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The

REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS

of 1918-1921 in

GERMANY, ENGLAND, ITALY AND FRANCE



By
Wm Z. Foster

PUBLISHED BY
**THE TRADE UNION EDUCATIONAL
LEAGUE**

118 N. LASALLE ST. Chicago Ill.

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The Trade Union Educational League is in no sense a dual union, nor is it affiliated with any such organization. It is purely an educational body of militants within existing mass unions, who are seeking through the application of modern methods to bring the policies and structure of the labor movement into harmony with present-day economic conditions. It bespeaks the active co-operation of all militant union workers. For further details apply to

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No. 3

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CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	2
THE GERMAN REVOLUTION - - - - -	3
THE FAILURE OF THE BRITISH TRIPLE ALLIANCE - -	21
THE WHITE TERROR IN ITALY . - - - -	32
THE WAR BETWEEN REDS AND YELLOWS IN FRANCE -	50
CONCLUSION - - - - -	64

INTRODUCTION

The great labor upheaval that shook all Europe following the war constitutes the first serious attempt of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist system. The workers, horrified by the terrible slaughter and awakened to the bitter injustices of the wages system, made a desperate effort to do away with the state of society which engenders such crimes. But they failed: they were unable to break the power of the capitalist class. Only in Russia and Hungary were revolutions actually achieved—and the one in Hungary was quickly drowned in blood by the victorious reactionaries.

During my recent visit to Europe as a Federated Press correspondent I had an opportunity to study the post-war revolutionary movements in Germany, England, Italy, and France, and in the following pages I shall try to portray briefly their general outlines and the causes of their failure, together with such preceding and succeeding events as may prove interesting and instructive to American readers.

WM. Z. FOSTER.

Chicago, Dec. 15, 1921.

CHAPTER I

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

The German workers began their supreme try for emancipation in November, 1918, just before the end of the world war. The military and political position of the old regime was desperate. The Austrian army had been hopelessly crushed and the German army was in general retreat. The soldiers, deeply infected with radical propaganda and convinced that the war was lost, were ready for revolt. The Allied Governments were declaring that the Kaiser must be overthrown before peace could be had.

It was a most critical situation. Only a spark was needed to cause an explosion. And the spark came on November 2nd when the sailors at Kiel refused to participate in a suicidal attack on the British navy. They overcame their officers and set up a soviet. Like a flash the uprising spread, and in a few days the old authorities had been overthrown and soviets of workers and soldiers established in Hamburg, Lubeck, Hannover, Braunschweig, Magdeburg, Leipzig, Dresden, and many other cities. The revolutionary movement swept all over Germany swift as a prairie fire. The old regime was utterly powerless before it.

The climax came in Berlin on November 9th. The Government, headed by Prince Max of Baden, had seen for a month past what was coming and tried to forestall it by throwing the aroused workers a few sops in the way of political reforms. In this they were aided by the Majority Socialists,* several of whom accepted portfolios in Prince Max's cabinet. But the efforts of Prince Max and his pseudo-Socialist allies to preserve the old regime were unsuccessful. The masses, deeply stirred by the Independents and Communists, demanded drastic action: the work-

*At that time the German Socialist political movement consisted of two general organizations, the Social-Democratic Party (called the Majority Socialists) and the Independent Social-Democratic Party (called the Independent Socialists). Originally both factions had been in one organization, the Social-Democratic Party; but because of the traitorous conduct of the latter's leaders in backing the

ers set up soviets everywhere, while the soldiers deposed and disarmed their officers and elected new ones from their own ranks. The eventual result was that the Majority Socialists, to maintain their leadership, were compelled to join in the general demand for the immediate resignation of the Kaiser. But the latter equivocated, reluctant to surrender the rich political privileges that his family had enjoyed for centuries. Therefore the workers, on the historic 9th of November, 1918, declared a general strike and in the midst of it sent a committee, headed by Ebert, to the old Government and forced it to resign. Then the Kaiser, seeing that the army had gone over to the revolutionists and that the game was up, quickly abdicated and fled the country. Thus, with hardly a semblance of resistance, the Imperialist regime collapsed and the power passed into the hands of the victorious workers. A paeon of joy surged through the whole labor movement—the long-looked-for revolution seemed a fact accomplished.

THE GERMAN SOVIETS

In place of the deposed Government, the workers set up a Council of People's Commissars, consisting of six members, including Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg, of the Majority Socialists, and Haase, Dittmann, and Barth of the Independents. Karl Liebknecht flatly declined to become part of the council because the Majority group were allowed to sit in it. The Council was given full power to act until the convocation of the National Congress of Soviets, which was recognized from the beginning as the supreme legislative body of Germany.

The National Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets met in Berlin on December 16th, five weeks after the over-

Kaiser's war plans, the left-wing elements seceded in 1917 and formed the Independent Social-Democratic Party. This body later developed a left-wing group known as the Spartacans, led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. In December, 1918, the Spartacans broke with the Independents and formed themselves into the Communist Party of Germany. The programs of the three groups were as follows: Social-Democratic Party, reformist; Independent Social-Democratic Party, radical reformist; Communist Party, revolutionary.

throw of the Kaiser. It consisted of 442 delegates from all over Germany. Its fundamental task was to decide what kind of government the new society should have. Immediately it assembled the sharpest differences of opinion manifested themselves among the three factions of the movement. The Communists stood flat-footed for soviets and the dictatorship of the proletariat. They demanded that the Congress, then actually practicing working-class dictatorship, should continue on as the sole Government of Germany. Their slogan was, "All power to the Soviets." The Independents accepted the soviet idea in principle, but were against trying to realize it through the dictatorship of the proletariat. In general they favored the plan of a two-department government, with a general democratic Assembly on one side with jurisdiction over political matters, and a national Soviet on the other side to have control of the industrial situation. They felt that the industrial Soviet, so established, would gradually oust the democratic Assembly and take over its function, thus avoiding the civil war that was to be expected if the dictatorship was constituted forthwith. The Majority Socialists, notwithstanding their wordy camouflage, were dead against the soviet plan. They took a bourgeois democratic position and stood for the immediate calling of a National Constituent Assembly, to be elected by all classes of the people and to serve as the future ruling body. They proposed, in effect, that the purely working-class soviets commit suicide to make room for an all-class government.

Between these widely divergent and irreconcilable conceptions no compromise was possible, and the three factions, realizing that the fate of the revolution depended upon the outcome of the issue, fought desperately to make their respective points of view prevail. On the radicals' side the struggle was greatly embittered by the Majority Socialists' shameful support of the old regime during the war and their constant blocking of every revolutionary move of the workers since the overthrow of the Kaiser. To impress the Congress with their strength, the Com-

munists staged a great general strike and mass demonstration in Berlin. But to no purpose: from the earliest votes taken in the Congress it was quite evident that they were in a hopeless minority and without a chance to put through their program. Nor were the Independents much better off. Despite their best efforts, they were literally snowed under when the test came. The Majority Socialists, grace to their prestige as the leaders of the famous old Social-Democratic Party and to their almost complete control of the working-class press and the trade unions, were masters of the situation by a ratio of about eight votes to one of the combined opposition. They did as they wished with the Soviet Congress.

The principal battle of the Congress raged around the question of setting a date for the convocation of the Constituent Assembly—the Communist plan of, “Down with the Constituent Assembly and all power to the Soviets,” having been hopelessly beaten from the start. The Independents fought for delay: they wanted to give the revolution a chance to develop. First they proposed that the national election be held on March 16th, 1919, and when this was defeated, on February 16th. But the reformist Majority Socialists were taking no chances on the uprising becoming a real proletarian revolution: they were for doing away with the dangerous soviets at once. So they set January 19th as the election date and arranged things in such fashion that the Soviet Congress should abdicate its power on February 6th to the Constituent Assembly. In other words, they accomplished their basic plan of having the soviets commit suicide as quickly as possible.

SOCIALISTS VERSUS SOCIALISTS

The hard feeling between the three Socialist factions had been greatly intensified by the general course of events since the downfall of the Kaiser. The Communists were in open revolt against the Majority Socialists and advocated that the workers rise and drive them out of the Government. And the Independents were forced on to a similar

break with the Majority Socialists by the latter's great haste to abolish the Soviets. The first definite signs of the final split between these two factions came in the Soviet Congress right after the fixing of the election date. It was over a question as to which body should wield the power after the Congress adjourned, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets or the Council of People's Commissars. The Majority Socialists, eager to choke the Soviets in every manner, settled the question in favor of the Council of People's Commissars. Then the Independents refused to serve on the weakened Central Executive Committee, which was thereupon composed entirely of Majority Socialists. As the Central Executive Committee was nominally the controlling body over the Council of People's Commissars, this withdrawal made impossible the position of the three Independent Commissars, and a few days later, upon the occasion of the shooting down of demonstrating workers by the troops, they resigned in a body. This left the Government entirely in the hands of the Majority Socialists. The break between the right and left wings of the movement was complete.

A very acute situation at once developed, which soon led to a fatal clash. The immediate cause therefor was an attempt by the Majority Socialists on January 4th to still further consolidate their power by removing from office Eichhorn, the Independent chief-of-police of Berlin. Aroused by this incident and despairing of saving the revolution except by drastic action, the Independents and Communists joined hands and set about to overthrow the reformist Government. On January 6th, both factions held an enormous demonstration in Berlin, which culminated in the selection of a revolutionary committee, headed by Ledebour and Liebknecht, whose duty it was to organize a new Government. Their armed followers occupied the offices of many newspapers and publishing houses, including the "Vorwaerts," official organ of the Majority Socialists.

Meanwhile the old Government was not idle. It dele-

gated the military control to Noske, a Majority Socialist, who quickly adopted drastic measures to quell the dangerous uprising. Noske smashed the Soldiers' Soviets and placed old Imperialist officers at the head of the troops;* he also demobilized the revolutionary military units and replaced them by volunteer organizations recruited from among reactionary elements of all sorts. Then, refusing all overtures for arbitration, he proceeded to drown the rebellion in blood.

The ensuing street fighting in Berlin was marked with extreme bitterness and intensity. It lasted just a week, and many hundreds lost their lives. On the rebels' side the burden of the struggle fell upon the Communists, as many of the Independents' leaders found that they had much more important business elsewhere. Little by little the Government, backed by the united capitalist class and also by a large share of the workers, got the upper hand. Its troops recaptured the unoccupied newspaper offices and other buildings, one after the other. The Government military officers, mostly Imperialists called back into the service by Noske, treated the worker prisoners with ferocity. They executed large numbers where captured. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg managed to escape, but were arrested soon afterward and brutally assassinated by their captors. Thus was the revolutionary left wing of the Socialist movement crushed only a week before the election to the Constituent Assembly took place.

The coming together of the Constituent Assembly was a great disillusionment to the workers, for they found themselves a minority therein, even as the revolutionaries had foretold. Their two parties mustered only 185 representatives (of which the Majority Socialists had 163 and the Independents 22), whereas the combined opposition parties had 236. Thus political power passed out of the

*It was these same officers who engineered the "Kapp-putsch" of March 12th, 1920, when the Imperialists drove the Government out of Berlin and seized the power themselves, only to be in turn defeated by a general strike of the trade unions.

hands of the workers and into the hands of the reactionary classes.

The ruinous policy of the Majority Socialists had borne its natural fruit. Right after November 9th the workers had been in complete control of the armed forces and the political government of Germany. They were masters of the situation. But the Majority Socialists soon destroyed this mastery. First they relinquished the control over the army by putting the Imperialist officers again in command of it. Then they threw away the political control by summoning a Constituent Assembly. The German revolution was dead: killed by the Majority Socialists.*

THE MEANING OF IT ALL

The German workers are bitterly disappointed at the failure of their great movement. They smile sadly when anyone speaks of the German revolution. For all they got out of it were a few minor industrial and political reforms. These did not affect the fundamental institutions of private property in the social means of production and distribution. The profound transformation of society from an individualist to a collectivist basis, so ardently preached for a generation by revolutionaries, did not materialize. Capitalism weathered the great storm intact.

