

## A Letter from S. J. Rutgers to a Japanese Comrade.

No doubt the Left Wing and direct action will have the future, since only by self-activity can the workers learn to control their own, not only in bringing about a change for power but also to reconstruct society on a new basis, which is the more difficult part of the task. Even if tomorrow the workers got the power through parliamentary means and the capitalists would not have recourse to armed power (which, of course, they would) the workers, by entrusting the reconstruction to their parliamentary representatives and leaders would again fall into a new slavery. Only the self-activity and participation of large groups of workers and poor peasants, with the exclusion of exploiters and close control over "intellectuals" from the old bourgeois and middle-classes can help. This is, of course, a difficult situation since the workers have no education and leadership, and science is a monopoly of bourgeois intellectuals and organizations.

The Russians have shown the way in a marvelous manner, although the lack of response in Western Europe threatens the results and forces them to have recourse to militarism and bureaucracy to a certain extent, in order not to be crushed by outside forces and inside misery. It was a great disappointment to me to find the workers in the West so much less prepared for real action than in Russia. The strength of the old bourgeois or capitalist civilization is so strong here that conditions are much more difficult. But the worst part is, that the workers themselves have become quite a part of the capitalist world. With their enormous organizations, buildings, treasures, a strong staff of bureaucratic leaders, participation in capitalist institutions, in the league of nations, etc., they become imbued with bourgeois spirit and bourgeois interests. Schools, churches, the press and all that we call civilization tends to confuse them, giving them just enough knowledge to enable the workers and peasants to fall victims of the reasoning of the master class, and not enough to analyze and destroy the illusions. Those workers that develop themselves above the average necessary for the capitalists are largely bribed and corrupted by money, positions or respectability.

Nowadays, in all the countries of the West, the masses are starting from the bottom in direct action and self-activity, but they are betrayed time and again by their leaders and by intellectuals from their own ranks. This process will continue, I fear, for some time and meanwhile western society is running fast towards a complete collapse and chaos, and it will be extremely difficult to rebuild anything from the ruins left. A great deal of misery and cruelty is now awaiting us, although the collapse of capitalism proceeds so rapidly that either a complete slavery or a new life will have to spring up. No doubt it will be new life, since Russia holds out to help us though.

But for some time we still expected that Western Europe, once awakened, would soon take the lead and help Russia to reconstruct its economic life and its new social structure.

Some of us are now inclined to believe that difficulties in the older countries to overcome bourgeois civilization and bourgeois institutions are so great that the less developed countries of the East, including Russia, offer a better chance and may proceed in the new development. Such Communists remember that civilization has in former times also changed its center from East to West and from South to

North, and that even in animal development, new species do not develop from those that have adapted themselves most perfectly to their surroundings, but from more primitive species that have more possibilities for adaptation to new circumstances. This, however, is a dangerous analogy to transmit into social life and we should be very careful with such examples. But still there is some fundamental truth in it and it throws more attention to the East. It may be remembered that instinctively the Russians always have paid more attention to the East than our Western friends in general.

Of course, all this should by no means diminish our activities here; on the contrary, the world will have to change all around and strenuous efforts will be required everywhere. But it may emphasize for our Eastern friends their responsibilities, and stimulate their activities. It would be a dangerous mood to expect too much from others, more dangerous, if the possibilities are that a great part of the common task will fall on their own shoulders. I cannot judge whether Japan is already so far overpowered by capitalist organization and spirit, that difficulties there are almost equal to those in Western Europe and that we have to look more to the subjugated races of China and India. But anyhow I feel a greatly increased interest in Far Eastern affairs, especially in the actual facts about the life of the original population.

The Soviet System is very flexible and can be adapted as in Russia, to small and middle peasantry, handicraft, etc. But to know whether and how this could be possible we ought to study those conditions in the light of Russian achievements.

