

THE ADOPTION OF A FIGHTING TACTICAL LINE

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THE XIIth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. announced that "the end of relative capitalist stabilisation has come," that "at the present moment the transition to a new round of revolutions and wars is taking place."

From this estimate of the situation, the XIIth Plenum drew the following conclusions :

"The international situation in general sharply raises the problem of solving the main task . . . at the present time, i.e., of preparing the working-class and the exploited masses, in the course of the economic and political struggle, for the impending fight for power, for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Precisely because little time remains before the revolutionary crisis matures, it is necessary, without losing a moment, to *intensify and accelerate* our Bolshevik mass work to win over the majority of the working-class, to heighten the revolutionary activity of the working-class."

The winning over of the majority of the working-class (not in the formal, parliamentary sense, but in the Leninist sense of the term, in the sense of winning over the decisive strata of the proletariat for the struggle under our leadership) and the establishment of the hegemony of the proletariat over wide circles of the toiling masses—these are the two fundamental strategic tasks which we have to fulfil in preparing the workers for the forthcoming fights for the dictatorship of the proletariat. But these are *strategic* tasks, which have always faced the Communist Parties of capitalist countries, and will continue to face them as long as their struggle lasts. The XIIth Plenum was faced with the question of finding the *fundamental tactical link* which we must seize immediately, under the present conditions of the relative stabilisation of capitalism, to *rapidly* drag forward the whole chain, so as to *strengthen and accelerate* the mass work of winning over the majority of the working-class, so as to *accelerate* the preparation of the proletariat for the decisive fights.

Comrade Stalin stated that our tactics change within the framework of one and the same strategic plan "according to the ebb and flow of revolution, the rise or the fall of the revolutionary wave, but always remain as a portion of strategy subordinated to it and helping it." What should be our tactics in the period of the end of the partial stabilisation of capitalism and the transition to a new cycle of revolutions and wars, in order to "help" in the best and most rapid manner, our strategic tasks—the winning over of the majority of the working-class, and the attraction of the broad strata of toilers and the exploited masses to the side of the fighting proletariat? This question was raised at the XII Plenum of the E.C.C.I. And the Plenum solved it with the greatest

clarity and precision, marking out a new and concrete tactical line for the sections of the Comintern (*not new in a theoretical sense, but in a practical sense*), corresponding to the new international situation.

To properly estimate the tactical change indicated by the XII Plenum, we must clearly realise the *long and extremely difficult path* which led and prepared our Communist Parties in capitalist countries for it, and which enables the Comintern to realise it now, with the greatest chances of success.

What should be the tactics of Bolsheviks in conditions of growing revolutionary mass upsurge, but not yet a revolutionary situation? Lenin taught us this in the epoch of the first Russian revolution. In November, 1904, on the eve of the 1905 revolution, Lenin gave a picture of the growing revolutionary upsurge in his well-known article "The Zensky Campaign and the Plans of Iskra," and immediately continued as follows :

"Therefore" (I emphasise this word.—A.M.) "it would be very unwise for some people to get the idea again of shouting for an immediate storm," etc.

We see that it is precisely when there is a growing revolutionary mass upsurge, but when there is not yet a revolutionary situation, that it is unwise to shout prematurely about an immediate storming of the position. But how should we prepare to storm—in a Bolshevik manner? Lenin replied to this question in the same article, putting forward important tactical principles. Under conditions of a revolutionary upsurge, said Lenin, it is far better to *concentrate* our demonstrations not on the meetings of the oppositional liberals, where we can state our demands to them and criticise their half-hearted tactics (although we do not abandon this method) but at the police stations and jails, because a *mass onslaught* on our real enemy—the Tsarist Government—is the best method of influencing our unreliable and conditional allies—the liberals.

"It is not 'negotiations' which are needed here, but an actual preparation of forces. It is not pressure on the local authorities but pressure on the Government and its agents. . . . If we have any force, then it should be opposed to the force of the cossacks and the police . . . and if the Russian proletariat is destined once more to bring pressure to bear on the tactics of the liberals, you may assume that they will bring this influence to bear by a mass onslaught on the police."

Thus, under conditions of revolutionary upsurge, the *chief thing* is no longer propaganda, propagandist criticism and agitation, although *they are always necessary*, but the organisation of the *onslaught of the*

masses in frequent mass fights, and the leadership of them. In the conditions of revolutionary upsurge, by concentrating our work on the organisation of mass fights, we shall better and more rapidly attract allies than we have been able to do by propaganda and agitation. Lenin afterwards repeated this idea on many occasions. In "Left Wing Communism" he wrote :

"As long as the question" was, and still is one of gaining the vanguard of the proletariat for Communism, just so long and so far will *propaganda* take the first place. . . . But when the question is one of the practical activities of the masses, of the disposition of armies numbering millions and of the distribution of *all* the class forces of a given society for the last and decisive fight, the mere repetition of the truths of 'pure' Communism will avail nothing. Here one must count by millions and tens of millions, not by thousands, as, after all, the propagandist does, the member of a small group that never yet led the masses. Here we must ask not only whether the vanguard of the revolutionary class has been convinced, but also whether the historically active forces of *all* classes of a given society have been properly distributed so that the final battle may not be premature."

