

The Communists and the Unemployment Crisis

By ARNE SWABECK

Without any let-up, the economic crisis has been hitting deeper and the ranks of the unemployed workers have increased from day to day, with the beginning of 1931 so far showing the very lowest ebb. Consequently, the economic experts and the financiers, in their New Year "messages", maintained an extremely cautious tone, in everything except their demands for wage-cuts. From the International Labor Bureau at Geneva comes the announcement that the world's unemployed workers today count 20,000,000, the European share being 11,000,000—on a whole, a rather moderate estimate.

That there has been a constant decrease of jobs in the United States with an almost exactly corresponding growth of breadlines is evident even to the casual observer. The New York Industrial Commissioner, Frances Perkins, reports factory employment in the state hitting the lowest level on record for December since the establishment of the bureau in June, 1914. The December index for factory employment showed 77.5, a drop of 4.1 from November, which is again the largest decline of any single month since 1920. Steel output during December reached its lowest in six years, production for the month being 38.57% of capacity. Foreign trade during the year 1930 fell off a total of \$2,737,780,000. There has been an epidemic of bank failures and while, to an extent, this reflects the struggle between chain and unit banking, on a whole it is only additionally symptomatic of the ravages of the economic crises growing inevitably out of the capitalist system of production.

Hoover's Promises

Even to the most gullible, the "optimistic" promises, made at the famous Hoover conferences more than a year ago, to bolster up the waning confidence in this system for initiating large scale industrial "emergency" undertakings, alleged to be mounting into billions of dollars to alleviate unemployment, should now have proven themselves incontrovertibly as nought. The railroad magnates stepped up with the largest single item of alleged expansion but at the end of September, 1930 showed a drop of employment on all Class A roads of 261,000 jobs: from 1,747,816 to 1,485,906 or 15 per cent. Mr. Wollman of Hoover's Unemployment Commission reports a decrease of number of workers engaged in public works in June 1930 from the same month of the preceding year. All in all sufficient proof of the fact that capitalism, in order to maintain its existence needs an industrial reserve army.

Undoubtedly there have been "valiant" efforts on the part of the capitalist owners of industry to dispose of the large stocks of "surplus" products on hand together with a curtailment of production in preparation for a revival. Above all, this is expressed in what is politely called "efforts to reduce cost of production", in other words, to increase the rapacious speed-up system and further reduce wages. The automobile output, for example, has come down to an estimated total of 3,350,000 for the year compared to the 5,350,000 for 1929. Mr. Wiggin, the president of the Chase National Bank, in his New Year's "message", added his voice to the many other exploiters demanding a further wage reduction.

Most certainly there have been similar "valiant" efforts by U. S. capitalism in the ferocious struggle for further re-divisions of the world market. One need only cast a glance at the latest South American "revolutions" made to order by Wall St., and at the proposed silver loan for the stabilization of China; in other words, attempts at saddling part of the burden of American capitalist restitution upon the shoulders of the workers abroad.

Economic Cycles of Capitalist Production

Despite the efforts of the masters of industry we have now for more than one year been in the midst of this crisis, an inevitable outcome of the cyclic nature of capitalist production constantly proceeding through its course: depression—"prosperity" to depression again. That this crisis is more convulsive and more deep-going than preceding ones is a natural outgrowth of the developing process of contradiction between increasingly socialized production and individual capitalist appropriation. It is caused mainly by the general decline of imperialist capitalism especially in Europe and the growing interdependence of world capitalist economy, making the crisis appear almost simultaneously in every capitalist country, and becoming more acute in all its manifestations. It is caused by the immensely increased expansion of productive capacity due to technical application of science to the machinery of production, growing rationalization and speed-up. It is caused by the growing standing army of unem-

employed cast off from industry even during its "favorable" period when employment decreased despite the increase in production. It is further caused by the growing intensity of the struggle to reduce the working class standard of living as a whole through what is euphemistically called "reduction of the cost of doing business". These are some of the main factors in the present situation.

The contradictions of the savage system of capitalist production and rule have increased enormously, becoming of serious portent for the future. First we must register the fact that henceforth we will have in the rich United States a large standing unemployed army creating a central problem for correct Communist policy. **Present Status of Working Class Movement**

At the present moment, the outstanding feature of the situation is still the capitalist offensive, the working class attitude being expressed in a distinctly defensive manner. A ferocious slashing of wages, both directly and indirectly, to a point where many standard trade unions are unable to maintain their officially set scale; a murderous increase of the speed-up system, pitting the employed workers against the unemployed; efforts to saddle the scant charity pittance to the "most needy cases" entirely upon the backs of the workers; brutal dispersal of unemployment and other working class demonstrations, and mass arrests of the Communist vanguard.