And now the disillusioned workers are demanding to know how this can be; how it was that they were in complete control of society and yet did not accomplish the revolution. Nor are answers to their queries lacking. The current explanation, the one most widely accepted by all

*Since the foundation of the Constituent Assembly the left-wing elements have made many desperate efforts to undo the treachery of the Majority Socialists by upsetting the bourgeois Government. In March, 1919, when the Assembly was newly in session, determined uprisings occurred in Berlin and other cities. In Munchen, during April of the same year, a soviet was established. But the general movement was crushed by an armed repression. The latest attempt was in March of this year, when a great revolt—the “March action”—took place in Central Germany. But it, too, was ruthlessly stamped out. The capitalist class and its Government, by the assistance of the Majority Socialists, has definitely gained the ascendancy in Germany.

classes, is that the revolution failed because of lack of unity among the Socialist forces. The story goes that while they were wasting their strength and opportunity fighting each other, the capitalist class succeeded in reorganizing its scattered forces and in working its way back to power. Especial condemnation is visited upon the Communists, who are accused, because of their militant tactics, of having driven the terrified Majority Socialists' into an alliance with the capitalist forces.

It is a plausible theory, but it does not fit the facts. The truth is that the revolution was not a failure in the accepted sense of the term. It went through without a hitch, just as the Majority Socialists planned it, including the passage of the reform laws, the relinquishment of army control, the calling of the Constituent Assembly, and all the rest. Its niggardly results represent the realization of their program. During the revolutionary period, from November, 1918, to February, 1919, it was they who held the power and determined the course of events. In the fateful National Congress of Soviets they had eight votes to the opposition's one. They also controlled four-fifths of the workers' press, and when the general election came along they showed their domination of labor ranks by electing almost eight times as many delegates as their competitors, the Independent Socialists. At no time during the turbulent revolutionary period was their supremacy in the workers' organizations seriously threatened by the rebellious left wing. They had strong control at all times. The quarrels between the three factions had little or no decisive effect on the general course of the labor movement in the crisis. In blaming the left-wing opposition for the failure of the revolution, the Majority Socialists are merely striving to escape the wrath of the disappointed and disillusioned workers by evading responsibility for the petty achievements of the great revolutionary movement.

Not only did the Majority Socialist program go through without a break, but what is vitally significant, it was

carried out in definite agreement with the capitalist class. This agreement took place in broad daylight, right in the heat of the revolutionary outbreak. It expressed itself in a trade union contract, the most important and far-reaching document of the kind in the world's labor history. It will pay us to examine in some detail this very remarkable contract, the circumstances leading up to its formulation, and the consequences flowing from it.

THE "SETTLING" OF THE REVOLUTION

For a month before it actually happened, the fall of the Kaiser was manifestly inevitable. The wide-awake employers, foreseeing the approaching revolutionary storm, realized that if they were to escape its terrific force, they would have to make substantial concessions to the workers. They were exceedingly anxious for a "settlement" that would save them their economic rulership. And the workers' political and industrial leaders, nearly all bred-in-the-bone Majority Socialist reformers, were equally anxious to avert the breakdown of capitalism. Although they propagated radical phrases, they did not believe in the revolution. They had no faith that the workers were capable of running society even if they could seize control of it. Their position was that Socialism had to come by evolution, not by revolution.* They saw in the vast upheaval merely a good opportunity to wrest important reforms from the employers.

With the employers and the dominant workers' leaders all standing upon the common ground of the necessity to shield capitalism from the menacing danger of revolution, an agreement between the two interests was not difficult of achievement. This agreement was brought about, naturally enough, on the industrial field, the two groups reasoning rightly that if the organized capitalist class and the organized working class could come to an understanding in

*Most of the Independents were also afflicted with this essentially pro-capitalistic opinion, hence their conditional support of the Constituent Assembly, rather than a straight-out dictatorship of the proletariat, as proposed by the Communists. They were merely more radical in their reformism than the Majority Socialists.

the realms of industry such political struggles as might develop later on would not have much meaning. With this end in view, the deliberate prevention of the revolution, a conference was opened in Berlin the first of November, just a few days before the Kaiser fell. It was the most extensive and inclusive gathering of its type ever held anywhere. On the one side were the representatives of all the great employers' associations, headed by Hugo Stinnes, and on the other side the leaders of all the big trade unions, headed by Karl Legien.* It was the whole capitalist class of Germany dealing collectively with the whole working class. Never had any country seen a similar situation before.

The conference lasted until November 15th. As the two great forces worked together, consciously deciding the terms on which capitalism should be allowed to live, political turmoil raged all over the country. The revolution broke out at Kiel and stormed across many cities. Soviets were set up, first in the single towns, then for all Germany. The old regime was destroyed, the conference in Berlin even being interrupted by the sound of the workers' machine guns finishing off the last defenders of the Kaiser. On November 15th, only six days after the downfall of the monarchy, the conference completed its work and gave to the world the following, the most important labor document ever written. We quote it in full:

THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE EMPLOYERS' AND
WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS, NOVEMBER 15TH, 1918

The large employers' organizations and the trade unions agree to the following:

1. The trade unions are recognized as the industrial representatives of the working class.
2. Any limitation of the workers' right to organize is not permissible.
3. The employers and employers' organizations will give

*The Hirsch-Duncker, and the Christian trade unions were represented, as well as the Socialist unions. The small Syndicalist unions, however, took no part in the conference.

up fully the "yellow" unions (organized strikebreakers), and will not support them directly or indirectly.

4. All returning worker-soldiers will have the right, after due notification, to enter into the positions they held before the war. The participating employers' and workers' organizations will so strive, through the production of raw materials, etc., that this obligation may be entirely fulfilled.

5. Joint management and control of the employment of all labor.

6. Labor conditions for all workers will be established, according to the conditions of the various industries, by collective agreements, with employers' organizations. The negotiations will be undertaken and completed as quickly as possible.

7. In every plant with a working force of at least 50 employees there will be a workers' committee established, whose duty it will be, in cooperation with the employer, to see to it that the working conditions of the plant are kept in conformity with the collective agreements.

8. In the collective agreements provision will be made for arbitration committees, consisting of an equal number of worker and employer representatives.

9. For all industries the maximum daily working time will be eight hours. No wage reductions are permitted because of this decrease in working hours.

10. For the purpose of carrying out these agreements and the future measures to be adopted regarding demobilization of the army, the maintenance of industrial life, the assurance of an existence to the workers, and especially regarding the war-wounded, the participating employers' and workers' organizations will organize a central committee, based upon joint representation and with proper industrial branches.

11. The central committee will also decide fundamental questions, in so far as such arise out of the collective regulation of wage and working conditions. It will also arbitrate disputes which affect several industrial groups. Its decisions will be binding upon both employers and workers, unless they are contested within a week by one of the organizations involved.

12. These agreements enter into force the date of their signing and will remain as the legal regulation until a three months' notification of a desire to change has been given by either side.

This agreement shall also apply strictly to the relations between the employers' organizations and the office workers' (Angestellten) unions.

This agreement "settled" the German revolution.* It determined just what the workers should get from the revolutionary upheaval upon exactly the same principles as an ordinary trade union contract establishes what they get from a minor industrial disturbance. For their part, the employers conceded universal recognition of the trade unions as the sole representatives of the workers' economic interests, the right of the workers in all trades and callings to freely organize, the establishment of working conditions in all industries by trade union agreement, the abolition of the "yellow" unions, the setting up of arbitration committees in every industry, the universal eight-hour day, half control of the national employment service, formation of the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft," or industrial parliament, shop committees, etc. And in return the workers' leaders agreed, by the very fact that they helped draw up the document, that the capitalist system should continue in Germany. No, more than that, they actually agreed that the capitalist class should be reestablished in power; because, when the contract was signed, the revolution was an accomplished fact, the Government and the army being entirely in the hands of the workers.

The Stinnes-Legien trade union agreement was drawn up intentionally, by both sides, to stop the revolution. The employers frankly admit this, even though the Majority Socialists and the other conservatives who handled the trade union side of it do not. Dr. F. Reichert, business manager of the Association of German Iron and Steel

*A striking fact is that German writers on the revolution, and I have read many of them, such as Bernstein, Stroebel, etc., attach no decisive importance to the Stinnes-Legien agreement. Their attention being diverted by the spectacular events on the political field, the writers have altogether overlooked the tremendous and deciding effect of this peace-pact between the employers and the trade unions on the industrial field.

Manufacturers, in explaining to his constituents the meaning of the agreement, said:

“Even in the early October days the real situation was clear. The question was this: how could we save industry? How could we protect the employing class from the sweeping socialization of all branches of industry, from nationalization, and the threatening revolution?”*

The answer, of employers and trade union leaders alike, to the menacing problem of revolution, was the Stinnes-Legien agreement. And events proved it an effective solution. After the 15th of November, when it was signed, the task confronting the two groups of capitalists and workers was to confine the great upheaval to the terms and stipulations of this agreement. And both co-operated together successfully to that end. In the industrial field, the union officials and employers, acting jointly, established the shop committees, the “*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*,” and other reforms, and then stopped dead; while in the political field, the “revolutionary” government, dominated by the Majority Socialists, obediently enacted the provisions of the trade union agreement into law, one after the other, with rubber-stamp precision, and there it, too, halted, giving the workers nothing more in legislative way except equal suffrage and one or two other political rattles and tin whistles.

Nor could all the stormy opposition of the Independents and the Communists force either the trade unions or the Socialist Government one step further than this agreed-upon program. Thousands of militant workers died trying to break the infamous trade union pact and to force the situation into real revolution! But all in vain: the agreement prevailed even to its minor details. When, during the tumultuous days of January, 1919, it seemed that the radical elements might succeed in their purpose and upset it, Noske, by building up volunteer regiments of reactionaries and by reinstating the Imperialist officers in the army command, simply called in the other party to

*“*Entstehung, Bedeutung, und Ziel der Arbeitsgemeinschaft*,”
P. 6.

the agreement to help him enforce it. Then both contracting parties, the exploiters and the Majority Socialist trade union leaders acting unitedly, mowed down the rebellious workers with machine guns.

THE BETRAYAL OF THE REVOLUTION

In view of all these circumstances, it is futile for the Majority Socialists to blame the paltry results of the revolution upon the quarrels between the various groups in the labor movement. These, we repeat emphatically, had next to nothing to do with the outcome. What happened was that the program of the Majority Socialists prevailed. The limits of the upheaval were definitely set by the Stinnes-Legien trade union agreement. And when it was signed the revolution was only six days old and still in the "hurrah stage." In spite of their wartime quarrels the two great Socialist parties were still co-operating together. They did not finally break until much later. And their subsequent political struggles were but so much froth boiling around the central, decisive fact of the great trade union agreement, even though few German writers seem yet to have realized this cardinal proposition. The doom of the German revolution was sealed by the Majority Socialist leaders when they drafted the Stinnes-Legien agreement. Knowingly, intentionally, in signed contract with the exploiters, they sold out the already-accomplished revolution for a mess of pottage—a handful of reforms—and re-established the rule of the capitalist class.

This great treachery, besides ruining the German revolution, seriously if not fatally, compromised the cause of the world revolution itself. If Germany had gone into real revolution—and it surely would have done so had it not been for the attitude of the Majority Socialists—all the countries in Eastern Europe must have followed suit. In all likelihood the great movement would have swept across the Continent and put an end to the capitalist system generally.

In any event, even if no other countries had joined Germany and Russia in revolution, these two would have

formed a great proletarian economic and social block that must have succeeded in establishing a new type of society. Germany, with its splendid industrial equipment, and Russia, with its boundless natural resources, would have made up an enormous unit that would have been able to live independently of the rest of the world. Capitalism's blockade would have been powerless against it, likewise its military attacks.

