

## Trade Union Movement

# Questions of the International Trade Union Movement\*

By O. Piatnitzki

**Question:** Is it now necessary to make special efforts in the work of the revolutionary trade unions to establish a trade union united front and trade union unity?

**Answer:** Undoubtedly yes. The Communists have always insisted on this necessity, but the new factor in the present situation is that the workers in the reformist, independent, Catholic and other trade union organisations are beginning to be convinced of this necessity also. This means that there is now a greater chance for the establishment of trade union unity than was formerly the case.

Great masses of the workers are now beginning to sum up the results of two distinct policies. The one is the policy of reformism, the policy of class harmony, the policy which has flung the working classes of a number of countries back half a century in their development, both economically and politically. The second is the policy of a revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie as conducted by the Communists for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The first policy has led directly into fascist slavery, even in a country like Germany, where the working class was particularly strongly organised. The second policy was the policy of the October revolution, and it has led to the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union.

The disappointment of ever greater masses of the working class in all capitalist countries with the first policy, the reformist policy, and the tremendous successes which have been gained by the revolutionary policy, have caused increasing numbers of workers to demand unity of action with their Communist fellow workers, to demand the establishment of a united working-class front and trade union unity.

Naturally, it is much more difficult to obtain trade union unity than it is to set up a working-class united front. Already we have seen the united front in action in individual questions or groups of questions and for limited periods. However, trade union unity demands organisational unity. It must also be taken into consideration that in any case the trade union movement is very split up, and that it takes on various forms and develops various tendencies in the various countries. The result is that it is quite impossible to obtain trade union unity according to a uniform plan applicable to all countries in the same fashion. We must proceed from the practical situation which exists in each particular country in order to carry on our struggle for trade union unity, both outside and in particular inside the reformist and reactionary trade union organisations.

**Question:** Have any essential alterations taken place in the objective situation influencing our application of the united front tactic and our fight for trade union unity, or are we now repairing errors in the previous application of our united front policy (tactic of the united front from below) and thus improving our leadership of the spontaneous movement of broad masses of the workers in favour of unity?

**Answer:** In comparison with the period of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International and the Fifth Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions, there have undoubtedly been great alterations in the working class and in the working-class movement. After the temporary defeat of the working-class movement in Germany, in January, 1933, and the disintegration of the German social democracy, and in particular after the events of February, 1934, in Austria, a double process began in the ranks of the working class: Disappointment with the policy of reformism showed itself in the ranks of the workers, and many of them turned their backs on the social democratic parties. In addition there developed a strong urge on the part of the workers towards

the establishment of the united working-class front. In some cases this was seen in a demand for organisational unity, and in others in the going over of the most class-conscious sections of the reformist workers to the Communist Party.

Naturally, the social democratic and trade union leaders are carrying out various manoeuvres in order to hold up this process, but are they in as favourable a position for that purpose now as they were in the years 1918 to 1920? They are certainly not; they no longer have such possibilities. This is above all the case because the changes which have taken place in the working class and in the working-class movement have occurred under the conditions of severe economic crisis and of an intensifying crisis of capitalism.

How did the social democratic and reformist trade union leaders succeed in manoeuvring in the period mentioned?

In Germany, where the Social Democratic Party was in power in that period the social democratic leaders let loose the reactionary soldiery on the workers. In 1920 the Noske guards turned machine-guns on the peaceful demonstration of workers, which took place in 1920 in front of the Reichstag to protest against the passing of the Factory Councils Law, but at the same time the Social Democratic Party was able to hold up the development of the revolutionary movement by offering reforms which were of consequence to all workers: Tariff agreements, the eight-hour day, full civil rights, factory councils, with the right to say a word in the development of conditions within the factories, etc. After the war the workers in a number of countries were no longer completely without rights as they had been prior to the war, when the trade unions were still compelled to fight for their recognition on the part of the employers, etc.

