

**J. V. Stalin**  
**On**  
**The British Strike**  
**1926**

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**June 8, 1926**

Comrades, with your permission, I shall proceed to make a statement on affairs in Britain in connection with the strike<sup>1</sup> and on the recent events in Poland,<sup>2</sup> a statement which your chairman, Comrade Chkheidze, has been good enough to call a report, but which can only be called a statement because of its brevity.

### **WHAT CAUSED THE STRIKE IN BRITAIN?**

The first question is that of the causes of the strike in Britain. How could it happen that Britain, that land of capitalist might and unparalleled compromises, has of late become an arena of gigantic social conflicts? How could it happen that "great Britain," "mistress of the seas," became the country of a general strike?

I should like to point out a number of circumstances which made the general strike in Britain inevitable. The time has not yet come to give an exhaustive reply to this question. But we can, and should, point out certain decisive events which made the strike inevitable. Of these circumstances, four may be noted as the most important.

*Firstly.* Britain formerly occupied a monopoly position among the capitalist states. Owning a number of huge colonies, and having what for those days was an exemplary industry, it was able to parade as the "workshop of the world" and to rake in vast super-profits. That was the period of "peace and prosperity" in Britain. Capital raked in super-profits, crumbs from those super-profits fell to the share of the top section of the British labour movement, the leaders of the British labour movement were gradually tamed by capital, and conflicts between labour and capital were usually settled by compromise. But the further development of world capitalism, especially the development of Germany, America and, in part, of Japan, which entered the world market as competitors of Britain, radically undermined Britain's former monopoly position. The war and the post-war crisis dealt a further decisive blow to Britain's monopoly position. There were fewer super-profits, the crumbs which fell to the share of the British labour leaders began to dwindle away. Voices began to be raised more and more frequently about the reduction in the standard of living of the British working class. The period of "peace and prosperity" was succeeded by a period of conflicts, lockouts and strikes. The British worker began to swing to the Left, to resort more and more frequently to the method of direct struggle against capital.

That being the state of affairs, it will be easily understood why the bullying tone of the British mine owners in threatening a lock-out could not remain unanswered by the miners.

*Secondly.* The second circumstance is the restoration of international market connections, and the consequent intensification of the struggle for markets

among the capitalist groups. It is characteristic of the post-war crisis that it severed practically all the connections between the international market and the capitalist countries, replacing those connections by a certain chaos in relations. Now, with the temporary stabilisation of capitalism, this chaos is receding into the background, and the old connections of the international market are gradually being restored. Whereas a few years ago the problem was to restore the mills and factories and to recruit workers to work for the capitalists, the problem now is to secure markets and raw materials for the restored mills and factories. As a result the struggle for markets has assumed new intensity, and victory in this struggle is going to that group of capitalists and that capitalist state whose goods are cheaper and whose level of technique is higher. And new forces are now entering the market: America, France, Japan, Germany, and Britain's dominions and colonies, which managed to develop their industry during the war and have now joined in the fight for markets. It is natural in view of all this that the easy extraction of profits from foreign markets, so long resorted to by Britain, has now become impossible. The old colonial method of monopolistic plundering of markets and sources of raw material has had to give way to the new method of capturing the market with the help of cheap goods. Hence the endeavour of British capital to restrict production, or at any rate not to expand it indiscriminately. Hence the vast army of unemployed in Britain as a permanent feature of recent years. Hence the threat of unemployment, which is exasperating the British workers and rousing their fighting spirit. Hence the lightning reaction, which the threat of a lock-out evoked among the workers in general and the miners in particular.

*Thirdly.* The third circumstance is the endeavour of British capital to secure reduced costs of production in British industry and a cheapening of commodities at the expense of the interests of the British working class. The fact that the miners were the target of the main blow in this case cannot be called an accident. British capital attacked the miners not only because the mining industry is badly equipped technically and is in need of "rationalisation," but primarily because the miners have always been, and still remain, the advanced detachment of the British proletariat. It was the strategy of British capital to curb this advanced detachment, to lower their wages and lengthen their working day, in order then, having settled accounts with this main detachment, to make the other detachments of the working class also toe the line. Hence the heroism with which the British miners are conducting their strike. Hence the unparalleled eagerness displayed by the British workers in supporting the miners by means of a general strike.

*Fourthly.* The fourth circumstance is that Britain is governed by the Conservative Party, the most bitter enemy of the working class. It goes without saying that any other bourgeois government would, in the main, have acted in the same way as the Conservative government to crush the working class. But there is also no doubt that only such sworn enemies of the working class as the Conservatives could have so lightly and cynically thrown down such an unparalleled challenge to the whole British working class as the Conservatives did when they threatened a lock-out. It can now be considered fully proven that the British Conservative Party not only wanted a lock-out and a strike, but that it had been preparing for them for nearly a year. Last July it postponed the attack on the miners because it considered the moment

“inopportune.” But it made preparations during the whole period since then, accumulating stocks of coal, organising strikebreakers and suitably working up public opinion, so as to launch an attack on the miners in April of this year. Only the Conservative Party could have taken such a perfidious step. The Conservative Party wormed its way into power with the help of forged documents and provocations. It had no sooner come into office than it attacked Egypt, using every means of provocation. For a year now it has been waging direct war on the Chinese people, resorting to the tried and tested colonial methods of plunder and oppression. It is not sparing of means to make impossible the development of closer relations between the peoples of the Soviet Union and the peoples of Great Britain, steadily building up the elements of an eventual intervention. It is now attacking the working class of its own country, having for a whole year prepared for this attack with a zeal worthy of a better cause. The Conservative Party cannot exist without conflicts inside and outside Britain. After this, can one be surprised that the British workers returned blow for blow? Those, in the main, are the circumstances which made the strike in Britain inevitable.

### WHY DID THE BRITISH GENERAL STRIKE FAIL?

The British general strike failed owing to a number of circumstances, of which the following, at least, should be mentioned:

*Firstly.* The British capitalists and the Conservative Party, as the course of the strike has shown, proved in general to be more experienced, more organised and more resolute, and therefore stronger, than the British workers and their leaders, as represented by the General Council and the so-called Labour Party. The leaders of the working class proved unequal to coping with the tasks of the working class.

*Secondly.* The British capitalists and the Conservative Party entered this gigantic social conflict fully armed and thoroughly prepared, whereas the leaders of the British labour movement were caught unawares by the mine-owners’ lock-out, having done nothing or practically nothing in the way of preparatory work. It should be mentioned in this connection that only a week before the conflict the leaders of the working class were expressing their conviction that there would be no conflict.

*Thirdly.* The capitalists’ general staff, the Conservative Party, waged the fight as a united and organised body, striking blows at the decisive points of the struggle, whereas the general staff of the labour movement—the T.U.C. General Council and its “political committee,” the Labour Party—proved to be internally demoralised and corrupted. As we know, the heads of this general staff proved to be either downright traitors to the miners and the British working class in general (Thomas, Henderson, MacDonald and Co.), or spineless fellow-travellers of these traitors who feared a struggle and still more a victory of the working class (Purcell, Hicks and others).

