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# LIVING MARXISM

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This magazine, published by the Groups of Council Communists, consciously opposes all forms of sectarianism. The sectarian confuses the interest of his group, whether it is a party or a union, with the interest of the class. It is our purpose to discover the actual proletarian tendencies in their backward organizational and theoretical forms; to effect a discussion of them beyond the boundaries of their organizations and the current dogmatics; to facilitate their fusion into unified action; and thus to help them achieve real significance.

The unsigned articles express the views of the publishers.

## ORGANIZATIONS OF THE UNEMPLOYED

The tremendous growth of unemployment in the depression of 1929 created a relief problem which could not be met by the existing local and state relief institutions. However, it was generally believed that the depression would be of short duration, and for a long time no serious attempt was made to adapt the relief policy to the needs of the situation. The Communities were expected to solve their local problems by an extension of their charity work. As late as 1931 President Hoover\* was of the opinion that

“the maintenance of a spirit of mutual self-help through voluntary giving is of infinite importance to the future of America... No governmental action, no economic doctrine, no economic plan or project can replace that God-imposed responsibility of the individual man or woman to their neighbors.”

However, in less than another year, the “God-imposed responsibility” was recognized as impotent. State and local relief funds were exhausted, and the Federal government was forced to participate in the welfare work with Reconstruction Finance Corporation loans to the states and communities.

This change of policy was forced upon the “rugged individualists.” By the end of 1932 the politicians and economists were increasingly prone to express fearful prophecies to the effect that if a satisfactory solution of the unemployment question were not found soon, great sociologic convulsions would be unavoidable. The politico-social crisis could be overcome only by a sharp turn in social policy and conscious intrusions into the economic mechanism.

The radicalizing of the employed as well as of the jobless masses was making great progress: hunger marches, spontaneous unemployment demonstrations of all sorts, and even plunderings, became increasingly frequent. Unemployed organizations came into being or were formed by existing political organizations. The unrest of the unemployed became a matter of great concern, since it functioned in an atmosphere of general uncertainty and social tension. In and of itself the unemployed movement was too weak to

\*Address on Unemployment Relief. Oct. 18, 1931.

pass the bounds in which it could be held down with the usual instrumentalities, but in conjunction with the state of mind prevailing throughout society under the impact of the crisis, it formed the seat of a general fermentation which at times promised to assume a revolutionary character.

Charity serves practical functions. It masks the cruel social relations, and it helps to clean the streets of a portion of the "human scum." However, it becomes rather a bad joke in times of depression, when millions of "able workmen" are forced to look for help. The transformation from charity to unemployment relief becomes unavoidable. But this transformation will be postponed as long as possible. Only when enough pressure is exerted from below, will the necessary legislative steps be taken, since any change in policy is possible only by friction and struggle. The initial move for a change has always been compelled by the masses, or by the desire and needs of the "authorities" to prevent mass action. However, after this initial move is made, it brings in its wake additional reforms, which often seem to have no connection any longer with the social pressure which impelled them. The illusion is thus created that the rulers of society have the choice between the one or the other policy, and that the influencing of the rulers, that is, parliamentary activity, might be sufficient to effect changes in policy favorable to the masses. In reality, however, without the pressure of the masses, nothing of any importance has ever been given to them. To feed the unemployed, the necessary funds have to be created either by taxation or by inflationary measures, both of which involve losses for other social groups. The pressure of the unemployed for relief involves a struggle among the classes as to who is going to pay the bill. This struggle forces additional measures to compromise situations, or to defeat one or the other group, and in this way, out of a simple mass demand for unemployment relief, there may arise a whole series of political changes which, on the surface seem to have nothing to do with the action of the masses, but which can be explained only by that very same action. Of course, all other social and economic problems also play their part; nevertheless, mass pressure is most important. To be sure, such changes can be undertaken only within the framework of the present exploitation conditions, but within these boundaries a wide range of possibilities exists. The workers may be sure that the much hailed "New Deal in Welfare" did not result from the wisdom and humanity of certain politicians. These most-beloved "virtues" were rather the result of the unrest of the broad masses, and this unrest forced a new policy, together with new politicians, onto the social scene.

The unemployed organizations like to view these accomplishments as results of their own activities, and, in turn, these new accomplishments are pointed out as incentives for further struggles, for still better things to come. Success depends, of course, upon organization; without organization nothing will ever be accomplished, but this widely shared opinion, however, still leaves unanswered the question as to *what kind* of organization. The answers given are really simple; each organization maintains that its particular education, specific form of organization, and exclusive emancipation program will do the trick. And it could not be otherwise; competing establishments will not admit that the commodities of the next enterprise are also worth while buying. The struggle for existence involves the struggle against competitors.

To lament against such "narrowmindedness" means only to lament against capitalism; and the struggle against the latter already implies the struggle against the existing competitive labor organizations.

