

From the arsenal of Marxism

WHY did working class militancy collapse just when it was needed to stand up against the most savage ruling-class onslaught for 40 years? This is one of the most important questions facing those whose hopes and struggle for socialism centre on the working class.

There had been no crushing, demoralising defeat before the return of the Tory government in May 1979. Quite the opposite, in fact — the movement had shown its mettle, and plenty of muscle, in the 'winter of discontent' of 1978-9.

The explanation is to be sought in the complex interaction between the effects of the Tory victory, the deepening slump bringing mass unemployment and the economic devastation of whole areas, the bureaucratisation of the top layers of the shop stewards' movement, and the collaboration with the government of the national trade union leaders.

It is all the more difficult for the would-be Marxist left to come to terms with what has happened because 'primitive slumpism' — the belief and expectation that the inevitable economic crisis, when it came, would radicalise the working class — had been a very popular response during the boom years to the capitalist argument that prosperity had bourgeoisified the working class.

In the following excerpts from his writings, Leon Trotsky shows that there is no mechanical or direct relationship between slump and working class militancy. He shows, for example, that it was the economic slump of 1907 that finally snuffed out the 1905-7 Revolution in Russia. He argues that the economic crisis of the late '20s had the effect of grinding down the British labour movement after its defeats in the General Strike and afterwards. In his words, "Thus, in a conjunctural decline accompanied by growing unemployment, particularly after defeats, increased exploitation does not breed a radicalisation of the masses, but, quite the contrary, demoralisation, atomisation and disintegration. We saw that, for example, in the British coal mines right after the 1926 strike".

Thus the current downturn should sweep away, not our hopes for the future, but any residues of 'primitive slumpism' inherited from the past. That 'primitive slumpism' has been shown to be no more than a rehash of the mechanistic pseudo-Marxist sociology common to both a section of the 'Marxist' European Social Democracy and the ultra-left wing of the early Comintern. Trotsky's texts shed a great deal of light on the debates now going on in the British left. Other aspects of this question will be taken up

in future issues of *Workers' Socialist Review*.

The texts are taken:

1. From Trotsky's unfinished biography of Stalin,
2. From a 1930 article, 'The Third Period of the Comintern's Errors',
3. From a speech made by Trotsky at the Third Congress of the Communist International.

From "Stalin"

BY 1910 the industrial revival became an indisputable fact. The revolutionary parties were confronted with the question: what effect will this break in the situation have on the political condition



Trotsky in 1930 with co-thinkers (left to right) Pierre Naville, Gerard Rosenthal, Denise Naville
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of the country? The majority of Social-Democrats maintained their schematic position: the crisis revolutionises the masses, the industrial resurgence pacifies them. Both factions, Bolshevik as well as Menshevik, tended, therefore, to disparage or flatly deny the revival that had actually begun.

The exception was the Vienna newspaper Pravda, which, notwithstanding its Conciliationist illusions, defended the very correct thought that the political consequences of the revival, as well as of the crisis, far from being automatic in character, are each time determined anew, depending on the preceding course of the struggle and on the entire situation in the country. Thus, following the industrial resurgence, in the course of which a very widespread strike struggle had man-

aged to develop, a sudden decline in the situation might call forth a direct revolutionary resurgence, provided the other necessary conditions were present. On the other hand, after a long period of revolutionary struggle which ended in defeat, an industrial crisis, dividing and weakening the proletariat, might destroy its fighting spirit altogether. Or again, an industrial resurgence, coming after a long period of reaction, is capable of reviving the labour movement, largely in the form of an economic struggle, after which the new crisis might switch the energy of the masses onto political rails.

The Russo-Japanese war and the shocks of the revolution prevented Russian capitalism from sharing the worldwide industrial resurgence of 1903-1907. In the meantime, the uninterrupted revo-

lutionary battles, defeats, and repressions, had exhausted the strength of the masses. The world industrial crisis, which broke out in 1907, extended the prolonged depression in Russia for three additional years, and far from inspiring the workers to engage in a new fight, dispersed them and weakened them more than ever. Under the blows of lockouts, unemployment and poverty, the weary masses became definitely discouraged. Such was the material basis for the 'achievements' of Stolypin's reaction. The proletariat needed the resuscitative font of a new industrial resurgence to revive its strength, fill its ranks, again feel itself the indispensable factor in production and plunge into a new fight.

The Third Period of the Comintern's errors

These excerpts are from a long article of Trotsky's, published in 1930, criticising the ultra-left policies then pursued by the Stalinised Communist International on the perspective that this was the 'third period', the 'final' crisis of capitalism.

1. What is the radicalisation of the masses?

For the Comintern, the radicalisation of the masses has become, at present, an empty catechism, not the characterisation of a process. Genuine communists—teaches L'Humanite—should recognise the leading role of the party and the radicalisation of the masses. It is meaningless to put the question that way. The leading role of the party is an unshakeable principle for every communist. If you do not accept this, you can be an anarchist or a confusionist but not a communist, that is, a proletarian revolutionary. But radicalisation in itself is not a principle; it is only a characterisation of the temper of the masses. Is this characterisation correct or incorrect for the given period? That is a question of fact. In order to correctly gauge the temper of the masses, the right criteria must be used. What is radicalisation? How does it express itself? What are its characteristics? With what tempo and in which direction does it develop? The deplorable leadership of the French Communist Party does not even pose these questions. At most, an official article or a speech will refer to an increase in the number of strikes. But even then only the straight figures are given without a serious analysis or even a simple comparison with the figures of the preceding years.

Such an attitude to the question flows not only from the unfortunate decisions of the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI but, as a matter of fact, from the Comintern programme itself. The radicalisation of the masses is described as a continuous process: today the masses are more revolutionary than they were yesterday, and tomorrow will be more revolutionary than today. Such a mechanical idea does not correspond to the real process of development of the proletariat or of capitalist society as a whole. But it does correspond almost perfectly to the mentality of the Cachins, Monmousseaus, and the other frightened opportunist.

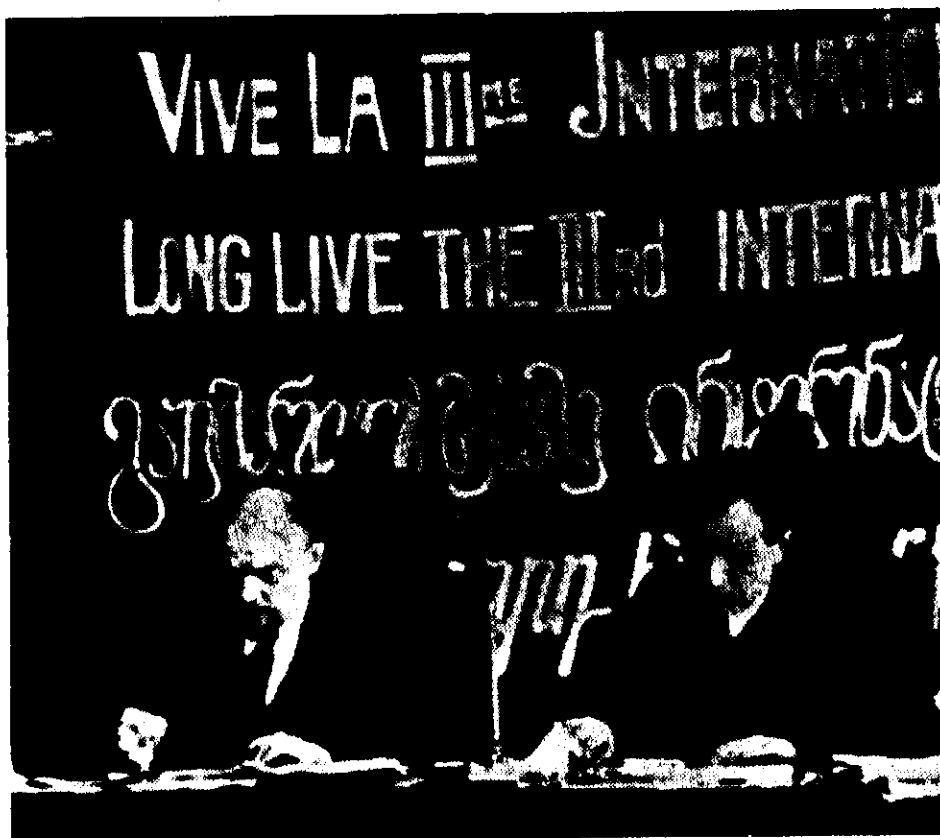
The social democratic parties, especially before the war had imagined the future as a continual increase in the social democratic vote, which would grow systematically until the very moment of taking power. For a vulgar or pseudo-revolutionary, this perspective still essentially retains its force, only instead of a continual increase in the number of votes, he talks of the continual radicalisation of the masses. This mechanical conception is sanctioned also by the Bukharin-Stalin programme of the Comintern. It goes without saying that from the point of view of our epoch as a whole the development of the proletariat advances in

L'HUMANITE: paper of the French CP.

