

HOW TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE EXTRAORDINARILY FAVOURABLE SITUATION; HOW TO OVERCOME BACKWARDNESS

(Results of the XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I.)

THE XI. Plenum met over a year after the meeting of the Enlarged Presidium of the E.C.C.I. During the past year, events had developed rapidly in the direction foretold by the VI. Congress of the Communist International in its characterisation of the contradictions of the third post-war period, by the X. Plenum of the E.C.C.I., and finally by the Enlarged Presidium.

Since the Enlarged Presidium met, the crisis of over-production on the basis of the general crisis of capitalism developed into the greatest economic crisis the world has ever known, embracing all capitalist countries and all the most important branches of industry, depriving of work, throwing out on the streets, and dooming to hunger 35,000,000 workers, not counting those who work part-time and the workers in the colonies, who have not been included in the statistics. This crisis is aggravated by the fact that it is combined with a grave agrarian crisis which has already dragged on for ten years.

Simultaneously, in another zone, in the U.S.S.R., we witness the tempestuous growth of Socialist construction. The turn of the peasantry to Socialism has been strengthened. The collective farm movement has again begun to grow with an ever-increasing tempo and to-day already 45 per cent. of the peasant households have been collectivised. Socialist competition is growing, shock brigades are growing, and we have already entered the decisive year of the Five-Year Plan, which, it is clear to all, will be realised in four years.

“The contradictions between the capitalist and Socialist systems have never manifested themselves so forcefully, the superiority of the Socialist system over the capitalist system has never revealed itself so visibly, as to-day . . . Capitalist stabilization is drawing to its end. In the U.S.S.R. the building of the foundations of Socialist economy is being completed.” (Theses of the XI. Plenum, from Comrade Manuilsky's Report.)

We are witnessing in capitalist countries, on the one hand, the furious growth of Fascism, the sharp increase of political reaction of the ruling classes trying to find a capitalist way out of the crisis at the expense of a lowering of the level of the living conditions of wide working masses through their further economic and political enslavement, trying to get out of the crisis by means of military intervention against the U.S.S.R.

“Danger of military intervention against the U.S.S.R. has become the immediate danger for the whole world proletariat.” (Theses from Comrade Cachin's Report.)

In capitalist, colonial and semi-colonial countries we are witnessing, on the other hand, the growing dissatisfaction of the widest masses, the growth of their sympathy for the country of the proletariat dictatorship, the growth of Communism, the growth, even *though unequally*, of the revolutionary upsurge, in some European countries the growing basis for a revolutionary crisis, and in some colonial countries the existence already of a rapidly maturing revolutionary crisis. During the last year, in Great Britain, we saw again a rising wave of strike movement in Scotland, South Wales and Lancashire. In the U.S.A. we saw our Party able to bring one and a half million unemployed out on the streets on March 1st, 1930. In Czecho-Slovakia we saw a powerful movement of the unemployed led by our Party. In Germany the movement has already been raised to a much higher stage. Four and a half million votes for our Party at the elections, a 50 per cent. increase in the membership of our Party, the Berlin metalworkers' strike, the Ruhr strike under our independent leadership, the continual demonstrations accompanied by bloody encounters with the police, the beginning of the disintegration of Social-Democracy—all this bears witness to the fact that in Germany the prerequisites for a revolutionary crisis are growing. The same can be said of Poland, where, together with the upsurge of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, we see the upsurge of the revolutionary movement of the peasantry, particularly in Western Ukraine, where the peasants burned the landowners' estates, where Pilsudski's forces pacified them by punitive expeditions. And in Roumania (in the Dobrudja) and in Bulgaria we see a powerful upsurge of the peasant movement. In China, where the Red Army grew to 100,000, where the Soviets have already been organised in districts with a total population of tens of millions, where the Red Army successfully repelled the offensive of Chang-Kai-Shek, we can already speak of a revolutionary crisis. The maturing revolutionary crisis in India is taking other forms. The revolutionary crisis in Spain is growing.

We see that there is full justification for the Theses of the XI. Plenum, declaring :

"The development of the class struggle under the conditions of the further development of the world economic crisis confronts the broad masses of the toilers with the decisive alternatives : either the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or the dictatorship of the proletariat."

