

#### 4. DECISION DEFERRED:

##### THE SYNDICALISTS VIS-A-VIS MOSCOW

The wave of enthusiasm for the newly-founded Comintern that swept through the syndicalist movement, questioned by few within it, carried over into 1920 nearly unhindered. The doubts of the few would grow and multiply in 1920, particularly as the CI adopted a clearer, sharper and more rigid organizational structure, reflecting the shifts and changes in the Bolshevik strategy for world revolution and dramatically symbolized by the policies endorsed by the second CI congress in the summer of 1920. And yet these doubts would remain primarily those of uncertain individuals, perhaps an increasingly uneasy minority, rather than the formalized and public opposition of syndicalist organizations. And the Bolsheviks, who provoked these doubts by challenging syndicalist ideology, also acted to defuse them by exploiting widespread revolutionary sentiment and their own revolutionary success to underwrite their claims that the policies of the CI alone represented revolutionary legitimacy, simultaneously to defer them with their bid to establish a revolutionary International exclusively for trade unions.

##### The Changing View from Moscow

As its predecessor had been an entirely unrepresentative and makeshift affair, the second congress constituted the first substantive meeting of the CI. The outlook of the Comintern, moreover, had altered in the fifteen months since its inception. In the interim the revolutions in Central Europe - more serious than the earlier abortive Spartakist rising in Berlin in January 1919 - had failed, the Soviet Republic of Bavaria having been forcefully suppressed at the beginning of May, that of Hungary three months later. Interpreting these events as no more than preliminary skirmishes *en route* to a final and inevitable wave of revolution, the Bolsheviks were not unduly dismayed. Something of the aura of spontaneous revolutionary enthusiasm of the founding congress of 1919 survived in the sessions of 1920. Many delegates expected the advance of the Red Army against the Poles to spark revolt in Poland and Germany.

But the Bolsheviks had drawn conclusions from the earlier failures

in Germany and Hungary as well as from their own revolutionary victory. When the Comintern was founded, early in 1919, they had anticipated an imminent series of international workers' actions, which they believed would spread revolution in the West and simultaneously preserve that in Russia. The primary aim of the first congress of the CI had therefore been one of propaganda: to assail capitalism, to indict and isolate the social democratic traitors who had earlier dominated the labour movement, to spur a wide variety of workers' organizations to revolutionary action. But a decisive wave of revolutions had not come and the Bolsheviks had subsequently shifted their attention to the needs of revolutionary organization within an international struggle, now viewed in a long- rather than a short-term perspective. The second CI congress of 1920 would serve above all purposes of organization. The success of their own revolution against all odds, moreover, had convinced the Bolsheviks that they not only could but had to generalize from their own experiences as a model applicable everywhere. The pivotal role of the communist party in wielding absolute central control over the revolutionary process predominated among the principles derived from this model. Centralization and discipline became the touchstones of revolutionary tactics. And just as the party had orchestrated the domestic revolution, the Bolsheviks intended the CI to play the centralizing and guiding role in the international revolutionary struggle.<sup>1</sup> The new emphasis on organization within the CI would inevitably highlight the ideological disparities between the Bolsheviks and syndicalists.

The program the Bolsheviks now intended the CI to implement seemed to represent a sharp shift in strategy to many foreign revolutionaries, certainly to the syndicalists, because they had not realized that Bolshevik revolutionary theory had long accorded a central and commanding role to the party. While western syndicalists frequently saw the Russian system of soviets as one decentralizing producers' representation and administration, the Bolsheviks regarded the soviets as secondary institutions, to be wholly subordinated to the party, like all workers' organizations. The Bolsheviks' made their views on soviet-party relations clear in their party's 1919 congress, held two weeks after the first CI congress closed. The assembly reiterated the claims of the CI congress that the soviets were carrying out the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia. It added, however, that the task of the party was to win "decisive influence and complete control in all organizations of the working people: in trade unions, co-operatives, rural communes," and above all, "in the soviets." In its "selfless" work the party sought "a position of undivided political supremacy in the soviets and of actual control over all their work."

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The delegates declared that in Russia the party already held "the entire Soviet apparatus in its hand." Within the party itself, "the strictest centralism and the most severe discipline are an absolute necessity. All decisions of higher echelons are absolutely binding for those below."<sup>2</sup> But revolutionaries in the West prior to 1920 knew almost nothing about the decisions of the Russian Communist Party. The long-standing protests of the revolutionary opposition in Russia – those of the syndicalists foremost among them – against the monopolization of power in the soviets by the Bolshevik party, moreover, had gone unheard in the West.

The main message reaching the international labour movement from Moscow came instead from the CI and other sources, and permitted the soviet system to be depicted in terms very congenial to western syndicalists, as resting upon producers' associations and organized from below and therefore compatible with the syndicalist vision of workers' self-administration through their economic organizations. Thus, Lenin's *State and Revolution*, written in the revolutionary excitement of the summer of 1917 and available in the West in 1919, could more easily be read as a celebration of workers' control than as justifying the tutelary and dictatorial role of a political party. Far more importantly, the party scarcely figured in the theses and manifestos of the early Comintern. Even the document on the dictatorship of the proletariat drafted by Lenin and endorsed by the first CI congress breathed not a word about the party, identifying this dictatorship instead as "a system of councils." More specifically, "the forms taken by the proletarian dictatorship . . . have already been worked out, that is, the Soviet power in Russia, the workers' councils in Germany, the shop stewards' committees, and other analogues of Soviet institutions in other countries."<sup>3</sup> This claim by no means constituted an effort by the Bolsheviks to disguise the importance they attached to the party. It represented in part their appreciation for the crucial role played by the soviets in the revolution in Russia. More importantly, it expressed their optimistic anticipation of a wave of revolutions in central and western Europe, which, in the absence of established communist parties, would have to be channeled through a series of workers' councils. But the message from the early CI did permit the syndicalists to envisage the soviet system as closely akin to the one they advocated. Alfred Rosmer, for example, declared in September 1919 that because the Russian Revolution related so closely to their conceptions by the soviet form it assumed, it should be doubly cherished by French syndicalists. "The local Soviet chosen by all the workers and by them alone, which is the foremost organ of the new

regime," he asked, "does it not correspond to the council of an interunion committee or of a *bourse*?"<sup>4</sup>

The new emphasis upon organization also required that the CI adopt an unambiguous policy on the tactics to be pursued in the trade union movement. The first congress had not resolved this issue. The Bolsheviks had advanced no resolution of their own on this question and neither a proposal rejecting work within reformist unions, nor one insisting upon the necessity of so doing, had been adopted. By the time of the second congress, however, the issue had become crucial. The membership in trade unions throughout the world had trebled between 1914 and 1920.<sup>5</sup> In western Europe the majority of unions remained loyal to social democracy and millions of members were enrolled in the resuscitated IFTU, or Amsterdam International. The Bolsheviks now deemed it imperative to win the masses away from the social democrats by working within the reformist organizations. Lenin, castigating the ultra-left communists in "*Left-Wing*" *Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, clearly enunciated there the need to win the members of reformist unions to the revolution.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Grigorii Zinoviev, the head of the Comintern, had declared prior to its second congress that since the IFTU had become a far more serious adversary of the CI than the Second International itself, the most pressing revolutionary task was "to crush the Amsterdam International."<sup>7</sup>

The role of communist parties and trade union policy thus became controversial issues in Moscow in the summer of 1920 and the position taken by the Bolsheviks on them made a confrontation with the syndicalist and industrialist delegates inevitable. To the Bolsheviks, the decision to imprint the CI irreversibly with their own program and organizational principles meant that the time had come to disabuse the syndicalists of their ideological aberrations. On the eve of the congress, Zinoviev asserted that the CI must "put an end to all syndicalist prejudices" on such questions as the role of the communist party. "It will have to separate the Communist wheat from the Syndicalist weeds."<sup>8</sup>

### The Foreign Syndicalists in Russia

Although the Bolsheviks intended above all that the second CI congress formalize the criteria for the establishment of communist political parties in the West, their program of revolutionary organization and action extended beyond that. They had also made it clear that syndicalists and industrialists would be welcome in Moscow. They saw in syndicalism

a dynamic move integration into by the CI. The CI extended "to all unions."<sup>9</sup> The syndicalists they had been called had come to communism and had brought the enthusiasm that the revolutionary soil as

Among the syndicalists on the committee for the Third International was an active and influential figure included as observer was Lepetit, who represented France. Also from France was Salan?), who spoke at the congress arrived in Russia as a syndicalist. In France he had survived, but during the revolution he emerged as heir to the syndicalist active in this area. Included in this group were Jack T. who along with William Gallacher and the Stewards, while in the United States. The IWOP (although the American branch on his behalf), but there were others including Paul F.

Like most foreign delegates received a warm and female committee in addition to the banquets, to revolution and cinema. The such elaborate program to foreign visitors to impress and finally to limit and control swept before the



a dynamic movement which, duly instructed and reshaped, warranted integration into the international forces of revolution, to be commanded by the CI. The CI's invitation to its second congress therefore expressly extended "to all groups of revolutionary syndicalists" and to the IWW unions.<sup>9</sup> The syndicalist and industrialist delegates were unaware that they had been called to Moscow to repudiate their own doctrine. They had come to contribute to the international struggle against capitalism and had brought with them such high spirits and revolutionary enthusiasm that they often regarded their first step onto Russia's revolutionary soil as highly symbolic, an event to be celebrated.