How did Lenin *concretely* visualise the matter of influencing allies by mass pressure on the class enemy, under conditions when a revolutionary crisis was approaching, but did not yet exist? He replied to this in the pre-war period, during the second revolutionary upsurge in Russia in 1912-13. In this case, as in 1904, Lenin, in July, 1912, warned against premature shouts about storming the position :

"While supporting and extending the onslaught of the masses, we must attentively take note of the experience of 1905, and while explaining the necessity and inevitability of a revolt, we must warn and restrain from premature attempts of such a nature."

In the same place, Lenin again spoke of the onward surge of the masses, but he wrote what he understood by "supporting and extending the mass onslaught" as a preparation for the decisive struggles; somewhat later, in January, 1913.

"The workers are directing all their attention to supporting, strengthening, developing and consolidating the spontaneous revolutionary strike *consciously*, as preparations for the revolt of the peasants and the soldiers. If strikes exhaust the workers, they should be given a breathing space, allowing one section to rest while sections which have already rested, or 'fresh' forces, will come into the struggle. We must make strikes shorter. . . . We must sometimes replace strikes by demonstrations, but the chief thing is for the strikes, meetings and demonstrations to take place continually, so that all the peasants and all the soldiers will know of the stubborn struggle of the workers, so that the villages,

even the most backward ones, will see that the towns are in a ferment, that their 'own' have risen, etc."

Thus, under the conditions of a revolutionary upsurge, the organisation of *continual* mass activity of the proletariat, the *inter-weaving* of partial *economic and political* fights is the best means of drawing the backward reserves up to the proletarian vanguard, the best method of winning over the majority of the working-class, and establishing its hegemony over the broad toiling masses.

The programme of the Comintern is in complete conformity with this, when it speaks of our tactical line at a time of revolutionary upsurge. It sets the task before our Parties of "the organisation of mass activity to which must be *subordinated* all branches of Party agitation and propaganda, including that in Parliament." Here it should be mentioned that the programme of the Comintern speaks of the "*subordination of all branches* of agitation and propaganda, to the organisation of mass activity," to such a level of the revolutionary upsurge at a time when the task of "leading the masses to a direct attack on the bourgeois state" already arises, when it is already necessary to carry on "propaganda of ever-sharpening transition slogans." Evidently, under conditions when "little time remains before the maturing of a revolutionary crisis," but there is not yet a revolutionary situation, when we are not yet faced with the direct task of a frontal attack on the bourgeois state, we must, while developing and organising economic and political fights, only take the line, but a firm line, of subordinating *all* our propaganda and agitation to this.

The tactical principle of transferring the centre of activity from propaganda and agitation to the independent organisation of class fights had to be, and was proclaimed by the Comintern from the very commencement of the third post-war period, when the situation was characterised by the following words of Comrade Stalin at the XV Congress of the C.P.S.U. :

"Out of partial stabilisation there will arise an increased crisis of capitalism, and this growing crisis will break down stabilisation."

But this tactical position was taken from *Russian experience* and reflected the experience of Russia, and although it was experience of international importance (experience which must be repeated on an international scale with historic inevitability), nevertheless the tactical line based on this experience was realised very slowly, and with great difficulty, by the Communist Parties in Western Europe and the U.S.A. The causes of the difficulties of translating this tactical line from the "language of Russia" into "West European and North American languages" consist in the fact that the operation of this tactical line in highly developed industrial countries en-

counters *additional difficulties* in practice, which did not exist, or but slightly manifested themselves, in economically backward Russia.

Lenin repeatedly stated that "compared with the advanced countries, it was easier for the Russians to *begin* the great proletarian revolution," although it will be "more difficult to continue it." (Lenin, "The Third International and Its Place in History.") In Germany and other advanced capitalist countries it is harder to begin it than in Russia, because, as Lenin expressed it, in Germany imperialism "is unfortunately forged of better steel, and therefore cannot be shattered by the efforts of a chicken" (Lenin, "Left Wing Childishness and Petty-Bourgeois Habits"). We point out here the two chief additional difficulties which arise from the greater strength of the bourgeois system in these countries compared with the backward Russia of the period prior to the October Revolution.

Firstly, in Western Europe and the U.S.A. the bourgeoisie are much better organised than was the case with the bourgeoisie in backward Russia. In these countries the bourgeoisie have succeeded in including firmly in *their own* organisation considerable sections of the working-class, through the agency of the degenerate social-democratic party and the reformist trade unions, based on a labour aristocracy, bribed by imperialism.

