IN THE R. I. L. U.

The Lessons and Prospects of the Economic Struggles.

Report delivered by Comrade Losovsky at the Plenary Session of the Executive Bureau of the RILU.

Comrades. In order to draw the correct balance of the struggles which have taken place of late, and in order to draw up a correct draft of the further perspectives of the revolutionary trade union movement, we must first of all form a clear idea of what stage has now been reached by international capitalism in its retrograde development. During the period which has elapsed since the IV. Congress of the RILU., events have taken place causing every leader of the labour movement to approach with special circumspection the work of organising our tasks in accordance with the changed situation. Here a position of unique importance is assumed by the sudden and frightful crisis convulsing the United States, and reaching far beyond the frontiers of this mightiest of capitalist countries. The crisis in the United States is no purely American phenomen. The events which found expression on the American exchanges in October, the Stock Exchange crash which ruined millions of small investors, were brought about by a stagnation in production, and the further development of this exchange crash reacted again upon production, and thereby accelerated and intensified the economic crisis in the United States.

Of these events the most important point for us, for the Central Council of the RILU., is the collapse of the illusions cherished by considerable strata of the working class, and, strangely enough, even by some revolutionary organisations — illusions regarding the stability and consolidisation of capitalism in general, and the special stability and the special power of capitalism in the United States in particular.

What is of the utmost importance for us is the indubitable existence of an economic crisis in the United States, and the beginning of a general economic crisis in the greatest capitalist countries, for the influence exercised by the American Stock Exchange, by American capital, and by the various branches of American industry upon the international money market and the world's economy, is so great that a collapse on the Stock Exchanges of the United States cannot but react upon international economy. We must choose our tactics, and determine the ways and means to be adopted by our organisations in order to attain the greatest success in the struggle, in accordance with the status of capitalism under the given conditions, and in accordance with the concrete difficulties with which it is faced and the extent and nature of these fresh convulsions.

All business circles in the United States were plunged into excitement by the exchange crash. The government of the United States, aided by the leading representative of the American trusts, President Hoover, in conjunction with his colleagues, attempted to offer a certain resistance to the financial earthquake which was causing serious complications in the whole economy of the country. Hoover organised several special conferences of industrialists, railway magnates, representatives of publiv utility services, and labour representatives. Hoover plans the formation of a National Economic Council, a sort of capitalist State Planning Commission, for the purpose of regulating that which is beyond all regulation. It is especially interesting for us to note the measures which the leaders of American politics and economy are endeavouring to take in order to stem the growing crisis. The business men of the United States have, however, but little faith in these measures, and however great their esteem for Hoover, they are nevertheless fully aware that neither Hoover nor his colleagues can alter the elementary laws convulsing the finance and economy of the United States at the present time.

The crisis in the United States, and the commencing general economic crisis, involve extremely serious international political consequences. The social consequences, too, will be extremely serious, and will effect a fresh regrouping of forces in the ranks of the working class; they will show how very illusory were the speculations of the Right and conciliatory groups.

Most conspicuous of all are the international consequences, the lessening and restriction of production, already beginning

to be felt in the United States, in spite of the existence of enormous reserves, and in spite of the existence of enormous possibilities of production. This restriction is bound to intensify to the highest degree the struggle on the world markets; the after effects of the crisis will bring to the surface the aggressive tendencies of American capitalism, which, goaded by the crisis, will hurl itself upon its competitors with the greater fury and determination, in the effort to oust them from their positions. The crisis will further greatly increase the armaments on land, on the water, an in the air, because, in the first place, forces must be created enabling this attack on the markets to be carried out successfully, and because the increase of unemployment will in many countries lead to the attempt to relieve unemployment by the building of new warships and the increase of armaments. These two results of the crisis will further strain international relations, increase the number of ways and methods of mutual combat among the states, and lead to sharp collisions between the competitors.

Here England is one of the main competitors of the United States. The crisis will therefore intensify the struggle between England and the United States. It will further increase the struggle between France and the United States, and, since German industry is developing its exports to a great extent with the aid of American capital, with the object of being able to pay the contributions imposed upon it first by the Dawes plan and then by the Young plan, the struggle between American and German imperialism for the same markets will be simultaneously increased.

Another factor which I need not dwell upon is that the increased armaments will doubtless render the antagonisms between the United States and Japan, already at an extreme tension, more acute than ever, and may lead to a war for predominance in the Pacific Ocean. Thus the totality of the problems resultant on the crisis begun and spreading in the United States leads to acuter antagonisms among the states, to fresh wars for markets, spheres of influence ,and zones of power. There can be not the slightest doubt on this point.

