

# The Closing Session

EUGENE GORDON

Moscow.

**F**OUR MEN within the door opening upon Okhotny Ryad examined my Soviet passport and my pass, comparing the snapshot in the lower corner of the passport with my face. They nodded and I stepped into the broad, crowded foyer of the trade-unions' building. Today's was the closing session of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International.

I had heard so many details about the Congress that a great deal seemed familiar from the start. I had heard of this temporary "bookshop" along the left wall. On the front of the building outside there were appeals in sixteen languages to workers of the world to unite. Above the rows of shelves behind this counter stacked with books and pamphlets similar panels of red cloth and white lettering, but these words in diverse tongues dealt with Marxian literature.

Conversation and laughter in strange tongues made it seem that the sixteen languages had been multiplied by perhaps 16. Voices formed an undertone that neither rose nor fell and in which individual words were indistinguishable. Words were diffused and blurred into a restrained roar. It was the voice of the world proletariat.

Flowers and greenery embanked the passage leading to the white marble staircase, at the foot of which stood four men examining passes. They scrutinized mine as if the first to see it. One man tore off two corners of the card and handed it back; I wound with the stairs to the second landing. There was another temporary counter up here. Delegates pressed upon it buying the Communist papers of their countries. There were also piles of mimeographed news bulletins with the latest dispatches from all countries.

I was in the wide sweep of corridor of which Borodin had told the staff of The Moscow Daily News the day after this Congress opened. Exhibits here of material created in the struggle against imperialist war and fascism, according to Borodin, was the most extensive ever collected. He said it was worth a trip around the world to see.

This corridor was shaped like the blocked letter C, inverted, the hall of columns — the auditorium in which the Congress met — being contained within the curvature. On the lefthand side, therefore, the wall was broken at intervals by doors opening into the auditorium; the righthand wall, however, was an unbroken front of heavy placards. Indeed, both walls were like huge placards, the lefthand side only being interspersed with openings. All the photographs, drawings, maps, newspapers, newspaper clippings, letters, posters, leaflets, throw-aways — everything the militant work-

ing class has printed in its struggle against a resourceful and cruel enemy — had been assembled here, each exhibit bearing the name of the country and the organization sending it. The corridor seemed to stretch for miles, as crowded as a small town shopping center on Saturday night. If I do not see it all now, I wondered, shall I ever have this chance again? Through the doors on the left I saw a few persons in the auditorium.

It seems as if the Communist paper *L'Humanité* has sent from France the largest exhibit of all. Not amazing in view of the advanced development of the united front movement there. Enlarged photographs of French workers in every industrial center of that country illustrate whole pages both from *L'Humanité* and the bourgeois French press. A huge map, drawn to scale, is startling in its black and red areas representing a death-struggle opposition. The red circle around Paris is the People's Front against fascist reaction. Photographs from Germany, Spain, Japan and China are equally horrible. Two Spanish girls lie on their backs upon the cobblestones, their clothing splotched with blood. Militiamen tramp past, their eyes irresistibly drawn to the mutilated bodies. The fine young body of a Chinese worker lies headless in the middle of a deserted street. Chinese, German, Spanish and Japanese workers press upon me, discussing these pictures as something from a casual experience. In a few days they will be returning. No one can say whether this German boy will be alive a month from now. Dolorez, the woman delegate from Spain, realizes that her safe return to the workers who sent her depends wholly upon their own might. The voice of the world proletariat, subdued and restrained, yet roars through these corridors and halls like thunder below the horizon.

Here is the exhibit from the United States, with a picture each of Foster and Browder above it. Here is a May Day demonstration in Union Square; demonstrations in Harlem; workers being attacked by company police; a Negro hanging by his neck to a tree; a Negro agitating a crowd of black and white workers. It is getting late and the auditorium is nearly filled. Since my arrival in the Soviet Union I have met a few young people, born after the October Revolution, who speak with awe of New York and America. Admiration for America's technique has caused some of them to overlook her heinous social face. I wish every worker in Moscow could see this exhibit. I need have no fears for Moscow's young generation, however, I remind myself, recalling a recent experience at a Pioneer camp. "When are the workers in the United States going to have their revolution?" they persisted in asking. They know the answers

to their own questions, a fact which heartens and cheers me.