Are the reformist leaders at present in a position to offer the broad masses of the workers anything at all? No, they are not. In recent years the bourgeoisie in all capitalist countries has been striving to pass the burdens of the economic crisis on to the shoulders of the workers, and in this it has had the support of the social democracy. With social democratic assistance the bourgeoisie has abolished or greatly worsened the laws which were passed immediately after the war. With the assistance of the social democracy the bourgeoisie has considerably worsened the economic situation of the working class. In many capitalist countries increasing masses of workers are recognising that the policy of the reformists for the achievement of socialism by peaceable means leads direct to fascism. For this reason the social democratic leaders are no longer in a position to deceive the working class as they did in the years 1918 and 1920. This situation makes it possible for the Communist Parties and for the revolutionary trade union movement to utilise the growing discontent of the masses with the policy of reformism and to utilise the growing urge to working-class unity.

This new factor in the situation makes it necessary to overhaul our tactics and to make certain changes, and to overhaul also the methods, form and content of the work of the Communist Parties.

How must the united front tactic be applied? This formulation of the question might convey the impression that the Communists now intend to abandon the tactic of the united front from below. That is naturally not the case. **The united front from below must remain the basic form of the Communist united front tactics.** However, this does not mean that the application of the united front from above is thereby excluded from our activities. It may possibly be seen that in some cases the application of the united front from below is the only possible tactic, but it can never be the case that the application of the united front from above is the only possible tactic.

Let us take the case of France, where an agreement has been

\* (Taken from a speech delivered to Communist members of the Red International of Labour Unions.)

reached between the leaders of the Socialist Party and Communist Party for joint action in a number of questions. It was not so long ago, at the beginning of this year, that the congress of the Socialist Party (although against the will of a strong minority) and the leadership of the Socialist Party were opposed to any negotiations in the question of a united front with the Communists. However, after this refusal the lower organisations of the Communist Party again approached the lower organisations of the Socialist Party with proposals for a joint struggle against fascism, and the result was that the united front began to show itself in practice in Paris and in other industrial centres.

The pressure that was set up from below in this way proved to be so strong that the socialist leaders **Faure** and **Blum** were compelled to admit that against the will of the leadership of the Socialist Party the idea of the united front was gaining ground, and that the only way to prevent their own members establishing a united front of their own accord and without their leaders was for their leaders to take up negotiations with the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Is it possible under such circumstances to declare that the establishment of the united front in France was the result of an agreement from above? Certainly not.

There can be still less talk about the establishment of a united front only from above on account of the fact that in a number of countries (France and Great Britain, and still more Austria) a great section of the members of the reformist trade unions and of the Social Democratic Parties are not only beginning to insist on the establishment of a working-class united front, but are beginning to establish it themselves against the express decisions of their leaders.

The new element in the present application of the united front tactic is not therefore that the Communists have taken up a fundamentally different attitude to this or that form of the united front tactic, but that the Communists are now applying this tactic more daringly and with greater elasticity by opening up a decisive attack on the social democratic leaders and trade union bureaucrats who are sabotaging the struggle for the establishment of the united front.

Up to the present the united front has been established on the initiative of the Communists whereby two tactics have been applied.

In some cases a united front was established in various questions between the leaderships of the parallel political parties or trade unions whereby the Communists and the revolutionary trade unions at the same time addressed themselves to the members of these organisations and called upon them for a joint struggle.

In other cases where the central leaderships of the Socialist Parties and the trade unions rejected the united front proposals the Communists and the revolutionary trade unions organisations addressed themselves directly to the lower organisations of the socialist and trade union bodies, thereby ignoring the decisions of the socialist and reformist trade union leaders.

It is a well-known fact that on February 9 and 12 great masses of the French workers demonstrated on the streets at the call of the Communist Party, and that many members of the Socialist Party and of the reformist trade unions took part in these demonstrations in defiance of the express instructions of their leaders not to take part in the demonstrations; in other words, a section of the workers amongst the following of the socialist and reformist trade union leaders and against the will of the latter were drawn into the struggle against fascism by the Communist Party and the revolutionary trade unions.

In a number of countries the reformist leaders are continuing their old tactic of openly sabotaging the united front. In these countries working-class solidarity is being established by the adoption of the Communist united front proposals by the lower reformist and socialist organisations (Great Britain and Czechoslovakia).

