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Program of Action of the Red International of Labour Unions

Sections XIX to XXIII

XIX. Reforms and revolution

The working class has always fought. During revolutionary periods this struggle takes the form of civil war and direct clashes between capital and labour; during periods of more regular development the struggle continues, but it takes on different forms. The working class and its organizations are constantly influenced and pressured by the ruling classes and the bourgeois state. The bourgeoisie must ideologically conquer the working class, because its domination rests not only on brute force but above all on the ideology it inculcates in the working class. All the material and moral forces of contemporary capitalist society converge in a single purpose: to transform the working class into a machine to produce surplus value. Social reforms depend on the relative strengths of the existing classes. In every country social legislation has a direct relation to the strength of the working class, to the pressure it can exert and its capacity to hold positions it won in the past. The strength of workers' organizations is measured not so much by the formal adoption of certain social legislation, but more by the extent to which social reforms passed by legislatures are effectively applied; reforms constitute a secondary product of revolutionary struggle.

What is the relationship between these isolated victories and the general struggle of the working class? What is the relationship between winning social reforms and ending the whole system of exploitation? Within the workers' movement there are two radically different answers to these questions. On the one hand, the majority of union leaders consider that the goal of workers' organizations is to win social reforms; they think that socialist society can result through the gradual development of social reforms and the slow transition towards superior forms of social life. Applying these isolated victories extensively can completely transform the structure of

society itself. According to them, the development of social reforms makes the capitalist system disappear and establishes harmony between the various classes. And social reforms will spare society of all the problems caused by class struggle. This is the counter-revolutionary theory underlying the actions of all the rightist groups in the workers' movement. They limit the workers' struggle to daily questions of immediate interest. General class questions, like the replacement of one class by another and the suppression of the capitalist system, are of little interest to them.

They are only interested in practical everyday questions – the length of the working day, wages, and social insurance – and nothing more. They think social revolution is extremely harmful and impossible to realize in any case. They dream of a gradual transition from bourgeois “democracy” to socialism.

Both the theorists and practitioners of reformism consider themselves to be the true realists, because they only struggle for concrete issues; they do not propose any “unrealisable or illusory” demands. But in fact, theirs is the most utopian theory that has ever existed. Every day, life itself relentlessly contradicts the theory of class harmony and peaceful transformation. A brief look at the worldwide capitalist offensive presently underway is sufficient to drive on the bitter irony that the theory of the absolute value of social reforms represents for the working class.

Apart from the above position that says that reforms are everything, there stands the other extremist position that says that social reforms are harmful to the interests of the working class. This point of view is put forward by the anarchists. They say: “The broader and more extensive the social reforms, the more moderate the working class becomes and the more likely the bourgeoisie will be able to sweep the working class along in its wake. Neither the reductions in the work day, nor insurance nor the other reforms can resolve the principal question. Furthermore, reforms are definitely not of any interest to the working class. The working class must think exclusively of radical change, of social revolution, and leave aside social reforms that can in no way, regardless of their number, solve the fundamental problem.” This sums up the negative theory of the anarchists and certain anarcho-syndicalists.

It is true that social reforms cannot resolve the main contradictions of contemporary society. But this absolute negation of social reforms does not stand up to criticism. In fact, we have only to con-

sider the development of the contemporary workers' movement in various countries to be easily convinced of the enormous role the successive gains played in the working class' sharp struggles. Yet, the anarchists think that these victories are merely crumbs, the result of a long-standing hoax dreamt up by the ruling classes. However, there has never been a social reform or bill, defending workers rights in the least bit, that was willingly adopted by Parliament, for purely altruistic reasons; all were adopted under strong pressure from the working class. Thus, each social reform obtained represents the conquest of a position by the working class in its daily struggle against the bourgeoisie. To say that the occupation of a trench does not play any role in the later plan of attack would be absolutely false and in flagrant contradiction with the experience gained in struggle around the world. For example, consider the reduction in the work day, factory inspections, job security; all of these were introduced through the force of necessity, under the influence of the revolutionary actions of the masses or out of the threat of these actions. But this does not change the role of these reforms in any way. The anarchists' rejection of partial victories can no more serve as the guiding line for the revolutionary unions than the reformist bombast, touting reforms as the be-all and end-all. Both formulations, "social reforms are everything" and "social reforms are nothing" are unacceptable. They are abstract metaphysics and do not correspond to reality. In its struggle the working class must work towards the realisation of ever broader social reforms, without, for a moment, forgetting the final greater aim.

The basic question is as follows: can the working class, by means of certain social reforms and following the peaceful road and without violent upheavals, take control of production, or is the seizure of political and economic power tied to open and relentless class struggle, in other words, civil war? Years of experience gained in struggle shows that there is no reason to believe that peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism is possible. It shows that to effectively take control of the economic structure of the country, the working class must speak only of revolution. But social revolution is not a rejection of social reforms. Unlike the anarchists, we do not treat social reforms in a light-handed or contemptuous manner, but we do make use of them in the general struggle so that every step forward made by the working class will be consolidated and serve

as the springboard in a future struggle. This tactic must serve as the starting point in the present economic struggle of the working class.