How could it happen, it may be asked, that the powerful British proletariat, which fought with unexampled heroism, proved to have leaders who were either venal or cowardly, or simply spineless? That is a very important question. Such leaders did not spring up all at once. They grew out of the labour movement; they received a definite schooling as labour leaders in

Britain, the schooling of that period when British capital was raking in super-profits and could shower favours on the labour leaders and use them for compromises with the British working class; whereby these leaders of the working class, becoming ever more closely identified with the bourgeoisie in their manner of life and station, became divorced from the mass of the workers, turned their backs on them and ceased to understand them. They are the kind of working-class leaders who are dazzled by the glamour of capitalism, who are overwhelmed by the might of capital, and who dreary of “getting on in the world” and associating with “men of substance.” There is no doubt that these leaders—if I may call them that—are an echo of the past and do not suit the new situation. There is no doubt that in time they will be compelled to give way to new leaders who do correspond to the militant spirit and heroism of the British proletariat. Engels was right when he called such leaders bourgeoisified leaders of the working class. <sup>3</sup>

*Fourthly.* The general staff of British capitalism, the Conservative Party, realised that the gigantic strike of the British workers was a fact of tremendous political importance, that such a strike could be seriously fought only by measures of a political character, that the authority of the king, of the House of Commons and of the constitution would have to be invoked to crush the strike, and that it could not be brought to an end without mobilising the troops and proclaiming a state of emergency. The general staff of the British labour movement, the General Council, on the other hand, did not, or would not, realise this simple thing, or was afraid to admit it, and assured all and sundry that the general strike was a measure of an exclusively economic character, that it did not desire or intend to turn the struggle into a political struggle, that it was not thinking of striking at the general staff of British capital, the Conservative Party, and that it—the General Council—had no intention of raising the question of power.

Thereby the General Council doomed the strike to inevitable failure. For, as history has shown, a general strike which is not turned into a political struggle must inevitably fail.

*Fifthly.* The general staff of the British capitalists understood that international support of the British strike would be a mortal danger to the bourgeoisie. The General Council, on the other hand, did not understand, or pretended not to understand, that the strike of the British workers could only be won by means of international proletarian solidarity. Hence the refusal of the General Council to accept financial assistance from the workers of the Soviet Union<sup>4</sup> and other countries.

Such a gigantic strike as the general strike in Britain could have yielded tangible results if, at least, two fundamental conditions had been observed, namely, if it had been turned into a political struggle, and if it had been made an action in the struggle of the proletarians of all the advanced countries against capital. But, in its own peculiar “wisdom,” the British General Council rejected both these two conditions, thereby predetermining the failure of the general strike.

*Sixthly.* There is no doubt that a role of no little importance was played by the more than equivocal behaviour of the Second International and the Amsterdam Federation of Trade Unions in the matter of aiding the British general strike. In point of fact, the platonic resolutions of these organisations of Social-Democrats on aiding the strike were actually tantamount, to a refusal

of any financial aid. For in no other way than by the equivocal conduct of the Social-Democratic International is it possible to explain the fact that all the trade unions of Europe and America together donated not more than one-eighth of the amount of financial aid which the trade unions of the Soviet Union found it possible to afford their British brothers. I say nothing of aid of another kind, in the form of stopping the transport of coal, a matter in which the Amsterdam Federation of Trade Unions is literally acting as a strikebreaker.

*Seventhly.* There is likewise no doubt that the weakness of the British Communist Party played a role of no little importance in contributing to the failure of the general strike. It should be said that the British Communist Party is one of the best sections of the Communist International. It should be mentioned that throughout the general strike in Britain its attitude was absolutely correct. But it must also be admitted that its prestige among the British workers is still small. And this circumstance could not but play a fatal part in the course of the general strike.

Such are the circumstances, at any rate the chief ones, which we have been able to ascertain at the present time and which determined the undesirable outcome of the general strike in Britain.

### LESSONS OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

What are the lessons of the general strike in Britain—at least, the most important of them? They are the following.

*Firstly.* The crisis in the British coal industry and the general strike connected with it bluntly raise the question of socialising the instruments and means of production in the coal industry, with the establishment of workers' control. That is a question of winning socialism. It scarcely needs proof that there are not and cannot be any other ways of radically solving the crisis in the coal industry other than the way proposed by the British Communist Party. The crisis in the coal industry and the general strike bring the British working class squarely up against the question of the practical realisation of socialism.

*Secondly.* The British working class could not but learn from its experience at first hand that the chief obstacle in the way to its goal is the political power of the capitalists, in this case, the Conservative Party and its government. Whereas the T.U.C. General Council feared like the plague to admit the inseparable connection between the economic struggle and the political struggle, the British workers cannot now fail to understand that, in their difficult struggle against organised capital, the basic question now is that of power, and that until it is settled, it is impossible to solve either the crisis in the coal industry or the crisis in the whole of British industry in general.

*Thirdly.* The course and outcome of the general strike cannot but convince the British working class that Parliament, the constitution, the king and the other attributes of bourgeois rule are nothing but a shield of the capitalist class against the proletariat. The strike tore the camouflage of a fetish and inviolable shrine both from Parliament and from the constitution. The workers will realise that the present constitution is a weapon of the bourgeoisie against the workers. The workers are bound to understand that they, too, need their own workers' constitution, as a weapon against the bourgeoisie. I think that

the learning of this truth will be a most important achievement of the British working class.

*Fourthly.* The course and outcome of the strike cannot but convince the British working masses of the unsuitability of the old leaders, of the unsuitability of the old functionaries, who grew up in the school of the old British policy of compromise. They cannot but realise that the old leaders must be replaced by new, revolutionary leaders.

*Fifthly.* The British workers cannot but realise now that the miners of Britain are the advanced detachment of the British working class, and that it is therefore the concern of the entire British working class to support the miners' strike and ensure its victory. The whole course of the strike brings home to the British working class the absolutely unassailable truth of this lesson.

*Sixthly.* The British workers could not but be convinced in the difficult moment of the general strike, when the platforms and programmes of the various parties were being tested in action, that the only party capable of boldly and resolutely upholding the interests of the working class to the end is the Communist Party.

Such, in general, are the principal lessons of the general strike in Britain.

## SOME CONCLUSIONS

I pass on to a few conclusions of practical importance.

The first question is that of the stabilisation of capitalism. The strike in Britain has shown that the resolution of the Communist International on the temporary and insecure character of stabilisation is absolutely correct.<sup>5</sup> The attack of British capital on the British miners was an attempt to transform the temporary, insecure stabilisation into a firm and permanent one. That attempt did not succeed, and could not have succeeded. The British workers, who replied to that attempt by a gigantic strike, have shown the whole capitalist world that the firm stabilisation of capitalism in the conditions of the post-war period is impossible, that experiments like the British one are fraught with the danger of the destruction of the foundations of capitalism. But if it is wrong to assume that the stabilisation of capitalism is firm, it is equally wrong to assume the contrary, namely, that stabilisation has come to an end, that it has been done away with, and that we have now entered a period when revolutionary storms will reach their climax. The stabilisation of capitalism is temporary and insecure, but it is stabilisation nevertheless, and so far still remains.

Further, precisely because the present temporary and insecure stabilisation still remains, for that very reason capital will persist in attempts to attack the working class. Of course, the British strike should have taught the entire capitalist world how risky experiments like the one made by the Conservative Party in Britain are for the life and existence of capitalism. That the experiment will not be without its cost for the Conservative Party, that is scarcely open to doubt. Neither can it be doubted that this lesson will be taken into account by the capitalists of all countries. All the same, capital will attempt fresh attacks on the working class, because it senses its insecurity and cannot but feel the need to establish itself more securely. The task of the working class and of the Communist Parties is to prepare their forces to repel such attacks on the working class. The task of the Communist Parties is, while

continuing the organisation of the united working-class front, to bend all their efforts to convert the attacks of the capitalists into a counter-attack of the working class, into a revolutionary offensive of the working class, into a struggle of the working class for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and for the abolition of capitalism.

Lastly, if the working class of Britain is to accomplish these immediate tasks, the first thing it must do is to get rid of its present leaders. You cannot go to war against the capitalists if you have such leaders as the Thomases and MacDonalds. You cannot hope for victory if you have traitors like Henderson and Clynes in your rear. The British working class must learn to replace such leaders by better ones. For one thing or the other: either the British working class will learn to dismiss the Thomases and MacDonalds from their posts, or it will no more see victory than it can see its own ears.