The objective conditions are very favourable for us, but the subjective factor (the preparedness of the Communist Parties for the great future battles at the head of the working class) lags tremendously behind the tempo of developing events, in spite of the undoubted achievements of some of our parties, particularly of the German Communist Party.

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It was in this situation that the XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. took place. They were confronted by a complicated task—to mark out the path for the overcoming of our backwardness. To solve this task, unsparing self-criticism was demanded and was made at the Plenum. It was in the process of this self-criticism, in the debates, that it became manifest, as Comrade Kuusinen, closing the Plenum, correctly noted, that our International was more united and monolithic than it had ever been, while at the same time we observe now in the camp of our enemies and, above all, in the camp of the II. International the growth of elements of disintegration which represents a clear reflection of the deep crisis of capitalism and the strengthening of the positions in favour of Communism.

On the agenda of the Plenum there were only two points closely related to one another : (1) Report of Comrade Manuilsky—"On the Tasks of the Sections of the Comintern in connection with the deepening of the economic crisis and the growth, in a number of countries, of the prerequisites of a revolutionary crisis" with the joint reports of Comrades Thälmann, Lensky and Chemodanov on the Situation and Tasks of the Communist Party of Germany, the Communist Party of Poland and the Young Communist International respectively. (2) Report of Comrade Cachin—"On the Growing Danger of Military Intervention Against the U.S.S.R. and the Tasks of the Communists." We shall not dwell here on Comrade Cachin's report, which is of immediate significance, nor on the discussions on this report; this question will be dealt with in a number of special articles.

We shall only take up the first report, around which the discussions in the Plenum and in the Commissions developed, mainly because in treating the questions touched upon by this report some comrades and even some parties showed mistakes and vagueness at the eve of the Plenum,

which in the future might lead to serious mistakes. In connection with this the Plenum was confronted with the following tasks :

- (1) To make clear the question of the essence of the revolutionary crisis and of the conditions of its growth, in order to avoid "left" and right mistakes;
- (2) To make absolutely clear the questions connected with the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and its different forms, as well as those connected with Fascism and Social-Fascism, as two manifestations of the social support of this dictatorship;
- (3) To note wherein consists at the present moment the chief immediate task of the Party in relation to the proletariat;
- (4) To make clear wherein lies, at the present moment, our chief weaknesses; and finally
- (5) To find the true path to the reserves of the proletarian revolution and a differentiated approach to the masses in the different countries, in order to explain more easily to them the necessity of a revolutionary way out of the crisis.

The XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. gave a clear answer to all these questions, thus sharpening our ideological weapons for the approaching large-scale battles which in some countries will prove of decisive importance.

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In an evaluation of the contemporary objective situation and the revolutionary perspectives, our parties or individual comrades have frequently resorted to the term "political crisis," and have spoken very often of "the growing of the economic crisis into a political crisis." In the basic report on the first point of the agenda, and especially in the concluding speech of Comrade Manuilsky, it was shown with exhaustive thoroughness why, under the present conditions of gravest economic crisis and the growing of the prerequisites of a real revolutionary crisis, the use of the term "political crisis" can divert the Party from the true path. "Political crisis" is an indefinite term, applicable to most varied situations. Very different upheavals and correlations of classes and parties are understood by the term "political crisis" : parliamentary crises and the crises of the upper classes in the camp of the ruling classes, as well as revolutionary crises. The term "political crisis" in the present setting, fraught with revolutionary events, can be falsely interpreted in the sense of a crisis of secondary importance, not a profound one, not touching the basis of the existing order and, therefore, can *withdraw attention from the revolutionary activity of the masses*, and concentrate attention on different regroupings in the camp of the ruling classes.

