

IN THE R.I.L.U.

How and Why We Must Work in the English Trade Unions.

By LOSOVSKY.

The most powerful organisations in England, with traditions stretching back a hundred years, are the British trade unions. In structure, in rules, in the relations between the members, and in their leading organs, they present a variegated picture. Bourgeois political manoeuvres, scatteredness, sectarianism, rivalry among various unions for members, these traditional features of the British trade unions continue to prevail to the present day in the British trade union movement. And the question which we have to face is how to organise the mass resistance of the workers to the offensive of the employers and the government which is going on with respect to wages, unemployment benefit, means tests and other matters. The question is how to rally the workers, rouse them to the struggle against the employers and to create such conditions that the members of the trade unions will take their fate into their own hands. This is the task. How can it be carried out? It cannot be carried out without working in the places where the working masses are to be found, without working in the trade unions where there are to be found about 4 million workers. In some industries, a very large percentage are organised. It is useless to talk of winning over the masses if we do not take up this work in the trade unions practically and concretely.

I have read the resolution of the Balham organisation, which contrasts work in the factory to work in the trade union. This contrasting is not correct. Why is it not correct? Because **one does not exclude the other, but one is a condition for the other.** We cannot successfully work in the midst of the unorganised without carrying on constant and everyday work among the workers organised in the trade unions. If this work is not done, it is impossible under present conditions to draw the workers into the mass struggle against the employers and the bourgeoisie.

Firstly, we must take our stand on the necessity of organising a mass resistance of the workers to the offensive of the employers, and secondly on the fact that some of the strikes in Britain still take place with the participation and under the leadership of the trade unions. (Of course, as far as the leaders participate in this struggle, they do not base themselves on the interest of the working class.) We must also remember the peculiarities and the particular structure of the British trade unions. We must adapt our work to every trade union. As a rule, the British trade unions have no representatives in the factories. In some industries, the members of each trade union working in a factory elect their representative, and the representatives of all the trade unions in the given factory form a committee. There are individual factories where all the workers elect a factory committee which decides conflicting questions between the unions and also questions of wages in the factory, conditions of labour, etc. (Metro Vickers, Manchester). In the mining industry there are not pit committees. The checkweighman, elected by the trade union, plays the role of a connecting link with the union. There are factories where there are collectors of dues. These collectors are elected by the members of the union either at the given factory or at a meeting of their union branch, etc. This variegated picture makes us raise the question concretely as to the forms and methods of work for each union separately—for the miners' union, the metal workers, chemical workers, railwaymen, etc. It is time to undertake real serious and painstaking work.

What concrete tasks face the revolutionary workers who must understand the importance of winning the millions of trade union members to the side of the class struggle? First of all, it is obvious that in those factories where there is any kind of representative, a factory committee, shop stewards, etc., we must struggle resolutely to get revolutionary workers in these positions. This can only be done if our candidates come out with concrete propositions, understood by the masses, for an organised resistance to wage cuts, rationalisation, (Bedeaux system, the 8-10 loom system in the textile industry, etc.), or lengthening of the working day. It can only be done if we put forward effective forms and methods of work, if we advance people who can fulfil the work which has to be done.

The next step is to prepare meetings of the branches. In

this work we must not give way to the repression of the trade union bureaucrats who expel revolutionary minded workers from the unions, but we must carry on extensive work among the members of the union for the struggle for their rights, against expulsions, for democracy in the trade unions. We must fight for regular branch meetings. How can this be done? We must gather the members of one union in the given factory, then another, then a third, carry a resolution of the members, demanding the calling of a general meeting of the union, and come to the general meeting of the local branch prepared, with ready prepared propositions, face the trade union bureaucrats with mass pressure, **organise the calling of trade union meetings by the workers themselves**, if the bureaucrats refuse to call them, etc. Can this be done? It can. It is not correct to put the lower trade union functionaries on the same level as the leaders of the trade unions. Of course, there are traitors also among the lower elected functionaries, but it is harmful not to distinguish between the mass of lower functionaries and the trade union bureaucrats at the head. We can and must work among the lower functionaries. Therefore it is not right to count as a traitor every honest lower functionary who does not yet understand the tasks of his class and who has still illusions about the trade union bureaucrats. The British bourgeoisie have a very cunning system of corrupting the workers. They carry with them millions of proletarians who not only vote for the Labour Party but for the Liberals and Conservatives. But all the same, there are considerable sections of workers and rank and file functionaries in the British trade union movement who do not wish to surrender the positions they have won, and who want to fight.

The Party and the M. M. made a correct decision on the necessity not only of carrying on stubborn work in the trade unions, but of struggling to convert the trade union branches into organs of the class struggle of the workers.