Those, comrades, are a few conclusions which suggest themselves.

Now permit me to turn to the events in Poland.

### THE RECENT EVENTS IN POLAND

An opinion exists that the movement headed by Pilsudski is a revolutionary movement. It is said that Pilsudski is fighting for a revolutionary cause in Poland—for the peasants against the landlords, for the workers against the capitalists, for the freedom of the oppressed nationalities in Poland against Polish chauvinism and fascism. Because of this, it is said, Pilsudski deserves to have the support of the Communists.

That is absolutely wrong, comrades!

Actually, what is going on in Poland at present is a struggle between two groups of the bourgeoisie: the big bourgeois group, headed by the Poznaners, and the petty-bourgeois group, headed by Pilsudski. The purpose of the struggle is not to defend the interests of the workers and peasants or the interests of the oppressed nationalities, but to consolidate and stabilise the bourgeois state. The struggle arises from a difference concerning the methods of consolidating the bourgeois state.

The fact of the matter is that the Polish state has entered a phase of complete disintegration. Its finances are going to pieces. The zloty is falling. Industry is in a state of paralysis. The non-Polish nationalities are oppressed. And up above, in the circles close to the ruling elements, there is a regular orgy of theft, as is admitted quite freely by spokesmen of all the various groups in the Sejm.<sup>6</sup> The bourgeois classes are therefore faced with the dilemma: *either* the disintegration of the state goes so far that it opens the eyes of the workers and peasants and brings home to them the necessity of transforming the regime by a revolution against the landlords and capitalists; *or* the bourgeoisie must hurry up and stop the process of decay, put an end to the orgy of theft, and thus avert the probable outbreak of a revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants before it is too late.

Which of the bourgeois groups, the Pilsudski or the Poznan, is to undertake the stabilising of the Polish state?—that is the point at issue.

Undoubtedly, the workers and peasants link their aspirations for a radical improvement of their lot with Pilsudski's struggle. Undoubtedly, for this very reason the top section of the working class and the peasantry in one way or another support Pilsudski, as being the representative of strata of the petty

bourgeoisie and petty nobility, in his struggle against the Poznaners, who represent the big capitalists and landlords. But undoubtedly also, at the present time the aspirations of certain sections of Poland's labouring classes are being utilised not for a revolution, but to consolidate the bourgeois state and the bourgeois order.

Of course, certain external factors are also playing their part here. Poland is a small country. It is linked financially with certain Entente circles. In the present deplorable state of its finances, bourgeois Poland cannot, of course, do without foreign loans. But the so-called Great Powers cannot finance a country in which the ruling circles unanimously admit that there is an orgy of theft in all branches of state administration. In order to obtain loans, the state administration must first be "improved," the orgy of theft must be stopped, some kind of guarantee must be provided that the interest on the loans will be paid, and so on. Hence the necessity for the "rationalisation" of the Polish state.

Such, in the main, are the internal and external factors which have determined the present struggle between the two principal bourgeois groups in Poland. There are in Poland today a number of fundamental contradictions which, when they develop further, are bound to create a direct revolutionary situation in the country. These contradictions occur in three basic spheres: that of the working-class question, that of the peasant question, and that of the national question. All these contradictions may at once become evident and cause an explosion if Poland embarks on a war adventure, if it is incapable of establishing good-neighbourly relations with the surrounding states. Can Pilsudski, can the motley Pilsudski group, resolve these contradictions? Can this petty-bourgeois group solve the working-class question? No, it cannot, for to do so it would have to come into fundamental conflict with the capitalist class, which it cannot and will not do under any circumstances if it does not want to forfeit the financial support of the Great Powers. Can this group solve the peasant question—for example, along the lines of confiscating the landlords' land? No, it cannot; and it will not do so if it does not want to bring about the complete disintegration of the commanding personnel of Pilsudski's army, which consists mostly of small and middle landlords. Can this group solve the national question in Poland along the lines of granting freedom of national self-determination to the oppressed nations: the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, the Byelorussians, etc.? No, it cannot; and it will not do so if it does not want to forfeit all confidence in the eyes of those "Greater Poland" chauvinists and fascists who constitute the chief source from which Pilsudski's group derives its moral support.

What, then, remains for it to do?

Only one thing: after defeating the big bourgeois group *militarily*, to submit to the same group *politically* and drag at its tail—*unless*, of course, the Polish working class and the revolutionary section of the Polish peasantry in the near future set about the revolutionary transformation of the Polish state and drive out both groups of the Polish bourgeoisie, the Pilsudski group and the Poznan group.

That raises the question of the Polish Communist Party. How could it happen that the revolutionary discontent of a considerable section of the workers and peasants in Poland brought grist to the mill of Pilsudski, and not of the Polish Communist Party? Among other reasons, because the Polish Communist

Party is weak, weak in the extreme, and because in the present struggle it has weakened itself still further by its incorrect attitude to Pilsudski's army, in consequence of which it has been unable to assume the lead of the revolutionary-minded masses.

Recently I read in our Soviet press an article on Polish affairs by Comrade Thälmann,<sup>7</sup> member of the Central Committee of the German Communist Party. In that article Comrade Thälmann touches on the attitude of the Polish Communists in calling for support of Pilsudski's army, and criticises it as unrevolutionary. I have to admit, unfortunately, that Comrade Thälmann's criticism is absolutely correct. I have to admit that our Polish comrades committed a gross error in this instance.

That, comrades, is all I wanted to tell you about affairs in Britain in connection with the general strike and about the recent events in Poland. (*Stormy applause.*)

### Notes

1. The general strike in Britain took place on May 3-12, 1926. More than five million organised workers in all the major branches of industry and transport took part in the strike.
2. This refers to Pilsudski's armed coup of May 12-13, 1926, by which he and his clique established a dictatorial regime in Poland and gradually carried out the fascination of the country.
3. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On Britain*, Moscow 1953
4. On receipt of the news of the general strike in Britain, the Presidium of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, at a meeting on May 5, 1926, with the participation of representatives of the Central Committees of the trade unions resolved to call upon all members of trade unions in the U.S.S.R. to contribute one-quarter of a day's earnings in support of the British workers on strike, and that same day it remitted 250,000 rubles to the British T.U.C. General Council. On May 7 the A.U.C.C.T.U. sent to the General Council a further two million rubles collected by workers of the U.S.S.R. On May 9 the General Council informed the A.U.C.C.T.U. of its refusal to accept this money or any other support from the workers of the U.S.S.R.
5. This refers to the theses on "Immediate Problems of the International Communist Movement" adopted on March 15, 1926, by the Sixth Enlarged Plenum of the E.C.C.I. (See *Sixth Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. Theses and Resolutions*, Giz, 1926, pp. 4-39.)
6. The groups in the Sejm were groups in the lower house of the Polish bourgeois parliament. In 1926 the deputies in the Sejm were divided into more than thirty groups, representing the interests of the various classes and intermediate sections of Polish society.
7. This refers to Ernst Thälmann's article, "The Tactics of the Polish Communist Party," printed in *Pravda*, No. 123, May 30, 1926.

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**J. Stalin**

**The Anglo-Russian Unity Committee<sup>1</sup>**

**Speech Delivered at a Joint Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, C.P.S.U.(B.)<sup>2</sup>, July 15, 1926;**

Comrades, we are passing through a period of the accumulation of forces, a period of winning over the masses and of preparing the proletariat for new battles. But the masses are in the trade unions. And in the West the trade unions, the majority of them, are now more or less reactionary. What, then, should be our attitude towards the trade unions? Should we, can we, as Communists, work in the reactionary trade unions? It is essentially this question that Trotsky put to us in his letter recently published in *Pravda*. There is nothing new, of course, in this question. It was raised before Trotsky by the "ultra-Lefts" in Germany, some five years ago. But Trotsky has seen fit to raise it again. How does he answer it? Permit me to quote a passage from Trotsky's letter:

"The entire present 'superstructure' of the British working class, in all its shades and groupings without exception, is an apparatus for putting a brake on the revolution. This presages for a long time to come the pressure of the spontaneous and semi-spontaneous movement *on the framework of the old organisations and the formation of new, revolutionary organisations* as the result of this pressure" (see *Pravda*, No. 119, May 26, 1926).

