

radical international decline of commodity prices. To cut the costs of production is the first step in this direction. This not only signifies an intensified rationalization of industry, a higher efficiency in production, a squeezing out of "unprofitable" intermediary enterprises and small business men, but a universal levelling downward of the working class standard of living. From this it follows that America recovery will not be based in the first place upon a re-establishment of the internal market, upon its domestic expansion, because the purchasing and consumptive power of the proletariat will be lowered in two ways: the existence of millions of permanently unemployed and the decline in the standards of those employed, and because the chronic agrarian crisis shows no signs of let-up but rather points to a further impoverishment of the agricultural producers. Armed on the one hand with its gigantic financial facilities, and on the other hand, with a reorganized industry capable of competing actively in the present state of the world market, the United States will be in a position to turn its attention more energetically to its foreign trade, that is, to the form of its business activity that must assume an ever greater position in its economic life. In recent years, the foreign trade of the United States has not loomed up so large in its economic life. Precisely this fact tends to the belief that in the coming period, it will occupy an increasing place in America's economy. The value of American exports (1928) was twenty-five percent greater than the value of the exports from the United Kingdom, but the exports per capita of the latter were more than twice the value of the per capita exports of the former. It is towards a reversal of this and similar ratios that the ruthless advance of American imperialism will strive. The race between the United States and its competitors will proceed at a maddening speed, despite the great obstacles standing in the way in the form of commodity price declines, decreasing ability of foreign countries to absorb loans, the acute international agrarian crisis, the pyramided burdens of war debts, etc. But in the race, the United States, as chief banker of the world, has by that alone a manifest advantage. In 1929, the foreign (net) loans of the U. S., which serve to expand the importing ability of the borrower, were \$862,200,000 compared to England's \$557,600,000 in which despite the heroic efforts of Britain to expand its influence in Latin America, expressed in an almost two-fold increase of its loans over the previous year, it did not attain the American total for Latin America. The 1929 comparison affords even greater illumination on the relation of forces in contrast to the 1925 loans, when Great Britain came within \$120,000,000 of

equalling the American volume of foreign underwriting. Whether or not the United States in the next period will reach the peak it attained towards the end of the last decade cannot be determined in advance. What does flow from the whole situation, however, is that the herculean efforts of the U. S. to issue out of its crisis will entail the extension of the "American plan", that is, the plan to put Europe on diminishing rations in world economy. This in turn will bring with it increasing misery and exploitation of the European masses, the accentuation of the class struggle, confronting the proletariat of Europe with the alternatives: proletarian revolution, war, or submission to the super-exploitation of America.

The fury of America's advance against its imperialist competitors is determined by still another factor. Arriving belatedly upon the field of world conquest, the United States does not enjoy a colonial domain comparable to that of Britain, France, and others. Its Allies came out of the war with increased colonial divisions, in which the United States had virtually no share. Its hegemony in Latin America, its infiltration of China, are far from adequate substitutes for a colonial realm. The crisis poses this imperialist need with pointed imperativeness. Little concerned with the fact that the loss of colonies to Europe will only mean deeper revolutionary crises for the latter, the United States will seek to satisfy its voracious appetite by carving away parts of the colonial empires of Europe. Here, as with every other "issue" from the world crisis, the specters of war and social revolution march side by side.

But the effects of America's efforts to issue out of the crisis are not to be limited to Europe alone. They will be very profound and acute in the United States as well. Rapid as is the decline of the costs of living, marked by the commodity price fall, the decline of the living standards of the American workers is even more precipitous. Rapid as is the decline in employment, with its concomitant of misery for the millions of jobless, the decline in wages has been even more acute. The empty "pledges" of Hoover, of the industrialists, of the A. F. of L. leadership, that "wages will not be cut", has not prevented their being cut. It would be wrong to believe that the process of wage-cutting is coming to an end. In reality, it has only begun. In the terrific offensive that the capitalist class is carrying on and plans to extend against the working class, in the changes produced generally by the crisis, lie the foundations for a change in the relationship of forces within the working class and the opening up of a broad perspective for working class struggles and radicalization.

The Prospects for the American Working Class Movement

The American working class movement has passed through two distinct post-war stages: one of vigorous growth and militant struggles, the other of ideological and numerical degeneration and sluggish passivity. The first stage embraced the first post-war years and coincided with the deflation of the war-labored industrial apparatus of the country and the eve of the 1921 crisis. It was not only a period of the tremendous growth of the trade unions and the first signs of a mass movement towards a labor party, but also of a series of tremendous strikes in the basic, open shop industries of the country. Moreover, the steel strike, the miners' movement of 1920, the big textile strikes, the railroad walkout, together with the general strike in Seattle, did not coincide accidentally with the over-running of Europe by revolutionary crises—the Triple Alliance in England, the Hungarian and Bavarian revolutions, the occupation of Italian factories, etc., etc.

