

THE STRUGGLE AHEAD OF US

By HARRY POLLITT

THE present world economic crisis, bringing an unheard-of wave of poverty and starvation to hundreds of thousands of working-class homes in every capitalist country, is a striking confirmation of the analysis of the present system that was made by the Communist International at its Sixth Congress in 1928 and confirmed on the basis of subsequent events at the Tenth Plenum of the Communist International in July, 1929, and the recent meeting of the C.I. Præsidium in February, 1930.

All the chatter about the possibility of capitalism having reached a stage when it would no longer be troubled with crises over the problems of markets, competition and price, except in the world market in rivalry with other capitalist powers ; also the theories of the wonders that "organised capitalism" would be able to accomplish ; all the airy-fairy talk about America having entered on a tremendously long period of prosperity that showed the way to every other country ; all the reformist nonsense of the Second International and the Amsterdam International about rationalisation leading to increased standards of living and increased employment for the working class, have been blown sky high. Not a single class-conscious worker to-day can any longer remain unclear as to what is the meaning of the present situation.

The present crisis is not an ordinary cyclical crisis such as we were accustomed to before the war. It is a cyclical crisis in the period of the general crisis of capitalism and in the present third period of post-war capitalism. This means that it is not a transient phase out of which there will emerge a trade boom leading to the possibility of bettering the conditions of the working class, but on the contrary the essential feature of the present situation is that it accentuates the break-up of capitalism and leads to a higher stage, the stage of revolutionary fight of the working class against capitalism, of the struggle to achieve political power and through the dictatorship of the working class to commence in capitalist

countries the part that has already been played by the Russian workers and peasants.

It is important to note that in the two important capitalist countries where the parties of the Second International are in power, England and Germany, the unemployed figures are soaring higher each week and the drive against the working class increases in intensity. It is important to note that in America, where the fusion of a corrupted Trade Union bureaucracy with the whole forces of capitalism expressing itself through the Presidency of Hoover is most complete, that here we have a crisis in the country that only six months ago was being held up as the El Dorado of the whole world. To get the full significance of the meaning of this we have to look at the U.S.S.R. Here through the Revolution, that is, through armed insurrection and civil war, the workers in 1917 won political power. From that time onwards they have been able to record steady advance until in 1928 their economy had been so reorganised and strengthened that it was possible for the first time in the history of the world for a country to openly set itself a planned economy that should be achieved within five years.

In this present world economic crisis the challenge of the Soviet Union resounds throughout the world. It is a challenge of Socialism or Capitalism. The significance of the challenge can no longer be hidden under the phrases of "peaceful advance," "gradualness" and "social reformism." It is the challenge of the Social Revolution which means planned economy, which means increasing economic and cultural standards, as against monopoly capitalism with its crises and driving down of the working class. It is because of this challenge and the increasing strength of the revolutionary movements in the capitalist countries, and in the colonies which they are holding down by armed violence, and because the U.S.S.R. is the one country in the world to-day where there is no economic crisis, that the war preparations are proceeding apace against the Workers' Republic.

At the moment when the world capitalist powers are in their deepest difficulties, the U.S.S.R. under the leadership of the Communist Party is strong enough to commence the task of the liquidation of the kulaks as a class, that is, the liquidation of the last internal enemy of Socialism, the last class enemy within

the borders of the U.S.S.R. It means that the U.S.S.R. is solving the biggest difficulty it has had to face, and that with its solution the revolution not only becomes more secure but its influence and the call to follow its example resound with ever greater force to the working class of the whole world. For this reason, under the slogan of "religious freedom in Russia," the capitalists, divided though they are by the present struggle for markets, have with a touching unanimity inaugurated this campaign for religious freedom in Russia throughout the world which is, in reality, a campaign in defence of the kulaks and is being put forward as the slogan under which intense war preparations against the U.S.S.R. are to be made.

It is interesting to try and see what is new for the British working-class movement in this present economic crisis. Firstly, in the period of growing unemployment we have a greater concentration of capital taking place so that production becomes restricted to the more efficiently equipped factories. This restricts the areas of employment in a period of rising unemployment. It is accompanied by a terrific application of rationalisation which is speeding up production and intensifying labour which accelerates unemployment quite apart from the lack of orders due to the economic crisis. This is particularly seen in one or two striking examples.

In regard to shipbuilding, in 1921, 1,538,052 tons of shipping were built with 229,379 men employed. In 1929, 1,560,254 tons of shipping were built with 145,938 men employed, that is to say that in the last eight years 154,337 men in the shipbuilding industry have been eliminated by rationalisation.