Is there as yet an actual working class resistance to this offensive? Unquestionably, there is a growing widespread mass discontent which has not yet assumed concrete forms: the illusions of the capitalist charity crumbs as a solution still prevail; the working class political ideology has not yet reached beyond the boundaries of the capitalist parties but still swings within the sphere of transferring allegiance from the Republicans to the Democrats—here and there growing support to reformism; 1930 shows fewer strikes on record than any year during the past decade despite the drastic wage cuts; there is not yet a mass response to the fight for the unemployed led by the Communist vanguard. In fact, we must record a decided drop in such response once manifested, largely, however, due to the blundering tactics of the Communist Party leadership. In sum and substance the situation presents itself to us at this moment as a downward curve of the working class movement.

From Wrong Estimates Wrong Conclusions

At the very inception of this crisis the bottom fell out entirely from the party leadership's estimate of the general trend and from the tactical policies it pursued, resulting in a constant narrowing down of the movement and preventing the rich potentialities from materializing. Its cry of widespread workers' radicalization, workers' offensive struggle already culminating in a revolutionary upsurge came to nought, shattered upon the rock of realities and further negated by its own inclination toward opportunist distortions of the slogans for immediate demands.

We witnessed in the early part of the struggle the attempts to set up a national organization of unemployed councils, ready made by mere administrative orders from above and within the artificial limitations of the T. U. U. L. It remained confined to the party and circles immediately sympathetic to it unable to develop roots in the life of the masses. There can, of course, be no other result from this sort of short cut maneuver, which attempts to skip over a whole stage of diligent preparation essential for an actual mass foundation upon which to set the workers into motion and from which alone can spring genuine organization. Correct tactics during the period of the low ebb become the preparations for the flood tide—the rise of the movement. But just as surely, the hitting of a too high key from a note of an entirely fictitious revolutionary upsurge produces a relapse, a setback. In serious matters of revolutionary politics from this relapse flows the inevitable consequence—downward sliding. This became expressed in the opportunist tendency of the party leadership to concentrate almost exclusively on the slogan of relief, embodied in a spurious "unemployment relief bill". Further, in a collection of signatures for the bill, also to be presented to congress, turning the workers' attention in that direction and to that extent away from the powerful dynamics of mass struggle.

Playing into the Hands of Reformism

Is it surprising that the party leadership found itself in a position unable to make any other distinction from social, liberal and ordinary bourgeois reformers, also framing "relief bills", except the vulgar op-

portunism of the amount of dollars and cents demanded for each worker per week? Next the leadership even reduced its original demand for \$25.00 weekly benefit per worker to \$15.00, putting it exactly on a par with a similar "bill" for \$15.00 per week now proposed by a newly organized New York committee representing civic, social welfare groups and conservative trade union leaders. Such a policy will in no way serve as preparation for the next stage, for the coming upturn in the movement for active resistance to the capitalist offensive. It cannot mobilize the workers under the Communist banner but on the contrary helps to put new life into an otherwise rather feeble social reformism.

In the revolutionary movement there is no escape from the inevitable logic of erroneous policies. A general strategy which runs counter to the basic curve of the specific period leads to a continuous decimating of the forces available. In this respect matters stand not any better with the hunger marches of unemployed now initiated by the party leadership. The very slogan itself, hunger march, is wrong, as it leads, even under the best of circumstances, to a separation of the unemployed from the employed. With the objective of marching to reinforce the demand for the fifteen bucks weekly relief, however, just as glibly promised by the civic reformers and pursuing methods which deliberately make the small Communist vanguard an easy target for police dispersion, we must not be surprised at the working masses remaining passive bystanders. Thus there are very good reasons that despite the splendid prerequisites for the beginning of a real proletarian movement this negative result is all that the balance sheet can show to date.

The next immediate future will undoubtedly bring a further rise of prerequisites of a class movement of the American workers. The low ebb will be followed by an upward curve of workers reassembling their forces, entering into active resistance and gradually assuming the offensive. With this in view the problem of the Communist movement of correct revolutionary policy becomes a seriously pressing matter.

What Must Be Done?

Facing a coming crucial period of an upward turn, our mass activities must be of such a nature as to effectively prepare for its success, give the correct direction for the working class struggle and establish Communist leadership. This means first of all a correct evaluation of the present **defensive character** of the movement, secondly it means a correct program for today and in anticipation of the next steps, when fighting for immediate demands, a sharpening of the general line of demarcation from reformism. Concretely the following points must be emphasized:

1. It is absolutely necessary to make clear the general object and limitations of immediate partial demands and not to arithmetically add new demands for every ill of the present situation appearing as solutions in themselves, such ends only in reformism pure and simple. Partial demands for partial objectives are advanced by the Communists essentially for the purpose of setting the workers into motion against their class enemy and in such a way that the struggle will lead ever more toward the revolutionary goal. In this unemployment situation, with its slashing capitalist offensive, particularly the demands which unite the unemployed with the employed and prepare for a working class offensive. We must make clear that partial demands are never advanced by Communists in the reformist sense of being in themselves a solution, we must say definitely: "There is no solution to the unemployment problem under capitalism."