Among the syndicalists present was Alfred Rosmer of France's Committee for the Third International. He would support the CI and become an active and important officer within it. The French delegation also included as observers the radical syndicalists Marcel Vergeat and Bertho Lepetit, who represented the minority syndicalist movement in France. Also from France came the Spaniard best known as Wilkens (Aimé Salan?), who spoke for Spanish workers in northern France. Wilkens arrived in Russia as a political socialist and returned an anarcho-syndicalist. In Britain the pre-war syndicalist organizations had not survived, but during the war the radical Shop Stewards' Movement had emerged as heir to the syndicalist legacy, and many syndicalists were active in this anti-war, anti-parliamentary association. Its delegation included Jack Tanner, Co-President of the 1913 syndicalist congress, who along with Dave Ramsay represented the London Shop Stewards. William Gallacher and John Clarke represented the Scottish Shop Stewards, while J.T. Murphy held the mandate of the national organization. The IWW in the United States did not send a delegation (although the American journalist John Reed sometimes spoke on its behalf), but there were IWW supporters from elsewhere in attendance, including Paul Freeman of Australia and Dick Beech of Britain.<sup>10</sup>

Like most foreign visitors to Russia during this period the congress delegates received solicitous attention from their hosts. Entertainment and female companionship were provided at their hotels. They were in addition constantly fêted, taken on organized outings, treated to banquets, to revolutionary pageants and morality plays, to the opera and cinema. The Bolsheviks had a number of reasons for mounting such elaborate programs. They undoubtedly intended to be hospitable to foreign visitors, to keep them comfortable and entertained, but also to impress and flatter them, to make them pliable and agreeable, and to limit and control their exposure to revolutionary Russia, like travellers swept before the facades of Potemkin villages.

Some, like Wilkens, later lamented that so many of their purportedly revolutionary fellow delegates were bedazzled by these entertainments and spectacles and so readily accepted these lavish attentions – not to mention the food, shelter and services, luxurious by Russian standards – without looking behind them. They were equally troubled to discover that the Bolsheviks would resort to such devices. The communists made every effort “to keep the delegates under their spell,” Lepetit complained.<sup>11</sup> Some, like the Spaniard Angel Pestaña and the German Augustin Souchy, who combined profound sympathy with the Revolution with high revolutionary expectations and austere personal standards, remained immune to such blandishments. Many of the libertarian delegates often met with Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, the well-known anarchists earlier deported to Russia from the United States. Goldman commended Pestaña and Souchy as “the clearest minds” among them. The two men had arrived in Russia wholly sympathetic to the Revolution and its Bolshevik mentors, she recorded, but neither could be fêted “into seeing everything in roseate colours. They came as earnest students of the situation, desirous of getting the facts at first hand and observing the Revolution in action.”<sup>12</sup> Pestaña and Souchy would become outspoken defenders of the libertarian view in Moscow and, later, influential interpreters of the Russian experience within their own national movements.

“Slender, with eyes and a small moustache of a beautiful black,”<sup>13</sup> as one observer in Russia described him, Pestaña became the first member of the Spanish CNT to witness revolutionary Russia. Born in the province of Léon in 1886, abandoned in infancy by his mother, Pestaña was raised by his father, an illiterate, itinerant labourer in railway construction and mining. At fourteen, upon his father’s death, he had to abandon his earlier boys’ jobs to descend into the mines. He continued the life of labouring vagabondage and relentless poverty that he had known in his childhood, working as a miner, railway and farm worker, actor and musician. Reading anarchist journals and discussions with anarchist workers converted Pestaña. He soon moved into labour activism, which earned him repeated beatings and detentions in a series of jails. Later, sought by the police, he fled to France. Although he was only twenty when he went into exile, the hardships and miseries of a difficult and solitary life had already begun to etch into Pestaña’s face the sombre appearance that prompted his later syndicalist comrades affectionately to dub him The Knight of the Mournful Countenance.<sup>14</sup> In 1914 he returned to Spain, where he worked as a watchmaker and soon joined the prominent circle of labour leaders, which included José Negre,

Manuel Buenac in Barcelona. He and an organization of 1916, part of of the Catalonia of the CNT jou Knight of the M and most influen by the CNT to in making his w

Augustin Sou twenty-eight wh Ratibor in Uppe in the region. I where he discov other anarchists anarchists upon but by the work of the *Sozialistis* had founded in which it regarde as derelict in its 1914 found Sou delivered ill and The words regi provided Souchy in a military h mination of his and Fatherland’ syndicalists and antimilitarist ac authorities. In Norway and De the cell in which for antimilitarist study of Gustav suppression of th to the question of proletarian d a libertarian so cialism.<sup>20</sup> But he

Manuel Buenacasa, and Salvador Seguí, of the Syndicalist Atheneum in Barcelona. He devoted his considerable abilities both as a propagandist and an organizer to rebuilding the previously banned CNT. For much of 1916, part of it spent in prison, Pestaña served as acting Secretary of the Catalanian Regional Committee. In 1918 he became the editor of the CNT journal, *Solidaridad Obrera*. In four turbulent years the Knight of the Mournful Countenance had become one of the best known and most influential leaders of the CNT. One of three delegates appointed by the CNT to attend the second CI congress, only Pestaña succeeded in making his way to Russia.<sup>15</sup>

Augustin Souchy, described as a "red-haired horse-soldier,"<sup>16</sup> was twenty-eight when he arrived in Russia in 1920. He had been born at Ratibor in Upper Silesia into one of the earliest social democratic families in the region. In 1911 a fourth-class ticket brought Souchy to Berlin, where he discovered the writings of Gustav Landauer, Kropotkin and other anarchists. He was particularly impressed by the insistence of anarchists upon the realization of socialism not through legislative bodies but by the working class itself. Souchy threw himself into the activities of the *Sozialistischen Bund*, the first of which the charismatic Landauer had founded in Berlin in 1908.<sup>17</sup> The *Bund* sharply criticized the SPD, which it regarded as mired in parliamentarism and opportunism and as derelict in its duty to combat militarism. The outbreak of war in 1914 found Souchy visiting anarchists in Vienna. Deported, he was delivered ill and shackled to the Silesian garrison town of Neustadt. The words registered in red on his warrant - "Beware: Anarchist" - provided Souchy with a title for his memoirs over sixty years later. Placed in a military hospital, Souchy awaited neither recovery nor a determination of his fate, but fled to neutral Sweden. "The war 'for Kaiser and Fatherland' was not my battle."<sup>18</sup> In Sweden he worked with the syndicalists and radical Young Socialists. Souchy's revolutionary and antimilitarist activities brought him into periodic conflict with the authorities. In one eight-day period he was expelled from Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Arrested in Sweden in 1919, Souchy occupied the cell in which his friend Albert Jensen had just completed a sentence for antimilitarist propaganda. Souchy produced in confinement the first study of Gustav Landauer, murdered the preceding May following the suppression of the Bavarian revolution.<sup>19</sup> He had already devoted a book to the question of dictatorship. While Lenin had defended the necessity of proletarian dictatorship in *State and Revolution*, Souchy defended a libertarian socialism and rejected dictatorship in *Diktatur och Socialism*.<sup>20</sup> But he was not content to appraise this issue in the abstract;

judgment could rest only on a study of actual revolutionary conditions, which now became his objective. Deported to Germany, Souchy was soon active in Berlin in the revived syndicalist movement, where he met Rocker and worked on *Der Syndikalist*. But he wished above all to investigate conditions in Russia at first hand. Commissioned by the German syndicalists, he began a six-month study trip in April 1920. He had not been mandated to attend the second CI congress, however, and therefore participated in an unofficial capacity.

Souchy, Pestaña, and their fellow syndicalists and industrialists were to experience some rude shocks in Russia, not only in the second congress when the Bolsheviks unveiled the organizational principles they intended to impose upon the Comintern, but even before it. The distribution to the delegates of Lenin's "*Left-Wing*" *Communism* and Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism*, which stressed centralization, discipline and the repressive dictatorship of the proletariat, early signalled the direction the congress would take. And even before it opened the Bolsheviks began to formalize their international policy towards the trade unions. The All-Russian Trade Unions had proposed the establishment of a revolutionary trade union International to displace the revived IFTU already in 1919, and the head of the CI, Grigorii Zinoviev, had made a similar proposal to the ninth Bolshevik party congress in March 1920. The CI Executive Committee issued an appeal in April to all revolutionary trade unions to unite internationally. It added, significantly, that they should collectively form a section of the CI.<sup>21</sup> Zinoviev repeated the CI Executive's proposal at a meeting in Moscow in June where Russian, British and Italian trade union leaders agreed to form a Provisional Council to prepare a trade union congress for the purpose of founding a trade union International. In a concession to the British and Italian delegates a decision on the status of the proposed International was deferred.

Now, before the CI congress itself convened, a clear omen about its course appeared for the syndicalists at a session of the CI's Executive Committee to which they were invited. The meeting sought to secure support for the work of the new Provisional Council. The Bolsheviks intended the proposed labour International, eventually called the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), to be the instrument by which the CI would combat the Amsterdam International and simultaneously secure the support of syndicalist organizations and groups. The policies of the Provisional Council, reflecting those the Bolshevik leadership had been developing, inevitably aroused fears among the syndicalists.