Marcel CACHIN: leader of the French Communist Party, and a servile Stalinist.

Gaston MONMOUSSEAU: a CP trade union leader. His pseudonym was Jean BRICOT.

Albert VASSART: another CP union leader.



the direction of the revolution. But this is not a steady progression, any more than the objective process of the deepening of capitalist contradictions. The reformists see only the ups of the capitalist road. The formal "revolutionaries" see only its downs. But a Marxist sees the road as a whole, all of its conjunctural ups and downs, without for a moment losing sight of its main direction—the catastrophe of wars, the explosion of revolutions.

The political mood of the proletariat does not change automatically in one and the same direction. The upturns in the class struggle are followed by downturns, the floodtides by ebbs, depending upon complicated combinations of material and ideological conditions, national and international. An upsurge of the masses, if not utilised at the right moment or misused, reverses itself and ends in a period of decline, from which the masses recover, faster or slower, under the influence of new objective stimuli. Our epoch is characterised by exceptionally sharp periodic fluctuations, by extraordinarily abrupt turns in the situation, and this places on the leadership unusual obligations in the matter of a correct orientation.

The activity of the masses, properly understood, expresses itself in different ways, depending upon different conditions. The masses may, at certain periods, be completely absorbed in economic struggles and show very little interest in political questions. Or, suffering a series of defeats in economic struggles, the masses may abruptly turn their attention to politics. Then, depending upon the concrete circumstances and the past experiences of the masses—their political activity may go in the direction of either purely parliamentary or extra-parliamentary struggle.

We give only a very few variants, but they characterise the contradictions of the revolutionary development of the working class. Those who know how to read the facts and understand their meaning will readily admit that these variants are not some kind of theoretical construction but an expression of the living international experience of the last decade.

In any case, it is clear that in a discussion about the radicalisation of the masses a concrete definition is demanded. The Marxist Opposition should, of course, make the same demand of itself. A simple denial of the radicalisation is of as little use as its complete affirmation. We should have an estimate of what the situation is and what it is becoming.

(...)

What do the Statistics Show?

Do the statistics confirm the thesis of the radicalisation of the masses or do they refute it? First of all, we answer, they take the discussion out of the realm of abstractions in which Monmousseau says yes and Chambelland says no, without defining what is meant by radicalisation. The statistics of the strike struggles are indisputable proof of certain shifts in the working class. At the same time, they give a very important estimate of the number and character of these shifts. They outline the general dynamics of the process and make it possible, to a certain degree, to anticipate the future or, more exactly, possible future variants.

In the first place, we can affirm that

the statistics for 1928-29, compared with those of the preceding period, characterise the beginning of a *new cycle* in the life of the French working class. They give us the right to assume that deep molecular processes have taken and are taking place in the masses, as a result of which the momentum of the decline begins—if only on the economic front now—to be overcome.

Nevertheless, the statistics show that the growth of the strike movement is still very modest, and do not in the least give a picture of a tempestuous upsurge that would allow us to conclude this is a revolutionary or at least a pre-revolutionary period. In particular, there is no marked difference between 1928 and 1929. The bulk of the strikes continued to be in light industry.

From this fact Chambelland comes to a general conclusion *against* radicalisation. It would be a different matter, he says, if strikes were spreading to the large enterprises in heavy industry and the machine shops. In other words, he imagines that a radicalisation falls ready-made from the sky. As a matter of fact, these figures testify not only that a new cycle of proletarian struggle has begun, but also that this cycle is only in its first stage. After defeat and decline, a revival, in the absence of any great events, could occur only in the industrial periphery, that is, in the light industries, in the secondary branches, in the smaller plants of heavy industry. The spread of the strike movement into the metal industry, machine shops, and transportation would mean its transition to a higher stage of development and would indicate not only the beginning of a movement but a decisive turn in the mood of the working class. It has not come yet. But it would be absurd to shut our eyes to the first stage of the movement because the second has not yet begun, or the third, or the fourth. Pregnancy even in its second month is pregnancy. Forcing it may lead to a miscarriage, but so can ignoring it. Of course, we must add to this analogy that dates are by no means as certain in the social field as in physiology.

Facts and Phrases.

In discussing the radicalisation of the masses, it should never be forgotten that the proletariat achieves "unanimity" only in periods of revolutionary apex. In conditions of "everyday" life in capitalist society, the proletariat is far from homogeneous. Moreover, the heterogeneity of its layers manifests itself most precisely at the turning points in the road. The most exploited, the least skilled, or the most politically backward layers of the proletariat are frequently the first to enter the arena of struggle and, in case of defeat, are often the first to leave it. It is exactly in the new period that the workers who did not suffer defeats in the preceding period are more likely to be attracted to the movement, if only because they have not yet taken part in the struggle. In one way or another, these phenomena are bound to appear also in France.

The same fact is shown by the vacillations of the organised French workers, which is pointed to by the official Communist press. Yes, the inhibitions of the organised workers are too well developed. Considering themselves an insignificant part of the proletariat, the organised workers often play a conservative role. This of course is not an argu-

ment against organisation but an argument against its weaknesses, and an argument against those trade union leaders of the Monmousseau type who do not understand the nature of trade union organisation and are unable to estimate its importance to the working class. At any rate, the vanguard role of the unorganised at the present time testifies that the question is not yet one of a revolutionary but of a united economic struggle, and moreover in its elementary stage.

The same thing is demonstrated by the important role of the foreign-born workers in the strike movement, who, by the way, will in future play a part in France analogous to that of the Negroes in the United States. But that is the music of the future. At present, the part played by the foreign-born workers, who often do not know the language, is further proof of the fact that it is not a question of political but of economic struggle, which has received an impetus from the change in the economic conjuncture.

Even in relation to the purely economic front, one cannot speak of the *offensive* character of the struggle as Monmousseau and Company do. They base this definition on the fact that a considerable percentage of the strikes are conducted for *higher* wages. These thoughtful leaders forget that such demands are forced upon the workers on the one hand by the rise in the cost of living and on the other by the intensified physical exploitation, a result of new industrial methods (rationalisation). A worker is compelled to demand an *increase* in his nominal wages in order to *defend* his standard of living. These strikes can have an "offensive" character only from the standpoint of capitalist bookkeeping. From the standpoint of trade union policies, they have a purely defensive character. It is precisely this side of the question that every serious trade unionist should have clearly understood and emphasised in every way possible. But Monmousseau and Company believe that they have a right to be indifferent trade unionists because they are, if you please, "revolutionary leaders." Shouting until they are hoarse about the offensive political and revolutionary character of purely defensive strikes, they do not, of course, change the nature of these strikes and do not increase their significance by a single inch. On the contrary, they do their best to arm the bosses and the government against the workers.