The question as to *what kind* of education and organization will serve the needs of the workers becomes still more complicated when we remember that no organization despite their assurances to the contrary, really presents a consistent structure or program. Although these organizations exert more or less influence upon the workers and society at large, they are themselves influenced even more by social life and changes therein. This fact is reflected in their political shifts, designed to maintain and serve the organization. With the establishment of the custom of collective bargaining, for example, even an organization like the IWW was forced to break with well established traditions in order to benefit by the boom in unionism, of which it was in dire need and to resort, at least to a certain extent, to the much hated contract-making with the employers. Fundamentally, to quote a second example, there is no difference between Lundeberg's present leaning on the much hated strike-breaking A. F. of L. to save the organization from being crushed by Bridges' strike-breaking CIO-Union, and, say, the changes of policy within the Third International since Hitler's advent to power, or the "inconsistencies" of the Anarchists in Spain in relation to the State, or the countless "betrayals" of the "Marxist organizations" all over the world. The only difference is one of magnitude, which then determines the practical meanings the changes assume. In all cases the "inconsistencies" are aimed at keeping organizations alive, or to force their growth by adapting their policies to the needs or possibilities of the moment. To the question then of *what kind* of organization is essential to the struggle of the workers no absolute answer can be offered; the answering will be made, not by "organizations", but by particular groups within the organizations, and in different ways at different times.

The cry for organization as such is an empty slogan, for it has not one but a thousand meanings. So far all organizational activity has been by necessity of a self-seeking character. Organization did not serve the workers; the workers were served only insofar as serving them helped the organization. Small opportunities were given to unemployed organizations, yet even in this field, because of their subordination to the political parties, the unemployed organizations did not function so much to serve the jobless, but sought to enlist the latter with the purpose of strengthening the positions of the "mother-parties". Capitalism however, itself a marvelous organizer of masses, is not afraid of organizations as such, it is concerned only with real activities, organized or unorganized, which interfere with its own well-being. Having made the statement that the changes in welfare policies were mainly the result of mass pressure, and this especially on the part of the unemployed, we are now impelled to investigate what role the unemployed organizations actually played in this process, what specific form of organization or policy, if any, led to success, and what conclusions may be drawn for the future unemployed activities.

Besides the varied self-help organizations\* springing up in the years 1930-32, there also came into being during the same period a series of un-

\*Compare: What Can The Unemployed Do? — Living Marxism, No. 2; pp. 59-61, and No. 3; pp. 85-92.

employed organizations demanding adequate relief. Some of these organizations were engaged in both self-help activities and organized attempts to get relief from the authorities, as for example, the *Seattle Unemployed Citizens League*, which by 1931 claimed to have 5,000 members. The collapse of self-help schemes transformed this organization, as well as others, into unemployed circles interested exclusively in obtaining relief. The organizations arose out of individual connections of workers at relief stations and labor forums, or were formed by church communities, ward healers, or individuals with an urge to help the poor. Some organizations succeeded for longer or shorter periods in attracting considerable numbers of workers, others remained discussion clubs; but none of them asserted any significant influence upon the relief situation, and most of them had ceased to exist even before the New Deal had made it difficult to organize the unemployed on relief issues.

With the exception of the Unemployed Unions of the IWW, which were formed in 1932, all unemployed organizations demanded better relief, work relief, and a more efficient welfare system. Some of them came out with demands for social legislation, and especially unemployed insurance. The question of relief funds engaged other organizations in discussions of tax problems. The usual increases in "sales tax" were denounced as mediums for lowering the life standards of the masses, and a tax on the rich was requested instead. However, in this field, the voice of the unemployed was totally ignored.

Since 1932 the political labor parties engaged in the formation of unemployed organizations. In the first year of their existence the *Unemployed Councils* (UC) of the *Communist Party* (CP) were without doubt the most aggressive and effective organizations. Those groups organized with the help of the *Socialist Party* (SP), and best known as *Workers Committees on Unemployment* (WC) were the more "respectable" of the two main unemployed organizations. The latter, working in close connection with liberal welfare organizations and various church denominations, were more interested in fostering social legislation, using the unemployed organizations to demonstrate impressively the necessities of reforms. For this reason there was a competitive struggle between W. C.'s and U. C.'s, and this struggle at times forced the first to engage in unwanted radical actions. The U. C. were the dominating organization in some cities, and the W. C. in other cities. Smaller organizations continued to operate in their shade. There was nothing remarkably different about these independent organizations. Save for possible exceptions unknown to us it may be said that they were rather more conservative and less inclined to engage in struggles for relief.

