

BEFORE THE V. CONGRESS OF THE R. I. L. U.

The Red Trade Unions in Czechoslovakia Before the V. Congress of the R. I. L. U.

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The tasks which confront the red trade unions in the new period of the class struggle, as well as the decisions of the IV. Congress of the R. I. L. U., encountered the greatest resistance particularly in Czechoslovakia.

The red trade unions were headed by the opportunist Hais group, which consisted of old trade union functionaries of the reformist school, who by their whole life and practice were closely connected with the methods of the reformist trade union work. This leading group based itself upon a functionary-apparatus consisting for the greater part of highly skilled workers, who in the factories stood much nearer to the reformist functionaries than to the broad masses of the working class. The members of the red trade unions remained passive and continually fluctuated.

This composition was quite in keeping with the policy of the red trade unions, the policy of "pressure upon the reformist leaders", the policy of the united front from above, which led the red trade unions sometimes even to the policy of class peace.

The radicalisation of the working masses, which in Czechoslovakia found expression, even before the IV. Congress of the R. I. L. U., in stormy demonstrations against the worsening of social insurance and in the metal workers' movement, took place outside of the red trade unions. The opportunist policy of the red trade unions deepened from day to day the chasm between the revolutionary energy of the working masses and the revolutionary trade unions.

The North Bohemian textile workers strike, which broke out in January 1929, showed the whole depth of this crisis. This strike was the first attempt to apply the new strike strategy in practice: it was the first great struggle against the social fascists and the terror of the State apparatus; it was the first attempt of the red trade unions to conduct the strike independently.

But the strike of the North Bohemian textile workers was also the signal for the open puch of the liquidatory elements. It was the immediate reason for the split of the red trade unions, whereby the Hais group, supported by the bourgeois State apparatus, appropriated the whole property of the red trade unions.

This puch has also numerically weakened the red trade unions. Out of the 100 000 members, 70 000 went over to the red industrial unions, 12 000 went into the Hais trade unions, the rest remained unorganised or went over to the reformist unions.

In spite of these temporary losses, the struggle with the liquidators meant a great stride forward for the red trade unions. The most important decisions of the IV. Congress of the R. I. L. U. were popularised in the course of this struggle, and the basis created for the red trade unions to fulfil those

tasks which confront them in the present period. Immediately after the split, the red trade unions had to show how far they are capable of fulfilling these tasks. Throughout the year 1929 there was a number of partial strikes, which were exclusively conducted by the red trade unions against the social fascists and the fierce terror of the State apparatus, which is coming forward more brutally against the workers in every strike struggle.

But also in this period the growth of the red trade unions lagged far behind the development of the situation. The red trade unions are often taken by surprise by the spontaneous strikes which break out.

The resolution of the VI. Plenum of the R.I.L.U. on the Czechoslovakian question precisely points out these weaknesses and sets a number of new tasks: to convert the red trade unions into factory organisations, to reorganise the functionary cadres, to recruit new members.

Immediately after the Plenum of the R.I.L.U. the red trade unions were confronted by new tasks as a result of the profound changes in the situation. Already at the beginning of 1930 the economic crisis seized one branch of production after another; unemployment is becoming a scourge of the Czechoslovakian proletariat.

The red trade unions suddenly were faced with new conditions. The economic crisis created very favourable objective conditions for a rapid growth of the red trade unions, but the latter had not yet developed to such an extent as to be able to cope with the new tasks arising out of the economic crisis.

The first attacks of the employer's offensive ended with a success for the capitalists, who succeeded in Unter-Reichenau, Bleistadt and Römerstadt in isolating the striking workers and throttling their resistance by means of gendarmerie bayonets. The social fascists have had better success in their attempts to isolate these strikes than the red trade unions in their efforts to extend the struggle.

The red trade unions committed serious mistakes on the occasion of mass dismissals of the workers. In a number of localities they remained passive; in other localities the functionaries of the red trade unions started negotiations with the employers on the question who shall be dismissed, which shifts shall be dropped etc.