But as it was Russia was deserted and left to make the fight single-handed against the most terrific odds. Her weak industrial development threw her helpless before the capitalistic blockade, and her isolation exposed her gravely to constant assaults from counter-revolutionary armies sent against her by world capitalism. The general result is that, because of Germany's defection, the great revolutionary experiment is being made under incomparably more unfavorable circumstances. This is of the most vital importance, for all nations have their eyes on the Russian revolution and are pinning their hopes and fears upon it. If it succeeds it will eventually provoke world revolution. But if it fails, not only will labor everywhere suffer overwhelming defeat, but a mighty blow will have been dealt at the very concept of revolution itself. The position of those pseudo-Socialists who deny the capacity of the workers to control society successfully and who preach the necessity of the guiding hand of the capitalist class will be enormously strengthened. The tendency towards reformism will be greatly encouraged, and the next big revolutionary attempt of the workers indefinitely postponed. The betrayal of the German revolution by the Majority Socialists was the greatest crime ever committed against Labor by false leaders.

THE AFTERMATH

Considering the deplorable weakness of our American trade unions and the little control we have over industry, we in this country might be inclined to believe that a movement which brought with it, as the German revolution did, the almost complete organization of the working

class, the universal eight-hour day, and the other propositions of the Stinnes-Legien agreement represented a great victory. But not so the German workers. They look upon it as a big defeat; for they want to do away with capitalism, not to patch it up. Consequently depression and discouragement reigns among them, coupled with a feeling of bitter resentment on the part of the more militant elements. The latter realize that their leaders have betrayed them, even if the masses do not yet know it, and they are organizing to get rid of them. A general struggle for control rages everywhere in the German movement between the revolutionary and conservative elements.

In the political field this strife is an open battle, the Majority Socialists, Independents, and Communists,* with their respective parties, each striving to win the support of the masses. In the industrial field the struggle for mastery takes place chiefly in the old trade unions. The Majority Socialists still hold most of the official machinery, but the Independents and Communists, through their system of minority committees, independent labor journals, etc., inside of the old unions, are gradually breaking their grip. At present the proportion of control, by rank and file votes, is about as follows: Majority Socialists 50%, Independents 25%, Communists 25%. As the struggle sharpens, however, with the Communists driving on irresistibly, there is a strong tendency for the Majority Socialists and Independents to combine their forces, politically and industrially, against them. Eventually the German Socialist movement will probably resolve itself into two clearly defined currents, one distinctly conservative and the other sharply revolutionary.

At first the Communists thought that the best way to fight the conservatives on the industrial field would be to withdraw from the old trade unions and to start new ones based upon purely Communist lines. The chief exponent

*There are two Communist Parties in Germany: one called the Communist Labor Party, and the other the United Communist Party. The latter is many times the larger organization.

of this dualistic program was one Wolfheim, a member of the American I. W. W.* But the keener leaders were quick to see the folly of this policy, which more than anything else, has paralysed the American labor movement. They perceived in a few months' time (though our militants cannot see it even after thirty years' bitter experience) that it operated only to pull the militants away from the masses and to isolate them into little sterile outside groups, thus leaving the conservatives in undisputed control of the old unions. Then they began their present campaign of organizing within the trade unions. It is true that the Communist Labor Party still adheres to the dualistic policy, but it is by far the smaller of the two Communist Parties in Germany, and very much the weaker in influence. At the 1921 Congress of the III International at Moscow, its general program was condemned, and it was ordered, on pain of expulsion, to amalgamate with the United Communist Party. Such an amalgamation would, of course, necessitate the giving up of its Utopian policy of dual unionism.

Naturally the old conservative leaders do not take kindly to the Communists' organized efforts to win over the trade unions. They have expelled thousands of revolutionaries—the figure is said to be as high as 80,000.† All of which convinces the Communists that their proper place is in the trade unions, and makes them redouble their efforts to stay there and work. And in spite of all hindrances they are succeeding. They now have the support of at least 2,500,000 members of the big German Socialist unions. They condemn as counter-revolutionary the cry “Heraus aus der Gewerkschaften!” (Out of the trade unions!), raised by

*“*Die Gewerkschaft! Die Betriebsorganisation!*” P. 15.

†These expelled members do not form dual unions. On the contrary such a policy is rigidly eschewed. They make an issue of their case with the rank and file of the old unions and seek to force their way back into these bodies. The leaders of the Metal Workers' Union have recently been compelled to take back into their organization a big faction of revolutionaries in Halle that had been expelled.

the dual unionists, as it corresponds with the interests and wishes of the old conservative leaders.

The Communists, and the left wing of the Independents, are determined to have done with the type of leadership that betrayed them in the revolution. They are putting at the head of their organizations men of spirit and courage, who, when the next great crisis comes, will break entirely with capitalism and establish a Soviet Republic.

CHAPTER II

THE FAILURE OF THE BRITISH TRIPLE ALLIANCE

In England, as in all other European countries, labor discontent rose to a high pitch after the close of the war. The workers took on a new degree of militancy, the trade unions grew rapidly, and large strikes broke out all over the country. This general movement of revolt reached its height during the coal miners' lockout in the Spring of 1921.

In this memorable struggle, which once verged close to a revolution, the workers tried to throw the tremendous Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen, and general transport workers against the capitalist class. But they failed most dismally: their efforts led merely to one of the worst debacles labor has ever experienced anywhere. The Triple Alliance, when called into action, collapsed like a house of cards, and the British working class suffered a great defeat. But before we point out the course of the movement and the causes of the defeat, it will be well for us to trace briefly the origin and history of the Triple Alliance. Valuable lessons are contained therein for American militants.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE

The Triple Alliance is a trade union federation covering the three great industries of coal mining, railroading, and general transport. The bodies actually composing it are the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, the National Union of Railwaymen, and the National Federation of Transport Workers. None of these big organizations is entirely an industrial union, however, as a number of craft unions of skilled workers still exist in the respective industries. But in strikes these small craft bodies commonly move with the larger unions; hence, the Triple Alliance may be properly said to cover the three industries. The totals of workers involved in its activities are as follows: miners 1,150,000, railwaymen 500,000, transport workers 350,000—or 2,000,000 in all.

The Triple Alliance is the result of a long and com-

plicated evolution of the old trade unions making it up. It has been constructed literally brick by brick. Its evolutionary chain of development stretches back to the very beginning of its three great component unions. The miners were originally organized by districts, each coal county having an independent organization of its own. But finally an expanding capitalism compelled the welding together of this score of separate organizations into the present national unions, naturally with a great increase in power and efficiency to the workers. The railwaymen were likewise split into many weak and squabbling sections in their earlier periods of unionism. Eventually, however, three of these sections, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the General Railway Workers' Union, and the United Signalmen and Pointsmen, fused together and formed the National Union of Railwaymen. This organization, dominating the railroad labor field, at once launched into a sphere of great activity and power. Like the miners and the railwaymen, the transport workers have also built their national organization of a lot of craft fragments. Their present federation represents the practical amalgamation of a large number of national and local unions of seamen, waterside workers, and vehicle workers. And the same forces that compelled the formation of the three national unions of miners, railwaymen, and transport workers, viz.: the increasing pressure from the employers and the expanding intelligence of the workers, eventually forced these three great bodies to federate together into the Triple Alliance. This immense union is a striking illustration of the evolutionary manner in which the workers of the world construct their labor organizations. It is a standing refutation of the theory of those who base their tactics upon the expectation that the workers will throw aside all their old trade unions and realign themselves into new organizations sketched out upon idealistic principles.

The evolution leading to the creation of the Triple Alliance and other large British labor organizations has been greatly facilitated by the fact that English progress-

ive and radical workingmen have always carried on their activities in the old unions, thus giving those bodies the benefit of their boundless enthusiasm, idealism, and energy. They have never been very seriously afflicted with the dual unionism which has wrought havoc to the American labor movement. G. D. H. Cole says: "From the time of the dock strike of 1889 onwards the trade unions were to a considerable extent captured by the Socialists, and the resolutions at trade union congresses reflected, clearly, the aspirations of Fabianism and the Independent Labor Party."*

But this natural and effective policy of the militants working within the organized masses underwent a serious crisis with the development among revolutionaries of a clear-cut program of industrial unionism, beginning about 1905. The new movement, influenced to a considerable extent by the American I. W. W., took a sharply dualistic turn, many active spirits advocating the wholesale destruction of the old unions and the creation of new ones. The situation came to a head at a conference of some 200 militant unionists held in Manchester on November 26th, 1910. Two factions were present, the first consisting of trade unionists, led by Tom Mann, who were for staying within the old organizations and developing them into industrial unions, and the second, consisting of I. W. W. and S. L. P. delegates, who advocated quitting the trade unions and starting the labor movement afresh on "scientific" lines. After much debate the first faction carried the day, and the movement of British revolutionaries was definitely committed to the policy of working within the old unions to bring about their amalgamation into industrial organizations.

The Manchester conference was one of the most important gatherings ever held by workingmen in Great Britain. This was because of the great peril of dualism which it averted. It marked a turning point for the British labor movement. Had it decided, as did the similar conference of American

*"An Introduction to Trade Unionism," P. 97.

industrial unionists in 1905 (the one which launched the I. W. W.), to pull the militants out of the old organizations, those bodies surely would have been bled white of all progressive thought and ruined even as our unions have been. But fortunately the militants were kept within—to the movement's possessive enormous profit.

Immediately after the Manchester conference the industrial unionists, then calling themselves Syndicalists for the most part, made a great drive on the trade unions to infuse them with the new spirit and to remodel their structures. They set up many minority committees and independent journals to advocate the cause of progress. Especial attention was paid to the miners, railwaymen, and transport workers. Nor were results slow in coming. In 1911 each of these three groups of workers, under the direct stimulus and leadership of the radicals, engaged in great national strikes, all of which were markedly successful. The whole labor movement was shaken from top to bottom by the profound upheaval. During the next two years it added to itself 1,500,000 members, and progressive sentiment spread everywhere.

As a result of this famous drive of the radicals, the movement for amalgamation and consolidation extended like wildfire. Few indeed were the organizations that did not have in their midst close groups of militants diligently working to fuse them together. One early achievement, in 1911, was the creation of the National Federation of Transport Workers. In the beginning of 1913 followed the amalgamation that produced the National Union of Railwaymen. The general movement culminated in the formation of the Triple Alliance, which was proposed by the miners in 1913 and completed by all three organizations at the end of 1915.*

Militant British trade unionists generally pinned great hopes on the Triple Alliance. They believed that inasmuch

*Many other federations and amalgamations have come from this movement, including the Federation of Building Trades Workers, the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, etc., etc.

as its three constituent organizations were able to exert such tremendous pressure while acting separately, all of them acting together would be able to deal a heavy, if not a mortal blow to capitalism. The Triple Alliance was the pride of the British movement, and the labor world awaited with anxious interest for the time to arrive when it should be tested out. This time finally came on the occasion of the great miners' dispute early in 1921.

THE ATTACK ON THE MINERS

The lock-out of the miners, primarily a great trial of strength between the workers and the capitalists generally, raged around the technical question of whether or not the system of collective bargaining to obtain in the mining industry should be operated upon a district or a national basis. Prior to the war the district was the unit: that is, the miners in each coal section drafted agreements with their respective groups of employers pretty much in accordance with local conditions. This worked out distinctly to the advantage of the employers, who were enabled to play one district against another by sewing them all up with agreements expiring at different times, thereby making real solidarity and united action impossible among the men.

The miners early perceived the handicap to them of the district system and have long sought to so arrange matters that the workers' cause in the mining industry might be handled upon a national basis. They wanted to bring the full power of all the coal miners in the country unitedly against all the coal operators. The employers strenuously resisted every step in this direction. During the war, however, they had to yield, and when the mines were taken over by the Government negotiations between the employers and workers over wages and working conditions began to be carried out on a national scale. This constituted a substantial victory for the miners and contributed greatly to the growth of solidarity amongst them.*

*All these expedients were only temporary makeshifts so far as the workers were concerned. The ultimate aim of the Miners' Fede-

But the hard-headed employers refused to give up so easily. They awaited a favorable opportunity to destroy the miners' new-found unity, which was bound to come when the Government gave up control of the mines and turned them back to private management. This process of decontrol had been set by an Act of Parliament to take place on August 31, 1921, and the workers and employers, anticipating the event, were already (by February, 1921) in conference negotiating about the new conditions to prevail in the industry. The employers demanded heavy reductions in wages and the reestablishment of the district system of collective bargaining, whilst the workers resisted the wage cuts and insisted upon the creation of a national wages board and a national profits pool.*

Suddenly, in the midst of these negotiations (at the beginning of March), the Government threw the whole situation into a turmoil by announcing that the decontrol of the mines would go into effect March 31st, exactly five months earlier than the time set for it by law. The reason alleged was that the Government could no longer afford to pay the heavy subsidies required to keep wages, prices, and profits at prevailing levels; but the truth was that the move was carried out in concert with the other plans of the mine owners to deal a crippling blow at the Miners' Federation.