The C. P. — dominated U. C. were organized in branches, districts, counties, state and national organizations. Special importance was laid upon the needs of the single man, fighting on breadlines and in shelters for their existence. This activity brought to the U. C. more aggressive elements and gave it the character of a proletarian organization, despite its professional but, whenever possible, hidden petty-bourgeois leadership. The intensive propaganda work carried on by the U. C. with the help of party funds, and especially their struggles against evictions, which were supported by many unorganized workers and also by those belonging to other organizations, gave the U. C. the character of an organization of direct actionists. Conflicts with

the police in eviction struggles, hunger marches, and demonstrations made out of the U. C. the most popular organization, although its numbers were far less than those of the W. C. However, the political domination by the C. P. devaluated to a large extent the work of the U. C. The actions were not undertaken to serve mainly the needs of the jobless, but to foster the general policies of the C. P., and any conflict between the needs of the workers and the political desire of the C. P. was decided in favor of the latter. This attitude was also common to the other organizations, but not in such a consistent, single-minded fashion. There was never the slightest hesitation on the part of the C. P. to split or destroy any organization, including their own, to eliminate or hamper any kind of activity out of harmony with the party needs. But as long as there was no contradiction between the aims of the party and the needs of the U. C., most of the credit for organized unemployment has to go to the U. C. The struggle of the U. C. against evictions was connected with attempts to force the lowering of rents with renter's strikes, which, however, largely remained empty threats. In its election platform of 1932 the C. P.\* had already incorporated the demand for unemployment insurance. In distinction to later requests, this early program contained the illusory demand "that the insurance and relief system be administered by the workers themselves." The Federal Government was supposed to

"institute a system of insurance, on the basis of full wages, for all unemployed and part-time workers, the necessary funds to be paid entirely by the employers and the State and to be raised by the allocation of all war funds, a capital levy, increased taxes upon the rich, etc."

Much stress was laid upon hunger marches to state capitals and to Washington. The participation of relievers in these marches was minimal. These attempts could be considered only as more or less successful publicity stunts, which lost their value in repetition.

The socialist-controlled W. C. called and participated to some extent in hunger marches, demonstrations, or action at the relief stations. The political control of the W. C. by the S. P. was less rigid than that exerted by the C. P. over the U. C., but not because of the greater wisdom of the S. P. leaders, but because the S. P. was not especially fond of being identified with radical activities. Being an extremely capitalistic minded organization, the S. P. advocates Socialism in the same manner as the Church preaches the goodness in man. It is also more interested in the salvation of the soul than in the welfare of the body. In short, it is an organization designed to make an interesting living for some of its members, and to provide entertainment, education, and hope, for the rest of them. The work of the Socialists within the W. C. was largely restricted to educational measures and, by arranging W. P. A.—classes in the "social sciences", served practically the educators hired by the government when the latter took over the education of the unemployed. The W. C., in counteracting the "bad" characteristics of the unemployed movement, that is, the tendency towards direct action, essentially fostered the "respectability" later adopted also by the U. C. and the C. P., which allowed the organized unemployed movement then to become a "government-recognized" institution designed to serve some lobbyists in Washington. Save in phraseology, the legislative program of the W. C. did

\*W. Z. Foster. *Toward Soviet America*. p. 248.

not differ from that of the C. P. The W. C. also was organized into locals, county organizations, state and national bodies. However, the organization was more flexible than that of the authoritarian C. P. In some cities a house of delegates brought representatives of locals of both organizations together.

In relief work the main function of these and other organizations was the installation of grievance committees, calculated to assist workers in getting the established relief rates. At certain places these grievance committees were welcomed by the relief authorities and, at others, they were opposed, so that the struggles of the unemployed were, for a time, centered around the question of the rights to grievance committees. Principally no one had anything against such committees. R. L. Johnson, welfare director of Pennsylvania wrote, for instance:\*

"I set up in the state headquarters a bureau whose sole function was to deal with the organized unemployed. We established in each county, committees of three to represent the people on relief and to meet weekly, either with the county administrator or his representative, to go over grievances. In all my dealings with the unemployed, I was guided by the firm conviction that the best way to lick the problems of Fascism and Communism and to minimize the dissatisfaction and misunderstanding among the unemployed was to give them an opportunity, at least once a week, to air their grievances, which certainly are heavy, before someone authorized to correct any injustice."

However, the original grievance committees were of another character; they were combined with the continual threat of mass action at the local stations and functioned, not with specific rules, but in accordance with the militancy of the workers. To remove the "obstructive" character of the committees, the authorities established central bureaus to consider grievances, and thereby took away responsibilities from the local stations and reduced the committees to mere servants of the case-workers. The unemployed organizations did not succeed in their attempts to stop this emasculation of the grievance committees.

The aforementioned *Unemployed Unions* of the I. W. W. were of the opinion that relief could not solve the unemployed question, and that it was necessary to put the jobless back to work by shortening the working day for all workers to 4 hours. Their policy was the "picketing of industries" to impress upon the employed workers the need for opening the factories to the jobless. To foster the understanding necessary to fulfill their program, they advocated the participation of the unemployed in the strikes of the employed. They did not propose any immediate relief demands, and in actuality the Unemployed Unions were nothing more than agitation committees for the I. W. W. However the U. U. did not grow, and they were later abolished. The unemployed were advised to enter the regular Industrial Unions. Regardless of their special philosophy the Wobblies like all other workers organized or unorganized, participated in all the daily activities of the unemployed, demanding and fighting for better relief, even though "relief could not solve the problem."