2. Based upon the above considerations the demand for the **six-hour day without any reduction in pay** must become the central immediate demand. It should be clear that this demand has the widest base of appeal and tends the most directly to set into motion and embrace unitedly both the unemployed and employed workers. As a direct slogan of action it can become a very effective means of preparation for the working class offensive in the next stage.

3. Other demands to be linked up with this most outstanding one should be formulated not from the view of having as many as possible, seemingly covering every need, but from the view of becoming definite rallying points. For example: (a) immediate unemployment relief from the bosses and their government; (b) extension of large scale credits to the Soviet Union. The last mentioned demand has a particularly direct

bearing on the world aspect of unemployment and furnishes a means of cementing the natural interests between the Soviet Union and the world proletariat.

4. The forms, methods and tactics applied in the agitation struggle for the unemployed are of as equally vital importance and can become correct only when thoroughly inspired by serious efforts toward a **broad united front basis**. The hunger marches must be made demonstrations in which all workers can participate and further fight jointly their for common interests under the proper broad slogans. It is necessary to effect a reorganization of the unemployed councils genuinely on a united front foundation. Especially should serious efforts be made to include the existing trades unions and working class organizations even to the extent of such whose leadership, in an effort to offset possible rank and file revolts, pretends to be championing the needs of the unemployed. Efforts toward a correct Leninist united front policy includes in particular the direct approach to the rank and file through the workshops, the breadlines, the union meetings but also the formal approach to the organizations officially.

5. Above all it is necessary for Communists to draw the complete revolutionary implications of the unemployment struggle. To tie up the agitation for the immediate needs in an indissoluble bond with the struggle for the socialist revolution and in such a manner that each step for the realization of the former becomes progressively a step toward this final goal, is an inescapable duty of the Communist movement.

Kote Zinzadze Dead!

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ed secretly in Menshevik Georgia and did the pioneer work of arousing the proletariat in the civil war that finally liberated Georgia from the yoke of British imperialism and its Menshevik handmaidens. For a time, he served as head of the Georgian G. P. U., helping to crush the enemies of the proletarian revolution, with the same courage and devotion he demonstrated when he fought czarism before the revolution and was imprisoned by the Ochrana. After the death of Lenin, comrade Zinzadze found himself in the ranks of the Opposition to which he adhered until his death, defying the abominable pressure of the Stalinist apparatus, which sought but could not find in him a capitulator of the stripe of Kadek and Co.

He who fought for the living teachings of Lenin and the victory of the October still lived to see the counter-revolutionists against whom the Opposition organized, come to trial in Moscow, The Ramzins and their ilk found the ready mercy of the Stalinist apparatus, caught red-handed though they were in their nefarious plot against the workers' state. But Zinzadze, who struggled with his comrades against the Thermidorians inside and outside the party, was allowed to die in exile by a cynical party régime.

What a bitter and illuminating commentary on the present leadership that they find it possible to work in harmony with the counter-revolutionary and restorationist forces for years, but cannot tolerate in their ranks the best Bolsheviks of yesterday, today and tomorrow! The Stalins, Molotovs, and their creatures throughout the International, who desecrate the memory and teachings of Lenin at their hypocritical memorial meetings, rest uneasy while the Zinzadzes, the Blumkins, the Rakovskys, and thousands of the best sons of the Russian revolutionary proletariat, continue to live. The revolutionists must die, must be murdered on their sick beds or in the courtyard of the G. P. U., so that the legend of Stalinist infallibility and the permanence of Stalin's rule may prevail.

The Thermidorian Right wing remains a source of blocs and maneuvers for Stalin, while Zinzadze dies in exile and Rakovsky is threatened with the same fate. The Ramzins and Kondratievs come forward in new editions every day, produced out of the loins of the apparatus, while the Blumkins are shot down in the dead of night. The proletarian heart of Russia is enfeebled by the crushing grip of the apparatus and the party is strangled by the noose of Stalinism. But out of the soil that produced the legions of Russia's October revolution, will grow new Zinzadzes and Blumkins, new Bolsheviks from the new generation, who will yet achieve the triumph of the living, real Leninism in the International. The coming victory will be the memorial to those who have died in battle.