Immediately the Government made its announcement about the decontrol, a critical situation arose. The employ-

ration is to have the Government own the coal industry and then operate it by a sort of guild, one-half of whose officials should be appointed by the unions, and the other half to consist of technicians and Government representatives. For full particulars of their program see Frank Hodges' booklet, "*Workers' Control in the Coal Mining Industry.*"

*The miners conceived the industry altogether in a national sense. They wanted the wages of the workers, the price of coal, and the profits of the owners to be definitely established upon a national scale. The situation was to be so regulated that the poorer coal fields which could not meet the regular standards of wages, prices, and profits should be automatically subsidized by the richer ones. The owners contested every phase of this scheme. Their program was to reduce the industry to the old chaotic system of each district and mine for itself in every respect.

ers, realizing the advantage given them, arrogantly sharpened their demands, which the workers as abruptly rejected. A deadlock ensued, practically amounting to a cessation of negotiations. In the midst of this the owners posted wage scales which the workers were ordered to accept before April 1st or the mines should be closed. The miners stood firm, and on the date specified the lock-out automatically began. The greatest labor struggle in British history was on.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE

Conditions were most unfavorable for the miners to make a successful fight alone. Many thousands of them had walked the streets for months, unemployed. Moreover the unions' funds were depleted from the strike of the year before. In this crisis, faced by a hostile Government and the militant employers, and with their own forces greatly weakened, the beleaguered miners called for assistance to their partners in the Triple Alliance, the railwaymen and the transport workers.

With quite manifest reluctance, the leaders of the latter responded and entered into the negotiations. But this intervention did no good: evidently the ruling class were determined to smash the Miners' Federation, backbone of the British labor movement. The conferences came to naught; the rank and file of the workers demanded action; so finally, on April 8th, the heads of the Triple Alliance were compelled to set Tuesday, April 12th, as the definite date when their immense organization should enter upon a strike.

This action at once threw the country into intense excitement.* The militant workers were jubilant—at last, with their great Triple Alliance, they would teach the arrogant employers an unforgettable lesson. A panicky fear seized the ruling class. The usually sedate British press broke forth into screaming headlines, warning the people against the impending revolution; whilst the Government

*The writer was in London all through this crisis and can bear witness to the revolutionary tenseness of the situation.

took energetic measures to break the strike, among which were the organization of a large volunteer Defense Force, and the transformation of large parks in London and other cities into auto-truck stations for the provisioning of the dense population. Never had modern Great Britain before experienced such a crisis.

But if the militant workers were expecting great things from the Triple Alliance, its principal leaders, J. H. Thomas, Frank Hodges, Robert Williams, et al, were not. Reformers and compromisers to the last man, they feared to use the terrible weapon which they held in their hands. Apparently they dreaded a revolutionary situation about as much as did the capitalists themselves. Backing and filling and yawing about, they desperately sought a way to a settlement. They made no real preparations for conducting the strike, but held conference after conference with the Government and the employers, all of which arrived nowhere. And then when they were finally square up against the strike, they suddenly postponed it from April 12th to April 15th.

This move sadly injured the workers' cause. It showed to the world that the Triple Alliance leaders were only bluffing and did not dare to strike. It demoralized and discouraged the workers, and correspondingly encouraged the employers and their close ally, the Government. Utilizing the precious delay to the utmost, these forces rapidly built up a temporary transport system and swarmed tens of thousands of men (many of whom, sad to say, were befuddled workers) into Lloyd George's Defense Force. Meanwhile the endless conferences went on uselessly.

The final smash came on the very day of the scheduled strike, the timid leaders at last finding a way to gut the great movement. Their excuse was a speech made by Frank Hodges, Secretary of the Miners' Federation, the evening before in the Parliament Buildings. Hodges was invited there to address an informal meeting of a large number of Members of Parliament, and during his talk, in answer to a question, he declared that the miners would

consider the proposition of a temporary settlement, leaving the main issues at stake to be adjusted in the future.

This unauthorized statement, criminally injudicious in view of the circumstances, threw everything into the air. Next day the papers almost unanimously declared the strike crisis to be past, as Mr. Hodges' "offer" had opened the door wide for a settlement. It was just such a situation as the frightened leaders of the railwaymen and transport workers wanted, and, eagerly seizing upon the idea of a temporary settlement, they insisted that negotiations be started upon such a basis. Their two executive committees went on record to this effect, but the miners, standing firmly for their original demands, stubbornly refused to consider any temporary adjustment. Thereupon, the railwaymen and transport workers, declaring in effect that the contrary actions of Hodges and the miners' executive committee had thrown the whole movement into disarray and made a united effort of all the workers impossible, called off the strike of their respective unions and left the miners to make the battle alone. The much-prized Triple Alliance, hope of the British working class, had failed ingloriously.*

TO THE BITTER END

The announcement that the Triple Alliance strike was cancelled gave British labor a profound shock. A cry of mingled rage and alarm rose everywhere in the movement. Hundreds of telegrams poured into the unions' headquarters and labor papers denouncing the great betrayal. Many railway and transport local unions bitterly assailed their leaders as traitors and demanded that their organiza-

*A sample of the unbelievable stupidity with which the Triple Alliance movement was handled generally is the following: Instead of the leaders setting a definite time limit, say 24 hours before the strike time, at which negotiations with the employers should cease, thus giving the great movement time to develop, they carried on conferences almost until the last minute. In consequence, the chances for real solidarity among the workers were ruined by exposing the latter to the thousand and one false rumors about a settlement deliberately set afoot in the capitalist press to confuse them and to destroy their unity.

tions be brought into active support of the miners. Numbers of them even went on strike. But it was of no use, the solidarity of the Triple Alliance was thoroughly broken. The unfortunate combination of right-wing officials at the head of a left-wing movement, of reformists trying to direct a revolutionary upheaval, had resulted in the usual, nay inevitable, tragedy. The miners were irretrievably left to fight on by themselves.

And a right gallant struggle they made. In the face of terrific difficulties, confronted by a united and confident capitalist class, and with their own allies deserted, they battled on for 13 weeks. British industry became stricken with paralysis and the whole country was threatened with ruin. The final result was that the haughty employers were compelled to come to terms with their workers. The settlement was a compromise, with the employers getting rather the best of it. They carried their main point of district wage boards, but the miners were able to secure the establishment of a weak national board, which they hope to invigorate later into the kind they desire. The employers also secured the wages' cut, but it was not nearly so drastic as they had hoped for. The profits pool was completely lost, but the workers secured the limitation of the owners' profits to an amount equal to 17% of all wages paid, and the right to themselves share in the balance of the profits after operating costs, wages, and the owners' share of profits have been paid. Thus, in partial defeat for the miners and in disruption and discouragement for trade unionism in general, ended the great movement of the Triple Alliance which, but for the timidity of its leaders, would most certainly have resulted in a tremendous victory for the whole British working class.

Consequent upon the sad fiasco of the Triple Alliance, the militant elements throughout the trade union movement of Great Britain have launched a campaign to oust the men responsible for the defeat. Speaking of the breakdown of the great movement and its after effects, Herbert Tracy says:

“It shook the prestige of every working class leader who had anything to do with the Triple Alliance, and shattered finally and complete the pretensions of that organization. It no longer counted. Harried and abused on all sides, J. H. Thomas fled to the United States. Robert Williams suffered the pain of expulsion from the Communist Party, and later lost his seat on the National Executive Board of the Labor Party. Ernest Bevin and Harry Gosling confronted hostile critics at every meeting they addressed.”*

Nor will the fight against the reactionary leaders stop there. The British militants thoroughly understand and appreciate the principles of working within the old unions—they are almost entirely free from the virus of dual unionism. Inside the trade unions they have constructed a whole network of minority organizations, including shop-steward movements, amalgamation committees, educational leagues, labor colleges, etc. These are making rapid headway in revolutionizing the masses—at the recent Congress of the Red Trade Union International Tom Mann stated that at least 20% of the trade union rank and file had clearly expressed themselves in favor of the Moscow International as against that of Amsterdam. Hence, the experienced British rebels may be depended upon to work intelligently and doggedly within the old unions until they have finally removed the reformist officials, hang-overs from a past era of labor, and replace them with revolutionaries, who alone are fitted to lead the working class in the coming bitter and profound struggles for social mastery.

*“*The Coal War in Britain,*” P. 38.

CHAPTER III

THE WHITE TERROR IN ITALY

No less than Germany, England, and France, Italy also experienced a profound labor unrest just after the war. A wave of organization spread among the workers, the membership of the General Confederation of Labor reaching the unprecedented total of 2,500,000. Strikes multiplied on every hand, all of them being waged with unusual vigor and success. In September, 1920, the whole movement climaxed in a vast revolutionary outburst, as a result of the occupation of the steel and iron plants throughout all Italy by the militant metal workers.

THE SEIZURE OF THE PLANTS

The epoch-making movement of the metal workers developed simply enough. Harassed by a constantly mounting cost of living, the Federation of Italian Metal Workers (known as the F. I. O. M.), on June 18th, demanded a general increase in wages amounting to approximately 35%.* This the organized employers resisted. Smarting under many recent defeats by the workers, including the establishment of the eight-hour day, the setting up of shop committees, the restriction of the employers' right to hire and discharge, etc., etc., they were eager to deal a blow at the unions. And they deemed the prevailing situation propitious for so doing. Industry was slackening up rapidly and thousands of workers were unemployed. Quite evidently a state of serious trade depression was setting in, and a consequent weakening of the strike power of the workers might be expected. So the employers delayed the negotiations, jockeying about to find a favorable opportunity for delivering the thrust which they were so anxious to put in.

In the midst of this maneuvering the F. I. O. M., as a

* Besides the F. I. O. M., there were three other unions in the movement, the Syndicalist Union, the "White" Union (Catholic), and the Italian Union of Labor (Nationalist). But they were minor factors. Of the 500,000 workers in the industry fully nine-tenths belonged to the F. I. O. M. The latter organization practically directed the negotiations with the companies.

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demonstration of its power and to hasten the negotiations, ordered the metal workers everywhere to at once cease all overtime work and to confine themselves strictly to the eight-hour day. Unimpressed by this move, the employers finally gave the workers a definite refusal to their demands. This broke off negotiations, and the big fight began. The F. I. O. M. at once called a special convention which, after carefully going over the difficult situation, decided upon the two following war-measures: (1) to inaugurate a campaign of obstructionism, or slowing-up by all the workers in the industry, and, (2) to seize the metal plants if the employers attempted to use the lock-out as a counter-weapon. The resolution in question said:

“The convention adopts the proposition of the Federal Committee that, from the beginning of the working day on August 20th, a policy of obstructionism shall be applied in all the plants, in the manner and form indicated by that committee. The committee is sure that all the metal workers will know how to defend themselves with every means . . . their right to work, and to remain in the factories, as against every possible action of their employer adversaries.”*

Promptly, as planned, the obstructionism went into effect in all kinds of metal works in every part of Italy. At first the employers ridiculed the campaign and disregarded it as being of no consequence. But the splendid discipline of the Italian workers soon woke them up. By systematically “soldiering” and obeying the plant rules with elaborate over-care (destructive sabotage was sharply forbidden by the unions), the workers reduced the productivity of the whole industry by at least 50%.

