

Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1919–23

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Whatever its author's intention, nearly every study of the history of Soviet Russia or of the international Communist movement contributes to the continuing controversy over Lenin's responsibility for all the policies that usually are lumped together under the label of Stalinism. Irving Howe and Lewis Coser wrote in 1957 that 'from the party of Lenin to the party of Stalin there is a fundamental disjuncture marked by a violent counter-revolution'.¹ In a more recent exchange of views on this subject, George Lichtheim, although he did not say that Lenin would have behaved as Stalin did, said it is his considered opinion that 'Stalin's policy, broadly speaking, was within the context established by Lenin in 1923'.² Lichtheim was referring in particular to Stalin's industrialization plans, but in the same article he makes it clear that his opinion holds for Stalin's policy in its entirety.

David Caute takes what might be called the Howe–Coser 'disjuncture' position in his excellent study of *Communism and the French Intellectuals*. 'Not until the victory of Stalinism in the late 'twenties', he says, 'did the intellectuals become what Arthur Koestler called the "non-Aryans", the distrusted and barely tolerated camp-followers of international communism.'³ He argues that the leaders of the *Parti communiste français* constructed their policy regarding intellectuals 'step by step, on a largely *ad hoc* basis'.⁴ Other scholars have made the same judgment—but that judgment needs to be modified.⁵ It is true that denigration of intellectuals

¹ *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 501.

² Reply to a letter to the editor by Stephen F. Cohen, *The New York Review of Books*, IX (December 21, 1967), 40.

³ (London: André Deutsch, 1964), p. 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵ E.g., M. M. Brachkovitch and B. Lazitch, in their essay, 'The Communist International', in Drachkovitch, ed., *The Revolutionary Internationals* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 187, state only that the anti-intellectual policy began as a 'by-product' of the 'class against class' strategy decided upon by the International at the Sixth World Congress in Summer 1928. Robert S. Short, in 'The Politics of Surrealism, 1920–1936', in *The Left Wing Intellectuals between the Wars, 1919–1939* (Journal of Contemporary History, No. 2; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), pp. 16–17, says that domination of

did not become a systematic policy until Stalin's ascendancy was established, but Caute and others have failed to note that the origins of that policy are to be found in the events of an earlier period. The first major exodus of intellectuals from the French Communist Party came in January 1923. Caute says, rightly, that it resulted from dissension over the power of the Comintern to lay down party policy.¹ During that struggle, however, certain things that Caute neglects prepared the way for the adoption of the Stalinist system. If the intellectuals did not then realize that they were soon to find themselves in the status of 'non-Aryans', it was because they failed to understand what they read—or what they wrote.

Communist policy concerning intellectuals may have been the product of *ad hoc* decisions, but those decisions were justified in terms of Leninist doctrine. That policy was not purely a product of 'Stalinism'; it was developed during the period of the ascendancy of Lenin and Trotsky, with their support. Finally, the International, not just the French party, helped to produce it.

I

Marx and Engels, intellectuals *par excellence*, saw themselves and other intellectuals as natural leaders of the proletariat, but the doctrine they taught was ambiguous enough to generate endless debate. Obviously, intellectuals were necessary to get the complex 'scientific' theories of Marx and Engels off the bookshelves and into the heads of proletarians. The *Communist Manifesto* was quite clear:

In time, when the class struggle nears the decisive hour . . . , a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. . . . A portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and, in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.²

Clearly these ideologists—the word intellectual had not yet been invented—were to be part of the Communist vanguard. Elsewhere, however, Marx stressed the inevitability of the workers' revolt:

As soon as it has risen up, a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated finds the content and the material for its revolutionary activity directly

writers and the dogma of socialist realism superseded 'the era of comparative tolerance toward intellectuals [that was] fostered by Trotsky and Lunacharsky'.

¹ Caute, pp. 86–9, and especially p. 366, where he says that 'a sizeable group quit the Party in January 1923 merely because the Comintern had succeeded in enforcing its United Front policy'. The leading members of this group did not resign, but were expelled, as Caute himself points out on p. 88. Cf. Gerard Walter, *Histoire du Parti communiste français* (Paris: Somogy, 1948), p. 123.

² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', *Selected Works in Two Volumes* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), I, 43. The word translated as 'bourgeois ideologists' is *Bourgeois-ideologen* in the original. *Ausgewählte Schriften* (Munich: Kindler Verlag, 1962), p. 816.

in its own situation: foes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggle to be taken; the consequences of its own deeds drive it on. It makes no theoretical inquiries into its own task.¹

Marx and Engels also wrote that ‘the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself’.²

Such statements obviously may be and have been interpreted in different ways. One of the major themes of Leopold Haimon’s study, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism*, is the struggle between advocates of the opposing doctrines of ‘spontaneity’ and ‘consciousness’.³ Groups like the so-called ‘Economists’ emphasized the deterministic element in Marxism; some extremists insisted that the role of intellectuals was merely to express the current attitudes of the working class, no matter how backward that class might remain. They also on occasion protested against the important part played by intellectuals in the Russian Social Democratic movement and demanded that more leaders be drawn directly from the proletariat.⁴ Others stressed the intellectuals’ duty to help make the proletariat conscious of its destiny. Some of them, including Lenin, insisted that without the leadership of intellectuals the proletariat would stumble into the traps of the bourgeoisie and never attain its otherwise destined triumph.⁵