It follows from this that we ought not to work in the "old" organisations, if we do not want to "retard" the revolution. Either what is meant here is that we are already in the period of a direct revolutionary situation and ought at once to set up self-authorized organisations of the proletariat *in place of* the "old" ones, *in place of* the trade unions -- which, of course, is incorrect and foolish. Or what is meant here is that "for a long time to come" we ought to work to replace the old trade unions by "new, revolutionary organisations."

This is a signal to organise, *in place of* the existing trade unions, that same "Revolutionary Workers' Union" which the "ultra-Left" Communists in Germany advocated some five years ago, and which Comrade Lenin vigorously opposed in his pamphlet "*Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder*. It is in point of fact a signal to replace the present trade unions by "new," supposedly "revolutionary" organisations, a signal, consequently, to *withdraw* from the trade unions.

Is that policy correct? It is fundamentally incorrect. It is fundamentally incorrect because it runs counter to the Leninist method of leading the masses. It is incorrect because, for all their reactionary character, the trade unions of the West are the most elementary organisations of the proletariat, those best understood by the most backward workers, and therefore the most comprehensive organisations of the proletariat. We cannot find our way to the masses, we cannot win them over if we by-pass these trade unions. To adopt Trotsky's standpoint would mean that the road to the vast masses would be barred to the Communists, that the working-class masses would be handed over to the tender mercies of Amsterdam<sup>3</sup>, to the tender mercies of the Sassenbachs and the Oudegeests.<sup>4</sup>

The oppositionists here have quoted Comrade Lenin. Allow me, too, to quote what Lenin said:

"We cannot but regard also as ridiculous and childish nonsense the pompous, very learned, and frightfully revolutionary talk of the German Lefts to the effect that Communists cannot and should not work in reactionary trade unions, that it is permissible to turn down such work, that it is necessary to leave the trade unions and to create without fail a brand-new, immaculate 'Workers' Union' invented by very nice (and, probably, for the most part very youthful) Communists" (see Vol. XXV, pp. 193-94).

And further:

"We wage the struggle against the 'labour aristocracy' in the name of the masses of the workers and in order to win them to our side; we wage the struggle against the opportunist and social-chauvinist leaders in order to win the working class to our side. To forget this most elementary and most self-evident truth would be stupid. And it is precisely this stupidity that the German 'Left' Communists are guilty of when, *because* of the reactionary and counter-revolutionary character of the trade-union *top leadership*, they jump to the conclusion that -- we must leave the trade unions!! that we must refuse to work in them!! that we must create new, *artificial* forms of labour organisation!! This is such unpardonable stupidity that it is equivalent to the greatest service the Communists could render the bourgeoisie" (*ibid.*, p. 196).

I think, comrades, that comment is superfluous.

This raises the question of skipping over the reactionary character of the trade unions in the West, which has not yet been outlived. This question was brought forward at the rostrum here by Zinoviev. He quoted Martov and assured us that the point of view opposed to skipping over, the point of view that it is not permissible for Marxists to skip over and ignore the backwardness of the masses, the backwardness and reactionariness of their leaders, is a Menshevik point of view.

I affirm, comrades, that this unscrupulous manoeuvre of Zinoviev's in citing Martov is evidence of one thing only -- Zinoviev's *complete departure* from the Leninist line.

I shall endeavour to prove this in what follows.

Can we, as Leninists, as Marxists, at all skip over and ignore a movement that has not outlived its day, can we skip over and ignore the backwardness of the masses, can we turn our back on them and pass them by; or *ought we to get rid of* such features by carrying on an unrelaxing fight against them among the masses? That is one of the fundamental questions of communist policy, one of the fundamental questions of Leninist leadership of the masses. The oppositionists spoke here of Leninism. Let us turn to the prime source, to Lenin.

It was in April 1917. Lenin was in controversy with Kamenev. Lenin did not agree with Kamenev, who overestimated the role of petty-bourgeois democracy. But Lenin was not in agreement with Trotsky either, who underestimated the role of the peasant movement and "skipped over" the peasant movement in Russia. Here are Lenin's words:

"Trotskyism says: 'No tsar, but a workers' government.' That is incorrect. The petty bourgeoisie exists, and it cannot be left out of account. But it consists of two sections. The poorer section follows the working class" (see Lenin's speech in the minutes of the Petrograd Conference of April 1917, p. 17<sup>5</sup>).

"Now, if we were to say, 'no tsar, but a dictatorship of the proletariat,' that would be *skipping over* \* the petty bourgeoisie" (see Lenin's speech in the minutes of the All-Russian Conference of April 1917, p. 76<sup>6</sup>).

And further:

"But are we not incurring the danger of succumbing to subjectivism, of desiring to '*skip over*' the uncompleted bourgeois-democratic revolution -- which has not yet outlived the peasant movement -- to a socialist revolution? I should be incurring that danger if I had said: 'No tsar, but a *workers'* government.' But I did *not* say that; I said something else. . . . I absolutely insured myself in my theses against any *skipping over the peasant movement, or the petty-bourgeois movement generally, which has not yet outlived its day, against any playing* at the 'seizure of power' by a workers' government, against Blanquist *adventurism* in any shape or form, for I pointed directly to the experience of the Paris Commune" (see Vol. XX, p. 104).

That is clear, one would think. The theory of *skipping over* a movement which has not outlived its day is a Trotskyist theory. Lenin does not agree with this theory. He considers it an adventurist one.

And here are a few more quotations, this time from other writings -- from those of a "very prominent" Bolshevik whose name I do not want to mention for the present, but who also takes up arms against the skipping-over theory. "In the question of the peasantry, which Trotsky is always trying to 'skip over,' we would have committed the most egregious blunders. Instead of the beginnings of a bond with the peasants, there would now be thoroughgoing estrangement from them."

Further:

"Such is the 'theoretical' foundation of Parvusism and Trotskyism. This 'theoretical' foundation was later minted into political slogans, such as: 'no tsar, but a workers' government.' This slogan sounds very plausible now that after a lapse of fifteen years we have achieved Soviet power in alliance with the peasantry. No tsar -- that's fine! A workers' government -- better still! But if it be recalled that this slogan was put forward in 1905, every Bolshevik will agree that at that time it meant '*skipping over*' the peasantry altogether."

Further:

"But in 1905 the 'permanentists' wanted to foist on us the slogan: 'Down with the tsar and up with a *workers'* government!' But what about the peasantry? Does it not stare one in the face, this complete non-comprehension and ignoring of the peasantry in a country like Russia? If this is not '*skipping over*' the peasantry, then what is it?"

Further:

"Failing to understand the role of the peasantry in Russia, '*skipping over*' the peasantry in a peasant country, Trotskyism was all the more incapable of understanding the role of the peasantry in the international revolution."

Who, you will ask, is the author of these formidable passages against Trotskyism and the Trotskyist skipping-over theory? The author of these formidable passages is none other than Zinoviev. They are taken from his book *Leninism*, and from his article "Bolshevism or Trotskyism?"

How could it happen that a year ago Zinoviev realised the anti-Leninist character of the skipping-over theory, but has ceased to realise it now, a year later? The reason is that he was then, so to speak, a Leninist, but has now got himself hopelessly bogged, with one leg in Trotskyism and the other in

Shlyapnikovism, in the "Workers' Opposition."<sup>7</sup> And here he is, floundering between these two oppositions, and compelled now to speak here from this rostrum, quoting Martov. Against whom is he speaking? Against Lenin. And for whom is he speaking? For the Trotskyists.

