

XI. Plenum of the E. C. C. I.

Speech of Comrade Losovsky in the Discussion on Comrade Manuisky's Report.

Comrades, the development and deepening of the world economic crisis brings us face to face with a series of tactical problems with which I would like to deal.

But before going into the role of the Comintern and R.I.L.U. Sections in the leadership of the economic struggle, I want to touch upon a series of questions of a more general character. The first of them — is whether the present economic crisis which is developing on the background of the general capitalist crisis, is the last crisis, in other words, whether we can say that for the bourgeoisie there is definitely no way out of this crisis?

If we approach the question from the historical point of view then, of course, the general capitalist crisis means that the capitalist system is doomed. **But this certainly does not mean that the present world economic crisis which is steadily developing, is the last crisis, that it will lead directly to the struggle for power and the establishment of proletarian dictatorship in all the large capitalist countries.** If capitalism can no longer revert even to the period of relative stabilisation, this does not after all mean that it has explored all the avenues, and that conjunctural vacillations and changes are quite impossible. „There are no absolutely helpless situations“, — said Lenin in this respect at the II. Congress of the Communist International.

Now, more than ever, one must follow closely the dynamic of the class struggle. Particularly important is now the role of the **subjective factor**, and therefore our attention must be concentrated on the manner in which the Comintern and R.I.L.U. Sections are utilising the present crisis, so as to place the bourgeoisie in a helpless situation.

The most characteristic fact in the given phase of the class struggle is the frenzied attack of the bourgeoisie on the elementary needs of the workers, and the counterattack, true, only in some sectors, on the part of the proletariat. The present relation of forces is as clear as daylight: the employers, the Socialist parties, the reformist trade unions and the bourgeois state on one side, and the Comintern and R.I.L.U. Sections with the masses who are following them, on the other.

The fundamental strategical task facing now the Comintern Sections is—to make clear to every proletarian this distribution of forces, to make every proletarian understand, on the basis of the daily struggle, **the strike breaking role of social democracy and the reformist trade unions**, and to get away the masses of organised and unorganised workers from the influence of our chief enemy in the working class—social democracy.

Capitalist rivalry affects detrimentally all categories of workers, and this creates favourable premises for drawing the whole working class into the defensive, and subsequently, also into the offensive struggle. But to be able to do this, we must first of all destroy the prejudices which have still a strong hold not only on the minds of considerable strata of workers, but even **on the minds of many functionaries in our parties and trade unions.**

A prejudice inherited from pre-war social democracy is: “in the period of crisis economic struggle is impossible.” Comrades! you are all aware that the whole policy of contemporary social democracy is built up on this proposition, this is also the point of departure of all ex-Communists, from Brandler down to Trotsky.

In the struggle against the Rights and Trotskyists we issued from the beginning the slogan: “Economic struggle **inspite** of the crisis”, which is an acknowledgement that the depression and the crisis create a certain number of additional difficulties in the struggle. But some of the functionaries of our Parties and Red Trade Unions have laid hold precisely of these **additional difficulties**. In the meantime **the development of the crisis and the deepening of the class struggle** have shown that this formula of “inspite of the crisis” is inadequate, that the offensive of the capitalists creates also a series of **additional possibilities**, and further, that at a definite stage of the development of the crisis and class struggle these additional possibilities outweigh the difficulties which are created by the enormous unemployment.

Experience has shown that the formula “economic struggle **inspite** of the crisis” no longer answers the purpose, that it must be replaced by another: “Economic struggle **because** of the crisis”. This does not, of course, mean that we must not take into consideration the additional peculiarities and difficulties which are encountered, in connection with the crisis, in this or that industry, in this or that country. No. It means something different. We must concentrate on giving free play to the struggle, on overcoming, uprooting in our ranks scepticism, a happy-go-lucky style of work, excessive reticence and reserve, for on this depends the line of development of the immediate class battles.

The question of the significance of the economic struggle in the present epoch was brought up long ago by the Comintern. Thanks to Lenin this question loomed big at the III. Congress of the Communist International. At that time, Zinoviev, Radek and Bukharin were “veering to the left”. And when Radek brought forward his first draft thesis on tactic (Radek told me this the other day) Lenin, having read the thesis, said to him: “Excellent thesis, only that everything in it should be written the other way round” (Laughter). What then was the fundamental idea so drastically expressed by Lenin? What was it that Lenin wanted then to emphasise? Lenin wanted to emphasise **the necessity for the communist parties to concern themselves with the immediate needs and everyday demands of the workers.** It is in this sense that Lenin introduced a series of formulae into the revised theses. For instance, on the importance of the elementary demands of the workers for the general class struggle of the proletariat, it is said in the theses:

“The revolutionary substance of the present epoch consists precisely in the fact that the most modest vital demands of the toiling masses are incompatible with the existence of the capitalist society, and that in this way the struggle for these demands develops into a struggle for Communism”.