"In the West," said Lenin, "the Mensheviks have acquired a much firmer footing in the trade unions. There a much wider strata of labour aristocracy, those *professional, narrow-minded, selfish, brutal, jealous, petty-bourgeois elements* has cropped up, *imperialistically inclined, and bribed and corrupted by imperialism.*" (Lenin, "Left-Wing Communism.")

Therefore it is much more difficult in such a country to develop and organise proletarian revolutionary elements, because the development and organisation of proletarian revolutionary elements there requires much more careful preparation than was necessary in Russia.

"The better the organisation of the proletariat in capitalist countries; the more definitely does history require from us, and the greater thoroughness must we show in winning over the majority of the working-class." (Lenin, Report on the Tactics of the C.P. of Russia at the III Congress of the Comintern.)

In order to unleash and lead the class fights of the proletariat in these countries, it is necessary to win over the majority of the *organised* workers, and for this purpose we must penetrate into the chief stronghold of social-democracy—into the reformist trade unions, establishing a united front of struggle of the Communist workers, the workers in the reformist trade unions, and the unorganised workers. But it is not easy for Communists to carry out the tactic of the united front from below, to work, and to work successfully, in the stronghold of social-democracy—in the reformist trade unions. In these

unions Communists are slandered and persecuted in every way. In this connection Lenin wrote :

"It is necessary to be able to withstand all this, to go the whole length if need be, to resort to strategy and adroitness, illegal proceedings, reticence and subterfuge, to anything in order to penetrate into the trade unions, remain in them, and carry on Communist work inside them at any cost." (Lenin, "Left-Wing Communism.")

In view of the difficulties of work in the reformist trade unions, and of establishing the united front from below with the social-democratic workers, the comrades in the Communist Parties of capitalist countries have too often dropped into "left" sectarian passivity, using every kind of "left" excuse to avoid the fulfilment of these tasks ; or else, when they undertook this business, they sometimes made Right opportunist mistakes, capitulating to trade union legality, and especially to the cunning manoeuvres of the social-democrats. In general, the Communist Parties of capitalist countries, *taking the line of least resistance*, continued to *concentrate* their work on propaganda and agitation, when the conditions of the period (the shattering of the partial stabilisation of capitalism) already demanded that the centre of the work should be transferred to the organisation of class struggles. As a result, the Communist Parties, which had great successes in the sphere of propaganda and agitation, and which correspondingly *extended their political influence continually among the proletarian masses*, did not consolidate this influence organisationally, because it is easiest to consolidate our influence among the masses in the process of class fights, and, above all, in economic fights, while it was precisely in this sphere that the successes of the Communist Party were most insignificant ; especially if we remember the objective conditions which became very favourable to the penetration of Communism with the beginning of the world economic crisis. The matter of destroying the mass influence of social-democracy suffered greatly from this neglect of the organisation of class fights. Social-democracy, by its innumerable treacheries, provided the most valuable material to be used against itself. But no agitational exposures, and none of the hard words which the Communists used so freely, could replace the rapid and fundamental exposure which could have been achieved in the process of the class struggle when the masses, in the experience of their struggle, become convinced of the vile rôle played by the social-democrats.

It required a number of years of the deepest economic crisis for the social-democratic barrier which separated the Communists from the masses in capitalist countries, and prevented the development of class struggles, to be so shattered that the Communist Parties could at length move forward in this sphere.

The second additional difficulty, which affects the Communist Parties in leading capitalist countries, is the difficulty in the matter of winning the hegemony of the proletariat over the peasant movement. In backward Russia we had a "combination of proletarian revolution with peasant war," a combination which Marx awaited so impatiently and so vainly for in Germany. In the Western European countries, in the epoch of their bourgeois revolutions, the bourgeoisie, and not the proletariat, had the hegemony over the peasants. As the result, the bourgeoisie in those countries strengthened their influence in the villages to a much greater extent than in Russia, and this has found expression in the fact that in the West European capitalist countries, as distinguished from Russia before the revolution, there are strong mass peasant organisations, the leadership of which is entirely in the hands of big landowners and agrarian capitalists connected with finance capital. And this barrier between the proletariat and the peasants is only beginning to break down now, in capitalist countries, owing to the long and intensifying agrarian crisis.

It is sufficient to recall, even but cursorily, the number of times the leadership of the Comintern has raised, on the basis of Russian experience, the question of passing from propaganda and agitation to the organisation of class fights, and if we contrast this to the practice of West European and North American Communist Parties, it will convince us how difficult it was for this tactical line to make headway in these Parties.

At the very beginning of the third post-war period, in February, 1928, the slogan of "class against class" was put forward at the IX Plenum of the E.C.C.I. At this IX Plenum this slogan was launched:

"Every strike must be the arena of struggle for the leadership between the Communists and the reformists. Therefore, the line of conduct of Communists must be that of assuring Communist leadership in strikes."

Following this, the IV Congress of the R.I.L.U. issued as its central slogan the "Independent leadership of economic struggles."