A few days of this jolted the employers out of their complacency, and they at once proceeded to use their great weapon, the lock-out. The first place they tried it was in Milan where, on August 13th, 2,000 employes of the Romeo Company were locked out. But the Milan metal workers were wide-awake and determined. They immediately

*“*L'occupazione delle fabbriche*,” P. 20—a pamphlet issued by the Central Committee of the Federation of Metal Workers (F. I. O. M.).

seized and occupied every metal works in the city, some 300 in all. Then the employers ordered a general lock-out throughout Italy for the next day. But again the alert metal workers outplayed them; they promptly took charge of every steel works, iron foundry, machine shop, etc., in the entire country. Then they mounted machine guns on them, hoisted red flags, and prepared to defend themselves. The 500,000 metal workers were in open revolt against their would-be masters.

Almost instantly these stirring events precipitated Italy into an intense revolutionary crisis. Everywhere the workers, their imagination and enthusiasm set on fire, rose in their might. They could see the great revolution close at hand. The industrial workers seized factories in many industries, and the peasants began to confiscate the land. As for the ruling class, they were stricken with the paralysis that came to their likes in Russia and Germany during the mass-uprisings in those countries, and which always comes to the exploiters in true revolutionary situations. They could do nothing—the Government was powerless, and the army likely to go over to the workers at any moment. The red flag flew over hundreds of towns and thousands of factories. Italy was on the very verge of the social revolution.

THE REVOLUTION KNIFED

Such a tremendous situation, growing out of their simple wage movement, was of course far beyond the jurisdiction of the metal workers alone; hence Organized Labor as a whole, political and industrial, immediately took a hand in the matter. On September 9th, the Executive Bureaus of the Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labor met in Milan to see what should be done next. But they could come to no agreement, and the whole problem was referred to the meeting next day of the entire Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Labor, which is composed of delegates from all the affiliated national unions and central labor councils. The represen-

tatives of the Socialist Party were also invited to attend.

This conference was one of the most important labor meetings ever assembled, and marked a mile-stone in labor history. The fateful question it had to decide was: should there be a revolution or not? No sooner was the conference come together than two sharply opposing factions developed: one for the revolution and the other against it. Gennari, then a leader in the Socialist Party but now head of the new Communist Party, led the revolutionaries, while D'Aragona, General Secretary of the General Confederation of Labor, was the principal spokesman for the reformists.

Gennari, sensing the true situation and speaking for the Socialist Party, declared that the contest had passed beyond the realms of a mere wage dispute and had become a revolutionary political struggle. He demanded that the General Confederation of Labor turn over the direction of the movement to the Socialist Party, so that the latter could immediately try to put the revolution into effect and to establish the workers' society.* D'Aragona strenuously combatted this proposal and threw all the weight of his prestige and official power against it. He insisted that the workers of Italy were not yet ripe for revolution, and that to attempt any such would be disastrous, in fact the suicide of the whole labor movement. He demanded that the struggle be restricted to purely an industrial affair, and he proposed that the movement, instead of aiming at the revolution, should be turned towards achieving the institution of workers' control in all the industries of Italy. In his stand D'Aragona had the support of the Turatti (right-wing) and the Serrati (centrist) groups, which normally control the Socialist Party, but which tempor-

*This demand was in accordance with the agreement between the Italian Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labor, which is to the effect that the political affairs of the working class shall be handled by the former organization, and their industrial affairs by the latter, and that when an industrial struggle verges into a political one the control of it shall pass into the jurisdiction of the Socialist Party.

arily lost much of this control to the revolutionaries during the crisis.

Two general resolutions came before the conference, the first presented by D'Aragona for the reformist plan, and the second by Bucco for the revolutionary plan. Their most important clauses follow:

(1) (D'Aragona), "The conference decides that the objective of the movement shall be the recognition by the employers of the principle of the workers' control in the factories. By this it is intended to open a way to those greater conquests which must inevitably lead to collective direction and socialization, thus settling fundamentally the question of production. The workers' control will give to the working class the possibility of preparing itself technically, and will enable it to substitute (with the help of the technical and intellectual forces, which cannot refuse their cooperation in this highly necessary task) their own new authority for that of the employers which is now passing away."*

(2) (Bucco), "Considering that the situation created in the country in consequence of the agitation of the metal workers does not admit of a solution of a purely economic character, and as it has created a state of mind in the working class which, rising far above craft interests, has developed high aspirations of a political character,

"The National Council of the General Confederation of Labor requests the Executive of the Party to take charge of the movement and to direct it to the realization of the maximum solution of the Socialist program, viz.: the socialization of the means of production and distribution."†

*The workers' control is a committee system by which the industrial workers have an opportunity to learn all the technical and business sides to their respective industries. They have access to the books at all times, so that they may know how much profits are made, where the raw materials come from, how much of them are used, how the supply is regulated, where the finished products go to, what the turn-over of labor is, the general statistics of industry, etc. The workers may also attend the meetings of the boards of directors. They also exercise a certain control over the hiring and discharging of workers. The system is really a school in industrial management for the actual producers.

†These resolutions are taken from D'Aragona's report (P. 90 and 96) to the Leghorn, 1921, Congress of the General Confederation of Labor.

The former of these resolutions was to allow capitalism to continue, in return for a few reforms, and the latter was to at once declare a state of revolution. The first one was carried by a vote of 591,245 against 409,569, and the labor movement was thereby put squarely on record to eliminate the political aspirations of the workers in the situation, and to confine the struggle to purely economic grounds by directing the movement solely towards the winning of the workers' control of industry.

Following out this plan, a meeting was arranged on September 15th, with Prime Minister Giolitti and the employers. Giolitti expressed himself in favor of the workers' control and the employers were also compelled to agree to it in principle. Negotiations were then continued with the employers alone, which resulted a few days later in an agreement covering the whole industry and carrying with it increases in wages and a few other reforms. A mixed commission was appointed to study and prepare a proposition for the enactment of a law embodying the workers' control of industry. On September 21st-22nd, the metal workers held a congress to consider the contract and other results of their struggle. Considerable discontent was expressed by the radicals that the movement had been stopped short of revolution. But the die was cast and the action of the reformist leaders was finally endorsed. On September 24th, the rank and file, by a referendum vote backed up the congress' action, and the historic battle, which had lasted three and a half weeks, was called off. The factories were turned back to the capitalists.

So died, ingloriously, the magnificent revolutionary effort of the Italian workers. It was the German revolution all over again, with but minor variations. A great anti-capitalist movement was peddled for a song by timid reformist leaders. The principal difference between the two was that in Germany, the situation being extremely acute, the workers actually got the reforms promised them, whereas in Italy, where matters were not quite so

intense, they did not get them. Workers' control of industry has not been established in Italy up to this day. Nor is it likely to be without a great, direct struggle by the workers. The ruling class has made a football of the proposition. Their political and industrial agents have blocked its realization so thoroughly that it has now degenerated into merely a political demand of the labor movement. The great revolutionary movement was thrown away by the weak-kneed labor leaders on the strength of the promise of a crooked capitalist politician, Giolitti.

THE WHITE TERROR

Almost instantly all Italy knew that the workers had been overwhelmingly defeated; that for the sake of an increase in wages, soon afterwards wiped out by the advancing cost of living, and for a vague promise of the workers' control, they had given up the best opportunity ever presented to the working class to abolish the wages system. As for the workers, they fell prey to a profound pessimism and demoralization. Raised to supreme heights by their superb effort, they dropped into the depths of discouragement when they saw it ruined. Their marvelous revolutionary spirit and enthusiasm vanished like a bubble that had been pricked. And by the same token the capitalists were cheered and heartened beyond measure. They rightly felt that they had won a tremendous defensive victory, and they also perceived that the defeated workers were broken in spirit and almost helpless. Hence, when they had recovered somewhat from their first fright at being dangled so unceremoniously over the revolutionary precipice, the latter launched a great offensive against the whole workers' line. This attack was one of the bitterest and most unscrupulous ever waged against labor. The capitalists were determined to take lasting revenge upon their rebellious slaves and to make forever impossible the recurrence of such a revolutionary danger as the one just passed.

One of the chief instruments used by the employers in this historic onslaught was the Fascisti organization. The

Fascisti are a national body, with regularly established branches in nearly all the cities, towns, and villages of Italy. It is officially reported that their membership totals 170,000, but some labor men claim that it runs as high as 1,000,000. They have elaborate headquarters in many places, and are served by a whole battery of daily, weekly, and monthly journals. The organization, like White Guard movements everywhere, does lip-service to a rabid patriotism: it is supposed to be fighting for the glory of Italy, but in reality it is merely a tool for doing the dirty work of the country's employing interests. These exploiters finance it liberally and openly. The membership, especially the more militant part of it, is made up of ex-military officers, students, sons of business men, habitual criminals, and the hundred and one other degenerate elements who, through greed and stupidity, are always available to serve as White Guards for capitalism. The name of the organization was taken from the bundles of sticks, or "fasci," which served as the emblem of the old Roman Empire, and which typify the power that comes from close organization. The leading spirit of the movement is one Benito Mussolini, a renegade Socialist. He is editor of "Il Popolo d' Italia," national daily organ of the Fascisti. At a recent meeting of the latter's central executive committee he was affectionately referred to as "the master and flame of our faith." In these days when European capitalists have a particularly dastardly attack to make against the workers, they always get some so-called revolutionist to maneuver it for them: Noskes, Briands, Thomases, Mussolinis, and Kerenskys are ever at hand to do them service.

The Fascisti organization is of comparatively recent growth. It originated from the scattering groups of fanatical "patriots," a la D'Annunzio, that sprang up immediately after the close of the great war. These "patriotic" nuclei won their spurs in April, 1919, when they raided, sacked, and burned the offices of the "*Avanti!*" the revolutionary paper in Milan. The movement lingered, however,

weak and inconspicuous, until after the metal workers' strike. Then the frightened and belligerent employers seized upon it as just the weapon they needed, forced it into a mushroom growth, and launched it in a deluge of blood and iron upon the devoted heads of the workers. Thus they inaugurated one of the most astonishing campaigns of oppression and bloodshed in modern history.

The method of the Fascisti is calculated, organized terrorism. They aim to paralyze the workers with naked fear and to destroy every semblance of organization and independence among them. Murder, arson, rape, kidnapping, and the systematic violation of every right, human and civil of the workers, are the means they use in their work of destruction. One of their favorite tactics is the so-called "punitive expedition." Commonly this horror developed as follows: for some real or fancied grievance, the Fascisti would decide to punish the workers in a certain town. To this end they would assemble their cohorts from the surrounding country, sometimes to the number of many thousands, and then make an armed, automobile raid in force upon the ill-fated community. Then they would proceed to brutally shoot and beat men and women, destroy working-class property, and generally act as thugs until their fine "patriotic" instincts were satisfied. When the invaders departed usually there would not be a stick or a stone of anything relating to Labor left standing. Such "punitive expeditions" happened in scores, if not hundreds of Italian cities and towns, particularly in the industrial north. They have resulted in the death of large numbers of workers and the destruction of many labor temples, cooperatives, newspaper plants, etc. A recent estimate calculated the ravages of the Fascisti as follows: workers killed 400, wounded 3500, labor temples, etc., destroyed 150.*

The following experience of the town of Argenta is typical of what happened to many others:

**The Federated Press*, November 23rd, 1921.

“On the night of Saturday, April 15th, towards three in the morning, a thousand Fascisti, coming from Bologna and Ferrara, surrounded and invaded our district. Their goal was to terrorize and destroy the organizations which obstinately remained affiliated to the local labor council. Armed with revolvers, rifles, and hand-grenades, they fired many thousand shots. Divided in squadrons and led by local Fascisti, they invaded the homes of the known Socialists, many of whom they then dragged out and mercilessly clubbed. The Mayor, Zardi, was forced to sign his resignation. The Fascisti then occupied the Post Office and made the janitor ring the alarm bell constantly. The occupation lasted all night. Over twenty were seriously injured by the ferocious beatings. The Labor Temple was sacked and burned, as were the homes of many comrades. On April 17th, an expedition of Fascisti, in several auto trucks, went to St. Biagio d’Argenta, and destroyed the furniture and fixtures of the local there. Thus Argentano also, which had the most glorious labor traditions in our province, was forced to capitulate.”*

Special attention was given by the Fascisti to the destruction of the workers’ political organizations.. Free speech and assembly were entirely abolished in many districts. Men who dared to place their names in nomination on the Socialist ticket were beaten, assassinated, or driven away to other towns and ordered not to return on pain of death. Some were held incommunicado in the private jails of the Fascisti. A favorite terroristic method was to force the resignation of regularly elected local officials who might be friendly to the workers. In such cases the Fascisti would boldly and insolently demand that the Socialist mayors and councilmen get out of office, even though they had been placed there, as often happened in many radical strongholds, by nine-tenths of the total votes cast. And the history of the struggle indicates that the resignations were usually forthcoming when demanded. Those officials who refused did so at their peril. Good fortune would be theirs if they were not summoned to the door to answer a knock some dark night and then murdered in cold blood.