In this matter, as in many others, it is probable that Lenin’s personal feelings significantly affected the development of Communist policy. It has been argued effectively that though he recognized that the *intelligentsia* must of necessity furnish revolutionary leadership, he profoundly distrusted intellectuals.⁶ In Russia the mentality of the *intelligentsia* was pessimistic: they saw themselves as an embattled minority fighting for a lost cause. Moreover, they were deeply moralistic. Lenin hated both pessimism and moralism. He considered intellectuals anarchistic and individualistic, while he was himself the leading proponent of revolutionary discipline. In 1917 he still believed that the Bolsheviks had to have the support of the intellectuals, but he also believed that only those intellectuals willing to submit themselves to the most exacting party discipline were fit to aid the workers.⁷

¹ ‘The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850’, *Selected Works*, I, 148.

² ‘Circular Letter’, Marx and Engels to A. Bebel *et al.*, September 17–18, 1879, *Selected Works*, II, 485.

³ (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶ Adam Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), esp. pp. 210–11, where Ulam maintains that Lenin hated the intelligentsia; also Victor S. Frank, ‘Lenin and the Russian Intelligentsia’, in L. Schapiro and P. Reddaway, eds., *Lenin: The Man, the Theorist, the Leader, A Reappraisal* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. 23–36, and Peter Reddaway, ‘Literature, the Arts and the Personality of Lenin’, *ibid.*, pp. 37–70.

⁷ Louis Fischer, *The Life of Lenin* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 258.

Lenin clearly feared that the Russian *intelligentsia* would quail at the actual fact of revolution. He was right: they reacted to the Soviet seizure of power with a notable lack of enthusiasm. In March 1919, Gregory Zinoviev reported to the First Congress of the Third International that 'intellectuals are very scarce in our ranks'. Only recently, he said, had certain intellectuals begun to change their attitudes and to work with the Communists in the soviets. But careerism was a problem, he continued, and there had been 'difficulties' in integrating intellectuals into the party.¹ Writers, technicians, teachers and clerks not only failed to support the Revolution but worked actively against it. Anatole Lunacharsky, Bolshevik commissar of education, reported attempts at sabotage by intellectuals but said they were easily stymied.² Toward the end of 1918 the Soviet government found it necessary to suppress the All-Russian Teachers' Union and replace it with an organization under stricter control.³ Students, who had long been dedicated to the welfare of the proletariat, were equally disappointing: Zinoviev said that the word 'student' had almost become a synonym for 'White Guard'.⁴ Victor Serge, writing from Moscow, advised the French party to begin training the technicians it would need when it took power; like Zinoviev, he was disturbed by the 'careerism'

¹ *Der I. Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale: Protokoll der Verhandlungen in Moskau vom 2. bis zum 19. März 1919* ('Bibliothek der Kommunistischen Internationale', VII; Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1921), p. 24.

² 'Die Kommunistische Internationale und die Intellektuellen', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 17 (1921), 203. The sabotage Lunacharsky spoke of was purely verbal: intellectuals were still, he said, murmuring against the government, making wild accusations, and rejoicing at the failures of the Revolution while deploring its successes. Still, it is pertinent here to recall that in Soviet usage the word *intelligentsia* has a much wider scope than does the essentially French word *intellectuels*; it includes not only the lawyers, writers, journalists, scientists and teachers to which the French word (along with its German and English equivalents) applies, but also experts, managers, technicians and other 'brainworkers', some of whom had opportunities for real 'sabotage'. The difference probably results from the fact that the French word came into popular use only at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, in the late 1890s, after French industry was well developed. In Russia, where the word *intelligentsia* was taken up in the 1860s, it became part of the language of a quite undeveloped country. The French *intellectuels*, who were critical of French society, were quite clearly only a small percentage of the educated class—most university graduates, particularly engineers and technicians, were thoroughly integrated into French life and had no interest in radical change. The Russian *intelligentsia* of the 1860s probably included most graduates in every field of endeavor, and, by definition, they favored change. Soviet usage, made official in 1934, differs from pre-Revolutionary usage in lacking the connotation of rebellion and including a large semi-educated class of white collar workers that hardly existed before the Revolution. There exists now, of course, a group of *intellectuels* in the Soviet Union; they are referred to as the 'creative intelligentsia' or, sometimes, the 'true intelligentsia', and they are often in trouble with the regime. The upshot of this peculiar situation is that the admittedly vague word *intellectual* in its French, English and German forms is still more precise than its Russian equivalent, *intelligent*. Differences in definition, resulting in a mutual lack of comprehension by speakers of different languages, probably have exacerbated arguments over the mental makeup and social functions of the groups discussed, but it is difficult to see how this could be documented. The best discussion of these matters is Richard Pipes, ed., *The Russian Intelligentsia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

³ Lunacharsky, 'Die Volksbildung in Sowjetrussland', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 6 (1919), 96.