**T**HE curved corridor ended in a white marble staircase winding upward. Workers at the doors are scrutinizing passes; they examine mine and I enter the hall of glistening marble columns and dazzling crystal chandeliers. I find a seat near the door and opposite the end of the hall where enormous paintings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, above the Presidium, face the delegates against a background of folded red velvet. Here I can see the whole auditorium although I am some distance from the Presidium's platform. On the back of the seat in front of me there is a metal plate with the words "Russian," "German," "English," "French," "Spanish," "Chinese," "Japanese," "Scandinavian" and "orator" printed on it. Beside each word there are two metal holes for plugging in earphones. When the speaking begins you adjust the earphones and plug in at your own language. The interpreter, speaking simultaneously with the "orator," creates the illusion that you are listening to the "orator."

There are several Negroes among the American delegation. William L. Patterson takes his seat. I recognize members of the Marine Workers Industrial Union. Trachtenberg enters from the corridor on the opposite side, his arms piled with new books. He stuffs them into the aperture under his desk and sits down, wiping his shining forehead. The tailor-shop immaculateness of his person has not been disturbed, despite the exertion. I am touched with tenderness at sight of old friends, for recollections of other meetings in other places make me sentimental. I should like to call them by name; I should like to talk with them of folks and conditions back home. They will be returning soon but I shall remain in Moscow. They will be in the midst of daily struggles while I live where such struggles have ended forever. My time to return will come soon enough, however, and I shall be in the midst of struggles as of old. I thus console myself. "In Moscow we have no names," a worker who left the United States illegally told a friend here who greeted him aloud. "The name you called me — forget it. It's not the one I came under." Thus we are reminded that the enemy strains his ears to hear even in this Congress.

**I** AM subconsciously aware of growing tension, the drone of voices and of massing crowds. Hardly a seat in the reserved section remains unoccupied. Nearly eight o'clock. I take my Russian grammar from the briefcase. The glittering lights hurt my eyes. Patterson leans over my shoulder and we look up and down and across the filling auditorium and

discuss the delegates and the proceedings. Dimitrov, Patterson says, will make the closing speech. A new executive committee will be elected. There will be a new control commission and alternates to the executive board. "Maybe something in it for the Negro press," he says. "I think a Negro will be among the candidates for election." Tonight's proceedings will be filled with drama. Others have said the same thing. There is a Negro youth in the gallery opposite. He is among a group of white friends, one of whom is a girl I have met at meetings in my home in Boston, whom I have seen in demonstrations on Boston Common, in Pittsburgh and in Salem.

Patterson returns to his place among the delegates and Willi Bredel, the exiled German novelist, passed behind me toward his seat. He is short and chubby and is mirthful and serious by turns. He seats himself in the same row, across the aisle. Beyond him in the enclosure two elderly women emerge together from the door marked PRESIDIUM. The enclosure, too, is filling up but the women come straight ahead, as if to places reserved for them. They are both tall and white-haired; one is somewhat stouter than the other. Their clothes are plain, those of the larger woman being a sort of over-all dress with shoulder straps or suspenders over a light-colored shirtwaist. The stouter woman's hair is parted severely in the middle and knotted at the back of her head. It is her glasses which unmistakably identify her as Lenin's widow. I immediately know the other, too, from photographs, as Lenin's sister Ulyanova. They take seats in the front row close to the balustrade, being close enough to the platform to see and hear everything.