Though it is not possible to connect the solidarity between employed and unemployed with the insufficient propaganda of the insignificant unemployment activity of the I. W. W., this solidarity was demonstrated in many

\*Saturday Evening Post. March 28, 1936, p. 97.

strikes during this period, as, for example, in the Detroit Autoworkers strike in January—February 1933, and in the street car conductors strike in Milwaukee in the same year, and in many other instances. This fact is the more remarkable, as, "more than in other countries, it was always comparatively easy in the United States to get unemployed to act as strike breakers."\*

Since the first beginnings of the organized unemployed movement, attempts were made towards national coordination. In November 1932 the *Unemployed Citizen League of St. Louis* and the *Chicago Workers Committee on Unemployment* called a conference in Chicago, out of which resulted the first national *Federation of Unemployed Workers Leagues*. 44 delegates from 30 different organizations from Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, Michigan, Iowa, New York and Texas were represented. They rejected, although not very consistently, the various self-help schemes, and demanded unemployed insurance, adequate relief in form of cash allotments, prevailing wage rates for workers on public projects, and the right to grievance committees. Besides these immediate demands, there was a rather vague declaration in favor of Socialism as a permanent solution for the ills of the time. The Federation claimed 150,000 members, though these claims are not provable. Although the majority of the federated organizations were influenced either by the C. P. or S. P. ideas, or by still more reactionary ideologies, some of the smaller units were orientated towards a more consistent proletarian attitude. Especially noticeable here was the *Workers League of Chicago*.\*\* This organization, not controlled by any political party although it had communistically orientated members in its ranks, resulted from spontaneous meetings of unemployed, who at and near relief stations protested against the insufficiency of relief rations. Their program was concentrated upon direct demands for the momentary needs of the unemployed, and advocated the necessity of concerted action of all the jobless, regardless of party interests. Although this organization could not organize more than a few thousand members, its attitude won it a broad following among the unemployed. It activated the workers in more fruitful directions by helping to avoid political bickering, and frustrating to a certain extent the struggle of the parties for domination in the unemployed field. It helped considerably in bringing about large-scale actions, powerful mass demonstrations, which enforced the withdrawals of relief cuts. The Workers League of Chicago was largely responsible for the creation of the first National Federation, but it was also the main reason for the collapse of that organization. The S. P. and C. P. soon recognized that it would be impossible for them to control the National Federation, because of the existence of the Workers League. After Browder and Benjamin had convinced themselves by a visit to the Chicago Executive that it was impossible to change the balance of power position of the Workers League in the Federation, they decided, what had already also been decided by the S. P., to end the life of the Federation by withdrawing from it. Later, in the East, the now defunct *Conference for Progressive*

\*Twentieth Century Fund, *Labor and the Government*, p. 316

\*\*In later issues of *Living Marxism* we will deal with some of the unemployed organizations in greater detail. We will deal also with the relations of trade unions to unemployed and unemployed organizations, and, furthermore, with the present tasks and possibilities of the unemployed.

*Labor Action* had succeeded in forming unemployed organizations, or in gaining control of others which already existed, and which had been in loose connection with the Chicago Federation. These connections were severed in order to form a new national federation together with the U. C. of the C.P., an organization which was soon again dissolved, till, in 1936, the W. C. of the S. P., which previously had changed its name into *Workers Alliance of America* (WA), combined with the much disintegrated U. C. Today, the Workers Alliance is the only unemployed organization of any importance, although smaller groups here and there still function independently without, however, differing essentially from the W. A. and its activities.

Considering the whole organized unemployed movement from the onset of the depression to the New Deal, it cannot be said that the *organized* movement had at any time enough power or sufficient following to be able to *force* local, state, or national authorities to grant concessions. There is no doubt that all organizations together had some influence upon the unemployed masses, but neither the organized activity nor the support it actually got from the broad masses can be regarded as the *decisive moment* which brought about the change in welfare relations. The turn in governmental unemployed policy can be explained only out of the whole cloth, not out of a specific aspect of the crisis condition, the aspect of unemployment and its organizational expressions. Certainly the actual pressure exerted by the unemployed and their organizations would have forced any government to give and to increase relief. Certainly it is not possible to starve large, concentrated masses to death without inviting troubles more costly than the necessary relief allotments. However, as long as the unemployed represent a relatively small minority within the total population, and as long as only a minority of them is actually impoverished, it is difficult for the unemployed to enforce more than the most meager relief rations, for outside of riots and disturbances they do not possess real weapons to enforce their demands. But the use of such ultimate weapons presupposes a general crisis situation and a general atmosphere of unrest of a larger scope than had existed.