Hoover wants to calculate his own control figures and draw up his own plan. Nothing will come of this, for Hoover builds his plan on the drifting sand of capitalist anarchy. Soviet Russia, on the other hand, bases its plan on a firm foundation, for with us capitalist anarchy was abolished at the same time as private ownership of the means of production and exchange. The issue of the capitalist plans is simply the disruption of economy and a further intensification of the struggle. Our plans, on the contrary, lead to the progress of socialist construction, to the inclusion of further branches of industry, to the development of ever new forms and methods of carrying out the plans laid down.

If, however, you will contrast the Five-Year Plan of socialism with the belligerent plans of decaying capitalism, you will see very plainly that the immediate future is inevitably bound to witness an intensified struggle on the part of the capitalist world against that country which stands most firmly against the background of the general crisis of capitalism.

For this reason the danger of a war against the Soviet Union remains imminent. It is even greater as the crisis spreads. These international effects of the crisis will be accompanied, and are already being accompanied, by extremely important changes within the capitalist states involved in the crisis. Unemployment in particular will spread widely, and is already increasing. Hundreds of thousands of workers have already been thrown out of work in the United States in consequence of the crisis. The crisis will lead to an even greater pressure being exercised upon the working class, for the purpose of reducing the costs of production and increasing the possibilities of competition on the foreign markets. The crisis will lead to longer working hours, to worsened social insurance, to the robbery of even the few rights still remaining to the workers. In other words, the present crisis will intensify to the utmost the inner contradictions and the class struggle, and will force the working masses to resist the pressure already exerted upon them.

As a result of this crisis, the Fascistisation of the state apparatus of state administration will be accomplished at a much greater speed. Signs of this are observable, not only in Europe, but in America. The most characteristic feature of the present period is the fact that in this Fascistisation an especially important rôle is played by social democracy, which, though uttering democratic phrases, in reality carries out the Fascistisation of the state apparatus and the state administration. And this circumstance will intensify the struggle between the upper and lower strata in the social democratic parties and in the reformist trade unions. It will bring about a conflict between the workers and the leaders in the reformist organisations. For as soon as the upper strata of the trade unions and social democratic parties become the instruments for the execution of Fascist policy, then the objects of this policy, that is, the workers, cannot but protest, cannot but rise both against the bourgeois state and the employers, and against their head organisations. In this manner the revolutionary trade union movement is beginning to become stronger, both where special revolutionary unions already exist, and at the same time in places where they do not yet exist. The struggles will become more acute, and will increase both quantitatively and qualitatively. At the same time the trade union world will experience augmented attempts to split the trade unions, for reformist trade union bureaucracy will do its best to weaken, by means of schisms, splits, and expulsions, those organisations which begin to take a stand against the social Fascist policy.

What we see at the present time in the different countries shows that the struggle will assume much acuter forms than before. We may already observe the conversion of the economic struggle into the political. In some regions, in some countries, and especially in the colonies, we observe considerably sharper struggles, frequently merging into revolutionary conflicts and even insurrections. It may be said that in the course of precisely this phase of the economic crisis the question of the struggle for power may very well arise, and that in various countries not only immense conflicts and mass strikes may break out, but revolutionary risings.

Against this background the complete bankruptcy of the Right and conciliatory groups stands out conspicuously after proclaiming for one and a half years the firmer establishment and consolidation of capitalism. We have seen such people; we have seen them in America, in Germany. At the last congress of the Unitary Labour Federation one of the spokesmen of the opposition — an extremely confused thinker and windbag in any case — uttered what the others obviously thought. We heard that the social peace would still continue for 40 years, and that during this time there would be no revolutionary struggles.

It is quite natural that this collapse, destroying about 60,000 millions of stock exchange values, this crash which has exposed to the light of day the crisis spreading in the United States, and which forms the point of departure for an intensification of the crisis in England, France, and other countries, will awaken numerous agitated voices among the professors of the bourgeoisie, among the ideologists of capitalism, and these will once more resume the search for a remedy against the disease.