After the VI Congress of the Comintern and the liquidation of Brandlerism and conciliation to it, the C.P.G. made the first successful steps in this direction, in a number of big strikes. In the metal workers' strike in the Ruhr (213,000 strikers), in the Munich-Gladbach strike of textile workers (45,000 strikers), in the strike of the shipyard workers (60,000 strikers), and in the Hamburg strike of port workers, the Communists were able to make a breach in the reformist monopoly of the leadership of economic strikes for the first time, and take part in this *in addition* to the reformists.

Simultaneously, the Polish comrades even won the predominating position in the leadership of the strike

of 100,000 workers at the Lodz textile factories. These first successes in 1928 were very promising, especially as the C.P.G. was able, soon afterwards, in May, 1929, to organise a tremendous demonstration in Berlin, accompanied by barricade fighting in Wedding and Neukoln.

On the basis of these successes, Comrade Manuisky began his report at the X Plenum of the E.C.C.I. in July, 1929, with the following words:

"The central axis of this report will be the question of the Communist Parties winning the *leading rôle* in the labour movement. This question of the winning of the leadership of the workers' movement is, at present, the beginning of all beginnings, from which we must start when determining all the other tasks of the Communist Parties."

At the X Plenum, Comrade Piatnitsky stated that "we are moving towards a powerful upsurge of the workers' movement," and emphasised that "only by combining a correct policy with an effective organisation will the sections of the Comintern be able to carry out the tasks facing them." Criticising the organisational backwardness of the Parties and indicating how to eliminate it, he reminded the Plenum of the rôle played by our organisational separation from the masses; that in 1923 in Germany, though there was a revolutionary situation, there were no revolutionary mass actions.

The path was correctly indicated. The first steps were taken. And how did matters go later?

In 1929 the German Communist Party was able to completely obtain the leadership in two very stubborn strikes—the strike of the Berlin pipe fitters and the Hennigsdorf steel smelters' strike—but both these strikes embraced a much smaller number of workers than the above-mentioned German strikes in 1928. The C.P.G. was unable to develop or lead more strikes that year. This is explained, to a considerable extent, by the fact that the social-democrats and the reformist trade unions came out in open opposition to strikes and as open strike-breakers, while the C.P.G. was not sufficiently connected with the masses, and had not sufficiently strengthened its position in the reformist trade unions to overcome their resistance. In this same year, 1929, the Czecho-Slovakian Communist Party prepared and led two strikes—the textile workers in Reichenberg, and the agricultural workers, but in both these strikes it suffered a heavy defeat, owing to the "left" mistakes of the leaders of the Party at that time, and this led to a crisis in the revolutionary trade union movement of Czecho-Slovakia, and a Party crisis.

In 1930 the XVI Congress of the C.P.S.U. and then the V Congress of the R.I.L.U. took place, under conditions of world economic crisis. At the XVI Congress of the C.P.S.U. the Russian delegation of the E.C.C.I. raised once more, with the greatest clearness and distinctness, the question of the

necessity of transferring the centre of the work of the Comintern to the organisation of class fights. But in contradistinction to the X Plenum of the E.C.C.I., his question was raised *not in connection with successes, but with failures* in the sphere of the leadership of strikes. The comrade who reported for the Russian delegation in the E.C.C.I.* stated in his concluding remarks :

"Facts show that in a number of countries, our Parties have learned to organise mass political actions and demonstrations of the workers not at all badly. . . . However, in the leadership of class battles, beginning with economic strikes, the Communist Parties successes are still insignificant. Yet, the organisation of class battles under the leadership of the Communist Parties is the fundamental task of the present period. Whereas previously the work of the Communist Parties amounted in the main to *agitation and propaganda*, to-day the centre of gravity lies in the *organisation of class battles* under Communist leadership. Only on this basis, on the basis of the Bolshevik organisation of strike struggle, and other forms of class battle against advancing capitalism can and must the Communist Parties genuinely win prestige and working-class confidence in their leadership of the whole revolutionary struggle, of the proletariat. *From this angle the successes of the Comintern sections are still insignificant* (italics mine) and it is precisely in this sphere of activity that the Communist Parties must bring about a decisive change."

At the XVI Congress of the C.P.S.U. Comrade Manuilsky showed, in great detail, that the chief shortcoming of the sections of the Comintern consists in their organisational backwardness and their underestimation of the organisational rôle of the Communist Parties, which is linked up with the "agitational and propagandist period of their development," out of which they are only now beginning to grow. He added that this does not imply that agitation and propaganda lose any of their importance.

Soon after this, the V Congress of the R.I.L.U. in setting out the further tactical steps in the matter of obtaining the independent leadership of the economic struggle and pointing out the great achievements in this sphere, at the same time showed that since the IV Congress of the R.I.L.U. the revolutionary trade union movement had "lost a number of positions in the old capitalist countries" during the past two years.