In 1931-32, a number of strikes took place in England without the consent and against the will of the executive committees of the trade unions. The masses struck against the will of the leaders. In the process of the struggle, hundreds of leaders came forward. Why did the adherents of the R.I.L.U. not get into contact with them? Is it not clear that every worker fighting against the bourgeoisie, every activist and striker who is honestly fighting for the interests of the working class and taking an active part in the strike that is going on against the will of the leaders or is being carried on by the union under the pressure of the masses, belongs to those very elements among whom we must work, whom we must win over and on whom we must rely? Why do we talk of work in the trade unions and let slip such excellent possibilities for carrying on this work concretely and practically? We must fight to elect the best revolutionary workers to offices in the branches. We must see that not a single district congress, and not a national congress of the union takes place without our influence and our interference. Still more must we get hold of the leadership of the mass movement. We insist on the necessity of work in the reformist trade unions, not in order to adapt ourselves to the policy of the **corrupted** trade union bureaucracy. We stand for utilising the statutes, the structure and the peculiarities of the unions, **but it is one thing to utilise the peculiarities of a union and another thing to adapt our policy to the policy of the reformist trade union bureaucrats**. This would mean a repudiation of our views and would be a blow in the face of the Leninist tactics in the trade union movement.

Adaptation to the policy of the reformists is still the chief danger, but we must keep in view that under the given circumstances underestimation of the work in the trade unions is a **serious hindrance** in the matter of winning over the masses.

We must commence to form groups of the M.M., first of all inside the trade unions and in the factories. We must develop the work of these groups. We must take hold of the local branches of the unions in an organised way, and not deal in metaphysics which has already led to pitiable results. But we must not think that we are bound to stick the label of the M.M. on to every movement. There may be various forms in various unions, by which the protest and the discontent of the workers makes itself known. Therefore, having formed a revolutionary opposition under various names in various unions, we can and must fuse all this together into one whole.

The main thing is to form a basis in the factories and in the trade unions for the revolutionary trade union movement.

How can we win influence among the workers? Only by showing them that our policy is better and that we know how to fight against the bosses for the vital interests of the workers, that we know how to organise strikes, that we know how to organise demonstrations, that we can do painstaking work in the trade unions and in the factories better than the reformists, that we know how to defend the interests of the unemployed. We have to prove this in practice. The British workers do not believe in words. When the adherents of the R.I.L.U. prove that they are really fighters and that they can lead the mass movement, than the British proletarians, who think concretely and practically, will say: "These are real fighters and not bureaucrats, and I will go with them against the Citrines, the Bevins, these past and present friends of MacDonald and Thomas."

In Britain there are two dangers: One comrade thinks that work in the trade unions demands from us adaptation to trade union policy and denial of our views so as to avoid expulsion from the union. What is meant by such a feeling? It means complete disbelief in the possibility of revolutionising the working class, in the possibility of the growth of our movement, disbelief in the strength of our revolutionary tactics and a complete denial of the views of the Comintern and the R.I.L.U. There is another extreme which, at the bottom, arises from the same disbelief but has leftist phraseology. "Why should we work in the trade unions. We can't do anything there. The workers in them are hopeless, etc." This pseudo revolutionariness is in reality permeated with the same spirit of disbelief in the masses and the same base opportunism which saturates the Right opportunists. Both are seeking an excuse to justify their passivity, their incorrect views, their inability and their lack of desire to work. Some members of the Balham group use for their incorrect and harmful views, to which the C.C. of the Party and the M.M. have properly objected, some incorrect and unsuccessful expressions and formulations which came in my concluding remarks at the VIII Session and which were not properly translated, although the whole of the concluding remarks emphasise with the greatest energy the necessity of working in all trade unions, especially in the reformist unions, everywhere where the working masses are to be found.

What is our aim in insisting on work in the trade unions? To win over the working masses, to lead the masses to the fight against the bourgeoisie and their reformist assistants. Why does this task seem incorrect and impossible to some British comrades? It seems to me that the tasks indicated by the Congresses of the R.I.L.U. and the Comintern and the C.P.G.B. are correct and possible. We cannot and must not hand over millions of members of trade unions to the undisputed rule and orders of the T.U. bureaucrats. We must fight for every worker, for every local branch, for every lower T.U. post. We must build up our M.M. groups. We must take such a line that every worker will see in us and only in us the firm fighters for the cause of the workers. Then we shall be able to undermine the influence of the reformist bureaucrats, overcome reformist ideology in the ranks of the British proletariat and win the organised and unorganised workers of Great Britain to the side of the revolutionary class struggle.

Swiss Plumbers Win Part Success.

Zuerich, 4th July 1932.

The strike of the plumbers in **Zuerich** which was fought for seven weeks with great determination and against great odds has now ended. Owing to the combined weight of the police, the authorities and the reformist leaders it was not possible to win a clear victory, but the ten percent wage-cut demanded by the employers will now not be put through. A wage-cut of three percent will come into force this month and a further wage-cut of two percent on the 1st January 1933. The employers then undertake to press for no further wage-cuts throughout the year 1933. As a result of the strike which was led by the revolutionary trade union opposition against the will of the reformist leaders who had already agreed with the employers to accept the ten percent cut immediately, the prestige and strength of the revolutionary trade union opposition have greatly increased.