What advantages does the united front in the struggle against capitalism and fascism offer to the workers? Above all it increases the strength of the workers in their struggle against the bourgeoisie. Secondly, it strengthens the fighting capacity of the workers and their confidence in their own strength. Thirdly, it increases the authority of the Communist Party in the eyes of the masses, because it destroys the legend zealously encouraged by the socialist and reformist trade union leaders that the Communists are anxious to disrupt the working-class movement. Fourthly, it guides the social democratic workers back to the

class struggle. And, finally, it increases the influence of the Communist Party on the social democratic workers by bringing about a rapprochement between the Communist and social democratic workers.

The Communist Parties are only at the beginning of their work for the establishment of the united front. Up to the present comparatively little in this direction has been done, but that little which has been done has proved itself to be an important step forward to a rapprochement between the Communists and the broad masses of the workers.

**Question:** What is the programme of the united trade union movement? What is its programme where it is already a matter of practical politics, i.e., in France and Spain?

**Answer:** The situation with regard to trade union unity in Spain is that there are central bodies of the revolutionary trade unions, of the reformist trade unions, and of the anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, and in addition there are a host of autonomous trade unions. However, the prospects for a unification of all these unions are thoroughly favourable. The members of all the existing unions took part in the recent strikes, even in cases where the reformist and anarcho-syndicalist unions did not appeal to their members to come out on strike.

The programme on which the revolutionary unions in Spain propose the establishment of trade union unity takes into account the revolutionary situation existing in the country, and comprises the following demands: The abolition of all anti-proletarian legislation, a struggle against reaction, for the right to strike, for the forty-hour week without wage-cuts, for increases in wages, for State insurance without contributions on the part of the workers, etc. And organisational guarantees such as proportional elections, the right of criticism and inner-trade-union-democracy.

It must be pointed out that the struggle of the revolutionary trade unions in Spain has been hampered by the fact that the work in the committees for trade union unity was neglected, and that in consequence these committees have almost ceased to exist. Only recently has any real attempt been made to make good this mistake.

The situation is somewhat different in France. In France practical life has created a new form of trade union unity. The reformist trade union bureaucrats are sabotaging trade union unity with every possible means at their disposal. Only recently the leaders of the reformist trade union federation (C.G.T.) answered the unity proposals of the revolutionary trade union federation (C.G.T.U.) with the demand that the unions affiliated to the latter should dissolve themselves and that their members should join the C.G.T. unions unconditionally. They go further even and declare that they are prepared to discuss the calling of a national trade union congress only after such an unconditional dissolution of the revolutionary unions. In other words, the reformists say to themselves, after the revolutionary workers have joined our unions we shall have a chance of seeing the relation of forces; if the revolutionary workers are in a minority then we shall call the national congress and let it demonstrate our preponderance. If, on the other hand, the revolutionary workers should prove to be in the majority in any of the big unions then we shall postpone the calling of the congress until we have "reorganised" the unions in question.

The way in which the reformist trade union bureaucrats treat the question of unity shows clearly that if the revolutionary unions were to accept their conditions then the reformist bureaucrats would strain every effort to exclude the former revolutionary leadership under various pretexts from any part in the leadership of the united trade union federation. The French reformist trade union bureaucrats have already had a wide experience in this sort of thing. Prior to the split in the French trade union movement they expelled whole organisations which opposed their policy of class collaboration.

Can the revolutionary trade unions possibly accept such a proposal? They certainly cannot and they will not. Instead they are working for trade union unity on the basis of a programme of minimal demands, whereby they also demand guarantees that they will be able to work inside the proposed united trade union federation.

Must the idea of trade union unity be abandoned in France because the reformist trade union bureaucrats reject it? Certainly not, say the revolutionary trade unions, particularly in view of the fact that broad masses of the French workers, including many

members of the reformist and autonomous trade unions, are already beginning to join the working-class united front.

By September 1 no less than 166 united trade unions had already been formed in France, 105 amongst the railwaymen, 27 amongst the tobacco workers, 12 amongst the transport workers of the Paris district, and 3 amongst the miners, etc. The movement is also beginning to affect the trade unions in other branches of industry.

This weapon of establishing unity must inevitably begin to exercise pressure on the reformist leaders, no matter how much they may try to win the workers for their own plan of trade union unity, i.e., unconditional surrender on the part of the revolutionary unions. Are the revolutionary trade unions evading this new weapon for the establishment of unity? Not at all. On the contrary, they are doing their best to bring the various unions together in this way in at least some definite branch of industry. These new united organisations which arise by the bodies concerned leaving the reformist C.G.T. and the revolutionary C.G.T.U. respectively, although in some cases the bodies in question continue to remain members of their old federations, may play a very important role in the struggle for the establishment of trade union unity.

