Continuation of the discussion on the trade-union question. Speakers: Landler, Riehs, Rees, Morgan, Hourwich, Torralba Beci, Kolarov, Tommasi, Bell, Leo Pivio, Marković. Statement by the Norwegian delegation.

Gennari (Chair): Thirteen more speakers are on the list for the trade-union question. The Presidium has decided to take first the representatives of parties that have not yet taken part in this debate. It will then be up to the congress to decide whether it wishes to give the floor to the remaining speakers. Comrade Landler has the floor.

Landler (Hungary): Comrades, Comrade Zinoviev pointed out in his report that the trade-union question is the most important issue before the International. It might appear that the congress does not share this opinion. Already yesterday and also today the congress has displayed its disinterest through indifference. I would not have mentioned this, except that it leads to further conclusions. This indifference is all the more significant in that Comrade Zinoviev said, in diplomatic fashion, that no single section of the International has succeeded in carrying out the relevant theses of the Third International’s Second Congress. Comrades, we are well aware that – as Comrade Loriot said in the Executive, for example – they had built no cells among the syndicalists [CGT]. The reasons for this are secondary; they had not done it. We know from Comrade Radek and also from the British delegate how our British comrades responded to the miners’ strike.
Comrades, Comrade Zinoviev also reported briefly on what the Czechoslovak party has done in the trade unions, or, better, has not done. And we have also seen that the Yugoslav sister party, for example, responded when the trade unions were outlawed because of a political strike. They did not carry out any appropriate action in parliament. So some of the parties acted like Modigliani, when he said he would join the Third International, but would do no more than send a postcard. The fractions recognised in theory that we must influence the trade unions, but they did everything to ensure that in reality the trade unions were not influenced by the party. Other fractions simply believed that the mountain must come to Mohammed; they wanted to win the unions through an edict.

Comrades, I ask you: how is it possible to win the trade unions if we act in this way? If we accept that winning the unions is a life-and-death question for revolutionary growth, how should the trade-union issue be dealt with in the party? Comrade Zinoviev was right to note in his report that the unions cannot be influenced mechanically, and he also indicated how this can be accomplished. Not through mechanical work, not through edicts, not through revolutionary routine, but by grappling with the immediate issues facing the organised working class and carrying out this revolutionary detail work in the unions. That is the only way we can win over the unions.

Taking into consideration the indifference evident in this session, we must say frankly that a large segment of the congress shows more understanding for what one might call revolutionary phrase-mongering than for organised, revolutionary detail work. And that is quite curious. There are a great many workers here. The theses say that we should throw the parliamentarians and diplomats out of positions of responsibility, and replace them – if there is no alternative – with inexperienced workers. But this was said, comrades, in the assumption that inexperienced workers were rooted in the masses and lived with the masses. But if such inexperienced workers are placed in responsible posts, comrades, and they then lose their link with the masses and become so-called ‘great leaders’, then the only gain from this entire switch in leadership consists simply in the fact that in place of experienced and clever diplomats, we obtain leaders whose only virtue is their inexperience. I believe that such comrades, on achieving leadership positions, have to carry out even more revolutionary detail work in order to win the masses.

This is an international phenomenon, and most Communist parties do not keep it in view. Certainly there are many exceptions, but it appears that this is the rule. This reality makes it quite impossible for the party to gain influence in the trade unions. If this is always kept in view, if the work is carried out in this fashion, then the question of destroying the trade union will not arise. It will certainly not be the primary organisational question.