

FIFTEEN YEARS OF THE COMINTERN

By O. PIATNITSKY

(Concluded from last issue)

III. SOME INDICATIONS OF THE POWERFUL REVOLUTIONARY UPSURGE OF THE WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' MOVEMENT

In the overwhelming majority of capitalist and colonial countries a revolutionary crisis does not yet exist, but a revolutionary upsurge, a powerful rise of the workers' and peasants' movement is developing with unprecedented force, though far from evenly; the revolutionary crisis is maturing. However the bourgeoisie may rage, and in a number of countries pass over to open terrorist dictatorship and the merciless suppression of the actions of the toilers, the revolutionary upsurge finds expression in stubborn economic and political strikes, in demonstrations and hunger marches, in peasant unrest and partial insurrections and also in outbreaks of unrest in the army and navy.

I will give a few figures showing the growth of the strike movement in recent years.

In four years, from 1929 to 1932, according to incomplete figures, chiefly official and therefore below the real state of affairs, in fifteen countries (Germany, France, Great Britain, U.S.A., Belgium, Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Canada, Holland, Japan, India and China), there were 25,398 strikes with 12,311,200 strikers who lost a total of over 100,000,000 working days.

In 1933, the number of strikes, strikers and days lost was at least as great as in 1932, *i.e.*, there were about 7,000 strikes, 4,000,000 strikers and 22,000,000 working days lost (summaries for 1933 do not yet exist). Thus we may consider that for the last five years in fifteen countries alone there were 32,000 strikes, 16,000,000 strikers and 122,000,000 working days lost. This extent of the strike struggle is all the more striking because it takes place in the presence of tremendous unemployment. At the same time the strikes which have taken place in this period took place in most cases apart from and against the will of the T.U. bureaucrats. They were accompanied by sharp clashes of the workers not only with the employers but also with the government apparatus. The strikers are using new forms of struggle, and in particular have adopted the method of seizing and not leaving the factories, mills and mines, taking possession of the offices and warehouses of the enterprises and trusts, and simultaneously taking steps to maintain contacts with the workers of other factories, etc., and bringing about a spread of the strike.

The chief causes of the strikes have been the struggle against repeated wage-cuts, against the frantic growth of the intensification of labor, against mass dismissals, etc. In cases where the strikes were carried out on a united front basis with the participation of the workers of all views and headed by an independent leadership and not by the bureaucrats of the reformist and yellow trade unions, the strikers were able in a number of cases (even in such fascist countries as Japan, China, Italy and Germany in 1933), to secure the satisfaction of their demands, even if only partially. Thus they partly held back the merciless attack of the bourgeoisie on their standard of living.

In all capitalist and colonial countries during this period big demonstrations and hunger marches of the unemployed, organized and led by the Communists, have often been repeated. In many countries there have been peasant movements and outbreaks against the unbearable burden of taxes and debts, against the speculative reduction of prices on agricultural produce by the trusts, against growing poverty and ruin.

The Twelfth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. in September, 1932, stated in the theses on the report of Comrade Kuusinen on the international situation that "the present situation is fraught with unexpected outbursts and sharp turns of events". The correctness of this estimation was confirmed immediately after the Plenum. We remember the Geneva events in November, 1932, when a peaceful workers' demonstration was turned into a bloody slaughter, into the fraternization of soldiers and workers, into big protest strikes of the workers; the revolt in the Dutch navy on the cruiser "Die Seven Provinzien"; the strike of the Rumanian railwaymen accompanied by barricade fighting and ending in mass shooting; the Belgian miners' strike; the events in Cuba; the fascist coup d'etat in Germany; finally, the latest events, the general strike in France and the uprising of the workers in Austria.

The victory of German fascism, the destruction of all the economic and political gains of the proletariat, the total destruction of the workers' mass organizations, the brutal fascist terror, the surrender by German social-democracy and the reformist trade unions of all the positions held by the proletariat, have had a great influence on the workers of the entire world.