People often wonder why it is so difficult to organize the unemployed. This difficulty, however, is not mysterious at all; it indicates only that the workers recognize quite well the limitations of unemployed organizations. They cannot help but recognize the power of capital and its institutions, and they have a difficult time accepting the idea that these forces could be successfully opposed with no more than demonstrations and protests, which actions are possible only as long as the authorities allow them. For the same reason they believe that the individual approach will have the best results, because he who cannot fight must either scheme or beg. This also causes them to prefer the more reformist organizations and the professional leaders, for these organizations and persons do exactly what seems to the majority of workers the most sensible thing to do—the attainment by political scheming of what cannot be achieved by struggle. Only when relief is denied altogether does the need for radical action come to the fore and influence organizations. But as soon as institutions for relief are created, the unemployed, and with them their organizations, will tend to make them more effective, which however, is possible only by a certain amount of cooperation. Even those relief institutions resulting from struggles of the unemployed give rise to new attitudes as soon as they become permanent, and foster political bargaining

rather than political action. The transformation of the once relatively militant unemployed organizations into the present semi-governmental *Workers Alliance* is not, as is often argued, only the result of treacherous changes of policies on the part of the political parties, but, more so, the result of the changing attitudes of the masses, effected by the general change of governmental policy. That “accidentally” this change coincided with changes of policies within the C. P. is only a lucky break for the latter, but has no further bearing on the question. Even if the C. P. would not have become a government-supporting agency, and if all other issues would have remained the same, the unemployed movement would still be what it is today, with the C. P. out of the picture. Though the W. A. is controlled by the C. P. and influenced by the S. P., it cannot be said that the members or the unemployed masses are behind these two political organizations. They are behind Roosevelt’s government because, recognizing their present lack of power, they hope that a friendly government will give them freely what they cannot get by force; therefore they are friendly to the government. What holds true for the unemployed also holds true for the W. P. A. workers. Being a little better off than the relievers, they are mainly interested in keeping this favorable position. They know quite well that a strike for better positions has little chance of success, since they cannot, as in private industry, destroy profits, but can only cause some savings for the government. The power of the government to close projects at will is enough to cause the workers to think that their organizing would mean only unnecessary costs to operate functionless organizations. Although they are often willing to act on the job against the atrocities of their immediate superiors, they cannot yet be organized successfully for struggles of a larger scope.

As regards the New Deal in Welfare, it must be considered, as we have already observed, as only one item in the total re-organization process which began amidst the crisis and was forced not only by the unemployed but by the majority of the population, including capitalistic layers, to overcome the depression with a program of public spending that was made possible by inflationary measures. That is, the New Deal sought to secure profitability for a portion of the capitalists by sacrificing the interests of others. This program was of necessity an employment program, and it divided the unemployed into relievers and W. P. A. workers. Where the first are concerned, nothing has changed for them. Their situation is just as miserable as it was five years ago, the only difference being that their possibilities for action are still further reduced because of this division in their ranks. The *Workers Alliance* is by this very same situation not only induced to be mainly interested in the extension of the spending program, but forced to be so, and therefore must support the government, which claims an inclination to favor the same philosophy. But it is impossible to support on the one hand a government against its adversaries who entertain different plans as to how the social problems should be solved, and, on the other hand, to attack this very same government by calling for actions on the part of the unemployed. And so the organized unemployed movement, which set out to enforce its will upon the government, has so far succeeded only in advancing to a position, were it serves the government.

(To be continued in the next issue.)

## THE MASSES AND THE VANGUARD

Economic and political changes proceed with bewildering rapidity since the close of the world war. The old conceptions in the labor movement have become faulty and inadequate and the working class organizations present a scene of indecision and confusion.

In view of the changing economic and political situation it seems that thorough reappraisal of the task of the working class becomes necessary in order to find the forms of struggle and organization most needful and effective.

The relation of "the party," "organization" or "vanguard" to the masses plays a large part in contemporary working class discussion. That the importance and indispensability of the vanguard or party is overemphasized in working class circles is not surprising, since the whole history and tradition of the movement tends in that direction.

The labor movement of today is the fruit of economic and political developments that found first expression in the Chartist movement in England (1838-1848), the subsequent development of trade unions from the fifties onward, and in the Lasallean movement in Germany in the sixties. Corresponding to the degree of capitalist development trade unions and political parties developed in the other countries of Europe and America.

The overthrow of feudalism and the needs of capitalist industry in themselves necessitated the marshaling of the proletariat and the granting of certain democratic privileges by the capitalists. The latter had been reorganizing society in line with their needs. The political structure of feudalism was replaced by capitalist parliamentarism. The capitalist state, the instrument for administering the joint affairs of the capitalist class, was established and adjusted to the needs of the new class.

