

# BULLETIN

## OF THE IV CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

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### Twenty Third Session.

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Chairmen: Comrade Markhlevsky.

#### Contents:

Report on co-operation. Comrade Meshteriskoff.—Draft resolution on report on co-operation.

Speakers: Meshteriskoff, Lauridan, Henriet, Khintchuk.

Session opened 7. 10 P. M.

Chairman Markhlevsky: I declare the session open. I call on Comrade Meshteriskoff to report on co-operation.

Meshteriskoff: Measured not by the power and discipline of its organisation but by the number of its members, the co-operative movement represents one of the strongest forms of the labour movement.

It is no exaggeration to state that the co-operative organisation has tens of millions of members throughout the world.

The co-operative is not merely a movement whose members combine from time to time for making necessary purchases in common, it is an organisation which endeavours to create its own ideology, to permeate all its work by that ideology, and to inculcate it into the minds of its members. The view persistently advocated by the old leaders of the co-operative movement, i. e., that the co-operation should be "the third form of the labour movement" entirely independent from the two other forms the Party and Trade Union organisations, tended to create in the mind of every active co-operator a special co-operative domain wherein the old co-operative leaders ruled supreme. Of course, no human head can be divided by impenetrable walls into entirely separate compartments. The new ideas of the revolutionary struggle forced their way even into this secluded

"co-operative sector", but this process developed with extreme slowness. On the other hand, parallel with this endosmosis there developed an endosmos, a diffusion in another direction. The deeply rooted opportunist ideas penetrated from the co-operative sector into the other part of the working-man's head and contaminated it with opportunism.

Up to the present co-operatives were a purely economic organisation, they were never a militant organ of the proletariat. Therefore, the co-operatives did not attract the attention of the revolutionary members of the working class who always preferred the militant and exciting work in the political parties and in the trade union organisations. This was used to the best advantage by social-traitors of all types and descriptions. Meeting no resistance on the part of the revolutionary elements, they created for themselves extremely powerful positions in the co-operatives and gained an undivided control over their funds. They also utilised this fortress for poisoning the class consciousness of the proletariat by the poison gas of their opportunist social-traitorous ideology. They were able to reach with their propaganda tens of millions of workers.

All this goes to show how important it was for the revolutionary organisations to dislodge the old leaders of the co-operatives from their last refuge and to capture this fortress of the extreme right opportunists.



The experience of the Russian revolution has shown clearly what colossal difficulties arise in the organisation of public feeding and exchange of commodities, in case the proletariat captures power without having preliminarily gained control over the co-operatives.

Under such conditions the proletariat is compelled to carry on the struggle for this position at a time when all its forces should be concentrated on the retention of political power and the organisation of the new society, when it is imperative that the co-operatives should immediately begin to perform their useful functions at the command of the new proletarian government. The conquest of the co-operatives cannot be achieved at one blow. It is impossible during a brief period of time to thoroughly clean up the swamp of the old co-operatives. Many of the important co-operatives remain for a long time in the hands of the old co-operatives—the enemies of the proletariat who sabotage the work, and the organisation of public feeding and of exchange of commodities is carried on inefficiently. This arouses the resentment of the masses but weakens the power of the new revolutionary government.

The Communist International is fully aware of the importance of the co-operatives. At the Third Congress of the Comintern held during the summer of 1921 the question of the co-operatives was placed on the agenda and the Congress adopted the theses presented by the speaker on this question.

These theses chiefly dealt with the work which communist should carry on in the co-operatives. The question of tactics and of organisation was dealt with only very generally. The theses mainly conveyed the idea that the co-operatives should cease to be "the third form of the labour movement" — entirely independent and isolated from the other forms, that the work of the revolutionary co-operatives should be most closely united with the work of the revolutionary political and trade union organisations of the proletariat. The theses emphasised that the old slogan of the opportunist co-operatives as to the political neutrality of the co-operatives should be decisively repudiated, for under the screen of this slogan the social-traitors boldly carried out without any hindrance the policy of transforming the co-operatives into the handmaid of the bourgeoisie. In respect to the

form of organisation the theses urged that the communist co-operatives should organise communist nuclei which should unite the district organisations and also nationally and that the entire movement be headed by the co-operative section of the Communist Party. This section was instructed to convene the First International Conference of Communist Co-operatives.

In compliance with this instruction the first international conference of international cooperators convened in Moscow on November 1, 1922. At this conference 36 delegates representing 20 countries were present. Delegates with voting power represented Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbeidjan, Armenia, The Eastern Republic, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Bulgaria, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania and a representative of the Anglo Saxon countries and the members of the co-operative section of the Comintern. Of the countries with a large co-operative movement Czecho-Slovakia and Belgium were not represented. There was also no special representative from England.

The conference continued for 6 days, November 1st.—6th., holding two sessions every day.