⁴ 'Les Origines du Parti communiste russe', *Bulletin communiste* (Paris), II (December 1, 1921), 891.

of the intellectuals. As for journalists and writers, Serge said, they were petty bourgeois:

With very rare exceptions, all the journalists and all the writers still in Soviet Russia—many of them because of the material impossibility of emigrating—were declared or secret enemies of the regime. The best known set the example of putting their talents at the service of reaction. That was the case with Andreev, Merejkovski, Ivan Bunin, Anfiteatrov, E. Tchirikov, and Kuprin.¹

Only Maxim Gorky, Serge remarked, offered his services to the revolutionaries in the early days, and that was because of his proletarian parentage. Gorky himself contributed to the condemnation of Russian intellectuals, saying that he believed that their failure to work for the revolution had added to the blood and destruction that was an inevitable part of the proletarian triumph.²

There is no need here to discuss the reasons for the opposition of the intellectuals to the Soviet regime; what matters is that that opposition was real and that it caused serious difficulties for Soviet leaders. Apparently, it also surprised them. Yuri Steklov, the essayist and historian, said in an article on the intellectual opposition that it was 'contrary to the expectations of all the theoreticians of socialism'.³ Whether Steklov's surprise was exaggerated or not, the leaders of the International speedily adjusted to the unexpected. When the journalists and lawyers who led the PCF began to kick against the traces, the Russian authorities quickly took note of yet another case of the perfidy of the intellectuals.

II

In December 1920, the first leaders of the French Communist Party brought with them into the Third International a majority of the membership of the French Socialist Party. Those leaders, almost all of bourgeois origin, were, with rare exceptions, very like hundreds of other intellectuals in other political groups; they were simply less prudent, or more passionate. Few of them understood the nature of the party they had joined. They believed in the new society which the Bolsheviks claimed to be creating, but they knew that France was not Russia. When the International laid down twenty-one harsh conditions that the French party would have to accept to gain admission, they took them with a grain of salt. Their secretary-general, L. O. Frossard, said they believed that '*tout s'arrange*'.⁴ Over the next two years they conducted themselves as if they were still

¹ 'Les Classes moyennes dans la Révolution russe', *BC*, III (August 3, 1922), 614. This article continues in the issue of August 10, pp. 630–2.

² 'Die Internationale der Intellektuellen', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 7–8 (1919), 1128.

³ 'Die bürgerliche Intelligenz in der russischen proletarischen Revolution', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 19 (1922), 128.

⁴ Walter, p. 101; Robert Wohl, *French Communism in the Making, 1919–1924* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 189.

members of a pre-war socialist party, saying what they wished, criticizing when the spirit moved them, wearing their communism very lightly. They quickly drifted into violent conflict with the International. Henri Fabre, editor of the *Journal du peuple*, wrote that he deplored the rift with old comrades that had followed the party's decisions to accept the twenty-one conditions. Frossard and other leaders, followed by a majority in the party, refused to accept the decisions of the International on a number of tactical questions. They acted as if the French party were autonomous and the International a federation.

The ensuing battle could have been fought out on any of three current issues: party discipline, personalities, or the nature of 'democratic centralism', the Leninist version of party democracy. All three were involved in the controversy, but a fourth issue was raised by the partisans of the International. Led by the Russians, and in particular by Trotsky, the centralizers (known at this time as the 'left') turned the term 'intellectual' into an epithet and used it to denounce their opponents. Almost at once the role of the intellectual in the French Communist Party became the subject of a full-dress ideological debate.

By 1920, the Russian experience with intellectuals had led to the development of a theoretical position on the duties of intellectuals. That position was outlined in a letter written by the Executive Committee of the Communist Youth International to the First International Congress of Communist Students.¹ The letter stated that the Russian and Hungarian revolutions had shown the immense importance of the collaboration of 'intellectual forces', particularly science, in the establishment and defense of the proletarian state. For this reason the collaboration of 'bourgeois intellectualism imbued with the revolutionary spirit' was welcome. But experience had also shown, the Committee continued, that such collaboration could be effective and desirable only when it was fully subordinated to the 'internal and external laws of the political and economic battle of the proletariat'.

Yes, that subordination is necessary even in the spiritual domain, since the revolutionary intellectual must share in proletarian psychology. Only by uniting in the proletarian spirit of collectivism is it possible to avoid the dangers that exist in the individualist psyches of intellectuals.

The Communist student group of Paris expressed similar sentiments, but added a warning. Socialist intellectuals could contribute to the enlightenment of the proletariat by using their scientific training to elucidate the nature of the proletarian struggle, and they could help greatly in organizing Communist society.² They must avoid thinking, however, that they

¹ *BC*, I (March 18, 1920), 5. The CYI was neither particularly influential nor orthodox, but its position on this question was consonant with Soviet experience.

² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

themselves were going to transform society by their own efforts, or that they should be the ones who train the general staff of the proletarian revolution. The duty of Communist student groups was to study Marxism and to propagandize in the other student organizations. Both these documents included reservations about the role of intellectuals, but neither of them gave any indication that Communists had as yet discovered how difficult it would be to bring the intellectuals to heel.