"(a) The membership of a number of revolutionary trade unions has fallen considerably (France, Czechoslovakia); (b) a number of revolutionary trade union organisations have been driven underground and lost ground among the masses (Yugo-Slavia, Roumania, etc.); (c) some of the sections and organisations affiliated to the R.I.L.U., though growing organisa-

tionally, have been lagging behind as regards not only the actual requirements of the movement, but also the increase of their political influence (Germany, China, Latin America)."

In analysing the big strikes which had taken place since the IV Congress of the R.I.L.U., the V Congress stated: (1) that in some cases strikes have broken out spontaneously, without our preparations, owing to our separation from the masses, (2) that in some cases when strikes were prepared by us, the reformists were able to wreck them because they approached the masses with concrete partial slogans, while Communists *merely agitated* for the conversion of the economic struggle into a political struggle, (3) that finally, in very many cases, the Communist organisations and the Red trade unions united with the demands of the reformists, formed unprincipled blocs, with them and lost their political individuality.

After the V Congress of the R.I.L.U. the German Communist Party carried on an energetic struggle against "Merkerism," this "left" attitude in the trade union movement which took the line that the masses of workers, organised in the reformist trade unions, who support social-democracy were identical with their leaders (the theory of "little Zoergiebels"), which made the tactic of the united front from below impossible. This struggle was largely instrumental in bringing about the two big successes of the German Communist Party in the leadership of the economic struggle. The Berlin metal workers' strike, which embraced 140,000 workers, took place, to a considerable extent, under the leadership of Communists, while the Ruhr miners' strike (December, 1930-January, 1931), which involved 60,000 workers was entirely under the leadership of the Communists, in the struggle against the reformists. But these two successes were the *last before the XII Plenum*. In 1931 the C.P.G. considerably weakened its work in the sphere of the trade union movement and economic struggle. The C.P.G. and the R.T.U.O. did not react, either to the crash of the Danat Bank or the emergency decrees of Brüning, and later Von Papen, by organising a strike movement.

At the end of 1930, and in the first half of 1931, wide and very successful work in the sphere of the economic struggle was carried on by the Communist Parties in Great Britain, U.S.A., Germany and Czechoslovakia only in the unemployed movement. During this period the Communist Parties were the monopolists in the leadership of the unemployed movement. However, even this work became somewhat weaker later.

A new and considerable change in the leadership of the economic struggle began in the middle of 1931 in Poland and Czechoslovakia and partly in other Communist Parties, and also recently in Germany. But this is connected with the end of the stabilisation of capitalism, which will be dealt with later.

* "The Developing Crisis of World Capitalism." Modern Books, Ltd.

Summing up, we may state that from the beginning of the third post-war period to the end of the relative stabilisation of capitalism, in spite of all the efforts of the Comintern, the successes of the Communist Parties in the matter of the obtaining the independent leadership of the economic struggle were extremely small compared with the tremendous tasks which face them.

The development of the revolutionary trade union movement, work in the reformist trade unions, penetration into the factories by forming factory cells in them—all these are necessary levers for the organisation of class struggles and especially economic struggles. And still facts quoted at the XII Plenum show that the work of reinforcing these levers, until very recently, lagged far behind the numerical growth of the Communist Parties, and that of their political influence. During the last sixteen months, the Parties in the Comintern (excluding the C.P.S.U.) increased by 400,000 members. The German Party increased by 150,000 members, i.e., it doubled its membership. The Czechish Party increased by 30,000 members, i.e., it also doubled its membership. There was an increase in the numbers of the Chinese, Polish, Austrian, Italian, Bulgarian, Belgian, British, Spanish and other Communist Parties. And what of the revolutionary trade union movement? The representative of the R.I.L.U. Comrade Losovsky, replied to this at the XII Plenum of the E.C.C.I.:

“The situation is that the number of members of the German Communist Party exceeds the number of members of the revolutionary trade unions” (although, of course, the reverse should be the case.—A.M.) “the Czech Communist Party is increasing more quickly than the Red trade unions, the C.P. of Great Britain is growing while the Minority Movement is declining, the great increase of the Polish Communist Party is not reflected in a corresponding growth of the R.T.U.O. . . . The only country where there is some ‘co-ordination’ between the Party and the trade unions is France, where the Party is not growing—and the trade unions are now growing. But such a co-ordination hardly merits imitation.”

At the Plenum Comrade Piatnitsky remarked that a similar disparity existed in the Communist Parties in capitalist countries between the growth of street cells and area groups, on the one hand, and the factory cells on the other.

“The decision to transfer the centre of gravity of the Party and trade union work to the factory, in most cases has remained on paper. . . . In the C.P. of Germany the local organisations without any cells and the street cells have increased tremendously, while the growth of the factory cells has lagged considerably behind the area groups and the street cells.”

Comrade Piatnitsky even indicated an important fact confirmed by Comrade Losovsky, that a large

number of members of Communist Parties in capitalist countries *do not wish to be members of trade unions, do not wish to work in the trade unions.* The Party census in Czecho-Slovakia showed that about 56 to 57 per cent. of the members were not members of trade unions, and in Germany about 40 per cent. of the Party members are not members of the trade unions or the R.T.U.O.