You see, how clearly the question is put—“the struggle for the immediate demands develops into a struggle for Communism”.

The same resolution contains also a series of extremely important propositions which it will be very useful to record; for already at that time the question was raised about independent leadership of economic struggles, and about the manner in which the masses can be won for our side on the basis of our leadership of these struggles. This is what we read in the same resolution of the III. Congress of the Comintern:

“This independent policy: defence of the vital interests of the proletariat by its most active and conscious section cannot be crowned with success and cannot lead to the awakening of the backward masses, unless the aims of the struggle grow out of the concrete situation, unless they are intelligible to the broad masses, unless the broad masses see in these aims their own aims, though they are still unable to put up an independent fight for them.”

This resolution, as we can see, is quite up to date. Already at that time it placed before the international Communist movement got only the question of the significance of the struggle for the vital interests of the workers, but also the question of methods for the conquest of the masses, on the basis of this struggle. Was there here **separation of politics from economics? Certainly not!** Resolute struggle for economic demands, connecting the defence of the elementary demands of the workers with the offensive against the capitalist order, this is precisely the present policy.

I will deal now with the problems placed before us by the economic struggles since the time of the X. Plenum of the E.C.C.I.

Between the X. Plenum and the present there was the V. Congress of the R.I.L.U., which, as you know, summed up the activity of the R.I.L.U. and Comintern Sections with regard to leadership of economic struggles. I will therefore deal only with questions which have arisen in connection with the development of the economic struggles after the V. Congress.

The characteristic feature of this period is the considerable growth of the economic and political struggle which runs parallel with the growth and deepening of the world economic crisis.

With regard to the number of workers drawn into strikes and the stubbornness of the strikes, **Britain** is ahead of all the countries. But I must make at once the reservation that neither the Party nor the Minority Movement is responsible for this. We have to do in Britain with a situation when hundreds of thousands of workers come out on strike against the will of the "Labour" Government, against the trade union leaders, but also without leadership on the part of the Communist Party and Minority Movement. Our Party and the Minority Movement are not **inside** the struggle but come into it from outside. In the face of the movement of hundreds of thousands of workers, they are still a small sectarian group which comes generally too late with its advice of which the workers do not yet take heed.

In the British Party and in the Minority Movement the influence of trade unionist traditions is still very strong. Reverence for the trade union, for trade union legality is deeply ingrained in the minds of many Communists. They have not yet digested the tactic of independent leadership of economic struggles.

The danger consists in the fact that many functionaries of the Minority Movement vote for resolutions, for independent leadership, but do not wish to up this into practice. This is the worst form of creeping opportunism in practice: formal agreement with, and practical sabotaging of the R.I.L.U. line.

What has the Party done to overcome this opportunism? What has been done to exterminate trade union prejudices? Very little. In Britain there has not even been a proper discussion what independent leadership of economic struggles means. This question was not discussed because the leading comrades of the Minority Movement deliberately isolated the Minority Movement of Britain from the international experience and decisions of the Congresses and leading organs of the R.I.L.U.

There were in the British Commission of the R.I.L.U. comrades who insisted on recognition being given by us to certain achievements of the Minority Movement. I was and still am against this. In the best case, these achievements can be measured by millimeters (movement for the Charter), whereas the mass movement goes forward, if I may say so, by kilometers, and therefore, the gap instead of decreasing, increases, and the lagging behind becomes more and more dangerous. That is why it is incumbent on us to sound the alarm, to compel the Minority Movement to turn about face to the masses, to build up factory groups, to put life into the work of these groups, to convert the Minority Movement into a mass organisation, to develop the work within the trade unions where millions of workers are still to be found. This is the crux of the matter.

From the weakest link I will go now to the strongest—**Germany**. Here, too, we must point out from the start the extremely slow development of the revolutionary trade union opposition. When I say—extremely slow, I mean to emphasise by this the correlation between the organisational growth of the R.T.U.O. and the political influence of the Party. The figures given here by Comrade Thälmann are not exactly cheerful: only about 150,000 R.T.U.O. members, including 50,000 odd in the independent trade unions; 30,000 in the unemployed groups, and about 70,000 in the factory and works groups. Are we justified in saying that we have a mass trade union organisation in Germany? Certainly not! For Germany this is not a mass organisation but **very modest steps on the road to the establishment of a mass trade union organisation**.