The Bolshevik speaker, Lozovskii, now proposed that he had drafted the program of power, working cells, and the collaboration with the CI.<sup>22</sup>

The syndicalists rejected the demand. Not only was this the Council's simultaneous international policy. He also linked to the core workers. Tanner power as well. The Like Tanner he did that while the FA of power and dictatorship the CNT had for He specifically called the betrayal during which had become a fatal role in revolution pointed out that deserved this repression maintaining communist war and thus aided suffered in the United seconded Pestaña. in question, but in

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The Bolshevik spokesman on international trade union policy, Aleksandr Lozovskii, now presented for the approval of the delegates a document he had drafted that endorsed the dictatorship of the proletariat, the seizure of power, working within the reformist unions by creating communist cells, and the collaboration of the newly-founded Provisional Council and the CI.<sup>22</sup>

The syndicalists immediately protested the policies and phrasing of the document unexpectedly thrust upon them. Jack Tanner, for example, rejected the demand that revolutionaries work within reformist unions. Not only was this policy futile but it conflicted with the Provisional Council's simultaneous goal of splitting the labour movement internationally. He also rejected any conception of proletarian dictatorship linked to the communist party rather than directly to the organized workers. Tanner extended this argument to the conquest of political power as well. The objections of Souchy were even more far-reaching. Like Tanner he disavowed working within reformist unions. He observed that while the FAUD endorsed communism, it opposed the conquest of power and dictatorship.<sup>23</sup> In joining the protest Pestaña noted that the CNT had formally adopted the goal of libertarian communism. He specifically condemned a paragraph in the document speaking of the betrayal during the war of the unions embracing "apoliticism," which had become the "lackeys of imperialist capitalism, and had played a fatal role in retarding the final emancipation of the workers." He pointed out that of professedly syndicalist organizations only the CGT deserved this reproach, that precisely the political unions - those maintaining connections with the socialist parties - had supported the war and thus aided the capitalists. Citing the severe judicial repression suffered in the United States by the IWW for its anti-war attitude, Rosmer seconded Pestaña. The Bolsheviks grudgingly agreed to alter the passage in question, but in fact never did so.<sup>24</sup>

In later sessions, presided over by Lozovskii, the same issues - the dictatorship of the proletariat, the conquest of power, relations with the communists and with the CI, working within the reformist unions - continued to dominate. At one point Tanner and Souchy unsuccessfully introduced a counter-proposal, supported by Pestaña, advocating not the seizure of power but the violent overthrow of the state and of capitalism and the establishment of a provisional dictatorship of the workers' organizations. They also called for an international congress of revolutionary trade unionists to determine future policy.<sup>25</sup> While the Bolsheviks and their supporters were able to turn back this challenge, the syndicalists and revolutionary industrialists were sufficiently forceful



to prevent the Bolsheviks from imposing their own policies totally. On the question of relations with the CI, for example, the collective opposition staunchly refused to abandon the autonomy of the proposed labour International and therefore rejected the view of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Trade Unions that the labour association "enter the Third International as one of its sections," since the CI "ought to be the *État-Major* of all the revolutionary organizations of the proletariat."<sup>26</sup>

Dissatisfied with the course of the meetings, the Bolsheviks moved to stifle dissent. Although precisely the relationship of the Provisional Council and the proposed labour International to the Comintern was at issue, Lozovskii decreed that only delegates of unions already affiliated with and accepted by the CI could participate in subsequent discussions. In consequence the majority of the opposition withdrew. Lozovskii's manoeuvre ensured the acceptance of his document since of the remaining delegates (from Russia, Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Georgia, France and Pestaña of Spain) only Pestaña had not signed it. Rosmer had signed in the name of the minority syndicalists in France. In the end the Spaniard, who felt obligated by the CNT's decision to adhere to the CI, also added his name, but stipulated that the CNT reserved final judgment, particularly concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat, the conquest of power and relations with the communists.<sup>27</sup> With the congress itself due to convene, further sessions of the Provisional Council were postponed.

### The Second Congress of the Comintern

Within the congress itself the syndicalists were in for even greater buffeting. Any illusions fostered by its first congress about the CI as a loose alliance of co-existing groups of disparate ideology united mainly by their revolutionary commitment were quickly dispelled. The Bolsheviks had drawn up in great detail a program of organization and strategy that they intended the CI to embrace and implement and they used every means to ensure this result. They could exploit the great prestige they now enjoyed in the revolutionary movement; they could determine who would chair the important working committees; they could manage the expression of dissent on the congress floor. They could also control the allocation of votes within the assembly. Over 200 delegates attended the second congress. Of 169 deliberative votes,

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136 represented communist organizations. To guarantee acceptance of their policies against both the radical elements within the communist movement and those outside it, the Bolsheviks assigned 64 votes, or 38 percent, to their own national party. They supplemented this by allotting sufficient votes to 'safe' delegates to ensure a reliable majority. In such circumstances the Bolsheviks could be confident that the assembly would sanction their views on such questions as the role of the communist party in the revolution.

The theses on this issue, drafted and introduced by the head of the CI, Zinoviev, clearly delineated the Bolshevik view of the overarching preeminence of the party. The document declared that the CI

decisively rejects the view that the proletariat can accomplish its revolution without having an independent political party of its own. Every class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle, which is inevitably transformed into civil war, is the conquest of political power.

Zinoviev's theses explicitly repudiated the policy of the American IWW and the European syndicalists, whose campaign against a workers' political party "helps only to support the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary 'social-democrats'." The syndicalists and revolutionary industrialists were eager to combat "the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, but they do not know how. They fail to grasp that without an independent political party the working class is a body without a head." Their ideology marked an advance over the counter-revolutionary program of the Second International, "but in comparison with revolutionary Marxism, i.e. with communism, syndicalism and industrialism are a step backward."<sup>28</sup>

Despite earlier indications of mounting Bolshevik intransigence, the syndicalists were not prepared for such a direct and uncompromising attack. Zinoviev's introductory speech unleashed a furor of protest. Tanner took the rostrum to challenge the value of a workers' political party. The work of the Shop Stewards' Movement in Britain, which emphasized the revolutionary importance of factory committees, he argued, had to be conducted in the face of the Labour Party, whose leaders were often the same men who struggled against it as trade union officials. He pointedly questioned whether party and proletarian dictatorship were equivalent. The most conscious and competent minority of the workers' movement could provide the guidance required without forming a political party. Did the Bolsheviks believe they had only something to teach the West and nothing to learn from it? Tanner urged that a degree of autonomy be left to individual movements. Others

seconded his assertion that while the Second International had been formless and lacked character, the Third was overcompensating in its dogmatism. Against the charge of dogmatism ("this expression is quite out of place here"), Lenin argued that an International would be superfluous if individual parties remained free to make their own decisions. To Tanner's advocacy of a non-political guiding minority he responded that "there is in reality no difference between us. . . . If this minority is really class conscious, if it is able to lead the masses, and is capable of solving every question, it actually becomes a party."<sup>29</sup> But to do so, it "must organize itself, create a solid organization, impose a discipline based on the principles of democratic centralism. Then you have the party."<sup>30</sup>

Pestaña also challenged the theses, particularly their characterization of syndicalism as reactionary.<sup>31</sup> But unlike Tanner, Pestaña emphasized another dimension of syndicalist ideology, stressing not the guiding elite but the spontaneous mass character of a revolutionary uprising. The Russian Revolution was one thing, the Bolshevik seizure of power quite another. He dismissed as gratuitous, as belied by history, the claim that revolution everywhere required the existence of communist parties. Political parties did not make revolutions; they merely organized coups, "and a *coup d'état* is not a revolution."<sup>32</sup> History demonstrated that from 1789 onward revolutions were made without parties (at which point Trotsky shouted, "You forget the Jacobins!").<sup>33</sup> For Pestaña the origins of revolution were to be found in the widest cultural circumstances of a people, in the disparity "between its aspirations and the organization that commands and governs it." The more or less violent expression "of a spiritual condition favourable to a change in the norms that govern the life of a people," revolution blossomed out of a complex evolutionary process requiring the committed effort of several generations, Pestaña argued, "and there is no party that can arrogate to itself the privilege of being the only one that has created this process." The communist party, he continued, was requisite neither to the making nor the maintenance of a revolution; nor was the seizure of political power requisite to the liberation of the workers. "You did not make the revolution in Russia alone," he declared to the Bolsheviks, "you cooperated in its making and you were fortunate enough to gain power."<sup>34</sup>

Trotsky responded to the syndicalists in general and to Pestaña in particular. Precisely because he knew the value and necessity of the party, Trotsky observed, and because he saw on the one hand a socialist opportunist like Scheidemann in Germany, who utilized political power,

and on the other hand their bourgeois leaders, he considered them," he said, "indispensable in France as in the non-political world to become the prompter of the and illusion too. Trotsky to deal with to speak of Revolution. spontaneous. De task. Trotsky decide how to had just made

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and on the other the syndicalists who "not only want to struggle against their bourgeoisie, but who, unlike Scheidemann, want to decapitate them," he considered it essential to convince the syndicalists of the indispensability of the party.<sup>35</sup> The work of the minority syndicalists in France was praiseworthy, although they simply did not realize that the non-political revolutionary minority they esteemed must inevitably become the communist party. Presentiments of future developments had prompted them to play a revolutionary role "in spite of their prejudices and illusions." And there would have to be a communist party in Spain too. Trotsky gently mocked Pestaña, who as a syndicalist "is not willing to deal with politics. This is extremely interesting. He does not wish to speak of the Communist Party in order not to offend against the Revolution." But revolutions could not be wholly and simply spontaneous. Decisions had to be made and only the party could fulfill this task. Trotsky illustrated his argument by way of example. Who should decide how to respond to the peace proposals that the Polish government had just made? The Council of People's Commissars?

