

The May Plenum of the E.C.C.I.

THE May Plenum of the E.C.C.I. occurred at a time when the international situation was one of the utmost gravity. The *coup d'état* of Chiang Kai Shek and the acts of provocation against the U.S.S.R., which are closely connected with it—the attack on the Soviet Embassy in Peking, on the Trade Delegation in London, and, finally, the breaking off of diplomatic relations between the U.S.S.R. and England—everything pointed towards a close approach of the danger of war. The work of the Plenum was guided by these signs, these facts decided its character.

The May Plenum occupied itself only with three questions: war and the danger of war, the situation in England and the Chinese revolution. After careful and thorough discussion of these questions in special Commissions the Plenum came to unanimous decisions, which affirmed the correctness of the policy of the Comintern in the past, and at the same time contained concrete directions how to carry out that policy in the future, having regard to the sharpening of the struggle between the imperialist world on the one side and the international proletariat, the U.S.S.R. and revolutionary China on the other.

The conclusions of the May Plenum at the end of its sitting, with regard to war and the war danger, can be summed up in the following manner:

“The new phase of imperialist policy is characterised by the preparations of capitalism to turn from small to large wars.”

“All contradictions among the capitalist States fall into the background before the principal contradiction, which is dividing the whole world into two camps. In one camp we have the Soviet Union and revolutionary China, in the other camp the whole capitalist world. China and the Soviet Union are the two focal points of the entire international situation.”

On the coming war danger the Plenum declared:

“The factor which at the present moment is most threatening to peace is England. The new factor characterising the international situation is that of England having again achieved hegemony in European policy.”

The Plenum emphasised the fact that the approaching war against China and the Soviet Union differed from the imperialist war of 1914 in certain particulars.

“Such a war is a peculiar one because it is openly a class war. Here the imperialists are not fighting against each other with the help of their respective populations, but the imperialists are sending out a punitive expedition to overthrow the workers and peasants.”

It follows from that that the most important slogan of the present anti-war campaign should not be the abstract one of “war against war,” but the concrete slogan, “Defend the Chinese and Russian Revolution.” “The attention of the masses must be concentrated on this slogan.” On the same subject the Plenum further pointed out that “the next war will be a mechanised war.”

“Every country will be turned into a mighty factory for turning out weapons of destruction.” “In consequence of this character of the war the importance of the working class and their organisations grows, particularly of the trade unions, without whose co-operation the war would be unthinkable. Their opposition to the war, together with the revolutionary fight of the army against the war, would be fatal for the imperialist States.”

THE imperialists are quite clear on that point, so they are making strong efforts for the ideological preparation of the working class masses for war. In this respect the Second International, the Amsterdam Trade Union Federation and the ultra-left deserters from the Comintern, by skilfully dividing up the work, render unique service. Since it is quite hopeless to lead the masses to war against revolutionary China under the banner of “Defend the Fatherland”—no reasonable man will believe that China threatens the British Isles with invasion—the bourgeoisie and their accomplices are compelled to draw upon such sophisms as, for example, “Defence of interests,” “Defend the flag,” “Protection of civilisation,” etc. In order however, to prepare ideologically for a campaign against the U.S.S.R. the Second International is conducting the

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most vile propaganda against the "red imperialism" of the Soviet Union. At the same time, traitors from the ranks of German Social-Democracy are awakening illusions among the masses as to the future neutrality of Germany: they understand perfectly that in case of war the German chemical industry will most probably stand at the service of the States conducting the war against the U.S.S.R., that the German system of transport will assure a way for the transportation of munitions and weapons from England, Italy, etc. Similarly the ultra-left renegades are trying to disorganise the Soviet-Russian hinterland, in that they are attempting to slander and discredit the Soviet power and the leadership of the C.P. in the eyes of the working masses. They accuse them of "Kulak-isation," of "degeneration," of "national weakness of intellect," etc.