It does not improve matters when our "leaders" point out that the strikes become "political" on account of—the active role of the police. An astonishing argument! The beating up of strikers by the police is called—a revolutionary advance of the workers. French history reveals quite a few massacres of workers in purely economic strikes. In the United States, a bloody settlement with strikers is the rule. Does this mean that the workers in the United States are leading the most

Maurice CHAMBELLAND: leader of the syndicalist (pure trade-unionist) minority in the CGTU. The French trade union movement at the time was divided into two main federations, the reformist CGT and the revolutionary CGTU, led by the CP.

revolutionary struggle? The shooting of strikers of course has in itself a political significance. But only a loudmouth could identify it with the revolutionary political advance of the working masses—thus unconsciously playing into the hands of the bosses and their police.

When the British General Council of the Trade Union Congress called the revolutionary 1926 strike a peaceful demonstration, it knew what it was doing. That was a deliberately planned betrayal. But when Monmousseau and Company call scattered economic strikes a revolutionary attack on the bourgeois state, nobody will think of accusing them of deliberate betrayal. It is doubtful that these people can act with deliberation. But that certainly is no help to the workers.

In the next section we will see how these terribly revolutionary heroes

render some other services to the bosses, ignoring the upturn in commerce and industry, underestimating its significance, that is, underestimating the profits of the capitalists and by the same token undermining the foundation of the economic struggles of the workers.

All this is done, of course, to glorify the "third period".

2. Conjunctural Crises and the Crisis of Capitalism.

At the Fifth Congress of the Unitary General Confederation of Labour, A. Vassart made a lengthy speech against Chambelland, which was later published as a pamphlet with a foreward by Jean Bricot. In his speech Vassart attempted to defend the revolutionary perspective against the reformist perspective. In this our sympathies are entirely on his side. But unfortunately he defends the revolutionary perspective with arguments that can only help the reformists. His speech contains a number of fatal theoretical and factual errors. One may object, Why pick on this particular faulty speech? Vassart can still learn a great deal. I would be glad to think so. But it has been made difficult by the fact that the speech has been published with a foreward by Jean Bricot, who is at least a cousin to Monmousseau himself, and this gives the pamphlet a programmatic character. The fact that not only the author but also the editor did not notice its flagrant errors shows the sad state of the theoretical level of the present leaders of French communism. Jean Bricot does not tire of

demolishing the Marxist Opposition. What he ought to do, as we shall soon demonstrate, is simply sit down and study his ABC. Leadership of the workers' movement is incompatible with ignorance, as Marx once said to Weitling.

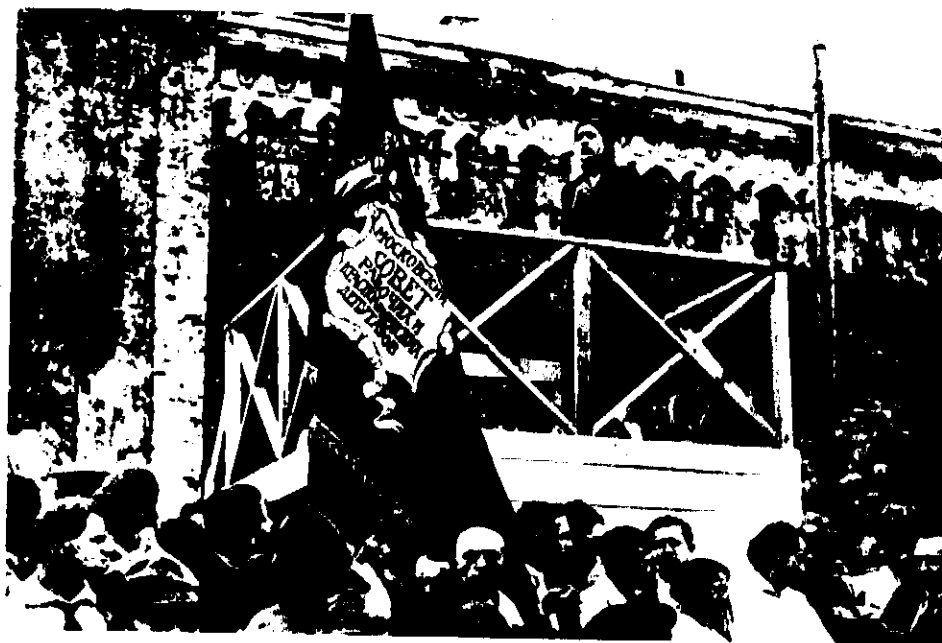
At the congress, Chambelland expressed the superficial thought-based exclusively on his own reformist inclinations—that capitalist stabilisation will last for about another thirty or forty years, that is, even the new generation of the proletariat now coming forward will not be able to make a revolution. Chambelland had no serious arguments to substantiate his fantastic time period. The historical experience of the past two decades and the theoretical analysis of the present situation completely negate Chambelland's perspective.

But how does Vassart refute him? He proves first of all that even before the war the capitalist system could not exist without convulsions. "From 1850 to 1910, an economic crisis took place approximately every fourteen years (?) bred by the capitalist system" (page 14). Further: "If before the war the crisis took place every fourteen years, we see a contradiction between this fact and the assertions of Chambelland, who does not foresee a serious crisis in the next forty years" (page 15).

It is not difficult to understand that with this sort of argument Vassart, who confuses conjunctural crises with the revolutionary crisis of capitalism as a whole, only strengthens the false position of Chambelland.



Zinoviev:
1924 he
pronounced
the French
Socialist
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Above: A delegate to the Second Congress of the Comintern addresses Red Square

First of all, setting the conjunctural cycle at fourteen years is rather surprising. Where did Vassart get this figure? We see it for the first time. And how is it that Jean Bricot, who instructs us so authoritatively (almost as authoritatively as Monmousseau himself), did not notice such an immediate and vital significance for the labour movement? Before the war, every trade unionist knew that crises or at least depressions recurred every seven or eight years. If we take the period of a century and a half, we find that there were never more than eleven years between crises. The average duration of the cycle was about eight and a half years and, furthermore, as was shown in the prewar period, the conjunctural cycle had a tendency to accelerate, not slacken, which stemmed from the renewal of technical machinery. In the postwar years, the conjunctural fluctuations had a turbulent character, which was expressed by the fact that the crises recurred more frequently than before the war. How does it happen that leading French trade unionists do not know such elementary facts? How can one lead a strike movement without having a realistic picture of conjunctural economic shifts? Every serious communist can and must pointedly put this question to the leaders of the CGTU, primarily to Monmousseau.

This is how the matter stands on the factual side. It is no better from the point of view of methodology. What does Vassart actually prove? That capitalist development is generally inconceivable without conjunctural contradictions; they existed before the war and will exist in the future. It is doubtful that even Chambelland would deny this commonplace. But this does not yet open up any revolutionary perspective. On the contrary, from the fact that for the past century and a half the capitalist world experienced eighteen crises, there is no reason to conclude that capitalism must fall with the nineteenth or twentieth. In actuality, conjunctural cycles in the life of capitalism play the same role as, for example, cycles of blood circulation in the life of an organism. The inevitability of revolutionary flows just as little from the periodicity of crises as the inevitability of death from a rhythmic pulse.

At the Third Congress of the Comintern (1921), the ultra-lefts of that time (Bukharin, Zinoviev, Radek, Thaelmann, Thalheimer, Pepper, Bela Kun, and others) claimed that capitalism would never again know an industrial revival because it had entered the final ("third") period, which would develop on the basis of a permanent crisis until the revolution itself. A big ideological struggle took place at the congress around this question. A considerable part of my report was devoted to proving that in the epoch of imperialism the laws determining industrial cycles remain in effect and that conjunctural fluctuations will be characteristic of capitalism as long as it exists: the pulse stops only with death. But from the state of the pulse, in connection with other symptoms, a doctor can determine whether he is dealing with a strong or weak organism, a healthy or sick one (of course, I do not speak of doctors of the Monmousseau school). Vassart, however, attempts to prove the inevitability and proximity of the revolution on the basis of the fact that crises and booms take place every fourteen years.