This can partly explain the deeds of the majority of the French proletariat in February, 1934, in all the industrial centers of the country in reply to the numerous demonstrations of the fascists. These actions of the proletariat took the form of big demon-

strations and a stupendous strike. Led by the Communist Party, the French proletariat went out and demonstrated against the fascists, partially on the 7th and especially on the 9th of February, despite the prohibition of the authorities, the mobilization of the government, police, gendarmes and troops, despite the open appeals of the reformist trade unions not to participate in the demonstrations, and the maneuvers of the socialists who on the eve of February 9 called a general strike for February 12 with a view to disrupting the demonstration called by the Communists for February 9.

The Austrian workers began a political strike without waiting for the call of the trade unions and the Social-Democratic Party. The C.C. of the Social-Democratic Party sanctioned the strike when it had already begun and had turned into an armed insurrection despite the wishes of the social-democratic leaders.

These last events have shown that the workers are liberating themselves from the influence of reformism in spite of all the maneuvers of the latter, and that they are prepared to block the path of the advance to fascism. This makes it obligatory on the Communist Parties to unite and rally the working class for the struggle against fascism, against the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and for Soviet power. For this purpose the Communists must in every way intensify, among the workers, the struggle against and exposure of the Social-Democratic Parties and the reformist T.U. bureaucrats. In order to successfully carry out these tasks it is necessary to carry on increased work in the mass workers' organizations which still follow them, especially in the trade unions.

IV. THE SHORTCOMINGS AND TASKS OF THE SECTIONS OF THE C.I.

Can we say that the Communist Parties have made sufficient use of the discontent of the broad masses and the departure of the organized workers from reformism? This question is especially important from the point of view of the tasks which face the Communist Parties, particularly at the present time when the revolutionary crisis is maturing and gathering force, when the world is approaching closely to a new round of revolutions and wars? No, we cannot.

In his report to the Seventeenth Congress of the C.P.S.U. Comrade Stalin considered it necessary to emphasize that "The victory of the revolution never comes about of itself. It has to be prepared and won. And it can only be prepared and won by a strong proletarian revolutionary party". Have we many such strong proletarian parties in the C.I.? No, only a few.

Can we say that the growth of the strength of the sections of the Comintern, which is unquestionable, corresponds to the degree at which the masses of workers and peasants are being revolutionized? Un-

fortunately, we cannot give an affirmative reply to this question either.

As far back as the Sixteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U., the resolution on the report of the delegation of the C.P.S.U. in the E.C. of the Comintern emphasized the necessity of doing away with the situation where the sections of the Comintern lag organizationally behind their growing ideological and political influence. This task has not by any means been fulfilled, whereas it is now taking on still greater importance, and its solution must be secured at all costs.

When war breaks out the sections of the Comintern, which are still legal or semi-legal, will be driven underground by the bourgeoisie. Therefore, the question of the work of the Communist Parties under illegal conditions takes on tremendous importance. When the bourgeoisie drive the Communist Parties underground, they set themselves the task of destroying the vanguard of the proletariat, of isolating it from the working class. It can be stated without exaggeration that the bourgeoisie has not succeeded in destroying the sections of the Comintern in a single country, that no terrorist methods of the bourgeoisie have proved effective in liquidating the work of the Communists. But this is not enough. In actually carrying on mass work there are still a number of weaknesses and shortcomings in the majority of even the legal sections of the C.I. This is also the case in the illegal Parties. We must bring about the widening and strengthening of contacts with the masses whatever the conditions under which we work. The development of mass Bolshevik work, the improvement of its content, the use of more flexible forms, the strengthening and deepening of the contacts of the Party with the masses and above all with the factories and mines, are still not in the center of the attention even of the legal and semi-legal sections.

If, on the one hand, terror and persecution make the mass work of the Communist Parties difficult, then under the conditions where the growing exploitation and impoverishment of the masses is growing, they, at the same time, make it easier to develop this work by breaking up "democratic" illusions among the masses and rendering them more susceptible to revolutionary agitation and propaganda. It is only a question of learning how to carry on this Communist agitation and propaganda among the masses and of being able to consolidate organizationally the ideological and political results obtained both in legal and illegal conditions.

The chief reason why the sections of the C.I. fail to carry on sufficient mass Bolshevik work, despite the numerous resolutions of the Comintern and of the sections themselves, is the existence both of social-democratic survivals and of a sectarian outlook which have not yet been uprooted from the practical work of the vast majority of the sections. But if these sur-

vivals have hindered our work in the past, then during war time, and when war is being prepared they may have fatal consequences. Therefore, the Thirteenth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. paid special attention to the question of improving mass work.