The Ghent system naturally also rendered the situation of the red trade unions very difficult. The red trade unions, deprived of all funds as a result of the split, and the only class trade unions, which therefore have to bear the whole burden of financing the economic struggles, were unable to pay out the unemployment benefit according to the Ghent system. There was only one way open to the red trade unions: to organise a mass struggle of the working class against the Ghent system and for full State benefit. The 6th of March, the fighting day against unemployment, was a serious attempt to pursue this path. The red trade unions, together with the C. P. Cz., had organised mass demonstrations and led tens of thousands of workers into the streets in spite of all the terror exercised by the State power. But after the 6th of March, the activity of the red trade union ebbed somewhat. The inner difficulties are growing. And we are in fact unable to initiate a mass struggle of the working class against the Ghent system. The red trade unions are taking up an opportunist attitude to this question: they declare a boycott of the Ghent system and adopt the standpoint that they, as revolutionary organs of the class struggle, cannot on principle pay out any benefit.

This attitude, which with Left phrases only served to cloak the weaknesses of the Red trade unions in the struggle against unemployment and for complete State benefit, increased the inner difficulties. The social fascists are conducting a stubborn struggle against the red trade unions by making use of the question of benefits. The tasks laid down by the VI. Plenum of the R.I.L.U. remain on paper. The recruiting campaign yielded very small results, whilst on the other hand the red trade unions are losing a portion of their members.

It is only recently that a change has come about in this situation. The attack of the employers on the revolutionary stronghold in the Ostrau district, on Karlshütte, ended with complete failure on the part of the employers. Under the leadership of the red trade unions the workers are going on strikes: powerful demonstrations are being organised. The capitalists are compelled to drop their demands.

This success not only strengthens the position of the red trade unions in Karlshütte, where the workers unanimously

decided at a factory meeting to join the red trade unions collectively, but it is stirring the whole of the working class.

The workers in the textile factories in Friedek are replying to the employers' demand for a reduction of wages by a determined strike. Under the leadership of the red trade unions over 6000 textile workers went on strike, and after a few stormy days won the victory and forced the textile barons to retreat. Under the leadership of the red trade unions the workers of the Heinik firm in Prerau entered on a strike against wage cuts; several weeks later the glass workers of Josefodol go on strike and partial strikes of the building workers break out at the same time.

The red trade unions are now beginning to understand their tasks in this period; they are beginning to fulfil their tasks, even if with great shortcomings and mistakes.

The rapidly progressing disintegration of the liquidatory Hais group constitutes a great political strengthening of the red trade unions. The economic crisis accelerated the final and open going over of the liquidators to the social fascists. The Executive committee of the Hais trade unions decided at a stormy meeting to unite with the social fascist trade unions. This decision encountered great resistance on the part of the rank and file members of these trade unions. A number of groups collectively joined the red trade unions; thousands of members are leaving the Hais unions and remaining unorganised or individually joining the red trade unions. The liquidatory Hais unions are disappearing from the scene of the class struggle, while they are able to bring over into the reformist trade unions only an insignificant number of members and the apparatus of secretaries.

The work in the social-fascist trade unions, where a great amount of discontent has been observable of late, is practically virgin soil for our revolutionary trade union work. Also in the Czechish-nationalist trade unions this discontent finds expression in the decline of the trade union groups.

The preparation for the V. Congress of the R. I. L. U. was carried out in the sign of self-criticism, of exposure of our shortcomings. It was opened by a discussion on the vital questions of the red trade unions and of the Czechoslovakian proletariat. The recent events in the Ostrau district, in the Brüx district and in other places demonstrate that these discussions are closely bound up with actual practice, with the struggles which are rapidly developing under the leadership of the red trade unions.

The growing strength of the labour movement as well as the growing confidence of the workers in the red trade unions, which is shown by the results of the last factory council elections, are the basis upon which the red trade unions will accelerate their development and consistently fulfil not only those tasks laid down by the IV. R. I. L. U.-Congress, but also the new tasks which the V. Congress of the the R. I. L. U. and the approaching great class battles in Czechoslovakia will set them.