About a month before this exchange crash, but after the crisis had begun to make itself felt, the Congress of the League for Trade Union Unity was held in the United States. This League drew up a lengthy programme, containing among other things one very brief sentence. This sentence is very brief, but none the less it bears witness to the fact that although these comrades were gathered together in the centre of the United States, and although it was their task to judge the status of American capitalism, they had not yet grasped anything of what was going on beneath their eyes. In this programme we read as follows: „The capitalism of the United States is a monopoly capitalism." This is correct. We read further: „The era of competition in industry is gone for ever." It is actually written down in so many words that in the United States the era of competition in industry is past. These comrades are obviously of the opinion that monopolist capitalism completely excludes competition. This was that theory of exclusiveness under which its originators: Lovestone, Pepper, and others, themselves had most to suffer, for they were expelled from the Comintern. How this theory contrived to get into the programme of our League, whether by smuggling or with open visor, Comrade Foster will tell us. All I can say personally is that whatever the threshold this theory may have crossed it has nothing in common with our views, as only a very slight reference to what Lenin wrote on monopolist capitalism suffices to show. It is only necessary to glance at the numerous resolutions passed on this subject by the Congress of the Comintern, in order to see how little this theory agrees with reality, and how detrimental it is.

For us it is of great importanec to learn the extent and character of the upsurge beginning in the labour moveme

before this crisis began, and which will now grow and intensify as a result of the crisis. The fresh upsurge which we are experiencing at the present time differs from that which took place immediately after the war — in 1919/20 — in the fact that at that time a revolutionary situation existed only in one part of the European countries. At the present juncture we see something very different. The upsurge extends not only over Europe, but to the extra-European countries, to the colonies; it is spreading to fresh continents, to Latin America, to such vast countries as India, China, Japan etc. The upsurge is not yet so intense as in 1919/20. But on the other hand it differs not only in its greater extent, in its comprehension of fresh continents and countries, it possesses at the same time a subjective factor which was lacking immediately after the war. We possess an organised communist movement, a developed revolutionary trade union movement, Sections of the Communist International and of the Red International of Labour Unions, playing a considerable rôle in the development and intensification of the internal crises of every country. Hence the upsurge of the labour movement, as it stands at present, reaching far beyond the limits of Europe, and comprising new lands and continents, raises for us a large number of questions which were purely European at one time, and whose solution was formerly needful only in the old capitalist countries.

Is it possible to say at the present moment at what speed the development of the labour movement will proceed, in what sections the struggles will become acuter, or where the weakest link in the capitalist order, the link most easily broken, is to be found. We can only guess where and at what spot the first revolutionary spark will be struck. But that this swelling upsurge is leading certainly to this is no guess. It need not be said that the upsurge does not resemble a rising tide carrying all before it in one homogeneous mass. In some countries relations are already strained to the utmost. In India the economic strikes have become in some places not merely political strikes, but revolutionary struggles. In other countries we see only the first signs of an awakening — in Italy for instance. On some sections of the front we have great centres in the capitalist countries, such as Poland, Yugoslavia, Roumania, and a large number of other countries. Let us take for instance the strikes taking place at the present time in France. These are of different extent and different character; they show that the upsurge is unequal. In order to be able to determine our tactics in the commencing and growing struggles, we must first of all clearly grasp what has taken place. We have just passed through a considerable number of serious conflicts between labour and capital: the Ruhr conflict, the strikes in Lodz, in the North of France, in India, in Australia, in the United States, in China, in the Balkans, in Poland etc.

The most important new factor in these struggles is the fact that a turning point has been passed in the transition from the defensive to the offensive. Secondly, all these strikes, in spite of their economic demands or formally economic character, are of far-reaching political significance. Thirdly, the unorganised workers, the women workers, and working youth, play a very active part in the struggles. Fourthly and finally, even the smallest success cannot be gained — experience confirms this — without relentlessly combating the social Fascist trade union apparatus, the social democratic parties, and the reformist trade union bureaucracy which is inclining more and more to Fascism.

It may be said that during the last few months no great conflicts have occured, apart from India. Is this not a sign that those who warn us against over-estimating the development to the Left in the masses are right. The Left development of the masses, say the Rights, is simply an invention of Moscow. The Left development of the masses is an invention, so say the Rights in Germany, in France, and in other countries. When asserting this, they refer expressly to the circumstance that no great strikes are going on at present. The strikes bear a more or less scattered character, and from this they draw the conclusion that our prognosis regarding the Left development of the masses, and the growing extent and tension of class relations, are purely fruits of the Moscow imagination.

I am of the opinion that here, as in all other questions, the Rights are suffering from colour blindness. They are unable to estimate the import and character of any action. They judge a strike chiefly by quantity. They do not comprehend that there are strikes which show the approach of conflict, strikes which may be small in themselves, but which possess enormous political significance as forerunners of entirely new struggles.