Nobody among the delegates pays especial attention to the women. Perhaps that's because, having been present at all or almost all the sessions, they have come to be considered simply as two of the crowd. But I cannot think of them so impersonally. These two women are living links between a genius who is dead and the new world he led in creating. Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, the woman who sits there, was married to Lenin. They read and discussed together; they slept in the same bed; they suffered together in exile. There above the Presidium is an enormous painting of Lenin beside those of Marx, Engels and Stalin. When I look at Krupskaya sitting here Lenin and Leninism assume a new significance. Lenin is not simply a name any longer. Lenin is no longer simply a painting in the auditorium or in a shop window of Kuznetsky Most or a bronze bust in the dining room of the Moscow Daily News or the name on any one of thousands of pamphlets and tomes in libraries. He is a reality. He is no longer a theory but he is life. The woman who sits beside Krupskaya knew Lenin as a youth, as a young man and as a man. She was a link between him and the revolutionary movement when he was in exile. She has called him brother as a sister calls one brother. Now these women sit together here among representatives of millions of workers of every

land, Lenin's widow and Lenin's sister. They sit here following the sessions of a body which Lenin's genius helped to create. The October Revolution transformed social life on one-sixth of the earth's surface but Lenin was the soul of the Revolution. How do these two women feel, knowing that Lenin belongs no longer to them but to the future of mankind?

THE closing session of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International is about to open. I make myself comfortable and adjust the earphones. Members of the Presidium are seating themselves on the platform. There is Browder at the center of the table, the lower part of his face twisted into that characteristic half smile. Beside him sits the tall, esthetic Henri Barbusse. Marty of France sits next to Rolland. There is Wilhelm Pieck, whose hair is as white as his linen suit and as shaggy as a lion's mane. Dimitrov is not there, I reassure myself, having examined the Presidium again and again. Stalin, of course, is not there. He appeared on the opening night. No more room is left in the auditorium and only one or two seats are left for pass-holders. The delegates form an international audience of young men and women in their work clothes. They are men and women among whom sit the most advanced thinkers of the world. These men and women are not "intellectuals" seeking ways and means through formal logic of changing the world; they are dialectical materialists; they are realists. They are, in every country except this one and Soviet China, law-breakers or criminals, some with heavy prices on their heads.

There is a Negro among the Brazilian delegation. The Americans sit near the front, on the right. The Japanese occupy the front rows, with the English directly behind. The Philippine delegation and delegations from Central and South America fill in the center and extend away over to the other side. The red panels with their white lettering, encircling the auditorium at the height of the balcony, have become an international symbol. It is the same in Boston as in Moscow; the same in Shanghai as in London; the same in Manila as in Birmingham. I feel as if I know everybody in the great hall.

Thorez of France arises and declares the concluding session of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern open. Franz, for the Mandate Commission, reports that although the total membership of the Communist Parties at the time of the Sixth Congress was 1,676,000, the total membership at this time is 3,418,000. These figures include the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Franz pauses for quiet; he continues. In the capitalist countries at the time of the Sixth Congress there were 445,300 Communists but today there are 758,500. Again he waits for quiet. There are today 1,554,000 members of the Young Communist Leagues, including the All-Union Leninist Communist League. Communist Leagues, including the All-Union Leninist Communist League.

Applause had been continuous but when

the speaker went into the next statement the whole house applauded, shouted and whistled. "The total number of members in the Communist Parties and the Young Communist Leagues, including the Party and the League in the Soviet Union, has risen from 3,835,000 at the time of the Sixth Congress to 6,800,000 at the Seventh," Franz shouted.

OTHER reports followed swiftly. Gottwald, on behalf of the commission appointed to study the third point on the agenda of the Congress (Dimitrov's report on fascism and the united front), declared that in not one of the amendments proposed by delegations to the resolutions on Dimitrov's report were there any deviations from the general line of the Comintern, evidence of the complete unanimity of the Congress. Marty spoke on Ercoli's report on "Preparations for Imperialist War and Tasks of the Comintern." Ackerman spoke for his commission on Manuisky's report on the results of Socialist construction in the Soviet Union. When Marty declared that the triumph of the working class and collective farmers of the Soviet Union "is inseparably linked up with the name of the organizer of this great victory, with the name of the great leader of the toilers, Comrade Stalin," the house rose, shouting and applauding. It was a long time before quiet could be restored enough for the session to proceed.