Vassart could easily have avoided these obvious errors if he had at least made a study of the report and discussion that took place at the Third Congress of the Comintern. But, unfortunately, the most important documents of the first four congresses, when genuine Marxist ideology was the rule in the Comintern, are now prohibited reading. For the new generation of leaders, the history of Marxist thought begins with the Fifth Congress, particularly with the unfortunate Tenth Plenum of the ECCI. The principal crime of the dense and blind bureaucratic apparatus consists in the mechanical interpretation of our theoretical tradition.

Economic Conjuncture and Radicalisation

If Vassart does not know the dynamics of business cycles and does not understand the relationship between conjunctural crises and revolutionary crises of the capitalist system as a whole, then the dialectical interdependence of the economic conjuncture and the struggle of the working class is just as unclear to

him. Vassart conceives of this interdependence as mechanically as his opponent Chambelland does; although their conclusions are directly opposite, they are equally erroneous.

Chambelland says: "The radicalisation of the masses is in a certain sense the barometer which makes it possible to evaluate the condition of capitalism in a given country. If capitalism is in a state of decline the masses are necessarily radicalised" (page 23). From this Chambelland concludes that because in France strikes embrace only the peripheral workers, because the metal and chemical industries are only slightly affected, capitalism is not as yet in decline. Before him there is still a forty-year period of development.

How does Vassart answer this? Chambelland, according to him, "does not see the radicalisation because he does not see the new methods of exploitation" (page 30). Vassart repeats the idea that if one recognises the intensified exploitation and understands that it will develop further "that in itself compels you to reply affirmatively to the question of the radicalisation of the masses" (page 31).

Reading these polemics, one gets the impression of two blindfolded men trying to catch each other. It is not true that a crisis always and under all circumstances radicalises the masses. Example: Italy, Spain, the Balkans, etc. It is not true that the radicalism of the working class necessarily corresponds to the period of capitalism's decline. Example: Chartism in Britain, etc. Like Chambelland, Vassart substitutes dead forms for the living history of the labour movement. And Chambelland's conclusion is also wrong. You cannot deny a *beginning* of radicalisation because strikes have not yet embraced the main sections of the workers; what can and must be made is a concrete evaluation of the extent, depth and intensity of this radicalisation. Chambelland, evidently, agrees to believe in a radicalisation only after the whole working class is engaged in an offensive. But leaders who wish to begin only when everything is ready are not needed by the working class. One must be able to see the first, even though weak symptoms of revival, while only in the economic sphere, adapt one's tactics to it, and attentively follow the development of the process. Meantime one must not even for a moment lose sight of the general nature of our epoch, which has proved more than once and will prove again that, between the first symptoms of revival and the stormy upsurge that creates a revolutionary situation, not forty years but perhaps only a fifth or a tenth of that are required.

Vassart fares no better. He simply establishes an automatic parallel between exploitation and radicalisation. How can the radicalisation of the masses be denied, Vassart asks irritably, if exploitation grows from day to day? This is childish metaphysics, quite in the spirit of Bukharin. Radicalisation must be proved not by deductions but by facts. Vassart's conclusion can be turned into its opposite without difficulty. The question can be put this way: How could the capitalists increase exploitation from day to day if they were confronted by the radicalisation of the masses? It is precisely the absence of a fighting spirit that permits an intensi-

fication of exploitation. True, such arguments without qualification are also one-sided, but they are a lot closer to life than Vassart's constructions.

The trouble is that increasing exploitation does not always raise the fighting spirit of the proletariat. Thus, in a conjunctural decline accompanied by growing unemployment, particularly after defeats, increased exploitation does not breed a radicalisation of the masses but, quite the contrary, demoralisation, atomisation and disintegration. We saw that, for example, in the British coal mines right after the 1926 strike. We saw it on a still larger scale in Russia, when the 1907 industrial crisis coincided with the wrecking of the 1905 revolution. If in the past two years intensified exploitation brought about the evident growth of the strike movement, the basis for it was created by a conjunctural rise in the economy, not a decline.

Fear of Economic Processes

But the ultra-left opportunists leading the Comintern fear an industrial upturn as an economic "counterrevolution". Their radicalism leans on a weak reed. For a further rise in the industrial business conjuncture would first of all deliver a mortal blow to their stupid theories of the "third and last period". These people deduce revolutionary perspectives not from real contradictory processes but from false schemata. And from this flow their fatal errors in tactics.

It may seem quite improbable that the official orators at the CGTU congress tried above all to depict the state of French capitalism in the most piteous light. Loudly exaggerating the present swing of the strike movement, the French Stalinists' description of French industry makes future strike struggles seem absolutely hopeless. Among them was Vassart. Precisely because he, together with Monmousseau, does not distinguish between the fundamental crisis of capitalism and the crisis of conjuncture, and this time thinks along the same lines as Chambelland that a conjunctural rise might put off the revolution for a period of decades, Vassart is apprehensive about an industrial upturn. On pages 21-24 of his pamphlet, he proves that the present industrial revival in France is "artificial" and "momentary" (page 24). At the December national committee meeting, Richetta diligently painted the French textile industry into a state of crisis. If this is the case it means that the strike wave, which so far has served as the only indication of radicalisation, has no economic foundation or is losing it rapidly. To say the least, Vassart and Richetta give the representatives of capital a priceless argument against economic concessions to the workers and, what is more important, they give decisive arguments to the reformists against economic strikes, for it must be understood that from a perspective of chronic crisis one cannot develop a perspective of growing economic struggles.

Do not these sorry trade unionists follow the economic press? But, they may say, the capitalist press deliberately displays optimism. However, it is not a question of the editorials. From day to day, from month to month, the

newspapers publish the market reports, the balances of the banks, the commercial and industrial businesses, and the railroads. Some of the totals involved have already been reprinted in *La Verite*. The more recent figures are further proof of the upward trend of French industry. The last weekly economic supplement to reach me, *Le Temps* (December 9, 1929), for example, carries a report of a general meeting of the stockholders of the metal industry of northern and eastern France. We do not know M. Cuvelette's attitude to the philosophy of the "third period" and we admit that we are not very much interested. But nevertheless he can very well add up profits and collect dividends. Cuvelette sums up the total of the past year as follows: "The condition of the domestic market has been exceptionally favourable." This estimate, I hope, has nothing in common with platonic optimism, because it is strengthened by forty-franc dividends instead of the twenty-five-franc dividends of the year before. Has or has not this fact an importance for the economic struggles in the metal industry? It would seem that it has. But, unfortunately, behind the back of Cuvelette we see the figures of Vassart and Bricot or that of Monmousseau himself, and we hear their voices. "Don't believe the words of this capitalist optimist who does not know that he is up to his ears in the third period!" Isn't it clear that if a worker makes the mistake of believing Monmousseau and not Cuvelette, he must come to the conclusion that he has no basis for a successful economic struggle, to say nothing of an offensive?

The Monmousseau school if one may give such a title to an institution where people are taught to unlearn thinking, reading and writing is afraid of an economic upturn. It must be said

plainly that for the French working class which has renewed its composition at least twice, during the years of the war and after the war, drawing into its ranks tremendous numbers of youth, women, and foreign-born and still far from having assimilated these new elements - for this French working class the further development of an industrial upturn would create an incomparable school, would allow it to gather its strength, would prove to the most backward sections their meaning and role in the capitalist structure, and would thereby raise the general class consciousness as a whole to new heights. Two or three years, even one year, of a broad, successful economic struggle would rejuvenate the proletariat. After a properly utilised economic upturn, a conjunctural crisis might give a serious impetus to a genuine political radicalisation of the masses.

