

Strike Struggles and Tasks of Revolutionary Unions

By A. LOZOVSKY

The following article is the concluding part of a speech delivered by A. Lozovsky, General Secretary of the Red International of Labor Unions. In view of the fact that it contains valuable material dealing with the whole international labor movement and its tasks in the period now opening, the Pan-Pacific Monthly believes that the trade union movement of the Pacific area will be benefited by a study of the problems of labor and their solutions as given in this article. The first part of the speech was published in our April issue. In that part were discussed the new features of economic fights in the present period, the change in structure of the working class and its effect on the trade unions, reformism and the labor aristocracy, the nature of present struggles—offensive or defensive, leadership of struggles by revolutionary trade unionists independently of the reformist bureaucracy, how to conduct such struggles so as to secure the participation of the broadest masses. In this last matter, the reformists were criticized for their opposition to the participation of the unorganized workers in the election of strike leadership and direction. From this point the present article continues.—EDITOR.

The Old and New Argument on the Unorganized

IF we had had differences only with the reformists on this question, it would have been nothing new. I may remind you that the question of the part played by the unorganized in the struggle, was a subject of discussions as far back as before the war. To anyone interested in this question we could recommend the study of the discussion between Rosa Luxemburg on the one hand and Scheidemann and Husemann on the other on the question of the role of the unorganized in economic and political struggles. But it was a much more complicated business. It appeared that in our own ranks there was a reflexion of social-democratic traditions, social-democratic views regarding the unorganized, these traditions and views proving strongest in those countries where social-democracy is strongest, in Germany to be precise.

Inside the German Party a struggle round the decisions of the Fourth R.I.L.U. Congress had already become acute. The struggle for the independent leadership of economic disputes, the building up of strike committees, the bringing into the struggle of the unorganized, etc.—these formed the net of problems round which the internal groupings gathered; these were the questions which be-

came of fatal import for a certain number of communists who had to be driven out of the Communist International.

Obscurity on the Question of T.U. Leadership of Economic Fights

How do these ex-communists look on the matter? Noteworthy is Walcher's article in the third issue of the journal known as "Against the Stream" ("Gegen den Strom"), the official organ of the Communists expelled from the party. The article is headed "Some Words on the New Tactics of the Trade Union Movement." Walcher writes: "Who must lead the economic struggle? The trade unions. That is stated in all resolutions. Yet the Fourth R.I.L.U. Congress has brought forward a new slogan: that economic fights must be led by the trade union opposition, although the trade union opposition is not the trade union." From this fallacy emanates all the obscurity now embodied in the basis of the Rights' Platform.

Of course, the trade union must direct the strike struggle and all economic disputes, that is what trade unions exist for, but what are you going to do if the trade unions do not direct that struggle? That is the question. If the reformist trade unions do not run the strike but smash it, what are you going to do about it? What is the sense of our mouthing such elementary truths when we

need to talk of what the unions really are and what leadership they actually provide.

Instead of trotting out truisms like this, that the trade union should conduct the strike and so on, we want to know whether the reformist unions do provide leadership, and whether we are going to arrange our tactics with a view to waiting until the reformist trade unions begin to lead the strike struggle. Experience has shown that the reformist trade unions do not lead the struggle, that they actually break strikes.

We are faced with the alternative: either we are going to try to lead the strike ourselves and increase our influence while carrying on the fight, thus winning over new sections of the masses and so gradually ousting reformist influence at the point of production, or we are going to put our money on the reformist "dark horse" and lay down our tactics with a view to forcing the reformists to fight. The Fourth RILU Congress was in favor of the first, and the German Rights of the second. Hence their great slogan "Force the Bureaucrats to Fight"! ("Zwingt die Bonzen!")

But, comrades, how are we going to force them to fight? One of two things: either we believe that they can actually give a lead, or we are going to wait until they change their point of view, we meanwhile trying to convince them and prove to them the soundness of our viewpoint and then 200 years or so from now they will have come round to the view that our policy is the sounder one. In either case these are no tactics for communists. Communist tactics do not consist in forcing bred-in-the-bone reformists to fight, but in leading the working masses against the will and wish of these bureaucrats and hounding them out of the movement. When there is a difference of view on what would seem to be such an elementary question for communists in our own ranks, we find it a bit of a tight fit in one Party and one International with communists of this brand. Let them go over to the social-democrats and there force the bureaucrats to put up a fight.