1. The Communist Parties do not carry on a sufficiently systematic ideological struggle against social-democracy and other opponents at the meetings they call of workers, office workers and peasants. In the struggle against social-democracy two kinds of mistakes are made: a. Instead of carrying on an ideological struggle the Communists frequently try to get away with simple abuse, calling the workers who are members of S.D. organizations and reformist trade unions, fascists or little Zoergiebels. There have been cases of this kind in Germany and a number of other countries. b. On the other hand, quite a number of Communists look on the Social-Democratic Parties as genuine workers' parties, and if they carry on an ideological struggle, it is directed exclusively against the S.D. leaders. Such has been the case in Czecho-Slovakia, France and in some Party organizations in Switzerland.

It is further forgotten that as social-democracy becomes increasingly fascized, it intensifies its demagogy, adapting itself to the radicalization of the masses, and dishonestly plays with the slogans of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", "workers' power", etc., so as to restrain the masses who are leaving it.

Thus, for instance, in the platform of the C.C. of the German Social-Democratic Party published in the *Neuer Vorwärts* on January 28, 1934, it states that "the overthrow of the national-socialist enemy by the revolutionary masses will lead to the formation of a strong revolutionary government", which must immediately carry out measures to completely destroy the power of the defeated enemy. Among these measures are the confiscation without compensation of heavy industry, big estates, etc., and also the breaking up of the old political apparatus.

In the resolution adopted by the Congress of the Polish social-democrats which took place in February, 1934, the Congress puts forward the slogan of "workers' and peasants' government" which "in the transition period will have the character of a dictatorship necessary to prevent the attempts of counter-revolution". In the same resolution it states that "this government can arise only as the result of the *mass struggle of the workers and peasants* and of overcoming illusions among the masses that *any power can improve their lot within the framework of the capitalist system* without the final overthrow and destruction of the state power of the ruling classes" (*italics in resolution*).

2. The Communists do not sufficiently expose the fascists to all the toilers as the most reactionary, the most chauvinist and most imperialist groups of finance

capital. New material is provided every day by fascist policy enabling us to show plainly to the toilers of all countries in verbal and written agitation that the fascist dictatorship brings the worst forms of economic and political slavery to the workers, peasants and the lower strata of the petty bourgeoisie. When calling for resistance to the terrorist gangs of the fascists, the Communists do not sufficiently carry on a struggle against fascist ideology, chauvinism and racial hatred, nor do they contrast it sufficiently with proletarian internationalism.

3. The Communist Parties carry on practically no stubborn and systematic work in the reformist and fascist mass trade unions, not only in those countries where there are legal and illegal red trade unions (Czecho-Slovakia, France, America, China, Japan), but also in countries where these do not exist. As systematic work is not sufficiently carried on in the mass organizations of our opponents, there are practically no Communist fractions which could consolidate the influence of the Party in these organizations and win the best elements for the Party. When, during the big revolutionary fights in 1920 Lenin saw dangerous tendencies to neglect revolutionary work in the mass organizations of the enemy, in the speeches of some of the "left" Western European Communists, he devoted a special chapter to this question in *Left-Wing Communism*: headed "Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions". Lenin wrote: that "Not to work within the reactionary trade unions means to leave the insufficiently developed or backward working masses under the influence of the reactionary leaders, agents of the bourgeoisie, the labor aristocrats or 'bourgeoisified' workers" (*Left-Wing Communism*, London, p. 37).

It is true that in some places Communists have recently begun to work in the reformist trade unions. They no longer call on the workers to leave the trade unions, to refuse to work in them. They even make decisions to carry on work in the reformist unions, but in spite of their own decisions and the decisions of the Comintern, they actually use all kinds of pretexts not to carry on this work. And the result is what Lenin foresaw in 1920. In spite of the fact that the reformist trade unions have participated in lowering the standard of living of the workers, in mass dismissals, etc., the T.U. bureaucrats have in many cases been able to hold the unions back from the struggle against the bourgeoisie. Why? On the one hand owing to the fact that they have carried on painstaking work, have given sick benefits to the trade union members, and relief during disablement and unemployment, have defended the members of their unions when dismissed, at the expense of the unorganized and revolutionary workers. And on the other hand owing to the fact that the Communists have not worked inside these

unions and have not been able to expose their maneuvers.