At about the same time a discussion of the kind of dissent permitted to Communists was in progress. Though it did not directly touch on the role of intellectuals, it was to bear heavily on that question. In a report of a discussion with leaders of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) in 1920, the Executive Committee of the International attacked the important USPD leader, Reichstag Deputy Wilhelm Dittman, for ‘developing a particular theory of “tolerance” that was completely impregnated with petty bourgeois prejudices on “liberty of thought”’.¹ This did not settle the question. Among the resolutions passed at the Second Congress of the International, in July 1920, was one in which the Congress deplored the indiscipline of new members who acted as if they were still in the old Second International—which Communists considered a debating society—then, somewhat ambiguously, endorsed free discussion of significant party theory. ‘The duty of Communists is not to gloss over any of the weaknesses of their movement’, the resolution read, ‘but to criticize them openly in order to get rid of them promptly and radically’.²

Lenin began to resolve the ambiguities on this subject in a speech he made in November 1920:

Freedom of criticism is a splendid thing—but once we are agreed on this, it would be no bad thing to concern ourselves with the content of criticism. For a long time the Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries and others tried to scare us with freedom of criticism, but we were not afraid of that. If freedom of criticism means freedom to defend capitalism, then we shall suppress it.³

He said further that when Communists proclaimed liberty of criticism, they meant detailed, constructive criticism. He returned to the subject a month later, saying that the most telling current attack on the Communists was the accusation that they violated the principles of freedom and equality. He asserted that all these attacks were really directed at the Soviet’s suppression of private property; they were simply defenses

¹ ‘Actes du Comité Exécutif de l’Internationale communiste’, *BC*, I (October 7, 1920), 25. I have been unable to find this reference in the official minutes of the ECCI, but in view of the consistent accuracy of the *BC* in reporting such actions it seems reasonable to accept it.

² *Der Zweite Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale: Protokoll der Verhandlungen vom 19. Juli in Petrograd bis 7. August 1920 in Moskau* (‘Bibliothek der Kommunistischen Internationale’, XXII; Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1921), p. 755.

³ ‘Our Foreign and Domestic Position and the Tasks of the Party’, *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), XXXI, 425.

raised by the bourgeoisie, and it would be suicidal for Bolsheviks to listen to them.¹ But he had hardly put an end to the problem.

The tide of criticism, some of it not at all 'constructive' by Bolshevik standards, continued despite Lenin's remarks. Writing in May 1921, Boris Souvarine, the leading theorist of the French party's left wing, said the recent expulsion of the German Communist leader Paul Levi should serve as a lesson to Communist parties everywhere. Criticism did not frighten Communists, he explained, 'but *Communist criticism* should be exercised inside the Party and in the interest of the Communist movement'.²

The matter of 'freedom of opinion' could not be settled by theoretical discussion; only events could demonstrate what theory was to mean in practice. Moreover, the meaning of freedom of opinion was actually part of a larger question: how was the International to be organized? If each national party set its own policies on the limits of discussion, policies would vary from party to party. The International would then indeed be nothing more than a debating society. But if the policy of democratic centralism, the cornerstone of Leninism, applied not only within each party but within the International as a single body, one standard would prevail everywhere.

The internal history of the International from its founding until around 1924 was largely a history of struggles over the locus of power. In France these struggles dominated every question. At the PCF congress in Marseilles in December 1921, opponents of the authority of the International won full control of the party after fighting out the issue on a general basis, without ever actually suggesting that the International should be disobeyed.³ Souvarine, leader of the pro-International faction, was not re-elected to the party's Comité Directeur; four of his supporters who were elected refused under the circumstances to serve. The Executive Committee of the International was sure to respond to this challenge. As it happened, the battle focused on the issue of the 'United Front', that is, the decision of the ECCI that all sections of the International would in the future join all other workers' parties in supporting drives for immediate benefits for the masses. The question of party tactics was extremely important, but this issue, like every one that came up, was also part of the struggle over the power of the International to control its sections. Opponents of the United Front tactic were no doubt sincere in their opposition, but they were also the same men who had fought the power of the International.

¹ 'False Talk on Freedom', *ibid.*, pp. 391–6.

² 'Commentaires d'un communiste', *BC*, II (May 5, 1921), 295. (Italics in the original.) Souvarine, who was the moving spirit behind the adhesion of the French Socialist Party to the Third International, was the representative of the PCF at the Executive Committee of the International. Levi, the most eminent intellectual in the German party in 1921, at the time of the unsuccessful putsch called the March Action, was expelled because he held the International responsible for the fiasco.

³ Wohl, pp. 247–51.

Many supporters of the new policy, on the other hand, probably were no more enthusiastic about the policy than its opponents, but they supported it because it was the policy adopted by the International.

On December 4, 1921, the ECCI approved a set of theses outlining the United Front policy; the leaders of the PCF first discussed them at a meeting on January 4, 1922.¹ Their opposition was virtually automatic. They argued that whatever its merit elsewhere, in France such a tactic would result in disaster. Neither militants nor ordinary workers would understand why the party should suddenly switch from attacking socialists and trade unionists to wooing them.² The battle against the International was joined.

