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The V. World Congress of the Communist International.

Speech of Comrade Zinoviev on the Trade Union Question.

(Twenty Ninth Session)

Comrades, The Trade union question is of enormous importance. If there were to remain any lack of clearness in this question, it would have an enormously injurious influence upon the whole movement.

A good deal has been heard at this Congress of the necessity of bolshevizing the parties, of remaining true to Leninism. We would prefer to hear less about bolshevizing the party, but to have the essence of Leninism itself studied more deeply, especially regard to the trade union question.

Bolshevism is against splitting the trade unions.

The standpoint of Leninism in the trade union question as we see most clearly in its tactics. You are aware that the first split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks occurred in 1903, that more than 20 years ago. The Bolsheviks have acted quite differently in the trade union question. In spite of the various splits in the political organisations we have neither before, during, nor after the revolution caused a split in any trade union. (Interjection of Radek: "Quite true!") This must give us cause to think. Our trade unions even after the revolution were still, to a considerable extent, in the hands of the mensheviks and in spite of this we have done everything in order to avoid a split. Later on when the Mensheviks represented a very unimportant fraction in the trade unions, the Party did everything possible to capture the trade unions from within without splitting them.

If therefore you wish to understand the Bolshevik tactics you must not forget this fundamental fact: During the course of 25 years whilst there were a number of splits in the political organisations (the Mensheviks called us professional splitters) there was not a single split in the trade unions, neither when we were the minority nor when we had the majority. Therein lies one of the fundamental facts of the history of the Russian Revolution and of the history of Russian Bolshevism.

Whoever calls himself a Leninist, whoever desires to bolshevise the Party (it seems to me that Schummacher claims to desire this — God preserve us from such a Bolshevisation) — will not split the trade unions. This would on the contrary mean supporting the Mensheviks, although Schummacher may regard himself a "Leftist". We have already seen many such "Leftists". If I am not mistaken Schummacher was here three years ago as a representative of the Independent Socialist Party. Now however he acts as if the International was not left enough for him. (Interjection of Radek: "That is often the case.")

If you wish to speak seriously of bolshevizing the parties you must take note once and for all: the struggle for the unity of the trade union movement is one of the characteristic features of Bolshevism; that is shown by the practice of Russian Bolshevism over a period of 25 years. We have not split a single trade union. Why? Perchance because we were so fond of the Mensheviks or perhaps because we regarded the trade unions as a sacred and untouchable form of the movement? No, but solely for one reason, because we regarded the trade unions as a centre around which the mass of the proletariat, the whole working class gathered.

Not long ago in the German party it was: Enough of the Trades Unions, we want a "new form" for the labour movement, and these comrades really thought that their good will was enough to find a new form with ease. That is all they wanted — only no bolshevism! The trade unions were not discovered by Grassmann, D'Arragona or Legien they are the historic form of the mass organisation of the proletariat under capitalism. You can't suck a new form of the labour movement out of your fingers. We have a new form of mass organisation of the workers (beside the trades unions) and that is the Soviets. But that is such a form as cannot be called into life at any moment. At the second world congress we had a special resolution on the conditions for the creation of Soviets. Read them through again. There

you will find exact information as to when it is possible to proceed to the formation of Soviets. This is on the eve of the revolution, that is, when they constitute the germ of a workers' government in the form of a proletarian dictatorship. In the Soviets we have therefore really a new form of the labour movement. But they cannot be formed at any time, only on the eve of revolution. There is no other form of the proletarian mass movement.

The factory councils are gradually becoming a new form of the labour movement within the trade union movement. But the trade union remains, remember, also after the victory of the proletariat, after the wresting of power by the proletariat, an extremely important organisation. That, at any rate, has been proved by the, until now, sole victorious revolution, the Russian revolution.

It would therefore be extreme frivolity to talk as if we could, at will, just because we wanted, create a new form of the labour movement, and neglect the old form, up to now the sole one. Comrade Lenin taught us that the trade union movement, in spite of all the betrayals of social democracy, represents the historic form of the combination of the whole proletariat in one organisation. That is the reason for the efforts of the social democratic leaders to destroy the unity of this movement and drive the communists out of it. That is why we said, at the 3rd and 4th world congresses, that the social democratic leaders have an interest in destroying the unity of the trades unions, but that it is to our interest to preserve that unity. This form of the labour movement will render us good service, not only during the struggle for power but also after the capture of power. Lenin often said that had we not had the unions behind us in 1917, the dictatorship would not have lasted months, let alone years. It was the trade unions that facilitated the organisation of production, of the Red army and of much besides.