Wang Ming, representing the Communist Party of China, speaks for the two commissions appointed by the Presidium on the affiliation of new sections of the Communist International. The Congress has decided to accept as sections of the Comintern the Communist Parties of Indo-China, the Philippines, Peru, Columbia, Porto Rico and Costa Rica and has instructed the Comintern to decide on the question of accepting as sections the Communist Parties of Panama, Ecuador and Haiti, following the submission of these parties of material and information on their real position. The Peoples' Revolutionary Party of the Tana-Tuva Peoples' Republic has been accepted, Wang Ming says, as a section of the Comintern with the rights of a sympathetic party.

In a few minutes it will be ten o'clock and Dimitrov has not yet appeared. Perhaps he will not come, after all. Perhaps reports of his being scheduled to sum up were rumors of no more foundation than those that Stalin would be here tonight. . . . Thorez has given the floor to Pieck, who moves the acceptance of a resolution instructing the Executive Committee to reconsider the statutes of the Communist International, making changes in them in accordance with the decisions of the Seventh World Congress. As all the other resolutions proposed tonight have been unanimously adopted, so is this one. Angaretis comes up next, reporting on a number of appeals for reinstatement in the Communist International. He moves, on behalf of the Presidium, that they be submitted to the New International Control Commission, yet

is still to be elected. The motion is carried.

"We have now come to the last point on the agenda," Thorez says. I sit up straight and open my eyes, squinting beneath the dazzling chandeliers at the press box on the other side of the auditorium. A man there is yawning broadly and continuously, probably exhausted by weeks of these sessions. But he makes no move to leave. Shepard, of the English Daily Worker, sits behind him. Vern Smith and Sender Garlin, of the American Daily Worker, are taking notes. The last point on the agenda. Elections to the leading organs of the Comintern.

Ercoli is speaking in the face of blinding white lights concentrated upon the platform at opposite sides of the auditorium. He moves the election of an executive committee of the Comintern of 46 members and 33 alternates. He reads the names. When Dimitrov's is reached the applause mounts to a thunderous storm. "Long live the tried colleague of Stalin, the helmsman of the Comintern, Comrade Dimitrov!" The storm subsides only to rise again in greater intensity at the calling of Stalin's name for the executive committee. The stamina and enthusiasm of these spokesmen of the international working class stimulate me, too, to shout. They are shouting: "Long live Stalin!" "Three cheers for Stalin!" "Vive Staline!" "Es lebe Stalin!" "Eviva Staline!" "Stalin Banzai!" For fifteen minutes by my watch the crowd shouts and sings and whistles, each delegation in its tongue. Yet they have been here since five o'clock and earlier.

The chairman does not hasten them; he sings with them, leading them in the "Internationale." Even as we look on we realize that this is an event of world significance, this closing session of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern; we realize that never again shall we all meet together as we are met here now. Many of these laughing and singing young men and women from the scattered areas of the world will never see another such congress. Some of them will fall in the class struggle. Some will be arrested upon their return to their native lands and buried in fascist dungeons. They realize these facts as well as anybody. But tonight is theirs; tonight they sing and laugh and shout at the mention of the names of men whom the enemy has not been able to kill. The chairman, who might shorten the meeting because the hour is very late, joins them, helping to prolong it.

**I**T WAS five minutes before midnight when Thorez gave the floor to Dimitrov. It was five minutes before midnight when every person rose in the hall and began shouting above the music of the orchestra which had just entered the balcony opposite and taken a position directly over the platform. "Rot front!" the crowd cried in German. "Banzai!" the Japanese shouted. The American yelled "Hurrah!" while the band played and Dimitrov stood waiting behind the speakers stand, his manuscript spread be-

fore him. The spotlights glared upon his face while official cameras recorded pictures of him, of the Presidium and of the audience. Dimitrov stood waiting; unsmiling, at ease. He resembled some old-fashioned Shakespearian actors I have seen; I thought of William Farnum when he used to play the rugged and noble roles of upright men whose bodies and minds were strong. Dimitrov suggests such men: sturdy, well-built body, a broad face and high forehead. His heavy black eyebrows and thick black hair combed back heighten the impression of the romantic actor. But there is nothing in his manner suggestive of acting. He waits, looking over the delegates. He seems to be thinking that all this is part of the business of this Congress. Suddenly Henri Barbusse, at the long table above and behind Dimitrov leans over, looking at someone in the audience. Browder and Pieck look and Dimitrov turns from the stand before him toward a man who approaches with a great red-bound volume. Containing the whole history of Dimitrov's life to date, the book is a present from a group of workers. He accepts it amidst cheers.