But that Council must be under a certain control. That control cannot be exercised by the unorganized working masses. We therefore have to summon the Central Committee of the Party and have it formulate an answer to this proposition. . . . The same refers to the agrarian problem, to the food questions, and to all others. Who is going to solve these problems in Spain? It will be the Communist Party, and I am certain that Comrade Pestaña is going to be one of its members.<sup>36</sup>

Souchy's response to the theses both indicted their dogmatism on a broad front and reflected the persistent *ouvriérisme* of the syndicalist movement. Rather than beginning with preconceived notions, revolutionary theory should derive from the conscious development of the tendencies and means embedded in the workers' actual struggle with the bourgeoisie. A fighting International, Souchy asserted, could be created only if it embodied and expressed "the living spirit of the working class movement," found not "in the heads of the theoreticians but in the hearts of the workers." He maintained that the bourgeoisie acknowledged the threat of the syndicalist movement by persecuting it everywhere, while they had no fear of workers' political parties. The political party itself, after all, and not anti-parliamentarism, was the legacy of the bourgeoisie. In Souchy's view, the Bolsheviks sanctioned parliamentary methods just when the most advanced elements of the proletariat were growing progressively anti-parliamentary, as demonstrated not only by the syndicalists and industrialists, but by the majority of the German communists as well. It was wiser to heed what was actually happening

in the revolutionary labour movement than to set out from a "doctrinaire point of view to bring in parliamentarism under the pretext that it is good for propaganda, after having put it out of doors to the sound of trumpets." Souchy also disputed Zinoviev's suggestion that the trade unions would be unable to reorganize the economic life of society. Who, he asked, should organize the economy? "Some bourgeois elements which we organised into parties, who are not in touch with. . . . economic life, or rather those. . . . near the source of production and consumption?"<sup>37</sup>

But the efforts of the minority were unavailing against the large pro-Bolshevik majority in the congress. Zinoviev's theses easily won approval.

The syndicalists were ideologically reprimanded not only during the debates on the role of the communist party, but throughout the congress, and their rebuttals had no effect. Bukharin's theses sanctioning the participation of revolutionaries in parliamentary elections and procedures were expressly directed against the IWW and the revolutionary syndicalists (as well as the German KAPD), as genuinely revolutionary but anti-parliamentary groups. Bukharin condemned anti-parliamentarism as "a naive and childish doctrine which is beneath criticism," as "blind to the possibility of revolutionary parliamentarianism."<sup>38</sup> An IWW supporter combatted Bukharin's theses in committee and when they came before the full assembly the minority, with as little success, attacked them as opportunist and debilitating. William Gallacher of the Scottish Shop Stewards perceived two mutually exclusive policies: parliamentarism "calls forth in the masses a feeling of subservience to all kinds of democratic phrases, the other keeps alive the revolutionary spirit." In his view the CI now had to choose to go "the way of subservience or the way of fighting." Souchy challenged the policy of revolutionary parliamentarism as resurrecting "the old mistakes of Social Democracy in its infancy," as no more than a "search for new arguments in support of the old worn out parliamentarism." Souchy found the defense of parliamentarism to be bereft of logic, to rest on dogma alone, and he vigorously resumed his indictment of the Bolsheviks as incorrigibly doctrinaire. "You are Marxists, and that is sufficient; you are theoretically prejudiced, dogmatic." Marxists, he asserted, "have imbibed the idea of parliamentarism with their mothers' milk; with these dogmatists parliamentarism is bred in the bone."<sup>39</sup> Souchy's outcry reflected in part the exasperation of a minority, helpless against the program being inexorably imposed on the congress.

Lenin's theses on the tasks of the CI also rebuked the minority. In the section concerned with correcting policy, Lenin directed Anglo-Saxon

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communists to explain "the incorrectness" of the views of those in the Shop Stewards' Movement and the IWW and to seek "to unite with these organizations into a single communist party." Calling attention to the divisions among anarchists on the issues of proletarian dictatorship and Soviet power, he urged the communists to work to win the workers for the Comintern by weaning them from anarchism.<sup>40</sup>

The proceedings were making it clear that as eager as the Bolsheviks were to secure the support of all revolutionary groups, particularly that of the syndicalists, they would nevertheless insist that the desired collaboration be on Bolshevik terms. This was as evident in the treatment of the trade union question as of any other. Karl Radek, whom Pestaña described, not without grounds, as an "*antisindicalista rabioso*," chaired the committee that considered this question.<sup>41</sup> Even Rosmer, much more sympathetic to the Bolsheviks than the other syndicalists on the committee, found the dogmatic attitude of Radek and his colleagues dismaying; they had in his opinion decided in advance simply to ignore all dissenters. The opposition, which on this issue included Tanner and Ramsay of England, Pestaña of Spain, Souchy of Germany, and John Reed of the United States, could therefore make little headway within the committee. The call for close collaboration between communists and syndicalists and the demand to work within the reformist unions drew strong protests. Rosmer agreed with the Bolshevik policy of avoiding splits and working within the reformist unions, but considered this section of the theses to be "formulated so brutally, so summarily, that it could only offend and certainly not convince."<sup>42</sup> The minority vigorously combatted the theses not only in committee but also on the floor of the congress. In presenting the document to the assembly Radek complained that some delegates demonstrated tendencies towards syndicalism, "a movement which has taken a stand against the proletarian government and against the dictatorship of the proletariat." Communists saw syndicalism as "a passing malady of the revolutionary workers," and therefore sought to cooperate with syndicalists. "But at the same time we must point out to them all the follies of their ideology."<sup>43</sup> Despite the efforts of the opposition in the ensuing prolonged discussion, during which Radek exhibited his penchant for personal invective, the assembly readily accepted the theses.

The proposed statutes of the CI elicited further strife. The syndicalists and industrialists especially opposed the attack upon union autonomy embodied in article fourteen, requiring labour unions to form a mere section of the CI and to secure representation in its congresses through their national communist party. It further called for an exchange of

representatives between the Executive Committee of the CI and its trade union section.<sup>44</sup> John Reed lamented that the trade union International was apparently to be allowed even less independence than that of the communist youth. His proposal to table this article failed.<sup>45</sup>

On this as on other issues in the congress the syndicalist opposition could make no headway, both because it operated within an assembly intended above all for representatives of political parties and because it found itself thwarted at every turn by the general and uncritical enthusiasm of most delegates for the Russian Revolution. The delegates of non-party labour organizations had also been invited to Moscow, but they constituted a small minority in the assembly.

The Bolsheviks, moreover, now made abundantly clear the essentially political character they wished the CI to bear. They did so in a number of ways, among them by formalizing their position on the role of the communist party in the revolution, discussed above, by their insistence that revolutionary labour organizations secure representation in the CI through their national communist party, above all by the famous twenty-one conditions of admission to the Comintern, that would soon prove so divisive within the socialist movement outside Russia. The twenty-one points were designed to ensure that no social democratic opportunists or other unreliable elements would penetrate and dilute the CI, to ensure more generally that the new communist parties would be purified, highly centralized, disciplined, resolute and wholly reliable organs of "the international general staff of the proletarian revolution," as Zinoviev put it.<sup>46</sup>

The syndicalist delegates took little interest and small part in these discussions over wholly political criteria of admission, though they were fully aware of the character being given to the CI by its second congress. From their perspective, moreover, the ninth of the twenty-one points reiterated yet again the communist threat to the autonomy of the unions by directing that every party wishing to enter the CI systematically organize communist cells within the trade unions, workers' councils, factory committees and cooperatives. Such cells, it added, "must be completely subordinate to the party."<sup>47</sup> Despite vocal opposition to the twenty-one points even by some political delegates, the conditions of admission were accepted with only two dissenting votes (the syndicalists abstained), a reflection in part of the enormous prestige that the Bolsheviks commanded within the wider revolutionary movement.

The Bolsheviks easily turned to good account the wave of popularity upon which they rode, for it served to enhance the majorities by which their policies were endorsed, simultaneously to ensure that whatever

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hearing the opposition secured would not be before a receptive audience, which intensified the feeling of the minority that it had encountered a Bolshevik juggernaut in the congress. In an article not otherwise critical of Moscow, for example, John Clarke, a Shop Stewards' delegate, later wrote:

One could not elude the ever intruding suspicion that every item brought forward was presented for unqualified acceptance, and as one watched the proceedings and observed how little the most skillfully conducted opposition influenced the crowd of Bolshevik-worshippers present, one could be righteously excused for suggesting the 'cut and dried' policy was mainly responsible for the 'success' of the Congress.

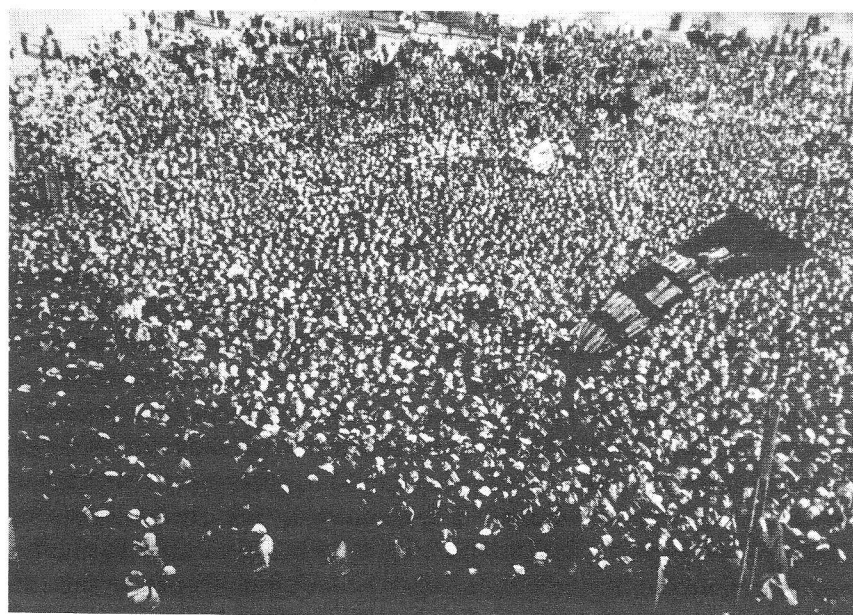
The voice of the opposition was muffled in other ways as well. When the theses on the trade unions drawn up by Radek's committee reached the congress floor those who were to present the opposing view, in a departure from previous procedure, were simply appointed. But none of the syndicalist or industrialist delegates, the primary opposition on this issue, were so designated, which astounded and disgusted Pestaña.<sup>48</sup>

The ratification of article fourteen of the Comintern statutes, requiring the trade unions to secure representation in the CI through their national communist parties, jeopardized the work of the Provisional Council of the RILU which resumed after the congress had closed. Initially Pestaña alone represented the dissenting view in the renewed meetings, for some delegates had already left Moscow and only the delegates of Russia, Bulgaria, Spain, and Rosmer of France, took part. The remainder of the opposition – particularly Souchy, and members of the IWW and the Shop Stewards – were boycotting the sessions because of Lozovskii's earlier refusal to let them participate in its discussions. Lozovskii, moreover, continued to insist that only those unions endorsing the dictatorship of the proletariat and the conquest of political power would be admitted to the trade union congress being planned. Pestaña now declared his own continued cooperation to be futile in view of article fourteen, since the CNT would not support the prospective congress unless trade union autonomy were respected. Only when Lozovskii urged that the proposed congress itself decide the disputed question did Pestaña agree to continue working with the committee, though he warned it to nurture no illusions that the CNT would change its attitude.