Could you not help us in this respect by your own judgement, and by sending literature, as far as this has been published in some modern language? I mean conditions of agricultural property (remnants of primitive communism or family-property, tenant farmers and proletarians on the land) conditions of workers in small industry, handicraft, etc., traditions of primitive communes or family life etc. Not only about Japan but about China, Korea and Siberia as well. Also from the standpoint of Japanese Socialism it will be highly valuable for you to study more closely conditions in China. A close co-operation will be necessary between Japanese and Chinese revolutionists. Japan seeks domination of China for imperialistic reasons. The foremost duty of the Japanese Socialists therefore, is to count act this policy; in the first place, by opposing militarism and imperialism in every form, by weakening the Japanese capitalist stronghold, by fighting for a human life and material improvements at home, etc.

But the other side of the fight against imperialism is to strengthen the Chinese proletariat, to increase its power of resistance, to help to bring the Chinese movement in the line of class consciousness and Bolshevism. For that purpose it is necessary to study closely its conditions, its history, its traditions and feelings and to create by your own actions and deeds that feeling of mutual trust, that is necessary for co-operation, under such difficult circumstances. Japan and China as nations are in such a direct antagonism, that it may be helpful to have the support of European comrades in clearing up the general situation and mutual misunderstanding. We are becoming more and more aware of the utmost importance of developments in the Far East for the great problem of the world revolution.

have a constant supply on hand, but not so the working class, which lives from hand-to-mouth, day in and day out. The Labor Council therefore found itself face to face with a situation it had never even dreamed of. A firm decision was necessary. The Council either had to feed the workers or surrender. May it be said to the lasting credit of the Council that its members braved the situation and determined to feed the workers. The Council was likewise obliged to provide food for the sick, keep the streets clean, furnish lights to the hospitals, etc. Furthermore, in order not to let the rowdies run riot, the Council provided pickets (or Red Guards) to patrol the city streets. Hence the functions of government automatically dropped into the hands of the Labor Council. But was this Revolution? Not at all. It was never intended to be such. What actually happened was this: the capitalists, terrified at the power displaced by the workers, called on the military to intervene, and with force in one hand and promises in the other, they were prepared to talk to the workers on their own terms—naturally! This ended the general strike. What I wish to point out is that the subversion of the small crafts into that great ocean of General Labor not only secured the rights of organized labor in particular, but demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that the working class was able to take control of the industries, if they only desired to do so.

### Industrial Unionism Not Enough.

To be sure, industrial unionism is absolutely essential to modern class-warfare, but industrial unionism per se is not the be all and end all of capitalism. Indeed, there are plenty of industrial unions today which are highly reactionary. The Miners' Federation of America still tolerates the renegade Lewis as its President, in spite of his open betrayal of the miners in their last strike. Australia has a "One Big Union," yet it is far from being revolutionary. It might even be stigmatized as conservative. Hence all talk of industrial unionism as the Saviour of Mankind is pure bunkum and claptrap. Unless the unionism be permeated with a spirit of rebellion, and a conscious desire to overthrow capitalism, its changing from craft to industrial organization is like changing from Tweedledee to Tweedledum.

### Communism and the Limitations of Economic Strikes.

However, it is not at all essential that all the workers be class-conscious. Had the Russian Communists waited until each and every Russian was a Bolshevik, they might have lingered an eternity—and longer still. If there be dissatisfaction and discontent (and no one can deny that this is so today), a conscious minority, conscious of its historic mission, can and must swing the masses towards a revolutionary effort to capture and destroy the bourgeois state. It is the very absence of this active, organized minority that causes the impetus of all the great strikes to spend themselves in utter exhaustion and in temporary weakness. This is the reason why the Seattle general strike was a failure, in spite of its apparent success. No greater exhibition of solidarity was ever more complete than that of the workers of Seattle. Yet it failed. The same is true of Winnipeg. A general strike such as Seattle or Winnipeg can easily be turned into a national general strike if the active minority is on the job and well organized in a Communist Party. To recapitulate: industrial unionism today is made imperative by the development of machinery and the concentration of capital, but this organization in itself is not, and cannot be the "Messiah" of the Revolution. The union organizations, by the very nature of things, are not adapted to revolutionary action. Their fight being always a struggle to better conditions, they are not able to distinguish between the immediate illusory gain and the complete emancipation of their class. It is therefore important that we realize the natural limitations of purely economic strikes.

