

The Fight for Class Clarity in the Indian Unions

By L. BURNS

IN view of the developing class struggle in India, the incredible growth of the activity of the Indian proletariat, and the decisive and leading role it is playing today in all the economic and political struggles against British imperialism and the native bourgeoisie, the revolutionary wing in the Indian labor movement is faced with many serious and difficult problems. The striking turn of events of the Tenth Session of the All-India Trade Union Congress when a group of Right-Wing T. U. bureaucrats headed by Joshi and Chamanlal seceded from the Congress reveals glaringly the rapid progress of events in the Indian labor movement and our weak as well as strong points.

All the forces of reaction have been mobilized in India to smash the revolutionary wing. Alarmed at the growing activity of the working class, MacDonald's "Labor" Government and the Anglo-Indian bourgeoisie are now using white terror and persecution on a scale never witnessed before to crush the revolutionary movement among the workers.

Despite the energetic protests of the workers of India and of the whole international labor movement, the Meerut prisoners—the leaders of the revolutionary labor movement of India—have been imprisoned for almost a year now. The left wing leaders who were not caught when the first arrests were made, were subsequently "rounded up" and imprisoned.

The revolutionary unions are constantly being raided. The revolutionary press is continually being harassed by new restrictions and prohibitions. The strike movement led mostly by the Left Wing Revolutionary elements, are suppressed by armed force. Strikers are shot down. A ban has been decreed on all picketing. Strikers' meetings and demonstrations are disallowed and are always dis-

persed by the police and the troops. India is now being swept by a wave of white terror and reaction. The British Labor Party and MacDonald's "Labor" Government are proving to the whole world that they are well able to look after the interests of their imperialist masters.

All the measures taken by the imperialist government to strangle the revolutionary labor movement meets with the wholehearted support of the Indian bourgeoisie who, seeing the menace that the development of the labor movement holds out for them, have completely capitulated to British imperialism and are now openly betraying the national liberation movement.

The reformist leaders are giving every support to the Anglo-Indian Government and the employers to smash the revolutionary labor movement. The reformists are on the side of the enemies of the working class. Not only have they silently approved the terrorist measures of the Government. But they are rendering invaluable service to the imperialist Government and the Indian bourgeoisie by egging on the Government to smash the revolutionary labor movement and its leaders with their continual cries of "Communist Danger," "Moscow is controlling the Indian Labor Movement," etc. The imperialist government, the Indian bourgeoisie and the reformists are sparing no efforts to make it impossible for the Left Wing to continue its work.

Despite all the obstacles, despite the serious drawback it suffered when some of its best leaders were arrested in connection with the Meerut affair, and the fact that arrests have been continuing ever since (Renadiv and others), the Left Wing has made considerable headway of late.

The Left Wing gained a remarkable vic-

tory at the last Session of the All-Indian Trade Union Congress in Nagpur—a direct expression of the growing revolutionary movement among the workers of India. Thanks to the active lead it gave during the economic struggles and the fine organizational work carried out, the Left Wing successfully extended its influence over the labor movement of India and substantially strengthened its position. This was made very clear at the Nagpur Session when a group of reformist T. U. bureaucrats headed by Joshi and Chamanlal seceded from the Congress.

For 12 months past the reformists had been preparing the ground to “oust” the revolutionary T. U. representatives from the Congress, but they were themselves compelled to leave, having been utterly defeated on all the fundamental questions discussed at the Tenth Session. The All-India Congress has thus been purged of all those elements who made no secret of their support of imperialism and who have always betrayed working-class interests.

On several burning political issues at the Tenth Session in Nagpur, the Left Wing rallied to its support the majority of the Congress delegates and carried several resolutions and decisions which will have a great bearing on the future development of the Indian Labor movement.

First of all, the Left Wing got a resolution carried on boycotting the Whitely Commission (an imperialist agency), thus strengthening the anti-imperialist struggle of the Indian workers and discrediting and exposing before the working masses the reformist leaders like Joshi and Chamanlal who had been cooperating with the Commission.

Further, by criticising the Amsterdam International (another imperialist outfit) and the British Labor Party, and getting a resolution carried for breaking with the League of Nations International Labor Office, the Left Wing dealt a severe blow at international social imperialism which for many years has been endeavoring to get control of the Indian labor movement and to dam back the growing working-class struggle against foreign and native exploitation.