When Tomskii of the All-Russian Trade Union Executive took over the chairmanship of the committee a more conciliatory approach emerged. Lozovskii had repulsed Pestaña's repeated recommendations that the congress be held outside Russia. In Lozovskii's absence the



*Above: Lenin addressing the second congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1920.  
Below: a mass demonstration in Uritzki Square, Petrograd, during the second congress.*



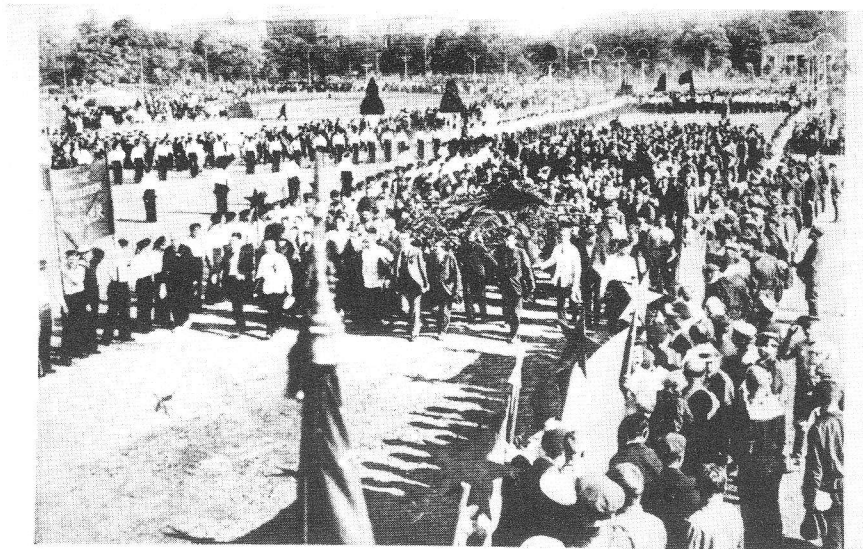
Delegates

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Délégués portant des couronnes sur les tombes des camarades morts pour la Révolution  
en octobre 1917  
et aux monuments de Karl Liebknecht et de Rosa Luxemburg

Above: delegates to the second Comintern congress bearing wreaths to honour the fallen of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Spartakist rising. Below: a photo from the 1920 congress of the Italian USI. From left: Armando Borghi, the visiting Spaniard Eusebio C. Carbo, Virgilia D'Andrea and Errico Malatesta.



He aquí una importante fotografía histórica tomada en 1920, con ocasión del Congreso de la U. S. I., celebrado en Florencia.  
En ella aparecen de izquierda a derecha: Armando Borghi, Eusebio C. Carbo, Virgilia D'Andrea, recientemente fallecida, y Enrique Malatesta.



committee accepted Pestaña's proposal that it be held in Russia only if efforts to prepare it in Italy or Sweden failed (though such efforts were never made). Tomsii also permitted an alteration whereby labour organizations practicing the class struggle would be invited to the proposed congress even if they had not formally endorsed the proletarian dictatorship and the seizure of power. In view of this modification the committee dispatched Pestaña to invite the excluded syndicalists to join again in the work of the committee, which they consented to do.<sup>49</sup>

If most syndicalist delegates, disillusioned by the course of the congress, were left with few doubts concerning the intensely political character of the CI, they still harboured hopes for the formation of a revolutionary labour International, as had the syndicalists of the 1913 London congress. They were consequently reluctant to turn their backs on the proposed RILU, even if from the first all the evidence suggested that the Bolsheviks meant the RILU to be subordinate to the Comintern, just as they insisted upon subordinating trade unions to the communist party within each country. The syndicalists, in short, wished to share in the work of the Russian Revolution on an international scale as labour bodies, but not at the price of yielding to political control and sacrificing their cherished autonomy. Thus Lozovskii's promise that the work of the Provisional Council was in fact provisional, that the impending labour congress would itself determine the RILU's relationship to the CI and that of the unions to the communist parties in the various countries, partially rekindled their hope. They could now support the proposed congress, though most did so with forebodings.

The dissidents who returned to the organizational committee did not waver in their earlier refusal to sign the proclamation for the coming congress. Of the syndicalists and industrialists, aside from Rosmer, only Pestaña put his signature to it, though with express reservations. The document endorsed the dictatorship of the proletariat, the formation of communist cells within existing unions, and an interchange of delegates between the CI and the Provisional Council. It proclaimed the workers' duty to be to organize their trade unions "alongside the political organizations of the proletarian Communist International and in strict liaison with it."<sup>50</sup>

A latecomer to the sessions was the Italian Armando Borghi, "with a handsome face, youthful and Mazzini-like, bearded, and an ardent voice like velvet," as Victor Serge recalled.<sup>51</sup> The representative of the USI, Borghi arrived too late for the Comintern congress itself and his

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sojourn in Russia proved brief, since news of the occupation of the factories in Italy soon sent him rushing homeward. But Borghi remained long enough to be disillusioned by the revolutionary doctrines and strategies he encountered in Moscow. Serge, a Belgian-born Russian once active in the anarchist movement in France but now a member of the Russian Communist Party, arranged to confer privately with Borghi, whom he had met during the Italian's exile in Paris before the war, and acquaint him with the situation in Russia. Serge told Borghi that the party had devoured the soviets, that it regarded all dissent as treason to be eliminated, that a ruthless discipline was being imposed in the factories, that the dictatorial propensities of a Trotsky were unlimited.<sup>52</sup> Invited to a meeting where a number of Russians and others were preparing an appeal to the Italian proletariat, Borghi found the document Bukharin presented to the group to be an "indigestible" potpourri of "iron discipline and communist infallibility." He alone opposed it. He recalled the effect of his arguments for syndical independence and against the claims of a single party to monopolize the revolutionary idealism that should penetrate and unify the trade union movement: "Wasted efforts!"<sup>53</sup> Although the USI had much earlier announced its support for the CI, the Provisional Council of the RILU hoped to win the affiliation of the USI's trade union rival in Italy, the larger, reformist CGL. The Council therefore hesitated to associate with Borghi, who gained admission to the Council's deliberations only with the strenuous support of the other syndicalist delegates.<sup>54</sup> The conception he encountered of the subordination of the labour organizations to the communist party within the planned RILU dismayed Borghi; despite being pressured to sign the Council's documents he refused to do so, and he prompted Pestaña to strike his signature from one of them as well.<sup>55</sup>

### The Refractory Few

In addition to the ideological cleavages between the CI and the syndicalists, aggravated by the Bolsheviks' mounting preference for pontification over discussion, Moscow's increasingly repressive policies toward the anarchist and syndicalist movements in Russia deepened the disillusionment of many libertarian delegates with the Bolsheviks. Rumours of the oppression endured by the Russian libertarian movement were confirmed personally for some delegates through conversations not only with such anarchist residents in Russia as Emma Goldman and

Alexander Berkman,<sup>56</sup> but also with members of the native syndicalist movement. The Russian syndicalists had obviously not been invited to the CI congress, but Alexander Schapiro and others took advantage of the meetings to confer with their foreign counterparts on the state of the movement in Russia. They expressed their misgivings and fears to such delegates as Souchy, Pestaña, Borghi and Lepetit.<sup>57</sup> The Russians entrusted to the syndicalist delegates two appeals from their own movement to the world proletariat, one concerning the war in Poland, the other the persecution of the Russian libertarians.