It follows that one of the most important moments in the defence of the Russian and the Chinese revolution is the fight against all these traitors and calumniators. In connection with that the Plenum emphasised, among other things, the necessity of the fight against the pacifist talk on disarmaments, and described it as "greatest hypocrisy and mockery." "We must make clear to the masses"—declared the Plenum—"that the only country which has in reality reduced its army to a minimum is the Soviet Union, that the Soviet Union is the only State which firmly supports peace, that all disarmament plans of the imperialist States are but treachery," intended to divert the attention of the working class from the tremendous war armaments of these States. In the fight against pacifism—the Plenum declared—we must take care to distinguish between the "vague, sentimental pacifism from which the working class is still suffering" and the "conscious treachery of the bourgeois pacifists, priests and other charlatans in which the Social-Democrats—as, for example, the I.L.P.—are included."

The Plenum further considered in a concrete manner the tactical problems of the fight against imperialist war. It summed up all that Lenin had taught on this question, which is still valid to-day. It considered minutely how this Leninist tactic is to be employed in the actual relations of this coming "open class war" which will differ considerably from the war of 1914, the war between imperialist States.

GREAT attention was particularly directed by the Plenum to the question of the General Strike in connection with war. The promises of the whining "heroes" of the Second International to "answer" a war with a General Strike are nothing but empty phrases or deliberate treachery. "The struggle against war is not a single act: it demands bloody sacrifices from the working class, a whole series of mass actions (demonstrations, strikes in munition factories, etc.), whose outcome is the victorious revolt of the proletariat. The Communist Parties must use every effort possible to enlarge such mass action, and must work firmly towards a General Strike. . . . We must not, however, lose sight of the fact that it depends on the revolutionary development of the situation, whether the slogan of the General Strike can be put forward as a slogan of

action." The defeatist slogan must also be adapted to the new character of the future war.

"If, in an ordinary imperialist war between two capitalist States the workers can fight for the overthrow of their own government, and not for the victory of one of the belligerent States, how much more must they fight in the imperialist and counter-revolutionary war against the Chinese revolution (to-day against Wuhan) or against the Soviet Union, for the working masses of China and the Soviet Union?"

The slogan of "fraternisation"—which is still valid to-day—will have to be adapted to the new conditions also. "This slogan . . . must be bound up, in an imperialist war against revolutionary China (now the Government in Wuhan) and the Soviet Union, with the appeal to the soldiers of the imperialist armies to go over, at a suitable moment, to the troops of the revolution."

THE Plenum similarly discussed the questions of the abolition of the existing armies, of the "people's militia," the "arming of the proletariat," "the workers' militia."

"In modern capitalist countries, in which the period of bourgeois revolution is finished, the Communist Parties must put forward, in conjunction with the demand for the abolition of the existing army, the slogan of 'Arming the Proletariat.' . . .

"The slogan of the red army will become real after the seizure of political power by the proletariat. . . .

"The slogan of a workers' militia is nowadays of propagandist importance. Its realisation presupposes the victory of the proletariat revolution in a number of the most important capitalist States. The Communist Parties, in their propaganda for this slogan must lay greatest emphasis on the demand for the disarming of the bourgeoisie, of the fascist organisations, the police, the gendarmerie.

"The slogan of a general militia must be put forward (a) in colonial countries; (b) in capitalist countries where, in consequence of the existence of feudalistic survivals, bourgeois-democratic revolutions are still possible, which . . . can change into socialist revolutions; (c) in a number of countries where the military caste are responsible for military *coups d'état*. . . .; (d) in capitalist countries . . . which are in a position of semi-colonial dependence on world capital, and particularly if there is present a powerful national-revolutionary movement against their oppression." Together with these slogans, Communists are obliged "to support the demands of the soldiers and sailors, as *e.g.*, elected officers, territorial system in relation to the administration of the military services, the right to vote, improvement in the material conditions of the soldiers, etc. The Communists must bring in all these slogans in connection with their general ones."

THE Plenum directed particular attention to illegal work in the forces and among the youth. Finally, the Plenum referred to a number of mistakes and defects of the Party in this particular sphere: The under-estimation of the war danger, as though the war were a matter of the more or less distant future; in several countries the inability to connect questions of

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internal politics with international problems; in other countries, on the other hand, the under-estimation of imperialism in those lands; mistakes in the direction of a vulgar pacifism; false conclusions of a few comrades from the ideas of Lenin which he stated in the instructions to the delegates to the Hague, and which were interpreted by the comrades as renouncing the strike as a means of fighting against war.