The political resolution adopted at the Con-

gress does not only condemn Nehru's Draft Constitution and demand complete national independence for India, but puts forward the slogan of a *Workers' Republic for India*. This is a class demand directed not only against imperialism but against the capitalist system as a whole.

The Congress' affiliation to the Anti-Imperialist League and the contact thus set up with the oppressed peoples in all parts of the world, will strengthen the position of the Indian workers in their fight against imperialism, will raise their prestige in the eyes of all the foremost workers throughout the world, and will go a long way towards transforming Congress into a militant organ of working-class struggle against foreign and native exploitation.

Another important development is that contact has again been established with the Indian Welfare League.

At the Tenth Session, the Left Wing took up very timely, although not altogether clearly, the question of using the weapon of a general strike to fight imperialism and capitalism. The conditions are now ripe in India for the calling of a general strike. It is the most important task we are faced with at the present time. We should remember that it was under Left Wing pressure that the last Session (held in December 1928) adopted a decision to call a general strike should strikers continue to be shot down and should the *Trades Disputes Bill* be endorsed.

Although strikers have been shot down ever since and the Industrial Disputes Regulation Act has become law, the T. U. bureaucrats who headed the Trade Union Congress (Joshi, Bakhale, etc.) deliberately sabotaged the General Strike decision of the Ninth Session. Jawaharlal Nehru, the “Left” Nationalist and the Chairman of the Trade Union Congress in 1929 joined Joshi in sabotaging the General Strike Resolution. By raising the question of the general strike at the Nagpur Session of the Congress through its representative comrade Ruikar, the Left Wing acted in correct and timely fashion.

As we see from the circular letter issued by Deshpande, the new General-Secretary of the Congress, the Left Wing is at last be-

ginning to give proper attention to the problem of training good militant leaders from the ranks of the workers themselves. Thanks to Left Wing influence the New Congress Executive Committee has already launched a slogan urging the putting forward of leaders from the rank and file.

The victory of the Left Wing is not disputed anywhere. The Tenth Session of the All-India Trade Union Congress proved a milestone in the history of the revolutionary labor movement of India.

The splendid victory of the Left Wing and the part it is playing in the trade union movement raises a series of new difficulties, and incidentally, several new tasks. To overcome these difficulties and to carry out its work effectively, the Left Wing must get its bearings in the present situation and carefully note the experience and the mistakes of the past.

The chief menace for the Indian Trade Union movement at the present time is National Reformism. Objectively, the National reformists or the Left Nationalists (Jawaharlal Nehru, Subba Chandra Bose, etc.) who formed the majority with the Left Wing in the Congress after the secession of the reformists, are the agents of the national bourgeoisie in the ranks of the working-class movement. They are retarding the development of the revolutionary labor movement far more cunningly and skillfully than the social reformists (after the style of Joshi) had ever been able to do.

They do not hesitate to use left catchwords about struggling against imperialism. But this is merely to throw dust into the eyes of the workers. Wherever it is in the interest of the native bourgeoisie they even support strikes at *foreign* enterprises (as was seen in *Golmuri*), but they condemn any struggle and any movement among the workers if the interests of "national" capital are affected (witness the Jamshedpur Metal Workers' Strike in 1928).

That the national reformists should have supported some of the resolutions submitted by the Left Wing and have remained in the Congress after the secession of the reformists, should mislead no one and should not halt

the campaign to expose them and to oust them from the leadership of the labor movement.

By adapting themselves to the present radicalization of the masses, and taking all measures to penetrate the labor movement with a view to weakening the working class struggle from within and to subordinate it to the political leadership of the National Congress — which, we might add has now realized the power and the significance of the working class—in order to use it in striking a bargain with imperialism, the national reformists will, of course, not hesitate to make left gestures and use revolutionary phrases.

What the national reformists are really up to is divulged by the words and action of their leaders.

Speaking on several occasions, Subha Chandra Bose, the newly elected Chairman of the Trade Union Congress, bitterly protested against "the pernicious attempts to get the labor movement to support the slogans of international communism." He was definitely opposed to all talk of a class war.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the present chairman of the National Congress and the former chairman of the All-India Trade Union Congress, never loses an opportunity to proclaim his loyalty to socialism, he urges everybody to struggle against imperialism and capitalism, points to the treachery of the Labor Party, but actually he is compromising with imperialism all along the line (having signed together with the Right bourgeois nationalist leaders the Opportunist Manifesto in Delhi in reply to the Viceroy's declaration) and supporting the half-baked resolutions and the compromises adopted at the last Session of the National Congress in Lahore.