Most syndicalist delegates, moreover, also paid the ritual visit to Kropotkin, who lived in Dmitrov, near Moscow, to discuss the situation with the anarchist prince and to hear his critique of the Bolshevik regime and his defense of the libertarians. Kropotkin no doubt reiterated the main points of the message he had recently sent to the workers of the West, which was published in Britain while the CI congress was underway. Kropotkin warned that foreign intervention in Russia had intensified the evils inherent in party dictatorship and state communism. "We learn in Russia," he wrote, "*how Communism cannot be introduced,*" above all because centralized party dictatorship had undermined the great contribution of the Russian Revolution, its "grand idea," the workers' and peasants' soviets through which the energies of the producing masses could be channeled into revolutionary reconstruction. Kropotkin concluded, significantly, by looking beyond the domestic situation in Russia. The times required that "the idea of a great International of all working men of the world must be renewed." Political associations, like the Third International, dominated by a single party, had a right to exist, but the more fundamental revolutionary need was for "a union of all the Trade Unions of the world - of all those who produce the wealth of the world - united, in order to free the production of the world from its present enslavement to Capital."<sup>58</sup>

A number of syndicalist and industrial unionist delegates at one time or another were also invited to the Kremlin for an audience with Lenin, to discuss the situation in their own countries as well as their differences with the communists. Lenin exercised considerable personal influence upon some of them, while others resisted the spell cast by his enormous prestige and by his forceful, intense personality.<sup>59</sup> Souchy believed he had been summoned to be cured of the infantile malady of left communism that Lenin had recently written against, particularly as Lenin immediately launched into a lecture on communist orthodoxy. Like others before and after him, Souchy raised the issue of the regime's treatment of the Russian libertarians, to which Lenin replied that while

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the anarchists were of great value in the first phase of revolution, if in the second phase they did not respect revolutionary state power they must be considered counter-revolutionary. When Borghi arrived at the Kremlin - "the Vatican City of the Bolsheviks" as he called it - Lenin immediately launched a defense of centralization, as he had on the occasion of Souchy's visit. Was centralization not necessary, Lenin asked, if liberty was killing the revolution? But that implied that tyranny could not be suppressed, Borghi responded. To Lenin's analogy of the revolution as a surgical act, after which the patient would temporarily be bedridden and under a doctor's care, Borghi replied that a "doctor does not hospitalize the healthy," a reference to the Bolshevik's persecution of revolutionaries. Queried by Borghi, Lenin observed that the Russian anarchists and syndicalists were unwittingly working towards the re-establishment of the old regime. How did they do so? Borghi asked. "With their criticism." But to Wilkens Lenin observed that the libertarians had the right to criticize in Russia, where they enjoyed a degree of freedom unknown in other countries. Wilkens asked whether another revolution would not be necessary against the bureaucratic elite that centralization necessarily created, and reported Lenin's response: "If this bureaucracy, if the adherents of the communist party . . . constitute themselves as a class, it will be necessary to make another revolution and it will be made."<sup>60</sup>

Lenin could make no headway with Pestaña, whom he greatly respected. A later Spanish delegate to Russia, Joaquín Maurín, recalled the "excellent impression" Pestaña had made personally on the communist leaders and especially Lenin, who viewed him as "an intelligent and puritan worker, endowed with a great gift of observation and of critical sense, for whom the idea of liberty is the cornerstone of his ideological edifice."<sup>61</sup> Asked by Lenin whether his experience in Russia had altered his opinions, Pestaña responded that it had instead reconfirmed them. Pestaña repeated his view that while a revolution inevitably involved violence it did not necessarily require formalized class dictatorship. That the syndicalists had remained in a minority in the congress had not shaken his faith. Pestaña in fact found the mentality of most delegates to be more bourgeois than revolutionary, as he explained to Lenin, citing the contrast between their revolutionary rhetoric in the congress and their behaviour away from the sessions, as at the hotel where they lorded it over the employees and put their shoes out at night to be polished by Russian workers.<sup>62</sup> Although neither Pestaña nor Lenin could alter the other's views, the two parted on terms of mutual respect. Lenin's various meetings with the dissident syndicalists were in fact

all cordial, though some of his interlocutors remarked upon his authoritarian character, which appeared to be in keeping with the increasingly insistent claims of the Bolsheviks to constitute the final arbiters of revolutionary doctrine and strategy.

If Lepetit and Vergeat met privately with Lenin no record has survived. Long-standing internationalist activists, the two never had the opportunity to report personally to their comrades in France, for they apparently perished in the Arctic Ocean in a desperate attempt to reach Norway on their homeward journey. Certainly Vergeat, the skilled metalworker, and Lepetit, the construction worker and veteran of French jails, were dismayed by much they encountered in Russia and their letters home expressed their disappointment. They could commend the enormous efforts of the Russian communists but simultaneously lament, for example, that precisely the workers themselves were often excluded from decision-making in what was professedly a workers' revolution.<sup>63</sup> The two preferred to spend their time investigating conditions of life in Russia at first hand rather than attending formal meetings. They declined to represent the minority syndicalists of France in the CI congress, though they informally attended a number of sessions. Lepetit recorded in a letter home, published in *Le Libéraire*, that he found nothing of interest in the congress despite the hullabaloo being made about it. Most delegates arrived "seduced by the prestige of the Revolution" and with little interest in serious discussions, so that "the theses of the Russian communists are all adopted by near unanimity. That no longer seems like a congress, but rather like a council, where one comes simply to approve the orders, the decisions of the church; it is not very flattering for the foreign delegates."<sup>64</sup> Wilkens later wrote that the Russians in the many factories that Vergeat and Lepetit visited were delighted finally to encounter foreign delegates who were themselves workers. Victor Serge recalled the athletic Lepetit in Russia, "cheerful, suspicious, questioning, who suddenly vowed that in France 'the revolution will be made entirely differently!'" Before his return Lepetit told Wilkens that the time had certainly come for the syndicalists of the West to discuss and take a position on the issues of the Revolution. More than ever must the Russian Revolution be defended.

But I do not believe that state communism is useful for sustaining the Revolution; on the contrary, I see that it kills it. The formula 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' is entirely specious. And at the *minoritaire* congress [in France, scheduled for September 1920] I will defend my point of view without mercy.<sup>65</sup>

Most syndicalist delegates attending the second CI congress therefore

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departed Russia with heavy spirits. The issues of organization that had dominated the congress had highlighted the profound differences between the Bolsheviks and themselves, hitherto concealed by the general enthusiasm for the Revolution and the fact that Bolshevik ideology itself had only slowly been shifting and hardening between 1917 and the second congress. Many syndicalist delegates now had the sense that they had been summoned to Moscow not to make their distinctive contribution to the international revolutionary struggle, but to be magisterially tutored and corrected, to do penance for their ideological sins. The opportunity to observe revolutionary Russia at first hand, and the increasing awareness of the Bolsheviks' harsh policy toward domestic libertarian dissent, further served to temper and dispel much of the enthusiasm they had brought to Moscow. Even the hopes for a genuinely revolutionary labour International, thwarted for many years among the syndicalists, were muted by the realization that the Bolsheviks would not be likely to permit the proposed RILU to assume a genuinely independent character. The refusal of many syndicalist and industrialist delegates to sign Bolshevik policy statements clearly signalled their disillusionment. They expressed their disappointment in other ways as well. Before his departure, for example, Borghi wrote the Secretary of the CI declaring that the USI reserved judgment regarding the policies accepted by the second congress. When he recalled his fading hopes that an autonomous revolutionary labour International would emerge from Moscow, Pestaña spoke not only for himself. "All my beautiful illusions came to fall one by one," he wrote, "withered and dead, like the petals of the rose fall when they lack the sap of the plant."<sup>66</sup>

### **The Syndicalists in Quest of Unity: The 1920 Berlin Conference**

The year 1920 proved an important one for the syndicalists, though not always in immediately obvious ways. It was in that year that the Bolsheviks, unambiguously condemning syndicalist policies, had enthroned the communist party as the supreme arbiter of all revolutionary questions, and fashioned the CI into an insistently political and categorically centralist organization. But they had also blunted the impact of these actions on the syndicalist movement by simultaneously announcing the imminent establishment of a revolutionary trade union International. Many of those who would play important roles in the movement of syndicalist internationalism, moreover, first made contact with one

another in 1920, re-establishing and frequently re-stocking an international network of activists. In that year, to cite a few examples, Souchy first met his co-nationals Rocker and Kater; Borghi and Pestaña met the leading German syndicalists; Wilkens, Souchy, Pestaña, Borghi and others first met in Russia, where they also made the acquaintance of Schapiro and other Russian syndicalists; and Bernard Lansink Jr. of The Netherlands and Frans Severin of Sweden either met or renewed their acquaintance with the chief German syndicalists in Berlin in December. For 1920 was also the year of the first serious post-war international syndicalist conference.

While the syndicalists' efforts to convene a congress after the war in Holland, Denmark or Sweden had failed, their desire to arrange such a meeting received fresh impetus with the news that Moscow intended to found a new and revolutionary trade union International in 1921. Planning for the congress now centred in Berlin, where geographic proximity kept the German syndicalists better informed than their foreign counterparts on revolutionary developments in Russia. The Germans of the FAUD had recommended an international conference for 1920 at their 1919 congress, when they had outlined their attitude towards the dictatorship of the proletariat and collaboration with the communist party. Many of the visitors and delegates moving to and from Moscow passed through Berlin, moreover, which fostered extensive discussion of the Russian situation and gave the Germans the opportunity to begin making plans with the more sympathetic of these travellers. Pestaña, for example, paused in Berlin on his way back to Spain for discussions with the leaders of the German movement, as did Borghi.