Specific conflicts that constantly arise over wage reductions, the lengthening of the work day, or the introduction of the false remedy of workers' control should not remain outside the consciousness of the working class. They must be linked. Every action, every little dispute must be explained in the light of the general interests of the working class. Every scrap of territory torn away from the bourgeoisie, every victory over capital's offensive (unemployment insurance, etc.), every real advance must not in any way halt the march of the workers' organizations, but should incite them to continue with greater determination towards the fundamental task: the overthrow of capitalism. The idiocy and anti-worker character of the reformist theory is due to the fact that its basic principle says that it is possible to create the ideal living conditions for the working class within the framework of capitalism, and to build a new society without a revolution. The unions and organizations marked by this principle will never be able to take part in the sharp world-wide struggle presently occurring on the economic front. A utopian belief in legality is the contemporary union movement's worst affliction.

The relationship existing between the daily struggle of the working class for improvements of its living conditions and its general class tasks is clearly explained in the last part of our **Program of Action**.

“While conducting the fight for the improvement of the conditions of labour, raising the standard of life of the masses, and establishing workers' control over industry, we should always keep in mind that it is impossible to solve all these problems within the frame of the capitalist system. For this reason the revolutionary trade unions, while gradually forcing concessions from the ruling classes, compelling them to enact social legislation, should put before the working masses a clear-cut idea, that only the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat can solve the social question. For this reason not a single case of mass action, not a single small conflict should pass, from this point of view, without leaving a deep mark. It is the duty of the revolutionary trade unions to explain these conflicts to the workers, leading the rank and file always toward the idea of the necessity and the inevitability of the social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

If we approach all these conflicts, all these manifestations of the sharp struggle going on around us, from the point of view of socialism, of the social revolution, of the dictatorship of the proletariat; if we take this point of view to look on the reforms and the particular concessions wrested from capitalism, we will be able to obtain the maximum results from the energy that the working class deploys in the struggle. In their daily struggles, the revolutionary unions conquer new positions step by step and entrench themselves behind these victories in order to charge once again into the revolutionary fray. The only truly revolutionary tactic bases itself on this understanding of the relationship between reforms and revolution, since it is based both on the evaluation of the class's real strength and the utilisation of even minor means of struggle against our class enemy.

XX. Unity of the revolutionary front

The unity of the working class is necessary for its victory over the bourgeoisie. But we must not think that all unity, under all conditions and in all places, is beneficial to the working class. The working class has created different types of organizations in the course of its struggle: political, union and co-operative. These three types of organizations represent the multiple and varying interests of our class; in addition, it should be noted that in each country these organizations have their own peculiarities. Nowhere has the working class created just one organization; on the contrary, we find that everywhere there are moderate unions, revolutionary unions and even Christian and liberal unions.

The heterogeneous nature of the working class, its varying levels of development, is reflected in the various organizations which compete with each other and struggle to acquire influence over the proletariat. For example, in the United States we have the American Federation of Labour, which is so avowedly anti-socialist that it considers the Amsterdam International too revolutionary. In Germany, two million workers are organized into Catholic unions, alongside the reformist social-democratic unions. In France, the majority of the CGT is reformist and the minority is revolutionary. There is not a single country where there exists ideological unity, unity of opinions and unity in the understanding of tasks. Unity in action is not possible without unity in understanding the tasks of the working class and an identity of views on the methods of struggle to be used. Can we create a united front when some unions are in fa-

vous of using revolutionary means of struggle and the rest are in favour of reconciliation with the bourgeoisie, if some see their salvation in the League of Nations and the others in the struggle against it, if some see the basis of their activity as class collaboration and the others in revolutionary class struggle? Under these conditions it is difficult to forge the desired unity, even if the workers of all tendencies all belong to one organization. At this point principled people ask "Is the unity of the working class a means or an end?" The end is socialism, unity is just the best means to achieve this end, and we are for this unity in as far as it moves the proletariat closer to socialism.

It does not follow from this that the existing unions should be broken up or dissolved. We must win over these unions, raise the consciousness of the masses, bring the workers into the struggle and on this basis create proletarian unity. To defeat the bourgeoisie, the working class has the greatest interest in the formation of a single front. Where does the bourgeoisie's strength come from? Its unity: its political, economic and governmental bodies always act in a common front against the workers. In contrast, the working class is still facing it dispersed, without co-ordinated actions and is consequently being systematically defeated by the bourgeois class.

We may well lament this lack of unity, but our regrets will not change anything. We must face up to reality, we must take into account the true balance of power in waging our struggles, we must understand all the causes of this division of the workers' organizations. A united front is always desired by revolutionary workers, but it cannot be created on the grounds of class collaboration. And as long as the union leaders persist in their views, unity cannot be achieved, since not a single revolutionary worker would agree to creating this type of unity. We are working towards a united front based only on class struggle, based on resistance to the bourgeoisie. Whether in offensive or defensive struggles, revolutionary workers must welcome all common action taken by workers, regardless of the tendency to which they belong. However, we must not deceive ourselves, – the unity of the working class will only be forged through hard struggle. The bourgeoisie is a good teacher for us in this respect since it forces the most politically backward workers to ponder questions they had not thought of until then.