In order to make the essential point, that industrial unionism does not spell Revolution, let us assume that the Triple Alliance is a unified body or One Big Union. True, such an organization would bring us a step nearer to Communism, but industrial unionism in itself is not the Social Revolution. It is simply a more scientific reorganization of organized labor, for the purpose of repulsing the onslaughts of the centralized capitalist class, which is able by means of the trustification of industry to pit one section of the workers against the other. This method of combination by industry instead of craft is not the result of abstract philosophical reasoning, but is forced upon the workers as the only suitable weapon for defense. The proof of this lies in the fact that industrial unionism never precedes the trustification of industry, but, on the contrary, is the legitimate and inevitable offspring of Big Business. In short, neither industrial unionism or the General Strike (to wit, the late Irish General Strike to free the hunger strikers), means Social Revolution. The latter undoubtedly must precede and then run concomitant with an uprising, but the successful "engineering" of this general strike is the task of the Communist Party.

### When the Revolution Will Come.

To obtain Economic Emancipation, it is necessary to fight for it. To wait, as some evolutionary encyclopedic pedagogues advise us so very often, until all the workers are organized into industrial unions, and then to wait another century until capitalism crumbles by its own weight, is sheer nonsense and hypocrisy. That capitalism contains the seed of its own destruction is evident, but we must remember

(Continued on page 7)

## Industrial Unionism and the General Strike

By MORD WILGUS

A comrade from America inquires of me "whether the Triple Alliance is sleeping." Sleeping does not describe the Triple Alliance correctly. I would rather say that it was still-born. That the Alliance exists can not be doubted, but its existence is that of dead matter, devoid of flesh and blood, and all the other attributes that are characteristic of life and action. The cause of its inactivity is self-evident. The Triple Alliance is composed of three distinct bodies: Miners, Railwaymen, and Transport workers; each of which insists on acting individually on behalf of its own particular interests, without the smallest regard for the interests of the general mass of workers, or even of the other members of the Alliance. The result is that the Central Organization is powerless to act as a single unit, a situation which is as dangerous to labor as it is deplorable. Moreover, the moving and courageous spirit that is essential to a strong centralized body is foreign to the fake labor leaders. Mr. Thomas is still galloping after the coat-tails of respectability, and his readiness to accept honors from the parasitic hands of the exploiters is convincing proof of his quite traitorous conduct to the working class. The rewards of Judas Iscariot was microscopic compared with those of J. H. Thomas, the man who would gladly lick the boots of the master-class as a demonstration of his servility. This is the same labor-faker who shed crocodile tears on his visit to the battlefields of France, where he observed the body of the Right Hon. Raymond Asquith lying side by side with that of a humble proletarian soldier. What further proof is necessary to demonstrate the intrinsic identity of the classes?

### The Seattle Strike.

But to return to the topic. Let us pause and see what experience, the ablest of teachers,

will tell us on this fundamental problem of industrial unionism and the general strike. I refer now to the general strike in Seattle—a great industrial city on the Pacific coast—during the early part of 1919. The facts are as follows: The shipbuilders had several grievances against their masters, which they were anxious to clear up. The union interviewed the owners, and they categorically refused to consider the demands. The workers' powerful industrial weapon was therefore decided upon to bring the horses to their senses. A strike was declared. The companies countered with a threat or immediate dismissal of all those men who failed to return to work the following morning, a threat which could easily be enforced, because the signing of the Arbitration had diminished the demand for shipping. The situation became critical, and a meeting of the City Labor Council was called to consider the grave danger to organized labor. After a little hesitation and rambling, a general strike was decided upon, to take effect at once. The craft unions greeted this war-cry with great enthusiasm, and the general strike was complete. The buzz and tumult of a great city was no more. Not a thing was moved—not even the private cars of the masters. Wherever a wagon or an auto was observed, it was immediately silenced by the pickets. The factories were shut tight, and the city was as quiet as a dumb-bell. The only vehicles that budged were those bearing large signs, with the inscription: "By Permission of the Labor Council." Now, everyone is quite aware of the fact that if it comes to a test of endurance, the capitalists are by far the stronger. They do not buy flour, potatoes, coal, vegetables etc. piecemeal; on the contrary, by purchasing these necessities in large quantities, they not only obtain them cheaper, but they