To such depths has Zinoviev fallen.

It may be said that all this concerns the question of the peasantry, but has no bearing on the British trade unions. But that is not so, comrades. What has been said about the unsuitability in politics of the skipping-over theory has a direct bearing on the trade unions in Britain, and in Europe generally; it has a direct bearing on the question of leadership of the masses, on the question of the ways and means of emancipating them from the influence of reactionary, reformist leaders. Pursuing their skipping-over theory, Trotsky and Zinoviev are trying to skip over the backwardness, the reactionariness of the British trade unions, trying to get us to overthrow the General Council from Moscow, *without* the British trade-union masses. But we affirm that such a policy is stupidity, adventurism; that the reactionary leaders of the British trade-union movement must be overthrown by the British trade-union masses *themselves, with our help* ; that we must not skip over the reactionary character of the trade-union leaders, but must *help* the British trade-union masses to *get rid of* it.

You will see that there certainly is a connection between policy in general and policy towards the trade-union masses.

Has Lenin anything on this point?

Listen to this:

"The trade unions were a tremendous step forward for the working class in the early days of capitalist development, as marking the transition from the disunity and helplessness of the workers to the *rudiments* of class organisation. When the *highest* form of proletarian class association began to develop, viz., the *revolutionary party of the proletariat* (which will not deserve the name until it learns to bind the leaders with the class and the masses into one single indissoluble whole), the trade unions inevitably began to reveal *certain* reactionary features, a certain craft narrowness, a certain tendency to be non-political, a certain inertness, etc. But the development of the proletariat did not, and could not, proceed anywhere in the world otherwise than through the trade unions, through interaction between them and the party of the working class' (see Vol. XXV, p. 194). [Lenin, "*Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder*. VI. *Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?* (1920)]

And further:

"To fear *this* 'reactionariness,' to try to avoid it, to *skip over* it, is the height of folly, for it means fearing that role of the proletarian vanguard which consists in training, educating, enlightening and drawing into the new life the most backward strata and masses of the working class and peasantry" (*ibid.*, p. 195).

That is how matters stand with the skipping-over theory as applied to the trade-union movement.

Zinoviev would have done better not to come forward here quoting Martov. He would have done better to say nothing about the skipping-over theory. That would have been much better for his own sake. There was no need for

Zinoviev to swear by Trotsky: we know as it is that he has deserted Leninism for Trotskyism.

That is how matters stand, comrades, with the Trotskyist theory of skipping over the backwardness of the trade unions, the backwardness of the trade-union movement, and the backwardness of the mass movement in general. Leninism is one thing, Trotskyism is another.

This brings us to the question of the Anglo-Russian Committee. It has been said here that the Anglo-Russian Committee is an agreement, a bloc between the trade unions of our country and the British trade unions. That is perfectly true. The Anglo-Russian Committee is the expression of a bloc, of an agreement between our unions and the British unions, and this bloc is not without its political character.

This bloc sets itself two tasks. The first is to establish contact between our trade unions and the British trade unions, to organise a united movement against the capitalist offensive to widen the fissure between Amsterdam and the British trade union movement, a fissure which exists and which we shall widen in every way, and, lastly, to bring about the conditions essential for ousting the reformists from the trade unions and for winning over the trade unions of the capitalist countries to the side of communism.

The second task of the bloc is to organise a broad movement of the working class against new imperialist wars in general, and against intervention in our country by (especially) the most powerful of the European imperialist powers, by Britain in particular.

The first task was discussed here at adequate length, and, therefore, I shall not dwell upon it. I should like to say a few words here about the second task, especially as regards intervention in our country by the British imperialists. Some of the oppositionists say that this second task of the bloc between our trade unions and the British is not worth talking about, that it is of no importance. Why, one asks? Why is it not worth talking about? Is not the task of safeguarding the security of the first Soviet Republic in the world, which is moreover the bulwark and base of the international revolution, a revolutionary task? Are our trade unions independent of the Party? Is our view that of the independence of our trade unions -- that the state is one thing, and the trade unions another? No, as Leninists, we do not and cannot hold that view. It should be the concern of every worker, of every worker organised in a trade union, to protect the first Soviet Republic in the world from intervention. And if in this the trade unions of our country have the support of the British trade unions, although they are reformist unions, is that not obviously something to be welcomed?

Those who think that our unions cannot deal with state matters go over to the standpoint of Menshevism. That is the standpoint of *Sotsialistichesky Vestnik*.<sup>8</sup> It is not one we can accept. And if the reactionary trade unions of Britain are prepared to join with the revolutionary trade unions of our country in a bloc against the counter-revolutionary imperialists of their country, why should we not welcome such a bloc? I stress this aspect of the matter in order that our opposition may at last understand that in trying to torpedo the Anglo-Russian Committee it is playing into the hands of the interventionists.

Hence, the Anglo-Russian Committee is a bloc of our trade unions with the reactionary trade unions of Britain, the object of which is, firstly, to strengthen the connections between our trade unions and the trade-union movement of

the West and to revolutionise the latter, and, secondly, to wage a struggle against imperialist wars in general, and intervention in particular. But -- and this is a question of principle -- are political blocs with reactionary trade unions possible at all? Are such blocs permissible at all for Communists?

This question faces us squarely, and we have to answer it here. There are some people -- our oppositionists -- who consider such blocs impossible. The Central Committee of our Party, however, considers them permissible.

The oppositionists have invoked here the name of Lenin. Let us turn to Lenin: "Capitalism would not be capitalism if the 'pure' proletariat were not surrounded by a mass of exceedingly motley intermediate types between the proletarian and the semi-proletarian (who earns his livelihood in part by the sale of his labour power), between the semi-proletarian and the small peasant (and the petty artisan, handicraft worker and small proprietor in general), between the small peasant and the middle peasant, and so on, and if the proletariat itself were not divided into more developed and less developed strata, if it were not divided according to place of birth, trade, sometimes according to religion, and so on. And from all this follows the necessity, the absolute necessity for the vanguard of the proletariat, for its class-conscious section, for the Communist Party, to resort to manoeuvres, arrangements and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small proprietors. The whole point lies in *knowing how* to apply these tactics in order to *raise*, and not lower, the *general* level of proletarian political consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to fight and win" (see Vol. XXV, p. 213).

And further:

"That the Hendersons, Clyneses, MacDonalds and Snowdens are hopelessly reactionary is true. It is equally true that they want to take power into their own hands (though, incidentally, they prefer a coalition with the bourgeoisie), that they want to 'rule' on the old bourgeois lines, and that when they do get into power they will unfailingly behave like the Scheidemanns and Noskes. All that is true. But it by no means follows that to support them is treachery to the revolution, but rather that in the interests of the revolution the working-class revolutionaries should give these gentlemen a certain amount of parliamentary support" (ibid., pp. 218-19).

Hence, it follows from what Lenin says that political agreements, political blocs between the Communists and reactionary leaders of the working class are quite possible and permissible.

Let Trotsky and Zinoviev bear this in mind.

But why are such agreements necessary at all?

In order to gain access to the working-class masses, in order to enlighten them as to the reactionary character of their political and trade-union leaders, in order to sever from the reactionary leaders the sections of the working class that are moving to the Left and becoming revolutionised, in order, consequently, to enhance the fighting ability of the working class as a whole. Accordingly, such blocs may be formed only on two basic conditions, viz., that we are ensured freedom to criticise the reformist leaders, and that the necessary conditions for severing the masses from the reactionary leaders are ensured.

