

Recent Lessons in Strike Strategy

Last summer, some very militantly fought strikes took place in the northern industrial section of France. About 150,000, mainly metal and textile workers, struck against the provisions of a check-off from their wages instituted by a new Social Insurance Act. Their demands were for a wage increase commensurate with this check-off.

Of the greatest importance for the strategy of the revolutionary vanguard in such a situation becomes the question: What is the basic tendency of the working class movement? To stop a moment here, one notices immediately the upward curve of working class struggle. Beginning with the latter part of 1929 strikes again increased in France, in numbers, in participants, in militancy, as distinct from the preceding years. First they embraced merely the lighter industries but by July last entered also the heavier metal industry. Even the unemployment crisis had not yet invaded France. Conditions were excellent for an offensive struggle.

Was the Communist party strategy based upon such an upward curve? No, on the contrary. The French party had already early in 1928, following Molotov's "brilliant" example at the Tenth Comintern Plenum, placed France in the front trenches of a decisive revolutionary situation. This, of course, did not correspond with objective reality. The reaction produced drove the party, way back to the rear and it found itself at the tail of events when the workers of the North pressed forward in struggle. History is merciless with those who are at the tail of events. The party failed utterly to prepare for this struggle and even to recognize its actual significance.

Workers Divided in the Strike.

The workers of the industrial north are divided in the two existing unions. The major section belongs to the C. G. T., which is under reactionary leadership. The militant union, the C. G. T. U., counts only a minority within its ranks. The latter, as a matter of fact, has witnessed a period of decline throughout the country during the last few years. From its high point of over 500,000 members it has dropped to about 250,000. The party's keeping this union in mechanical leading strings has by no means been a healthy factor. While in the final analysis the question of mechanical control resolves itself into whether or not correct slogans and correct programs are advanced, this is precisely where the party failure lies. Unquestionably this also had something to do with the direct decline of membership and influence. Meanwhile, the union under reactionary leadership has suffered less decline and has even gained a foothold within the militant union in form of a syndicalist opposition going to the Right.

Upon enforcement of the social insurance check-off last July the workers of the north took the initiative in strike over the head of the bureaucrats of both unions. The latter, as a matter of fact, found themselves compelled to move only after about 50,000 workers were already out. The party, caught unprepared, at first advanced a slogan against the social insurance law. Later it corrected itself to the quite ordinary position of demanding a 10 sous hourly wage increase to meet the insurance tax. The reactionaries of the C. G. T. demanded a 5 sous increase, the amount of the actual tax. With no greater distinction prevailing, the majority support went to the reactionaries' demand as one seemingly easier obtainable. The latter were not slow in taking advantage of this development to complete their rôle of betrayal in finally entirely dropping this demand.

A Caricature of Strike Strategy.

Only a few months prior to this outbreak a conference, initiated by the Profintook place in Strassburg, Germany. The C. G. T. U. had its representatives there. The French party leaders were represented. Its "momentous" results were pretty well reflected in the inglorious record of the party and C. G. T. U. leadership in the strikes in the north. The truth is that the conference failed to discuss even problems approximately strike strategy but merely produced long resolutions on the technique of smaller tactical problems. And yet even such small tactical problems, when actually faced in the strike, suffered from bureaucratic abuses by this leadership. Through the *Inprecorr* (Vol. 10, No. 35), we are informed, that the party members carried on endless discussions on the forms of strike committees while the workers forged ahead conducting their own struggle. And in a later issue we are told that when strike committees finally came into being they were not even democratically elected.

Both unions established their strike committees, each trying to lead independently. This simply meant that the strikers

remained practically leaderless. The cardinal necessity in such a situation—a correct united front policy, was completely negated. The party and C. G. T. U. leadership rejected it. The capitalist agents of the C. G. T. had, of course, no interest whatever in a united front struggle. Theirs was solely the rôle of betrayal and it was made more easy by the failure of the revolutionary section to apply this correct policy. Through the final defeat ensuing, the syndicalist bloc, those who are turning backward to the Right, have now been strengthened in their advocacy of unity of organization. Such advocacy has, of course, nothing in common with the united front policy. While the former can at the present moment mean only the solidification of the control and influence of the reactionaries, the latter policy, correctly applied, would go a long way toward weakening their hold upon the masses.