As we see, the May Plenum of the E.C.C.I. in the true spirit of Leninism did not deal with the war danger abstractedly—"from the standpoint of eternity"—but throughout concretely, having regard to the concrete character of the coming war, the given historical situation of the different countries.

We take only two points from the resolution on England. The Plenum stated that:

"the intensification of the class struggle in England finds its expression in the accelerated differentiation within the working-class movement." On the one side "the leaders of the Labour Party and of the trade unions are openly coming nearer to the ruling class in all the burning questions of external and internal politics—the miners' struggle, the new trade union law, intervention in China, preparations for war against the U.S.S.R., peace in industry, Americanisation. . . . While the trade union bureaucrats and the leaders of the Labour Party work with capitalism for peace in industry, they are conducting a furious struggle against the Communist workers and the adherents of the Minority Movement and the left wing. . . . Although the I.L.P. tried, by using left wing phrases, to separate itself from the right wing reformists, it has in all practical questions openly supported the bureaucracy, the right wing."

On the other hand, there is noticeable a radicalisation of the working class masses.

"The feelings of the broad masses of the people find their expression in the constant decrease of votes given to the Government in bye-elections. . . . The development of the left wing within the Labour Party, the energetic echo which the conferences of the Minority Movement experience, the success of the Party and the Minority Movement in the trade union elections in the coal areas, all indicate the growth of the left movement among the working class."

The second point of the Plenum decision, dealing with the unity of the English workers with the proletariat of the Soviet Union and the Anglo-Russian Committee, deserves particular attention; the more because the representatives of the Russian opposition in the Plenum displayed the greatest demagoguery on these questions. On this question the Plenum came to an unequivocal and clear decision. Rejecting the slanderous opinions put forward by the Opposition on the so-called "opportunist" policy of the Comintern on this question, the Plenum declared:

"The Communist Party must, now as before, enlighten the workers on the significance and importance of unity between the workers of Great

Britain and the proletariat of the Soviet Union; that this unity, in face of the military policy of the British Government, is an absolute necessity. The Party must make clear to the workers that in consequence of the sabotage of the entire General Council, from Hicks and Purcell to Thomas, the Anglo-Russian Committee has not yet been able to accomplish its great task. . . . The Comintern fully and completely approves the explanation of the British Communist Party, which places the entire responsibility for the results of the last Berlin Conference on the General Council. The history of the activity of the Anglo-Russian Committee in the last year justifies the position of the British Communist Party, which explained to the workers that the General Council is responsible for the concessions of the Russian trade unions, and that these concessions are new indications of the fact that the Soviet trade union movement is honestly trying to obtain practical unity. At the same time, the Plenum approves the campaign of the Communist Party among the miners in favour of unity between British and Russian miners."

In the same fashion the Plenum discussed thoroughly the fighting measures to be taken against the ultimatum of the General Council to the Trades Councils (March 25th), according to which the Trades Councils are obliged to break off all connections with the Minority Movement.

THE Plenum devoted extraordinary attention to the Chinese question. It was considered in all its concrete form, in its complete actuality, parrying all attempts of the Opposition to drown it in a sea of abstract revolutionary phrases, behind which phrases was concealed an opportunist, out and out pessimistic and bankrupt content. The Plenum laid down, above all, "that recent events completely confirm the standpoint of the C.I. towards the Chinese revolution," and that in particular "the march of events has entirely borne out the prognosis of the seventh Enlarged Executive on the unavoidable separation of the bourgeoisie from the national united front and its going over to the side of the counter-revolution." The Plenum laid it down "that the breaking away of Chiang Kai Shek has created a new general political situation in China and a new grouping of the decisive class forces in the country," that it "signifies a temporary defeat of the Chinese revolution, a certain strengthening of the counter-revolutionary alliance." At the same time, however, the Plenum affirmed that "the tactic of a united front with the national bourgeoisie in the period of the revolution which has finished was quite correct," that the "bankrupts' opinion that the present crisis in the Chinese revolution is a decisive defeat . . . is false."

The Plenum declared that "the chief cause of the treachery of the bourgeoisie and their military leader, Chiang Kai Shek, lay on the one hand in the development of the mass movement in the working class and peasantry, as well as in the successes of the Communists; on the other hand, in the growing pressure of the united

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strength of international imperialism." In connection with these results of the movement, which brought about that breaking away, the Plenum declared that "the temporary defeat of the revolution accompanied by its transference to a higher stage of development and the beginning of a more intense mobilisation of the masses."