Organisationally, we are behind the times, behind the demands of the moment. This finds expression in our failure to draw broad masses into the strike movement, to lead mass economic struggles, with some exceptions, such as the Berlin Metal Workers, the Ruhr Miners, in the fact that only a small percentage of the unemployed are organised by us, despite the obvious sympathy of broad masses of unemployed for us. Finally, this finds expression in the extremely slow development of the revolutionary trade unions set up by us, etc. The reasons of such a slow organisational development of the Trade Union opposition, and of the slow growth of our Red Trade Unions is, I think, chiefly the fact that the R.T.U.O. appears before the masses as **the Trade Unions Department of the Party**, that we do not pay sufficient attention to the crystallisation of an active body of

non-Party workers, that the R.T.U.O. has not yet demonstrated its ability to lead mass struggles. We can record considerable successes in Germany, but these successes do not come up to the mark, the R.T.U.O. coordinates only one thirtieth of those who voted for the Communist Party at the Reichstag elections. The Party has already won the confidence of the masses in the struggles, but not so the R.T.U.O., and the fundamental task consists in pushing forward the R.T.U.O., as a mass non-Party organisation, in raising the prestige of the revolutionary trade union opposition in the eyes of the masses, in securing for it the confidence of the masses, in trying to secure firm Communist leadership through the fractions, and in always bearing in mind that the R.T.U.O. is not a duplicate of the Party but an organisation intended to draw the broad masses of workers into the struggle against capitalism.

I will deal also with trade union work in some of the countries, using as a criterion the measure of our Parties' and R.I.L.U. Sections' leadership of the economic struggles of the proletariat.

Of all the R.I.L.U. Sections in the Capitalist countries, the Unitarian Confederation of Labour in **France** is the largest. Throughout its existence, it has led many economic struggles, but its structure and methods of work are so obsolete that lagging behind the mass movement is very noticeable here. First of all we must say that despite hundreds of Comintern and R.I.L.U. decisions, the basic work of our Trade Unions has not substantially changed, it continues to be as primitive as before. The basic organs do not lead an independent life, they stagnate: they frequently do not know what is going on in the factory, and when they do know, they do not pay sufficient attention to it. Instead of becoming the centre of the discontent of the masses they frequently erect a wall between themselves and the workers. The work of the leading organs is preeminently of an agitational and propagandist character, hence the result: a considerable loss of members in a whole series of federations. True, the beginning of 1931 is marked by a certain growth of some of the federations, but this growth is so insignificant that the losses of 1930 have not yet been made good.

To show up the shortcomings of our trade union work in France, I will give you two examples—the question of unity and the miners' strike.

The opposition in the unitarian trade union came to an understanding with the left elements in the reformist Confederation, and began a noisy agitation for the fusion of the two Confederations. The manifesto of the 22 found an echo not only among a certain section of the functionaries, but also among the workers. But what was done by the Unitarian Confederation to repulse this attack which was made under the banner of unity? That the action of the 22 was an attempt to disorganise the ranks of the Unitarian trade union movement, was not made a secret of, and that the artful rascal and swindler, Dumoulin, started this business for the disorganisation of the revolutionary trade union movement, is selfevident. But this is not the question, the question is that our opponents have hit on something which is a tender spot with every worker. And yet, our comrades did not take this campaign seriously enough. They frequently act on the assumption that if we have to do with a clumsy manoeuvre, the masses are sure to see through it, and instead of an immediate reply to this manoeuvre, instead of taking into their hands the initiative with regard to unity, and take up the offensive against the opposition on the basis of the struggle for unity, our comrades maintain a defensive position, lose precious time, and let a considerable number of trump cards pass into the hands of the agents of reformism. The Comintern and the R.I.L.U. had to interfere, so as to remind our comrades of a well known fact, that only the Unitarian Confederation of Labour is for unity, that it must advocate a single confederation, and that it is incumbent on us to tear the initiative out of the hands of our opponents. It is on these lines that the Unitarian Confederation of Labour came forward with a special declaration on the unity of the trade union movement based on class struggle. However, this action which made a deep impression among the workers, was not fully utilised by the Communist Party and by the Unitarian Confederation. A unity resolution was certainly published, but subsequently the trade union and Party press forget all about this resolution: yet, it should have been made the pivot of our whole activity during the coming period. (To be concluded.)