This indefinite term can give rise to "left" and particularly to "right" mistakes. When, for example, the rapid growth of Fascism and the rapid passing of the petty-bourgeois masses out

of the old traditional bourgeois parties into the Fascist camp, is called a political crisis of bourgeois power, it is obviously a "left" mistake in the evaluation of the objective situation. In this case it is correctly considered that the stormy transition of the petty bourgeois masses from openly-bourgeois parties to Fascist parties denotes the growth of their dissatisfaction with the policy of monopolist capital. But the other side of this is not taken into consideration, namely, that the Fascist parties in this case, through their national and social demagoguery, succeeded in switching the dissatisfaction of these masses to a struggle with the revolutionary movement, and that this is one of the means of the bourgeoisie for forestalling the revolution and for violently crushing the revolutionary movement. Such a "left" evaluation of the situation can lead one to the false conclusion that the overcoming of Fascism is very easy, that it disintegrates of itself. Such a formulation can lull our vigilance and beget passivity in our struggle with Fascism. Still more dangerous is the other opposite formulation that the political crisis is a "crisis of the upper strata" with the comparative lagging behind of the revolutionary upsurge of the lower strata, representing a whole unavoidable stage separated by a Chinese wall from the revolutionary crisis. Such a right formulation would have brought us towards the direct path of Brandlerism.

In view of all this the XI. Plenum proposed to our Parties that, in the evaluation of the present political situation and the revolutionary perspectives, they use only clear terms—the revolutionary crisis and the revolutionary situation, showing the presence of those three objective changes which Lenin pointed to, namely, when firstly, the upper strata can no longer rule as of old, when, secondly, the lower strata no longer wish to live in the old way, and when, thirdly, the revolutionary activity of the masses is growing. In connection with this, there is, in the Theses of the XI. Plenum, the differentiated characterisation of the political situation in different countries depending on the degree and the rate of the development of the economic crisis and the growth of internal and external contradictions in connection with it.

In connection with the evaluation of the present stage of the crisis of capitalism, the Political Report of Comrade Manuilsky criticised the mechanical and fatalist theory which made it appear as if Fascism was a "new type" of state, as the Fascists themselves declare, and as if this was not simply one of the methods used by the bourgeoisie to suppress the working class, as if the Fascist type of bourgeois dictatorship is the last "political superstructure" of capitalism, and as if "its destruction is possible only with the

destruction of capitalism." The latter may be true of Italy, but it has already proven false for Spain, where the Fascist-Monarchist régime of Primo-de-Riviera fell and has, so far, been replaced not by the dictatorship of the proletariat but by a bourgeois landowners' dictatorship under the Republican Flag. A fatalistic point of view of the development of Fascism can lead to, and has already led to, serious opportunist errors, to a refusal to resist the offensive of Fascism, while, as they say, the proletariat, led by the Communist Party, is not strong enough to carry through the proletarian revolution. It is enough to point, for example, to the intolerable passivity of our Finnish comrades during the Lapuan uprising (acknowledged and criticised by the C.C. and the Conference of the C.P. of Finland).

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The following question, to which the XI. Plenum paid much attention, is—who is our chief enemy. It has been said that our chief enemy is Fascism. Such a view contains within itself great danger because it bolsters up Social-Democracy which tries to justify all its vileness and all the vileness of the bourgeois-democratic government by the fact that it is, they say, "the lesser evil" in comparison with the threat of the establishment of an open Fascist dictatorship. Comrade Thälmann, in his co-report on the example of Germany, showed plainly that Social-Democracy can most successfully play the rôle of Fascists, not mentioning the fact that it clears the way for Fascism by its whole policy. Even before the September elections to the Reichstag there began, with the increased encouragement of financial capital, the tempestuous upsurge of the National-Socialist Fascist movement in Germany. The Communist Party answered with counter tactics. Having presented the programme of the "social and the national liberation of Germany," it opened fire on the Fascists, attracting the Social-Democratic workers to a united front in the struggle with Fascism. Consequently, it was able to put a stop to the growth of Hitler-Fascism and even to introduce elements of decomposition in it, but this has still not put an end to the general process of the fascisation of the State. At present the Brüning Government, with the active co-operation of Social-Democracy, which uses its police apparatus for the violent suppression of the Communist movement, is engaged in introducing a Fascist dictatorship.