At the same time it must not be forgotten that wars and revolutions in our epoch result not from conjunctural crises but from the contradictions between the development of productive forces on the one hand and the national boundaries of the bourgeois state on the other, carried to their ultimate conclusion. The imperialist war and the October Revolution have demonstrated the depth of these contradictions. The new role of America has further accentuated them. The more serious the development of the productive forces in one country or another, or in a number of countries, the sooner a new upturn in industry will find itself confronted with the basic contradictions of world industry and the sharper will be the reaction economic and political, domestic and international. A serious industrial revival would be, in any case, not a minus but a tremendous plus for French communism, creating a mighty strike movement as a fore-



Stalin:
gravedigger of
the revolution

runner to a political offensive. There will be no lack of revolutionary situations. It is quite likely, however, that there will be a lack of ability to utilise them.

But is a continuing upward trend in the French industrial conjuncture guaranteed? This we cannot dare to assume. All sorts of possibilities remain open. At any rate, it does not depend on us. What does depend on us, and what we are obliged to do, is not to close our eyes to facts in the name of pitiful schemata, but to see the course of economic development as it really is and to work out trade-union tactics on the basis of facts. We speak now of tactics in distinction to strategy, which is determined, of course, not by conjunctural changes but by basic tendencies of development. But if tactics are subordinate to strategy, strategy is realised only through tactics.

For the Comintern as well as the Profintern, tactics consist of periodic zigzags, and strategy is the arithmetical sum of these zigzags. That is why the proletarian vanguard suffers defeat after defeat.

3. What are the Signs of Political Radicalisation?

The question of the radicalisation of the masses is not exhausted, however, by an analysis of the strike movement. What is the level of the political struggle? And, above all, what is the size and influence of the Communist Party?

It is remarkable that in speaking of the radicalisation the official leaders pointedly ignore the question of their own party. Yet the facts are that beginning with 1925 the membership of the party has been falling from year to year: 1925, 83,000 members; 1926, 65,000, 1927, 56,000; 1928, 52,000; 1929 35,000. For the previous years we use the official figures of the Comintern

secretary Piatnitsky; for 1929 the figures of Semard. No matter how these figures are regarded, they undoubtedly are greatly exaggerated; nevertheless, as a whole, they very vividly show a curve of the party's *decline*: in five years, the membership fell by more than half.

It may be said that quality is more important than quantity, and that there now remain in the party only the fully reliable communists. Let us assume that is so. But this is not the real question. The process of the *radicalisation* of the masses can in no way mean the isolation of the cadres, but, on the contrary, the influx into the party of reliable and partially reliable members and the conversion of the latter into "reliables."

The political radicalisation of the masses can be reconciled with the regular decline in party membership only if one sees the role of the party in the life of the working class as a fifth wheel to a wagon. Facts speak louder than words. We observe a steady decline of the party not only during the years 1925-27, when the strike wave was ebbing, but also during the last two years, when the number of strikes was beginning to grow.

At this point the honourable Panglosses of official communism will interrupt, pointing to the "disproportion" between the size of the party and its influence. This is now the general Comintern formula, invented by the shrewd for the simple. However, the canonised formula not only fails to explain anything but in some respects even makes matters worse. The experience of the workers' movement testifies that the more a revolutionary party assumes a "parliamentary" character — all other conditions being equal — the more the extent of its influence exceeds its size. Opportunism is a lot easier than Marxism, for it bases itself on the masses in general. This is obvious from

a simple comparison between the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. The systematic growth of the "disproportion", with the decline in the number of organised communists, consequently can only mean that the French Communist Party is being transformed from a revolutionary into a parliamentary and municipalist party. The recent "municipal" scandals revealed that this process did develop to a certain degree in the last years, and it may be feared that "parliamentary" scandals will follow. Nevertheless, the differences between the Communist Party as it is today and the social democratic agents of the bourgeoisie remains enormous. The Panglosses in the leadership merely slander the French Communist Party when they discourse on some gigantic disproportion between its size and its influence. It is not difficult to show that the political influence of communism, unfortunately, has grown very little in the last five years.

For Marxists, it is no secret that parliamentary and municipal elections distort and even falsify the underlying moods of the masses. Nevertheless, the dynamics of political development find a reflection in parliamentary elections; this is one reason why Marxists take an active part in electoral struggles. But what do the election results show? In the 1924 legislative elections the Communist Party polled 875,000 votes, a little less than 10 per cent of the total electorate. In the 1928 elections, the party polled a little more than a million votes (1,064,000), which represented 11 1/3 per cent of the votes cast. Thus the specific weight of the party in the

PANGLOSS, the caricature optimist philosopher in Voltaire's satire 'Candide', who insists through disaster after disaster that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds".



Kalinin's birthday party, 1929: left to right, Molotov, Mikoyan, Stalin, Kamenev, Voroshilov, Kalinin and Budenny celebrate

electorate increased by 1 1/3 per cent. If this process were to continue at the same rate, then Chambelland's perspective of thirty to forty years of "social peace" would appear too - revolutionary.

The Socialist Party, already "non-existent" in 1924 (according to Zinoviev and Lozovsky), polled almost 1,700,000 votes in 1928, more than 18 per cent of the total, or more than one and a half times the Communist vote.

The results of the municipal elections change the total picture very little. In some industrial centres (Paris, the North) the Communists undoubtedly won votes away from the Socialists. Thus in Paris, the specific weight of the Communist vote increased in four years (1925-9) from 18.9 per cent to 21.8 per cent, that is, by 3 per cent, at a time when the Socialist vote fell from 22.4 per cent to 18.1, that is, by 4 per cent. The symptomatic significance of such facts is undeniable; but so far they have only a local character and are greatly discredited by the antirevolutionary "municipalism" personified by Louis Sellier and other petty bourgeois like him. As a result of the Selliers, the municipal elections that took place a year after the legislative elections did not bring about any real changes.

Other indications of political life also, to say the least, speak against the premature parrotings on the so-called political radicalisation of the masses that is supposed to have taken place in the last two years. The circulation of *L'Humanite*, to our knowledge has not grown. The collections of money for *L'Humanite* are certainly gratifying. But such collections would have been large, in view of the demonstrative reactionary attack on the paper, a year, two, and three years ago as well.

On the first of August - it must not be forgotten for a minute - the party was incapable of mobilising either all the workers who had voted for it or even all the unionised workers. In Paris, according to the probably exaggerated reports of *L'Humanite*, about fifty thousand workers participated in the first of August demonstrations, that is, less than half of the unionised workers. In the provinces, things were infinitely worse. This proves, by the way, that the "leading role" of the political bureau among the CGTU apparatus people does not guarantee a leading role of the party among the unionised workers. But the latter make up only a tiny fraction of the class. If the revolutionary upsurge is such an irrefutable fact, what good is a party leadership that, at the critical moment of the Sino-Soviet conflict, could not mobilise an anti-imperialist demonstration even a quarter - rather, even a tenth - the size of the country's electorate? No one demands the impossible of the party leadership. A class cannot be manipulated. But what stamped the August 1 demonstration a failure was the monstrous "disproportion" between the victorious shouts of the leadership and the real response of the masses.

As far as the trade union organisations are concerned, they paralleled the party's decline - judging by the official figures - one year later. In 1926, the CGTU numbered 475,000 members; in 1927, 452,000; in 1928, 375,000. The loss of 100,000 members by the trade unions at a time when the strike

struggles in the country were increasing is incontestable proof that the CGTU does not reflect the basic processes at work in the economic struggles of the masses. As an enlarged reflection of the party, it merely experiences the decline of the latter, after some delay.

The data given here doubly confirm the preliminary conclusions we came to on the basis of our analysis of the strike movement. Let us recapitulate. The years 1919-20 were the culminating point of the proletarian struggle in France. After that, an ebb set in, which in the economic field began slowly to change. In the political field, however, the ebb or stagnation continues even now, at least among the majority of the workers. The awakening of activity of certain sections of the proletariat in economic struggle is irrefutable. But this process too is only in its first stage. It is primarily *light* industry that is drawn into the struggle, with an evident preponderance of the *unorganised* workers over the organised, involving a large number of foreign-born workers.