How can we explain the fact that up to now the Communists have not carried on any real work in the trade unions in spite of the instructions, the concrete directives and the repeatedly open criticism made by the Comintern and the R.I.L.U.? I will mention some of these reasons:

a. After the war, the revolutionary elements who left the Social-Democratic Parties and reformist trade unions because of the treachery of the latter joined the Communist Parties just formed. Therefore, right from the time when the Communist Parties were formed they took up an unfavorable attitude to the work in the reformist trade unions..

b. When the Social-Democratic Parties split, that section of the active elements who had experience in trade union work remained in the Social-Democratic Parties.

c. In the countries where there are red trade unions, all the Communists have limited themselves to work in the red trade unions. In those countries where there are no red trade unions but where the T.U. opposition was formed, they have formed their parallel apparatus, and rightly so, but they did not at the same time carry on work inside the reformist trade unions. This is why the T.U. opposition, when organizing and conducting independent strikes, was unable to draw the members of the reformist trade unions into the strike struggle, and consequently was unable to consolidate its position in the reformist trade unions.

d. As the result of this poor work in the trade unions, the Communists have been unable to offer the necessary resistance to the expulsion of Communists and revolutionary workers from the trade unions, which in turn has still further weakened the positions of the Communists in the trade unions.

One of the decisive reasons why despite their active participation and frequently their leadership of strikes, the Communists in France and Poland, in Great Britain and the U.S.A. and also in other countries have not sufficiently widened (the main thing is that they have not consolidated) their influence, is the fact that they have not worked in the reformist trade unions and other mass workers' organizations.

The Communists will not be able to consolidate their influence in the trade unions if they do not carry on a struggle for every elected post in these organizations. "This struggle must be mercilessly conducted until, as was done in our case, all the incorrigible leaders of opportunism and social chauvinism have been completely exposed and thrown out of the unions". (Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism*, London, p. 36).

4. The Communists carry on little work in the reformist trade unions, and still less in the fascist and company unions. Of course, work in the fascist

unions presents still greater difficulties than work in the reformist unions, and the Communists need not only selflessness but also flexibility, a special ability to formulate demands that will rally the members around them, etc., so as to successfully carry out their tasks.

While struggling in every way against the formation of fascist trade unions, Communists cannot refuse to work in them once they have taken on a mass character. Work inside the fascist unions is possible and necessary. It is especially necessary now that parallel to the reformist trade unions and side by side with them, the bourgeoisie are building their own mass trade unions under their direct, open and unlimited guidance, and are, by various means compelling the workers to join these unions. Thus as a result of the measures taken by Roosevelt in the U.S.A., not only did the A. F. of L., according to its own statement, increase its membership by a million and a half, but the company unions organized by the bosses on the basis of openly subordinating the workers to the bosses now have 5,000,000 members, according to the bourgeois press. The fascists who possess state power not only seize the reformist unions but, as in Poland, construct their fascist unions parallel with the P.P.S. and nationalist unions. Finally, in addition to the trade unions, the fascists who suppress every kind of workers' organization, whether cultural, sports or any other not under their direct control, are trying to get the workers, both adult and youth, men and women, to join special organizations under the pretext of satisfying their needs (*Dopo Lavoro* in Italy, *Kraft durch Freude* in Germany, etc.).

All that has been said of the work in the trade unions fully applies to the work in the other mass organizations of the enemy.

Of course, increased work in the trade unions and other of the enemy's mass workers' organizations by no means signifies the dissolution of the trade unions and mass organizations which are under the influence of the Communist Party. These organizations should be strengthened and above all transformed into real mass organizations where the leadership of the Communists is ensured through properly working Communist fractions.

5. Increased work in the reformist and fascist unions is indissolubly connected with the improvement and extension of the work of the Communists in the factories. Experience shows that this work is quite possible, despite the fact that in all countries, especially in the fascist countries, the bourgeoisie are trying to cleanse the factories of unreliable workers, in spite of the fact that the entire network of fascist organizations in the factories is directed towards throwing the revolutionary workers out of industry.