*“*Fascismo: Primi Elementi Di Un’ Inchiesta Socialista Sulle Gesta Dei Fascisti In Italia*, P. 59.

In scores of localities the workers' representatives were thus driven from political office by the Fascisti and their positions turned over to reactionaries.

Naturally the labor unions also suffered heavy attack in the general campaign of oppression. Their strikes were fought with unparalleled bitterness and their militant members fiercely persecuted. This was particularly the case in the smaller localities, although even in the larger cities, such as Milan, Turin, Bologna, Florence, Modena, Parma, etc., the movement suffered greatly. In many places the Fascisti actually compelled the unions' officers to resign: then, after electing tools of their own, they would affiliate the devitalized organizations to their national yellow labor movement. The same general tactics were used against the cooperatives, which had their property burned or stolen, their officers persecuted and ousted, and their organizations either broken up or absorbed by the Fascisti. The latter are actually building up their own "patriotic" trade union and cooperative movements with remnants of organizations literally carved out of the body of Organized Labor.

The labor press, notably the "*Avanti!*" of Milan, was a special object of attack by the Fascisti. The methods employed varied, including the burning of the newspaper plants, the destruction of the presses, the intimidation of newsdealers for handling the papers, the stationing of Fascisti in the post offices who forced the workers, under pain of dire vengeance, to return their papers and to cancel their subscriptions, etc. Recently the "*Avanti!*" published a long list of newsdealers who had been compelled to stop handling their journal, and also tables showing thousands of subscribers who had been made to give up the paper. The following letter indicates a typical condition in the Fascisti war against the labor press:

"Cogruzzo, Reggio Emilia,

"May 10th, 1921.

"Editor '*Avanti!*'

"I must inform you that on the eighth of the current

month the greater part of our best comrades were compelled by the Director of the Fascio to sign declarations refusing the 'Avanti!', and whoever might have refused would have been condemned to death. We signed against our will, because we were constrained by the violence of the Fascisti. But you of the management may contrive to send it to me, as my mind and faith has always been for Socialism, and will be for it tomorrow even as yesterday. Although the Fascisti may club me, may do with me as they will, still I will cry with my last breath: 'Long Live Socialism,' 'Long Live the International of Workers.'

“Fraternally,

“(C. U.)”

Far from attempting to stop this civil war, or reign of terror, provoked by the Fascisti, the Government openly aided it. Time and again its soldiers and police joined hands in the Fascisti depredations, and then arrested and punished the outraged workers. The workers were kept unarmed, under severe penalties, while the Fascisti were allowed to go about armed to the teeth. This attitude of the Government explains why a minority of Fascisti were able to so completely tyrannize over a majority of workers. Nor were the big fraction of Socialist members in the Chamber of Deputies able to change the situation. They complained in vain about the crimes of the Fascisti and their governmental allies. The whole situation gave evidence of the general breakdown of political government in Italy.

In the face of the Fascisti white terror, the attitude of the organized workers was largely one of passive resistance. Stating that Fascism was an after-war phenomenon that must soon pass away, their leaders counselled them to hold firm and not to allow themselves to be provoked into acts that would call forth still greater violence. For the most part the workers heeded this advice, although here and there some of the more aggressive ones occasionally gave the Fascisti a dose of their own medicine. But such resistance usually resulted in still further “punitive expeditions.”

THE STORM ABATES

The intense period of Fascism began in September, 1920, and lasted about a year. That was the "Golden Age" of the organization, the time when hunting workers became a sport for all the young-blood aristocrats to amuse themselves with. But the movement is now receding rapidly and bids fair soon to become a negligible factor in Italian life.

The basic reason for this recession is the general failure of the campaign. The workers' organizations have gallantly withstood the storm directed against them. Some, it is true, went down, but the heart of the movement is still sound. Seeing this, and realizing that the workers must eventually recover from the depression and demoralization afflicting them since the breakdown of the revolutionary metal workers' agitation, the exploiting class became alarmed and began to look for means to end the civil war, for they knew that if the masses woke up while the Fascisti campaign was in full swing, the probability was that they would make short work of the capitalist system and all its defenders. A contributing factor also to their fear was the rapid spread of the "Arditti del Popolo" movement, which is an organization of radical workers who undertake to pay the Fascisti and their active supporters in their own coin. But the final urge to peace came from the recent general elections, when, despite wild terrorism by the whole Fascisti organization, the workers' parties were able to elect nearly as many national Deputies as they had before—140 (that is, 125 Socialists and 15 Communists) as against 156. After this electoral showing, which came as a great surprise to the exploiters, the latter decided to slacken a bit in their campaign of organized murder, and a peace pact was signed in Rome on August 3rd, 1921. This interesting and important document follows:

For the purpose of restoring the normal life in Italy between political parties and economic organizations, the following have assembled—under the

presidency of Hon. Enrico De Nicola, president of the Chamber of Deputies—the representatives of the National Council of the Fascisti, the Fascisti Parliamentary group, the Socialist Party Executive Committee, the Socialist Parliamentary group, and the General Confederation of Labor.

There were also invited: The leader of the Communist Parliamentary group, the representatives of the People's Party Parliamentary group, and the Republican Deputies. The leader of the Communist Parliamentary group stated verbally to the president of the Chamber that the Communist Parliamentary group, in conformity and in harmony with the declarations published by the Executive Committee of the Italian Communist Party, would not participate in the conference. The representatives of the People's Party Parliamentary group, Hon. De Gasperi and Cingolani, responded thanking us for the invitation and expressing wishes that the result of the conference would be the much desired pacification. But they felt that the intervention of parties which do not find themselves in the same situation and the same struggle as the contestants might diminish the value of the agreement that was to be concluded between the two parties at issue. The group preferred to renounce its claim to official recognition, and to contribute to the success of the noble purposes of the President by persevering, in the Chamber and out of it, in its attitude of rigid legality and impartiality towards the social forces. For the Republican Deputies the Hons. Chiesa, Mazzolani, Conti, and Macrelli, replied, likewise thanking us and expressing fervid hopes for the pacification so necessary for the welfare of our country, but stating their belief that the intervention of the Republican Party would be inopportune because it has tried to remain neutral in the unfortunate contests between the factions, even when its own organizations suffered heavily.

1. It is understood that there is here reproduced and confirmed the official communication of the 28th of July, which settled a question raised by the Fascisti regarding the relations between the Socialist Party and the Communist Party.

2. The five bodies here represented agree to so

arrange matters that all threats, overt acts, reprisals, punitive expeditions, vendettas, oppressions, and personal violence, of every species shall immediately cease.

3. The marks, emblems and badges of both parties shall be respected.

In this matter requests and propositions were made regarding the exposure of flags on public buildings, but the president ruled that such questions rest within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Government and Parliament and cannot be settled by agreement between political parties.

4. The parties mutually pledge themselves to respect each others economic organizations.

5. Every action, attitude or conduct in violation of this pledge and agreement shall be disavowed and deplored by the respective organizations.

The Socialist Party declares itself to be foreign to the organization and work of the "Arditi del Popolo," which moreover is made plain by the conference of the latter, which proclaimed itself independent of all parties.

6. Every infraction of these provisions shall be referred immediately to the judgment of an arbitrator, who shall objectively determine the responsibility therefor.

7. To work out this agreement the political and economic organizations of each party shall contribute to the construction in every Province of an arbitration committee composed of two representatives of the Socialists and two of the Fascisti, presided over by a person selected by common accord, or in failure of that, by the President of the Chamber of Deputies. Wherever, fifteen days from today, the parties have not designated their arbiters, the nomination of them shall be made by the undersigned organizations.

8. All the local agreements that do not correspond exactly to the spirit of this agreement are herewith annulled.

9. The organizations pledge themselves not to violently oppose the reinstatement in their positions, by legal means, of those who claim to have been forced to resign their positions as public officials.

10. The parties mutually agree to the restitution of all objects of value belonging to the organizations and

to individuals, which eventually are found in the possession of other organizations and individuals.

11. The undersigned representatives invite the press of their respective political parties to conform themselves to the terms of the present agreement, in order that its ends may be accomplished as easily as possible.

The above is made public by means of the press with the firm faith and hope that everyone may understand how the gravity of the hour demands the strength and honesty of this joint word of peace, and the necessity for compliance with it.

The treaty was signed by representatives of the Fascisti, the Socialist Party Executive Committee, the Socialist Parliamentary group, the General Confederation of Labor, and the President of the Chamber of Deputies.*

In August, shortly after this document was drawn up, the writer passed through Italy. Peace was then far from being established. The left wing of the Fascisti were in violent opposition to the peace treaty and were demanding the utter extermination of every form of organized labor. They had forced the resignation of Mussolini, Marsiglio, Rossi, and Farinacci, prominent officials of their organization. The walls of Florence, Bologna, and other cities were plastered almost unbrokenly with flaming posters, couched in violent language and calling upon the "Fascisti Italiani di Combattimento" to crush labor completely. Outrages were occurring in many towns, and the few remaining

*Following the promulgation of the general treaty, a number of local agreements were worked out in the various cities and towns. And shamefully enough, these too often amounted only to vigorous Fascisti-Socialist alliances against the Communists. For example, in the Pieve d'Olmi pact, signed September 24th, 1921, and reported in the October-November number of "*Alba Nuova*," the local Socialists agree to the following disgraceful clauses:

(a) To block the development of the Communist movement locally.
(b) To nominate a commission composed of two Fascisti and two Socialists and a president chosen by the four members; to which shall be reported all untoward incidents, and all those who are members of the Communist movement—this being to differentiate between Socialists and Communists.

3. Expulsion of the Communists from the unions, and absolute prohibition against the Socialists wearing Soviet emblems. Direct separation from responsibility for the work of the Communists, and an obligation to report the same.

labor offices, cooperatives, etc., were all under heavy guard.

But the Fascisti movement, by its general failure, had a knife stuck in its heart even before the peace pact was signed, and it kept on bleeding until now, when it has lost very much of its former militancy. It is probably a very good thing for the capitalist class that this is so, because Italian Labor is rapidly awakening again and going over to the offensive. Even as I write, all Italy is torn with great strikes of the metal workers, seamen, printers, railroadmen, etc. In such a situation any great militancy by the Fascisti might easily rouse the workers to revolutionary resistance and thus bring about the end of capitalism.

LABOR CLEANS HOUSE

The Fascisti white terror was the penalty paid by Italian workers for betrayal by their leaders. The seizure of the metal works was a revolutionary act. Either it should have been followed by a general drive of the workers for political power, or it should not have been undertaken at all. As it was the workers were first spurred to the heights of revolutionary hope and enthusiasm and then thrown down to the depths of despair. The consequence for them was demoralization and an incapacity to resist the stormy attack of the aroused employing class.

The unfavorable outcome of the metal workers' strike has greatly strengthened the war of the revolutionary elements against the conservatives in the labor movement. One result of this war was the recent split in the Italian Socialist Party and the formation of the Communist Party by the seceding faction. Another result is the rapid spread of Communist sentiment among the trade unions. These bodies are being honeycombed by minority committees of revolutionists aiming to break the power and influence of the conservative leaders.