The bothersome proletariat whose assistance against the feudal forces had been necessary now had to be reckoned with. Once called into action it could not be entirely elimi-

nated as a political factor. But it could be coordinated. And this was done — partly consciously with cunning and partly by the very dynamics of capitalist economy — as the working class adjusted itself and submitted to the new order. It organized unions whose limited objectives (better wages and conditions) could be realized in an expanding capitalist economy. It played the game of capitalist politics within the capitalist state (the practices and forms of which were determined primarily by capitalist needs,) and, within these limitations, achieved apparent successes.

But thereby the proletariat adopted capitalist forms of organization and capitalist ideologies. The parties of the workers, like those of the capitalists became limited corporations, the elemental needs of the class were subordinated to political expediency. Revolutionary objectives were displaced by horse-trading and manipulations for political positions. The party became all-important, its immediate objectives superseded those of the class. Where revolutionary situations set into motion the class, whose tendency is to fight for the realization of the revolutionary objective, the parties of the workers "represented" the working class and were themselves "represented" by parliamentarians whose very position in parliament constituted resignation to their status as bargainers within a capitalist order whose supremacy was no longer challenged.

The general coordination of workers' organizations to capitalism saw the adoption of the same specializations in union and party activities that characterized the hierarchy of industries. Managers, superintendents and foremen saw their counter parts in presidents, organizers and secretaries of labor organizations. Boards of directors, executive committees, etc. The mass of organized workers like the mass of wage slaves in industry left the work of direction and control to their betters.

This emasculation of worker's initiative proceeded rapidly as capitalism extended its sway. Until the

world war put an end to further peaceful and "orderly" capitalist expansion.

The risings in Russia, Hungary and Germany found a resurgence of mass action and initiative. The social necessities compelled action by the masses. But the traditions of the old labor movement in western Europe and the economic backwardness of eastern Europe frustrated fulfillment of labor's historic mission. Western Europe saw the masses defeated and the rise of fascism a la Mussolini and Hitler, while Russia's backward economy developed the "communism" in which the differentiation between class and vanguard, the specialization of functions and the regimentation of labor reached its highest point.

The leadership principle, the idea of the vanguard that must assume responsibility for the proletarian revolution is based on the pre-war conception of the labor movement, is unsound. The tasks of the revolution and the communist reorganization of society cannot be realized without the widest and fullest action of the masses themselves. Theirs is the task and the solution thereof.

The decline of capitalist economy, the progressive paralysis, the instability, the mass unemployment, the wage cuts and intensive pauperization of the workers — all these compel action, in spite of fascism a la Hitler or the disguised fascism of the A. F. of L.

The old organizations are either destroyed or voluntarily reduced to impotence. Real action now is possible only outside the old organizations. In Italy, Germany and Russia the White and Red fascisms have already destroyed all old organizations and placed the workers directly before the problem of finding the new forms of struggle. In England, France and America the old organizations still maintain a degree of illusion among workers, but their successive surrender to the forces of reaction is undermining them rapidly.

The principles of independent struggle, solidarity and communism are being forced upon them in the actual class struggle.

With this powerful trend toward mass consolidation and mass action the theory of regrouping and realigning the militant organizations seems to be outdated. True, regrouping is essential, but it cannot be a mere merger of the existing organizations. In the new conditions a revision of fighting forms is necessary. "First clarity — then unity." Even small groups recognizing and urging the principles of independent mass movement are far more significant today than large groups that deprecate the power of the masses.

There are groups that perceive the defects and weaknesses of parties. They often furnish sound criticism of the popular front combination and the unions. But their criticism is limited. They lack a comprehensive understanding of the new society. The tasks of the proletariat are not completed with seizure of the means of production and the abolition of private property. The question of social reorganization must be put and answered. Shall state socialism be rejected? What shall be the basis of a society without wage slavery? What shall determine the economic relations between factories? What shall determine the relations between producers and the total product?

These questions and their answers are essential for an understanding of the forms of struggle and organization today. Here the conflict between the leadership principle and the principle of independent mass action becomes apparent. For, a thorough understanding of these questions leads to the realization that the widest, all-embracing, direct activity of the proletariat as a class is necessary to realize communism.

Of first importance is the abolition of the wage system. The will and good wishes of men are not potent enough to retain this system after revolution (as in Russia) without eventually surrendering to the dynamics engendered by it. It is not enough to seize the means of production and abolish private property. It is necessary to abolish the basic condition of modern exploitation, wage slavery, and that act brings on the succeeding measures of reorganization that would never be invoked without the first step. Groups that

do not put these questions, no matter how sound their criticism otherwise, lack the most important elements in the formation of sound revolutionary policy. The abolition of the wage system must be carefully investigated in its relation to politics and economics. The article following this one deals with certain economic aspects of the problem. We will here take up some of the political implications.