Very instructive in this connection is the career of Chamanlal, a former national reformist who played a prominent part in initiating the recent split in the Trade Union Congress. It was not so long ago that Chamanlal was championing Socialism. Like Nehru he spoke loudly against imperialism and the British Labor Party. Today Chamanlal has openly gone over to imperialism. He did not hesitate to take part in the work of the Whitley Commission and betray the interests of the working class of India. The

example of Chamanlal should serve as a warning to all the Indian workers and especially to the revolutionary wing.

These facts make clear the true character of the national reformists. During the Tenth Session of the Trade Union Congress, however, the Lefts did not steer altogether clear, ideologically, of the national-reformists. Nor did they unmask them before the working masses. The impression may well have gained ground therefore among the workers that no differences exist in principle between the Left Revolutionary Wing and the National Reformists.

Two of our Left Wing leaders, Kuikar and Qulkarni, published a statement in the press expressing even the conviction that "under the leadership of Subha Chandra Bose, the Congress will prove strong enough to withstand all the onslaughts levelled against it by the moderates." Such tactics only tend to strengthen the position of the national reformists in the labor movement, and this can only retard the working class struggle.

In the present day situation in India the national reformists are the biggest menace in the labor movement, for with the lack of real revolutionary leaders, the benevolent attitude of the Government and their juggling of left phrases, they are in a position to dupe certain sections of the working class and to consolidate their positions in the labor organizations. The national-reformists are extremely dangerous "allies," and an ideological struggle, and later, an organizational struggle, is inevitable. One of the most important tasks confronting the Left Wing today is to expose the true character of the national reformists before the working masses.

The Left Wing will have to be exceedingly careful and adopt a correct class line in tackling the problem of the united front and the questions that have arisen in connection with the recent split. As a matter of fact, these questions are being now pushed to the fore.

The national reformists, who out of political reasons were unable to join the reformists in leaving the Congress over the issue of the Whitley Commission, for in this way they would have demonstrated their alliance

with imperialism, although as regards the class struggle they support the reformist position far more than they do the Left Revolutionary Wing, are now eager to see the "united front" restored and have the reformists return to the Congress. To be sure, Subha Chandra Bose, a national reformist, and the present chairman of the trade union Congress, contemplates calling a conference in the very near future to "smooth the differences and prepare for joint action."

The reformists deliberately engineering the present split hoping in this way to preserve their influence over certain sections of the workers and thus weaken the revolutionary struggle of the Indian proletariat. They came out very clearly at the recent Trade Union Congress on the question of their mutual relations with the Left Wing. In his statement to the press, N. M. Joshi, the leader of the reformist bureaucrats who seceded, declared quite definitely that a conference to restore unity should not be convened "until steps are taken to conceal the Resolutions passed at Nagpur by the Trade Union Congress."

In other words, the reformists agree to set up the united front only if the Left Wing gives up its positions, withdraws the resolutions carried at the Nagpur Session and capitulates completely to a small clique of reformist leaders who have lost touch with the masses. But the position of the Left Wing should be just as clear and definite on the question of the united front with the reformist T. U. bureaucrats. All vacillation on this question will only play into the hands of the reformists.

First of all, it should not be forgotten that, as Comrade Deshpande, the present General-Secretary of the Trade Union Congress correctly pointed out, there is no split in the Congress as yet, since only a few T. U. bureaucrats seceded without having received any mandate to do so from the rank and file. We must steer clear of any attempts to set up the "United Front" with the reformist leaders if this means forsaking our principles, giving up our militant class policy and concealing the treacherous character of reformism.

The essence of our revolutionary united

front tactics is not to make combinations with the reformist bureaucrats, but to establish the united front from the bottom up, steadily winning over the masses to our side. The Left Wing must therefore carry out a vigorous campaign, systematically and ruthlessly exposing the treacherous character of social reformism, using concrete facts taken from every-day life and concentrate its activities in future on organizing the unorganized workers, winning over the rank and file in the reformist unions, drawing them into existing revolutionary organizations or organize new unions wherever necessary.