All this shows the extent to which the Communist Parties still bear the impress of the agitational and propagandist period, in spite of their considerable numerical increase and a still greater increase in their political influence (and the latter applies to the French Party, in spite of the stagnation of the membership).

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During the last two years many people have asked, and still ask with astonishment, why the proletariat of Western Europe and the U.S.A. have not yet made a revolution in conditions of the most intense economic crisis in the history of the world. Those whose astonishment drives them to ask this question, do not take the *additional difficulties* mentioned by Lenin into account, which stand in the path of the development and organisation of class fights in these countries, which did not affect backward Russia, or affected it to a much smaller degree. Those who ask this question do not remember how much better the bourgeoisie are organised, how much stronger is their main social bulwark—social-democracy and the reformist trade unions—in the chief capitalist countries, than the bourgeoisie and menshevism in Russia before the October Revolution.

But the mole of history is working precisely in the direction foretold by the Comintern. The VI Congress of the Comintern, in characterising the third period which was opening up, said:

“This period will inevitably lead, through the further development of the contradictions of capitalist stabilisation, to capitalist stabilisation becoming still more precarious and to the severe intensification of the general crisis of capitalism.”

Four years later the XII Plenum of the E.C.C.I. was able to state that “the end of the relative stabilisation of capitalism has come.”

The end of the stabilisation of capitalism means that “a tremendous *change* has taken place in the relationship of forces between the socialist and capitalist worlds,” that the increasing economic decline, the growing economic crisis, on the basis of the general crisis of capitalism, has reached such an extent that it makes it very difficult to emerge in the so-called “normal” capitalist way of overcoming periodic crises, that this blind alley, in connection with the growing revolutionary upsurge, “drives the bourgeoisie to seek a violent solution of these antagonisms both within their own countries and on the international arena.” The end of the stabilisation of

capitalism means that "a new imperialist war has become an immediate danger," that "preparations for intervention in the U.S.S.R. have entered a new phase," that "the threat of direct intervention hangs over the U.S.S.R."

The end of stabilisation means that "the further strengthening of political reaction and the fascisation of the State" is accompanied by "a contraction of the basis of bourgeois rule and manifestations of fissures and disintegration."

The end of stabilisation means that, on the basis of the increasing economic decline and the "sharp contraction of the material basis of reformism" which is connected with it, and the strong revolutionary mass upsurge, the "mass influence of the social-fascists has declined in almost all countries."

The last two points signify a decrease in the chief of the additional difficulties which hindered the development of class fights in the advanced capitalist countries. At the same time, the impoverishment of the masses, the plunder of the masses by the capitalists and by the bourgeois state, the police and fascist violence used against them, the menace of war which hangs over them, the danger of intervention in the Soviet Union—all this spreads the spirit of revolt among the masses. As the result, we see a rapid and general growth of the revolutionary upsurge at the present time with all the inequalities of revolutionary development usual for the epoch of imperialism.

To sum up, we have at present a revolutionary situation in China, revolution in Spain, "in the near future Japan may be in the situation of a revolutionary crisis," "Poland is approaching very closely to a revolutionary crisis." Germany is approximately in the same position. In a number of capitalist countries the mass movement is now taking the very forms which Lenin regarded as characteristic of a pre-revolutionary situation. Economic strikes for the elementary demands of the masses, under conditions when the bourgeoisie are throwing all the burdens of the deepest crisis arising from the capitalist system, on to their shoulders, are bringing them into conflict with the very foundations of the existence of capitalism, are assuming the character of revolutionary strikes. Economic strikes in some cases grow into general economic strikes in whole branches of industry, in other cases they become political strikes. Economic strikes become interwoven with political mass activity, with demonstrations and street fights. The revolutionary movement spreads from the town to the village. In certain capitalist countries the elements of the agrarian revolution, which broke out but recently in colonial countries, are growing.

All this is taking place *not only spontaneously*, as the opportunists claim, but accompanied by the *rapidly growing influence of the Communist Parties*. Under the conditions of the end of the stabilisation of capitalism, the sections of the Comintern have

rapidly grown during the last year. The number of members has increased from 550,000 to 914,000, excluding the C.P.S.U. Their political influence has increased similarly or to an even greater extent, judging by parliamentary elections. Still more important is the fact that *their organisational rôle has at last begun to increase*, that in some Parties a *big change* has taken place during the last year, in the matter of getting hold of the leadership of the mass movement on the basis of a capable application of the tactic of the united front from below, that these Parties—above all, the Polish Party, which led 80 per cent. of the strikes in the first quarter of 1932, then the Czecho-Slovakian Party and the German Party, in the anti-fascist struggle—have begun to take successful action in the rôle of *leaders of the developing mass struggle*.

