

NOTES OF THE MONTH

*Communist Congress—Labour Conference—Rôle of Communist Congress—Situation—Meaning of “End of Stabilisation”
—Future of the Crisis—Preparation for Revolutionary Issues—No Peaceful Solution of the Crisis—Strategic Conclusion—Revolutionary Significance of Present Mass Struggle—Capitalist Anxieties—Problems of the Mass Struggle—Unemployed and Employed Workers—The United Front*

THE results of the Twelfth Congress of the Communist Party, which was held in Battersea last month, are of concern, not only to the immediate members and supporters of the Communist Party, but to the whole working class. The issues dealt with were not simply the special problems of one section or party inside the working class, but the common problems of the whole working-class struggle at the present stage, viewed from the standpoint of the working-class revolution, that is, of the permanent interests of the working class as a whole. The kind of issues discussed were: the crisis and the workers' answer; the capitalist offensive; the strike movement and rising mass struggle, its lessons and problems; the fight against unemployment and the National Government's economy campaign; the war question; the rising left movements in the trade unions and among I.L.P. workers; the united working-class front. All these questions were discussed both theoretically, in relation to the general understanding of the situation and the line ahead; and practically, that is, the most careful, concrete exact conclusions were reached as to the next steps to be taken by the militant workers in order to advance. It will be seen that a conference of workers' delegates, all fresh from direct participation in the struggle, discussing these issues, is a very different kind of conference from the ordinary traditional party conference in this country, only concerned to prepare an electioneering

programme. The Communist Congress is the only workers' congress in this country which deals with the problems of the working-class struggle as a whole, which faces all the questions raised by the struggle, and points the way forward. For this reason, the results of the Congress should be carefully studied by all workers, including in the Independent Labour Party, in the Labour Party and in the trade unions, who wish to discuss and clear further the path forward in the present critical stage.

CONTRAST the Labour Party Conference and Trades Union Congress in order to see the basic difference of aim and approach. These were both in form workers' conferences, nominally representing very much wider bodies of workers, two millions in the case of the Labour Party, three millions in the case of the Trades Union Congress. But did they concern themselves with the problems facing the workers? With the attacks of capitalism on every front, and how to defeat them? With the strike movement? With the struggles of the unemployed? With the mobilising and uniting of the workers for the fight? Nothing of the kind. The devotion of a fraction of a session to one or two easy gestures, such as a formal vote of "protest" against one particular police charge, or the transparent manœuvre of the cotton strike fund, constituted the total attention accorded by these leading bodies to the problems of the workers' struggle—at the same time as the actual policy, and the refusal to receive the unemployed marchers, showed their real relation to the struggle and their identity with the line of the National Government. What was the main concern and activity of these conferences? The main concern was the preparation of paper "programmes" without end—programmes for the more efficient organisation of capitalist industry, for the reorganisation of banking, for public boards of control, even for so-called "nationalisation" within the capitalist state, &c.—all bearing this character of paper programmes without any relation whatever to the workers' struggle and urgent present issues. Here we see the full tradition of capitalist parliamentarism: the oblivion

to all realities of existing struggles, and hypnotising of attention on to a long set of promises for the future to be dangled before the electorate. "Elect us," runs the refrain of every capitalist party, Conservative, Liberal, or Labour, "and we shall do this, that, and the other for you." The task of the party conference becomes to prepare the most plausible programme of promises for the electors.

THE character and work of the Communist Party is in complete contrast to this. The Communist Party does not come forward with promises, in order to ask for power in return for its promises. For the Communist Party, it is the workers themselves alone who can free themselves, who must win power; and the rôle of the Communist Party is only as a part of this common struggle of all the workers, leading the way, fighting in the forefront, organising the struggle, showing the way of advance. The Communists, as Marx said long ago, "have no interests apart from those of the working class as a whole." What makes the distinctive character of their lead in the general struggle is, first, its international character: "in the various national struggles of the proletariat, they express and champion the interests of the proletariat as a whole, independently of nationality"; and, second, its deeper class character, over-riding all sectional interests: "in the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as whole." Or, expressing the same conception in another form, they unite the present struggle with the *future* of the Movement: "the Communists fight on behalf of the immediate aims and interests of the working class, but in the present movement they are also defending the future of that movement." These may sound very simple, familiar elementary truths; but they are at the heart of a correct understanding of the work of the Congress. *It is just in the power to unite the present struggles with the future of the movement, with the working-class revolution and the approaching*

