

The Industrial Situation

By Arne Swabek

Ever more the strike movements give evidence of working class exasperation from deep seated grievances, of rebellion against the increased class pressure in industry. They foreshadow the trend of the American workers toward a more definite class position and toward a class movement. They indicate the great possibilities becoming available for militant unionism.

THE TEXTILE WORKERS

Naturally the struggles of the workers in the Southern territory command the major attention. A newly developed industrial proletariat in rebellion against the rapidly established capitalist trustified industry, with its intense exploitation, is of the greatest significance. Not only are the unorganized textile workers engaging in this revolt, but even members of such

the importance and the antagonism that accompanies nationalist sentiments."

I believe that all this is a far cry from imperialism. I believe that here is a good chance for the ultra-Lefts to learn something. I am also ready to admit that not all of our resolutions have been carried out. There were probably more unlawful acts on the railway lines than in Moscow. That is precisely the reason why the Opposition wages an implacable struggle. Yet it is a poor politician who throws out the child with the water when the bath is over.

I have already shown the sense in which the Stalinist faction was responsible for Chiang Kai-Shek's provocations. But even if we assume that Stalin's bureaucrats have acted foolishly again, and have thereby helped the enemy to strike a blow against the Soviet republic, what conclusions should we draw? Perhaps the conclusion that we must not defend the Soviet Republic? or the conclusion that we must liberate it from Stalinist leadership. The editorial of *Contre le Courant* has outrageously come to the first conclusion, stating that we must not support Stalin's bureaucracy and its adventurist war. As though in such an event the Stalinist bureaucracy would be at stake and not the October revolution and its potentialities. In order to parade more of its wisdom, the editorial goes on to say: "It is not up to the Opposition to prepare some special remedy in the present crisis." We cannot imagine a worse standpoint. This is not the view of a revolutionary, but of a disinterested spectator. What shall the Russian revolutionary do? What shall the fighters of the Opposition do in case of war? Shall they perhaps take a neutral position? The author of the editorial does not seem to think of this. And that because of not being guided by the viewpoint of a revolutionary who will unconditionally enlist in the war, but because of proceeding like a notary who records the actions of both parties without intervening.

The Stalinists have reproached us more than once for being defeatists, or defenders on certain conditions. I spoke on this subject on August 1, 1927, at the joint plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission. I said:

"Whoever accuses us of defending the Soviet Union on conditions, we herewith brand as liars and slanderers."

In this way I repudiated the idea of neutrality and conditional defense, called it a slander and hurled this slander back into the teeth of the Stalinists. Did the author of the editorial fail to notice this? And if he did not fail—why did he not attack me? The speech to which I refer was printed in my recent book, published in French under the title "The Distorted Revolution."

When I delivered my speech, I did not deal with some specific war, but with any war that might be waged against the Soviet Republic. Only an ignoramus will fail to see from the combination of the preceding events a basic antagonism between the imperialist powers and Soviet Russia. Yes, in the question of my visa the imperialists are in cheerful accord with Stalin. But when it comes to the question of the Soviet republic, they all remain its mortal enemies, *irrespective of Stalin*. Every war would expose this antagonism and would inevitably result in endangering the very existence of the Soviet Union. For this reason I said in my speech quoted above:

"Are we, the Opposition, in any doubt on the question of defending the Socialist Fatherland? Not in the slightest degree. We hope not only to defend it but to teach others how to defend it. Have we any doubt on the ability of Stalin to take a correct line of defense for the Socialist Fatherland? We have, and this in the highest degree.

"The Opposition is for the victory of the U. S. S. R. It has proved, and will prove, no worse than the others. As to Stalin, that is another matter. Stalin, in fact, has something else in mind, which he dares not express. That is, Does the Opposition think that Stalin's regime is incapable of securing victory for the U. S. S. R.? Indeed, such is their opinion!"

Zinoviev: "Correct!"

"Not a single Oppositionist will renounce his right and duty, on the eve of war or during its course, to fight for the correction of the Party line—then and always—because this is the most important pre-requisite for victory. I will sum up: We are for the Socialist Fatherland, but we are not for the Stalinist course."

I believe that this position retains its full strength in the present moment as well.