Thus, *the first big—though not decisive—breach has at last been made, and even that only in a few capitalist countries*. This connection with the whole new situation has enabled the XII Plenum of the E.C.C.I. to transfer the Parties in capitalist countries to a fighting tactical line, to place the *tactical task of developing and organising the interwoven economic and political fights, raising them under suitable conditions to the higher level of mass political strikes, subordinating our agitation and propaganda to this matter, and linking it up with the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat as an aim which is already close at hand*, before them with the greatest incisiveness and chance of success.

May we say that the XII Plenum of the E.C.C.I. marks a tactical change not only in words, but in deeds, taking into consideration that this new tactical line has been talked about so many times while practice, on the whole, has gone along in the old way?

We may reply affirmatively to this question without the slightest hesitation, not only because the whole international situation has greatly changed, *for the first time* giving the Plenum grounds to speak of the end of the partial stabilisation of capitalism, but also because the XII Plenum itself differed in certain significant features from the previous Plenums of the third period.

Firstly, the new tactical line was not simply dictated and proclaimed by the leadership of the Comintern on the basis of the old rich revolutionary experience of the Russian Bolsheviks, correctly adapted to the present concrete conditions of various countries, and approved by the sections. A number of delegates from capitalist countries—from Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Germany and others, insistently demanded the tactical change, on the basis of their own new experience and from the successful application of the new tactics, pointing out that the *revolutionary* character of strikes had already become a widely spread fact, as in Russia in the epoch of the

first revolution : that the interweaving of economic strikes with political actions, and the growth of economic strikes into political strikes *with the active assistance of the Communist Parties* had also become a widely-spread phenomenon, and that, finally, the mass political strike is put forward at the present time not only as a desirable immediate aim, as was the case at the X Plenum of the E.C.C.I., but as something to which we were *directly led* by a number of general economic strikes, and a series of small political strikes.

Secondly, the question of the tactic of the united front from below, which is most closely connected with the whole of the new fighting tactical line, was likewise not treated in an abstract manner at the Plenum. The German and Czecho-Slovakian comrades, who took an active part in the discussion on this question, used arguments from their own rich experience and their weighty achievements in this sphere, although there had been some mistakes, which were realised before the Plenum, or at the Plenum. Therefore, the unanimous conclusions to which the discussion on this question led were very concrete and very instructive.

Thirdly, the question of the necessity of rapidly eliminating the habits of the agitational and propagandist period was also raised at the Plenum not only from above, by the leadership of the Comintern, as was previously the case. The delegates from various sections, realising that "little time remains before the maturing of the revolutionary crisis" and that it was necessary "without losing a minute, to *strengthen and accelerate* Bolshevik mass work for the winning over of the majority of the working-class, for heightening the revolutionary *activity* of the working masses," *raised the alarm* on the question of the organisational backwardness of their Parties. Comrade Urtado, the delegate of the Spanish Party (which, by the way, had increased to 17,000 members), said :

"The Party was incapable of becoming the real organiser of the revolution. On the contrary, in the Party there was and still exists the old conception which regards the Party as an agitational and propagandist organisation, carrying on definite campaigns, but unable to become an organisation which would serve as a basis for the further development of fights. As the result of this conception, the Party could not develop wide initiative and participation in partial economic and political fights, and could not convert these concrete partial fights into general fights on a large scale."

Comrade Thälmann said :

"The chief thing is to convert the German Party into a real militant Party capable of fighting. In some places the tendencies which exist, nourished by the bourgeoisie and their lackeys, to carry on only agitation and propaganda and parliamentary elections must be eliminated. We must pass from agitation and propaganda to the real unleashing of mass

actions and fights. The mass strike and the political general strike is our main weapon of struggle at the present stage."

The French delegation at the Plenum made the following decision in commission :

"In this situation, in order that the French C.P. can stand at the head of the masses, lead them and organise them, it must concentrate its attention on the problem of partial economic and political demands, so as to win the confidence of the masses, draw them into the struggle and progressively raise these partial fights to the level of big revolutionary battles. *This requires a decisive change in the work of the unitary trade unions, in the work of the parliamentary fractions, and the municipal fractions and in the work of the mass organisations under the influence of the Party. Up to the present, "Humanité" and the provincial Press have been chiefly weapons of agitation. They, and first of all "Humanité," must become the organisers of the mass movement.*"

Fourthly, the *organisational* decisions adopted at the Plenum testify to the accelerated preparations for the struggle in the intense conditions, when the situation rapidly changes. For example, the Plenum decided very definitely against *super-centralism*. This decision does not signify a course to the weakening of strict Party discipline. On the contrary, in connection with the work of the German oppositional group of Comrade Neumann, the Plenum emphasised the necessity of maintaining iron discipline in the Parties, *especially at the present moment*, and not shaking the authority of the leaders. The idea behind this decision consists in the necessity of strengthening and encouraging the *revolutionary initiative* of all the Party organisations, right down to the lowest cell, in fighting conditions, when the situation rapidly changes and when it is frequently impossible to delay a responsible decision until it is endorsed with the Party centre or the E.C.C.I.