Little by little the capitalist agents of the C. G. T. and the Socialist party, reinforced by the police and military suppression, were finally able to divide and defeat this splendid struggle of the workers, driving them back section by section with nothing gained. The many failures of correct policy—yes, of correct strike strategy—helped to turn a potential victory into defeat.

Recent German Experiences

In Germany the most recent lessons become of practically decisive importance because of the extremely acute stage of the class struggle. Only a couple of instances need be cited: the Berlin metal workers strike last September and the Ruhr miners strike in January this year. Both of them in different ways became major events. In both instances, the treacherous crawling of the socialist trade union leaders before their masters broke the workers' ranks. But we must add that the serious mistakes committed by the revolutionary vanguard slashed with the sharpness of a razor edge further into the already deep wounds of the German workers.

Basically we note in Germany a sweeping capitalist offensive to lower further the already miserable standard of the workers. With the long duration of the crisis, capitalism could no longer effectively use the coalition social democratic government to stem the tide of working class unrest. The Bruening government came and carried on openly and boldly the wage cutting formerly more cunningly concealed under the social democrats. We note a rise in revolutionary potentialities and simultaneously a menacing growth of fascism. These basic tendencies were particularly reflected in the latest Reichstag elections on September 14, 1930.

In this situation the metal corporations advanced their demand for a 15 per cent wage cut to take effect September 30. The ingenious invention of the social democrats, the compulsory arbitration machinery, set into motion and ordered an 8 per cent wage cut with 6 per cent for all young workers. 140,000 metal workers struck, however, only to become disintegrated and return about two weeks later on a promise of a new arbitration award. Yet, to capitalist Germany, it became a breath-taking demonstration of working class power. But how did the revolutionary vanguard square with its responsibility?

A Sample of Party Strategy

Unfortunately the party leadership,—the German Stalinist edition—had already gauged the decisive revolutionary situation in Germany long before this. Its noisy proclamations for conquest of the streets only left a gap between itself and the working class. Its shrill exhortations against the "social fascist unions" had practically crippled all revolutionary activities among the organized workers. The consequent firmer control over the unions by the treacherous social democratic officials in a strike situation, as we shall see, also became extended to the organized section.

Among the Berlin metal workers strike about half were unorganized. Nevertheless they followed the lead given by the organized section. The party and Red Trade Union Opposition proceeded, not to endeavor to gain influence over these masses through the unions, but through the establishment of their own strike committees and a small rival union to separate further the Left wing from the masses. It proclaimed the abstract slogan of a political general strike instead of starting direct from the economic issue of wage cut to turn the struggle directly against the system and its political state which were the executors of the wage reduction. It could thus not become the factor unifying the workers in a revolutionary direction. This tactic of openly splitting the workers in struggle before their support had been won for a revolu-

tionary ideology could only repel these workers. The revolutionary object is not to split away from the masses but to split the masses away from the reactionary leaders. Thus when the new arbitration award came, providing for the original wage cut to be applied in installments, the workers found themselves compelled to accept the award.

The strike itself, a powerful incentive to the advancing struggles of the German workers, did not attain that objective. The immediate results were a victory for reaction. In this, the serious mistakes of the revolutionary vanguard played their part.

This general line of policy of the Communist party also led to practical disaster in the Ruhr region when continued there. The mine owners served notice of a wage cut of 12 per cent affecting 300,000 miners, to take effect Jan. 15. The reactionary union officials intimated their willingness to accept a 4 per cent cut, thus greatly incensing the rank and file workers. Naturally here was a great opportunity to win mass sentiment, to lead directly all the miners, both organized and unorganized into struggle against the will of the officials; to win mass influence through correct union and strike tactics. The essential point should have been to agitate and organize broadly for a united resistance at the actual commencement of the wage cut. Instead, the party rushed ahead calling a strike entirely over the head of the unions to commence Jan. 1. About 40,000 miners responded, mostly unorganized, but with real militant spirit. The overwhelming majority, however, including the organized sec-

tion, assumed a waiting attitude, wanting to see what would happen when the wage cut was to take effect on Jan. 15. This again demonstrated that while the organized section can easily become the rallying point for the unorganized in a struggle, the opposite can rarely be the case even under the best of conditions. The picketing instituted by the strikers against the workers, otherwise willing to resist the bosses' onslaught but to do it in such a manner as to make the union carry the fight, created a wall of antagonism between these two sections. Simultaneously an immense police terror set in.