Years had to be sacrificed to prove the necessity of work within the reformist trade unions. This necessity is now no longer denied in words, but in deeds little has changed since the Sixth Congress of the C.I. in this work and no fundamental improvement has taken place.

Why have the decisions of the C.I. and of the R.I.L.U. concerning the work in the reformist unions not been carried out?

The chief reason is that the Communist Parties have not always been successful in applying these decisions to the circumstances which exist in their particular countries. For instance, the Communist Parties in those countries where revolutionary trade unions exist have failed to distribute their forces in such a way that both the work in the revolutionary and the reformist unions has received proper attention. In other countries poor or wrong leadership has caused the revolutionary trade union opposition to exert the major portion of its efforts outside instead of inside the reformist unions. In a third group of countries where the Communist Parties have succeeded in forming illegal revolutionary trade unions which have led a number of strikes, but have failed, owing to the intense terror, to develop into mass organisations, the Communist Parties have carried on no work at all in the official unions. For instance, in China the work in the Kuomintang unions was completely neglected, as also was the work in the fascist unions in Italy.

Very often the decisions were carried out purely mechanically, and the slogans and agitation of the Communists were not always readily understood by the members of the reformist trade unions; the approach of the Communists to the masses was very often of a sectarian character.

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons it must also be pointed out that the decisions adopted with regard to a number of individual countries did not always take into consideration the concrete conditions existing in the countries in question or the difficulties with which any attempt to carry out the decisions must meet.

The failures and weaknesses of our trade union work caused some comrades to conclude quite wrongly that as the Communist Parties had not attained sufficient success in their trade union work the trade union policy of the C.I. was therefore incorrect. These comrades are wrong. The work of the Communists in the reformist trade unions in Great Britain, Sweden, Poland and the United States has proved that where the Communist policy in the reformist unions is carried out with understanding and persistence undeniable successes can be obtained.

What sort of a new trade union policy do those comrades who are dissatisfied with the old propose? The policy they are said to propose is that the revolutionary trade unions should capitulate unconditionally, dissolve themselves and instruct their members to enter the reformist unions. It appears hardly likely that we should be able to obtain any improvement in our trade union work along such lines.

Must we reject always and under all circumstances the policy of the revolutionary trade unions unconditionally joining the reformist unions? In individual cases such a policy is possible—where the members of the red union which unconditionally joins the reformist union are given the chance of fighting inside the

reformist union for the official posts and freedom to carry on their struggle in the interests of the workers.

Is it possible to take these individual and isolated cases and make out of them a policy to be followed by the whole of the Communist Movement? In my opinion that is not possible.

Why? First of all, because we have in general no reason to believe that the reformists will be prepared to give us such freedom of movement in their organisations if we enter them unconditionally. And, secondly, in a revolutionary crisis the Communist Party cannot do without mass trade unions under its influence, organisations which embrace greater masses of workers than the Party itself and organisations through which the Party can exercise an influence on the masses of the unorganised workers also.

Is it advisable under these circumstances to let smaller revolutionary trade unions in France or Spain join their reformist opposites unconditionally? The revolutionary trade unions in these countries deny this. In France and Spain there are a number of smaller unions parallel to the big revolutionary trade unions, very often in the same town, and the unconditional transfer of these smaller unions might lead to a practical dissolution of the revolutionary unions and to a capitulation to the reformist demands.

At a moment like the present, when great events are maturing, is it possible for the Communist Parties to stand alone without the support of broad and sound mass organisations influencing great masses of the workers? In my opinion that would be impossible. This is true above all of those Communist Parties which are faced with big and decisive struggles.