In Italy, as elsewhere, the Communists are very much opposed to splits in the industrial field. They are strictly for working within the old unions. Just now they are

making strong strong efforts to bring the Syndicalist Union and the Federation of Railroad Workers, both of which are controlled by Syndicalists and Anarchists, into the ranks of the General Confederation of Labor, which is still in the hands of the reformist Socialists. Although this combination would still leave the revolutionaries in the minority, it would give them an organization so militant and powerful as to soon lead to their control of the whole labor movement.

On September 20th of this year, the Communists held their first national labor conference in Milan. There they outlined their general means of warring against the conservatives' control by adopting a resolution containing the following propositions: (1) Communists should stay inside the General Confederation of Labor, (2) Communists should work for trade union unity, (3) Communists in the trade union federations affiliated with the Red Trade Union International should work for unity with the General Confederation of Labor, (4) Communists should not try to detach unions from the General Confederation of Labor, (5) Communists in the railroad federation and other independent unions should work for their affiliation with the Red Trade Union International and the General Confederation of Labor.

At present the three revolutionary left-wing groups of Italian Labor, the Communists, Syndicalists, and Anarchists, control about one-third of the trade union movement. Their cause is developing rapidly, and once they are thoroughly organized, which must eventually happen, it will not be long before they have manned the labor movement throughout with real fighters, men who will not cringe in the test, as the Serrati-D'Aragona group did in the historic crisis growing out of the metal workers' strike.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAR BETWEEN REDS AND YELLOWS IN FRANCE

In France the after-war revolutionary crisis reached its greatest intensity during the general strike of May, 1920. This wide-spread movement shook French society to its foundations. It started as a general strike of railroadmen, but soon developed into a nation-wide walkout of transport workers, miners, electricians, gas workers, etc. The ruling class understood the agitation as a direct attempt at revolution and treated it accordingly. They victimized thousands of the workers in various ways, and jailed scores of the more militant leaders, charging them with conspiring at revolution. Eventually the upheaval was crushed, chiefly because of the inefficiency and cowardice of the reformist trade union officials. By the loss of the great strike French Labor suffered the severest defeat in its history.

THE ORIGIN OF SYNDICALISM

Before examining the course of the famous May strike and the bitter intra-union war resulting of it, we should glance briefly at the history of trade unionism generally before the strike. Originally the French labor unions, like those of nearly every other country, were in the hands of reformists, men who saw in them merely instruments for protecting, or possibly raising somewhat, the standard of living of the workers under capitalism. The two branches of the avowedly revolutionary movement—the Socialists and the Anarchists—had very little understanding or appreciation of the trade unions. About all that the Socialists used them for was as vote-catching machines for their political parties, and as for the Anarchists, they despised them altogether.

This general attitude of the revolutionists towards the trade unions persisted pretty much from the latter's origin in the early '70s down to the middle '90s. Then an epoch-making change took place. Suddenly the Anar-

chists, under the intellectual and practical leadership of such able men as Kropotkin, Pelloutier, Pouget, Pataud, etc., realized that their policy of isolating themselves in little groups was ineffective. They decided to propagate their ideas in the mass organizations of the workers, and in order to do so, made their famous "raid" on the trade unions. In a few years' time, grace to their extreme militancy, they succeeded in breaking the power of the conservative and Socialist leaders in the trade unions and in winning almost complete control themselves.

But during the struggle the trade union Anarchists changed their own philosophy and tactics profoundly. Casting aside many of their old individualistic notions, they came to adopt the conception of the class struggle. They also saw in the trade union the sole means of working class emancipation, and in its method, the strike, the great revolutionary weapon. In a word, their movement gave birth to the modern philosophy of Syndicalism. This doctrine came clearly to light for the first time during the General Confederation of Labor (C. G. T.) Convention at Amiens in 1906. Then was written the famous "Charte d' Amiens," which still serves as the classic statement of Syndicalism. It says:

"In the daily struggle for betterment, Syndicalism seeks the coordination of the workers' efforts, the increase in well-being of the toilers by the realization of immediate benefits such as the decrease of working hours, the increase of wages, etc. But this work is only one side of the task of Syndicalism: it also prepares for integral emancipation, which can only be realized by the expropriation of the capitalists: it indicates the general strike as the means of action, and it considers that the trade union, which today is the group of resistance, will be in the future the group of production and distribution, the base of social reorganization."*

With its new and vigorous leadership and its inspiring philosophy, the C. G. T. developed the greatest activity and militancy ever displayed by a labor movement. It

*Kritsky, "*L'Evolution du Syndicalisme en France*," P. 384.

waged strike after strike, most of them successful and many of them spectacular enough to attract the attention of the whole world. The organization became very powerful—it was rightly said at the time that its 500,000 members were much more of a factor in the life of France, than were the 2,500,000 members of the German Socialist unions in the affairs of their country.

THE LEADERS TURN YELLOW

This era of militancy lasted practically up to the outbreak of the world war in 1914, when it ended with a crash. Almost overnight hundreds of the seemingly revolutionary leaders, especially the officials grouped around Leon Jouhaux, general secretary of the General Confederation of Labor (C. G. T.), became ultra-patriotic. Instead of countering the war declaration by calling a general strike, as the C. G. T. was pledged to do, they fell in line with the war plans of the ruling class, echoing all its chauvinistic slogans and using the labor movement chiefly as a means to inject the germs of war-hysteria in the minds of the workers. The supposedly revolutionary Syndicalists of France plunged into the war almost as unresistingly as the reformist Socialists of Germany.

Naturally the French ruling class appreciated this. They made much of their labor allies, even as the German exploiters had done theirs under similar circumstances. Jouhaux and the others were feted and dined and given high political preferment. Most of their time they spent hobnobbing with the capitalists and sleek bourgeois politicians, or running about the world on war business for the Government. Of course, they were spared the dangers and hardships of serving in the trenches. For their treason to the workers, the erstwhile despised C. G. T. leaders suddenly blossomed forth as "big" men of France. On the other hand, those militants who, like Pierre Monatte, still remained true to the old ideals of the C. G. T., were harried and persecuted. Most of them were rushed off to the firing line forthwith, even as their similars had been in Germany.

This reactionary attitude of the trade union leaders did not cease at the end of the war: if anything it was intensified. Jouhaux, Merrheim, Dumoulin, et al, who a few years ago advocated the most extreme doctrines, now gave up the very principle of the class struggle and adopted that of class cooperation. They fought radicalism energetically and acted generally as the defenders of bourgeois society against the threatening wave of Bolshevism.

These tactics greatly embittered the revolutionists in the C. G. T. The latter came to look upon their officials as traitors to the cause, as agents of the capitalist class. Hence, they decided to oust them and to bring the organization back to its revolutionary basis. To this end they restarted their independent journal "*La Vie Ouvriere*" (suppressed during the war), and commenced to reorganize the famous militant minority which had done such good work in the trade unions during the Anarchist "raid" and the struggle against the Socialist politicians. The new war between the red and yellow Syndicalists was on.

THE BIG MAY STRIKE

It was in the midst of such an unfavorable atmosphere, with the red rank-and-filers warring against the yellow leaders, that the great strike of May, 1920, took place. The upheaval centered around the railroad industry. During the war and the period just following it, the Federation of Railroad Workers,* had jumped in membership enormously—the increase was from 23,000 in 1913, to 235,000 in 1920. Feeling its new power, the organization surged restlessly all during the war under the shameful tyranny of the horde of parasites, Government and otherwise, exploiting the railroad workers. And no sooner had the war finished than this discontent began to express itself in a series of strikes. Progressively these took on

*This is practically an industrial union, including as it does all categories of workers in the railroad industry. In 1917 it absorbed the last important craft union when it amalgamated with the railroad engineers.

more and more extent, until finally the movement of revolt culminated in the big clash of May 1st.

The immediate impulse to this great struggle was given in the preceding February. At that time a railroad official refused a leave of absence to a worker whom the union had given road duties to perform. Therefore, he stayed away from his work of his own accord. The company then tried to discipline him, with the result that protest strikes broke out in many places and spread rapidly over almost the entire railroad system of France, state-owned as well as privately-owned. At first the movement was unauthorized, but after a few days the union took it in charge and negotiated a settlement of the grievance.

Hardly had the men gone back to work, however, than the companies flagrantly violated their agreement. This caused intense resentment among the railroad workers, and they called a special convention to decide upon a course of action. Realizing that the exploiters had determined to test out the strength of the union, the workers were eager for the fray. The yellow leaders, cleverly sensing the revolutionary mood of the convention delegates and not daring to oppose it openly, vied with the radicals in demanding drastic action. Consequently the convention went strongly on record for a general strike to realize the following four demands: "(1) Nationalization of the railroads, (2) Immediate reinstatement of all discharged workers, (3) Abandonment of legal prosecution of strikers, (4) Recognition of trade unionism."* The strike date was set for May 1st, a few days thence, and an agreement was made with the heads of the C. G. T. that that organization should back up the railroadmen with its full striking strength.

These momentous events created wide-spread agitation throughout France—the ruling class could see the dreaded revolution in the offing. But they had little cause for real alarm: their protectors, the yellow trade union leaders,

*Jean Brecot, "*La Grande Greve de Mai*," P. 28.

were at hand to see that nothing serious happened. Even as their likes had done in the great crises in Germany, England, and Italy, so the French reformist labor officials desperately feared a revolutionary struggle and worked ceaselessly to prevent it. Immediately after the general strike was decided upon (which had been forced upon the reformists by the revolutionary situation) they set out to make it ineffective. This they succeeded in doing completely by passively sabotaging the movement to its ruin. As the precious pre-strike days slipped rapidly by, days that should have been devoted to intense preparation, the trade union leaders quibbled and equivocated, doing nothing to educate, enthuse, and organize the masses for the coming battle.

The plan agreed upon was that the railroaders should strike first. Then, at intervals of a day or two each, the miners, transport workers, and other strategically situated trades were to follow suit. Capitalism was to have been paralyzed by "waves" of general strikes. It was a big program, and one that presupposed an alert and disciplined labor movement. But the workers, neglected by their leaders, were unable to rise to its requirements. They hardly knew what the whole thing was about. Even the railroad men were confused and unprepared. Their strike, on May 1st, was only about 50% effective. And the strikes of the miners, transport workers, electricians, and gas workers, which followed in the next several days, were even worse. The great tie-up failed to materialize and the consequence was that after a few days the supporting trades had to go back to work. On May 22nd, similar action was taken by the railroadmen, who were thoroughly beaten. Thus passed the after-war revolutionary crisis in France. The movement was a complete fiasco; it was ruined by its own leaders.

The great May defeat was followed by the usual dire consequences. Taking the offensive, the employers smashed many unions and discharged great numbers of active workers. In the railroad industry over 25,000 militants

lost their jobs and were blacklisted. Scores of revolutionary leaders were thrown in jail and charged with attempting to overthrow the Government. But worse than all, the rank and file of the membership became disheartened and quit the unions in droves. Since the end of the strike the C. G. T. has decreased in membership from about 2,000,000 to 600,000. Thus French Labor paid dearly for having reformists at its head during the revolutionary crisis.

REDS AGAINST YELLOWS

This sad debacle intensified the hatred and opposition of the revolutionaries against the yellow trade union leaders. They extended their minority organization and redoubled their efforts to win control of the unions. The reformist officials replied by declaring war to the knife against them. They denounced the revolutionaries as responsible for the loss of the strike, and practically cooperated with the Government by sustaining its contention that the affair was a revolutionary attempt directed from Moscow. In the railroad workers' union they shamefully ousted the militants from the national executive board. While these militants were still in jail the conservatives, led by Bidegarray, held a meeting, deposed them from the board, and elected new members of their own stripe. Nine members of the new executive board were actual scabs, men who had refused to obey the general strike call. Even the American labor movement, with all its unsavory incidents, can hardly show anything worse in its history than the actions of Bidegarray and his clique. The eventual result was a bad split in the Federation of Railroad Workers and a great embitterment of the general conflict between the reds and yellows throughout the entire trade union movement.