Here is what Lenin says on this score:

"The Communist Party should propose a 'compromise' to the Hendersons and Snowdens, an election agreement: let us together fight the alliance of Lloyd George and the Conservatives, let us divide the parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of votes cast by the workers for the Labour Party or for the Communists (not at the elections, but in a special vote), and let us retain *complete liberty* of agitation, propaganda and political activity. Without this last condition, of course, we cannot agree to a bloc, for it would be treachery; the British Communists must absolutely insist on and secure complete liberty to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (*for fifteen years, 1903-17*) the Russian Bolsheviks insisted on and secured it in relation to the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, i.e., the Mensheviks" (see Vol. XXV, p. 223).

And further:

"The petty-bourgeois democrats (including the Mensheviks) inevitably vacillate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between bourgeois democracy and the Soviet system, between reformism and revolutionism between love for the workers and fear of the proletarian dictatorship, etc. The correct tactics for the Communists must be to *utilise* these vacillations, not to ignore them; and to utilise them calls for concessions to those elements which turn towards the proletariat -- whenever and to the extent that they turn towards the proletariat -- in addition to fighting those who turn towards the bourgeoisie. The result of the application of correct tactics is that *Menshevism has disintegrated, and is increasingly disintegrating in our country, that the stubbornly opportunist leaders are being isolated, and that the best of the workers and the best elements among the petty-bourgeois democrats are being brought into our camp "*

There you have the conditions without which no blocs or agreements with reactionary trade-union leaders are permissible.

Let the opposition bear that also in mind.

The question arises: Is the policy of our trade unions in conformity with the conditions Comrade Lenin speaks of?

I think that it is in full conformity. In the first place, we have completely reserved for ourselves full freedom to criticise the reformist leaders of the British working class and have availed ourselves of that freedom to a degree unequalled by any other Communist Party in the world. In the second place, we have gained access to the British working-class masses and strengthened our ties with them. And in the third place, we are effectively severing, and have already severed, whole sections of the British working class from the reactionary leaders. I have in mind the rupture of the miners with the leaders of the General Council.

Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev have studiously avoided saying anything here about the conference of Russian and British miners in Berlin and about their declaration<sup>9</sup>. Yet, surely, that is a highly important fact of the recent period. Richardson, Cook, Smith, Richards -- what are they? Opportunists, reformists. Some of them are called Lefts, others Rights. All right! Which of them are more to the Left is something history will decide. It is very difficult for us to make this out just now -- the waters are dark and the clouds thick. But one thing is clear, and that is that we have severed these vacillating reformist leaders, who have the following of one million two hundred thousand striking

miners, from the General Council and linked them with our trade unions. Is that not a fact? Why does the opposition say nothing about it?

Can it be that it does not rejoice at the success of our policy? And when Citrine now writes that the General Council and he are agreed to the Anglo-Russian Committee being convened, is that not a result of the fact that Schwartz and Akulov have succeeded in winning over Cook and Richardson, and that the General Council, being afraid of an *open* struggle with the miners, was therefore forced to agree to a meeting of the Anglo-Russian Committee? Who can deny that all these facts are evidence of the success of our policy, that all this is evidence of the utter bankruptcy of the policy of the opposition?

Hence, blocs with reactionary trade-union leaders are permissible. They are necessary, on certain conditions. Freedom of criticism is the first of them. Our Party is observing this condition. Severance of the working-class masses from the reactionary leaders is another condition. Our Party is observing this condition too. Our Party is right. The opposition is wrong.

The question arises: What more do Zinoviev and Trotsky want of us? What they want is that our Soviet trade unions should either break with the Anglo-Russian Committee, or that they, acting from here, from Moscow, should overthrow the General Council. But that is stupid, comrades. To demand that we, acting from Moscow, and *by-passing* the British workers' trade unions, *by-passing* the British trade-union masses, *by-passing* the British trade-union officials, skipping over them, that we, acting from here, from Moscow, should overthrow the General Council -- is not that stupid, comrades?

They demand a demonstrative rupture. Is it difficult to understand that if we did that, the only result would be our own discomfiture? Is it difficult to understand that in the event of a rupture we lose contact with the British trade-union movement, we throw the British trade unions into the embraces of the Sassenbachs and Oudegeests, we shake the foundations of the united front tactics, and we delight the hearts of the Churchills and Thomases, without getting anything in return except discomfiture?

Trotsky takes as the starting point of his policy of theatrical gestures, not concrete human beings, not the concrete workers of flesh and blood who are living and struggling in Britain, but some sort of ideal and ethereal beings who are revolutionary from head to foot. Is it difficult, however, to understand that only persons devoid of common sense take ideal, ethereal beings as the starting point of their policy?

That is why we think that the policy of theatrical gestures, the policy of overthrowing the General Council from Moscow, by the efforts of Moscow alone, is a ridiculous and adventurist policy.

The policy of gestures has been the characteristic feature of Trotsky's whole policy ever since he joined our Party. We had a first application of this policy at the time of the Brest Peace, when Trotsky refused to sign the German-Russian peace agreement and countered it with a theatrical gesture, believing that a gesture was enough to rouse the proletarians of all countries against imperialism. That was a policy of gestures. And, comrades, you know very well how dear that gesture cost us. Into whose hands did that theatrical gesture play? Into the hands of the imperialists, the Mensheviks, the Socialist-

Revolutionaries and all who were then trying to strangle the Soviet power, which at that time was not firmly established.

Now we are asked to adopt the same policy of theatrical gestures towards the Anglo-Russian Committee. They demand a demonstrative and theatrical rupture. But who would benefit from that theatrical gesture? Churchill and Chamberlain Sassenbach and Oudegeest. That is what they want. That is what they are waiting for. They, the Sassenbachs and Oudegeests, want us to make a demonstrative break with the British labour movement and thus render things easier for Amsterdam. They, the Churchills and Chamberlains, want the break in order to make it easier for them to launch intervention to provide them with a moral argument in favour of the interventionists.

These are the people into whose hands our oppositionists are playing.

No, comrades, we cannot adopt this adventurist course.

But such is the fate of "ultra-Left" phrasemongers. Their phrases are Leftist, but in practice it turns out that they are aiding the enemies of the working class. You go in on the Left and come out on the Right.

No, comrades, we shall not adopt this policy of theatrical gestures -- we shall no more adopt it *today* than we did at the time of the Brest Peace. We shall not adopt it because we do not want our Party to become a plaything in the hands of our enemies.

## Notes

1. The Anglo-Russian Unity Committee was set up on the initiative of the A.U.C.C.T.U. at an Anglo-Soviet trade-union conference in London, April 6-8, 1925. It consisted of the chairmen and secretaries of the A.U.C.C.T.U. and the T.U.C. General Council and another three members from each of these organisations. The committee ceased to exist in the autumn of 1927 owing to the treacherous policy of the reactionary leaders of the British trade unions.

2. The joint plenum of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission, C.P.S.U.(B.) was held July 14-23, 1926. It discussed a communication of the Political Bureau on its decisions in connection with the British general strike and the events in Poland and China, and reports on the results of the elections to the Soviets, on the case of Lashevich and others, and on Party unity, housing development, and the grain procurement campaign. At the plenum J. V. Stalin spoke on the Political Bureau's communication concerning the decisions taken by it in connection with the events in Britain, Poland and China, on the report of the Presidium of the C.C.C., C.P.S.U.(B.) on the case of Lashevich and others, on Party unity and on other questions. The plenum approved the activities of the Political Bureau of the C.C. and of the C.P.S.U.(B.) delegation in the E.C.C.I. on the international question, and adopted a number of decisions on important questions of state and economic affairs, inner-Party life and the conditions of the workers. The plenum expelled Zinoviev from the Political Bureau of the C.C. (For the resolutions of the plenum, see *Resolutions and Decisions of C.P.S.U. Congresses, Conferences and Central Committee Plenums*, Part II, 1953, pp. 148-69.)