On the recommendation of German, Dutch, Swedish, Italian and Spanish syndicalists, the FAUD convened an international conference in Berlin in December.<sup>67</sup> The conference acknowledged the 1913 London congress, whose work had been destroyed by the war, as its predecessor, and saw its task as that of seeking syndicalist accord on the international question and particularly on the forthcoming RILU congress, then scheduled for May 1921.<sup>68</sup> Delegations with full voting rights represented seven countries. Germany was represented by the FAUD; France by the *Comités Syndicalistes Révolutionnaires* (CSR); Sweden by the SAC; Holland by the NAS; the United States by the IWW; Argentina by the FORA; and Great Britain by the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement, a latecomer. The Germans also held a mandate from the small Czechoslovakian syndicalist organization. In addition the conference received testimonies of support from the Danish *Fagopposi-*

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*tionens Sammenslutning*, the *Norsk Syndikalistisk Federation* and the Portuguese CGT. All in all, the syndicalist delegates actually present claimed to represent around a million workers.<sup>69</sup>

Although the second CI congress had thrown down a doctrinal challenge to the syndicalists, the Berlin conference did not represent a concerted effort to defend their ideology. A striking feature of the conference, to the contrary, was the persistent enthusiasm for Moscow and the degree to which theoretical differences between communists and syndicalists were muted in the proceedings, despite the efforts of some delegates to call attention to them. There were a number of related reasons for this. First, while many syndicalists who had witnessed the CI congress in 1920 and personally dealt with the Bolsheviks had left Moscow disillusioned, many syndicalists abroad had been able to shift their enthusiasm for Moscow from the now highly politicized CI to the proposed trade union International. Second, two of Moscow's potential critics, the USI and the CNT, were not represented in Berlin. The USI, the most recalcitrant organization involved in the recent occupation of the factories in Italy, was still recovering from this dramatic encounter.<sup>70</sup> Upon his return from Russia, Borghi privately advised a few of his closest colleagues, including his companion Virgilia D'Andrea (whom the USI Executive had appointed temporary head in Borghi's absence) and Errico Malatesta, that "the distance between us and the Bolsheviks is astronomical."<sup>71</sup> The USI refused to participate in the negotiated settlement of the occupations being engineered by the Italian government and the CGL, and Borghi campaigned strongly against it. Within a few weeks the government acted to silence him and Borghi had been in jail for over two months when the Berlin conference met. In Spain Governor Anido had launched a counter-offensive against the CNT in Catalonia in late November and a great number of its leaders had been arrested. Two weeks before the conference opened three dozen leading *cenetistas* were transported to imprisonment on the island of Minorca, where they would remain for well over a year. As for Pestaña, after leaving Berlin he travelled to Italy to consult with the Italian syndicalists, where he was imprisoned and his documents from Russia were confiscated. Pestaña was released two months later to return to Spain, only to be immediately imprisoned there as well, four days before the Berlin conference met. Pestaña would be unable for quite some time to publicize his negative impressions of Moscow within the CNT, now driven underground. The USI and the CNT notified the conference that domestic repression prevented them from sending delegates.<sup>72</sup> Third, two of the organizations represented in Berlin were already pledged to

the RILU Council. The British Shop Stewards' Movement had earlier adhered. Although he had been a sharp critic of communist policy in Moscow, in Berlin Tanner faithfully reflected the new orientation of his organization. The French CSR had similarly affiliated with the RILU Council. The presence of these two organizations in Berlin contributed to the impression that the differences between the syndicalists and Moscow were by no means insuperable.

The CSR delegates, dispatched to Berlin to defend the RILU, appeared to represent a more cohesive movement than was the case. The CSR had grown out of the attempt of the *minoritaires* to organize themselves after the CGT congress of Lyon in September 1919. While they would do so with notable success, the CSR was not ideologically homogeneous. It constituted an amalgam of anarcho-syndicalists, revolutionary syndicalists and communist-syndicalists, imperfectly fused by mutual opposition to the *majoritaires* and the desire to carry the CGT into the Third International, rather than by agreement on any further positive program. During 1920, which saw the union movement in retreat in France, the rift between *majoritaires* and *minoritaires* not only deepened, but differences among the *minoritaires* began to be felt. The general strike the CGT had called in May to support striking railwaymen had failed completely and the organization witnessed a mass exodus from its ranks.<sup>73</sup> The experience demoralized both *majoritaires* and *minoritaires*, who blamed one another, further embittering their relations. During 1920, moreover, the favourable attitude of the *minoritaires* towards the CI had been shaken by the policies adopted at its second congress and, to a lesser extent, by the controversy surrounding the attitudes of the vanished Lepetit and Vergeat. Discordant notes began to be heard within the CSR. Its supporters nevertheless confronted the unified opposition of the *majoritaires* and their own aversion to splitting the CGT remained strong, though a few began to consider secession.

The policies enunciated at the second CI congress had a dual effect at the 1920 CGT congress, held in Orléans in September. On the one hand, the equivocation of the *minoritaire* response to those policies prevented a clear and unambiguous statement of their own position. Their resolution called upon the CGT to adhere to Moscow, and to be prepared to work with a political organization - they had in mind a communist party - if it were genuinely revolutionary; but it simultaneously insisted that the CGT maintain its own autonomy. On the other hand, the policies adopted by the CI allowed the *majoritaires* to accuse Moscow of seeking to subvert syndical independence. In the ongoing controversy the *majoritaires* invoked the commitment of the

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*Charte d'Amiens* to union autonomy against the *minoritaires*, who in turn invoked the *Charte's* commitment to revolutionary action against the former. By a margin of three-to-one the *majoritaires* easily carried the day in Orléans. This did not break the threat from the *minoritaires*, although dissension within their ranks over Comintern policies and the Bolsheviks' treatment of Russian libertarians was mounting. The *majoritaires* then passed to the offensive. In November 1920 the Confederal Committee of the CGT gave constituent federations and union associations authority to expel CSR members, though few reformist leaders were yet prepared to initiate a serious purge.<sup>74</sup>

The CSR had already adhered to the RILU's Provisional Council and its delegation to Berlin sought to prevent the conference from jeopardizing the work of the new organization in Moscow. The leaders of the CSR – Pierre Monatte was its Secretary but had been in prison since the May strike and Victor Godonnèche was acting in his stead – feared above all that the Berlin conference might found a separate syndicalist International; the CSR delegates had come to Berlin first and foremost to prevent this.<sup>75</sup> Their immediate concern proved unfounded, for while a variety of attitudes toward the prospective RILU found expression, only Severin of Sweden explicitly supported the formation of a syndicalist International. The consensus of the remaining voting delegations, aside from the French, was that the organizations present should arrive at a common platform to defend at the RILU congress, and that a separate International be considered only if every effort to establish a unified trade union International in Moscow failed.<sup>76</sup>

The All-Russian Trade Unions had also been invited to Berlin, and a delegation appeared on their behalf headed by S. Belinskii, who also represented the Provisional Council of the RILU. Belinskii had no sympathy for the conference whatever; he held that it had no right to exist, that the right to make decisions concerning the international movement belonged solely to the coming congress at Moscow.<sup>77</sup> Belinskii played upon the revolutionary commitment of the delegates and upon the widespread enthusiasm for Moscow. He minimized the differences between syndicalism and communism, minimized and even disparaged theoretical questions, and insisted that the entire issue must simply and inevitably be seen as the choice between the Moscow and Amsterdam Internationals, or expressed differently, "for or against the revolution."<sup>78</sup> If the delegates opposed capitalism they must accept the proletarian dictatorship. "There is no intermediate course."<sup>79</sup> Though Belinskii argued that the economic struggle was inevitably political and that the trade union International to emerge from Moscow would have to engage



in political action, he hastened to add that the RILU was quite distinct from the CI. Admission to the RILU required only acceptance of the revolutionary class struggle and proletarian dictatorship. The revolutionary union movement should be independently organized, Belinskii declared, though he cautioned against interpreting trade union autonomy too narrowly, adding that "unity in spirit with the revolutionary parties is necessary."<sup>80</sup>

Belinskii could only have been gratified that so many delegations showed little inclination to pursue doctrinal questions. The French recommended that syndicalists and communists "set aside all secondary questions of doctrine upon which we cannot 'a priori' reach accord."<sup>81</sup> George Hardy declared that the IWW, of which he was General Secretary, could not accept the position of the CI - particularly on the permeation of reformist unions - and strove for a revolutionary labour International free of all political influence. But he also insisted that the IWW did not want to combat Moscow, but rather to establish with Moscow's cooperation a single economic International. Although Tanner of the British Shop Stewards' Movement, like Hardy, complained of the disruptive tactics of the Russians in the conference,<sup>82</sup> he consistently backed Belinskii on substantive issues and urged his co-delegates to support the RILU: "We should join the Moscow International, even if we do not agree with everything Moscow wants of us."<sup>83</sup> Bertus Bouwman of the NAS (and a member of the Dutch Communist Party) also largely supported Belinskii and echoed him throughout the sessions.<sup>84</sup> Tom Barker declared that the FORA of Argentina expected nothing from a state *coup*, even if the new state called itself proletarian. The FORA insisted that only the industrial organizations of the workers could serve as the bases of social revolution. Party dictatorship was possible in Moscow, in Barker's view, because Russia was only eight percent industrialized, but in highly industrialized countries revolution must be realized by industrial and not political organizations. But Barker also expressed both confusion and weariness regarding theoretical issues. Though he characterized the FORA as essentially Bakuninist, he described himself as a Marxist in economic questions and as being "for Moscow, but against the state."<sup>85</sup> But he personally wished to "be finished with all theory," and recommended this course to the delegates.<sup>86</sup>

The French delegates were firm partisans of Moscow. At the beginning of the conference Jean Ceppe unsuccessfully proposed that it consider a single issue: Moscow or Amsterdam? Victor Godonnèche, a member of the CSR's communist-syndicalist wing, asserted what some of his fellow CSR members would certainly have challenged: "To say that

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syndicalism alone is capable of making the revolution is to state a historical heresy." But he also asserted – regarding criticisms of events in Russia – what many of them and many others on the revolutionary left in Europe would certainly have endorsed:

Is there not some injustice on our part to be more exacting towards the Russian revolutionaries than we are towards ourselves, we who have not only been incapable of achieving the revolution in our countries, but who have been powerless to defend the Russian Revolution against the criminal undertakings of our governments?<sup>87</sup>

The French maintained that the CI did not intend that communist parties intervene in the union movement. All revolutionary labour centrals could therefore participate in the RILU. A written statement declared that just as the CSR united disparate elements – "anarchist syndicalists, revolutionary syndicalists and syndicalists of a socialist-communist tendency" – even more diverse elements could be accommodated in the Moscow organization, which would take the character given it by the syndicalists. But first they must join. The CSR insisted that the unions had an expropriatory task to fulfill, that the reorganization of the economy was their "natural function." Although the CSR vowed to submit itself to no political party, it added that it would be unjust to compare the truly revolutionary Russian Communist Party with the opportunist and reformist parties of other countries. In revolutionary circumstances the CSR would cooperate with a party demonstrating in deed its commitment to the destruction of wage-slavery and the exploitative system.<sup>88</sup> Godonnèche advised the assembly that since the CSR had already pledged itself to the RILU, the French regarded this issue as closed.