The essential characteristic of the new phase of development in the Chinese revolution was formulated by the Plenum as follows:

"The agricultural revolution (in the end the confiscation and nationalisation of the land) is the essential social-economic content of the new stage of the Chinese revolution. Most important at present is the revolutionary 'plebeian' solution of the agricultural question from below, by the dozens and hundreds of millions of the peasants themselves, of which movement the Communist Party must place itself at the head, and which it must lead."

The Plenum decided that the principal task of the C.P. of China at present is to spread and to lead the peasant agricultural revolution from below, and at the same time emphasised that "the Communist Party within the Government must also influence Government policy in the direction of precipitating the agricultural revolution," and towards the change of the Government "into an organ of revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." Only on the basis of such a policy from above and below is the formation of really reliable troops and the organisation of the whole army on firm revolutionary principles possible.

THE Plenum emphasised, however, that the C.P. of China can only fulfil this task "if it . . . keeps its own revolutionary character, distinct from the political character of even the most radical petty-bourgeois revolutionary."

The Plenum referred to the fact that the Communist Party "must not renounce its right of criticising the vacillations of the revolutionary petty-bourgeois democracy," and stressed the point that "there was to be observed in the Communist Party of China a great deal of hesitation on this point." The Party had not always criticised with sufficient firmness the leadership of the Kuomintang, and within the Party there is occasionally noticeable a certain fear of the growth of the mass movement, particularly the movement among the peasants in favour of the appropriation of the land, the dispossession of the landed gentry, landowners, etc. But the Plenum expressed

"its firm conviction that the young Communist Party of China, which is rapidly growing and has already given examples of revolutionary heroism, will quickly correct these mistakes, which are explained by the extreme complexity of events and by the youth of the Communist movement in China."

The May Plenum of the E.C.C.I. thus justified the line of policy of the Chinese C.P., in the same way that the seventh Plenum had done: warning it against right wing deviations, "it refuses in the most decided manner

the demand for their secession from the Kuomintang, or the adoption of a position which if accepted in principle would lead to such a secession. . . . The Plenum is of the opinion that a policy which underestimates the Kuomintang, regarding it as a peculiar form of the revolutionary movement, would in actual fact mean the handing over of the banner of the Kuomintang to the right wing." The Plenum is further of the opinion "that such a juxtaposition of the tasks of the national revolution and the tasks of the proletarian class struggle, which we can record both of the ultra-left groups in Europe as well as of the Social-Democrats, is nothing less than a renunciation of the leadership of the proletariat in the democratic Chinese revolution, than a renunciation in favour of a so-called 'proletarian' exclusiveness, which politically is a species of opportunism, and makes the proletariat an appendage of the democratic camp."

A MOST emphatic condemnation was expressed for the refusal to participate energetically in the "provisional revolutionary government of Hankow," as also against "a sceptical attitude which formally is very 'radical-revolutionary,' but in reality repeats the mistakes of the Russian Mensheviks of 1905."

The Plenum, in opposition to this extreme leftism, which in essence, however, follows the Menshevik tactic, put forward the tactic of changing the Kuomintang into a mass organisation: "The inclusion of the broad masses in the Kuomintang, the election of the leading bodies by these masses and the formation of a basis of the eligibility of these organisations—this is the particular form of contact between the working masses and the revolutionary State power which corresponds to the present stage of the Chinese revolution." "The Hankow Government," said the Plenum, "which is a government of the left section of the Kuomintang, is therefore not yet a dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, but it is on the way to becoming such, and in the event of a victorious progress of the class struggle of the proletariat in shaking off their radical-bourgeois companions, and after overcoming a number of acts of treachery, will inevitably develop in the direction of such a dictatorship."