3. This refers to the Amsterdam Trade Union International, founded in July 1919 at an international congress in Amsterdam. It included the reformist trade unions of the majority of the West-European countries and the American Federation of Labour. The Amsterdam International pursued a reformist

policy, openly collaborated with the bourgeoisie in the International Labour Office and various commissions of the League of Nations, opposed a united front in the labour movement, and adopted a hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union, as a result of which its influence in the labour movement gradually declined. During the Second World War the Amsterdam International practically ceased to function, and, in December 1945, in connection with the foundation of the World Federation of Trade Unions, it was liquidated.

4. Sassenbach and Oudegeest were secretaries of the reformist Amsterdam Trade Union International and leaders of its Right wing.

5. See V. I. Lenin, *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 24, p. 123.

6. See V. I. Lenin, *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 24, p. 216.

7. The “Workers’ Opposition”—an anti-Party anarcho-syndicalist group in the R.C.P.(B.), headed by Shlyapnikov, Medvedyev and others. It was formed in the latter half of 1920 and fought the Leninist line of the Party. The Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.) condemned the “Workers’ Opposition” and decided that propaganda of the ideas of the anarcho-syndicalist deviation was incompatible with membership of the Communist Party. The remnants of the defeated “Workers’ Opposition” subsequently joined the counter-revolutionary Trotskyists.

8. *Sotsialistichesky Vestnik (Socialist Courier)*—a magazine, organ of the Menshevik whiteguard émigrés, founded by Martov in February 1921. Until March 1933 it was published in Berlin, and from May of that year until June 1940 in Paris. It is now published in America and is the mouthpiece of the most reactionary imperialist circles.

9. The conference of representatives of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain and the Miners’ Union of the U.S.S.R. was held in Berlin on July 7, 1926. It discussed continuation of the campaign in aid of the locked-out British miners. It adopted a declaration “To the Workers of the World,” appealing for energetic support of the British miners and it expressed the need for an early meeting of the Anglo-Russian Unity Committee. The conference decided on the expediency of setting up an Anglo-Soviet Miners’ Committee for maintaining mutual contact and for achieving united revolutionary action of the Miners’ Union of the U.S.S.R. and the International Miners’ Federation.

### 3.

**J. V. Stalin**

**The Anglo-Russian Unity Committee**

**Speech Delivered at a Meeting of the Presidium of the E.C.C.I. August 7, 1926;**

Comrades, even before Murphy's speech, the C.C., C.P.S.U. (B.) had received a letter from the Central Committee of the British Communist Party protesting against the declaration of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions<sup>1</sup> on the general strike in Britain. It seems to me that Murphy is repeating here the arguments of that letter. He put forward here chiefly formal considerations, one of them being that the disputed issues had not been the subject of joint discussion with the British Communist Party beforehand. I admit that this last point of Murphy's has some justification. The Comintern has indeed at times had to take decisions without preliminary agreement with the Central Committee of the British Communist Party. But there were extenuating circumstances: the urgency of some of the questions, the impossibility of getting in touch speedily with the C.C. of the British Communist Party, etc.

As to Murphy's other considerations and arguments relating to the A.U.C.C.T.U. and its declaration, it must be said that they are quite incorrect. It is incorrect to assert that the A.U.C.C.T.U. committed a formal error in issuing the declaration, on the grounds that in doing so it was taking upon itself what was allegedly a function of the Profintern or the Comintern. The A.U.C.C.T.U. has as much right to issue a declaration of its own as any trade-union or other association. How can the A.U.C.C.T.U. be denied this elementary right?

Still more incorrect is the assertion that by its declaration the A.U.C.C.T.U. infringed the rights of the Profintern or the Comintern, that the Profintern and the Comintern are injured parties whose interests suffered damage. I must inform you that the A.U.C.C.T.U. issued its declaration with the knowledge and approval of the Profintern and the Comintern. That, indeed, explains why neither the Profintern nor the Comintern has any idea of accusing the A.U.C.C.T.U. of having infringed its rights. Therefore, when Murphy attacks the A.U.C.C.T.U. on this point, he is as a matter of fact attacking the E.C.C.I. and the Profintern.

Lastly, it must be regarded as absolutely impermissible on Murphy's part to assert as he did that the A.U.C.C.T.U.'s criticism of the General Council, and its declaration generally, constitute "*interference*" in the internal affairs of the British Communist Party; that the A.U.C.C.T.U., being a "national organisation," has no warrant for such "*interference*." It is most deplorable to hear Murphy repeating the "arguments" put forward by Pugh and Purcell at the Paris meeting of the Anglo-Russian Committee. These are precisely the "arguments" that Pugh, Purcell and Citrine advanced the other day against the A.U.C.C.T.U. delegation. That alone is an indication that Murphy is in the wrong. The substance, the essence of the matter must not be disregarded because of formal considerations. A Communist cannot behave in that way. The affairs of the British miners would be in much better shape and the incorrect actions of the General Council would have been exposed if, side by

side with the A.U.C.C.T.U., the "national" trade union federations of other countries, those of France, Germany, etc., say, had also come forward with a criticism of the General Council. It is not as an error on the part of the A.U.C.C.T.U., but rather as a service to the British workers that the publication of its declaration criticising the General Council should be regarded.

That is all I wanted to say in connection with Murphy's report, taking into account mainly the formal aspect of the matter.

I might have confined myself to that, in so far as the issue concerns the formal aspect of the matter. But the fact is that Murphy did not confine himself to the formal aspect of the matter. He needed this formal aspect in order to secure certain substantial results of a non-formal character. Murphy's tactics consist in using formal grounds as a camouflage, and taking advantage of certain formal shortcomings in the activities of the E.C.C.I., in order to secure definite decisions here on matters of substance. It is therefore necessary to say a few words about the substance of Murphy's arguments.

What is Murphy really out for?

To put it crudely, what he is out for is to compel the A.U.C.C.T.U. to stop criticising the General Council *publicly*, to compel the A.U.C.C.T.U. to keep silent and "not to interfere" in the "affairs of the General Council."

Can the A.U.C.C.T.U., or our Party, or the Comintern agree to that?

No, it cannot. For what would compelling the A.U.C.C.T.U. to keep silent mean, how would its silence be understood, at a time when the General Council is working to isolate the British miners now on strike and is paving the way for their defeat? To keep silent under such circumstances would mean keeping silent about the sins of the General Council, keeping silent about its treachery. And to keep silent about the General Council's treachery, when it and the A.U.C.C.T.U. have joined in a bloc in the shape of the Anglo-Russian Committee, would be tacitly to approve its treachery, and, consequently, to share with the General Council the responsibility for the latter's treachery in the eyes of the labour movement of the whole world. Does it need further proof that the A.U.C.C.T.U. would be committing political and moral suicide if it were to take this course, if it were even for a moment to renounce public criticism of the General Council's treachery?

Judge for yourselves. In May, the General Council called off the general strike, betraying the British working class in general, and the British miners in particular. Throughout June and July, the General Council did not lift a finger to help the striking miners. More, it did everything in its power to pave the way for the miners' defeat, and thus punish the "recalcitrant" British Miners' Federation. In August, at the Paris meeting of the Anglo-Russian Committee, the General Council leaders refused to discuss the proposal of the A.U.C.C.T.U. representatives on assistance to the British miners, despite the fact that the General Council had raised no objection to the agenda proposed for the meeting by the A.U.C.C.T.U. We thus have a whole chain of betrayals on the part of the General Council, which has got involved in rotten diplomacy. But Murphy demands that the A.U.C.C.T.U. should close its eyes to all these outrages and put a seal on its lips! No, comrades, the A.U.C.C.T.U. cannot adopt this course, for it does not want to commit suicide.