Before creating one workers' front, before considering the fusion of all the organizations into a single fighting force, it is neces-

sary to create a single front of all the revolutionary forces. In doing this we encounter difficulties which stem from the history of the workers' movement. Creating a single front brings up the question of reciprocal relations between the political parties and the unions, this question of politics and economics that has always been a stumbling block for the workers, particularly in the Latin countries. Who should lead the revolutionary struggle as a whole, the political party or the unions? Those revolutionary unionists who are against political parties think that the unions alone should, and are able, practically speaking, to make the revolution. They therefore conclude that any agreement or permanent joint activities with the communist parties would be undesirable, inasmuch as it would mean the submission of the union organizations to the political organizations.

Many unionists around the world have become specialists in this fight against politics, preaching the idea of union neutrality and independence from political parties. Interestingly enough, in France, the left-wing unionists and the majority of the CGT are unanimous on union independence and autonomy. While they all speak of independence, quote from the Charter of Amiens and refer to it, each gives his own meaning to the word "independence". The following is a typical example: at the Metalworkers Congress in Lucerne (September 1921), a lively discussion on the question of politics broke out. Merrheim took the floor and spoke against the participation of the unions in political life. He was heatedly fought by the reformists of the other countries. Dissmann, Ilg and many others responded in strong terms to Merrheim, showing him that it was impossible to separate the union struggles from political struggle. Now, everyone knows what the politics of the Swiss, German, Austrian and other metalworkers are: clearly opportunist and intimately linked to the right-wing socialist parties; their tactical line in the union movement parallels that of these socialist parties in other areas.

But is Merrheim, this defender of union independence and autonomy, really not involved in politics? Are he and his supporters really independent? In Paris, at the end of August, the Commission of the League of Nations held a session (chaired by Viviani) to discuss questions of disarmament. This Commission, composed of government representatives, chattered about disarmament, knowing all the while that the arms race will not stop as long as bourgeois

regimes exist. Jouhaux participated in the meeting and made a long speech in favour of disarmament arguing that munitions should be manufactured in state factories, rather than by private companies. Isn't this politics? Is the participation of Jouhaux, and other representatives of the Amsterdam International, in studies by the League of Nations Commission and in the International Organization of Labour another example of the independence of labour organizations? Obviously this theory of the independence of unions doesn't even warrant a criticism for the simple reason that, being workers' organizations, unions are obliged to hold certain political positions, which are reformist or revolutionary depending on the level of consciousness and the state of mind of the proletarian masses.

This prejudice against politics and political parties shows itself in that the revolutionary unions believe that temporary or permanent agreement for the common struggle is impossible with the communist parties. However, a moment's thought is enough to make one realize that this viewpoint has no basis. Who are the ones who will apply the action program outlined in this pamphlet, in every country, who will be fighting to defend it, who will defend and achieve workers' control, who will found the organizations of self-defence, who will organize the masses in the resistance to the economic offensive of capital? Who, in their daily struggles, will be working hard to raise the consciousness of the masses in order to make them understand the necessity of the social revolution and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Who will combat the poison of reformism? At the critical moment, who will act to overthrow the bourgeoisie? Who will unite the masses and organize the struggle of the entire working class? In short, who will take up the defence of the action program of the RILU in every country? The answer is easy: revolutionary unions and communist parties. No one else. There is not and never will be any other force capable of doing it. Thus we can see that on both the national and international level there are only two types of organizations that will struggle to achieve the revolutionary action program: red unions and communist parties.

The question of an agreement with the communist parties would not have to be dealt with if the red unions themselves were not working to overthrow capitalism. But inasmuch as they do have this aim, which is also the aim of the communist parties, the absence of agreement on joint actions is a great crime against the

working class. It was no accident that the Third Congress of the Communist International and the First Congress of the RILU adopted the same action program. It was no accident that the two world Congresses called for close liaison and collaboration between the red unions and the communist parties and it was no accident either that article 33 of the resolution on tactics adopted by the First Congress of the RILU states:

“Under present conditions, every economic struggle inevitably takes on political significance.

“The struggle itself under such conditions, whatever the numerical strength of the workers involved in a given country may be, can be really revolutionary and be carried out for the greatest benefit of the working class as a whole if the revolutionary trade unions march shoulder to shoulder in the closest co-operation and unity with the communist party of the given country.

“The theory and practice of splitting the struggle of the working class into two independent halves is extremely harmful, especially in the present revolutionary period.

“Every mass action requires the utmost concentration of forces, which is possible only when all the revolutionary energy of the working class is straining to a peak, i.e., when all its revolutionary and communist elements are brought into play. Revolutionary action led separately by the communist party and the revolutionary red unions is doomed to failure and ruin. That is why unity of action, organic links between communist parties and trade unions, is a necessary condition for the struggle against capitalism to be successful.”

All this is not simply speculation, but stems from the logic of the struggle to be led. It is the answer to the fundamental question of the hour: how can we win faster and better? Basing ourselves on this sole consideration, we must underline the necessity of permanent liaison and close collaboration between all the revolutionary organizations in all of their actions, both offensive and defensive, against the ruling classes and their governments. But what does “organic links” mean? The merger of organizations, the submission of one to the other, the renunciation of autonomy? No, none of these. In this case, an organic link means unity in the struggle. We do not ignore the fact that the relationships between the unions and the parties vary significantly: from organizational unity (Norway) to hostile rivalry (France). We have no intention of forcing complex

vital relationships into the same mould. Without a doubt, the relationship between the communist parties and the revolutionary unions will be different in France and Spain, for example, from those in Central Europe or Scandinavia, since the revolutionary unionists, although they do not want to admit it, do act basically as political parties. We are not working towards some lifeless plan. We have no intention of trying to subordinate unionists to some outside organization; and we care even less to try to stop them from making the revolution by themselves, from overthrowing the bourgeoisie and establishing the power of the unions. That is not what we are concerned with. We are concerned with achieving unity in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, and not being defeated separately. This is why all the moaning about independence, about Moscow wanting to subordinate all of the unions is foolish talk that merely confuses the issue instead of solving the problem.