While the standards of the working class of the United States did not rise in proportion to the increase in the national wealth and the national income, it did rise above the standards prevailing for the working class before the war and above the standards of the European working class. But the working class purchased this internationally privileged position at the cost of debasing and destroying its own class positions—the trade union and the political movements. In making its profitable concessions, the bourgeoisie in return obtained an acquiescent working class converted—at least in its upper strata—into a petty bourgeois or semi-bourgeois mass. The working class, however, unconsciously paid a heavy price for the temporary improvement in its conditions: As a result, it faces the terrifying shocks of the crisis without any adequate apparatus, with only the merest skeleton of trade unions to defend itself against the capitalist campaign to slash its wages and to lower its living standards of living. This fact alone would suffice to determine the essentially defensive nature of the struggles taking place today and those which will take place tomorrow, and to determine it to the disadvantage of the working class.

Does it follow directly from this, however, that the American working class will go through the crisis—i. e. through the brutal capitalist offensive—without resistance? Such a conclusion follows least logically from the situation. The working class does not conduct a struggle for an abstract, never-changing standard of living, but for a concrete one connected with time and place. As the "prosperity reserves" of the workers reach the vanishing point, as the full and intimate realization of the radically lowered standards penetrate the consciousness of the mass, as it becomes daily more evident that the solution of the crisis is still a long way off, the moods of resistance will become stronger among the workers and begin to gain the upper hand. It is inconceivable that so sharp a decline in the living standards of the workers will be allowed to pass by them without a fight to retain what was gained yesterday, or at least a part of it.

The crisis in the United States, with its attendant unemployment and hardships for the working class cannot but exercise a radicalizing effect upon the American workers from another point of view: the contrast of capitalist America with the advances of the Soviet Union. There is a growing and intense interest among the American workers in the developments of the workers' republic. The comparison of millions of unemployed in wealthy capitalist America with the progress and absence of unemployment in the Soviet Union ex-

tends the basis of sympathy for Communism among the workers in general, a sympathy which the capitalist press and other institutions seek to negate by a systematic campaign of falsehood, misrepresentation. The working class gains encouragement from the successful existence of the Soviet republic and the progress of planned economy under the rule of the proletariat makes easier the progress of the Communist movement in the United States. The existence of the Soviet Union is not, by itself, the automatic, mechanical and never-changing guarantee of working class radicalization, as the Stalinists and Right wingers profess to believe. Furthermore, the intimate connection between the needs of the Soviet Union and the interests of the millions of unemployed under capitalism is not utilized by the Centrists along the lines proposed by the Opposition. In fact, they not only reject but prohibit a campaign among the American workers for the extension of long term credits to the Soviet Union to help it buy machinery which would partially alleviate the condition of unemployment. But it remains true that the strides forward made by the Soviet Union stand in favorable contrast to the crisis in capitalist economy and facilitate the work of the Communists in guiding the workers along the road of militant struggle against the endeavors of the bourgeoisie to impose upon the proletariat the burden of the crisis.

It is true that a deep economic crisis does not lend itself to widespread economic struggles of the workers, such as strikes, particularly in face of a huge unemployed army. But this applies primarily and above all to crises which follow a series of defeats, of lost battles, of crushed revolutions, and has been demonstrated especially in the last decade in one country of Europe after another, and today in China. In the United States today, the workers have not been exhausted by previous economic struggles and defeats. On the contrary, the outstanding feature of the period recently passed was the absence of such struggles. The working class still retains unspent resources which, although impaired in great measures by the prevailing unemployment, constitute a factor of great vitality. It cannot and will not stand passively while its living standards are so radically undercut. It will resist the capitalist offensive in the coming period with an increasing militancy and on ever broader field of struggle. It is towards the perspective of these coming struggles that the revolutionary Communist movement must orient itself.

