

Comrades, when we speak about the greatest event in the international labour movement of recent years, about the British miners' strike, it is our first task, I believe, to characterise this strike in all its special features.

What are the most important basic characteristics of this tremendous mass strike?

First, the circumstance that the miners' strike was fought out on the battle field of the declining British empire, that is, in an environment in which the British bourgeoisie was not in a position to make important concessions to the proletariat, and in which, therefore, the great economic battle inevitably had to transform itself into a political struggle.

The second feature of the situation is that the mass strike developed at a time when the British mining industry was in a critical situation. The British bourgeoisie was confronted with a dilemma, it had to decide whether it was to get rid either of its "surplus coal" or its "surplus miners". The British coal crisis really cannot be solved either on a British scale, nor, finally, on a capitalist basis, but only upon an international basis and in a Socialist direction.

One of the most essential characteristics of the miners' strike is its closest connection with the first great general strike that ever took place in a West-European country.

An additional peculiarity of the strike is the circumstance that class stood against class. The leading economic organ of the British bourgeoisie, the "Economist", summarised the situation in bold relief; in that it likened the struggle of the miners against the mine barons with the collision of an irresistible force with an immovable object. Without the aid of the whole State apparatus, the church, the press, and the reformist labour leaders, in Great Britain as well as on a world scale, the miners would never have been beaten.

The deep social ferment that was aroused by the miners' struggle, is characterised by nothing better than that the proletariat, like the bourgeoisie, also mobilised for struggle the vast reserve army of public life which in normal times is inactive — the women.

An additional feature of the miners' strike was also the following: the seven months' struggle was waged in the atmosphere of the state of emergency, of the mobilisation of the whole apparatus of force. Clausewitz, the great strategic theoretician, once wrote: "War is incomprehensible unless one realises that it takes place in an atmosphere of danger." The British miners' strike cannot be comprehended unless we realise that this strike was waged for seven months in an atmosphere of the state of emergency.

A further feature is that the miners' struggle — and this is of course no accident — coincided with the general offensive of the British bourgeoisie against the whole trade union movement of Great Britain.

As a last feature I should like to note that the leadership of the strike was no longer in the hands of the Right (Hodges) as in 1921, but in the hands of the "Left" leadership.

On the basis of this characterisation of the British miners' struggle we can note four phases in the development of the fight.

The first period coincides approximately with the general strike phase. The miners' strike at this time was supported by the whole British labour movement, and even the leaders of the General Council were forced apparently to put themselves at the head of the movement. During this period the hitting power of the miner's strike was of course the greatest.

In the second period the miners were already isolated. After the calling off of the General Strike, the Miners' Federation fought alone, but it still constituted a mighty army, and it still had all the objective possibilities for victory. A million organised workers, under unified leadership and uniform slogans, should absolutely have won.

The third period began at the time the leaders of the Miners' Federation (with certain exceptions) gradually went over to the side of the enemy. Their vacillation rapidly mounted into betrayal. By accepting the Bishops' proposals they wanted

to influence the petty-bourgeois public opinion of England. In reality they merely brought about the disorientation of the masses of mineworkers. The first strike-breakers showed their heads simultaneously with the first vacillations of the miners' leaders.

Then came the fourth period. Not only the topmost leaders, but also the subordinates, the delegates of the federation, began to waver; panic-stricken, they began to desert the battlefield. The unified battle-front was broken. The great struggle became splintered into guerilla warfare, and ended in defeat.

Three faces appear in the history of the British coal strike. The first is that of the masses, which for seven months carried on a struggle against the whole world — isolated, starving, persecuted. The second face is that of the reformist leadership. Viewed from this standpoint, the history of the coal strike is the history of the treason of the reformist leadership. The third face is that of the gradually rising new leadership, the growth of the influence of the Communist Party and the Minority Movement.

After this general characterisation of the great struggle I should like to make certain critical remarks concerning the international campaigns which the Communist International conducted on behalf of the miners' strike.