The campaign to expose the reformists and to win over the rank and file in the reformist organizations should be pushed forward especially at the present time since the reformists are now thinking of opening the Inaugural Congress of the new organization, the All-India Trade Union Federation. These activities are all the more important since the Left Wing did not make sufficient use of the Congress to show up the treacherous role of the reformists.

It is true that the Left Wing attacked the reformists when the question of boycotting the Whitley Commission was discussed and also on the contemplated organization of a reformist Pan-Asiatic Congress, and on the question of affiliation to the Pan-Pacific TU Congress. The Left Wing put in some very good work here, but it was not enough. To expose the reformists only on these questions is to leave the work half done. Their true role and treachery should have been exposed with facts and figures that could have been understood by all sections of the working class, facts taken from the everyday struggle of the workers and the recent strikes. They should have been used to show the masses whose interests the reformists are really defending. This mistake was rectified later to a certain extent. The two circular letters issued by Deshpande, the Congress Secretary, which give a correct appreciation of the recent events, reveal clearly enough how the reformists sold the recent strikes and how they ignored working-class interests.

As regards the united front with the re-

formists, several of the Left Wingers were not sure of their ground at the Tenth Session. This is clear, to take one example alone, from the statement published in the press by two prominent Left Wing leaders, Ruikar, the Chairman of the Left Great Indian Peninsular Railwaymen's Union and Kulkarni, the Vice-Chairman of the Trade Union Congress. They appealed to all trade union leaders of India to forget their differences and support the Congress. "We hope," write Ruikar and Kulkarni, "that Joshi will persuade his moderate colleagues to present a united front to our common enemy—capitalism and imperialism."

Past experience should have convinced everyone that Joshi and Co., have now set up such close contact with imperialism and capitalism that it would be hopeless to ever expect them to do anything else but betray the workers. Still, there are some Left Wing comrades who still overrate the role and influence of the reformists in the Indian labor movement and, following a mistaken united front policy, frequently withhold criticism and occasionally even try to come to terms with the reformist leaders, which always means a retreat from our class position.

That such a policy inevitably weakens the forces of the working class movement and leads to defeat is borne out by many examples, the General Strike of the Bombay Textile Workers in 1928 being a case in point. The ranks of the working class can only be strengthened and the whole movement given a real militant outlook by building up the united front from the bottom up on the basis of a militant class programme. It is therefore plain that one of the basic tasks confronting the Left Wing in the Indian trade union movement today is to struggle implacably against the reformist leaders to win over all the workers in the reformist organizations.

And finally, the Left Wing must give more attention to the strike movement in India and draw the proper lessons. Several large strikes took place in India in 1929 (general strikes of Bombay Textile Workers and Calcutta jute workers, the metal workers' strike in Golmuri, etc.—), whose political

influence could hardly be overestimated. All the strikes in 1929 were notable for the fine militancy shown by the workers, for the way the unorganized workers and women workers were drawn into the fight. Left Wing leadership was strengthened. Rank and file workers took active part in the representative strike committees that led the strikes; and the economic struggles from defensive movements frequently turned into counter-attacks against the whole capitalist system. Political demands were launched and street fighting took place between the strikers and police, etc.

It is a fact, however, that the class struggles did not find due reflection in the work and the decisions of the Tenth Session of the Trade Union Congress. The lessons from these struggles were not noted. The Congress, having ousted the reformists and cleared the decks for action, did not take advantage of the present session to prepare the ground for a proper lead for the impending struggles in India.

The Left Wing must now take serious steps to make careful preparations and to

coordinate the strikes better than in the past, drawing all unorganized workers into the strike movements, and getting the workers themselves to take part in the work of the leading organs. From now on the Left Wing must give an independent lead to the economic struggles of the Indian proletariat.

The remarkable development of the economic struggle in India which is increasingly turning into a political struggle now raises the question of a *General Strike*. At the present time, when all sections of the Indian bourgeoisie have betrayed the national-emanicipation movement, it is only a general strike of the working class that can raise the anti-imperialist struggle on a higher political plane.

Such a strike will deal a smashing blow at the whole capitalist regime in India. The Left Wing must now give serious attention to the question of a general strike. Careful preparations must be made and a suitable moment chosen for its declaration. But we must not permit the reformists or any of the wavering elements to have any hand in its leadership.