Fifthly, the new fighting tactical line, as was shown in our journal, in the leading article of No. 17/18 of the "Communist International," dealing with the Plenum, was the keynote of the theses and the resolutions of the Plenum, which were carefully discussed by all the delegations, while in previous Plenum this line was not given in a developed form, although the leaders of the Comintern insistently spoke of it.

The XII Plenum set out a firm tactical line. Does this mean that the work of all our sections will proceed smoothly along the new path? Not at all. Such a thing could not be. Not only are we learning in the struggle, but our enemies have learned a great deal, and are able to manoeuvre quite successfully. The speaker from the Polish section, Comrade Lensky, pointed out in his report that in spite of the biggest successes of the Polish Communist Party and in spite of the growing stubbornness of the workers in

strikes, the proportion of strikes lost in the first half of the present year had increased, and that in the general protest strike of March 16, the P.P.S. succeeded in seizing the initiative from the Communists, and declaring the strike, although they had not prepared it. In Czecho-Slovakia, after the well-conducted strike of the miners in Brůx, we had the failure at Kladno. Then again, not so long ago, we obtained success once again with the metal workers. Partial failures will be inevitable in the future. But the fact that the leading elements of the Communist Parties, judging by all the evidence, have learned and realised the *possibility, the necessity and the urgency of the tactical change*, is the first guarantee that they will soon make their way along the new path, or rather the old "Russian path." In this respect, the following fact is instructive. At the XII Plenum it was noted that the German C.P. had successfully carried out the campaign of anti-fascist self-defence on the basis of the tactic of the united front, and, as a result, had obtained a big success in the Reichstag elections. When the Party called for a general strike on July 20, at the time of the fascist coup in Prussia, the workers did not respond to this call, chiefly because the C.P.G. for a long time had weakened its work for the organisation of strikes for partial economic demands. Our German comrades fully realised this mistake, and resolved to reorganise their work in this sphere. The results can already be seen. During the last month alone, there have been already 400 strikes in Germany, and when this article had already been written, we received the news of the Berlin strike of tramway workers under the leadership of the R.T.U.O.

In 1910 Lenin wrote in the article "Two Worlds": "The irony of history has led to the fact that the ruling classes in Germany, who formed the strongest Government in the second half of the nineteenth century, consolidating the conditions for the most rapid capitalist progress and the conditions for the most stable constitutional legality, are now very obviously arriving at a situation when this legality, *their* legality, has to be broken—for the sake of the rule of the bourgeoisie. . . . The time is now approaching when this half-century of German history must change into a new zone, in view of objective causes. The epoch of the utilisation of the legality created by the bourgeoisie is *replaced* by the epoch of tremendous revolutionary fights, and these fights *in essence* will destroy *all* bourgeois legality, *the whole* bourgeois

system, but in *form* they must commence (and are commencing) with the confused efforts of the bourgeoisie to get rid of this legality, created by themselves, which has now become unbearable for them. . . . The socialist proletariat will not forget for a moment that ahead of them lies inevitably a revolutionary mass struggle, which breaks down all the legality of bourgeois society, which is doomed to destruction. . . . This is the peculiarity of the pre-revolutionary situation in modern Germany." (Lenin, Vol. XIV).

These remarkable words of Lenin had the sense of a big historic perspective for Germany. They can now be applied to the fullest extent to modern Germany, and not to Germany alone, in the sense of the nearest and most immediate perspectives. In reality, have not the German bourgeoisie who created *their own* constitutional legality (the Weimar constitution!) which helped them and their main social bulwark—social-democracy—so much in the stabilisation of German capitalism, been compelled to break *their own* legality for the sake of preserving their rule, and make confused efforts to get rid of it, by establishing one of the forms of fascist dictatorship, headed by the Papen-Schleicher Government? Is it not a fact that not only in Germany at the present time, but throughout the capitalist world there is taking place a "further strengthening of political reaction and the fascisation of the State"? Is it not a fact that this is accompanied everywhere not by the consolidation of the bourgeois state but by "the contraction of the basis of bourgeois rule, and the appearance of fissures and disintegration in it"? Is it not a fact that the present attack of fascism, which breaks constitutional legality is a prologue to the revolutionary mass struggle of the proletariat, which will destroy all the legality of bourgeois society which is doomed to destruction? Is it not a fact that the proletariat, led by the Communist Parties, are already passing from defence to a counter-attack against the capitalist offensive, against fascism and reaction, against approaching imperialist war and intervention in the Soviet Union?

The proletariat of the various capitalist countries, under the leadership of the sections of the Comintern, are making their way along the Russian path, but now *on the basis of their own experience*. This means that whereas the first cycle of wars and revolutions gave the Russian October to the world, the rapidly approaching second cycle of revolutions and wars will present it with the German October, the Polish October and then the world October.