revolutionary struggles, that lies the heart of the lead of the present Congress. The Congress faced in close and concrete form all the manifold issues and problems confronting the workers at the present stage, faced the smallest practical details of the mobilising and organising work that must be achieved ; but at the same time every part of this work was in organic relation to a central line and understanding of the whole situation, of the development of the workers' struggle and of the path of advance of the workers' revolution. The first necessity, in order to grasp firmly the results of the Congress, is to grasp firmly this central line and understanding of the situation and of the consequent line of the workers' struggle.

WHAT was the view of the situation reached by the Congress? Here the work runs closely with that of the preceding international meeting, the Twelfth Plenum of the International Executive, which drew the balance of the situation on the world scale. It is self-evident to every one that during the past year or fifteen months, roughly since the collapse of the Labour Government, formation of the National Government, collapse of sterling, Japanese invasion of Manchuria, &c., we have been entering into a new and far sharper stage of the crisis, with far more rapid development of events. Up to 1931 the crisis, despite its gigantic scale, still bore on the surface so far resemblance to the typical recurrent crisis of pre-war capitalism that it could be widely treated, as was done by social democracy, as simply a large-scale example of the cyclical crisis of capitalism ; and alone the Communists, who also alone had predicted it, insisted from the first on its distinct character as a special crisis developing in the midst of the general crisis of capitalism (the break-up since 1914). The events of 1931 have overwhelmingly confirmed the correctness of this. It is only necessary to consider such developments as the collapse of the Young Plan and whole reparations system, the collapse of the gold standard in the majority of countries, the war in the Far East,

the dictatorship in Germany, and rising mass struggles, to see the new type of period into which we are entering in consequence of the crisis. The Twelfth Plenum designated what has happened as the end of capitalist stabilisation.

IT is necessary to understand this conception of the end of stabilisation quite sharply and exactly, and not as a phrase or rhetorical flourish. It means that the main pillars on which the partial stabilisation of capitalism was built up in the post-war period, and especially between 1924 and 1928, have now broken down, *i.e.*, the restoration of the gold standard and stable exchange, the Dawes and Young Plans, Washington, Versailles, reconstruction on the basis of the American creditor, re-establishment of production and trade up to the pre-war level and beyond it, &c. The Sixth Congress in 1928, already noted the completion of this second period of post-war capitalism, or process of reconstruction, and opening of the third period in which capitalism, having reached to a higher level of productive forces and production than before the war (except in Britain, where the decay has, without interruption, been more advanced and extreme), was driving to increased contradictions and new and greater crisis. The Tenth Plenum in the summer of 1929 declared that this new world economic crisis was now about to break out, and would start from America, following the frenzy of speculation then in progress there, and spread over the world. The Eleventh Plenum in the spring of 1931 declared that the world economic crisis, which had then raged for a year-and-a-half, was undermining the basis of capitalist stabilisation, that "capitalist stabilisation is coming to an end," that the basic contradiction of declining capitalism and ascending socialism in the Soviet Union was now the forefront of the world situation, and that the effects of the economic crisis were showing themselves more and more in political forms, in political reaction and the advance to fascism, in imperialist contradictions and the advance to war, and in the rising class struggle. To-day this process has reached the point at which the Twelfth

Plenum is able to lay down as a completed fact "the end of capitalist stabilisation."

THIS is, however, only one side of the picture. The conception of the end of stabilisation, taken by itself, has still only reference to the past. What is important is the conclusion for the future. Where does the crisis lead? Where will it end? This question is on the lips of all, becoming ever more insistent, as all the ordinary prophecies of recovery are successively falsified, and the universal suffering grows. Does it lead to the final collapse of capitalism, as the left Social-Democrats (I.L.P.) argue, looking only to an automatic economic collapse, and leaving out of account the decisive question of the active rôle of the proletariat, which alone can finally overthrow capitalism? Or does it lead to gradual overcoming of the crisis, once the dead point or bottom has been reached, and renewed upward movement, after the model of the pre-war commercial crises—as all the bourgeois economists and politicians, including their Labour followers, calculate and hope, hailing every little sign, every fluctuation of production and trade, as the "beginning of the end" and the "harbinger of recovery"? To this question the Twelfth Plenum has given an explicit answer, the argument of which it is very important to note exactly.