In any case, a careful analysis of past and above all, present actions of the French unions is sufficient to show that at no point in their history did the CGT have a particular political line, either anarchist or reformist. They were “independent” of all principles, their shift from one tactic to another was done with such dizzying rapidity that it bears witness to the CGT leaders’ complete independence from socialism and from communism.

Thus, those who want victory must realize the unity of all the revolutionary elements in each country, by always keeping in mind that the unity of the revolutionary front is the condition for the unity of the entire workers’ front. The logic of class struggle will push the backward and reformist workers to join the revolution. And they will join all the faster as the front created through the organic links between revolutionary unions and communist parties becomes stronger, hence more powerful and more resistant.

XXI. To destroy or conquer the unions

Is it necessary to leave the old unions in order to establish a revolutionary front? As a general rule, should we detach revolutionary workers from the old unions? We will find the answer to these questions by examining the role that unions played before, during and after the war.

Labour unions were formed as self-defence organizations of the working class. As capitalist relations grew and developed and as the forms of exploitation became more complicated, labour unions be-

came more complex organizations and the tactics used in the struggle against the exploiters also became more complex. In the past, each worker dealt with separate capitalists; later on, the isolated worker dealt with organized capitalism; the next stage of development consisted of the struggle of organized workers against organized employers; and finally, the working class, organized in its economic and political organizations, is struggling against the organized employers and the bourgeois state.

In most capitalist countries, labour unions have struggled for several decades to improve the situation of the working class, all the while keeping their action within the bourgeois framework. With striking clarity, the war showed the labour leaders' great attachment for their countries' capitalism. In short, the labour unions were the basis of the entire war policy of recent years. For the leaders of the labour unions, the well-being of the working class is linked to the situation of their country's industry in the world market. Not only are we faced with the rivalry of the ruling classes of Germany and England, but with the rivalry of the English and German unions, since each considers that their destiny depends on expansion and the conquest of new markets. We are witnessing a very curious phenomenon: in the course of its development the working class creates organizations to defend itself from the bourgeoisie and, at a certain point in their development, these very same organizations become an integral part of the bourgeois capitalist machine. The union leadership that has entered into close contact with the bourgeois state considers all questions from the viewpoint of national interest, to the point where the workers' organizations have been transformed from groups whose aim was to struggle against the bourgeois state, into the principal pillars of the entire capitalist system. This contradiction, between the working class's vital need for a separate organization and the coming together of existing organizations and bourgeois capitalist apparatus, became particularly evident during and immediately following the war.

The labour unions had almost ten million members before the war. Immediately following the war, masses of workers joined the labour unions because the war had profoundly disturbed their previous situation. The isolated worker felt powerless and indecisive. The relative stability of bourgeois relations has disappeared, the foundations of society were shaken, and even the most backward workers joined the unions in an attempt to find answers to the ques-

tions confronting them. In the most important countries, the majority of workers are already organized. The number of unionized workers in England has passed eight million; in Germany the number exceeds twelve million (including the Christian and liberal unions). In German-speaking Austria (population six million), there are close to one million unionized workers and there are approximately the same number in Belgium. In short, we are witnessing an enormous and spontaneous movement of the mass of workers towards the unions which has suddenly widened the old framework of organization. Powerful federations with millions of members were formed. In this initial period, when the state was shaken and when the social struggle was in upheaval, when no one was certain of tomorrow and when there was an upsurge in the revolutionary movement, these organizations should have been the main weapon in the struggle of the working class for its interests.

It is true that this initial period of growth was over by the end of 1920. 1921 has been a period of decline in the membership of workers' organizations; however, the labour unions still comprise tens of millions of workers and around the world there are presently fifty million organized workers. This enormous organized army influences the whole capitalist world, which is forced to take these mass organizations of the working class into consideration.

According to the union leaders, the labour unions, which played such a considerable role during the war, should play an equally important role now that the international butchery is over. The victors underlined the importance of the labour unions in contemporary politics by allowing the union leaders to participate in the elaboration of certain articles of the Treaty of Versailles and to take part, as equal partners with the employers, in the International Bureau of Labour, part of the League of Nations. This was the most important achievement of the reformist unions in the international arena, the application on an international scale of the policy of collaboration already in force in each country. On the national level the contemporary union leaders worked towards a rapid and peaceful liquidation of the results achieved during the war, towards an increase in production, towards the most rapid re-establishment of normal capitalist relations, by offering their collaboration and asking for no more than parity in any government conferences. Thus a whole philosophy of collaboration developed. It is developing magnificently in Germany and is best expressed in the decisions of the Amsterdam

International which aim at establishing social peace. In the period since the war, the unions have served as the basis for all sorts of coalition governments; they have intervened as an enemy force against the revolutionary actions of the left-wing of the labour movement, using all the might of their powerful organizations to block the march forward of the worldwide revolutionary movement.