L. D. TROTSKY.

Constantinople, August 4, 1929.

conservative craft unions as the street carmen of New Orleans go into action against the employers with organization sentiment ripening amongst the workers everywhere in these states.

The shameful sell-out by the officials of the United Textile Workers Union of the strikers of Elizabethton, Tenn., is not the end there. These workers will again take up the fight. In the other little Southern mill towns spontaneous strikes of the unorganized workers occur almost continually. The most militant fight has unquestionably been made by the Gastonia workers under the leadership of the National Textile Workers Union. But for the time being the mill barons have succeeded through the celebrated murder frame-up tactics of American capitalism in putting the movement on the defensive. But the misery of the workers increases their deep-rooted discontent grows and it will be a matter only of time when they will again be able to resume the offensive. With united support of the American working class that day will arrive so much sooner.

It is unquestionably due to this aggressive, militant struggle led by the Communists at Gastonia, combined with the ruthless pressure upon the workers by the mill bosses that the officials of the United Textile Workers have decided to exploit the growing union sentiment in its announced intention to carry on an organization campaign throughout the Southern states. But their actual efforts, as already demonstrated in the Elizabethton betrayal, will be to lead this sentiment into channels safe for capitalism.

ON THE RAILROADS

Among the railroad workers growing militancy has been demonstrated of recent date in determined rank and file votes for strike to adjust their grievances. Held back however, by conservative craft prejudices and class collaboration practices nothing has so far gone beyond the usual procedure of arbitration. Yet the demand made by the railroad brotherhoods for the six hour day can only be ascribed to the increasing pressure of the rank and file upon the officialdom. Reasons for this pressure can easily be found in the fact that during the last eight years the combined roads of the country have cut their working force by 180,000 men; that in 1928 the total payroll was 90 million dollars below that of 1927 with an increase in profits of 108 million dollars; in the further fact of the corresponding heavy increase of speed-up, loss of union conditions, governmental action to defeat the workers and the general failure of the union leadership.

In the general working class condition the picture is a similar one, however, with the exploitation of the large masses of unskilled workers being much more intense. The U. S. department of labor reports that in 1928 there were fewer factory jobs than in any previous year since 1921 while payroll totals reached the lowest level since 1924. The reduction in the employment average since 1923, shown by the department, represent loss of jobs to more than 1,000,000 workers.

BUILDING AND AUTOMOBILES

Building activities according to the Commercial and Financial Chronicle in a report, covering 354 of the largest cities shows a decline for 1928 compared to 1925 of \$878,477,171 or about 20 percent. In addition the workers are faced with a rapid mechanization of the industry with machinery replacing labor and hand-tools, all of the material used being entirely finished in the factories mostly under non-union conditions. Thus even the privileged position of these skilled workers divided by craft prejudices, craft union barriers and reactionary corrupt leadership is being threatened, compelling an orientation towards new methods and forms of struggle.

It is understandable that the capitalist institutions view with considerable concern the "uncertain" situation in the automobile industry. In Detroit the per capita earnings of the auto workers decreased 8.5 per cent during 1928. Men over 45 years of age can find no jobs, unemployment is growing, layoffs and hiring at lower wages has become routine. Speedup is constantly increasing; among the workers discontent is spreading and is manifested in repeated strikes and growing sentiment for organization. In the latest report of the Student Industrial Commission we find a summary of these conditions as follows: "With all these shop strikes before us; with all this boiling indignation bursting on our ears; with men in discontented mobs gathering before factory employment offices, we see no other alternative than unionism. Human nature will stand just so much, then it breaks over the dams and overflows. One day this is going to happen in Detroit."

With the same tempo of these developments the trade union bureaucrats in general are moving constantly in the opposite direction, further to the right. They are proceeding to more bitter denunciations of militant tactics and of the Communists, increasing their betrayals and strengthening the fortifications of the capitalist system. Just now when the Gastonia strike leaders are facing framed up murder charges and execution the A. F. of L. Executive Council is again broadcasting its "warnings" to the affiliated unions not to give any money to "such Communist organizations" as the I. L. D., the W. I. R. and the National Textile Workers Union, condemning with the Communists also the "Conference for Progressive Labor Action". This becomes so much more brazenly reactionary in view of the fact that the Southern struggles involve not merely the right to strike under Communist leadership but the right of any and all strikes, of any and all workers organization.

