Session 11 – 1 July 1921, 12:40 p.m.

Tactics and Strategy – Discussion

Discussion on Radek’s report. Speakers: Hempel, Terracini, Lenin, Michalak, Vaughan.

Koenen (Chair): The session is now open. Many comrades have asked the Presidium to speed the pace of the discussions. In particular, the trade-union delegates pressed us to bring our discussions to a close rapidly, so that they will be able to hold their congress of the red trade-union International. The Presidium considers it appropriate to be stricter in allocating time for future agenda points. There was much discussion under the first agenda point of a wide variety of questions, which could have been held over for later agenda points.

In our opinion, it should be possible for the discussion on tactics and strategy that is now being opened to be essentially concluded in two sessions. We want at least to try. Then, of course, the written material, the theses, and the motions, will be turned over to a commission. Perhaps it will be possible, after the commission discussions, to devote a half-day to these questions. But we want at least to make the attempt to deal with this question in two sessions. Comrades who wish to speak are requested to make their request.

We will now begin the discussion on tactics and strategy. The first speaker is the representative of the KAPD, Comrade Hempel, who has extended speaking time.
Hempel (Appel, KAPD): Comrades, after listening to Comrade Radek’s report on the tactics and strategy to be adopted by the Communist International, we can say that we agree with a portion of his initial comments: namely, the assertion, based on examining the economic situation, that we are witnessing the collapse of the capitalist economic system, which will lead necessarily and unconditionally to proletarian revolution. However, as soon as we come to the question of how this proletarian revolution unfolds, how the revolutionary proletarian masses form up in struggle, differences become apparent.

I will attempt to go into this quite briefly, since I have been given little time. Let us consider the period of the revolution in Russia, in 1917. We observe revolution in Germany and Austria, and all the revolutionary struggles of this period, and we note that the proletariat in Russia formed up for struggle in soviets. In Germany we call them councils. That is how the proletariat formed up; that was the organisational form of the masses.

We also observe this in the smaller revolutionary struggles that took place in Italy during the occupation of the factories. The proletariat has its councils, or at least the form of councils. The proletariat in Britain had factory councils, and they are forming now in the great miners’ strike – the genuine revolutionary leadership of the shop stewards.¹ In all the revolutionary struggles of the German proletariat after 1918, ranging from the very small to the very large, the struggle was structured by councils, factories, and workplaces. That is what we observe in the revolution.

We should reflect on this. We should conclude that if this is how the proletariat forms up in revolution, then that is how we as Communists, who wish to be the leadership in this revolution and must be that leadership, should undertake to organise the revolutionary proletariat. That is what we of the Communist Workers’ Party say. And this is not something cooked up, as Comrade Radek believes, in the brain and test tube of Comrade Gorter in the Netherlands. It arises from the experiences of the struggle that we have fought since 1918. We workers are not great theoreticians; we have only the experiences of our struggles. We have learned to separate off revolutionary workers who really want to fight from the old structures of the workers’ movement and give them support in the new forms in which the revolution is taking place.

¹. Shop stewards committees, elective organs of workers’ struggle that developed in Britain before World War I, expanded rapidly during the War. Centred in the Clyde Valley industrial district, these committees spread throughout England and Scotland. After 1917 the movement took on an increasingly political character, actively opposing British military intervention against Soviet Russia.