In the midst of this destructive internal turmoil the C. G. T. held its 1920 Convention in Orleans. It resulted in a big defeat for the revolutionaries, as they polled only 658 votes against 1,485 for the reformists. Their program was overwhelmingly beaten. The old officialdom, vic-

torious, were exultant. Pessimism and discouragement seized hold of the militants. The defection of their leaders, the betrayal of the great strike, and the complete defeat at Orleans were almost too much for them. Their minority organization was brought face to face with the deadly peril of dual unionism. A considerable faction, largely influenced by the propaganda of the American I. W. W., advocated that the revolutionists quit the old unions and found a new movement patterned after their own principles. They also brought about a number of splits, notably in Marseilles, and launched a dual union of the usual "scientific" type.

For a time this separatist movement menaced the organization of the militants in the old unions. But eventually the clearer thinkers, headed by Pierre Monatte,* overcame it. They understood and pointed out the danger of dual unionism: how it separates the militants from the masses and leaves the latter to the tender mercies of the reactionary bureaucracy. While not blinking the difficulties that confronted their own program, they by no means considered them insurmountable. During their extensive experience in the past they had learned much of the power that may be exercised by militants when they are organized in the unions, and it convinced them that the same policy, vigorously prosecuted, would again result in the downfall of the reformist leaders. Therefore, swayed by this practical, realistic reasoning, the great body of the rebels rejected the proposed dual unionism and decided to fight out the issue in the old unions. They laid elaborate plans to win control of the C. G. T. at its 1921 convention.

*Monatte is editor of "*La Vie Ouvriere*" and the central figure among French trade union revolutionaries. Originally an Anarchist, he became a Syndicalist during the historic "raid" on the unions elsewhere described. At the outbreak of the war he was a member of the national executive committee of the C. G. T. But he resigned in protest when that body refused to participate in a Copenhagen, December, 1914, conference to end the war. Shortly afterward he was drafted into the army and sent to the front, where he remained until the close of the war.

NOYAUTAGE

The minority organization of the French trade union militants is the Revolutionary Syndicalist Committee, or C. S. R. as it is more popularly known. It is composed of the various revolutionary elements, including left-wing Socialists, Anarchists, Syndicalists, and Communists. Its political conceptions and policies vary from place to place and industry to industry, according as one or another of its groups predominate. In the main, however, the Syndicalists control it and map out its activities. The alliance of the four groups in the minority organization is one of expediency; they all have a common interest in standing together to overthrow the yellow bureaucracy. This necessitates that they bury their differences and get along together as best they can. The tendency is to suppress the doctrinal and tactical points upon which they do not agree and to concentrate on those policies which all hold in common. Nevertheless, considerable jangling goes on, notably between the Syndicalists and the Communists. This is serious, and unless it is kept in check it may eventually result in destroying the revolutionary minority bloc, which of course would amount to a great victory for Jouhaux and his coterie.

The C. S. R. is a practical organization. It has no cart-wheel chart (such as American industrial unionists dote upon) according to which it must reorganize the labor movement. Its breath of life is to meet issues as they crop up in the daily struggle and to solve them according to general revolutionary principles—not to work arbitrarily according to some intellectual's blue print. Characteristically, Monatte says:

“Do not be mistaken, my friends; I have no plan in my pocket for the redistribution of the old unions into new federations; no miraculous formula for local and national union constitutions capable of bringing us the masses all at one blow, of winning all strikes, and of making the revolution in five seconds.”*

*“*Reflexions Sur L'Avenir Syndical*,” P. 13.

The method of the C. S. R. is intensified organization of the militants, throughout the whole labor movement. In French labor parlance the system is known as *noyautage*.* The militants' organization corresponds with every stage of the trade union structure, industrial and geographical. In every local union there is a *noyau*, or organized knot of revolutionaries. In every national union there is likewise a general revolutionary committee, composed of delegates from all the local *noyaux* in the industry. And in every central labor council there is a general committee of *noyateurs* from all the local unions in a given district. The whole movement is topped off and linked together nationally by a large committee, the C. S. R. proper, which consists of representatives of all the general *noyaux* in the national unions and central labor councils.

Originally this intricate network of interior organization rested solely upon the principle of the voluntary affiliation together of individuals and *noyaux*. But of recent months large numbers of unions, influenced thereto by the *noyaux* within them, have affiliated directly to the C. S. R. and pay it a regular per capita tax—whence a big fight, as we shall see later on. The organization maintains an elaborate headquarters in Paris. It also keeps up an extensive system of journalism, there being *noyau* papers in many localities and industries to carry the rebel message to the rank and file. The general national organ of the movement is "*La Vie Ouvriere*," a weekly.

The C. S. R. *noyaux*, identical in many respects with the Russian Communist Party's *yatchaykas*, use the latter's method of the preliminary caucus. That is, before every labor gathering, be it a local union meeting, a national union convention, or a C. G. T. congress, the *noyaux* always meet together beforehand, map out their policies, and organize to make them prevail. The result is a general line-up everywhere between the forces of reaction and revolution; the organized militants wage their battle for

*Derived from the French word *noyau*, signifying core, heart, or interior group.

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progress effectively in every nook and corner of the labor movement. The French militant minority is the best organized of any in the capitalist world.

EXCLUSION AND DISRUPTION

After it had passed its crisis of dual unionism in the fall of 1920, the C. S. R. made rapid headway and soon won over large sections of the trade unions. This startled the yellow bureaucrats and they renewed their offensive against it. Seeing that the militants would not oblige them by quitting the unions voluntarily, they decided to throw them out. Hence, the executive committee of the C. G. T., upon the motion of Dumoulin, himself formerly a militant, declared for the expulsion of every organization having direct affiliation with the C. S. R. The pretense was that the latter body, especially because of its per capita tax system, constituted a rival to the C. G. T., a dual movement in fact. One after another, the national unions endorsed the actions of the C. G. T. and finally even the Amsterdam International of Trade Unions took a hand in the matter by blessing the campaign of expulsion. Then began the great struggle of the conservatives to expel the revolutionists, and of the latter to say in the unions.

This struggle, which is still going on, has become so intense that the issue now is "shall the French trade union movement be split, or not?" The yellows say, "Yes," and the reds, "No." The former realize fully that they are doomed if the revolutionists are allowed to remain among the masses. Therefore, they are determined to get rid of them, even if they have to wreck the labor movement in order to do so. And by the same token, the revolutionists know that their strategic place of advantage is in the mass organizations, and they are equally determined not to be driven out into sterile isolation. The capitalist press and all the crooked politicians in the country are openly on the side of the reformists in their efforts to split the C. G. T.

The first guns in the actual campaign of expulsion

were fired by the national unions of agricultural workers and clerks. Together they excluded five of their locals for affiliation with the C. S. R. Immediately thereupon, the revolutionists made a big issue of the matter. They started a great agitation throughout the whole movement, denouncing the outrage to the workers. As a result they gained large additions to their strength and struck terror to their opponents, who stopped the exclusion policy at once. The situation suddenly got so bad for the latter that, to prevent the whole labor movement from falling into the hands of the militants, they summoned the C. G. T. convention two months in advance of the regular date. In the period just past these worthies had publicly deplored the fact that they had not split the trade unions the year before at Orleans; and now they advised all and sundry that the same mistake would not be repeated at Lille.

But the Lille Convention, held in July, 1921, was a great blow to the reformists. When the votes cast on the vital issue were finally counted, the revolutionaries polled almost half of them—1348 against 1556 for the reformists. This represented an increase of over 100% in the rebels' strength during one year. Their showing was especially significant inasmuch as their votes were drawn entirely from live, aggressive organizations, while the conservatives got a large portion of theirs from "paper unions," which were kept in existence by the bureaucratic officialdom. The Lille Convention demonstrated clearly that the militants, by their policy of *noyautage* in the old unions, had secured the support of the masses of organized workers.

The Convention struggle, which was very bitter, surged mostly around general tactical questions. The militants' aims, briefly stated, were, "(1) To frustrate the confederal leaders' program of splitting the labor movement, (2) to bring the C. G. T. back again to the principles of the class struggle, (3) to break with the (League of Nations) bureau of Albert Thomas, (4) to affiliate with the trade union International of the revolution."* The reformists

*"La Vie Ouvriere," July 29th, 1921.

dared not meet directly the issue of expulsion, so they cleverly evaded it by seating, unopposed, the delegates of the five expelled local unions. Under the circumstances the best they could do was to get through a vague resolution, upholding in a general way the authority and discipline of the C. G. T.

Undeterred by their failure to find a favorable opportunity at Lille to divide the labor movement, however, the reformists are now going ahead with their criminal enterprise more vigorously than ever. They can see no way for themselves to maintain even a shred of control except by forcing the conservatives into one union and the radicals into another. They hope that in such an event the ruling class will favor the conservative labor movement and carry on a relentless warfare against the revolutionary body. Thus they expect to profit.

With this idea in mind, the Jouhaux group are deliberately forcing a split. Moreover, for obvious reasons, they are doing their level best to lay the blame therefor at the doors of the revolutionaries. "Discipline in the organization" is their slogan. They have misconstrued the Lille resolution into a justification of their disruptionist policy, and are expelling C. S. R. local unions all over the country.

On the other hand, the revolutionaries are more than careful to see that the onus for the seemingly inevitable split is not fastened upon them. They are contesting every inch of the ground, and are sticking in the old organization despite the greatest provocation. Throughout France, they are carrying on a great campaign in the unions, exposing the old officialdom as a gang of irresponsible disruptionists. The consequence is that one union after another is coming in to their ranks. They now control a majority of the central labor councils (which are important bodies in France), and nearly all the larger national unions.

At present writing a split appears unavoidable. It may be that the combined bloc of left-wing Socialists, Anar-

chists, Syndicalists, and Communists, through their ceaseless efforts, will be able to prevent it. They are doing all possible to that end: some even proposing that the C. S. R. drop its much-criticised system of accepting the affiliation of local unions, and henceforth confine its membership entirely to individuals. But the minority leaders doubt that even this measure would help, as the conservatives are inexorable in their determination to wreck the labor movement.

So critical is the situation now that before this booklet is in print the French trade union organization will be probably split in two. Should this calamity happen, it may be depended upon that the revolutionists will get the better of the division. Their policy of *noyautage* has succeeded incomparably better than a policy of dual unionism could have done. They have won the hearts and minds of the best and most intelligent sections of the organized workers. If the break must and does come, the masses will surely go with them. The yellows will be left with only the shell of an organization. Split or no split, the French labor movement will continue irresistibly on its march towards revolution.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In Germany, England, Italy, and France, the basic cause of the workers' defeat in the great revolutionary crisis was the same—reformist policies and leadership. The destinies of the labor organizations involved were in the hands of men who failed in the supreme test. Although doing lip-service to the revolution, these officials were reformers at heart, products of the long years of slow evolutionary advance by Labor before the war. They had no faith in the workers' ability to control society alone. Their point of view was essentially capitalistic, and their whole experience predisposed them to a policy of compromise and half-way measures. Psychologically they were utterly incapable of leading the masses victoriously to the overthrow of capitalism. It was perfectly natural that as the revolutionary movements developed in the various countries, these reformist leaders should either deliberately sabotage them or barter them off for petty reforms, as happened in all the countries noted. The first great revolutionary effort of the European working class was defeated, not by the capitalists but by the pseudo-Socialist labor leaders.

Their bitter experiences are bringing these facts home to the clearer thinking workers. More and more of them are being convinced that the old policies and leaders, which may have had some justification in the era of reform just past, are totally unfitted for the period of revolutionary struggle now beginning. Hence, the wide-spread efforts to eliminate the evolutionists and to replace them with revolutionists. The workers are placing at their head real fighters, men who, when the next crisis comes, will not cower and cringe, but will go through with the proletarian program, even as Lenin and his group did in Russia. European Labor is drifting steadily to the left, towards Communism.

THE END

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