Leninism in the trade union question means: Fight against a split in the trades unions. We do not say that as a bit of diplomacy against the social democrats, but because it comes from the deepest springs of Leninism.

Victory is Impossible Without Mass Organisation.

Leninism consists above all things in the recognition that irreconcilable Marxism is unthinkable, without the mass organisation of the proletariat, for a Marxism without mass organisation is no Marxism, and can never lead to victory.

Yesterday we celebrated the memory of the Paris Commune. But we want a victorious commune, we want the victory of the proletariat. And for this the combination of the whole of the working class is above all necessary.

At the 4th world congress we declared — and it still remains true — the more the social democrats recognise, that the working class, in the depth of its soul is with us, that we shall inevitably win the victory, the more they recognise that we are nearing revolution, the more they try to split the trades unions. They think: If the organisations of the working classes are already falling into the hands of the communists, we must see to it that they only get fragments and splinters of the trade unions, not the unions as such, which would become irreplacable weapons in their hands.

When we look at the English and German trade union movements, which are still in the hands of social democracy, it is difficult to believe that the unions can ever again be of service to the proletarian revolution. Nevertheless, they will be of service. The Russian unions were not one jot better when they were still in the hands of the Mensheviks. But when the decisive moment came, we defeated the Mensheviks. The discipline, the love of organisation, all the good, which for decades had been piling up in the trades unions, all this became in the hands of the communists, an irreplaceable weapon of the Russian revolution.

Therefore no-one who thinks seriously of the proletarian revolution, of the winning of the majority of the working class, can lightly handle the question of the unity of the trades unions. The bolshevism of the party is the policy of an honest fight for the unity of the trade union movement, and the incessant struggle for communism within the unions. The more the social democrats provoke, the stronger we must manoeuvre, the more we must close up our ranks in the unions, the stronger must we work within the unions. Why? Because our class comrades are to be found in the unions.

A frivolous comparison has been made here: As the bourgeois state can only be won by violence, so the trade unions can only

be won by violence. There is no sense in this analogy. The bourgeois state is distinguished from the trade unions in this, that the unions consist of our class comrades, that is of workers, who in spite of their aberration, in spite of their sometimes objective anti-revolutionary effect, can and will, at the decisive moment, take the right turning.

"Schumacherism."

In the German party there has been much talk of a new trade union policy. What does this policy consist of? It is "Schumacherism". It is only a pity that in our German party there are not whole Schumachers but also half Schumachers who defend the same wrong policy less consequently. It is better when we have a whole Schumacher before us and can discuss the whole question.

Schumacher represents the view that a whole philosophy separates us from the social democrats; therefore he thinks we cannot remain in the same unions with them. Of course a whole philosophy separates us from the social democrats. They are the lackeys of the bourgeoisie, and we are communists. Who does not understand that? It did not need a Schumacher to discover that. Or it is said: These dogs, these social democratic leaders are provoking us, in order to throw us out of the unions. We must therefore leave the unions. But just for this reason they are dogs, just for this reason they are lackeys of the bourgeoisie to provoke us and split the unions. We are not therefore sentimental dreamers, but straightforward proletarian revolutionaries, and can say: Dog remains dog, lackeys of the bourgeoisie remain lackeys of the bourgeoisie. We must hold out in spite of all, in order to win at any price, the majority of our class comrades in the unions, i.e. in the organisations which are still under the leadership of these accursed lackeys of the bourgeoisie (but which will not always remain so). The time is coming in which we shall win the majority of the workers in the unions. However much it may cost, we will not give up the winning of this organisation of the working class.

The Mensheviks in Russia were just such lackeys of the bourgeoisie, they wanted just the same to push us out of the unions. We fought the same fight. We said: The greater the provocation, the more we must hold on to remain in the unions, and in spite of all, to win the majority of the workers. In the Comintern there were always elements who wanted to lead us another way. Already in the 1st and 2nd world congresses there were voices, they were partly comrades from England and America, who said: "We do not wish to remain any longer in these unions." Lenin fought against them like a lion.