THE end of stabilisation does not yet mean that we are in a direct revolutionary situation. The objective conditions for this are rapidly developing. But this requires also the subjective readiness of the working class; and the influence of social-democracy and of the social democratic trade union leadership, reflecting the still surviving reformist-democratic-parliamentary traditions and illusions, is still strong and able to hold back the mass of the workers, especially of the decisive sections of the organised, employed workers. This influence is visibly weakening and being undermined by the exposure of the crisis; in Germany, where the stage is most advanced, the Communist Party has already,

as shown at the last elections, out-numbered the Social-Democrats in the most important industrial regions, in Berlin, the Ruhr, and the Rhineland industrial towns, and is well on the way to leading the majority of the working class; and, although this is an extreme stage of advance, in all countries the process of revolutionisation is going forward. We are still in the preparatory stage preceding the direct revolutionary crisis, but with diminishing time and with increasing pressure of the situation. The urgency of hastening forward this development of carrying forward the present partial struggles to wider and wider struggles, and to conscious struggle against the whole régime and for the workers' answer to the crisis, is obvious in view of the extremely rapid development of the crisis.

BUT the fact that we are not yet in the direct revolutionary crisis, that we are still in the critical preparatory stage, does not mean that capitalism can hope to achieve a peaceful solution of the crisis and gradual renewal of normal conditions. On the contrary. The character of the crisis in the present stage of capitalist decay has shown that it cannot be measured by the old standards and forms of the pre-war crisis, and that it cannot look to any "normal" outcome of the old type. The old type of crisis found its solution, first through the wholesale destruction and weeding out of smaller concerns and consequent extension of the field for the surviving larger ones—a species of unconscious natural rationalisation; and second, through the opening out of new untouched or incompletely opened regions of the world to capitalist penetration. To-day, both these processes find themselves blocked. Monopoly capitalism has reached such an extreme point that the surviving giants can no longer save themselves by devouring their smaller competitors (artificial, conscious rationalisation had already been widely carried through before the crisis); the number of bankruptcies is more limited; the giant trusts maintain themselves with state aid, maintain a relatively high level of profits and dividends in a dwindling

market, on a basis of restricted production with artificially-protected markets through a network of tariffs, prohibitions, licences, bounties, subsidies, &c.—and the crisis is thus prolonged. At the same time the division of the world by capitalism, outside the Soviet Union, is already complete; the Chinese national struggle resists further penetration; the conquest of new markets can only be attained by one or another imperialist group through large-scale violence and explosions, by war between the imperialist powers for the new division of the world, by war on China, by war on the Soviet Union. The growing conflicts of the Imperialist Powers, especially Britain and America, consequent on the crisis, repeatedly check the attempts at a rational harmonious solution of the problems confronting them. Alongside of this, the contradiction between the enormous productive forces and the poverty of the masses is now so great as to admit of no scope for a peaceful revival of production within capitalist conditions of property ownership. Thus all the conditions point with absolute certainty to one conclusion. *There can be no peaceful, purely economic, solution of the crisis. The crisis drives to a violent outcome.* The social and political contradictions, the mass struggle, raised to ever-greater heights by the consequences of the crisis, drive in the direction of revolution. The rising antagonisms of the imperialist powers, in the desperate fight for markets, for domination, for the new division of the world, drive to war. Thus the Twelfth Plenum characterised the present period the situation of the end of capitalist stabilisation, as a period of *transition*, of “transition to a new cycle of wars and revolutions.”