Fetishism of the TU Machine and Fear of Independent Leadership

From the tactics of "force the bureaucrats to fight" there emerge a number of other issues which brings the policy of the Communist International and the RILU into conflict with the social-democratic traditions still to be found in the minds of some communists.

If we take up the stand that we are to wait until we have reformed the machine, and are not going to lead the struggle, then it is obvious that our whole aim should be not to win the masses or to gain influence at the point of production but to conquer the reformist apparatus. But what is meant by the trade union machine? The machine consists of elected persons, technical workers, property, real estate, houses and so on. The machine has nothing else. Then whom are we going to conquer and what are we going to win? The reformist machine consists of dyed-in-the-wool social-democrats whom it is utterly impossible to win over; they can only be re-made in the next world, they'll have to be born again (laughter). We are therefore faced with the question, not of conquering the reformist apparatus, but of winning the masses, kicking out the reformist machinery and installing our own revolutionary machine.

But every time we bring up the question in this way there is a special species of communist (Germany is its habitat), which begins to get the wind up: "How are we going to carry on an independent struggle? We will elect strike committees, is that what we are going to do? Are we going to draw the unorganized into the struggle? Then what is the trade union machine for?"

Comrades, if we were to adopt this standpoint of these timid communists we would never get any further forward, in fact would soon be dropping very far to the rear. That is why the Communist International considered it best for itself to get rid of these poltroon communists and get people off its hands whose social-democratic traditions prevent us from moving onward, and why it submitted to all the parties the question of the independent leadership of economic fights.

The True "Innards" of the United Front in the Strike Struggle

Particularly in the economic field, the struggle is bound up with the problem of the united front. When we say that the whole mass of the workers must be drawn into the struggle it means that we must be able to build up a united front. And here again the policy of the Communist International and the RILU clashes with that of the "social-democratic communists", if one may put it that way. The united front from below means a united front at the point of production where the workers elect their various organs.

But when they hear the words "united front" the "social-democratic communists" always wonder what the union leaders, the reformist bureaucrats, will say about it. Would it not be better to talk the matter over with them first? That is how they argue. It is perfectly obvious that these people haven't the faintest idea of the tasks and objects, nor even the true essence, of the united front, for the united front has never been a method of conciliatory agreement with the Jacks-in-office. It has always been a method for lining up the workers to fight against these self-same reformist bureaucrats. Yet in quite a number of strikes we have had many most unhealthy features showing that our communists did not thoroughly realize what the united front was and how it was to be built up.

Examples of Bad Policy

More: traditions of trade union legalism and of the purest fetish-worshipping attitude towards the trade unions were revealed in these strikes. Let us take, for instance, the Lodz strike. The strike had already begun, the workers had elected a strike committee, and when the Polish Socialist Party Union sent its representatives to the strike committee and stated it would take over the leadership of the strike, the left-wing trade unionists were overjoyed and gave the PSP Union the majority of seats on the strike committee. That was the beginning of the end as far as the strike was concerned.

Another case in point. Some months ago the Bordeaux dockers came out on strike. There were two unions in the place, the reformist one with 150 members and the revolutionary union with 300, some thousands of workers being involved altogether. The leaders of the Unitary Revolutionary Federation agreed on a united front with the socialist mayor of the town and the leaders of the reformist union. Now as to the nature of this united front of theirs. Speakers of the Unitary Confederation of Labour (CGTU) coming from Paris were not to be allowed to take the platform at meetings of the strikers so that no differences of view might be created among the men out on strike. It was not a united front at all: It was a pact stipulating that neither party, reformists nor communists, would attack each other.

I don't know, comrades, how you look upon pacts of this sort, but I consider this kind of thing the lowest form of opportunism, a violation of all the resolutions of the Com-

munist International and the RILU. I consider that tactics like these must be utterly repudiated by every true communist. If, during a strike, we are going to conclude pacts regarding mutual neutrality with the reformists, how are we going to grow and increase in numbers, how are we going to extend our influence?

If we cannot prove during struggle that our tactics are better, that we are more consistent, that we are the most self-sacrificing progressive section of the proletariat, then how on earth are we going to prove it? By resolutions? By speeches? It is perfectly plain that such tactics can only emerge from the most extreme opportunism. Our comrades of the CGTU were therefore perfectly right when they turned up in Bordeaux to tear up the pact in question and take over the leadership of the strike which they fought to the finish, and during the strike itself they wound up the local branch of the reformist union and brought all the workers into the Unitary revolutionary union.

