

Recent Lessons in Strike Strategy

A serious study of recent events in the European labor and revolutionary movement would afford many valuable lessons. To bring some of these events out in their momentous importance should be well worth while. Add to them a few home experiences and we may approach the moot question of problems of strike strategy.

What is a correct strike strategy? Ask the theoreticians of the Stalin school and you will receive the most complex and detailed descriptions of the mechanics of conducting strikes. While this is necessary it does not really begin to touch the problem of strategy. Yet reams upon reams have been written in this manner in the official Communist International press, the sum total of which, considering its object, is hardly worth a brass farthing.

We are unquestionably moving toward a period of rising working class and revolutionary activities in the United States. With it yet greater problems will call for solution. It will be a test of the correctness of our theory and only that will stand up which is based upon the experience of life. Hence it is well to proceed to a close examination of these events mentioned in an endeavor to learn from them.

Recent Strikes in England

The declining British capitalist imperialism is now conducting an offensive against the working class all along the line. At the moment of this writing 250,000 weavers in the Burnley, Lancashire and Yorkshire districts are on the streets through an employers' lockout. An equal number of spinners are affected and practically idle. The weavers refused to accept the "famous" American stretch-out system of handling eight looms per operative instead of four as formerly prevailed. The lockout began January 19th.

In the railroad industry the employers demand a 10 percent wage cut. In the building industry as well as in the boot and shoe industry similarly wage cuts are demanded by the bosses. On July first, the legal maximum workday of seven hours in the mining fields is supposed to go into effect. But with the experience of recent events in these fields the coal miners may look forward with little probability of its becoming a reality. That is, unless they can pull themselves together better than before.

Coal Miners in Struggle

Some 140,000 South Wales miners have just returned to work after a strike to enforce the seven and a half hour workday act. The operators were willing to concede recognition of this act only on the basis of a demanded 6 percent wage cut. The miners terminated their strike on the promise of arbitration which has since resulted in the signing of a new three year agreement. It provides for a conciliation board to settle all disputes. The agreement failed, however, to decide the important question of a subsistence wage which is referred to an independent conciliator for adjustment.

Shortly prior to the South Wales walk-out the Scottish miners struck also to enforce the seven and a half hour workday act. They returned to work on a somewhat similar basis as the former. While the Scottish miners struck those of South Wales were kept on the job and only after the defeat had been administered to the former were the latter called out. Thus do the union bureaucrats, among them Arthur Cook and others who were once hailed as the "great leaders of the Left wing", divide and defeat the rank and file workers.

At the present moment the officially registered unemployed workers in Great Britain number over two and a half million. The bosses now have no need of what was called Mondism, i. e., the British form of class collaboration. They are directly on the offensive. Obviously in such a situation the lock-out, not yet well known in this country, becomes an extremely dangerous weapon against the workers. It cannot be defeated by the tactics pursued by the reactionary trade union heads.

MacDonald Again "For Labor"

After a considerable period of comparative "tranquillity", so much worshipped by the bureaucratic officials, the British workers are beginning to resist the attacks. The labor party, having reached its pinnacle in being his majesty's government, has had another opportunity to demonstrate its faithful service to capitalism. MacDonald advised the coal miners to forget the seven and a half hour workday law enacted by his government and to accept the stretch-out over eight hours. One of the "great pledges" of this government was to repeal the Tory trade union limitation bill. What will happen to this "pledge" is with usual cynicism of bourgeois scribblers indicated by Charles Selden in his *New York Times*

By ARNE SWABECK

dispatch of January 28th, partly as follows:

"Premier MacDonald was forced by the organized labor elements of his party to put the bill on his Parliamentary program for this session against his better judgment. He has fought hard for it, so thereby seriously risking the life of his government and his own political fortunes. If it comes out of the committee in such an altered form that the trade unions are unable to recognize it Mr. MacDonald will be able to drop it without taking another chance for defeat on the third reading. (sic!)"

What Has Become of Minority Movement?

One may ask, what has become of the Minority Movement once counting the support of over a million workers? Is it entirely wiped out, or does the present objective situation offer no opportunity for activity and growth? The latter could hardly be the case. It would perhaps be more correct to say that it is still suffering the consequences of the miserable Stalinist policies pursued by the British Communist party leadership during the last few years.

The general trade union officialdom is today making little or no pretense at shielding its reactionary views. The former "progressive" front is entirely absent. At the Nottingham Trade Union Congress last summer a majority in reality favored the Empire Economic Unity of Lord Beaverbrook. And from the *Inprecorr* we are informed that only two militant delegates spoke in opposition to these views.

No doubt the Communist leadership in the Minority Movement committed the cardinal mistake of building around the fake progressives of the Robert Williams, George Hicks, A. A. Purcell and Arthur Cook stripe. When they had the opportunity to reveal themselves in their true light and take their stand with the other reactionaries, the movement collapsed. Since the advent of the Stalin leadership in the Communist International this has been the record elsewhere also. The plunges into Left adventurism of the British revolutionists entering into

a head-on collision with the capitalist labor party; with the "social fascist" trade unions and into the building of new "revolutionary unions" could, of course, not prevent the collapse.

However, of more fatal consequence yet became the rank opportunist policy of the united front with the liberal labor politicians in the Anglo-Russian Unity Committee. The British revolutionary movement still suffers from its effects. This effort to leap over the stages of the slowly developing Communist party, which may have seemed revolutionary, could have no other results. It was false even prior to the general strike.

It was designed by the Stalin régime to become the means of rallying the British workers to prevent intervention in the Soviet Union. The Left Opposition replied already then: "The more acute the international situation becomes, the more the Anglo-Russian Committee will be transformed into a weapon of English and international imperialism."