While blocking the revolutionary movement, the unions had to struggle at the same time to improve the economic situation of the workers and defend their livelihood through agreements or strikes. And so, since the end of the war the labour unions have been following the path of reformism, while struggling against social revolution. It is precisely this counter-revolutionary role played by the leading group in the unions that has provoked a reaction from revolutionary workers. A new theory has developed saying that the labour unions, as organizations allied to the bourgeois state, should be destroyed and new unions created to replace them. This theory was born in Germany after the revolutionary workers suffered a series of defeats. It has taken root and grown in that country where the union bureaucracy has, with the greatest cynicism, trampled on the essential principles of class struggle, where the parity system found its expression in the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (joint committees of workers and employers), and where the bourgeoisie, following the revolution of November 1918, recognized that the labour unions had saved the state (that is to say property) from anarchy and complete collapse. These leftist elements argued as follows: the labour unions are conservative, they support the government, practise class collaboration, fight against the revolutionary movement and are against even the idea of social revolution; we must therefore break away from them and form our own unions, perhaps not large, but revolutionary.

The majority of labour unions are conservative; at the present time they are playing a counter-revolutionary role; they have come out squarely in favour of class collaboration. Without a doubt these are the facts, but do they justify destroying the unions? In any case, what does destroying the labour unions really mean? Unions don't consist only of union offices and funds; unions are organizations built up over decades, with millions of workers as members. There are many reasons why the mass of workers are in these conservative unions.

Without a doubt, the best, most aware and active part of the working class is to be found inside the unions. But this part is not yet active or aware enough. Nevertheless that's what we have to work with; we must take the working class as it is. Why should we destroy the labour unions and create new, small unions if we can win over the mass of the workers and through them the unions?

The theory of the destruction of the unions is based on the assumption that the reformist unions are of no use at all to the workers. This idea runs contrary to the facts. If the labour unions were of no value to the working class, then they never would have been able to attract their millions of members. They would have perished by themselves long ago. In fact, we can see that reality is diametrically opposed to this assumption: not only are the workers not turning away from the unions, but they are the only organizations that have preserved their unity despite the sharp struggle within the working class since the end of the war. There is not a country in the world where there are not two or three workers' political parties that are engaged in a fierce war; but despite political differences and the sharpening of political struggle, the labour unions remain on the whole united; workers of all tendencies continue to belong to the same unions and to struggle side by side. Is this just a question of chance? Certainly not. Even today, the old conservative unions carry out an important task for workers: the defence of their immediate interests against the frenzied onslaught of capital. The labour unions are like a common roof under which all workers can find refuge from social storms. The material interests of the workers, questions of wages, the work-day, child and women's labour, insurance, etc. bring the workers together, force them to remain united in the same union. To turn our backs on the unions would mean, under the present conditions, to turn our backs on the masses; to advocate the destruction of the unions would mean to provoke the indignation of the broad masses who see the reformist unions as defenders of their immediate interests. To be revolutionary means to go wherever the masses are to be found and outlining within mass organizations a course that clearly points out the advantages of revolutionary tactics over reformist tactics.

If the viewpoint of the leftists concerning the uselessness of the unions was correct, it would mean we could forget about the social revolution, because the social revolution is impossible without the participation of the tens of millions of workers organized in the un-

ions. It is true that we could dream of revolution; but it is impossible to achieve it without the unions. The struggle in recent months has shown with striking clarity all the harm that could be done by destroying the unions. If our English comrades had decided to adopt this policy, they would have had to withdraw all revolutionary elements from the unions, they would have had to do the same thing with the Miners Federation, which in spite of the reformism of certain leaders was able to carry out a three-month strike. That is the danger: the theory of destroying the unions is not only pessimistic concerning the mass of workers, but it exaggerates the role of the union bureaucracy. Here we see a truly ridiculous situation: the men who plan to overthrow capitalism, who hope to level capitalism in England, in Germany, in France, in the United States, doubt they can destroy the union bureaucracies of these countries. While they think that the Gompers, the Thomases, the Grassmanns and the Oudegeests are invincible, they do not give up the idea of winning out over the full-fledged representatives of contemporary imperialism.

This tactic of pessimism and despair has nothing in common with revolutionary spirit; it bears witness to weak nerves and poor revolutionary judgment. This is why the Communist International and the Red International of Labour Unions have violently and categorically rejected the slogan "destroy the unions", replacing it with "conquer the unions". The experience of the past year has shown the correctness of this tactic. In France, Italy, Germany, around the world, the revolutionary union movement is growing and spreading. It is not yet strong enough to overthrow the old bureaucracy, but it is strong enough in every country to influence union tactics and to clearly pose the questions that the union bureaucracy tries so hard to avoid.

The task before us is to confront the union leaders with the working masses in the context of day-to-day struggle, in order to ideologically and practically win these masses away from the influence of their conservative leaders. The result of this work will be the destruction of the influence of the conservative bureaucrats within the unions, rather than the destruction of the unions themselves. We advocate working in the unions, not in order to follow reformist slogans and principles, but to win over the masses and to transform these unions into instruments of the social revolution against their reactionary leaders.

It is precisely because the slogan “destroy the unions” means breaking away from the masses, isolating revolutionary workers, shrinking the movement until it becomes no more than sectarian activity, that the Red International of Labour Unions puts forward the slogan: “Be with the masses! Go to the heart of the unions! This is the only road to victory!”