In connection with a certain increase of production in a number of capitalist countries and the introduc-

tion of the short working week, in spite of the frantic intensification of labor, new workers are nevertheless being brought into the factories. This makes it possible for revolutionary workers to penetrate into the factories and to carry on work there. At the same time, the conditions of work in capitalist factories are becoming more and more unbearable. The workers, especially in the war factories, see with their own eyes how the various capitalists are enriching themselves on plunder and how the conditions of wage slavery of all the workers are being worsened. However, the Party organizations take the line of least resistance. The few members of the Party who have still remained in the factories after the dismissals during the crisis prefer to be in street cells in their place of residence. The Party organizations have not sufficiently realized the necessity of organizing cells in those factories where Communists have kept their jobs. They have not sufficiently realized the necessity of overcoming the difficulties of work in the factories by recruiting into the Party the workers who are still in employment.

The factory, the mill and the mine, more than ever before must now become the fortresses of Communism.

6. The Communist Parties have had great influence among the unemployed, but it was only in the first years that they formed organizations among the unemployed. Recently the work among the unemployed has been neglected by the sections of the C.I. and the revolutionary trade unions. The fascists are trying to penetrate among the most unfortunate of the unemployed who do not receive any relief. We must decisively take up the work among the unemployed.

The bourgeoisie, with the aid of social-democracy and the T.U. bureaucrats, are systematically cutting down all forms of social insurance, especially unemployment insurance. They are stopping the payment of relief to the unemployed. The bourgeoisie are introducing forced labor on an unprecedented scale, chiefly for war purposes, at miserable wages, and with barrack discipline. As the result of this, part of the unemployed are temporarily drawn into a peculiar process of production where conditions of unlimited exploitation prevail.

Along with this, mass Bolshevik work in the forced labor camps, on social and civil work, etc., takes on special importance at the present time.

Among the unemployed there are very many members of trade unions and other mass organizations. Communists will be able, thereby, if they increase their work among the unemployed, to penetrate into these mass organizations and consolidate themselves there.

We must in every way strengthen the mass struggle for social insurance and relief for the unemployed.

7. The historic victory of socialism in the U.S.S.R.,

and the proof to the whole world of the unlimited possibilities facing the country of the proletarian dictatorship in regard to the development of productive forces, in raising the well-being of the wide masses of toilers, has a tremendous influence on the workers, employees and the basic masses of the peasants in the capitalist world. This influence is growing year by year and month by month. The Communist Parties must make a much more energetic, complete and active use of the loyalty and love of these toiling masses for the land of the proletarian dictatorship, in order to extend and consolidate their influence among the masses.

8. The shortcomings given here are deepened and partly explained by the fact that Party decisions are not made known to every member of the Party, red trade unions, and T.U. opposition. This applies both to the decisions of the organs of the C.I. and the leading organs of the Party itself. These decisions are not sufficiently popularized by the Party and in most cases there is no check over their fulfilment. Among the activists of the Party there is no small number of "honest babblers" who restrict themselves to passing resolutions and think that these will be carried into practice by themselves.

"Good resolutions and declarations for the general line of the Party are only the beginning of the matter for they signify only the desire to conquer but not the victory itself. After the correct line has been given, after the correct decision of a question the success of a matter depends on organizational work, on the organization of the struggle to carry the line of the party into practice, on the proper selection of people, on the checking up of the decisions of the leading organs. Without this the correct line of the Party and correct decisions run the risk of being badly damaged. Furthermore, after the correct political line has been given, organizational work decides everything, including the fate of the political line itself—its fulfillment or its collapse." (Stalin report at the 17th Congress of the C.P.S.U.)

These words of Comrade Stalin apply entirely to the majority of sections of the C.I. The Communist Parties must not only make the broad masses aware of their decisions, but they must keep a systematic check-up on the carrying out of these decisions.

The Executive Committee of the Communist International is working to remove all the above-mentioned shortcomings.

When the Communist Parties remove all the shortcomings in their mass work and work in a Bolshevik manner, they will become transformed into the strong revolutionary parties of which Comrade Stalin spoke, and then the victory of the proletarian revolution will be achieved.