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Belgian Regime Bankrupt Official Figures Show

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BRUSSELS, Belgium, Dec. 15 – The declaration of the Stalinist minister Lalmand, placing the real index of the cost of living around 400 or 450 while the government has stabilized wages around the index 220, characterizes perfectly the social situation in Belgium, the complete bankruptcy of the Stalinist and reformist policy of collaboration with the government and the perspectives of great social struggles now manifest.

The slow increase in production the last six months now seems to have reached the limit of possible absorption by the home market. Compared with the other European countries, Belgium is in a favorable situation, because the war destruction was less and because large reserves of paper money were accumulated through the Congo's credit balance with the United States. By "stabilizing" the Belgian franc after a fashion through blocking credits – an operation executed exclusively at the expense of the middle classes – and by buying all the American stocks of food and textiles which fell into its hands, the government has succeeded in improving the food situation and in giving a certain impetus to production. But at the same time, the quantity of paper money in circulation has quadrupled, the credits in dollars are exhausted and the American loan will end in January. The increase in production has scarcely reached two-thirds of the prewar production (in metallurgy scarcely one-third, but in the coal industry 85 per cent) yet it already exceeds the possibilities of consumption by the masses.

The stores are filled with products, goods are accumulated by the wholesalers, but the masses can buy nothing with wages far below their real living needs. If the bourgeoisie wants to avoid a serious economic crisis, it must begin to export (Belgian exports today are only five percent of prewar exports.)

But in order to compete on the foreign market with American products at the lower price made possible by much more modern technical methods, the bourgeoisie must decrease the cost of production. In order to do this immediately it must decrease real wages. In the long run, to accomplish this, the capitalists must buy new machines and this in turn can be done only through super-exploitation of the proletariat.

The Workers' Defense

The bourgeoisie has tried to open its economic offensive against the working class in two ways : first by increasing prices, and thus decreasing the real wages of the workers : then by decreasing nominal wages, or by refusing to put into effect the meager wage increases granted three months ago by the government.

The working class responded immediately to this second maneuver. An almost uninterrupted series of partial strikes took place in small factories and in large enterprises far from the principal centers of the country. As a matter of fact the bosses dared launch their offensive only in those areas where they believed the workers were the weakest and most backward. But even these layers of workers responded with a tenacious and increasingly better organized resistance.

This series of small partial strikes however was not long in arousing the most advanced and the most important strata of the proletariat. Having admirably assimilated the lessons of the past struggles, roused from their lethargy and from the demoralization into which they had fallen for three or four months, the miners, the metal workers and the transport workers have responded in their turn. They took the offensive audaciously, clearly posing the most important question : that of prices and wages.

Under the pressure of the workers' delegates, often largely influenced by the Trotskyists, the Congress of the United Union of Miners decided to call a 24-hour strike. The demonstration succeeded admirably. Then the metal workers began to move, raising old demands which had remained unsolved for a year. They involved the technicians as well for the first time in the history of the Belgian labor movement.

They obtained satisfaction and in a resolution of extreme importance placed the question of the Sliding Scale of Wages and of Workers' Control of Production on the order of the day. Finally a strike of the transport workers now underway in Liege, provided the occasion for this organization to pose concretely the question of nationalization of the entire transport industry and its direct administration by the workers. Thus, we find ourselves clearly on the eve of great social struggles in Belgium.

Break the Coalition

The "economic recovery" of the country has been accomplished solely at the expense of the working class. The reformist and Stalinist leaders recognize this now. It provides the present setting for the workers' struggles. Thus does the bankruptcy of the policy of governmental collaboration by the workers' parties become evident ! Our party, the Revolutionary Communist Party, Belgian Section of the 4th International, calls on the toiling masses, whose economic struggles it supports and helps organize, to draw the POLITICAL conclusions from the situation. The collaboration of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party (Stalinists) with the bourgeois parties has plunged the working class into misery. To find a way out the workers' parties must break this coalition.

The action of the masses in struggling for the sliding scale of wages, the establishment of the cost of living index by the unions, and workers' control of prices and production, must likewise lead to driving the bourgeois ministers from the government and to constituting a Socialist-Communist government. The pressure of the masses must force such a government to hold immediate elections, and to stand before the entire working class of the country for the realization of a vigorous socialist program. If such a government does not act in a revolutionary manner, the workers will be able to free themselves from the reformist and Stalinist influence, and thus find the road toward the Bolshevik party !

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