It is plain that the bourgeoisie is aware of the seriousness of the scope that these battles will assume. It prepares for them in advance. Anti-Communist repressive measures increase in number and in ferocity. More workers are today imprisoned or threatened with imprisonment than at any other time since the war. The application of the Criminal Syndicalism Laws is being widely extended. Meetings and demonstrations are attacked and disrupted with a violence reminiscent of the war days. In many states the Communist movement is "illegal". For the first time since the end of war, the Communist press is being barred from the mails. The legislative offensive against the foreign-born workers is being resumed and, what is more, hundreds upon hundreds of them are actually being deported. Negroes continue to be subjected to the most atrocious persecutions and to that flower of American capitalist civilization, Lynch law. This whole vile system of persecution demands of the Communists the assumption of leadership in the struggle for elementary democratic rights of free speech, free press and free assembly, a struggle which has been left to the feeble and innocuous conduct of liberals of all stripe. The struggle for the rights of the workers to gather, to speak freely, to write and distribute their writings, to organize and act unitedly is an inseparable part of the struggle to strengthen and make easier the road of development of the movements of resistance to the capitalist offensive.

The commencement of this movement of resistance is already visible on the horizon of the class struggle. The number of strikes, all of a defensive nature, has increased in 1931, as has the number of strikers. What is particularly significant is the strike movement of tens of thousands of miners in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky, aggravated by the prolonged crisis in the bituminous coal industry. It is indicative of the change in the situation that the working class whose conditions were yesterday improved virtually without open struggle, is today compelled to carry on the most violent battle of desperation against what is tantamount to starvation, and in this instance, finds no leadership to guide it in its strike except that of the Communists. This strike, despite the specific conditions existing in the soft coal industry, cannot be considered an isolated phenomenon. Standing against a background of other strike struggles that have taken place in the last year or two (particularly in the textile industry, in the South) and of the sweep of the movement set going around the issue of unemployment, it is indicative of both the scope and the militancy with which the coming struggles of the American workers will be invested.

The Left Opposition cannot accept the Centrist evaluation, according to which the American workers are already now—and allegedly have been, for the last two years—manifesting a deepgoing, mass radicalization. In its initial declarations, the Left Opposition tended to accept, although with qualifying reservations, this false estimate. The correct appraisal of the relationship of forces at the given moment indicates that the premises, the preliminary conditions for

such a radicalization have been and are being established on an ever broader basis. The very fact that the American proletariat subjectively has lagged so far behind the advance of favorable objective conditions will determine the rapid and big steps forward which it will take when these objectively favorable conditions compel it to adjust itself to them and to catch up with them. In other words, the very backwardness of the American workers in the past, based not only upon specific historical causes but also and primarily upon the extended prosperity period of recent times, will—

Social Reformism and the Perspectives of the Revolutionary Movement

Along what channels will the advancing movement of the American working class flow in the next period? The Centrist illusions proceed from the premise in theory that social reformism in the United States is going through a process of decline and disintegration, while the Communist party is growing in influence by leaps and bounds. This determines their tactics to a large extent. The Right wing liquidators, on the other hand, proceed in their practice from the idea that the Communist movement is in decline: they turn their backs upon the masses in and around the organized Communist ranks and under their influence, and stake their cards more and more upon the Left wing of social reformism—even here, not so much upon the discontented workers as upon the shiftless "Left wing leaders". The Left Opposition proceeds from the idea that the advancing workers' movement is flowing and will flow simultaneously along the channels of social reformism and Communism. The proportionate strength of the two parallel streams will depend in large measure upon the course pursued by the Communists. The attitude of the self-contented bureaucracy which regards the growth of Communist and the decline of social reformism as an automatic mechanical process—developing outside of time and space and unaffected by the policies of Communism—an attitude which is strengthened with every temporary or superficial success, is the worst: kind of self-deception and deception of the ranks. It ignores the fact, made indisputable by all recent evidence, that the basis for social reformism in the United States, far from having been "narrowed down", is being extended.

During the "prosperity period", social reformism which, at the inception of the period, had reached its greatest sweep in the labor and farmer-labor party movements, was almost entirely dissolved in the outright bourgeois and petty bourgeois reform movements of the La Follette type. In the trade union field, the reformist and "progressive" elements the consummated type of which was the leadership of the Chicago Federation of Labor (Fitzpatrick, Nockels, etc.) were once more absorbed into the black reactionary swamp of the Gompers-Green bureaucracy. The elements wavering between the revolutionary movement (the Communists) and the avowed bourgeois movement in the working class (the A. F. of L. bureaucracy) ceased to play any decisive role in this period: they disappeared as factors in the labor movement, or they fell into complete passivity; or they reconciled themselves more or less completely with the trade union bureaucracy, or—this last group was composed of a diminishing few—they worked in intimate contact with the Communists. The tremendous material and ideological weight of the "prosperity" period dulled the militancy of the workers to such an extent that there was no place and no need—in the relationships between bourgeoisie and working class—of a substantial movement intermediate between revolution and reaction and performing the double function of expressing working class discontentment and diverting it from revolutionary paths. This path witnessed not only a decline of the Communist party's influence and numbers, but an even greater relative decline of the Socialist party. The "Chicago type" of progressives became identified once more with the Gompers machine and vanished as a distinct group. The forces grouped around Muste shrank into their shells more and more, eking out a quiet existence by the good graces of Green and Co.