The facts show that the E. C. C. I. correctly conducted the campaigns. Just prior to this Enlarged Executive, I again went over the whole material very carefully. I believe that we can conscientiously say that the E. C. C. I. furnished correct leadership to the proletariat and to the Sections of the C. I. Remember the first manifesto that was issued on April 23rd, that is, one week prior to the outbreak of the General Strike. In it we already had not only a correct analysis of the objective situation, but we also predicted in advance the whole course of the seven months' struggle, as well as all the essential lessons to be drawn out of the situation. The chief problems were already put clearly at that time, that class would fight class, that the famed British "democracy" would change into an open bourgeois dictatorship, that the economic struggle would turn into a political one, that the Right and Left leaders would play their characteristic role. The advice that was given to the proletariat and to the Parties was also correct and practical.

The other side of the picture is not quite so satisfactory. The sections of the Communist International carried out the solidarity campaigns for the miners extremely inadequately.

I shall outline only the most serious shortcomings of these campaigns:

The nine days of the general strike called forth great enthusiasm in all Parties. But the moment that the General Strike was broken off the campaigns of our Parties were also broken off. With the termination of the General Strike, and already prior to that time, most of the Parties very seriously under-estimated the role of the Right leadership in the British labour movement. The capitulator role of the Left leaders was also not immediately understood in the beginning. The political character of the general strike was also not always clearly comprehended, and still less so the political character of the miners' strike.

The Parties carried on the campaigns mechanically, these were very often of a purely **informatory character** and very few of the Parties were able to connect up this great international campaign with their own national campaigns. If we investigate the practical results, we will find that but little money was collected, that we did not succeed in organising the prevention of coal transport, and that even the propaganda for the really splendid campaign of the C. P. S. U., the really great sacrifices of the Soviet trade unions, were not sufficiently exploited as matters of principle.

The perspectives were viewed at too close range. Our Parties have almost always judged the situation of the miners' struggle a little too pessimistically and for this reason they prepared themselves only for a short struggle. The same mood prevailed as in the first period of the World War. In the beginning everyone believed that it would only last a month.

In my opinion this is one of the most important sources of the failure of our campaigns. If you analyse the campaigns you will see that the Parties, for about one week, conducted

quite a good campaign — articles, manifestoes, etc., — but then all at once they forgot the whole thing. For two whole weeks not a line, not a gesture.

In the following I should like to summarise the chief shortcomings of these campaigns, and I believe that we can afford to criticise ourselves since the action of the Communist Parties and of the revolutionary trade unions, when contrasted to the behaviour of the II. International and Amsterdam, express a genuinely revolutionary international solidarity.

1. There was revealed a certain **passivity** in practically all Parties in the carrying out of the solidarity campaign.

2. **Insufficient recognition of the great international significance** of the British miners' strike. There was revealed a certain **provincialism**, especially in our Party press. The community of interest between the British workers and the proletariat of the respective countries was not always worked out with sufficient clarity.

3. The carrying out of the campaigns (with the possible exception of Czecho-Slovakia) was nowhere on a real united front basis. Manifestoes were published, reformist leaders were criticised, but we did not penetrate to the masses in the factories and the trade unions.

4. The lack of influence in the trade unions enjoyed by the Communist Parties was the main weak spot of our campaign. The weakness of our Parties in the trade unions is primarily responsible for the shipment of blackleg coal to England from Germany, Poland, America and Czecho-Slovakia.

5. The campaigns for the General Strike and miners' strike were not sufficiently deepened theoretically. Most Parties neglected to draw theoretical conclusions from the big struggle. Even the most important problems were not raised, such as e. g. the relationship of the economic struggle to the political, the transformation of the most famous bourgeois democracy into an open dictatorship, the question of the General Strike, the question of the mass strike in general as a weapon in the arsenal of the proletariat, comparative studies, as to the Russian general strike movement of 1905 or the Chartist general strike, the affect of the British miners' strike and the general strike upon the problems of capitalist stabilisation. If you go through the literature of our Sections you will find that for the most part only the publications of the Executive raise these fundamental problems.

In my opinion these are the most important conclusions that we can draw from our self-criticism of these campaigns. Now I should like to proceed with the question of the perspectives. Aside from the problems of the British Empire, the present economic situation of England, the trustification process, the sharpening of class antagonisms, the differentiation of the labour movement, aside from all these problems I believe that one question has hitherto not been worked on sufficiently by us: this is the question of the **role of the Left wing in the British Labour Movement**.