The impetus to the strike wave was the upturn in the economic conjuncture with a simultaneous rise in the cost of living. In its first stages, the strengthening of economic struggles is not ordinarily accompanied by a revolutionary upswing. It is not evident now either. On the contrary, the economic struggles for a certain time may even weaken the political interests of the working class, at least some of its sections.

If we further take into consideration the fact that French industry has been on the upturn for two years now, that there is no talk of unemployment in the basic branches of industry, and that in some branches there is even an acute shortage of workers, then it is not difficult to conclude that under these exceptionally favourable conditions for trade union struggle the present strike wave is extremely modest. The main indications of its moderate character are the quiescence of the masses that carries over from the preceding period and the slowness of the industrial upturn itself.

(...)

What are the immediate perspectives?

The development of the working class, especially as expressed in the strike movement, from the very beginning of capitalism has been closely bound up with the development of the conjunctural cycle. But this must not be considered mechanically. Under certain conditions that go beyond the commercial-industrial cycle (sharp changes in the world economy or politics, social crises, wars, revolutions), the strike wave may express fundamental historical revolutionary tasks of the working class, not their immediate demands evoked by the given conjuncture. Thus, for example, the postwar strikes in France did not have a conjunctural character but expressed the profound crisis of capitalist society as a whole. If we use this criterion, we see that the strike movement in France today has a primarily *conjunctural* character; its course and tempo will depend in the most immediate sense on further fluctuations of the market, alternating conjunctural phases, and their scope and

intensity. The instability of this current period makes it all the more impermissible to proclaim the "third period" without any regard for the real development of economic events.

There is no need to explain that even if there should be a favourable conjuncture in America and a commercial-industrial upturn in Europe, a new crisis is entirely unavoidable. There is no doubt that when a crisis does develop, the current leaders will declare that their "prognosis" was fully justified, that the stabilisation of capitalism did not occur, and that the class struggle took on sharper form. Clearly, such a "prognosis" costs very little. One who predicted daily the eclipse of the sun, would finally live to see this prediction fulfilled. But we are unlikely to consider such a prophet a serious astronomer. The tasks of communists is not to predict crises, revolutions, and wars every single day, but to prepare for wars and revolutions by soberly evaluating the circumstances and conditions that arise *between* wars and revolutions. It is necessary to foresee the inevitability of a crisis after an upturn. It is necessary to warn the masses of a coming crisis. But the masses will be the better prepared for the crisis the more that they, with correct leadership, utilise the period of the upturn. At the recent plenum of the CGTU national committee, quite healthy ideas were expressed. Claveri and Dorelle, for example, complained that the previous CGTU congress (September 1929) evaded the question of the economic demands of the working masses. The speakers, however, did not stop to think how it could happen that a trade union congress overlooked what should be its first and most urgent task. In accord with so-called "self-criticism", the main speakers this time condemned the CGTU leadership more thoroughly than the Opposition ever did.

However, Dorelle himself introduced not a little confusion in the name of the "third period" concerning the *political* character of the strikes. Dorelle demanded that the revolutionary Communist trade unionists - there are no other revolutionary trade unionists at the present time - show the workers in every strike the relation of isolated examples of exploitation to the contemporary regime as a whole, and consequently the connection between the immediate demands of the workers and the proletarian revolution. This is ABC for Marxists. But this in itself does not determine the character of a strike. A political strike is not a strike in which Communists carry on political agitation, but a strike in which the workers of all occupations and plants conduct a struggle for definite political aims. Revolutionary agitation on the basis of strikes is a task under all circumstances; but the participation of workers in political, that is, revolutionary strikes is one of the most advanced forms of struggle and occurs only under exceptional circumstances, which neither the party nor the trade unions can manufacture artificially according to their own desires. The identification of economic strikes with political strikes creates confusion that prevents the trade union leaders from correctly approaching economic strikes, from organising them and working out a practical programme of workers' demands.

Matters are worse still in respect to

general economic orientation. The philosophy of the "third period" demands an economic crisis immediately and at all costs. Our wise trade unionists, therefore, close their eyes to the systematic improvement of the economic conjuncture in France in the last two years, although without a concrete estimate of the conjuncture it is impossible to work out correct demands and to struggle for them successfully. Claveri and Dorelle would do well to think the question through to the end. If the economic upturn in France continues for another year (which is not out of the question), then primarily the development and deepening of the economic struggles will soon be on the agenda. To be able to adapt to such circumstances is a task not only of the trade unions but also of the party. It is not enough to proclaim the abstract right of communism to have a leading role; it is necessary to gain this by deeds, not only within the narrow framework of the trade union apparatus but in the arena of the class struggle. To the anarchist and syndicalist formula of trade union autonomy, the party must counterpose serious theoretical and political aid to the trade unions, making it easier for them to orient

correctly in economic and political developments and to elaborate correct demands and methods of struggle.

The unavoidable shift in the upturn caused by a crisis will change the tasks, putting economic struggles into the background. It has already been said that the onset of a crisis will in all probability serve as an impetus to the political activity of the masses. The force of this impetus will depend on two factors: the duration and extent of the upturn and the depth of the crisis succeeding it. The more abrupt and decisive the change, the more explosive will be the action of the masses. This is natural. Because of inertia, strikes generally acquire their greatest sweep at the moment when the economic upturn begins to collapse. It is as if, in the heat of running, the workers encounter a solid wall. Economic strikes can then accomplish very little. The capitalists, with a depression under way, easily make use of the lockout. It is then that the deepened class consciousness of the workers begin to seek other means of expression. But which? This depends not only upon the conjunctural conditions but on the total situation in the country.

There is no basis to declare in advan-

ce that the next conjunctural crisis will create an immediate revolutionary situation in France. On the basis of the convergence of a number of conditions that go beyond the conjunctural crisis this is quite possible. But at this point only theoretical conjectures can be made. To put forward *today* the slogan of a general political strike on the basis of a future crisis that will push the masses onto the road of revolutionary struggle is to try to appease the hunger of today with the dinner of tomorrow. When Molotov stated at the Tenth Plenum that the general strike has in effect been put on the order of the day in France, he only showed once too often that he does not know France, nor the order, nor the day. The anarchists and syndicalists compromise the very idea of a general strike in France. Official communism goes along with them, attempting to substitute adventurist goat-leaps for systematic revolutionary work.

The political activity of the masses, before it assumes a more decisive form, for a shorter or longer period may express itself in more frequent attendance at meetings, in broader distribution of Communist literature, in additional electoral votes, in increased membership in the party. Can the leadership adopt in advance a worked-out orientation based on a stormy tempo of development, come what may? No. It must be prepared for one or another tempo. Only in this way can the party, not altering its revolutionary direction, march in step with the class.

The Art of Orientation

The art of revolutionary leadership is primarily the art of correct political orientation. Under all conditions, communism prepares the political vanguard and through it the working class as a whole: for the revolutionary seizure of power. But it does it differently in different fields of the labour movement and in different periods.

One of the most important elements in orientation is the determination of the temper of the masses, their activity and readiness for struggle. The mood of the masses, however, is not predetermined. It changes under the influence of certain laws of mass psychology that are set into motion by objective social conditions. The political state of the class is subject, within certain limits, to a quantitative determination—press circulation, attendance at meetings, elections, demonstrations, strikes, etc. etc. In order to understand the dynamics of the process it is necessary to determine in what direction and why the mood of the working class is changing. Combining subjective and objective data, it is possible to establish a tentative perspective of the movement, that is, a scientifically-based prediction, without which a serious revolutionary struggle is in general inconceivable. But a prediction in politics does not have the character of a perfect blueprint, it is a working hypothesis. While leading the struggle in one direction or another, it is necessary to attentively follow the changes in the objective and subjective elements of the movement, in order to opportunely introduce corresponding corrections in tactics. Even though the actual development of the struggle never fully corresponds to the prognosis, that does not absolve us from making political predictions. One must not, however, get intox-



Sit-down strikers, Paris 1936

icated with finished schemata, but continually refer to the course of the historic process and adjust to its indications.

