

WORLD CRISIS AND REVOLUTIONARY TRADE UNIONS

(At the Fifth R. I. L. U. Congress)

By I. ERENBERG

THREE full sessions of the Fifth World Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions heard the reports of its executive committee. The main reporter, Losovsky, general secretary of the Profintern, spoke for six hours and outlined the downfall of the rotten capitalist system, the steady, rapid growth of the Soviet Union, the impetuous revolts of the revolutionary proletarian masses in all the capitalist countries, especially in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

The representative of the Comintern, Heckert, in his three hour speech, laid the whole concrete work of the R.I.L.U. and all its sections under the spectrum of strict Leninist Bolshevik self-criticism. The other reporters told in their hour long speeches about the work among women, youth and the oppressed Negroes.

Situation of the Proletariat

Losovsky began his report with an analysis of the crisis that has shaken the whole economic structure of the capitalist world. "It is a crisis of over-production, continuous growth of productive possibilities, called forth by the tremendous disproportion existing between the production and the markets which have been narrowed down by the pauperization of the masses and by the rebellions in the colonies.

"The whole burden of the world crisis is being born by the working class. Permanent unemployed armies existed in several capitalist countries due to capitalist rationalization, already before the crisis. The latter gave birth to an unheard-of extent of unemployment, the terrible weight of which is lowering the standard of living of the workers and influencing their class struggles.

"First comes the U. S. A. with over seven million unemployed; second is Germany with about four million; then follows Great Britain with over two million; Japan with two million; Italy with 800,000; Poland with 400,000; Austria with 400,000; Latin America with 1,500,000, etc. In all the capitalist countries there are already over 20,000,000 unemployed. Every day brings news of the closing down of further factories and mills, of the dismissal of further hordes of workers. With their families, this means that about 70,000,000 people are thrown into misery, famine and starvation. This army, unprecedented in its dimensions, for the most part is not receiving any unemployment benefits and even where such are granted (Germany, Britain, Austria) they are just sufficient to carry on a semi-starving existence.

"But this is not yet all the misery that is crushing the working class. There are millions working short time, who have been thrown in this way into misery, famine and starvation. Besides all this, there also takes place a systematic lowering of the standard of living of those who still work: increasing of their working hours and lowering of their wages . . ." and Losovsky brings figures after figures of each capitalist country and industry separately, with which he draws clear and sharp pictures of the terrible misery and of the systematic progressive worsening of the already terrible conditions of the workers in every capitalist country.

The Soviet Proletariat

Losovsky deals with the extraordinary growth of the Soviet economy and the progressive growth and betterment of the standard of living of the Soviet proletariat.

"While the economic crisis is shaking the foundations of the whole capitalist and colonial world, and increasing the misery and degradation of the working classes, the Soviet Union is the only country unaffected by its terrible consequences. The reason for this lies in the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the nationalization of the means of production, and in the systematic planned work and activity.

"The Soviet Union has since the Fourth R.I.L.U. Congress begun to carry out the gigantic Five-Year-Plan (Pyatiletka) of socialist construction, the reconstruction of industry and the collectivization of agriculture. The rapid rate of progress of the industrialization of the Soviet Union, and the growth of socialist competition among the workers in the shops and factories are making it possible to complete the Five-Year Plan in four years. In some industries it will be completed in three and even two and a half years. (At this point the entire Congress burst out in tremendous applause.)

"The industrial output of the Soviet Union, constituting 122 per cent of the pre-war production at the time of the Fourth R.I.L.U. Congress, has in 1929-30 risen to 180 per cent of the pre-war level. The industrial growth of the Soviet Union, made possible by the dictatorship of the proletariat is accompanied by rapid increase in the number of workers and the improvement of their standard of living. Real wages of the workers, including social insurance and contributions paid into the fund for cultural improvements, have risen 167 per cent of the pre-war level. While the average working day before the revolution lasted from 10 to 11 hours, not a single industrial worker there now puts in over 8 hours per day. In the middle of 1930 more than 40 per cent of all workers employed are working only seven hours per day, while the workers in dangerous industries and those under 18 are working only six hours per day. The five day week embraces about 70 per cent of all industrial workers, every fifth day being a day of rest.

"Every worker is granted leave for at least two weeks, while those in dangerous industries get a whole month per year with full pay. The state bears all expenses of the social insurance of the workers (illness, accidents, unemployment, old age, etc.) and all wage workers are insured. In 1930, 681,000 workers are being sent to the health resorts at the expense of the social insurance fund. The building of workers' homes increases; 400,200,000 rubles were expended for this purpose in 1926-27, the figure for 1929-30 being 871,000,000 rubles. Large funds have been established for the improvement of culture, social education of children, cultural and educational work of the trade unions and are increasing every year. While unemployment in the capitalist countries has reached the figure of over 20,000,000, the number of unemployed industrial workers in the Soviet Union is very small and in several of the rapidly growing industrial districts and branches of industry, a severe shortage of labor is making itself felt.