The ECCI responded by voting on February 21, 1922, to establish a special committee to settle the question of the French attitude toward the United Front and to examine the whole situation of the PCF and its internal quarrels. The committee, chaired by Trotsky, included representatives of the Bulgarian, Polish, Swiss and German parties as well as several representatives from different French factions. At its sessions the questions at hand were thoroughly aired; Trotsky and others spoke at length on the United Front, pacifism, trade union relations and the power of the International. As soon as the committee concluded its sessions it opened negotiations with the French leadership. Attempts to reach a compromise failed repeatedly, but negotiations continued until the Second Congress of the PCF met in Paris in mid-October. During the year the ECCI considered what had become known as 'the French question' at several of its meetings. Again and again the substantive issues were discussed, but increasingly the Executive Committee and its partisans spoke of the many disagreements between the International and its French section as stemming from a single fault: the French party was dominated by men who were not real Communists.

During these arguments Trotsky, who dominated the meetings, not only discussed issues but levelled personal attacks at the leaders of the opposing faction. He repeatedly hurled charges of pacifism at Daniel Renoult, Victor Méric, Georges Pioch and Raoul Verfeuil, all of whom were members of the CD of the French party; he accused Méric and Renaud Jean, the party's expert on the peasantry, of being 'opportunists'.³

¹ Walter, pp. 80–2; extracts from the theses approved by the ECCI are given in Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International, 1919–1943: Documents*, Vol. 1: 1919–1922 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 307–16.

² Walter, pp. 82–112.

³ E.g., see *Die Taktik der Kommunistischen Internationale gegen die Offensive der Kapitals: Bericht über die Konferenz der Erweiterten Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale: Moskau, vom 24. Februar bis 4 März 1922* ('Bibliothek der Kommunistischen Internationale', XXVII; Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1922), pp. 136–41; 'Un Discours de Trotsky (séance du 8 mai)', *BC*, III (August 10, 1922), 623–4; 'Deuxième discours de Trotsky (séance du 19 mai)', *BC*, III (August 17, 1922), 638.

More significantly, however, Trotsky and his supporters began to revile their opponents simply by calling them 'intellectuals.'

Following the arguments in detail would be superfluous, for they were, as is usual in politics, redundant in the extreme. Certain speeches and articles, however, repay examination. Trotsky injected the question of intellectualism into the struggle in an article published in Souvarine's *Bulletin communiste* on May 25, 1922. In order for the French party to realize its potential, he wrote, it must rid itself of old political habits; writers in the party press must be rude and intransigent, and Communist deputies must stop spending so much time with their bourgeois colleagues. 'The French party', he said, 'needs a more severe attitude toward all manifestations of democratic and parliamentary ideology, *intellectual individualism* and the careerism of lawyers'.¹

Speaking at a meeting of the ECCI on June 10, Trotsky developed his ideas on the necessity for intransigence.² The party would remain small, he said, as long as its leaders still came from the same group of journalists, lawyers and intellectuals that had always controlled French socialism. In France, he continued, trade unionism, directed by leaders who had risen from the ranks of the proletariat, had attracted mass support because it expressed, though imperfectly, the revolutionary sentiments of the workers. It also opened the way for the 'most energetic elements' of the French proletariat to place themselves at the head of their own class. 'In the unions', he said, 'workers always saw one of their own in the lead. In the party, they saw professors of rhetoric, journalists, and lawyers'. Trotsky argued that this was the real difference between syndicalism and socialism. In the future, however, the situation must change. Though persons of bourgeois origin who had earned their places in the leadership should of course retain them, 'as the rule, and not as the exception, it is the workers who should rise in their party'. Two or three workers who could enter the parliament or a municipal council 'with a new and even somewhat arrogant spirit' could, he believed, do more for communism than dozens of intellectuals. Any deputy who cared anything about politeness and courtesy, as intellectuals did, would forget inside a year why he went to parliament in the first place.

On the following day, June 11, 1922, the Executive Committee passed a resolution commenting on the expulsion of Henri Fabre, the editor, from the French party. That act, the Committee said, was 'a step in the battle against the bohemian, intellectual, anarcho-journalistic spirit that, particularly in France, successively takes on all the forms and colors of

¹ 'Le Parti communiste français jugé par Trotsky', *BC*, III (May 25, 1922), 427.

² 'Zur Lage in der Kommunistischen Partei Frankreichs (Reden in der Sitzung der Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale am 8. u. 10. Juni 1922)', *Die Kommunistischen Internationale*, No. 21 (1922), 89–111; quotation on p. 107.

anarchism and opportunism, and inevitably ends with a stab in the back of the working class'.¹

Trotsky's attacks on intellectuals were seconded and systematized by August Thalheimer, a leading German Communist, in an article published on July 20.² Using Fabre once more as the prototype of the undisciplined intellectual, Thalheimer showed himself a master of the patronizing style so characteristic of Marxist polemicists. He began by saying that Communist discipline is not like military discipline—it is not blind obedience but obedience with comprehension.

We are told that the French worker lacks the spirit of discipline, that he is not capable of accepting the strict discipline of communism.

That is the chatter of the petty bourgeois and of intellectuals.

Because they are incapable of forgetting their own dear little selves, their important individuality, intellectuals *à la* Fabre imagine that workers are equally incapable of doing so.

The petty bourgeois is naturally individualistic; he believes himself to be a little universe in himself, something like the monad of our German philosopher Leibniz.