WHAT is the *strategic conclusion* of this analysis—that is to say, the practical conclusion of the necessary line to guide the activity of the working class in the present period in such a way as to carry it forward to the next? This is the decisively important question. The answer to this question depends on the analysis of the transitional or preparatory character of the present stage of the

crisis as leading, through growing conflicts, through sharp turns and explosions, to a new series of wars and revolutions. This means that *the present partial struggles, the developing mass struggle, take on a new and vital significance* in relation to the present stage of the crisis. They are, even in respect of the smallest struggle, *preparation* for the coming revolutionary issues and conflicts, and must be viewed as such. Through them the widest masses of workers must be won to the fighting front, and must be awakened to the political issues. The working class is gathering its forces, is requiring to mobilise all its forces ; the sections of workers not yet active must be drawn into the struggle, even at the outset on the most elementary limited and sectional issues ; and at the same time, through this elementary struggle, and alongside of it, revolutionary political consciousness must be developed for the coming fight. From this follows the twofold character of the lead of the Twelfth Plenum and of the Party Congress in Britain. The situation is seen as driving to revolutionary issues. But for this very reason the most intensive detailed mass work, organisation and development of partial struggles and linking of the revolutionary advance-guard with the widest masses of workers, becomes more than ever important. At the same time this intensified mass work, and concentration on the detail day-to-day propaganda and organisation in the unions and factories, must go forward ; and at the same time, in close unity with this, intensified revolutionary propaganda and response to the basic issues of the crisis, not merely reflecting, but going beyond and drawing forward the awakening general discontent of the masses over the crisis, and carrying it forward to political revolutionary consciousness and fight. Either process without the other loses its meaning and defeats its purpose.

IT is in this perspective that the revolutionary significance of the present developing mass struggle in Britain stands clear. At the present stage the smallest strike is no longer solely economic in character. Every demand, however limited,

every resistance to a wage-cut or to dismissals, every demand for unemployed relief, inevitably comes up against all the issues of the crisis, takes on the character of a struggle against the crisis and the capitalist way out, of a struggle, not only against the particular employer or local authority, but against the whole state and the capitalist régime. This already becomes increasingly visible in concrete form in the new character of the struggles ; in Lancashire, with the mass character of the fight, and with the wholesale drafting in of mounted police ; in the unemployed Hunger March and mass demonstrations and conflicts with the police. The readiness of the workers to struggle, in spite of all the economic arguments of defeatism of the Labour leadership, bears already the first beginnings of a revolutionary character, of a challenge to the crisis and to the capitalist régime. The consciousness of the workers is awakening to the issues of the crisis. Our task is, through these partial struggles, to develop this consciousness and to develop the organisation of the workers. The field is open, as never before, to revolutionary leadership, which is able to get close to the concrete issues of the immediate struggle, and at the same time to answer the basic questions of the crisis and to show the revolutionary path of advance.

THE rulers of finance-capital in Britain are strongly conscious of this revolutionary significance of the partial struggles at the present stage. This is the underlying meaning of the famous pessimist speech of the Governor of the Bank of England, Montagu Norman, at the Bankers' Dinner at the Mansion House on October 20. His words have been widely quoted as evidence of the pessimism, of the sense of impotence and bankruptcy of capitalism in the present crisis. But there is more than that ; and it is worth noting his words exactly, and the circumstances in which they were spoken, to get their force. He said (*Daily Telegraph* report, October 21, 1932) :

In spite of every attempt that has been made—mostly in isolation to a large extent—the vast forces of the world, the herd instinct, the desperation of the people who have neither work nor market, have brought about a series of events and a general tendency which appear to me at the present time to be outside the control of any man, of any Government of any country. . . .

I will admit that for the moment the way to me is not clear.

“The desperation of the people who have neither work nor market.” This is the basis of this utterance of despair. Note well the circumstances in which they were spoken. The speech was delivered on October 20. On October 11–12 had taken place the Belfast fighting and shootings. On October 15 the Belfast authorities had granted the increased relief scales. On October 18 had taken place the demonstration and fighting round the London County Hall (and on the same day Henderson had resigned the leadership of the Labour Party, in order to facilitate the manœuvres of the Labour Party to play a “left” rôle). The line stands out clear. *Behind the pessimism of Montagu Norman, of the capitalist rulers, is the rising mass struggle.* They know that every struggle in the present crisis, in the present extreme stage of capitalist decay and disequilibrium, shatters further the whole structure, defeats every capitalist policy, and at the same time increases the confidence of the workers and their refusal to accept any longer the burdens of the capitalist crisis as inevitable. But this same knowledge can give the workers the greater confidence to go forward with the present struggles as already the preparation of the future revolutionary battles.