Now these comrades say: "We are all Leninists, but we want to go out of the reformist trade unions, we want to create a new form of the labour movement, a whole philosophy separates us from the old unions. But comrades, we stand here and we can none other. (Applause.) The policy of the Comintern is this: Work in the unions as they are. Lenin understood how to send the first workers of our party, the first founders of our party into the reactionary unions, which had been founded by social gendarmes, he even sent them into the unions which General Subatoff had founded, only to draw the workers into our circle of influence. I must admit that the Disssmanns and the Grassmanns, the D'Arragonas, and the Gompers are just such gendarmes, they are reactionaries. We know this gang; objectively they are no better than General Subatoff. But as we went into these unions to win the majority of the workers, we must also remain in them. Subatoff-Grassmann and Subatoff-D'Arragona unions, if we do not do this, it means that we only want to win the majority of the workers with words. Or perhaps you really want to win the majority of the workers. You cannot win the majority if you do not stay in the unions. Then you only pour your water into the mill of these gendarmes. Schumacher may consider himself the leader in reality he is playing into the hands of Grassmann and Disssmann.

No Compromise in the Trade Union Question

We can allow no compromise on the question. The Comintern must speak out clearly: We must remain in the trade unions. All Schumacherish arguments rebound against Leninism and prove the truth of our policy. Why do the social democratic leaders expell us? Because they are afraid we might win the majority of the workers. If there is a question on which the Comintern might lose its head, it is just the trade union question. If there is any question which can wreck our German party, it is the trade union question. (Loud applause.)

Today a comrade said to me: By some communal election or other, we had suffered a defeat. Naturally every defeat, however small, is unpleasant to us. But we do not belong to those revolutionaries who require of their comrades always and at any price, a victory; we know that there must also be defeats. But as communists we also know that in spite of defeats we must continue the struggle. But if the Leninist stand-point does not find firm footing in the German party, if the Leninist work does not appear clearly in the trade union work, — that will bring such a defeat as we shall not be able to stand.

I must explain that the opposition in this question is not an "academic" one. Some communist "academics" try their very best to deepen every false step which we make, but the danger in the deviations in the trade union question is, that it is also made by good workers, and that is dangerous.

It is humanly comprehensible, that the workers clench their fists when they hear even the names of Grassmann & Co., and that hungry workers buy milk for their children rather than pay membership fees which go into the hands of social traitors. I can feel with them. But as a member of our class, as a member of the world party, as a class comrade, such a worker is not right. He must recognise that it is necessary to pay this fee, to win this organisation accessible to every worker, that it is necessary to remain in it, and that we can only win it from within. If we do not do that, our whole programme remains only on paper.

Comrades, what made us most anxious at the time of the German discussion of this question?

We understand that after the October defeat, after the Saxon comedy a crisis was inevitable. That is not so dreadful that we cannot make it good. But when the party as such, and very good workers who form the basis of our party, have no clear line of action on the trade union question, that makes us extremely anxious. And the party cannot follow a communist line, if it has not a clear line in this question of all questions. There must be no lack of clearness here. It is not a question of words but of compromise, and we must be absolutely clear on this question.

The Frankfurt resolution of the G. C. P. is theoretically right, it is the foundation of a right Leninist policy in the trade union question, but as every book has its own particular fate, so every resolution can have its fate, it may remain a paper resolution. We have spoken about it a good deal with our German comrades, with the best proletarians of Europe. They have many strong sides, but their weak side lies to some extent in this, that they have not yet fought out in the depths of their soul the trade union question. They have not yet conquered this question. They are still considering whether it is not opportunism to remain in the trade unions. Comrades, this inward battle must be fought to a finish.

Schumacher appeals to a whole series of resolutions from the transitional period of the G. C. P., from the time of the vacillations, when the attitude to the trade union question was being taken up. That there were vacillations is not so dreadful. It was the time of moulting. But when these vacillations last for years it becomes a misfortune for the party. Schumacher's arguments prove nothing. We hope they are theoretically overcome in Frankfurt. It only remains to overcome them in practice.