XXII. Reformist strategy and revolutionary strategy

Class strategy is much more difficult than military strategy. No matter how numerous contemporary armies may be, no matter whether there are millions, or tens of millions of soldiers in these armies and no matter how long the war lasts, we are nevertheless dealing with a temporary conflict. The last world war, with its tens of millions of soldiers, was a very complex phenomenon, and it was even more complicated at the rear than at the front lines. Besides the purely military mobilization, the providing of equipment, the creation of combat units – infantry, cavalry, artillery, air force, etc. – the bourgeoisie achieved a moral mobilization; it mobilized the consciousness of the broad masses for the war effort. Despite all the complexities of this war, class strategy is even more complicated than military strategy. Here we do not find two neatly delineated fronts, separated by barbed wire and constantly assailing each other with toxic gases and thousands of shells. The class front is inside the country. The working class is part of contemporary society. It is nourished by bourgeois culture, its children attend state schools, it reads the bourgeois press, etc. The front between classes zig-zags and class enemies penetrate the working class, not only in a physical sense but spiritually as well; they include experts, disciples, defenders, and even troubadours. This is why revolutionary class strategy, class politics, is one of the most complex problems of contemporary social struggle.

First of all, the struggle itself has taken on enormous dimensions. In recent decades workers have no longer been isolated. They have created their own mass organizations. The social conflicts shaking the foundations of contemporary society no longer express themselves through collisions between isolated, separate and dispersed individuals, but by the clash of organized armies. They demand a deep understanding of the internal social relations, the economic situation of the country and international industrial conditions. It is indispensable to know the relative strengths of the vari-

ous classes, the level of organization and resistance of the various strata of the bourgeoisie, the internal contradictions and frictions within the ruling classes and finally the level of organization of the working class, its revolutionary awareness of the goals of the various strata within the proletariat, its ideological level and degree of self control in class warfare. It is necessary to know all of this in order to establish a clear political line, in order for the leading core of the revolutionary unions to correctly conduct class politics. Strategy, that is to say class politics, is the art of manoeuvre; it is not an end in itself, but a means, a resource, a method and a form for attaining a specific end. Thus, strategy is determined by the problems that arise. This is why the same methods of struggle can be either revolutionary or reformist, according to the problems faced by the working class.

What is the fundamental difference between reformist strategy and revolutionary strategy? All the actions and manoeuvres of reformist unions are based on the principle of the peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism, a utopian, unattainable and historically impossible task. For us, the question of overthrowing the bourgeoisie arises in every form of struggle, in every intervention we make. In reply the reformists say: "You communists and revolutionary trade unionists think that the social revolution can be accomplished any time. You claim that violence alone will enable the working class, insufficiently prepared and lacking in class consciousness, to obtain goals that must be fought for over many decades."

It is completely absurd to say that revolutionary unions and communist parties think that it is possible to accomplish social revolution at any time, or that they want to transform each conflict into a social revolution. If that were true, the leaders of the red unions would be infantile in terms of revolutionary strategy, because they would not be taking into consideration the balance of power and the real possibilities of the struggle. No, such a childish conception of social relations does not exist in the revolutionary unions... we are not talking about immediately transforming every conflict into armed insurrection or a revolution, but rather about teaching the mass of workers, through the lessons drawn from every conflict, the necessity and inevitability of the social revolution and the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. The idea that any strike can bring down the bourgeoisie is obviously utopian. We certainly do not believe in such a miracle even though in the past revolutionary unions have

committed this error. But it is not utopian to clarify every social conflict in the light of the revolutionary viewpoint; on the contrary, it is a real possibility and it is essential to do so.

Let's take a few examples that will show more clearly the difference between reformist and revolutionary strategies. At the present time, we are witnessing a worldwide offensive of capital: wages are being lowered at an unbelievable rate; attempts are being made to lengthen the work-day. In short, the bourgeoisie has gone from the defensive to a frenzied offensive. In this period of sharp struggle, what are the reformists and the revolutionaries doing? We will not discuss the fact that many unions, under the influence of their reformist leaders, voluntarily lower wages. This unusual class strategy is due to the total submission of these misleaders to the bourgeois conception that a lowering of the price of essential goods must be accompanied by a lowering of wages. As if the previous wages were actually sufficient to cover all the workers' needs!

Provoked by capital's offensive, great conflicts are breaking out in which the workers of various political convictions struggle hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder against the entrepreneurs attacking them. This was the case in the miners' strike in England and is the case in the present strike in the north of France (September 1921), etc. How are the reformists reacting in the face of the workers' mass resistance to capital? "It is necessary to push back the offensive of capital;" this is what the leaders of the contemporary reformist union movement are saying and writing. Certainly, answer the revolutionary unionists, we must push back the attack. But is the aim of class strategy to merely push back a given attack? No, the task consists of making every soldier in this class war understand that this is not the final struggle and that he will always have to push back new attacks just as long as the enemy has not been destroyed. The great generals were well aware that the fundamental rule of military science is the demoralization, the disorganization, then the definitive destruction of the enemy's army. Only then is the war over. The reformist politicians never think of attacking the causes of class war, the underlying factors of these terrible conflicts. They take the conflict as a fact, act against it when the employers are totally unwilling to settle and then they lie back until there is a new, profound upheaval.