I could cite dozens of facts from the recent miners' strike in the Gard and Loire, from the strikes in Northern France, and from other countries as well, all going to show that many communists fail completely to realize what sort of united front should be organized, especially in the very thick of the fight.

Studying the Experience of the Strike Struggle

The experience of the recent fights and the tactics of the united front both in regard to independent leadership and the building up of fighting organs as well as in the matter of bringing the unorganized into the struggle ought to be most carefully studied by everyone of us. Owing to the extremely varied situations that arise, it is quite a complicated business to elaborate tactics in economic fights.

Comparing one country with another—Germany, Britain, France, Czecho-Slovakia, the Balkans, then China, Japan, India, Indonesia, and then the United States—everywhere we find great differences in the level of the trade union movement and most diverse and unequal political and economic conditions, while the numerical strength of the revolutionary section of the labor movement in proportion to the whole working class varies, thus creating a difference in the balance of power from country to country within the proletariat.

For this reason the elaboration of general tactics is a most complicated work requiring the participation of thousands and tens of thousands of practical workers, of thousands of leaders in the field of party and trade union work, in order to extract from all this varied experience certain general features giving the direction to our work in the sphere of organization and the leadership of economic battles.

We of the R. I. L. U. have taken the following line in this question. As far back as the third RILU Congress, i.e., in the middle of 1924, we raised this question of strike strategy. But it is only now, at the fourth RILU Congress, and after these recent strikes, that we have got down to the concrete study of the experience gained in this direction. We drew up a resolution on the lessons of the economic struggle in Germany which will be most instructive for each country, and not for the Germans alone. We elaborated a very detailed resolution on the lessons of the economic struggle in France. A like resolution has been drawn up regarding the economic struggle in Czecho-Slovakia and another on the struggle in Poland.

The study of the experience of these four countries and the detailed recapitulation of the weaknesses and mistakes committed in the economic struggle there possess the greatest importance for the entire international labor movement, inasmuch as they have peculiar features: Poland with its fascist regime and extremely split up TU movement, where even the reformist TU movement has been sundered into two parts, the fascist wing having broken away; France with its divided TU movement (there are two trade union centres); Czecho-Slovakia with a patchwork trade union movement having 11 TU centres; and Germany with her single trade union movement.

To Benefit All Countries

But we did not stop at that, for the study of the experience of individual countries, in view of the great importance attaching to this experience, is not yet enough. We wanted to do something bigger, that is, we wanted to formulate the experience of the recent fights in such wise that this experience might be pooled and utilized outside the four countries in question. For this purpose we called a special conference to deal with questions of strike tactics. It met in the third week of January in Strassburg and discussed all ques-

tions connected with strike tactics and especially the questions that have cropped up during the last few years.

This is a very difficult and complicated field to work over, for, as you are aware, the tactics and strategy of the economic struggle have been left practically untouched. Military tactics, on the other hand, have been elaborated in great detail. In every country you will find dozens of military schools where they teach the strategy and tactics of warfare. In every language there are hundreds of bulky volumes devoted to the problem of waging war. There is any number of specialists on the subject. Yet the problem of strike strategy, the problem of the strategy of economic battles and our tactics in these battles, has not been worked up and but little studied.

We have descriptions of strikes in all countries but we have no important, detailed, and all-round investigation into all the peculiar features to be found in each strike of any size and in every important economic dispute, although the careful study of the economic fights of many countries represents a matter of the greatest interest for the whole world trade union movement.

Recently I have had specially to study the economic struggle not only of European countries; I have had to go into the strike movement not only in Germany, France, Britain, Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, but also of the United States, of China, India, Japan and other countries, and must say that, in spite of the great diversity of the social-political conditions in which the working class has to fight and despite the great differences in the level of the labor movement, there are many common features. For this reason the labor movement of the more backward countries as well could learn very much from the experience acquired by the revolutionary workers elsewhere.

In Latin America

I have recently had to give much attention to the labor movement in Latin America—Mexico, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, Chili, etc.—to find in that vast continent a very young labor movement with tremendous possibilities, a movement in which but a short time ago the anarchists were still very powerful, a labor movement which was still very primitive, in which emotion is still very strong but in which there is little of deliberate policy. There is much revolutionary enthusiasm in this

movement but also much "wandering in the wilderness"; the broad masses want to fight and are prepared to sacrifice themselves, but they do not yet see the way clear in front of them.

And when one comes to study the economic progress of this young labor movement, battles of a profoundly political character, and compare them with what is taking place in other countries, one realizes how little we have done so far to make our experiences the common property of these new countries now drawn into the world labour movement.

