Zinoviev and Heckert on the trade-union question. 1. The relationship of the Red International of Labour Unions to the Communist International. 2. The struggle against the Amsterdam yellow International.

Koenen (Chair): The agenda today is the trade-union question. (1) The relationship of the Red International of Labour Unions to the Communist International. (2) The struggle against the Amsterdam yellow International. Comrade Zinoviev has the floor to speak on the first agenda point. After him, Comrade Heckert of the German delegation will report on the same question.

Report on RILU Relationship to Communist International

Zinoviev: Comrades, the Second Congress of the Communist International adopted Communists’ basic position on the trade-union question. I believe there is really no need to alter in any way the theoretical foundations of the position established by the Second Congress. In our opinion, a year of struggle has certainly confirmed the correctness of the Second Congress decision. In several countries – Britain and Germany, France and the United States – the trade-union bureaucrats have moved to expel Communists and Communist cells. This fact alone, in our opinion, is sufficient proof that the decision we took was correct, and that we hit the nail on the head during the Second Congress.
Now we have a new task. It is no longer a matter of formulating our position on the trade-union question theoretically – that has already been done. The task is rather to better organise the struggle against the yellow Amsterdam International. The task is to specify the practical relationship between the Red International of Labour Unions and the Communist International. The congress must address this task.

Comrades, we already said a year ago that the Amsterdam International was a yellow bourgeois organisation. This assertion of ours was met by a great deal of bitter abuse, and even some of our somewhat confused friends considered that we were exaggerating out of polemical zeal when we called the Amsterdam International a yellow International. I recall what we experienced in Halle, when we stated there, on behalf of the Executive, that the Amsterdam International was a yellow organisation, whose leaders did more harm to the working class, in many respects, than the gentlemen of the Orgesch organisation. The task at our congress is to establish that such an assessment of the Amsterdam International is not at all an exaggeration and was not merely a polemical turn of phrase.

Unfortunately, it is a plain, firmly established fact that the Amsterdam organisation really is a tool of the bourgeoisie. I have here a passage from an article by Albert Thomas, one of the leaders of this organisation. In a report on the trade-union International’s first year of activity, printed in the journal Internationale du travail, he tried to explain how this International came to be founded. He said that, after the War, the working class felt great stress and a great need to organise. But this factor alone was not enough. At the same time, the bourgeoisie felt the need to create an organisation. He said:

On the other hand, the governments, who bear responsibility for public safety, were concerned by the grave problems posed by demobilisation and disturbed by revolutionary propaganda carried out everywhere by Bolshevik Russia. They too had no choice but to seek, for their part, an orderly and methodical resolution of the immense social conflict and the wartime suffering.

In other words, the governments – the bourgeois governments – were also quite disquieted after the War by the crisis and by the revolutionary propaganda carried out everywhere by Bolshevik Russia, and they found them-

1. For Zinoviev’s remark at Halle, see Lewis and Lih (eds.) 2011, p. 125.