In the coal industry the process has been clearly seen for some time. In 1928, there were produced 1,363,000 more tons of coal with 72,469 less miners employed than in the previous year. An immediate result in the steel industry of a capitalist merger has been seen as recently as February when 600 workers of William Beardmore were dismissed owing to an arrangement between that firm and David Colville & Sons by which the latter acquired the goodwill of Beardmore's business so far as plates, sections and rails were concerned.

In the cotton industry now in deep water we have seen the attempts to increase working hours. Now comes a terrific drive to

introduce the principle of the eight looms for one weaver, which is the subject of the present dispute in the Burnley area and threatens the whole of the Lancashire weavers.

This general feature has been accompanied by an increase in the number of accidents. In 1923 there were 2,647 fatal accidents and 447,378 non-fatal accidents in the seven principal industries of this country. In 1928 there were 2,735 fatal accidents and 461,485 non-fatal accidents. The latter figures in relation to the number of workers employed in 1928 as compared with 1923 show a terrific increase in the number of accidents taking place directly through rationalisation and the speed-up.

The second thing that is to be noted in the present situation so far as the ranks of the unemployed workers themselves are concerned is the new type of worker being thrown on the streets. This is not the type commonly referred to as the unskilled and casually employed section of the working class ; it is to-day the skilled and semi-skilled artisan, particularly men and women over 40 years of age who are being displaced not only through the economic crises and application of new machinery but because of the intensification of labour only younger men and women are able to give the productivity that is required. So that we have to-day hundreds of thousands of men and women in the very prime of their lives and constituting a substantial portion of what has hitherto been looked on as the aristocracy of labour on the streets with no possibility under capitalism of being absorbed in industry again ; for the pace becomes quicker and increasingly prejudices any of their chances to again get back in the workshops from which they have been displaced.

Further, they also constitute a section of the working class many of whom in the past have been a little sceptical and not always sympathetic to the problems of the unemployed. It has been a commonplace in many workshops to listen to many types of workers declare "that the unemployed did not want to work." There are many workers of this type now on the streets themselves and the realisation of what unemployment means for them is going to be a tremendously powerful factor in the development of a militant unemployed movement, because this class represents a stratum of the working-class which has been accustomed to a

higher standard of life than the majority of their fellows and who will not lightly see these standards reduced, and who realise that the fight against unemployment is bound up with the whole fight against capitalist institutions.

The third thing that is new is that in the period of rising unemployment there is a marked rise in the fighting spirit of the working class. This is a factor of the greatest significance for future battles. It has too commonly been assumed that unemployment meant a lack of fighting spirit amongst the working class. In this country it should be noted that because of the magnificent work that has been done by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement for many years it has been absolutely impossible to use the unemployed as a blacklegging instrument, but as the figures have been growing over the last twelve months so has the fighting spirit of the workers itself been growing. This is strikingly confirmed by comparison of the following figures : In 1928, 302 strikes involving 124,400 workers which caused 1,388,000 working days to be lost ; in 1929, in a period of increased unemployment, 420 strikes involving 132,100 workers and causing 828,300 working days to be lost. The vital factor about these strikes in 1928 and 1929 is that every one has been fought in the teeth of the capitalist class, the Labour Party and T.U.C. which is an indication of the tremendous advance in the revolt of the working class against present conditions ; but this has been even more strikingly confirmed by the rally of the unemployed and employed workers all over the world to the call of the Communist International to make March 6 a day of revolt against unemployment, rationalisation and war.

To-day the task before the revolutionary workers is not the old task of fighting for the unemployed under slogans such as work or full maintenance ; the task to-day is the unification of the unemployed and employed under slogans which combine economic and political demands to form the basis upon which the fight of this united army of workers can take place against capitalism as a whole. The leading of this fight is the central task of every Communist Party in every capitalist country. Never has the leadership and accuracy of analysis as indicating the moods and temper of the masses been so magnificently demonstrated as in the

call of the Communist International to make March 6 the day for fight against unemployment and capitalist rationalisation. Already the reports have shown how this call has been answered so that every bourgeois newspaper on March 7 was compelled to give long accounts of the fights of the workers, employed and unemployed, under the leadership of the Communist Parties in every capitalist country.

This is the biggest thing that has happened for the working class for many years. It means that our counter-offensive against the capitalist class is gathering momentum and in actual struggle for bread and against the unheard-of exploitation of labour in the workshops thousands of new workers are being drawn into the fight who have previously been hesitant and apathetic and ready victims to the reformist fairy tales of the Second International, but who now see, particularly in England and Germany, the brutal repressive role of the MacDonalds and Müllers, and as a result of their experience in this struggle will become the new strata which will join the Communist Parties, thus strengthening them and making possible the coming decisive battles for political power and the dictatorship of the working class.