In order to make this question clear, the XI. Plenum, through the person of its reporter Comrade Manuilsky, recalled to mind that the "chief enemy of the working class has always been, is, and will be the bourgeoisie," that "Fascism and Social-Fascism are only two

varieties of the social support of the bourgeois dictatorship." In the theses, on the first point of the agenda, in connection with this question, it is said:

"Fascism, as the naked form of the bourgeois dictatorship, organically growing out of so-called bourgeois democracy, which is the masked form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, sharpens all the methods of oppressing and enslaving the toilers, *inherent in the capitalist order and inseparable from the whole system of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*—(Italics ours—Ed.). The bourgeoisie advances and moulds the Fascist régime, interweaving with it the remnants of bourgeois democracy on the path to the destruction of the class organisations of the proletariat, prohibition of Communist Parties, creation of special terrorist organisations *independent of the abolition or the preservation of parliamentary forms.*" "By drawing a contrast between the 'democratic' form of the dictatorship of the bourgeois and Fascism, Social-Democracy lulls the vigilance of the masses in the fight with the growing political reaction and Fascism, conceals the counter-revolutionary character of the bourgeois democracy, as a form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and thus itself serves as an active factor and channel for the fasciation of the capitalist state The successful struggle against Fascism demands . . . a rapid and resolute correction of mistakes, *which, in the main, consist of drawing, after the Liberal fashion, a contrast between Fascism and bourgeois democracy*—(Italics ours—Ed.)—and between the parliamentary forms of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and its openly Fascist form, which were the reflection of the Social-Democratic influence in the Communist ranks."

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The XI. Plenum further took up the question of what was our chief task. Lenin had already answered this question at the III. Congress of the Comintern. When it had become clear that due to the post-war revolutionary crisis the revolution was victorious only in Russia while in other countries the revolution had suffered defeat due to the treachery of Social Democracy, Lenin particularly emphasised in this connection that our chief strategic task was winning the majority of the working class:

"The main-stay of capitalism in industrial capitalist countries is precisely that part of the working class organised in the 2nd and 2½ Internationals. If it had not rested on this part of the workers, on these counter-revolutionary elements within the working class, the international bourgeoisie would have been absolutely in no position to maintain itself. . . The more organised the proletariat in a developed capitalist country is, the more does history demand of us thoroughness in the work of preparing the revolution and with the more thoroughness must we set about winning over the majority of the working class."

This chief strategic task which the XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. again brought into the fore-

ground, not only retains its significance now, but becomes particularly urgent because the economic crisis and the rapid development of Social-Democracy to Fascism, as well as the revolutionary upsurge of the proletariat, brings us closer, particularly in those countries where the revolutionary processes have moved considerably ahead, as in Germany and Poland, toward the realisation of this task. Consequently the XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I., in the Theses of Comrade Manuilsky's report, says:

"The principal task now of all the Communist Parties consists of *winning the majority of the working class* as the essential condition for the victory over the bourgeoisie and for preparation of the working class for the decisive battles for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The successful execution of this chief task is most closely bound with the consolidation of the independent revolutionary trade union movement, the transforming of the mass movement of the proletariat through the revolutionary trade union opposition and the independent revolutionary trade unions, into really mass organisations actually able to prepare and lead the economic struggles of the proletariat and to become the basic transmission belts between the Communist Parties and the broad masses of the workers."

The realisation of this chief task is closely bound up with the "liquidation of the mass base of Social-Democracy." The XI. Plenum paid particular attention to the struggle with Social-Democracy. The theses of the XI. Plenum declare:

"The world economic crisis plainly revealed the rôle of international *Social-Democracy, as the main social support* of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. . . . The whole development of Social-Democracy since the war and the rise of Soviet power in the U.S.S.R., is an uninterrupted process evolving to Fascism . . . The whole counter-revolutionary, anti-workers' policy of the international Social-Democracy is crowned by the preparation of *blockade and military intervention* against the first proletarian State in the world." . . . The Second International "*has transformed itself into a shock brigade of world imperialism, preparing war against the U.S.S.R.*"