I am reminded of an example taken from the history of the proletariat in Tzarist Russia prior to the October Revolution. On August 12, 1917, the Provisional Government and the representatives of all the bourgeois parties and the compromising parties had left Petrograd, where the revolutionary struggle had broken out. They journeyed to Moscow in order to hold a Council of State there. They fled from revolutionary Petrograd to "conservative" Moscow. The Moscow Committee of the Bolsheviki decided to organise a 24-hour general strike as a welcome to them. In Moscow and in many other centres throughout Russia there already existed a broad mass organisation: the soviets of workers and soldiers deputies. However, the Moscow Soviet decided against the proposed general strike, owing to the fact that the Mensheviki and the Social Revolutionaries had the majority in it. The Moscow Committee of the Bolsheviki then appealed to the trade unions, and the latter signed an appeal jointly with the Bolsheviki for a 24-hour general strike. Thus the Bolsheviki organised a general strike over the heads of the leaders of an existing mass organisation, the soviets, and with the assistance of the trade unions and the factory committees.

Such situations did not arise as the result of any particular national peculiarity of Russia, and they can arise in other countries also.

In general, therefore, the Communists do not think it desirable to dissolve the mass organisations which are already under their ideological and organisational influence, and they will not recommend these organisations to join the reformist unions unconditionally and without having secured guarantees that the Communists and their supporters will have freedom of movement in the reformist unions. However, this does not diminish but rather enhances the importance of a determined and conscious struggle for trade union unity upon certain conditions whereby the Communists must carry on a persistent, patient and convincing campaign to show the reformist workers that the Communists are putting forward these conditions in the interests of the struggle of the whole of the working class.

**Question:** At the present moment in France the slogan for the independence of the trade unions from all political parties is in circulation. This slogan has been taken up by the Communist press as one of the conditions for the unification of the trade unions and without any critical comment. Lenin has continually condemned the slogan of the independence of the trade unions as a theory aiming at throttling the class struggle. Are not our French comrades distorting the fundamental principles of the united front and unity tactic right at the beginning of their mass movement for unity?

**Answer:** In my opinion the comrades who formulate the question in this fashion are wrong. There is no such thing as a neutral trade union. We know that. The trade unions cannot

be neutral towards the bourgeoisie if they are going to carry on a struggle against it. In consequence the trade unions cannot be neutral towards that party which carries on the class struggle against the bourgeoisie. That is the Communist Party. That is clear. However, in this case it is not a question of the neutrality of the trade unions, but of their independence of the political parties. Let us take a look at the question from the standpoint of the concrete situation in France.

In France there are two big working-class parties, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, and two big trade union federations which own allegiance to the respective political parties. The Communist Party of France has taken on the task of unifying these two big trade union federations.

However, the Communists cannot agree to any unification of the trade unions so long as the unions follow the lead of the Socialist Party, and, on the other hand, the Socialist Party cannot agree to their unification so long as the unions follow the lead of the Communist Party.

One must not turn a correct thesis into a dogma, and to ignore the concrete situation which exists in France and in which the struggle for trade union unity is proceeding would be to make a correct thesis into a dogma.

The question of the leadership of the trade union movement is not a matter of a simple declaration, but a matter of the correct policy and tactics with which the Communists must win the masses for the leadership of the Communist Party. The unification of the trade union movement would offer the Communist Party the possibility of extending its influence to much larger masses of workers than has been the case up to the present. For this reason our French comrades are right when they have refused to make the question of trade union independence a hindrance to the unification of the trade union movement.

What does the independence of the trade unions mean? Perhaps that the Communists will not organise their fractions in the unions, and that they will cease pursuing their Communist policy in them? Nothing of the sort. The socialists will also not cease their work in the unions. In an article on trade union unity the "Populaire," of August 25, 1934, writes:—

"We are prepared to leave the deceitful slogan of 'no politics' to the reactionaries. In reality all trade union work is based upon some definite political standpoint."

The French Communists who are anxious to make some real advance towards trade union unity, have agreed to the slogan of independence without in the least having abandoned their fight to influence the activity of the trade unions through their fractions in the unions. For this reason the French Communists do not put forward as one of the conditions of the unification of the trade union movement that the leadership of the Communist Party should be recognised formally in advance, but rather they are doing their utmost to convince the majority of the workers in the unions that Communist leadership is the only correct one.

**Question:** To what extent does the estimation made by the Communist International that the social democracy is the main social prop of the bourgeoisie alter, and to what extent must this alteration be reflected in the trade union tactic of the Communist Party of Germany?