Centrism, which now rules the Comintern as an intermediate tendency living on the ideas of others, is by its very nature incapable of historic prognosis. In the Soviet republic, centrism became dominant under the conditions of reaction against October, at the ebb of the revolution, when empiricism and eclecticism allowed it to swim with the stream. And since it had already been announced that the course of development led automatically toward socialism in one country, this was enough to free centrism from the need of a world orientation.

But the Communist parties in the capitalist countries, which still have to struggle for power or to prepare for such a struggle, cannot live without prognosis. A correct, everyday orientation is a question of life or death for them. But they fail to learn this most important art because they are compelled to leap about at the command of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Bureaucratic centrism, which is able to live for a time off the capital of already captured proletarian power, is completely incapable of preparing the young parties for the conquest of power. In this lies the principal and most formidable contradiction of the Comintern today.

The history of the centrist leadership is the history of fatal mistakes in orientation. After the epigones missed the 1923 revolutionary situation in Germany, which profoundly changed the whole situation in Europe, the Comintern went through three stages of fatal errors.

The years 1924-25 were the period of ultraleft mistakes: the leadership saw an immediate revolutionary situation ahead of them when it was already past. In that period they called the Marxist-Leninists 'right-wingers' and 'liquidators'.

The years 1925-27 were the period of open opportunism, which coincided with a stormy rise of the labour movement in Britain and the revolution in China. In this period they called us nothing else than 'ultralefts'.

Finally, in 1928, the 'third period' is announced, which repeats the Zinoviev errors of 1924-5 on a higher historical plane. The 'third period' has not yet come to a close; on the contrary, it continues to rage, devastating organisations and people.

All three periods are characterised, not accidentally, by a steady decline at the leadership level. In the first period: Zinoviev, Bukharin, Stalin. In the second period: Stalin, Bukharin. In the third period: Stalin and — Molotov. There is a pattern in this.

Economic Strikes and Crises

"Wherein lies the basis of this revolutionary upsurge?" Molotov makes an attempt at analysis and immediately comes up with the fruits of his deliberations: "At the basis of the upsurge can only lie the growth of the general crisis of capitalism and the sharpening of the basic contradictions of the capitalist system".

Whoever does not agree is a "sorry liberal". But where is it written that at the basis of economic strikes "can only be" a crisis? Instead of analysing actual economic conditions and relating them

to the present strike movement, Molotov proceeds in reverse order; enumerating half a dozen strikes, he comes to the conclusion about 'the growth' of the capitalist crisis and — lands in the clouds.

The rise of the strike movement in a number of countries was caused, as we know, by the improvement of the economic conjuncture in the last two years. This occurred primarily in France. True, the industrial upturn, which is far from general for all of Europe, remained limited until now even in France, and its future is far from certain. But in the life of the proletariat even a small conjunctural turn in one direction or another does not take place without having an effect. If workers are laid off daily, those who remain on the job do not have the same morale as they do when workers are being hired, even though in small numbers. The conjuncture has no less an influence on the ruling classes. In a period of an industrial revival, which always arouses workers' expectations for a still greater upturn in the future, the capitalists are inclined toward easing international contradictions, precisely in order to safeguard the development of the favourable conjuncture. And this is the 'spirit of Locarno and Geneva'.

In the past we have had a good illustration of the relation between conjunctural and fundamental factors.

From 1896 to 1913, there was, with few exceptions, a powerful industrial expansion. In 1913 this changed to a depression, which, for all informed people, clearly began the long drawn out crisis. The threat of a turn in the conjuncture, after the period of an unprecedented boom, created an extremely nervous mood in the ruling classes and served as a direct impetus to the war. Of course, the imperialist war grew out of basic contradictions of capitalism. This generalisation is known even to Molotov. But on the road to war there were a series of stages when the contradictions either sharpened or softened. The same applies to the class struggle of the workers.

In the prewar period, the basic and the conjunctural processes developed much more evenly than in the present period of abrupt changes and sharp downturns, when comparatively minor shifts in the economy breed tremendous leaps in politics. But from this it does not follow that it is possible to close one's eyes to the actual development and to repeat three incantations: "contradictions are sharpening", "the working masses are turning to the left", "war is imminent" — every day, every day. If our strategic line is determined in the final analysis by the inevitability of the growth of contradictions and the revolutionary radicalisation of the masses, then our tactics, which serve this strategy, proceed from the realistic evaluation of each period, each stage, each moment, which may be characterised by a temporary softening of contradictions, a rightward turn of the masses, a change in the relation of forces in favour of the bourgeoisie, etc. If the masses were to turn leftward uninterruptedly, any fool could lead them. Fortunately or unfortunately, matters are more complicated, particularly under the present inconstant, fluctuating, 'capricious' conditions.

The so-called general line is only a phrase unless we relate it to each alter-

nating change in national and international conditions. How does the Comintern leadership act? Instead of evaluating conditions in all their concreteness, it smashes its head at every new stage and then consoles the masses for its subsequent defeat by a change of even expulsion of those on guard duty in the central committees of the national parties.

The Slogan of the General Strike

Entering with gusto into the "most tremendous revolutionary events", Molotov five minutes later returns to these strikes with the unexpected comment: "However, these mobilisations against capital and the reformism that serves it still have an isolated and episodic character".

It would seem that isolated and episodic strikes occur in different countries for quite different reasons but, in general, arising as they do out of a conjunctural upturn in the world market, are not yet precisely because they are isolated and episodic — "tremendous revolutionary events". But Molotov wants to unite the isolated strikes: a praiseworthy task. In the meantime, however, this is still the task, not an accomplished fact. To unite isolated strikes — Molotov teachers — is possible by means of mass political strikes. Yes, *under the necessary conditions*, the working class may be united in revolutionary mass strikes. According to Molotov, then, the mass strike is "that new, that basic and most characteristic problem which stands in the centre of the tactical tasks of the Communist parties at the given moment. And this means" — continues our strategist "that we have approached [this time only 'approached!'] new and higher forms of class struggle". And in order to affirm definitively the Tenth Plenum religion of the third period, Molotov adds: "We could not have advanced the slogan of a mass political strike if we had not found ourselves in a period of ascent". His logic is truly unexampled! At first both feet entered the most tremendous revolutionary events. Later it appeared that facing the theoretical head stood only the task of the general strike — rather, not the general strike itself, but only the slogan. And from this, by inverse method, the conclusion is drawn that we "have approached the highest forms of class struggle". Because, don't you see, if we had not approached them, how could Molotov advance the slogan of the general strike? The whole conception is based on the word of honour of the newly made strategist. And the powerful representatives of the parties respectfully listened to the self-confident blockhead and on roll call replied: "Right you are!"

At any rate, we learn that all countries, from Britain to China — with France, Germany and Poland at the head — are now ready for the slogan of the general strike. We are finally convinced that not a trace is left of the unhappy law of uneven development. We might manage to be reconciled to this, if they would only tell us for what political aims the slogan of the general strike is advanced in every country. It should at least be mentioned that the workers are not at all inclined toward general strikes just for the sake of general strikes. Anarcho-syndicalism broke its head on the failure to understand this. A gen-

eral strike may sometimes have the character of a protest demonstration. Such a strike may occur when some clear, sometimes unexpected, event stirs the imagination of the masses and produces the necessity for unanimous resistance. But a *protest strike demonstration* is not yet, in the real sense of the word, a *revolutionary political strike*: it is only one of the preparatory rehearsals for it. As far as the revolutionary political strike is concerned, in the real sense of the word, it constitutes, so to speak, the

final act in the struggle of the proletariat for power. Paralyzing the normal functions of the capitalist state, the general strike poses the question: *Who is master in the house?* This question is decided only by armed force. That is why a revolutionary strike which does not lead to an armed uprising ends finally with the defeat of the proletariat. If Molotov's words regarding revolutionary political strikes and "highest forms of struggle" have any sense at all, it is that simultaneously, or almost simultaneous-

ly, throughout the world, the revolutionary situation has reached maturity and faces the Communist parties of the West, East, North and South with the general strike as the immediate prologue to armed uprising.