In the debates at the XI. Plenum, comrades dwelt on the methods of struggle with Social-Democracy and its "left" pacifist manoeuvres. It was pointed out in the debates that opportunism and capitulation was a step taken by Social-Democracy long ago; that now the upper strata of Social-Democracy have organically fused with the capitalist State apparatus and with capitalist organisations, that *it has joined itself with them for life and death.* The Social-Democratic leaders are the conscious enemies of the working class, the *conscious* agents of a foreign class, of a hostile class in the workers' midst. Therefore, they cannot but

dupe their own rank and file members of the parties in a most dastardly way. They cannot speak with the Social-Democratic workers in a comradely fashion, initiating them into their real intentions, because objectively there is a gulf between them although this has not yet penetrated into the consciousness of the Social-Democratic worker (though it is already beginning to do so). Consequently, in order to win the Social-Democratic working masses, we must, above all, in the process of the development and the independent leadership of class struggles, expose to the Social-Democratic working masses how the leaders betray them, and explain to them that they and their leaders now belong to two different hostile classes. This, of course, is not enough for the Social-Democratic rank and file workers to become Communists. For this it is necessary that they, in addition, understand that the present-day Social-Fascism is inevitably and organically a growth from the old Social-Democratic opportunism. They must, in addition, understand that the Fascist dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is an organic outgrowth of the bourgeois-democratic dictatorship. They must understand that the proletariat has only one path leading to emancipation—not through the “rectification” of Social-Democracy, not through a return to the “pure” bourgeois-democratic order, but through the October path to the dictatorship of the proletariat. This they will understand if the intolerable situation in which the Social-Democratic party has brought them is contrasted with the victorious construction of Socialism to which the Bolsheviks, with their whole bolshevik revolutionary policy, has brought the proletariat of the U.S.S.R. But first of all, and above all, it is necessary to attract the Social-Democratic working masses into the class struggle, show them through experience that they and their leaders now belong to two hostile classes.

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The XI. Plenum, having noted a number of the successes of the sections of the Comintern, pointed out as well that there are still great weaknesses there which manifest themselves, chiefly, in lagging behind the rate of the development of events, and that the chief danger now lies in this backwardness. In the Theses of Comrade. Manuilsky's report we read:

“Simultaneously with these successes, the XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. has to record a number of serious weaknesses and deficiencies in the work of the majority of the sections of the Comintern which find their expression, fundamentally, in lagging behind the radicalisation of the masses, in the inadequate exposure of Social-Democracy and represent a particularly serious danger in the present, higher stage of the class struggle.”

We will not dwell here on those forms of “tailism” and lagging behind the radicalisation of the masses and on those methods of struggle with this backwardness, or on those paths of the approach of the Communist Parties to the revolutionising of the masses which the E.C.C.I. has already repeatedly pointed out (work in the big factories, organisation and activation of productive nuclei, independent leadership of all economic struggles, skilful presentation of partial demands at the given moment and in the given place, of the masses, and their skilful union with our general revolutionary slogans). We will only mention one clearly formulated point of the Theses of the XI. Plenum, causing our separation from the masses and our lagging behind their radicalisation, viz., “the mechanical adaptation of general directives without concretising them for a particular country and a particular concrete condition of the class struggle.”

The speaker reported in detail on the methods of overcoming this abstract approach in our propaganda and agitation in his concluding speech, illustrating it with many examples.

Taking the example of the Austro-German Tariff Agreement, the reporter explained that the German and Austrian comrades must react to this in one way, the Czechs, Polish and British comrades in another way, because the Communist Party of every country must fight, above all, against the imperialism of its own bourgeoisie. Consequently the German and Austrian comrades must expose this agreement ruthlessly as the attempt of German imperialism to regain its former strength. On the other hand, the French and British comrades must expose with equal ruthlessness the struggle of French and British imperialism against the tariff agreement as an attempt to perpetuate the Versailles yoke.