All the while I can imagine those who are seeing him for the first time, as I am, saying to themselves: "So this is George Dimitrov!" Here is the man who so confounded the suave and dandified Goering at the Leipzig trial that Hitler's most powerful agent cried in frustration: "I'm not afraid of you!"—a confession not merely of fear but of terror. The crowd still shouts and sings and the band still plays. What must be the thoughts of Hitler and Goering when they read of this Congress and of Dimitrov's role in it? There is no doubt that they will do all they can to counteract his new influence upon German workers. The German press, I understand, has given this Congress columns of space. This same press will probably be ordered now to report Dimitrov's "arrest" or "suicide" or "assassination." Dimitrov runs his fingers through his hair and looks back at the chairman, smiling. The ovation subsides; the band ceases playing; the chairman smiles and nods.

Dimitrov begins. "The Seventh Congress of the Communist International, the Congress of Communists of all countries and all continents of the world, has come to an end." He goes on. This is a congress of complete triumph of the unity between the proletariat of victorious socialism—the Soviet Union—and the proletariat of the capitalist world fighting for their liberation. . . . He covers six main points characterizing this Congress, characterizations which show its unlikeness to other congresses of the Communist International. . . . This Congress laid the foundation for the broad mobilization of forces of the working class and of all toilers against capitalism such as had never before been known in the history of the struggle of the working class; this Congress was a congress of struggle against imperialist war; a congress of the unity of the working

class—of struggle for the united proletarian front; it was a congress that expressed the feelings of the overwhelming majority of the working class, even though no non-Party delegates and no Social-Democratic workers were present. "This Congress," Dimitrov declares, "was a congress of new tactical orientation of the Comintern, an orientation which is based on the unshakable position of Marxism-Leninism and on this basis changes tactics in accordance with the changed world situation." . . . This Congress, however, was aware of the fact that there would be errors, individual deviations to the "right" or "left" in the carrying through in practice of a Bolshevik line; which of these dangers was in general the worse—this question was one simply of scholastics. "The danger is the worst which, in a given country and at a given moment, most hinders the carrying through the line of this Congress." . . . In the sixth place, Dimitrov says, this Congress was one of Bolshevik self-criticism and of strengthening the leadership of the Comintern and its sections.

Concluding, he calls upon the delegates to carry the decisions of this Congress to the wide masses of people, explaining and applying the decisions for leading the activities of millions of the masses. "We are pupils of Marx, Lenin and Stalin," he cries, his voice drowned in the ovation this declaration had evoked. "We must be worthy of our great teachers." He collects the pages of his manuscript and, making his way to the far end of the platform, mounts to the level where the Presidium sits. But the Presidium now rises, with everybody else in the great hall, singing the revolutionary songs of one country after another.

It is three quarters of an hour past midnight. Krupskaya and Ulyanova stand singing with the crowd. Thorez waits until the last song has been sung. He says: "I declare the Seventh Congress of the Comintern closed—" He waits for the cheering to subside. He proclaims: "Long live the Bolshevik Party and the leader of the international proletariat, Comrade Stalin—" He waits. "Long live the Communist International and its helmsman, Comrade Dimitrov!" The band swings into the "Internationale," thus turning the cheering into singing. The audience follows the band through every stanza to the very end, then stands waiting among the seats. Nobody moves to go out. The Presidium turns slowly and disperses into the room behind the red velvet hangings. The crowd dissolves into the corridors and into the streets. It is after one o'clock but Moscow is awake and merry. The Metropole Hotel across the broad square to the left is alive with light and music, for the tourists are having a good time. I start for my room but turn to look back at the building I have just left. A row of red flags illuminated by concealed lights flutter at their slender sticks. They look like jets of scarlet flame above the workers on the sidewalk.