

Plenum of Women Workers' Committee of the RILU

(December 16, 1929)

COMRADE LOSOVSKY'S REPORT

COMRADES, our International Women Workers' T. U. Committee was only established eighteen months ago. As you see, it is a very little child, and may be for this very reason does not stand quite firm on its legs. It is possible that the fault is malnutrition and bad attendance on the part of its parent, the R.I.L.U. At any rate we must view the situation as it is: the Women Workers' T. U. Committee, which without doubt is faced with very great tasks, as yet conducts its work but very weakly. If we view the objective situation at the present period, if we view the struggles which are now taking place, we will be able to register very great participation in these struggles by the women workers. And a Marxist analysis of events, a correct grasp of the meaning of these events, forces us to think that the part taken by women in the economic and political struggles will grow steadily. All objective data point to this. And the question now faces the R.I.L.U. of how to draw into the movement, with maximum results, new strata of women workers. The Women Workers' T. U. Committee is not a party organization. It is an organization which has as its task to draw into the movement the women workers, who are now being awakened to conscious life—to lead them from small economic strikes to bigger economic strikes, from economic strikes to great political struggles, from political struggles to uprisings, from uprisings to the Revolution. This is the path which all movements transverse, and this is also the path for the women workers in the capitalist and colonial countries. The question for the immediate future, for you, for the Women Workers' T. U. Committee, for the R.I.L.U., the entire question is: how to get new forces into the leadership,—in the center and in the various localities.

Work amongst the women is very often viewed as a "sideline," as an extra occupation. It has become a sign of good tone to mention the women in all resolutions. The women and young workers are mentioned—and then we calm down; the usual bow towards this or that duty, which does not oblige those who have signed the resolution to do anything. We must turn away from this

bad tradition: it is insufficient to mention the women workers in the resolution; it is insufficient to say that they are being drawn into industry, to say that they are participating in the struggle. This is only registering facts. It is not enough. We must concretely, in a practical manner, approach the question of how to organize work in the center, how to organize it in the districts.

If we view the activities of our organizations in all countries—Germany, Britain, the United States, France, Czecho-Slovakia if we take the colonial countries, we see how great is the disproportion between the participation of the women workers in the struggles and the attention which our organizations pay them. In my opinion, in this respect we must draw up all our organizations with the greatest vigor, we must take up this question most energetically. I must stress that the question of the women workers is not only the work of the women alone. A tradition in this respect has also been formed—only women must attend to work amongst the women. That is the women's affair. No, this is not the "women's affair." It is not the specialty of women alone: the labor movement of the whole world is interested in the work amongst the women going forward apace. At the same time very little has been done in this respect; very little has been done because our organizations still adhere to the old traditions of the reformist trade unions, which drag us backward. It is but recently that in most countries women workers were not yet accepted into membership in the unions. But recently we had to break down this tradition. And we must say that such traditions still continue amongst many, many people who consider themselves to be Communists.

For this reason the question of drawing the women workers into activity must become one of the most urgent in the near future, a most important part of our work. In my opinion the active workers in the revolutionary trade union movement could do very much in this respect, and if we ourselves take up this work and give the help required, we without doubt will achieve great results.

In six or seven months' time the Fifth Congress of the R.I.L.U. is to be held. The Women Workers' T. U. Committee and all the R.I.L.U. Sections will have to check up what has been done in this sphere. You, comrades, will have to be exacting in your tasks and insistent in carrying them out, and the more exacting you are, the more insistency you display, the more you fight for organizing activities amongst the women workers, the more you will achieve. Passiveness, lack of energy, will never lead to anything. The preparations for the Fifth Congress may serve as the turning point for further improving our activities amongst the women workers in all countries. Work will have to be conducted through special articles on this question, and discussions at

meetings, and by bringing up the questions from the viewpoint as to what has been done in this or that country. It is necessary to take steps that a good representation at the Fifth Congress be ensured. Usually, when making up the delegations from a certain country and knowing that thirty comrades have to be sent, twenty-nine men are sent and one place left for the women workers, though usually the place occupied by the women workers is far greater than they are allowed. This representation of the women workers is undoubtedly affected by the conservatism, the non-understanding of what is taking place in the labor movement, the absolute lack of perspective, because in the period to come the women workers, as the most exploited, will participate most actively in the struggle. If we do not succeed in taking advantage of the objective situation, of utilizing the favorable conditions, we will be unable to draw into the movement those fresh millions who even now at the present time are playing a considerable part and will play a still greater part in the struggle of the proletariat for emancipation. We must do away with the traditions in the question of activities amongst the women, of drawing them into the struggle. It is wrong to consider that the women workers, women in general, are something of the sort of a free supplement to the men's delegation. The question of delegates to the Congress must be considered from the point of view of the work which is required by the developing movement.

I think the Women Workers' T. U. Committee will seriously have to study the question of how many women workers, from which countries, etc., should be represented at the Fifth Congress. We state beforehand that all possible assistance will be extended by us. We will help each and all of our organizations to depart from the old traditions, which are quite often to be found side by side with our revolutionary activity. We must determinedly strike at conservatism, at any and all survivals of the old reformist traditions, which weigh down the international labor movement.

If we put to ourselves the question of what are the immediate perspectives for the development of the International Women Workers' T. U. Committee, what line the Committee is to follow, what problems it is to put in the forefront and how it is to draw the women workers into the movement, I think we can reply to this that the perspectives for its development are very great. Everything depends on the energy of our organizations. Our work must extend beyond the confines of Europe. Although we are great revolutionaries, nevertheless we often think that Europe is the center of the universe: if this was so before the war, we are now confronted by such huge capitalist countries, not in Europe, as, for instance, the United States, or such countries as India, Japan,

China, etc., which are now playing a far greater role than European countries, both in the imperialist struggle and in the struggle against imperialism. The problem of organizing the women workers goes far beyond the confines of Europe and comes up against those tens of millions of women workers in the colonial countries who are exploited with exceptional brutality.