**Answer:** In my opinion we must above all remember what was in Germany prior to the fascist dictatorship and what is there now. It is generally admitted that prior to the seizure of power by Hitler in Germany the Social Democratic Party and the reformist trade unions supported the bourgeoisie in every possible way, and that they supported one bourgeois government after the other. The trade unions were a hindrance, both to the political and the economic struggle of the working class. Let us take as an example the November strike of the Berlin passenger transport workers a few months before Hitler's accession to power. After the seizure of power by fascism the reformists handed over the trade unions to the fascists. On May 17, 1933, the whole social democratic parliamentary fraction voted unanimously for Hitler's foreign policy.

At the moment there are neither reformist trade unions nor any other sort of trade unions. There are also no mass reformist organisations of any other nature. There is also no centrally organised Social Democratic Party. Those groups of social democrats which show any signs of life at all are undoubtedly against the fascists.

It is naturally not impossible that the bourgeoisie may turn

back the wheel. It would appear even that the German bourgeoisie has made some approach to the reformist trade union bureaucrats by taking up negotiations through a mediary, as reported in the "Manchester Guardian." It is not impossible that there will once again be reformist trade unions, or mixed reformist-fascist trade unions, built up with the assistance of the reformist trade union leaders. If such organisations developed into mass organisations then the reformists might once again, and to a certain extent, play the role of a social support of the bourgeoisie.

However, can one say that the small groups of social democratic workers who are carrying on agitation against fascism, issuing leaflets and sometimes spreading Communist literature, and joining here and there in a united front with the Communists, not to speak of cases where they have joined the Communist Party, whereby they expose themselves to the risk of persecution and arrest, are a social support of the bourgeoisie? Certainly not.

In Germany the Communists have now set themselves the task of reconstructing the old free trade unions in the best traditions of the pre-war period in order that they may, above all, organise the struggle against the law of January 20, 1934, which robs the German workers of all the rights won in fifty years of working-class struggle. At the same time, the German Communists are working within the fascist mass organisations.

## Fight Against Imperialist War

### The Revelations at the American Armaments Enquiry

By P. F.

#### Illustrious Agents of the Armaments Industry

"What a position! We find that the government of the United States is encouraging the private sale of arms to foreign States, and that the King of Great Britain is doing the same! Is not this in paradoxical contrast to the efforts towards disarmament?"

This pious protest escaped from the lips of Senator **Vandenberg** during the deliberations of the Washington Committee of Investigation, when the evidence that the armaments industrialists, who defiantly emphasised their intimate relations with the State and in particular with its military apparatus, as well as the responsibility of the governments and statesmen brought to light some things that were really too outrageous.

**Louis L. Driggs**, president of the "Driggs Ordnance and Engineering Company," the biggest undertaking in America for the production of anti-aircraft guns could carry on his foreign business on the strength of a magnificent publicity testimonial supplied to him, at the time of Coolidge's presidency, by the war department through the Under-Secretary of State **Robins**. The war ministry is working in a barefaced way as a **partner in the armaments industry**. Soon after this Driggs' armaments combine was in a position to make use of this "expert opinion" of the war ministry in a big deal with the Turkish government. As if that were not enough, the U.S.A. cruiser "Raleigh" made a trip to Istanbul in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Driggs anti-aircraft guns. The U.S. Navy as agent for the Driggs armaments combine (as it is also for the Electric Boat and other firms)! —Senator Nye could not help saying that "the cruiser Raleigh has been used as a sales-ship for private armaments firms."

The U.S.A. war ministry went still further in the case of Colombia. Here the commander of the fleet, **James P. Strong**, worked out, in the interests of two armament combines (Driggs and "American Armament Corporation"), a plan for the "defence of Colombia in the event of a war with Peru." (It may be remembered that the U.S.A. armament combines, in intimate touch with the war ministry, are also equipping Peru.)

It was a matter at first of a 2,000,000 dollar deal. No wonder that Commander Strong was handed over to the government as a military and naval expert (read chief armaments agent). The deal was brought off. Incidentally Mr. Strong became the owner of armaments shares. Yankee imperialism is often fond of lending officers of high rank in this way. For Bolivia—here it concerned an order amounting to 1,800,000 dollars—Cuba and San