We must devote attention to a number of actual problems set us by the impending struggles. Experience has shown us, above all, that even when the line taken is correct, there is frequently an incongruity between the line and its execution. In many countries our adherents do not understand how to extend the movement, to draw fresh reserves into the struggle, to bring fresh forces into action. They let a small troop fight against the whole system of the bourgeois state, of the social Fascist trade union apparatus, of police victimisation, etc.

It is not to be expected that matters will be made better and easier the louder we shout about the "independent leadership of economic struggles". No, comrades, the mere passing of resolutions on this question is not enough. To make an outcry about it at meetings is not enough either. The independent leadership of the economic struggles means that we really do lead them, and do not come in the rear of events. This speciality of limping in afterwards is becoming too customary among us. It represents a very great danger for our organisation.

I shall adduce a few examples. Let us take the small strike of the plumbers. Where was here the whole trade union opposition of Germany (and it numbers hundreds of thousands)? Where was the revolutionary opposition of the other trade unions? What steps did they take? Why were plumbers left in isolation? Let us take other strikes — those in France, in Czechoslovakia — and you will see that even though we may have begun to solve the problem of the independent leadership of strikes, we have not yet begun to solve the question of the correct manner of conducting one single strike. For we have not grasped how to call up reserves, how to extend a strike, how to utilise the favourable situation which has been created and to win over new masses by its aid, and therefore a courageous and heroic struggle often ends in defeat.

I do not judge the leadership of a strike solely from the the standpoint of victory or defeat. No! It frequently occurs that even the best of tactics and the most efficient leadership may encounter such forces, such resistance on the part of the employers and the bourgeois state, that we suffer defeat. There are defeats which are tantamount to victory. The problem of the leadership of economic struggles is not to be regarded solely from the viewpoint of the defeat, but from that of the capability of drawing on reserves, of extending the struggle, and of gathering together the separate small conflicts, of converting the small individual struggles into struggles of a general class nature.

The most characteristic feature of the present stage of the struggle is the expressly political character of all economic conflicts. The connection between politics and economics has never before been so self-evident as now. In the programme of the Comintern we find a classic definition of the connection between economics and politics. Here we read: Politics are concentrated economics. At the present time we see how every small conflict leads to a struggle between the working class and the whole system of the state.

What do we mean by raising the strike to a higher level? It means advancing, during the course of the development of the economic strike, those new demands arising in the process of the struggle. In this question we find several extremes represented amongst us. On the one hand we see comrades who say: If we have once commenced a strike and advanced demands, these demands must remain the same until the end. This is obviously the purely trade unionist standpoint, an echo of that English trade unionism which insists, as you will remember, that even the general strike was an economic, and not a political strike. We must admit that the strikes of today bear an expressly economic character. This does not, however, mean that as soon as 1000 or 2000 workers go on strike we must at once proclaim: three halfpence wage rise and the dictatorship of the proletariat. If we have the dictatorship of the proletariat, we can manage without the three halfpence. It is clear that such a simplification as this, and such an attitude, would serve no purpose whatever, and has nothing to do with really revolutionary and well thought out tactics. The politisation of the struggles, the extension of the demands, consequent upon the course taken by the struggle itself: these are tasks of our leadership. We must of course elucidate our demands by propaganda during a strike, but without directly linking up our final aims with any small strike. The politi-

sation of the struggles is one of the most important factors for every trade unionist, and in this respect there is still much to be done.

In this connection we come to the problem with which we are now faced daily the question of the political mass strike. I know that there are countries where the slogan of the general strike awakens the idea that it can be carried out when we like, and as often as we like. In France, and indeed in all Latin countries, the traditions of anarcho-syndicalism hold sway. Here every strike is called a general strike, and great confusion is the result. On the other hand, we frequently observe another extreme. In the countries where the trade union movement is German in type, the resistance against anarcho-syndicalist phrasemongering leads to a clinging to traditions which are opportunist in the highest degree. Whilst in the Latin countries the political mass strike or general strike can be utilised as mere phraseology, on the other hand fear of this slogan — and fear of this slogan is a tradition — leads in the German trade union movement to other exaggerations, to phenomena of an entirely opposite nature.

What we need is clear insight into what a political mass strike really means, under what conditions it can break out, how it can be carried through etc., accompanied by the rejection of anarcho-sydicalist phrasemongering and social democratic opportunism, if we are to tackle the problem of the political mass strike, and if were are to solve the problem of the conversion of economic struggles into political.

(To be concluded.)