The East embraces such vast masses of women workers that those present here are barely able to imagine the statistics. In China, in Japan, and in India, the number of women workers is greater than the number of men. For this reason, therefore, our Women Workers' Committee must spread beyond Europe. In the first place, it must spread beyond the Palace of Labor in Moscow, and then beyond the confines of the U. S. S. R., and after this it must spread beyond Europe, beyond America, and in general, come out into the world! This means that you must embrace the broadest possible means outside the confines of the capitalist countries, keeping in view that the women workers in the colonial countries will undoubtedly be with you. They will follow you sooner than those considerable strata of women workers corrupted by bourgeois culture, who have yet to be won away from the influence which the church, bourgeois culture, bourgeois habits, the bourgeois press, etc., etc., still exert over them.

Finally, comrades, the last question—what methods can we apply to draw the women workers into the struggle? The most simple and tried method, and likewise the best, is that of bringing up before the women workers questions connected with their everyday needs and the everyday struggle. This does not mean to say that our task is to speak only of the *immediate everyday interests which at the given time are agitating the women workers*. This means to say that we must succeed in *linking up the everyday interests with our final aim*; this means that we must focus the attention of the women workers on what agitates them most, what is of greatest interest to them at the given time, but also that the women workers must take an active part in the general class struggle of the proletariat not only as women workers when at the factories, not only in movements, in strikes, but that they must also become active fighters in the labor movement in general. On the other hand, we must carry on work in such a manner that the *workers' wives*, who are also interested in the strike, for they usually have to bear all the burdens during stoppages, also take an active part in the strikes, in the strike struggle, in the general class struggle.

Experience in some countries has shown that the women workers, the workers' wives and children, play a very great part in revolutionizing the working masses through their actions during the

strikes, and that the movements of the vast masses of the women workers in the struggle for their elementary demands serve usually, as a great impetus for consolidating the working class, for raising the spirits of the men. When considerable numbers of women workers are in the movement the class struggle becomes increasingly sharper. There is even some element of competition between the men and the women in the struggle. We are not going to object in the least to such rivalry. We are for such rivalry, we are for the women being in the vanguard in the strike struggle, although we will insist that the men don't lag behind. At any rate, I repeat, we will not object to this competition. We must mobilize the masses of the women, raise them to a higher level, bring into the movement the huge masses of the women workers, force them to play a definite part in the movement.

And this is only possible if we do not conduct abstract propaganda, do not take up questions general and abstract, not understood by the women workers, do not generalize, if I may put it so, but work more simply, for the workers, so that the women understand what we are referring to. We must lead the women not from the general to the particular, but from the particular to the common aim, so that in the struggle they go from their everyday requirements to the general problems confronting the working class as a whole. This, of course, cannot be done at once—it is a very complicated science, if I be permitted to express myself in military terms, this science of “leading the masses.” We members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, have learned much in this respect from that great leader of the masses, *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*. Our foreign comrades must learn this also. You must always be able to feel the pulse of the masses. Whoever does not feel this is not a leader but just an official. Whoever does not see what is going on in the masses is just a functionary, sitting in his chair, but who does not feel the changes in the mood, the development of new moods in the masses. Whoever does not sense what is the life, what agitates the mind of the simple women workers from the factories, whoever does not understand this, had better leave the leadership of the labor movement, because this person will just be an official, and never a genuine leader of the mass labor movement.

This, comrades, is how I visualize the methods which should be applied in approaching the tasks confronting you. It would, of course, be ridiculous to think that the Women Workers' T. U. Committee could carry out such great tasks independently. The tasks of which I speak could hardly be carried out by us ourselves. All together we must carry them out. You are one of the cogs in the great wheel which already now is a great force in the world

labor movement. You are one of the levers by means of which we draw new divisions of the working class into the struggle, and the tasks confronting you are the concrete tasks laid down by the struggle. They must be carried out; they will be carried out, of course, with the energetic and determined support from the R. I. L. U. and all its organizations.

Resolutions are drawn for a period of several years. The tasks which you have put yourselves are tasks of several years. It would be childishness to think that you could carry them out in a few months. In six or seven months' time you will once more meet, and, I hope, the resolutions that you have adopted will not remain on paper. Better ten per cent carried out, than one hundred per cent not carried out. There is a proverb, as you know, which says "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." I base myself approximately on this when defining how much you should carry out in the next few months.

I think that we should consider one more question—that of organizing a conference parallelly with the Fifth Congress of the R. I. L. U. The Women Workers' Committee can and must prepare for this. There will be from eighty to ninety delegates from women workers at the R. I. L. U. Congress. Work must be carried out so that a serious conference be held. The work of the Women Workers' Committee in the period of preparations for the Fifth Congress should be to seriously prepare for this Conference. There will be several conferences held simultaneously with the R. I. L. U. Congress. There will be a conference of workers in Arab countries, a Latin American Conference, a conference of Negro workers, a Young Workers' Conference, and there should be a Women Workers' Conference. One of the tasks of the Young Workers' T. U. Committee is to lay down the practical methods and lines for preparing for such a conference in six and one-half month's time. The comrades here have objected to my moderate demands. They assert that ten per cent carried out is insufficient. That is all right! If you carry out the full one hundred per cent, all the better. The R. I. L. U., however, expects you to *commence to apply the resolutions adopted*, and I think that this is the most important point! (Applause.)