.I. and also the leading organs of every section (above all the C.C.) must ensure that all the Party organisations in all countries and every Party member is fully acquainted with all the chief directives of the Comintern, especially if there are directives of the C.I. with regard to the given country and the given Party organisation. The masses of Party members can be made aware of the decisions and the directives of the Comintern in various ways. Among these methods should be specially emphasised the discussion of the decisions and the directives of the Comintern at general meetings of Party members, including meetings of factory and street cells. The checking up of the fulfilment of the decisions and directives of the Comintern must be organised in all Party organs, right to the lowest cell. No instructor or representative is in a position to make an all-round deep and practical verification himself as to the fulfilment of the directives of

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the Comintern without mass self-criticism from below. Therefore, the question of mass self-criticism from below now takes on the character of one of the chief political and organisational problems in the preparation of the working class for decisive victorious fights.

In our Parties, self-criticism from below up to now has been very poorly developed (and in some cases is altogether absent). Recently self-criticism from above has been widely spread (France). But, firstly, self-criticism should not take the form of self-castigation, and secondly, self-criticism from above, the self-criticism of Party leaders (central and local) must compulsorily be supplemented by self-criticism from below. Self-criticism from below is an important basis of the régime of centralised iron discipline in the ranks of the Communist Parties.

Self-criticism from below is an absolutely specific form for forging out iron Party discipline. It is only possible in the ranks of Bolshevik Communist Parties, because the Communist Parties carry out the rôle of the vanguard of the proletariat by the most consistent and capable defence of the interests of the working class as a whole. Comrade Lenin systematically emphasised that the Communist Parties, as the vanguard of the working class, must at the same time learn from the masses, and must with particular attention study the methods and organised forms of the class struggle which are created by the revolutionary initiative of the masses. Lenin himself was an incomparable master of the use of the experience of the revolutionary creative powers of the masses. It is sufficient to remember his teachings on the Soviet Government as a historic form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, teachings which were taken from the practice of the revolutionary initiative of the Russian proletariat.

There is nothing more harmful than a mechanical sergeant-major conception of centralisation and Party discipline. In the Communist Parties, the extensive powers of a powerful and authoritative leading centre must compulsorily go hand-in-hand with the bold initiative of the local Party committees, especially the factory cell. The local Party committees and cells must utilise every favourable moment to strengthen the influence of the Party organisationally and politically in the localities, even though they have not yet received directives on these questions from higher Party centres. Knowing the general position of the Party and the Comintern, knowing the line of the Party and the Comintern on the chief questions of Party work, the local Party committees and cells must on their own initiative introduce changes into the existing forms and methods of Party work on every occasion when changing circumstances demand it, without waiting for special directives from the centre.

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This boldness and independence of the local Party organisations in carrying out the general line of the Party and its C.C. according to the concrete local conditions formed the main strength of the underground Bolshevik Party, when the local Party organisations, in view of police repression, were frequently cut off from their leading centres for long periods and had to act without losing a minute. This boldness and decisiveness of the local organisations of the Russian Bolsheviks lead to the victory of the October Revolution. The local organisations and every Party member, knowing the general directives of the C.C. on the seizure of power, did not wait for special directives for themselves, but acted with the greatest unselfishness according to local conditions. On the contrary, in West European Communist Parties, the local Party organisations and especially the factory cells, were until recently anemic and passive as a rule and did not take the risk of acting without directives from the C.C. Such was the case, for example, in Berlin on July 20, 1932. The Berlin Party Committee was late with its call for a demonstration after the appeal for a general strike, and the cells in turn did not show the slightest initiative. As the result, the call for a general strike hung in the air.

Therefore, the XII. Plenum of the E.C.C.I., while demanding from all Communist Parties an increase in the responsibility of every Party member and every Party organisation, simultaneously declared in the most decided form against super-centralism and for the initiative and independence of local Party organisations, especially the Party cells.

The correct line of the local Party organisations and cells is attained by a good selection and by the systematic Marxist-Leninist training of the leading cadres from top to bottom. Lenin from the first steps of his work for the organisation of the Bolshevik Party systematically and with the greatest insistence raised the question of the Party committees compulsorily, including the best and most popular leaders of the workers who were in contact with the masses. In view of the fact that under the difficult police conditions of tsarism, "for better ensuring the correct and continuous functioning of the local organisations, it is permissible to make partial use of the principle of co-optation," Comrade Lenin definitely insisted that the "co-optive members should be replaced at the first opportunity by comrades properly elected on the basis of the rules."

(See Org. Resolution of the Conference of the R.S.L.P. (b) December 19, 1908).

Why did Lenin insist on these demands to the Party leaders? Because the popular workers' leaders in close contact with the masses well reflect the feelings of the masses and can best of all bring into practical existence the correct fighting slogans of the general line of the

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Party. In addition, Party committees composed of popular leaders of the workers, in view of the deep faith of the masses in them, can most easily convert these fighting slogans into fighting mass revolutionary actions, i.e., they can carry out the general line of the Party in practice. Until recently, in our Communist Parties, when Party committees are being formed, the question of putting on to them the Party members who are leaders of the workers and are most popular and best connected with the masses has not been raised with sufficient consistency. On the contrary, in view of the absence of self-criticism from below, when forming Party committees, there have been not infrequent cases of acting haphazardly, working on considerations of groups, etc. At the XII. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. the delegates of the C.P.s of France, Great Britain and the U.S.A. spoke very eloquently of this, the delegates of the C.P. of Germany gave various facts, etc. Therefore, all Communist Parties should now attentively examine how matters stand with them regarding the composition of the Party committees, and whether they contain the popular Party members who are leaders of the working class and connected with the masses.