The May Plenum of the E.C.C.I. foresees, as did the seventh Plenum, that in the future, with the progress of the agricultural revolution there will inevitably appear vacillations within the heterogeneous petty-bourgeois masses, new divisions in the revolutionary front, new treachery. In order that these unavoidable betrayals should not be fatal to the revolution, and to create sufficient guarantees against their consequences, the Plenum recommends the Chinese Communist Party, firstly, to spread with all their strength the agrarian and the working-class movements; secondly, to employ all means to change the Kuomintang into a revolutionary mass organisation; thirdly, to criticise the mistakes and hesitation of the leaders of the Kuomintang; and, fourthly—what is of special importance—to increase tenfold the energy employed in changing the national army into a true revolutionary force:

"The E.C.C.I. is of the opinion that at present the question of the reorganisation of the army,

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the formation of troops devoted absolutely to the revolution, the contact between the army and the organisations of the workers and peasants, the securing of cadres in the army, the transformation of the army from a mercenary into a regular army of the revolution, etc., is of burning importance. Particular attention must be given to the formation of absolutely reliable troops composed of revolutionary workers and peasants, to the influence of the Communists and of the trustworthy 'left' members of the Kuomintang in the army, which must be cleansed of all counter-revolutionary elements, and to the formation of a Workers' Guard."

RECOMMENDING to the C.P. of China to participate energetically in the Hankow Government and to hold it to its course of changing into an organ of the revolutionary-democratic workers' and peasants' dictatorship, the Plenum also declared, with reference to the tremendous difficulties which the Hankow Government had, and still has, to overcome, that: "under these difficult circumstances the Hankow Government should rely principally on a policy of 'tacking' and manœuvring against foreign imperialism. The E.C.C.I. is against the idea of excluding in principle the 'Brest Litovsk' tactic of 'tacking' and manœuvring, by referring to the unproletarian character of the State power."

In so far as the C.P. of China takes over, and must take over, the responsibility for the Hankow Government, of which it is a component part, it must also bear the responsibility for the tactical manœuvres of the same.

Finally, the Plenum declared emphatically that:

"It would be useless at the present moment to put forward the slogan of delegate councils of workers and peasants. This slogan (in the district under the government of Hankow) would mean nothing more than the slogan of the proclamation of 'all power to the councils.' It would mean a double government, the road to ruin for the Hankow Government, the immediate passing over to a proletarian dictatorship in the form of councils, omitting the stage of the Kuomintang form of mass organisation and State power. In the further development of the revolution, when the democratic revolution begins to change in a Socialist direction, it will be necessary to form workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils."

THE May Plenum of the E.C.C.I. was a Plenum of war; it closed the ranks of the Comintern, in a situation of imminent war, for the difficult struggles ahead. On that account the work of the Plenum was done with great enthusiasm and in complete unanimity. In the commissions problems were thoroughly discussed, critical statements, coming from various quarters, were listened to attentively and patiently; these criticisms were, however, always objective, founded upon essentially Leninist lines, and so the decisions were come to unanimously.

In violent contrast to this unanimity of the Plenum is the attitude of the representatives of the opposition in the C.P. of the Soviet Union, *i.e.*, of comrades Trotsky and Vujovitch, whose speeches and numerous theses, articles and declarations, which were manufactured by the absent comrades Zinoviev and Radek, greatly hindered the work of the Plenum.

In a situation of acknowledged gravity, at a moment when all the forces of imperialism are opening fire on the Comintern, on the Soviet Union, and on revolutionary China, these comrades have not made a single effort to offer even one practical piece of advice, even one practical reference to ways and means of meeting the furious attacks of world imperialism against these citadels of revolution. Instead of that they have made "fraction" capital out of the difficulties of the Chinese revolution, of the Soviet Union, of the C.P.S.U., of the Comintern, they have made malicious and embittered attacks from the beginning on the leadership of the Comintern and its sections, to discredit it, to make unheard of slanderous complaints, and, in addition, demanded in the name of "freedom of criticism" the widest possible circulation of their mutinous speeches. In its essence their whole method of procedure implied an essential deviation from Leninism to Trotskyism in its worst form.

As in the world war of 1914, comrade Trotsky denied the revolutionary slogans of Lenin, which could, and finally did, change the imperialist war into a civil war, and in their place put revolutionary phrases only; so this time again he and his adherents have not been able to bring forward even one slogan which could mobilise the masses against the threatened intervention. The one thing which they demanded in connection with the war danger was the dissolution of the Anglo-Russian Committee, and this—this one demand—coincides with what the Conservative British Government has been impatiently awaiting, and what will be striven for by the English reformists and traitors to the working class—for they are clear on the point that by such a dissolution the preparations for a war offensive against the U.S.S.R. will be made much easier.