The petty bourgeois intellectual draws from his petty bourgeois instinct a philosophy, a doctrine, a poetry, a rhetoric, a religion.

Actually, he continued, workers, unlike petty bourgeois intellectuals, are capable of the highest discipline. He cited as an example the armies of Napoleon, which, he said, won so many battles not because they were mechanically oppressed but because they were fighting against the efforts of the aristocracy to restore feudalism. Petty bourgeois intellectuals would never understand this, he said, but workers did, and that explained why communism must rid itself of such intellectuals as Fabre, who was not a scapegoat but a symptom. The German party had expelled men like Paul Levi, who fought Moscow's 'ukases' in the name of 'liberty of opinion', and it had lost nothing. Good workers who followed such men out of the party soon deserted them. The petty bourgeois intellectual, Thalheimer said, does not understand that the proletarian revolution requires the use of concentrated force. 'It demands the subordination of the individual to the Party, and, later, to the proletarian state.' Moreover, the petty bourgeois intellectual is attached to bourgeois culture, 'but the proletarian revolution will begin with a period of destruction which will not spare bourgeois culture'. He concluded as follows:

It cannot be denied that for the preparation and the development of the proletarian revolution the petty bourgeois intellectual constitutes a hindrance, an element of weakness and disorganization, and that in practice he is a supporter of counter-revolution.

The proletarian revolution needs intellectuals, *but it needs Communist intellectuals*, who are BOUND by all their spirit, by all their mentality, to the working class, who express the thoughts of that class, who have left bourgeois ideology completely behind.

¹ 'Les Récentes décisions de l'Internationale', *BC*, III (July 6, 1922), 529.

² 'Réflexions d'un communiste allemand sur le cas Fabre', *BC*, III (July 20, 1922), 582–4.

Needing intellectuals, the French working class must fashion them for the work it must accomplish. Petty bourgeois intellectuals *à la Fabre* are its most dangerous enemies: the duty of the working class is to drive them from its midst. [Emphasis in the original.]

Jules Humbert-Droz, the Swiss Communist who served as one of the International's representatives in France, followed Thalheimer's analysis closely in an article published a month later.¹ Anyone can write what he likes, Humbert-Droz said, but he cannot attack the party and remain a member of it. Once decisions are made, they must not be questioned.

Assuredly the intellectual, the journalist, the lawyer have trouble understanding this limitation of liberty; deeply individualist, they are little inclined to accept the discipline of the collectivity. They would prefer a party which was a kind of discussion club; but the factory worker, who wants the Communist Party to be an organization of battle and revolutionary action, will understand much better, because in the course of his class struggles he has learned that only proletarian discipline signifies liberty.

In a strike, he explained, there is always a minority, but that minority certainly could not be allowed to talk and write against the strike and in favor of the right to work.

In September 1922, shortly before the Second Congress of the PCF was to meet in Paris and attempt to settle the questions outstanding, Souvarine made a final effort to explain not only what was wrong with intellectuals, but what their real function in the party should be.² After discussing previous attacks on intellectuals at some length, he summarized them all, saying that the problem was individualism. Some people, not only intellectuals but workers as well, put themselves above the party: this was the error that had to be eliminated. He would not put workers above intellectuals—that was 'laborism' (*ouvriérisme*), and it was as bad as the faults attributed to intellectuals. What intellectuals ought to do, he argued finally, was serve the party: 'That is why the "intellectual" who becomes a Communist loses his ridiculous pretension to the status of intellectual in order to exchange it for the infinitely higher desire to be a revolutionary.'

Souvarine then said that bourgeois intellectuals had indeed been useful to the party; they had given it 'its doctrine and its scientific knowledge, a clear consciousness of its historic mission and often even the example of courage in the struggle and of the spirit of sacrifice'. The problem was to put intellectuals in their proper place. Up until that time, he said, it had been thought necessary to use intellectuals as the party's representatives in parliamentary and regional assemblies 'under the pretext of competing in capability and eloquence with bourgeois representatives'. Thus the workers had come to believe that any political party was merely a means of exploiting their confidence for the profit of certain personalities. The

¹ 'Liberté et discipline', *BC*, III (August 17, 1922), 637.

² 'Des Ouvriers, pas d'ouvriérisme', *BC*, III (September 7, 1922), 681–3.

PCF should, therefore, prove to the workers that they were wrong. It should use intellectuals in places in which their abilities were needed, but it should choose its public representatives from the working class, ‘not so that they can translate the demands of their fellows into lofty phrases or put them in an elegant manner in order to win over their class enemies, but so that they can express the suffering and cry out the pains of the exploited and make themselves heard by their sleeping or discouraged brothers’.

None of these attacks and exhortations produced the desired effect. When the French party met in congress in October 1922, the ‘center’, led by the offending intellectuals, won full control of the party machinery by a vote of 1698 to 1516, with 814 abstentions.¹ Leaders of the pro-International ‘left’ resigned their posts. The victors awaited the vindication they were sure would come when ‘the French question’ was considered once more, at the Fourth World Congress of the International.