It is sufficient to review Molotov's strategy of the 'third period' to reveal its absurdity.

Speech to the Third Comintern Congress

THE RECIPROCAL relation between boom and crisis in economy and the development of revolution is of great interest to us not only from the point of theory but above all practically. Many of you will recall that Marx and Engels wrote in 1851 — when the boom was at its peak — that it was necessary at that time to recognise that the Revolution of 1848 had terminated, or, at any rate, had been interrupted until the next crisis. Engels wrote that while the crisis of 1847 was the mother of revolution, the boom of 1849-51 was the mother of triumphant counter-revolution. It would, however, be very one-sided and utterly false to interpret these judgments in the sense that a crisis invariably engenders revolutionary action while a boom, on the contrary, pacifies the working class.

The Revolution of 1848 was not born out of the crisis. The latter merely provided the last impetus. Essentially the revolution grew out of the contradictions between the needs of capitalist development and the fetters of the semi-feudal

social and state system. The irresolute and half-way Revolution of 1848 did, however, sweep away the remnants of the regime of guilds and serfdom and thereby extended the framework of capitalist development. Under these conditions and these conditions alone, the boom of 1851 marked the beginning of an entire epoch of capitalist prosperity which lasted till 1873.

In citing Engels it is very dangerous to overlook these basic facts. For it was precisely after 1850, when Marx and Engels made their observations, that there set in not a normal or regular situation, but an era of capitalist *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress) for which the soil had been cleared by the Revolution of 1848. This is of decisive importance here. This storm and-stress era, during which prosperity and the favourable conjuncture were very strong, while the crisis was merely superficial and short-lived — it was precisely this period that ended with revolution. At issue here is not whether an improvement in the conjuncture is possible, but

whether the fluctuation of the conjuncture are proceeding along an ascending or descending curve. This is the most important aspect of the whole question.

Can we expect the same effects to follow the economic upswing of 1919-20? Under no circumstances. The extension of the framework of capitalist development was not even involved here. Does this mean that a new commercial-industrial upswing is excluded in the future, and even in the more or less near future? Not at all! I have already said that so long as capitalism remains alive it continues to inhale and exhale. But in the epoch which we have entered — the epoch of retribution for the drain and destruction of wartime, the epoch of levelling out *in reverse* — upswings can be only of a superficial and primarily speculative character, while the crises become more and more prolonged and deeper-going.

Historical development has not led to the victorious proletarian dictatorship in Central and Western Europe. But it is the most brazen and at the same time the most stupid lie to attempt to conclude from this, as do the reformists, that the economic equilibrium of the capitalist world has been surreptitiously restored. This is not claimed even by the crassest reactionaries, who are really capable of thinking, for example, Professor Hoetzsch. In his review of the year this professor says in effect that the year 1920 did not bring victory to the revolution, but neither did it restore capitalist world economy... the curtailment of production continues... profound economic depression.

On the basis of this economic depression the bourgeoisie will be compelled to exert stronger and stronger pressure upon the working class. This is already to be seen in the cutting of wages which has started in the full-blooded capitalist countries: in America and in England, and then throughout all of Europe. This leads to great struggles over wages. Our task is to extend these struggles, by basing ourselves on a clear understanding of the economic situation. This is quite obvious.

It might be asked whether the great struggles over wages, a classic example of which is the miners' strike in England, will lead automatically to the world revolution, to the final civil war and the struggle for the conquest of political power. However, it is not Marxist to pose the



Lenin joined with Trotsky against the 'ultra-left' at the Third Congress of the Comintern, 1921
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question in such a way. We have no automatic guarantees of development. But when the crisis is replaced by a transitory favourable conjuncture, what will this signify for our development? Many comrades say that if an improvement takes place in this epoch it would be fatal for our revolution. No, under no circumstances. In general, there is no automatic dependence of the proletarian revolutionary movement upon a crisis. There is only a dialectical interaction. It is essential to understand this.

Let us look at the relations in Russia. The 1905 revolution was defeated. The workers bore great sacrifices. In 1906 and 1907 the last revolutionary flare-ups occurred and by the autumn of 1907 a great world crisis broke out. The signal for it was given by Wall Street's Black Friday. Throughout 1907 and 1908 and 1909 the most terrible crisis reigned in Russia too. It killed the movement completely, because the workers had suffered so greatly during the struggle that this depression could act only to dishearten them. There were many disputes among us over what would lead to the revolution: a crisis or a favourable conjuncture?

At that time many of us defended the viewpoint that the Russian revolutionary movement could be regenerated only by a favourable economic conjuncture. And that is what took place. In 1910, 1911, and 1912, there was an improvement in our economic situation and a favourable conjuncture which acted to reassemble the demoralised and devitalised workers who had lost their courage. They realised again how important they were in production; and they passed over to an offensive, first in the economic field and later in the political field as well. On the eve of the war the working class had become so consolidated, thanks to this period of prosperity, that it was able to pass to a

direct assault.

And should we today, in the period of the greatest exhaustion of the working class resulting from the crisis and the continual struggle, fail to gain victory, which is possible, then a change in the conjuncture and a rise in living standards would not have a harmful effect upon the revolution, but would be on the contrary highly propitious. Such a change could prove harmful only in the event that the favourable conjuncture marked the beginning of a long epoch of prosperity. But a long period of prosperity would signify that an expansion of the market had been attained, which is absolutely excluded. For after all, capitalist economy already embraces the terrestrial globe. Europe's impoverishment and America's sumptuous renaissance on the huge war market corroborate the conclusion that this prosperity cannot be restored through the capitalist development of China, Siberia, South America and other countries, where American capitalism is of course seeking and creating outlet markets but on a scale in no way commensurate to Europe. It follows that we are on the eve of a period of depression; and this is incontestable.

With such a perspective, a mitigation of the crisis would not signify a mortal blow to the revolution but would only enable the working class to gain a breathing spell during which it could undertake to reorganise its ranks in order subsequently to pass over to attack on a firmer basis. This is one of the possibilities. The content of the other possibility is this: that the crisis may turn from acute into chronic, become intensified and endure for many years. All this is not excluded. The possibility remains open in such a situation that the working class would gather its last forces and, having learned from experience, conquer state power in

the most important capitalist countries. The only thing excluded is the automatic restoration of capitalist equilibrium on a new foundation and a capitalist upswing in the next few years. This is absolutely impossible under the conditions of modern economic stagnation.

Here we approach the question of social equilibrium. After all, it is frequently said — and this is the guiding thought not only of a Cunow but also of Hilferding — that capitalism is being automatically restored on a new foundation. Faith in automatic evolution is the most important and most characteristic trait of opportunism.

If we grant — and let us grant it for the moment — that the working class fails to rise in revolutionary struggle, but allows the bourgeoisie the opportunity to rule the world's destiny for a long number of years, say, two or three decades, then assuredly some sort of new equilibrium will be established. Europe will be thrown violently into reverse gear. Millions of European workers will die from unemployment and malnutrition. The United States will be compelled to reorient itself on the world market, reconvert its industry, and suffer curtailment for a considerable period. Afterwards, after a new world division of labour is thus established in agony for 15 or 20 or 25 years, a new epoch of capitalist upswing might perhaps ensue...

In short, speaking theoretically and abstractly, the restoration of capitalist equilibrium is possible. But it does not take place in a social and political vacuum — it can take place only through the classes. Every step, no matter how tiny, toward the restoration of equilibrium in economic life is a blow to the unstable social equilibrium upon which the Messrs Capitalists still continue to maintain themselves. And this the most important thing.



The founding of the Communist International: Moscow 1919

Делегаты первого съезда Коммунистического Интернационала в Москве