"Not only the conditions of the workers have been greatly improved. Owing to the famous and successful collectivization, the standard of living of the wide peasant masses has been raised as well. Before the revolution, the workers and especially the peasants never even had enough food to eat. Now they are masters of their country and want to satisfy all their requirements. If the same quantity of manufactured articles that is produced now in the Soviet Union had been produced by the capitalist regime, the shops

and stores in Moscow and other towns would have been over-stocked, but a very small part of these goods would have found its way into the workers' districts and villages. Now all the output of the factories and mills is directed into the workers' districts and collective farms, except what must be used to buy machinery for the Five-Year Plan. The requirements of the workers and peasants have risen by many times while production increased only to double—this explains the shortage of goods . . ."

The hundreds of workers' representatives listened with the greatest attention to the living convincing facts formed by this great amount of figures and statistics. These dry figures speak louder than any words and tell about the conditions in the capitalist countries and those in the Soviet Union. In their minds they at once compare the situation in their "own" country with that here in the Proletarian Land. . . . What a difference! There in their own country just as well as in the entire capitalist world, such a terrible crisis. Here, in the Soviet Union—such an unusual growth and improvement.

While the Soviet proletariat is entering into a period of political, economic and cultural growth and steadily increasing prosperity, the proletariat of the capitalist countries is faced with the dilemma, either of suffering patiently a further lowering of its standard of living to the point of complete degeneration, or of choosing the way the Soviet proletariat took, i. e., overthrowing the power of capital and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. International and Soviet experience confirm the truth of Lenin's words, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is the only power that really defends the economic interests of the working masses, for it is "the only step towards equality and democracy in fact, not on paper, but in real life; not in political phrases but in the economic reality."

Self-Criticism and Tactical Conclusions

Comrade Losovsky dwelt on the great number of strikes since the Fourth R.I.L.U. Congress. He takes up each strike separately and points out their specific characteristics in the period of the world crisis. He brings facts after facts about the treacherous, strike-breaking work of the reformists and social-fascists in every strike. He also points out, that notwithstanding that the sections of the R.I.L.U. often conduct economic struggles, organize around them a united front of all interested workers, mobilizing new layers of workers, expose the strike-breaking role of the social-fascists, etc.—notwithstanding all that, there are still noticed many weaknesses and shortcomings in this work. Here he dwells concretely on all weaknesses and shortcomings of the various struggles in each country separately, that had right opportunist and left sectarian deviations.

Losovsky emphasizes that under the present conditions there cannot be any purely economic strikes. To revolutionize the strike movement means to make clear and understandable for the strikers the connection between their economic demands and the entire system of bourgeois dictatorship, to expose the role of the social-fascists, to make out of every worker a conscious fighter for the fundamental interests of the working class. Strikes are not the aim—they are only the means to an end. Lenin, who was the greatest strategist and tactician known to mankind, defined this end as follows:

"The final end of the strike struggle in the capitalist state is the destruction of the state apparatus, the overthrow of the particular class state power."

Here Losovsky turns to analyze the practical and tactical conclusions for the work in the immediate future. There are 21 conditions necessary for the organizations of a counter attack against the bourgeoisie in the period of the present terrible world crisis. The most important of them are: the struggle for the every-day needs of the workers; not to lag behind ("chvostism"), but lead the working masses; to organize the unemployed, not on paper, but in fact, and unite them in an iron bloc with those who still work; to struggle against fascism penetrating the enterprises, and link up the struggle against fascism with the struggle against social-fascism. We must really get down to the organization of Workers Defense Corps and pickets, strengthen the independent revolutionary trade union and the revolutionary illegal trade unions. Serious activities must be developed in the reactionary unions. We must seriously organize the trade union opposition in those countries where there are no independent unions. We must organize the unorganized, who comprise the bulk of the working class in the capitalist and colonial countries. Concrete steps must be taken to aid the struggle of the colonial peoples. We must organize and fight every day until the final victory of the international working class!

Defend the Soviet Union!

Especially must we now, and all the time, conduct a determined struggle against the new war menace, explaining to the working masses what it means, and its class meaning. "The international working class movement must also struggle to defend the Soviet Union—the land of the proletarian dictatorship—against imperialist attack. The working class in every part of the world is now giving central attention to the defense of our socialist construction. And it depends on the way we carry on our activities every day, on the way we organize the masses, on our work among the workers at large, whether or not the imperialists will be able to realize their designs (to attack and destroy the Soviet Union). In the Soviet Union the international revolutionary workers movement has a territorial base, and it is the defense of this base, the defense of our socialist construction that is the chief and foremost duty of the working class throughout the world. By defending the Soviet Union the working class throughout the world is defending itself!"

A tremendous storm of applause was the best unanimous answer of the hundreds of workers representatives of every corner of the globe on these last words of Comrade Losovsky. All the delegates are already on their feet. The militant tones of the "Internationale" burst out over the entire hall. The delegates make a stormy ovation for Comrade Losovsky, for the Profintern, for the Soviet Union, for the world social revolution.

Yes, not only has the world proletariat the territorial base in the Soviet Union, but the Soviet Union has a mighty fighting base in every country of the world!

Down with deportation, lynching, Jim-Crowism, segregation; elect delegates to the National Conference for the Protection of Foreign Born, Nov. 30th, Dec. 1st, Washington, D. C.