Consider the big fight on the Colombian banana plantations. For many of you these banana plantations may mean nothing, although the United Fruit Company there is possessor not only of plantations but railways, telegraph lines, etc., has its own police, troops, gunmen, etc. Thirty thousand strikers fought a real war in the literal sense of the word not only against the armed forces of the Company but the troops of the Colombian government as well. In the fight, more than a thousand men were killed. Actually speaking, this business began as a strike and finished as an insurrection and armed uprising.

I have taken only one example out of many which could be cited from any of these countries.

Political Nature of Modern Economic Struggle

There is no border line dividing the economic from the political struggle. Only the anarchists draw a distinction between economics and politics and separate them. In the present day strained situation, in an atmosphere thick with the hatred felt by the masses for the capitalist order, in the conditions born of a ruthless capitalist rationalization and an increased sharpening of social relations, every strike, no matter how elementary the demands of the workers may be, acquires a profoundly political and deeply class character, and the problem of the leadership of these strikes therefore confronts us as one of the most important issues, showing us how to reach the masses who, though still inside the reformist organizations, cannot help fighting against their own increased exploitation.

Sound leadership of the struggle, proper preparations for the struggle, the proper running of the economic strike, the sound organization of elective organs, firm connections between these organs and the masses,

steady control by the masses over the strike committees; the representation of the unorganized on these committees as well as the women workers, young workers, unskilled workers, etc.—these are all elements which will extend our influence over the broad masses. There is no other road for the Communist International, for the communist parties and for the RILU than that of winning the independent leadership in the economic struggle.

No matter where strikes or important disputes take place, it is the task of the revolutionary unions to take the initiative in building up elected organs and getting all workers, whether reformist, communist or non-party, whether organized in unions or unorganized, to take part in these elections. And it is up to the communists to win influence in these organs, not from outside but from inside, and to work so that the workers themselves should elect communists to these elected organs. The confidence of the workers waging the fight must be won. By this means, through the elected democratic organs, the struggle should be led and the masses who have begun the fight for elementary demands led on further, the economic struggle raised to the higher political plane.

Period of Opportunity

Quite a number of big questions arise in connection with our tactics as seen against the background of the disputes now coming to a head. The study of what is now taking place must force everyone of us to realize that these disputes are going to grow in number and that these individual economic fights are going to involve wider and wider sections of the masses every day. These separate outbreaks on different sectors of the front are all symptoms of a rising, wide-sweeping wave not only of economic clashes; they also mark the beginning of a political forward move in the labor movement.

If we of the Communist International and the Red International of Labor Unions remain beyond reach of this upflooding wave and lay our hopes on the reformist apparatus or demand of the reformists that they fight instead of our fighting for ourselves, or wait till they do something for the movement instead of doing it ourselves, and if we are unable in each of these strikes and disputes to win new positions, to bring over to our side tens and hundreds of thousands of workers, to bring them into the trade

unions and consolidate the revolutionary trade unions, and to line up the unorganized masses who give us their backing, then we will never carry out the elementary duty now being placed on us at this time which is proving so favorable for the development of communism and of the revolutionary trade union movement.

That is why it is required of each and every one of us that we regard our tactics during economic fights with far greater attention. That is why the Communist International has come to grips with this problem. That is why the Red International of Labor Unions is studying each country step by step, examining the positive and negative aspects of our tactics in the fight, is trying

to summarize the experience so far gained and pool it for the benefit of all countries.

That is why every revolutionary worker must give his most serious attention to the rising tide of economic movements, fully realizing that these economic fights possess a profoundly class, political nature and that by riding on the wave of these economic struggles, by guiding them, by impelling the movement forward, by lifting it to a higher level, we can extend and strengthen our ranks, consolidate the revolutionary trade union movement and take a gigantic step forward towards the organization of our forces for the realization of those tasks and aims to advance which we built up the Communist International and the Red International of Labor Unions.

CORRECTION IN NUMBER OF ISSUE

Due to the difficulties of communication in discontinuing publication in China and beginning publication of the official organ of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in America, an error was made in the number of the issue for April, which should have been No. 24, but was issued as No. 25. Readers who are preserving files of the Far-Eastern Monthly, to which the Pan-Pacific Monthly is the successor, will kindly note the omission of No. 24. The consecutive numbering of the Pan-Pacific Monthly, beginning with April, 1929 as No. 25, is continued for the benefit of readers of the Pan-Pacific Monthly.