But it is not merely the budding Southern industrial oligarchy which pursues such savage methods of repression against its unorganized workers. At the almost opposite end of the pole, among the craft conservative building trades workers, we saw this Spring the threat of a lockout by the employers against the whole of the building trades of New York, directed mainly against their struggle for the five day week, a threat which is sure to be renewed at a more "opportune" time.

THE RIPENING MOVEMENT

Thus the objective possibilities, the response to which can be noted both among the unorganized masses of workers as well as those within the trade unions, are slowly ripening for the building of a class movement of the American workers. The surest signs appear in the moves of the heavily exploited section of the workers in the basic industries. To unite these beginning struggles and give them organized expression is the particular task of the left wing. There is no other force able to lead and inaugurate the movement for building of new unions of the unorganized workers and to crash through the barriers of craft conservatism and capitalist ideology among the masses in the unions, winning them for class policies. To us this is axiomatic. To the working class, however, it must be proven and false steps will lead to isolation instead of broadening and increasing of the left influence.

The present policies pursued by the Party and the T. U. E. L. represent such false steps. The contradictions of these policies are already appearing. Thus the force of events has already compelled a certain modification of the original policy for the "Cleveland Unity Congress" away from the building of a center in the sense of a new trade union federation and more toward the correct attitude of building a left center as an organizing instrument. But they have not yet changed the "new line".

THE "NEW LINE" AND LENINISM

This "new line", non-Marxian and non-Leninist in conception, leads to splitting and the isolation of the small left wing and its followers as is now actually the result where the left wing appears today. Refusal to "draw these masses, now just awakening to the need for organization and struggle, into the A. F. of L." Refusal to "try to affiliate them collectively through the new unions to the A. F. of L.", separating the left wing from the now appearing progressive movement which, no matter how vacillating and spineless the leaders, nevertheless represents pressure from below as well as commands a following. In reality the "new line" means to withdraw entirely from the existing unions despite all protestations to the contrary.

With the masses awakening, the role of the existing unions having a mass basis will be of so much more importance no matter how reactionary their leadership. To direct this awakening toward the building of a class movement the left wing must work among the masses everywhere and closely co-ordinate its work within the old unions with that among the unorganized workers. Only when going hand in hand can it succeed.

Moreover, only through a broad united front organized with all forces ready to work toward a class movement—for militant unionism, exposing and fighting bitterly all self-seeking phrase—mongering aspirants to leadership, can the left wing become a real factor and prove its worth and capacity for leadership to the masses. But this is the opposite of the present Stalinist "new line"—this is the Leninist line.

A Gangster Assault

AN OPPOSITIONIST BEATEN IN THE UNION OFFICE

On Monday, August 19, comrade Nathan Berman, a member of the Communist League, went to the office of the Joint Board of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union in New York, to pay his dues, amounting to \$5.25. Berger, a leading Party member in the Union, greeted Berman as follows: "Hey, skunk, do you still belong to the Trotsky faction?"

Before Berman could do a thing, he was seized and held fast by three Stalinists, while Berger slugged him in the mouth till he bled. None of the Union officials protested.

On the way out of the office, Weiss, another leading Stalinist in the union and one of the heads of the cloak department, told Berman to "get the hell out of here". Berger was taken into the inner office while Berman was driven out.

Comrade Berman joined the Union in 1913, upon his arrival in this country. He joined the Communist Party in 1921, while it was still underground, and was expelled from it last year for refusing to vote for the expulsion of the Opposition. He was a supporter of the Left wing in the Union from the beginning, and a regular member of the T.U.E.L. In 1927 he was stabbed on the picket line five times by Right wing gangsters, in the breast, the back and the hand, and he has been under the doctor's care since that time because of the profuse loss of blood.

It is characteristic of the present struggle against the Communist Opposition that comrade Berman, a victim of the thugs of the Right wing and a staunch fighter for the Left wing union by a Berger, who deserted the fight during a strike. Comrade Berman was not driven away from the movement by Right wing gunmen and he will not be driven away by Stalinist thugs who copy their methods. But what have Zimmerman and Gold to say about this, what do Foster, Wicks and Weinstone, who are clamoring against the "gangsterism and burglaries of Lovestone", have to say about the gangsterism they use against Communist workers who support the Opposition.