First is the question of the seizure of power by the workers. The principle of the masses (not party or vanguard) retaining power must be emphasized. Communism cannot be introduced or realized by a party. Only the proletariat as a whole can do that. Communism means that the workers have taken their destiny into their own hands; that they have abolished wages; that they have, with the suppression of the bureaucratic apparatus, combined the legislative and executive powers. The unity of workers lies not in the sacrosanct merger of parties or trade unions, but in the similarity of their needs and in the expression of needs in mass action. All the problems of the workers must therefore be viewed in relation to the developing self-action of the masses.

To say that the non-combative spirit of the political parties is due to the malice or reformism of the leaders is wrong. The political parties are impotent. They will do nothing, because they can do nothing. Because of its economic weakness, capitalism has organized for suppression and terror and is at present politically very strong, for it is forced to exert all its effort to maintain itself. The accumulation of capital, enormous throughout the world, has shrunk the yield of profit, — a fact which, in the external policies, manifests itself through the contradictions between nations; and, in the internal policies, through "devaluation" and the attendant partial expropriation of the middle class and the lowering of the subsistence level of the workers; and, in general, by the centralization of the power of big capital units in the hands of the state. Against this centralized power little movements can do nothing. The masses alone can combat it, for only

they can destroy the power of the state and become a political force. For that reason the fight based on craft organizations becomes objectively obsolete, and the large mass movements, unrestricted by the limitations of such organizations, must necessarily replace them.

Such is the new situation facing the workers. But from it springs an actual weakness. Since the old method of struggle by means of elections and limited trade union activity has become quite futile, a new method, it is true, has instinctively developed, but that method has not yet been conscientiously, and therefore not effectively, applied. Where their parties and trade unions are impotent, the masses already begin to express their militancy through wildcat strikes. In America, England, France, Belgium, Holland, Spain, Poland — wildcat strikes develop, and through them the masses present ample proof that their old organizations are no longer fit for struggle. The wildcat strikes are not, however, disorganized, as the name implies. They are denounced as such by union bureaucrats, because they are strikes formed outside the official organizations. The strikers themselves organize the strike, for it is an old truth that only as an organized mass can workers struggle and conquer. They form picket lines, provide for the repulsion of strike-breakers, organize strike relief, create relations with other factories... In a word, they themselves assume leadership of their own strike, and they organize it on a factory basis.

It is in these very movements that the strikers find their unity of struggle. It is then that they take their destiny into their own hands and unite "the legislative and executive power" by eliminating unions and parties, as illustrated by several strikes in Belgium and Holland.

But independent class action is still weak. That the strikers, instead of continuing their independent action towards widening their movement, call upon the unions to join them, is an indication that under existing conditions their movement cannot grow larger, and for that reason cannot yet become a political force capable

of fighting concentrated capital. But it is a beginning.

Occasionally, though, the independent struggle takes a big leap forward, as with the Asturian miners' strikes in 1934, the Belgian miners in 1935, the strikes in France, Belgium, and America in 1936, and the Catalonian revolution in 1936. These outbreaks are evidence that a new social force is surging among the workers, is finding workers' leadership, is subjecting social institutions to the masses, and is already on the march.

Strikes are no longer mere interruptions in profit-making or simple economic disturbances. The independent strike derives its significance from the action of workers as an organized class. With a system of factory committees and workers' councils extending over wide areas the proletariat creates the organs which regulate production, distribution, and all the other functions of social life. In other words, the civil administrative apparatus is deprived of all power, and the proletarian dictatorship establishes itself. Thus, class organization in the very struggle for power is at the same time organization, control, and management of the productive forces and of the entire society. It is the basis of the association of free and equal producers and consumers.

This, then, is the danger that the independent class movement presents to the capitalist society. Wildcat strikes, though apparently of little

importance whether on a small or large scale, are embryonic communism. A small wildcat strike, directed as it is by workers and in the interest of workers, illustrates on a small scale the character of the future proletarian power.

A regrouping of militants must be actuated by the knowledge that the conditions of struggle make it necessary to unite the "legislative and executive powers" in the hands of the factory workers. They must not compromise on this position: All power to the committees of action and the workers' councils. This is the class front. This is the road to communism. To render workers conscious of the unity of organizational forms of struggle, of class dictatorship, and of the economic frame of communism, with its abolition of wages — is the task of the militants.

The militants who call themselves the "Vanguard" have today the same weakness that characterizes the masses at present. They still believe that the unions or the one or the other party must direct the class struggle, though with revolutionary methods. But if it be true that decisive struggles are nearing, it is not enough to state that the labor leaders are traitors. It is necessary, especially today, to formulate a plan for the formation of the class front and the forms of its organizations. To this end the control of parties and unions must be unconditionally fought. This is the crucial point in the struggle for power.