I was talking to a Berlin comrade, one of those proletarians who form the foundations of the party. I got the impression that he was to some extent ashamed before the masses, because we remain in the social democratic unions. In the undertaking in which he is working there are 30,000 workmen employed. Only a few thousands are organised in trade unions. Now he is ashamed to stand before them and say: You must go into the social democratic unions. These 30,000 he considers very good workmen. No, comrades, we know the masses well, we have had to do with thousands, yes, millions of workers. We already know those masses who say: "You don't get me into the trade union, it has no sense to go into that show. They sometimes make very radical gestures, but they often do not go into the party, and remain far removed from the revolutionary struggle. Then comes the moment when they say: 'Where was the party when we went wrong? It is there to set our mistakes right!' Of course we cannot carry out the revolution without these 30,000, but we must convince them that it is necessary to remain in the unions. If we do not that, then we cannot destroy the bourgeoisie order.

The German party must be absolutely clear on this question. We can forgive many mistakes, but this question can become a mill-stone about our necks; there where we should swim, this stone will drag us to the bottom, we may perish, if we have no clear understanding on this question. If the representative of the Schu-

macher tendency maintains that he speaks in the name of 20,000 comrades, that makes a sort of local patriotism, and we know these local isolated unions from the time of Legien, at that time the same number was mentioned.

We hope that of these 20,000, 19,000 will go with the Communist International when it has chosen a fixed line. With the rest we must part for a time, we can make no concessions. Schumacher is also a soldier of the revolution; the party has decided that he must carry this decision through, not only in form but in practice. I do not think that the German party will put up with Schumacherism for long.

Schumacher and his followers say: We also do not preach leaving the trades unions, we also do not say "Come out of the trades unions". We only (!) advocate the formation of independent unions, and the watch-word of the "Industrial Unions". We believe that the party must support this watch-word. — Is that so? Does Schumacher think us so simple that he believes we do not know what it is about, if he says it in different words? He wants to bring us before such facts as will disturb the line of the party in the trade union question.

Back to the Trade unions!

We must collect those workers who have left the unions with the one watch-word: "Back to the trade unions! Yes! Back to the reactionary, anti-revolutionary menshevik trade unions, back to the unions which are still under the leadership of social democrats! Back to these unions to create in them a rallying centre for our powers. If we do not make this demand and carry it through, then we are only revolutionary talkers, then we will never destroy the bourgeois order, then we will never seriously gain the majority of the workers. Here is not the place to joke, we do not believe in the truth of the words of the representative of the Schumacher policy, who says: "We do not advocate leaving the trades unions."

What Schumacher proposes is nothing else than a policy of secession, and objectively his meaning is: Out of the labour movement as it now is, with all its weaknesses, and that means: Out of the working class as it is. We do not wish to make ourselves any illusions: We cannot form our own great trade unions in Germany. Even if we could form them, we could not carry on a successful economic campaign with them; and if we wanted to do so, we should lose it. The result would be that the workers who are fleeing from the unions would stream back to the social democrats.

Cherish no illusions! The workers' councils represent a new form, but the trade unions remain even after the revolution, as we have seen from the Russian example. The soviets are a new revolutionary form of the labour movement, but you cannot create them every day, they can only be formed when revolution stands at the door. The real form of the present labour movement, which Marx and Lenin valued as such, is the trade union movement with all its faults and weaknesses, and with all the advantages which it offers to social democracy.

Absolute clarity must be reached on this question. If Schumacher does not give way, then he can no longer belong to the Comintern. If he unites 20,000 workers to lead them out of the unions, to take them away from the united front tactics, he robs us of 20,000 class fighters, instead of throwing them into the scale against the social democrats. At best he neutralises, splits, them off, and makes them into an enemy force over against us.

There can be no Question of "Marriage" with the Amsterdamers.

Now the second question, what is to be our attitude to the Amsterdam International Federation of Trade Unions? In my opinion, this question is of secondary significance. Comrade Bordiga maintains here, that the plan of certain negotiations with the Amsterdamers would give the whole movement an "extreme right" character. In comparison with the so-called ultra-left wing we have often been reproached with a "right" position. At the 3rd world congress Lenin said: "I am speaking as a right-winger against the offensive theory". Good, you may call us right-wingers, we are not afraid. The real left Leninist wing is always there, where the workers are. To win the great masses of the workers from the social democrats, that is the real revolutionary orientation of Leninism.

The "Memorandum" of the German delegation, which we saw today for the first time, has been mentioned here. We do not know exactly when it was written. We beg the congress not to judge our views on the basis of this memorandum. In this memorandum the point of view of the Russian party is not

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