A second current emerged during the conference, however, represented chiefly by the German and Swedish delegates. They stressed the disparity between the ideals of syndicalism and the policies pursued in Russia and advocated by the CI, and sought to ensure that these differences not be too readily ignored in the prevailing enthusiasm for Moscow. Their efforts inevitably aroused opposition. When the Germans objected to the International in Moscow, where party dictatorship reigned, and reiterated that syndicalism strove for a social order not under a new state but organized from below through the union movement, Bouwman of the NAS repudiated their position as anachronistic. Their desire for a syndicalist International he dismissed as no more than the longing for "an anarchist trade union movement." When Max Winkler of the FAUD contrasted syndicalist federalism with communist centralization,

Belinskii dismissed the issue. Despite Moscow's categorical support for centralism, he remarked that time must not be wasted on "matters of secondary importance." When the Germans, hoping to establish theoretical clarity among syndicalists prior to the RILU congress, submitted the declaration of principles drawn up by the 1913 London congress as embodying the FAUD's view, Belinskii attacked it as ignoring the current choice between Amsterdam and Moscow. Bouwman asserted that the conference could not, like the Germans, "cling like grim death to obsolete resolutions."<sup>89</sup>

The Swedish delegate also drew fire, for he sought not to minimize but to emphasize the theoretical divergences between syndicalists and communists. Frans Severin pointed out, for example, that the SAC insisted upon the self-responsibility of the workers, while in Russia the state determined leadership within the factories. According to him, the state calling itself the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' did not differ in its methods from the bourgeois state; both sought to institute their social policies by legislation and decrees from above. The strategy of the CI, resting precisely upon the seizure of power, meant the utilization of the trade unions as no more than simple instruments by the communists. For the SAC, however, the unions were much more than mere tools in the hands of a political party. It was imperative, Severin insisted, that the syndicalists not go to Moscow unprepared, that they have clarity and unity in their own ranks first. This was all the more important, he asserted, since the Russian trade unions were far from being organizations of class struggle like those represented in Berlin. On the contrary they were simply state organizations lacking even the right to strike. Only unity within their own ranks, therefore, would enable the syndicalists to advance their viewpoint in Moscow.<sup>90</sup>

Bernard Lansink Jr. exemplified neither the unbridled enthusiasm of many delegates for Moscow nor the highly critical approach of Severin and the Germans, but a pragmatic, intermediate position. Lansink viewed Moscow with more caution than Bouwman, his fellow NAS delegate. No revolutionary model applied to all countries, he argued; what served in Russia need not always serve in Holland. The issue of power in the transitional stage was a practical question and that of decentralization should be a national one, with each country responding to its own development and possibilities. Affiliation with the Amsterdam-based IFTU was obviously out of the question, but before proceeding to Russia the syndicalists must ask, Lansink insisted, what Moscow wanted of them. In particular they must determine whether Moscow acknowledged that the trade unions had an autonomous role

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to fulfill and that the RILU must be independent of the political Comintern. While he was prepared to go to Russia, Lansink proposed that a committee first be struck to enter into deliberations with Moscow on common policies to be pursued in the founding congress of the RILU.

### The Berlin Declaration

Despite the considerable support for Moscow in the assembly, most delegations acknowledged the need to establish a common basis upon which the syndicalists and industrialists could attend the RILU congress. The CSR delegates, however, wished only to ensure that the organizations represented in Berlin attend the Moscow meeting. To this there was no objection; the delegates unanimously endorsed the proposal. Their objective achieved, the French left Berlin. The remaining delegates undertook to formulate a collective policy statement. A resolution drawn up in committee and largely modelled on a Dutch submission elicited lengthy discussion when Hardy, erroneously predicting the IWW's consent, proposed that it be amended to endorse the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>91</sup> Belinskii, Bouwman, Tanner and Barker all supported the amendment, though in the course of discussion all of them (except Belinskii) disavowed dictatorship by a political party, as did Hardy. Severin and the Germans vigorously opposed it. Rocker, condemning any dictatorship through state violence, declared that the Germans would accept no formulation conveying an impression of dictatorship, a legacy of the bourgeoisie dating from the French Revolution. Belinskii, for his part, denied that party dictatorship existed in Russia. Since 'dictatorship of the proletariat' did not specify whether power should rest in the hands of political or of industrial organizations, and since many present disavowed party dictatorship, a search for alternative phrasing began. Severin eventually suggested that the expression 'the power of the working class' be employed.<sup>92</sup> The FAUD delegation endorsed his proposal, which prompted Belinskii to castigate the German and Swedish syndicalists as reformists. But nearly all delegates accepted Severin's phrasing. Belinskii's proposal to modify the resolution to read that the trade union International was to be organizationally autonomous, but would act in consultation and cooperation with the Third International, elicited further disagreements, but only Tanner supported it.

In its final form the document, overwhelmingly accepted, specified the principles that the delegates believed should animate a revolutionary

trade union International. It categorically endorsed "the revolutionary class struggle and the power of the working class." The workers could destroy capitalism only by applying their economic power, which finds expression in direct revolutionary action. The resolution insisted that the "regulation of production and distribution is the duty of the trade union organizations of each land." If the International and political parties or other organizations mutually endorsed certain actions, such actions could be executed jointly, but the International must remain "completely autonomous and independent of every political party." Finally, the document called upon all syndicalist and industrialist organizations to participate in the upcoming trade union congress in Moscow.<sup>93</sup>

Against the earlier advice of the French and Russian delegations the assembly also unanimously agreed to establish an International Syndicalist Information Bureau, charged with informing syndicalist and industrialist organizations not represented in Berlin of the conference's work and decisions, particularly of its final Declaration, and with consulting with the RILU Provisional Council on the policies to be pursued in the RILU congress.<sup>94</sup> The Bureau was assigned to Amsterdam with Lansink Jr. as its Secretary, and with Rocker and Tanner as additional members.

While the conference endorsed a mutual recognition of the membership cards of syndicalist and industrialist labour organizations in sixteen countries and the customary protest resolutions against the persecution of revolutionaries, the 'Berlin Declaration' remained its chief accomplishment. But in the ambiguous international situation of late 1920 the entire Berlin conference could be variously assessed. Events in Russia and above all the decisions of the second CI congress had certainly raised the doubts of a few western syndicalists about the correspondence of their interests and values to those of the Bolsheviks. At the same time, Moscow's call for a new and revolutionary trade union International permitted and encouraged many syndicalists and revolutionary industrialists to transfer their attention, and frequently fervent support, from the now unequivocally politicized CI to the impending RILU, whose ultimate character remained to be seen. Within this uncertain context the Berlin conference could be seen from different perspectives. The Dutch communist Bertus Bouwman commended it on behalf of the pro-Moscow revolutionary unionists, and even Belinskii, who would have preferred no conference at all, could express some satisfaction with it. The General Secretary of the IWW regarded the conference as "a great success from all points of view." The participants had fundamentally

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agreed, Hardy wrote, that they ultimately wanted a single labour International wholly independent of political associations. He concluded that the strength of the organizations represented in Berlin, along with those of Spain and Italy, meant "that Russia will have to come into line," and that there would be "no affiliation with the Third International." Hardy reported that Belinskii had assured him that "this was the view of the Russian Trade Union organization. We know it is not the view of the politicians in Russia." Souchy also noted that the delegates, disbanding with the highest hopes of having initiated steps toward a revolutionary trade union International, were committed to carrying this initiative further in the RILU congress. But Souchy, who had personally experienced the difficulty of modifying policies embraced by the communists in Moscow, interjected a note of realism into these expectations. Entertaining no illusions about the arduous nature of the syndicalists' task, he predicted a sharp ideological confrontation on the role of the unions and other issues between anti-statist syndicalists and the communists. "Whether the idea of revolutionary syndicalism will emerge victorious from this struggle," he wrote, "remains to be seen."<sup>95</sup>

Although the delegates assembled in Berlin had refused to endorse the proletarian dictatorship, although their Declaration stipulated the minimal conditions to which they believed a labour International had to conform, the goal of providing syndicalist unity for participation in the RILU congress had in fact been fulfilled only tenuously. The terms of the Declaration implied a degree of unity that in reality did not exist among syndicalist organizations at the end of 1920. A notable feature of the Berlin gathering, which found no expression in its Declaration, was the degree to which a substantial number of participants wished to ignore the disparity between syndicalist and communist ideology. The enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks who presided over it encouraged the complacent conviction that common ground could easily be reached with the communists. Confronted with this attitude, the delegates of the FAUD and the SAC found it no easy task to remind their colleagues of the differences dividing them from the communists.<sup>96</sup> By now the Germans and Swedes were convinced that the communists in Moscow were seeking nothing less than an ideological hegemony over the whole of the revolutionary movement. They realized that theoretical questions could not be dismissed, that syndicalist ideology must either be defended or sacrificed. And in fact the Bolsheviks (quite aside from Belinskii's tactical evasions in Berlin) did not reciprocate the willingness of some syndicalists to minimize

theoretical questions. They would categorically reject any talk of separating economic from political action. Nor would they entertain the notion of management of production by trade unions. A month after the Berlin conference Lenin declared the determination of industrial leadership by the workers rather than the communist party to be "syndicalist absurdity," which "must be thrown into the wastebasket."<sup>97</sup> Above all, the Bolsheviks had no intention of allowing the RILU any significant degree of independence from the CI. The Berlin Declaration itself did nothing to alter Bolshevik plans. Not the Declaration endorsed there, but the relative lack of unity demonstrated in Berlin dictated the subsequent strategy of the Bolsheviks towards the syndicalists and industrialists.

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