The advent of the crisis, preceded and succeeded by the blunders of official Communism brought with it a growing discontent of the hitherto passive workers. This discontentment is given its social reformist translation in the resurgence of the organized Muste movement (C. P. L. A.) in the trade unions and the growth of its influence (particularly in the textile and mining fields), in the appearance of the new "Left wing" in the socialist party, whose directorate is interlocked with that of the Muste group, and in the steady revival and growth of the Socialist party as a whole—its re-establishment in the needle trade unions, growth of its press, increase in its election votes, etc.

The growth, the unleashing of the social democracy in all its shadings, implies a certain "concession" of the bourgeoisie to the working class and an ability to make this "concession". In the past period the American bourgeoisie was able to satisfy the working class (at least its upper strata) without the aid of the social democracy or its Left wing. In the period of its crisis, the bourgeoisie has need of the social democracy to the extent that the dissatisfaction of the working class increases. The social democracy—from its extreme Right wing in the A. F. of L. bureaucracy to its extreme Left wing in the Muste group—is the staunchest bulwark of bourgeois

democracy against the proletarian revolutionary movement. Add to this the fact that the American bourgeoisie is still powerful enough to grant such "concessions" as the growth of reformism, and we not only have an explanation of its expansion but also a reason to calculate upon its growth (not its "narrowing down") in the coming period.

More than ever before, therefore, the next period will be a race for leadership of the working masses between the social reformists—particularly their Left wing—and the Communists, in which all the resources and skill and endurance of the latter will be put to the severest test.

The Centrist apparatus-men see in the growth of the reformist movement, particularly of its Left wing (the Muste group) nothing but a "conspiracy" against Communism. Anxious to have their own yesterdays of alliances with the "recalls" of all countries forgotten, they fail to see that the Muste and similar "progressive" movements are the initial manifestations of working class discontent with which the Communists must know how to establish contact, to collaborate in a united front on the basis of immediate issues and freedom of action and criticism of the collaborating forces. The Right wing spokesmen pretend to see in this Left movement only the "ranks", and deliberately neglect to emphasize the specific role played by the leaders, i. e., the contemptible role of paralyzing the activities and militancy of the masses, of preventing it from following its natural course towards revolutionary struggle. The Left Opposition, rejecting both the superficial radicalism of the Centrists and the Menshevik attitude of the Right wing, considers the growth of the social democratic, and particularly of the Left social democratic (Muste) movements as a sign of great significance for the revolutionary party. The Communists can win the workers away from their reformist leaders only if they demonstrate their willingness to join with them in an honest united front for the defense of the immediate interests and needs of the whole class. The Communists are not a sect with special interests outside the interests of the working class in general. The Communist party is the vanguard of the working class with no interests separate from it. As its most conscious enlightened, and militant section, it must take the initiative in forming the broadest united front movement, showing to the workers at every stage of the struggle that it is the Communists who are the most ardent and willing defenders not only of their broad historical interests (the social revolution) but of the most narrow, limited and practical needs of the day (reforms). It is in this way of linking the struggle for daily needs with the final aim, of having the former pave the way for the latter, that the struggle for reforms can be carried on in a revolutionary sense, that is, it can be directed against the reformists.

The simple, obvious truth that the workers learn only by their experiences is regarded today as a "bourgeois deviation" by Centrist. But this does not invalidate its correctness. In the struggle for unity of the working class against the capitalist offensive, the workers will learn—provided the Communists know how to teach them—that the Hillquits, Howats, Mustes, et al., are incapable and unwilling to lead a real struggle for their needs, that the Communists are the genuine representatives of the proletariat's cause. Such a struggle corresponds most appropriately with the specific period in which we are participating: the offensive of the capitalist class, plus the weakness of the workers' defense organizations (trade unions, etc.) necessarily arouses among all the workers the feeling that unity is imperative now more than ever before. Those who initiate, lead and fight most militantly for the unification of the labor front will strike a responsive chord among the workers, a response which will bear the greatest fruits for the Communist movement.