We have seen since that the committee itself in reality became a means of shielding the reactionary designs of the Trade Union Council by making the "progressive" front appear more real. The impact of the millions on strike threw these "progressive" fully back into the camp of the bourgeoisie. They became the most effective betrayers of the strike. But any criticism the Communists at the time attempted to direct against them was in advance negated by the prestige they enjoyed in being partners in the "unity" committee with the representatives of the revolutionary Russian workers. Ever since, the British Communist party, together with the Minority Movement has experienced a constant decline both in numbers and influence upon the course of the working masses. It could not be otherwise. Simultaneously, and to almost precisely that degree, the influence of the Trade Union Council and of the capitalist lieutenants in the leadership of the labor party has grown. And grown to a point where they are yet able to divide and defeat the British workers.

The isolated position of the British Communist Party and the Minority movement reflects its internal life. There is not yet an organized Left Opposition. However, with great struggles looming on the horizon and thereby, the growth of the real problems of the revolutionary movement, the experiences of the failures are bound to become expressed in the development of such an Opposition.

But to return to the question of the experiences in the workers' struggles and the problems of strike strategy, we intend, in the next issue, to bring some further examples from France, Germany and the United States and to draw some conclusions.

N. Y. OPEN FORUM

Feb. 21: THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE SOVIET UNION

By Max Shachtman

Feb. 23: DIALECTIC MATERIALISM: A REVOLUTIONARY SCIENCE

By Arne Swabek.

March 7: THE SITUATION IN THE NEEDLE TRADES

By James P. Cannon

at the

LABOR TEMPLE

14th Street and Second Avenue

Open at 8 P. M.

Admission: 25c

Auspices: New York branch, Communist League of America (Opposition).

For a United Front on the Unemployed

(Continued from page 1)

cific stage of development our tactics must lay the basis for correct preparation and direction of the next one. Correct tactics lead toward the revolutionary goal. Wrong tactics lead away from it and strengthens the enemy. A correct approach to the problem of ameliorating the working class needs of today, and now so acutely pressing, prepares for the battles of the rising labor movement tomorrow. Agitation slogans and immediate demands can present no solution in themselves and should not be so designed. They are, by the very nature of the class struggle, strictly limited in their character. That is, they can offer means of temporary amelioration. And they must be a help to unite the workers on the basis of their common interests and to set them into motion against their class enemy. They cannot solve the problem. Only the proletarian revolution can do that.

We propose unity of action of the Communist forces and, in advancing the following concrete program, we offer our fraternal co-operation with the official Communist Party in the struggle for the unemployed.

1. Common recognition of the capitalist offensive and of the defensive character of the general working class movement as the outstanding feature of the present moment. This requires a line of tactics which take this feature of the situation into account. Proceeding from this our tactics must naturally grow in boldness in preparation for the next stage when workers' struggles can pass over to the offensive.

2. The central immediate demand must be the *Six hour day without reduction in pay*. More than any other demand this has the quality both of offering real and tangible improvement of the workers condition and become a means to unite the working masses and set them into motion against their enemy. The Communist forces must take upon themselves particularly the duty of *arousing the existing labor unions and workers organizations* and welding them together into a powerful movement for the shorter workday.

3. It is essential for the working class also to fight against the murderous capitalist rationalization and speed-up of the workers. Similarly to fight for immediate unemployment relief, and for a system of unemployment insurance at the expense of the capitalists and their governments. In this connection we must always emphasize that the workers can obtain even the smallest measures of relief and reforms only through direct pressures of their mass numbers.

4. It is essential that the unemployment movement adopt the slogan and fight for extension of large scale credits from U. S. capitalism to the Soviet Union. The

further success of the great industrialization progress of the Soviet Union, is bound up with facilitation of an increase of supply of machinery for the immediate future from the capitalist countries. For this the Soviet Union needs credits. The orders which such credits will enable the Soviet Union to place in America will provide more work for the unemployed here. The great importance of this demand, for which we must arouse the workers to fight, consists in the fact that it unites the struggle of the American workers for their most pressing immediate needs with the industrialization program of the Soviet Union. Thereby it cements the bonds of American workers with the Soviet Union and makes them real participants in its struggle toward socialism.

5. To actually provide the broadest possible basis for the movement, Unemployment Councils should be organized as genuine united front bodies. Such councils when growing out of the movement struggling unitedly for the needs of the unemployed and against the capitalist offensive can become genuinely representative of the masses. The official Communist Party must revive and apply the united front as Lenin taught them. This means, in the present situation, to make direct proposals to the trade unions, the socialist party and the workers organizations for a common struggle for the above demands. On the basis of such proposals a strong agitation should commence among the workers in the ranks of these organizations. The fact that the reactionary leaders of the trade unions will reject our proposals, or refuse even to discuss them, is no reason to refrain from making them. Such an attitude on the part of the leaders will only deepen the contradictions between the bureaucracy and the workers and widen the basis for Communist influence. An energetic application of these tactics, on the basis of a realistic and correct program, will create the conditions for a real movement on the issue of unemployment. This is the need of the hour. Up to now the struggle has been a demonstration of the vanguard. It must be transformed into a mass movement under the leadership of the Communist vanguard. A correct evaluation of the situation, a correct program and the tactics of the united front are the ways to this transformation.

6. The main duty of the Communists in the unemployment situation is, as always, to become the leading force of ever broader working masses, proceeding from the immediate needs toward the final working class goal. There is no solution to the unemployment problem except through the proletarian revolution. In our agitation and struggles we must always make this clear.

National Committee
Communist League of America (Opposition)