The Congress convened in November 1922. A new committee on the French question was established, with Trotsky still at its head; it also included Lenin, Zinoviev, Bukharin, and a number of representatives from various national parties.² Lenin was unable to attend its meetings but followed them closely.³ On December 1, Trotsky delivered the committee’s report to the Congress. It was a summary of the attacks delivered during the past months by partisans of the International.⁴ For good measure, he added specific attacks on the *Ligue des Droits de l’Homme* and the Freemasons, which he called havens of bourgeois intellectualism, and demanded that all Communists sever relations with them. By the time of the Fourth World Congress, the various parties represented in Moscow had split so often that the Executive Committee of the International, dominated by the Russians, had had its opportunity to recognize the factions that best suited its image of the ideal Communist party. The result of the deliberations was, therefore, a foregone conclusion: Trotsky’s resolution passed with only two dissenting votes. The resolution, which dealt with every aspect of party organization, included these remarks:

The Communist vanguard of the working class has, of course, need of those intellectuals who bring to its organization their theoretical knowledge, their agitational or literary gifts. But it needs them on one condition, *i.e.*, provided that these elements break completely and irrevocably with the morals and customs of the bourgeois milieu, burning

¹ Walter, pp. 110–11.

² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

³ Alfred Rosmer, *Moscou sous Lénine: Les Origines du communisme* (Paris: Pierre Horay-Flore, 1953), p. 241; Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism: A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 183–4, 245.

⁴ *Protokoll des Vierten Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale, Petrograd-Moskau vom 5. November bis 5. Dezember 1922* (‘Bibliothek der Kommunistischen Internationale’, XXXVIII; Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1923), pp. 838–73.

behind them all the bridges to the camp they left, and do not demand any exemptions or privileges for themselves but submit to party discipline on a par with its rank and file. The intellectuals, so many of whom in France join the Party as amateurs or careerists, have caused the Party the greatest harm, distort its revolutionary physiognomy, discredit it in the eyes of the proletarian masses and hinder it from conquering the confidence of the working class. It is necessary at all costs to ruthlessly purge the Party of all such elements and to bar their entry in the future.¹

At the same time, the Congress ordered the French party to reserve at least nine-tenths of its elective offices for 'worker-Communists, still at the bench, and peasants'. Intellectuals, guilty of individualism, were to be tolerated only if they could 'break completely' with their bourgeois origins. Party offices were to be reserved almost completely for *bona fide* proletarians, who were presumably less likely to suffer from anarcho-journalistic tendencies and certainly more likely to reassure their suspicious comrades of farm and factory.

Some of the offending intellectuals decided to form a 'Committee of Resistance'; they were immediately expelled.² Others, including the party's General Secretary, Frossard, at first appeared to accept the decision, then left a few days later.³

III

By 1922 it was clear that Moscow intended to control every Communist party everywhere; indeed, the Twenty-one Conditions, treated in such a cavalier manner by Frossard, showed this when they were issued in 1920. Leaders of many of the national parties, most of them veterans of pre-war political battles and of the Zimmerwald-Kienthal anti-war movement, saw no reason to take orders from the Bolsheviks, for they knew them personally and saw that they were fallible. Efforts to maintain independence in the face of Russian pressure were doomed to failure, however, for Bolshevik success was to most militants an overwhelming argument for Bolshevik superiority. Time after time, the Bolsheviks who controlled the International stepped into intra-party squabbles to oust rebellious officers and establish a more complaisant leadership. It happened that many of the rebels were intellectuals, and, in fact, it is hardly surprising that so many intellectuals rebelled. During the battle over the institution of the United Front policy in France, Trotsky, Souvarine, Humbert-Droz, and other supporters of the International began to make the obvious connection: intellectuals were prone to indiscipline.

¹ 'Die politische Resolution in der Französischen Frage', *Protokoll des Vierten Kongress der K. I.*, p. 986; English translation in Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (2 vols.; New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1945), II, 276. Degras's extracts (I, 402-5) do not include the paragraph quoted.

² Walter, p. 123.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2; Wohl, pp. 306-7.

Such a conclusion required little reflection. Over the past half century working class leaders in Western Europe and the United States had fought a running battle with intellectuals in all sorts of labor organizations.¹ Marx had depended on ‘bourgeois ideologists’ to desert their own class in order to serve as the vanguard of the working class, but the very fact that these converts deserted once made them suspect: was their conversion complete? Did they really understand the working class and share its attitudes? Were they not likely to turn their coats a second time? The education that made them desirable as allies made them untrustworthy. They were given to analysis, and they trusted their own reasoning powers. Still, the fact was that among Communists the leaders who pointed out these difficulties were themselves intellectuals. Lenin, Trotsky, Souvarine—who could have been more ‘intellectual’ than these? But during the debates on the French question the way to a solution was discovered. Intellectuals, even those who were party leaders, could be treated as second-class citizens, *a priori* suspect, always subject to surveillance, constantly required to give evidence of their loyalty to the cause—and loyalty to the cause was always interpreted as readiness to accept the decisions of superiors.

The system that finally flowered in the idiocy of *Proletkult* got its start in 1922. It was not then fully developed. Intellectuals still led practically every Communist party. The argument resolved at the Fourth World Congress was after all about the United Front policy, not about intellectuals. But the idea that intellectuals were not to be trusted had been thoroughly aired; it had been given currency by eminent men, and it had won support from the ECCI. If distrust of intellectuals was not yet a coherent policy, neither was it a strange and unorthodox attitude. Moreover, it was already clear that to be an intellectual was an extra liability for any Communist who found himself opposed to party policy.