Under no circumstances can the revolutionary unions agree with such a method of action. Only one question concerns the revo-

lutionary unions: to destroy the enemy's army with the strength of an organized offensive. Does that mean we can destroy it any day and during any strike? No, but the necessity of destroying the enemy's forces, in other words the bourgeoisie, marks all the actions – the agitation, the propaganda and the demonstrations – of every revolutionary union. It also guides the negotiations of the terms of the truce leading to peace. Class unions always examine every question from the viewpoint of overthrowing the bourgeoisie, while reformist unions always deal with everything from the viewpoint of maintaining contemporary society as it is. Class unions aim at disarming and destroying the bourgeois class, reformist unions aim at reaching an agreement with it. Class unions consider these continual conflicts as an inevitable consequence of capitalist relations, which will only disappear with them, and therefore direct each of their actions towards destroying these relations; reformist unions see these conflicts as temporary and chance phenomena, to which they must react so that a closer collaboration can be set up with the representatives of the other classes.

In this way revolutionary and reformist strategies are in conflict, both during the struggle itself, and once the struggle is over. While revolutionary unions, using the example of the recent conflict, teach the necessity of a new hard struggle, the reformist unions are content to settle with the palliatives obtained because they consider that collaboration always attains the best results. The former consider the agreement, or contract, as a temporary truce during which it is necessary to prepare for another war; the latter see it as the establishment of normal relations that are occasionally disturbed by an outbreak of class passions.

Let's examine a second example: the representatives of the Amsterdam International helped elaborate certain articles of the Treaty of Versailles; they are members of the Bureau of Labour attached to the League of Nations and are members of commissions established by the League.

Recently (August 1921), Jouhaux, Oudegeest and Torberg participated in the Disarmament Conference convened by the League of Nations. Jouhaux gave a very long speech that was attentively listened to by the representatives of the bourgeoisie. The latter then continued, just as before with the entangled state of affairs that they had organized in order to trick the broad masses. What does Jouhaux's action represent from a class point of view? In the pres-

ence of those ministers who had organized the international massacre and still maintain a crushing military yoke, the representative of the General Confederation of France delivers a speech on the usefulness of arms reduction. They listened patiently because words are harmless. But what is the point of making a speech like that? Does Jouhaux think that speeches and appeals to abstract truths will influence the government? This is typical reformist strategy. Can you imagine what would have happened had a representative of the revolutionary unions delivered a speech on the same subject to these same bourgeois ministers? These gentlemen would not likely have let him finish. Because the revolutionary strategy would have aimed, without worrying about the reaction of the attending ministers, at showing that the conference and its related projects are a deception staged by aggressors. The speech, given from within the very fortress of the bourgeois state, would have exposed the ruling classes on the basis of their past record, of not wanting disarmament and in fact, of building up arms with growing determination. In short, the representative of the truly revolutionary unions would have openly accused these bourgeois hypocrites of fooling the working masses. That would have been the revolutionary strategy. There is no doubt that such an uncouth outburst would not have been tolerated a second time in conferences of this kind, but it is not the workers' task to be friendly towards their class enemies.

It is therefore possible in such a situation to conceive of a revolutionary conduct and oppose it to the reformist attitude. Thus we can see that the revolutionary strategy cannot be reduced to calling for an insurrection and revolution at every opportunity without regard to the objective conditions and real possibilities of a given situation. That is nothing but revolutionary phrase-mongering, not revolutionary tactics; it is proof of extreme skittishness and little judgement. No, this is not what revolutionary tactics and strategy are made of. Their essence is to always maintain the clear demarcation between classes, never allowing it to be blurred; to always underline the existing principles; and to always sharpen the contradictions. Reformist tactics however consist of smoothing over the sharp edges, plastering over the cracks, lessening and softening the class contradictions. From this viewpoint we can see that revolutionaries must not limit themselves exclusively to certain methods of struggle, as certain comrades – thinking that only strikes and armed insurrection are worth the attention of revolutionaries –

would have us believe. No, everything depends on the way we act and the effect, in terms of political education, these actions have on the mass of workers. We are familiar with revolutionary parliamentary actions, reformist demonstrations and even reactionary strikes, when, for example, the strike is waged against the hiring of blacks, etc. This is why we cannot under any circumstances be in agreement with the old unionist theory that attributes miraculous significance to certain forms and methods of struggle. Everything depends on the time, the place, the circumstances and, principally, the aim of the struggle and the problems that are raised.

While leading a severe and pitiless struggle against the tendency to collaborate with the ruling classes at any price, to continuously retreat and fear decisive actions, we must also struggle resolutely against the spirit of revolutionary adventurism and the attack-at-all-costs mentality. Recently Thomas, the president of the Amsterdam International, who is also head of the English railway workers, explained why they did they did not support the miners in their struggle: "Our action would have brought about the fall of the government and a collision with the forces of the state". So rather than bring about the fall of the government, he preferred to betray the interests of the miners. This is a perfectly classic example of reformist strategy. Above all else, do not bring down the government, do not sharpen the contradictions, do not enter into a decisive struggle with the ruling classes, but always work for an agreement regardless of the conditions, regardless of the cost in our struggle against such treason, against such an anti-worker strategy, we must be very hard and very determined. But, as we have already noted, that does not mean that everywhere we are obliged to preach the offensive, regardless of the conditions. The First Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions stated the fundamental principles of our strategy in a very clear and precise way. This is what the Resolution of Tactics says in this regard:

"43. We shall be able to conquer the masses, and consequently the trade unions, only on condition that in the attack or resistance we will be at the head, in the first ranks, of the working class. This standpoint shall in no case be construed to mean a call to action is advisable under any and all circumstances. The supporters of the Red International of Labour Unions must not only be model revolutionaries, but also models of sustained action and coolheadedness. The whole gist of success consists in the systematic, efficient and

stubborn preparation of every move, of every mass action; rapidity and sureness of action must go hand in hand with a detailed study of each situation and its conditions, as well as the organized strength of the enemy forces. In class struggles, as well as in battles at the front, we should not only know how to attack, but also how to retreat in orderly and compact formation. Both in offensive and defensive warfare it is always necessary to take into consideration whether we have the sympathy of the proletarian masses and what are the social and political forces involved.”

As we can see, the Congress demands that revolutionary leaders be, above all else, revolutionary realists. We must have fiery hearts and cool heads. In this regard, we should follow the example of our class enemies. Just a brief examination of the social struggle will show the great variety of means and methods used by the ruling class in the struggle to defend their interest. They play at social reforms while at the same time setting up militias of White Guard assassins, attacking on all fronts, destroying workers’ organizations and arresting the leaders. Parliament continues to pass laws and social-reform societies, both public and private, continue to stuff the working class with falsehoods. Literature, the Church, the universities, the legal system, the police, all act towards the same end. All available weapons are used by the bourgeoisie, from the heavy artillery of the police to the poisonous gases of reformism. We must always know how to find the weak points on this enormous front, to push back the attack and go on the offensive, to maintain leadership, to never shy away from any means of struggle against the class enemy, to fight ruthlessly against bourgeois spies and accomplices within the working class, and, methodically exploiting every error of the enemy in a persistent and calm way, advancing when possible and retreating to regroup when necessary, to lead the working class to the final goal, to socialism.

XXIII. Conclusion

The working class stands alone in the struggle for its emancipation. In this sense, the situation is worse than it was for the bourgeoisie, which in its struggle to overthrow the feudal regime could count on the emerging working class. During the French Revolution artisans from the districts of Paris formed vanguard revolutionary detachments. The working class is making revolution under different conditions. In the majority of European countries it is fighting

for power not only against the financial and industrial bourgeoisie, which clings to its privileges with all its strength, but also against a rich and strong peasant class. This peasant class is, on the whole, hostile to socialism, dreading its victory. The peasant class is the bulwark of European reaction.

The isolation of the proletariat in its struggle is aggravated by its heterogeneity, the lack of unity of its organizations and the bourgeois spirit that corrupts and divides them. Although it may hurt to admit it, it must be said that the workers are no strangers to imperialism. The war showed the degree of the workers' attachment to their nation's capitalism. The representatives of this unconscious attachment are the reformist union leaders and the reformist socialist parties. These conditions make it very difficult for the working class to fight. This is why the chief task of revolutionary workers is victory over the internal opposition to revolutionary work. This internal opposition is the fortress of the bourgeoisie in the present struggles; in both its organization and ideology the working class reflects the past, the present and the future. There are broad amorphous masses that take no part in the social struggle. It is sufficient to note that of the 21 million German workers, only 12 million are unionized (free unions, Christian unions, liberal unions, communist unions, etc.).

However, we must not think that the tens of millions of unorganized workers play no role among the forces presently at work. By their very abstention, they support the existing order, they are like a ball and chain holding back the forward march of the vanguard of the proletariat. They are followed closely by the organizations in the service of the bourgeoisie (the Christian, liberal and yellow unions) that wage organized struggle against revolutionary class ideology and politics. And finally we have the powerful reformist unions, whose theory and practice is similar to that of the liberal unions. It is not by pure chance that the German reformist unions have formed a bloc with the Christian unions and the Hirsh-Danker unions. As class struggle sharpens, the reformist leaders move closer to the Christian and liberal unions. We are therefore faced with enormous organizations that embody the conservatism of the working class. They oppose social revolution with organized resistance. In many countries, it is still only a minority of the organized workers that share our ideas about revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Under these conditions, the fundamental tasks of the revolutionary unions consist above all of winning over the masses, since without this condition no revolution will be possible. This will not be achieved by abstract agitation and propaganda, but by concrete and practical work, by a vigorous struggle for the day-to-day interests of the workers. We must show ourselves to be the ardent defenders of the proletarian united front, not the united front of class collaboration but that of class struggle. We lead the fight against the reformist leaders not for any personal motives, but because they defend an ideology and tactics that are harmful to the proletariat. We will cease this struggle when the masses organized in the reformist unions take up positions alongside us for the total emancipation of labour every time the old working class leaders place themselves at the head of the fighters. When a worker takes up the struggle against capitalism, we should not ask him what party he belongs to, which program of action he wants to carry out: he is fighting, so he is with us. We extend to him a brotherly hand, for he is our comrade in arms. The daily struggle is the best school for revolution and communism.

Tenacity, decisiveness, perseverance and unlimited devotion to the interests of the masses of workers will allow us to take our place in this daily struggle. Those who follow this path will win over the masses to the revolution and to communism and only they will have achieved, in practice, the spirit and letter of the Program of Action of the Red International of Labour Unions.

Moscow, August-October, 1921