The party again here advanced as the main slogan "the political general strike" and made the strike object the building of a new revolutionary union. *Rote Fahne* commented: "The Red Trade Union Opposition is pregnant with new unions" (quite similar to what one has heard from the T. U. U. L.).

On Jan. 4, this strike collapsed completely. It failed to draw in the majority of the workers. It lasted only four days. The defeat immediately instituted more police repression to crush any further possible resistance—primarily, however, in anticipation of the final arbitration award to be made. When this comes the workers will already have suffered their major defeat, its advanced section crushed for the time being and the militants further isolated from the masses.

Needless to say that in the serious situation now prevailing in Germany, particularly with the threat of fascism to crush all working class organization, it becomes obligatory upon the revolutionary vanguard to alter fundamentally its strategical line, and to pursue the tactics which will enable it to play its historic rôle.

—ARNE SWABECK.

Organization Notes

NEW YORK: Our branch, here, is the largest and liveliest branch in the League. The members are taking active part in the workers' mass movements! those who are unemployed participate in the work of the Unemployment Councils, others function in the Trade Union field. Ten thousand unemployment leaflets were distributed by this branch and it disposes of one thousand copies of the *Militant*, regularly every issue. In general literature distribution this Branch is far ahead of any other. Its orders for new pamphlets, when off the Press, usually run 500 copies at a time. This is made possible under the able direction of Harry Milton, the branch literature agent.

The Branch conducts a successful open forum once a week. It conducts at present two study classes with two more being organized.

For our program of expansion the N. Y. Branch is taking the lead. It has pledged itself to raise a total of \$1,000.00. The individual membership pledges amount to \$450.00 with \$122.00 in cash already paid in.

PHILADELPHIA: The branch in Philadelphia is now taking on new life. Last week-end a visit made by Comrade Swabec was utilized at a workers' gathering which decided to organize a mid-week open forum to be held every Wednesday. Our comrades have already made themselves the most active force in realizing this plan and have hopes for building up a good forum. Comrade Swabec also spoke at a meeting of the Liberal League Forum on the Present Crisis. There were present about 125 workers including several Party members, some of whom took part in the lively discussion that followed. Our Philadelphia branch members are right on the spot in covering meetings with literature and in distributing our unemployment leaflet.

OUR PROGRAM FOR EXPANSION

Replies to our program of expansion have been received from some of our Branches. New York not merely endorsed the plan enthusiastically but also proceeded immediately with helping to put it into effect. The Minneapolis Branch says: "We endorse the plan unanimously. We'll do our part

to put it over big." From Chicago likewise comes the word that all members agree this program of expansion is correct and has real prospects of success. From Toronto, Canada, the secretary tells us that while he has not yet had the opportunity to bring the Program before the Branch, he is sure it will be adopted.

These replies indicate that the membership sees possibilities of real progress under this plan and realizes that its goal can be attained step by step; each new step adding new strength. With the firm conviction that we are now facing a rising labor movement, theoretical preparation of the revolutionary vanguard becomes a most urgent need. "A Marxist Library for every Militant" will be a beginning. Further training in the school of the Class struggle will add the practical experience. An important part of our expansion program is to furnish "Workers' Books at Workers' prices".

The financial response to the expansion program is already indicated in our organization notes by the pledges made and the actual cash receipts of \$122.00 from the N. Y. Branch membership. Henceforth we shall present a graphic description of the financial goal of the campaign and the program made to-date. From issue to issue you will be able to watch the growth of a black heavy line (representing cash turned in) towards the goal).

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Our subscription drive is under way. New York leads with three new subs and two renewals. Minneapolis follows with four new subs with the rest scattered among the other branches.

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