## COMMUNIST PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Capitalist crises arise from the contradiction between the social forces and relations of production, a conflict in which the profitable employment of capital becomes increasingly difficult and which must lead to the collapse of capitalism. Marxism rejects all pseudo-socialist economic theories which consist merely of a new regulation of distribution while retaining the capitalistic system of production. Value production must be abolished before there can be the slightest semblance of a communist society. Under communism, labor has no "value" and no "price". The abolition of value exchange

is the abolition of the wage system, for the wage relation is but the exchange between buyers and sellers of labor power. If this relation exists — and it matters not whether the purchasers of labor power are individual entrepreneurs or the state — we have, by that very circumstance, production of value and surplus-value based on the exploitation of workers. And such capitalistic production admits of none but capitalistic distribution. “The manner in which the productive forces are exchanged, “says Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (page 32), “is decisive as regards the manner of exchange of the products.”

In communism, production is no longer a process of capital expansion, but only a labor process in which society draws from nature the means of consumption it needs. The only economic criterion is the labor time employed in the production of useful goods. And so, from the standpoint of Marxism, the Russian experiments in ‘planned economy,’ are not to be rated as socialistic. The Russian practice follows the laws of capitalist accumulation, on the basis of surplus-value production. The wage relation is identical with that of capitalist production, forming the basis for the existence of a growing bureaucracy with mounting privileges, which, beside the still present private capitalist elements, must be appraised as a new class appropriating surplus labor and surplus-value.

The gist of the Bolshevik theory of socialization may be sketched as follows: With the revolutionary overthrow, i. e., the expropriation of capital, the power over the means of production and hence the control over production and distribution of the products passes into the hands of the state apparatus. The latter then organizes the various branches of production in accordance with a plan and puts them, as a state monopoly, at the service of society. With the aid of statistics, the central authority computes and determines the magnitude and kind of production, as also the apportionment of the products to the producers.

To be sure, the means of production here have passed from the hands of the private entrepreneurs into those of the state; as regards the producers, however, nothing has changed. No more than under capitalism do the producers control the products of their labor, for they still lack the control over the means of production. Just as before, their only means of livelihood is in the sale of their labor power. The only difference is that they are no longer required to deal with the individual capitalist, but with the total capitalist, the state, as the purchaser of labor power.

The decisive problems of a communist economy do not come up until after the market, wage-labor, money, etc., have been completely abolished. The very existence of the wage relation signifies that the means of production are not controlled by the producers, but confront the producers as capital, and this circumstance further compels the reproduction process in the form of capital accumulation. The later process, is at the same time the accumulation of misery, and hence also the Russian workers are actually growing poorer at the same rate as capital accumulates. The productivity of the Russian workers *increases faster* than their wages; they receive a relatively ever smaller share of the increasing social product. To Marx, this *relative* pauperization of the working population in the course of accumulation is only a *phase of the absolute pauperization*.

## II.

Capitalist economy has perfected the computability developed by industry. Particularly in the last two decades the computing methods for determining costs have attained a high degree of precision. Though capitalist accounting methods are bound to money as the common denominator, the necessity for accounting does not die out with the disappearance of money and the market in the communist society. A general measure, a reckoning unit is indispensable to the social regulation of production and distribution. To Marx and Engels the basis and computing unit of communist economy was the *socially necessary labor time* contained in the products.

Labor time as the unit of reckoning will play a double role in the communist economy. “Its apportionment in accordance with a definite social plan maintains the proper proportion between the different kinds of work to be done, and the various wants of the community. On the other hand, it also serves as a measure of the portion of the common labor borne by the individual and of his share in the part of the total product destined for individual consumption. The social relations of the individual producers, with regard both to their labor and to its products, are in this case perfectly simple and intelligible, and that with regard not only to production but also to distribution.” (*Capital*, Kerr Ed. Vol. 1. pp. 90-91).

Communism is neither “federalistic” nor “centralistic”, and yet it is both together. It is a productive mechanism which assures the independent operation of the units and simultaneously enables social planning of production. In all forms of society the process of production must also be a process of reproduction. Under capitalism reproduction is regulated through the market mechanism, whereas under communism it is a planned process consciously determined by the producers themselves. If labor time is the measure of communist production, it is the measure also for expanded reproduction.

The social average working hour as the computing unit of communist society is capable of embracing all categories of production and distribution. Each enterprise will determine the number of working hours it consumes so that they can be replaced by the same magnitude. The labor time method is unquestionably adapted to compute the total cost of an enterprise, of a branch of industrial production and also of the individual product or partial product. Even those enterprises which give rise to no tangible product are quite capable of determining the amount of labor time they consume in the form of products.

The production formula of an enterprise as well as that of society as a whole, may be stated very simple: means of production, plus labor, creates the product. If one distinguishes between two different kinds of means of production: fixed and circulating, we might assume for example the following production formula for a shoe factory:

Machines, etc	Raw materials, etc	Labor power
10,000 working hours	70,000 working hours	70,000 working hours

If we further assume that this factory produces 50,000 pairs of shoes, then 150,000 working hours were expended for their production, or three working hours for each pair. This formula is at the same time the formula for simple reproduction. We know how many labor hours were consumed