The question of the evaluation of the slogan, “the national revolution,” advanced by the German Communist Party, was raised in connection with the question of the concretisation of the slogans for each country at the XI. Plenum. Comrade Garlandi rose to speak against this slogan, pointing out that a like slogan of the Italian Communist Party was, in its time, rejected by the E.C.C.I. as a slogan lending itself to opportunist interpretations. The XI. Plenum confirmed the correctness of this slogan as it is now presented in Germany, and the incorrectness of this slogan as it was then presented in Italy. Comrade Hans Neumann, in his report on the work of the Political Commission, which thoroughly edited the Theses based on Comrade Manuilsky's report and analysed this question, explained that this slogan, advanced at one time by some Italian comrades, had, according to the

conclusions arrived at by the Commission, an opportunist character, since this slogan in Italy had been advanced together with the proposal to convene a Constitutional Assembly in case of the fall of the Fascist dictatorship. In Germany this same slogan was advanced as the synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat in connection with the slogan of Soviet Germany, and was presented with it in order to emphasise the fact that the German proletariat—the leader of the revolution—aimed not only at emancipating all the working masses from capitalist slavery but from emancipating Germany nationally from the fetters of the Versailles system. Therefore, this slogan advanced by the German Communist Party had the complete approval of the Commission.

The reporter, in his concluding words, also showed with illustrations how essential it was to *differentiate* the approach to the masses in different countries in propaganda for the *revolutionary way out of the crisis*. The question of the revolutionary way out of the crisis must be expressed in one way for Britain, where at present it has only a propagandist significance, and in a different manner, for example, in Germany or Poland, where prerequisites for a revolutionary crisis are growing. In all countries the necessity of a revolutionary way out of the crisis must be based on the living example of the victorious construction of Socialism in the U.S.S.R. and the presence of the gravest crisis in the capitalist world. But at the same time supplementary arguments arising from the concrete situation of the given country must be presented.

In Austria, for example, Communists must explain to the masses that within the limits of capitalism and the Versailles system Austria is fated to decay, that salvation for the working masses of Austria lies only in a Soviet system and in Socialism, necessitating the abolition of narrow tariff boundaries.

The necessity for a revolutionary way out of the crisis for Britain must be based on the fact that its colonies, emancipated by the proletarian revolution in Britain, or the revolution in the colonies with the active participation of the British proletariat, will be transformed from countries hostile to capitalist Britain into loyal allies of Soviet Britain, and that this brotherly union of emancipated nations would save Soviet Britain from destruction in the future war with American imperialism which so frightens present-day imperialist Britain.

In France the necessity of a revolutionary way out of the crisis must be based on the fact that

predatory French imperialism, robbing Germany, stifling the colonies, and holding a number of new States formed on the continent of Europe in vassalage, intensifies the slavery of the working class of France with the assistance of the bought upper strata—the aristocracy of the workers. The speaker noted that in practically no one of our parties, with the exception of the German Communist Party, is there any differentiated approach to the question of a revolutionary way out of the crisis.

The speaker, in conclusion, pointed out the necessity of combining our agitation for a revolutionary way out of the crisis with the mobilisation of the masses around concrete tasks, uniting them with the direct interests of the working class and the working masses, and, above all, with unemployment. Correspondingly, the attack, for instance, in Czecho-Slovakia, should be directed mainly against the low "Austrian" wage level and against the rôle of Czecho-Slovakia as the chief reservoir for military equipment in the war against the U.S.S.R. In this connection, the mobilisation of the masses of the U.S.A. against American capitalism, for example, should be brought about by a struggle for the introduction of social insurance at the expense of the capitalists and the bourgeois State, etc.

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The XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. removed much of the scholastic, mechanical, abstract and the trite in the evaluation of our situation to-day, of our revolutionary perspectives in the presentation of our next tasks. The XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. explained that it was necessary to concretely adapt the lesson of Leninist revolutionary dialectics to the present complicated network of class antagonisms and the class struggle in different countries and different national settings. The XI. Plenum put in all its concreteness the question as to our chief enemy, as to the chief social mainstay of this enemy, as to our chief tasks, as to our chief weakness, as to our chief weakness, and as to the chief methods for overcoming these weaknesses. The XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I. forged an excellent weapon for the sections of the Communist International in the coming large-scale struggles which will prove decisive in some countries. The tasks of the sections of the Communist International consist in, once having rolled up their sleeves, realising in practice, with real Bolshevik energy, persistence and consistency, the decisions of the XI. Plenum of the E.C.C.I.