Murphy thinks that it would have been more fitting if the declaration against the General Council had been issued by the Profintern, as an international organisation, and if the A.U.C.C.T.U., as a "national" organisation, had

passed a brief resolution associating itself with the Profintern's declaration. Looked at from the purely formal angle, there is a certain architectural harmony of a departmental kind in Murphy's plan. Looked at from that angle, it has a certain justification. But looked at from the political angle, Murphy's plan will not stand criticism. There is no need to prove that it would not have had one-hundredth part of the political effect that the A.U.C.C.T.U.'s declaration has undoubtedly had, in the sense of exposing the General Council and politically educating the masses of the British workers. The point is that the Profintern is less known to the British working class than is the A.U.C.C.T.U., it is less popular than the latter, and, consequently, carries far less weight. But it follows from this that the criticism of the General Council should have come precisely from the A.U.C.C.T.U., as the body enjoying greater prestige in the eyes of the British working class. No other course was possible, for it was necessary to hit the mark in exposing the treachery of the General Council. Judging by the howl raised by the reformist leaders of the British labour movement over the A.U.C.C.T.U.'s declaration, it may be said with confidence that the A.U.C.C.T.U. did hit the mark.

Murphy thinks that public criticism of the General Council by the A.U.C.C.T.U. may result in a rupture of the bloc with the General Council, in the break-up of the Anglo-Russian Committee. I think Murphy is mistaken. *In view of the very active assistance the A.U.C.C.T.U.'s rendering the miners*, a break-up of the Anglo-Russian Committee may be considered out of the question, or almost out of the question. This, in fact, explains why nobody fears a break-up of the Anglo-Russian Committee more than the representatives of the General Council majority, Purcell and Hicks. Both Purcell and Hicks, of course, will try to blackmail us with the danger of a rupture. But you must be capable of distinguishing between blackmail and the real danger of a rupture.

Besides, it should be borne in mind that for us the Anglo-Russian Committee is not an end in itself. We did not join, and shall not remain, in the Anglo-Russian Committee unconditionally; we joined it on definite conditions, included among them being the right of the A.U.C.C.T.U. freely to criticise the General Council, equally with the right of the General Council freely to criticise the A.U.C.C.T.U. We cannot renounce freedom of criticism for the sake of respectability and maintaining the bloc at all costs.

What is the underlying purpose of the bloc? It is to organise joint action of the members of the bloc against capital in the interests of the working class, and joint action of the members of the bloc against imperialist war and for peace among the peoples. But what if one of the parties to the bloc, or certain leaders of one of the parties, violate and betray the interests of the working class, and thus render joint action impossible? Surely, we are not expected to praise them for such errors? Consequently, what is necessary is mutual criticism, the elimination of errors by means of criticism, so as to restore the possibility of joint action in the interests of the working class. Hence, the Anglo-Russian Committee has meaning only if freedom of criticism is guaranteed.

It is said that criticism may result in discrediting certain reactionary trade-union leaders. Well, what of it? I see nothing bad in that. The working class stands only to gain by the old leaders who are betraying its interests being discredited and replaced by new leaders loyal to the cause of the working class. And the sooner such reactionary and unreliable leaders are removed

from their posts and replaced by new and better leaders who are free from the reactionary ways of the old leaders, the better it will be.

This, however, does not mean that the power of the reactionary leaders can be broken at one stroke, that they can be isolated and replaced by new, revolutionary leaders at short notice.

Certain pseudo-Marxists think that one "revolutionary" gesture, one vociferous attack, is enough to break the power of reactionary leaders. Real Marxists do not, and cannot, have anything in common with such people.

Others think that it is enough for Communists to work out a correct line, and the broad masses of the workers will instantaneously turn away from the reactionaries and reformists and instantaneously rally around the Communist Party. That is quite wrong. Only non-Marxists can think that. In point of fact, a correct Party line and the understanding and acceptance of that line as correct by the masses are two things that are very far apart. For the Party to win the following of vast masses, a correct line is not enough; for that it is necessary, in addition, that the masses should become convinced through their own experience of the correctness of the line, that the masses should accept the Party's policy and slogans as their own policy and slogans, and that they should begin to put them into effect. Only on this condition can a party with a correct policy really become the guiding force of the class.

Was the policy of the British Communist Party correct during the general strike in Britain? Yes, it was. Why, then, did it not win the following of the millions of workers on strike? Because those masses were not yet convinced of the correctness of the Communist Party's policy. And it is not possible to convince the masses of the correctness of the Party's policy in a short time. Still less is it possible with the help of "revolutionary" gestures. It requires time and unremitting energetic work in exposing the reactionary leaders, in politically educating the backward masses of the working class, in promoting new cadres from the working class to leading posts.

From this it is easy to understand why the power of the reactionary leaders of the working class cannot be destroyed all at once, why this requires time and unremitting work in educating the vast masses of the working class.

But still less does it follow from this that the work of exposing the reactionary leaders must be dragged out over decades, or that the exposure can come of itself, of its own accord, without causing any offence to the reactionary leaders and without violating the "sacred rules" of respectability. No, comrades, nothing ever comes "of itself." The exposure of reactionary leaders and the political education of the masses must be done by you yourselves, the Communists, and by other political Left-wing leaders, through unremitting work for the political enlightenment of the masses. Only in that way can the work of revolutionising the broad masses of the workers be accelerated.

Lastly, one further remark in connection with Murphy's report. Murphy insistently harped on the specific features of the labour movement in Britain, on the role and significance of tradition in Britain, and, as it seems to me, he hinted that because of these specific features the ordinary Marxist methods of leadership may prove unsuitable in Britain. I think that Murphy is on a slippery path. Of course, the British labour movement has its specific features, and they must certainly be taken into account. But to elevate these specific features to a principle and make them the basis of activity is to adopt the standpoint of those people who proclaim that Marxism is inapplicable to

British conditions. I do not think that Murphy has anything in common with such people. But I do want to say that he is near the fringe where the specifically British features begin to be elevated to a principle.

A word or two about Humboldt's speech. Humboldt, in raising an objection, says that criticism must not be empty and pointless. That is true. But what has that to do with the A.U.C.C.T.U. and the R.C.C.I., whose criticism is absolutely concrete? Was the criticism of the heroes of "Black Friday"<sup>2</sup> empty criticism? Of course not, because now, when "Black Friday" has already become a matter of history, this criticism is being repeated by all and sundry. Why, then, should the criticism of the treachery of the General Council leaders during the general strike and later, when the miners are continuing their strike, be called empty criticism? Where is the logic in that? Was the treachery at the time of the general strike less fatal than the treachery on "Black Friday"?

I am opposed to the method of criticism of individuals suggested by Humboldt if it is recommended as the basic method. I think that we should criticise reactionary leaders from the angle of their general line of leadership, and not of the individual peculiarities of the leaders themselves. I am not opposed to criticism of individuals as a subsidiary, auxiliary means. But I hold that the underlying basis of our criticism should be principles. Otherwise, instead of criticism from the standpoint of principle, we may just get squabbling and personal recrimination, which is bound to lower the level of our criticism to the detriment of our work.

### Notes

1. The Declaration of the A.U.C.C.T.U.—the appeal "To the International Proletariat"—issued in connection with the betrayal of the British general strike by the reformist leaders of the Labour Party and of the T.U.C. General Council, was adopted by the Fourth Plenum of the A.U.C.C.T.U. on June 7, 1926. It was published in *Pravda*, No. 130, June 8, 1926.

2. The heroes of "Black Friday"—the reactionary British trade-union leaders—Thomas (railwaymen). Hodges (miners) and Williams (transport workers)—who called off the strike of railwaymen and transport workers in support of the striking miners which had been fixed for April 15, 1921, a day which, in consequence, came to be known among the British workers as "Black Friday."