Trotsky and his adherents proposed in place of the plan of winning over of the masses, which at present, in face of the danger of war, is of particular practical importance, a plan resembling that of the anarcho-syndicalists, and just at a time when all honest anarcho-syndicalist elements in sympathy with the Communist movement have already been assimilated by it, and who retain only the worst elements, "who with the foulest means fight side by side with the worst White Guards against the Comintern and the Soviet Union."

In place of the plan for consolidating the forces of the Comintern, which in view of the imminent war is of particular importance, they proposed a complete political and organisational alliance with the renegades of the Maslov-Ruth Fischer group, expelled from the Communist Party, and demanded their immediate reinstatement in the Comintern, and this demand is proposed at a time when these renegades are preparing the issue of an anti-Communist journal and the establishment of a counter-revolutionary fourth international.

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INSTEAD of the Comintern tactic with regard to the accomplished stages of the Chinese revolution, they proposed one which would lead to the secession of the proletariat from the national revolutionary movement, and the renunciation of the leadership of the proletariat, and the surrender of all positions of power to the capitalist bourgeoisie. For the future they demand a tactic of double government, in the district controlled by the Hankow Government, which will take the form of Soviets, also the immediate adoption of a plan for the fall of the left Kuomintang government.

“This is nothing less than the repetition of the old Trotskyist attitude, an omission of the petty-bourgeois-peasant stage of revolution, that is an attitude which comrade Trotsky, in harmony with the Mensheviks, represented as against Lenin.”

If this ultra-left attitude is compared with Trotsky's utterances, that the Chinese revolution and the Comintern had suffered nothing but defeats in the course of recent years, and had achieved no successes, it becomes evident that behind the ultra-left phrases of Trotsky and his disciples there is concealed a profound pessimism, a bankruptcy and a desertion from the revolution.

At a moment of war danger comrade Trotsky diverts attention from it, and puts forward the slogan, “The Greatest Danger is the Party Regime.” For the struggle against this regime Trotsky demands, just as he did after the split of 1903 in common with the Mensheviks, an unlimited freedom to criticise, even if this finds expression in throwing mud at the Comintern. The Comintern is conducting a so-called “ignominious policy,” which has helped towards the victory of the Chinese Cavaignac—Chiang Kai Shek—even though it aims at accusing the Soviet power of a national conservative narrow-mindedness—an accusation which harmonises completely with the Social-Democratic cry

of “red imperialism of the Soviet Union.” In demanding now, at a moment of war danger, the opening up of a wide discussion, they refer to the discussion during the Peace of Brest, but conceal, however, that Lenin was then against the discussion, and that it was only made possible because the C.C. of the C.P.R. was split on that question into two equal parts, whereas to-day the opposition of the C.P.S.U. and the Comintern is only represented by a small, diminishing number of Party comrades.

Instead of the slogan “We must now fight the imperialist offensive to the finish,” Trotsky put forward, “We will fight this plan to an end,” that is, against Party and Comintern.

THE whole Plenum unanimously condemned these comrades as politically bankrupt and as deserters. It declared that their behaviour is incompatible with their position as members and candidates of the E.C.C.I., and instructed the Presidium, together with the International Control Commission, to exclude comrades Trotsky and Vujovitch formally from the E.C.C.I. if this fight is not discontinued. At the same time, it recommended the C.C. of the C.P.S.U. to “take the strongest measures to protect the C.P.S.U. from the fractional struggle of comrades Trotsky and Zinoviev.”

In its commissions, the Plenum allowed comradely, objective criticism of defects and mistakes from all members of the E.C.C.I., indeed, it demanded such criticism and listened willingly to it; but the Plenum rejected, unanimously and angrily, the malevolent and inimical criticism of the Opposition, which essentially departs from the principles of Leninism, and shows solidarity with the renegades Maslov and Ruth Fischer. The Plenum proved that in the present hour of danger the Comintern can and will defend the Soviet Republic and revolutionary China, maintaining an iron discipline in its ranks, as a true Leninist weapon of world revolution.