If we look at this Left wing movement as it confronts us to-day in its new form we will find that it represents probably the most fundamental and certainly the most important alteration in the political and social life of Great Britain. What was the old, so to say "official" Left wing prior to the General Strike and the miners' strike? It was something hazy, politically and organisationally unclear, it was impossible to put one's finger on this Left wing. It was the expression of a general discontent among the masses, but it was an unclear, hazy expression. And how about its leadership? Every "labour leader" or every Labour Party intellectual who was dissatisfied with MacDonald, who could not stomach Ramsay's running after the king, or who was opposed to vivisection, or who had vegetarian inclinations, or who fought against compulsory vaccination, or who felt morally indignant about prostitution — believed himself called upon to lead the Left wing of the labour movement.

The general strike and the miners' strike have transformed this Left wing. The leadership now looks different, the new leadership is now furnished by the Minority Movement and the Communist Party. This, I believe is the greatest achievement that has come out of the struggles of the last seven months, it is the **weightiest asset** in Great Britain. For this very reason

we cannot say, as the reformists are now writing everywhere, that the battle was in vain, that the fight should have been avoided. This is the old wail of reformists of all countries, — Plekhanov already said after the first Russian Revolution, "We should not have resorted to arms." The reformist lie, it was no mistake for the British working class to resort to the arms of the heroic miner's struggle.

What is it that the international working class and the Comintern must learn from the British coal strike?

1. The coal strike shows us that the efforts of the bourgeoisie to stabilise capitalism must inevitably lead to **tremendous mass struggles**, and that these mass struggles in turn unavoidably menace the stabilisation of capitalism.

2. In the present situation, every important event in the labour movement of **one country**, becomes an event of **international importance**.

3. On the basis of the decline of capitalism, every important **economic struggle** must change into a **political struggle**.

4. The great struggles in England show how through these battles the British proletariat, which Engels rightly characterised as a **bourgeois proletariat**, is slowly beginning to be **proletarianised** not only in its manner of living, but what is far more important, in its ideology and actions.

5. The general strike and coal strike proved that the **workers cannot win any really large-scale battle under the direction of the old reformist leaders**. For Communists this result was always a matter of course, but it is not yet a matter of course for the world proletariat. The working class can learn this truth only through its **own experiences** and the British coal strike was one of the most important experiences of the international proletariat on this field. The British miners' strike will, in the not distant future, recruit thousands upon thousands of new Communists, not only in Great Britain, but also on an international scale.

In this sense the British coal strike was one of the most important Communist events of the last year. (Applause.)

#### Comrade SMERAL (Czecho-Slovakia):

Comrades! An important part of our task on this point of the agenda is not to **praise**, but to **criticise** and to **learn**. We all realise that towards the British comrades, who come directly out of the struggle, we should, with great seriousness, with tact, friendship, and — if I may use this word — with love — offer our criticism. The purpose of criticism from this Plenum is not to weaken, to chastise, or to discourage the Party that has been in the fight, but to strengthen and to harden it. The second basis of criticism is the following: all Sections must conscientiously study and learn from the course of the latest class struggles in England, its benefits and its defects.

In the **commission** we investigated the extent to which the Party proposed correct slogans and conducted correct campaigns in the various phases, the extent to which it took or failed to take timely measures, the manner in which it recognised the question of blame and responsibility of the Right as well as the Left leaders, and how it raised these questions before the great mass of the workers. Although frank Bolshevik criticism is the first task for us here, we are also fully conscious of the very good work of our British Party and of the results of this work. I believe that in addition to a criticism of the British Party at this time, a self-criticism of all our Sections is also in place. How have the Sections of the Communist International carried on during the British Strike?

We must confess quite frankly and without any fancy colouring that with the sole exception of the C. P. S. U. (b) this strike has shown such great shortcomings in all of our Sections that we must really be appalled if we view it in connection with the possibility of a new capitalist world war. We must immediately mobilise the whole International to get to work to eliminate these defects as rapidly and as thoroughly as possible. The bourgeois counter-revolution has not only succeeded in bringing Europe territorially into a condition of Balkanisation, but it has also succeeded in Balkanising the ideas of the European working class.