It is to cover up their own role of splitters of the labor movement, to cover up the fact that they are operating in the ranks of the workers as the agents of the bourgeoisie, that the reformists of all shades seek to convince the workers that the Communists are "sectarians", that they want to "divide the workers". It is essentially by innumerable denagogic variations on this theme that the reformists are able to hold the workers back from Communism. This is all the greater reason why the Communists must become the banner-bearers in the struggle for unity, openly, sincerely, vigorously, so that even the most backward workers will see and understand where the Communists stand. They must emphasize and repeat tirelessly—and prove it by deeds—that the Communist proposal for a united front is not—as the reformists charge—a "Communist maneuver against the workers" but rather a working class mobilization against the capitalist class.

At certain times and under certain conditions an agreement with the reformist leaders—when they are compelled to take a step forward—is necessary and unavoidable. The dogma of the "united front only from below" violates the Leninist conception of the united front and in practice leads to no united front at all.

The Communists cannot, of course take the position that without an organic unity of the revolutionists and the reformists (even if only on the trade union field), it is impossible to conduct successful struggles of the workers. Nor can the united front take the form of such a bloc of leaders at the top in which the Left wing is subordinated to the agents of the bourgeoisie, and used as an instrument against the workers. The classic form of the betrayal of the working class, developed jointly by the Right wing and the Centrists (Stalin and Bucharin) in the Anglo-Russian Committee, must stand as a lasting warning against such a conception. Nor can we conceive of the united front as the Stalinists do in their zig-zag to ultra-Leftism, that is, confining the whole question to an appeal to the workers to join the Communist party, to join the Left wing unions—and nothing else. This is recruitment, which goes on at all times, but it is not the application of the united front. The "principle" of unity is not and cannot be a fetish to the Communists. But the movement for the united front is an invaluable instrument for mobilizing the masses under revolutionary leadership for militant struggle. It constitutes a powerful lever for unseating the reformists from their positions in the working class. The party must take hold of this lever and exert all its pressure upon it.

What is the role of reformism? It serves as a bulwark created by existing bourgeois society against the proletarian revolution. Against the rising proletarian movement, the bourgeoisie and its reformist agents continuously seek to strengthen this bulwark, to prolong its existence. The Communists must seek to break it down as rapidly as possible. The existence of reformism is determined essentially by the strength of the capitalist class, its ability to rule. In the United States, this determinant factor would appear, at first sight, to invest reformism with vigor for many years or decades to come. In reality, however, its foundation is a very shaky one.

Reformism flourished for decades in such classic countries of capitalism as England and Germany in the period of the rise of imperialist society, prior to the world war and the Russian revolution, which radically changed the relationships of international class forces. The new wave of reformism in the United States is rising in the period of the decline of world imperialism, in the period of war and revolution, with its abrupt changes and turns. The tremendous post-war strength and power of American imperialism grows more and more upon the foundation of the convulsively wracked and tenuous economies of the rest of the world. Its power is less and less founded upon an equilibrium of the home market or a balance between agriculture and industry. Precisely because the hands and feet of American economic and political power rest ever more heavily upon the shaky ground of the other continents, the economic and revolutionary upheavals in the latter territories tend to rock the body of the American economic structure with growing violence. Unless the United States succeeds in completely Balkanizing Europe, in opening up the vast Russian market by the overthrow of the proletarian dictatorship, in completely exterminating the revolutionary movement in China—and these are the most likely of all perspectives—I cannot look forward to so lengthy a period of domination as was enjoyed by British imperialism for decade after decade. Even more than pre-war England, its Achilles heel lies precisely in the singular character of its world power. The Marxists cannot look forward to a fatalistic perspective in which the United States must be the last country to fall to the assault of the proletariat. Such a perspective is only the reverse—but no less false—side of the "Marxian determinism" according to which England or Germany stood first on the agenda of the proletarian revolution, while Russia was "denied" the possibility of surpassing these lands in point of revolutionary order. The unevenness of social development, rendered particularly acute and jerky in the present epoch of imperialism, may easily advance the United States toward the head of the list.

This coincides with the idea that broad perspectives are now opened up for the growth of the Communist movement, an idea which the more penetrating sections of the bourgeoisie are not the last to share. It is in this connection that the reformists seek to set up the highest possible barriers to the rapid progress of the revolutionary movement. On the economic field, these barriers are represented in the trade union movement by the A. F. of L. bureaucracy, their socialist assistants, and the "Left wing" progressive toadies of the Muste school. On the political field, most of these elements seek to erect a barrier in the form of a "Labor" or "Farmer-Labor" party, that is, a bourgeois workers' party in the image of the British Labor Party.

The American revolutionary movement possesses the richest experiences in the field of "labor party" politics, conducted in the period of the worst revisionism in the fundamental principles of the Communist movement. None of the main formulations of this problem made in the American party in the period between 1923-1928 was based upon a Marxist conception of the role of the labor party or of the nature of our epoch. In various