Within a year what had been a weapon of opportunity became a standard tactic. When Trotsky was first attacked in 1924 Souvarine, erstwhile scourge of the intellectuals, rushed to his defense. He was of course committing a breach of discipline. As the leadership of the party explained, it was hardly surprising that he should do such a thing, for after all he was himself an intellectual:

He was the defender of a class which was not that of his birth; he understood its needs imperfectly. Forgetting his teachings of Lenin, he did not lean toward the large masses of workers and peasants in order to know them better and love them more.

¹ See Carl Landauer, *European Socialism: A History of Ideas and Movements from the Industrial Revolution to Hitler's Seizure of Power* (2 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), I, pp. 351, 1076–7; Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (transl. E. and C. Paul; New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 277–304 *passim*; Louis S. Reed, *The Labor Philosophy of Samuel Gompers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), p. 27. (I am indebted to Professor Rudolph J. Vecoli of the University of Minnesota for bringing the last reference to my attention.)

A victim of the distortion produced by his professional status, he lost contact with the proletariat. He held tight to the Book, but he forgot Life.¹

Souvarine was expelled.

The struggle that brought this policy of distrust of intellectuals into prominence was fought largely by and about intellectuals who were actively engaged in attempting to influence party decisions; many of them, like Souvarine, Méric, and Cachin, were party officials or staff writers for party publications. They were not, however, the only ones affected. Such eminent sympathizers as Anatole France and the feminist Séverine, like other fellow travelers and rank-and-file party members, took the attacks on intellectuals to heart and broke their contacts with the French party, even though they were specifically exempted from formal disciplinary procedures. For if they were not driven out of the party, they were chastised each time they ventured to stray from the party line.² David Cauté has described the pattern that developed: literary figures, scientists and professors were used whenever possible for party purposes, but they were, with rare exceptions, systematically excluded from influence on party policies, and when they deviated from the party line they were bitterly attacked. An Henri Barbusse could join the PCF and remain a member in good standing by accepting party policy; an André Breton, who demanded and used the right to dissent, could not.

This pattern, which happened to develop first in France because of local circumstances, spread throughout the world. By 1928 the resolution of 1922 had become a source of clichés. That year Palmiro Togliatti, representing the Comintern at the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, spoke as follows:

The intellectuals are not the same as workers. They are easily influenced by the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois milieux from which they come. For that reason they waver easily, especially when difficult decisions are to be made. . . . They should adapt themselves to the working class.³

The situation later described by Koestler had come into being. Immediately after the 1922 Congress the percentage of intellectuals among Communist leaders began to decline, not only in France but everywhere in Europe.⁴ Men who once would have been logical candidates for leadership were discouraged from joining the party; they could be just as useful as members of front organizations, and in such positions they had no oppor-

¹ *Humanité* (Paris), July 19, 1924.

² Amédée Dunois, 'Démenti formel', *Humanité*, January 1, 1923, p. 1; see also my *Anatole France: The Politics of Skepticism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965), pp. 225–7; Bernard Lecache, *Séverine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1930), pp. 229–30; Cauté, pp. 76–7, 88–9.

³ Quoted in Drachkovitch and Lazitch, p. 189.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 187–8.

tunity to cause trouble for the Russians.¹ Steadily the ‘party intellectual’ became a party hack.² He who refused to do so found himself outside the party.

Exceptions were made. Antonio Gramsci, languishing in Mussolini’s prisons, apparently was a martyr too valuable to lose despite his deviationist tendencies. During the Popular Front period, parties everywhere relaxed disciplinary restrictions on intellectuals, but even then only those few who were willing to accept the full weight of party discipline could play active roles in party affairs. To trace the persistence of the Communist attitude of distrust toward intellectuals is beyond the scope of this paper, but it remained powerful, not only in France but everywhere, for at least forty years.³

It is true that Souvarine and many of the other intellectuals read out of the Communist movement in later years were victims of Stalinism, but the weapons that Stalin used against them they themselves had forged. The case against intellectuals had been developed in the heat of battle over a particular tactic and justified then in terms of Leninist doctrine. Stalin’s contribution was to make that argument the basis of a settled policy. Lenin might not himself have taken that step, but there is no doubt that Stalin’s policy was well within the bounds of Leninist tradition.

¹ Helmut Gruber, ‘Willi Münzenberg’s German Communist Propaganda Empire, 1921–1933’, *Journal of Modern History*, XXXVIII (September 1966), 290, n. 39.

² Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (London: Gollancz, 1959), p. 220.

³ One particularly striking example of the persistence of this attitude showed up in the constitution of the Communist Party of Indonesia (1962), which set the probationary period for new members coming from the intelligentsia at one year, twice the length of time required for workers, agricultural workers, poor peasants or the urban poor, and also required stronger recommendations. J. M. van der Kroef, ‘Indonesian Communism’s Cultural Offensive’, *Australian Outlook*, XVIII (April 1964), 42.