THE problems of the present rising mass struggle, its strength and weaknesses as so far developed, and the necessary path of advance, are thus the decisive practical problems confronting the working class and that constituted the principal subject of discussion of the Communist Congress. The developments of this year have shown a powerful rising strike movement, of which Lancashire has been the outstanding example, with many new features in the forms and

character of the struggle ; and a powerful agitation of the unemployed, with mass demonstrations and conflicts reaching a stage not previously touched in this country. What were the principal weaknesses of the movement as so far developed ? We may note several. The revolutionary forces are still very small and isolated ; and the mass-response to the conflict, the element of mass-spontaneity, far outstripped the leadership and organisation (experience of the London mass demonstrations). The strike movement still revealed the power of the trade union bureaucracy to break it, conspicuously both in the case of the weavers and the spinners. Behind this lies revealed a still further and basic weakness of the revolutionary movement in this country at present ; that it has still only touched the fringes of the employed workers in the main industries, and especially of the trade union organised workers, the mass of whom, despite growing discontent, still remain within the control of the reformist trade union leadership, and have not yet confidence in alternative methods and leadership.

CAPITALISM seeks to use the conditions of the crisis to drive a barrier between the employed and the unemployed workers, and to use this division as one of its principal pillars of support at the present stage. The fight over unemployment tends to become a fight of the unemployed, with only limited organised participation of the employed workers. The revolutionary workers, themselves in a heavy proportion unemployed, find easier response among the unemployed workers, or in general propaganda, and tend to neglect the heavier, stubborn, vitally indispensable work, through the unions and the factories, to win the decisive sections of the organised employed workers against the reformist leadership. But without the basic work in the unions and in the factories the line of independent struggle and independent strike leadership becomes empty ; and the effective control remains in the hands of the reformist leadership. Thus the Congress was brought to the root question of practical work in front : the necessity to strengthen

agitation, propaganda and organisation in the unions and in the factories, to develop every movement of struggle, every opposition movement, against capitalism and against the reformist trade union leadership, as the necessary condition of the further effective advance of the mass struggle.

WHAT is now the need? The need is to develop a powerful common front of struggle against the capitalist offensive, against the employers' attack and the National Government attack, and against the war-preparations of capitalism. Every present particular struggle, in which the workers combine their action for their immediate demands, every strike, every demonstration and campaign, every movement of opposition within the working-class organisations, is already a first step towards this united front. But these are only a beginning. More is needed. These local, partial and sectional struggles need to be developed and strengthened to bring out the consciousness of the common struggle, of the common issues, economic and also political, of the struggle, to draw in wider and wider masses of workers, to throw up new forces of leadership, and thus to lead the way forward to a powerful nation-wide united front movement of struggle against the National Government. In the words of the Congress main resolution :

The united front of struggle embracing the widest masses of the workers in the factories and trade unions, and including the working women and housewives, must be organised to successfully carry through the fight.

(1) Against the capitalist offensive led by the National Government and actively supported by the policy of the reformist trade union leaders on the wages of the workers, and unemployment and health insurance benefits, provision of work schemes for the unemployed, the Means Test, rationalisation, against any restriction on existing social services, high prices through tariffs and inflation, for freedom to strike, and against all anti-labour legislation now being used to try and smash the increasing militant resistance of the workers.

(2) Against the National Government's war preparations, and its active co-operation with other imperialist powers for armed

intervention against the Soviet Union, and particularly its policy of supporting and encouraging the anti-Soviet aims of the Japanese and French imperialists ; mass mobilisation against the breaking of the trade agreement with the Soviet Union. . .To systematically expose, especially in the factories and trade unions, the active support of the war policy of the National Government by the reformist leaders under the cover of pacifist phrases, and even verbal defence of the Soviet Union.

(3) For the withdrawal of all armed forces from the colonial countries, for the full independence of the colonies, with the right of separation from the British Empire.

This is the decisive lead of the Congress for the immediate struggle in front.

R. P. D.