

Down With Reformist Illusions— Hail The Revolutionary Class Struggle!

By ROSA LUXEMBURG

[The May Day article printed below was written by Rosa Luxemburg for May Day, 1913, a year before the outbreak of the World War. It shows the combination of sensitiveness to coming events and concern with the methods of meeting them which is characteristic of the highest kind of revolutionary leadership. Its scornful analysis of class collaboration illusions and portrayal of the nature of the imperialist epoch and the war danger lend its words a timely ring today.—*Editor.*]

WHEN May Day demonstrations were held for the first time, the vanguard of the International, the German working class, was just at the point of breaking the chains of a disgraceful Exception Law and of entering upon the path of a free, legal development. The period of prolonged depression in the world market, since the crash of the seventies, had been overcome and capitalist economy had entered directly upon an era of resplendent development that was to last almost a decade. Likewise the world had recovered, after twenty years of uninterrupted peace, from recollections of that war period in which the modern European state system had received its bloody christening. The path appeared free for a quiet cultural development. Illusions, hopes for a peaceful settlement between capital and labor sprouted forth luxuriantly among the ranks of the Socialists. Proposals to hold out “the open hand to good will” marked the beginning of the nineties; promises of an imperceptible, “gradual evolution” into Socialism marked their end. Crises, wars, and revolutions were considered outworn theories, mere swaddling clothes of modern society; parliamentarism and trade unionism, *democracy in the State and democracy in the industry* were to open the gates to a new and better order.

The actual course of events played frightful havoc with all these illusions. In place of the promised mild social-reformist development of culture there has set in since the end of the nineties a period of the most violent, extreme sharpening of capitalist conflicts, a period of storm and stress, of crashes and turmoil, of tottering and trembling in the very foundations of society. The ten-year period of the economic upward curve of development was compensated for in the following decade by two world-convolving crises. After two decades of world peace there followed

in the last decade of last century six bloody wars and in the first decade of the new century four bloody revolutions. Instead of social reforms—sedition bills, imprisonment bills and jailings; instead of industrial democracy—the powerful concentration of capital in cartels and employers' associations and the international practice of giant lockouts. And instead of the new upward development of democracy in the State a miserable collapse of the last remnants of bourgeois liberalism and bourgeois democracy. In Germany alone the destinies of the bourgeois parties since the nineties have brought: the rise and immediate hopeless dissolution of the National Social Party, the break-up of the liberal opposition and the re-uniting of its fragments in the morass of reaction, and finally the transformation of the Center from a radical people's party to a conservative government party. And the shifting in party development in other capitalist countries has been similar. Everywhere the revolutionary working class today sees itself alone confronted by the compact, hostile reaction of the ruling classes and by their energetic attacks, which are aimed at them alone.

The "sign" under which this whole development on the economic and political field has been carried out, the formula according to which its results may be traced back is: IMPERIALISM. This is not a new element, not an unexpected veering in the general historical course of capitalist society. Military preparations and wars, international conflicts and colonial policies have accompanied the history of capital from its cradle. It is the extreme augmentation of these elements, the concentration and gigantic outburst of these conflicts, which have resulted in a new epoch in the development of present-day society. In dialectic reciprocal action—at the same time result and cause of the powerful accumulation of capital and of the consequent sharpening and intensifying of the contradiction between capital and labor within and between the capitalist States without—has Imperialism entered upon its final phase, the violent division of the world by the assault of capital. A chain of continual, unprecedented competitive military preparations on land and sea in all capitalist countries, a chain of bloody wars, which have spread from Africa to Europe and which any moment may fan the glowing sparks to a world conflagration; in addition, for years the phantom of the high cost of living, of mass hunger throughout the whole capitalist world, which can no longer be banished—these are the "signs" under which labor's world holiday will soon celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its

existence. And each of these "signs" is a flaming testimonial to the living truth and power of the ideas of the May Day celebration.

The brilliant main idea of the May Day celebration is the independent action of the proletarian masses, is the political mass action of the millions of workers, who otherwise can give expression to their own will only through petty parliamentary action, separated by State boundaries and consisting for the most part only in voting for representatives. The excellent proposal of the Frenchman Lavigne at the international congress in Paris combined this indirect parliamentary manifestation of the will of the proletariat with a direct international mass manifestation, the laying down of tools as a demonstration and fighting tactic for the eight-hour day, world peace, and Socialism.

No wonder the whole development, the aggregate tendency of imperialism in the last decade has been to bring ever plainer and more tangibly before the eyes of the international working class that only the independent action of the broadest masses, their own political action, mass demonstrations, mass strikes, which must sooner or later break forth into a period of revolutionary struggles for State power, can give the correct answer of the proletariat to the unprecedented pressure of imperialist politics. At this moment of frenzied military preparations and of war orgies it is only the resolute fighting stand of the working masses, their ability and readiness for powerful mass action, which still maintains world peace, which can still postpone the threatening world conflagration. And the more the May Day idea, the idea of resolute mass action as demonstrations of international solidarity and as a fighting tactic for peace and for Socialism even in the strongest section of the International, the German working class, strikes root, the greater guaranty we shall have that from the world war, which will inevitably take place sooner or later, there will result an ultimately victorious settlement between the world of labor and that of capital.

Leipzig, April 30, 1913.

The Present Situation In The Labor Movement

By JAY LOVESTONE

EVERY acute economic depression has left an indelible mark on the American labor movement. No serious economic crisis has been weathered without being a force making for fundamental changes in the composition of the working class and in the organizational and ideological development of the American labor movement.

The American working class is today in the throes of a great crisis. Grave and significant events are in the process of development. The present crisis is distinct in one sense from all the other moments of trial and struggle that our working class has gone through. This crisis is not only one growing out of the acute depression at hand, but is also a "prosperity" crisis. The difficulties and problems the workers are facing today in the United States are reflexes at least as much of the recent period of prosperity as of the present period of severe economic depression.

What are the employers planning to do with the remaining trade unions? What will be the policy of the present trade union bureaucracy? What can be done to beat back the smashing, open-shop offensive now being waged by the huge capitalist interests against every vestige of working-class organization?

These are all pertinent questions. The life and death crisis which the biggest trade union of the American Federation of Labor, the United Mine Workers of America, is now going through; the gathering storms in the ranks of the railroad workers as a protest against the class collaboration schemes of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers type; the dire effects of the Watson-Parker law on the great mass of railway workers; the destruction of the needle-trade union organizations by the Socialist Party bureaucracy of the Sigman type, working hand in glove with the Green-Woll clique; the rising wave of protest and strike movements in the textile regions; and the historical mass conference of progressive miners held in Pittsburgh on April 1, are all straws indicating that there are now blowing winds which are shaking up the whole composition of the working class and uprooting and changing the prevailing structure and policies of our labor movement.

To answer the above questions; to understand which way, in which direction, we are now traveling, it is necessary to have an analysis of the composition of the working class and the relations within the working class, of the effects of the present economic crisis on the