On the basis of the materials which we possess, we can definitely assert that in all countries there are many popular revolutionary workers' leaders who are authoritative among the masses, who, however, not only do not sit in the organs of the Party leadership, but are even unknown to the latter. For this very cause, we find the cases of which the delegates at the XII. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. spoke -- big strikes break out in the factories where the given Party committees did not expect any strike movement, or there are cases of big strike movements extending over whole districts (the Lancashire textile strike) led by workers unknown to the Party leaders.

The Party committees must make provisions so that in the course of class fights non-Party workers will be brought forward to the rôle of popular Party leaders and also the workers of social democratic organisations and members of reformist trade unions. While exposing the social fascist hangers-on and plain police spies and strikebreakers, the Communist Parties must at the same time use every effort to bring within the orbit of their influence all honest non-Party worker leaders and leaders promoted by the masses from among the revolutionary-minded social democrats and members of reformist trade unions, making the widest use along these lines of all kinds of mass organisations -- trade unions, co-operative societies, sport clubs, etc., and especially the revolutionary elected organs of workers' representatives, such as factory committees, workers' delegations, strike committees, etc.

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The question of Party discipline must compulsorily be connected with penalties for failure to comply with the demands of Party discipline. The Party rules provide for various penalties -- reprimand, warning, expulsion from the Party. In Party practice, all these measures of Party disciplinary influence are used, but it should be mentioned that they are frequently used mechanically and not in connection with the work for the Bolshevik steeling of the Party ranks, for which reason these measures frequently miss their aim. At the XII. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. much was said about the mechanical expulsion of opportunist deputies by the C.C. C.P.F., without explaining this measure to the masses of Party members and the working class, as the result of which some of these deputies again secured election to parliament and preserved, or sometimes even enlarged, their contact with the masses (through the municipalities).

It should be emphasised that the question of any kind of penalty for the violation of Party discipline must be taken along the lines of fulfilling the basic political and organisational directives of the higher Party organs, in which case the main attention must be paid to verification and correction in the course of the work. This requires every Party committee to watch attentively what is being done in Party organisations led by them, how the chief directives are carried out at every sector, so as to come immediately to the assistance in every case when these directives are carried out badly or altogether not applied, taking the necessary measures immediately to change the state of affairs which has arisen. This requires the establishment of personal contact between the Party leaders and the Party organisations under their guidance (especially with the cells), the decisive elimination of leadership through circulars which is widely practised at present, including the C.P. of Germany. This requires also the abolition of the usual practice at the present time when members of the Party committees go out to the localities only to deliver long speeches, without entering into a study of the life and activity of the given local organisation, and not checking up on its work on the spot and giving instructions with regard to the best carrying out of the directives of the higher Party organs, including the directives of the Comintern. Besides this verification and instruction from above, there should be regular meetings and conferences of the Party activists and Party conferences for collective verification of the work which is being carried out, with the aim of bringing shortcomings and mistakes to light, and taking measures to eliminate them on the spot, in the course of the work.

In all these forms of verification, in every concrete case, the question must be concretely raised as to the responsibility of every Party worker and particularly of every member of the Party leadership. Up to the present,

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this responsibility is frequently not applied at all in the Communist Parties of capitalist countries. If it is operated, then it is at the time of intense struggle against oppositions and deviations. But we must keep in view that the struggle against deviations should be carried on all the time, that it would be foolish to wait for the accumulation of a considerable number of various deviations and the formation of an opposition to commence a struggle against them. Then, in addition to deviators there may be (and are) in the organs of Party leadership simply incapable workers. At the same time there are growing (and many have already grown) hundreds and thousands of new activists which the whole Party should discover in the course of strikes, demonstrations, and other mass revolutionary actions, checking up on them at meetings of activists and Party conferences and drawing them into leading work, thus extending the circle of the Party and near-Party activists and assuring the possibility of a rapid replacement of useless leading workers who have disclosed their inability to carry out in practice the line of the Comintern and the directives of the leading organs of their Party.

It is impossible to create the iron discipline necessary in the Communist Parties without systematically checking up on the fulfilment of decisions and without a correct policy of cadres, without a systematic selection of the best popular leaders of the working class into the leading Party organs, workers who understand how to independently carry out the line of the Party and the Comintern suitably to the concrete conditions of the place and time. From this point of view we must sharply criticise the documents of the Communist Parties since the XII. Plenum, because in them the question of checking up on the fulfilment of decisions and the question of cadres are either not raised at all or are raised in a most general form.

The international conditions categorically require all the Communist Parties of capitalist countries to put an end rapidly and decisively to such a state of affairs, when a correct political line is left in the air because no one takes the trouble to carry it into practice, when the most important decisions, after being adopted unanimously, are worked up only in the form of circulars, etc. Every Party member, and above all every member of the Party leadership, must be responsible for the Party business given to him, must answer with his unstained Party reputation, for being on leading work and finally for his right to remain in the ranks of the Communist vanguard.