The agenda of the conference was as follows:

1. Seating of delegates.
2. Reports by the delegates on the situation of the co-operative movement in their respective countries and on the work of Communists in the co-operatives.
3. Communism and Co-operation.
4. Tactical questions.
5. Organisational questions.
6. Elections.

The reports of the delegates brought to the fact that the co-operative movement is undergoing a big crisis due to the following causes: the economic crisis, the sharp fluctuations of the currency and the violent capitalist offensive. The assistance given to membership by the co-operatives limited their former narrow functions has under the conditions become illusory. So long as co-operatives continue to employ the methods of work they are unable to render any substantial aid. The bankruptcy of old co-operatives has been felt even by old leaders, who are totally unable to discover any new methods of work. All this

retards the growth and development of new revolutionary ideas in the co-operatives.

It was unanimously admitted by all the delegates that the Communist parties of Western Europe devoted very little attention to the co-operative movement and to the work of Communists in the co-operatives. Party papers reluctantly devoted space to these questions. In many countries the resolution of the Third Congress of the Comintern on the organisation of Communist nuclei in the co-operatives has not been carried out. The parties have not appointed comrades for carrying on work in the co-operatives, and very little has been done by our parties to gain control over them. The Communist Parties did not endeavour to enlist the assistance of the co-operative in the political and economic campaigns. There the Communist Party has till now entirely ignored the co-operative movement and gave no instructions to the Communists working in the co-operatives. Hence great confusion reigned among our comrades in the co-operatives. The party adopted a resolution obligating all its members to join the co-operatives and to work in them. But this resolution remained only on paper. According to the questionnaire, "the majority of the members of the Communist Party are not members of the co-operatives". "Only the Communist working men belong to the co-operatives"—is another answer to the questionnaire.

And then again: "The communist party has thus far failed to adopt a definite attitude towards the tendencies arising among the co-operators affiliated to the Party". The Party did not exert any influence upon the co-operatives and did not endeavour to take the control of this movement into its hands. The Communist Party,—the answer states—renders no aid to the committee of communist co-operators. We had great difficulty at the beginning to publish a few articles to explain our actions". The results of this policy are very detrimental. If the Communist Party evinces no desire to establish closer relations with the Communist co operators, the latter retaliate in the same manner. They do not look for any guidance from the party. "Our committee of Communist co operators says the questionnaire has no official connection with the Communist Party, but is endeavouring to maintain friendly relations with it". Only "friendly relations" with the general

staff of the entire revolutionary proletarian movement of the country. One of the most fundamental principles of the revolutionary co-operative should be the closest contact of all forms of the revolutionary labour movement, their subordination to one centre, united action and the hegemony of the Communist Party over all the various forms of the proletarian organisations will secure success in our work. It is very natural that owing to the alienation of the Party from the Communist co-operators and vice versa the movement of the revolutionary co-operatives is developing unsatisfactorily in France. "The Party has failed to render us the assistance which we expected of it",—says the report. This is why our influence has been less than it should be.

The less attention the party pays to the work in the co-operative movement, the more diffused it will be and the more difficult will it be to co-ordinate it. In this respect, France offers a sad example. This is what we read, for instance, in one of the letters of our French comrades.

"At the co-operative congresses we witnessed the following sad spectacle: as soon as a communist comrade raised his voice against the report of the reformists, some other member of the party got up and demanded (to the great delight of our opponents) a vote of confidence in the leaders of the co-operative movement. Thus it happened that most of the arguments against the statement of the communist came from members of our party. At every opportune moment the reformists, inspired by the desire to split and weaken the communist party, pointed with glee to the differences of opinion existing among us".

The communist parties must everywhere devote the greatest attention to the co-operative movement, otherwise the lack of discipline among the communist co-operators will become a habit which will be very difficult to combat in the future. The failure to occupy a position at the proper time, always results in great losses.

The time has come for communists to put up a serious fight within the co-operatives. Everywhere we observe dissatisfaction with the old leaders and with the old methods of co-operation. The new revolutionary ideas are being carried by the wind storm. In spite of the chaos, the weakness and the disorganisation of the work of the communist co-operators in France even there the co-operators



ative movement has achieved some success. For instance, we read the following statement in one of the reports of our French comrades:

"The success of our work is best shown by the voting at our Congresses. In 1919 no voting took place at all. In 1920 our comrades had 21 mandates out of a total of 4,000, in 1921—we had 51 mandates out of a similar total, in 1922—300 mandates out of 4000... Every day brings us new adherents.. We are justified in expecting brilliant results in the near future". In some countries, Holland for instance, there is no connection between the communists and the co-operative movement. Our section in Spain, Portugal, Yugo-Slavia, Rumania, Greece, and Latvia (to speak only of the European countries) have no notion whatever of what is going on in the co-operative movement.

On the other hand, it is evident from the reports of the delegates that wherever communists and the communist parties pay even the least attention to the work in the co-operatives, this work begins to bear fruit very rapidly. In this respect Germany takes first place. There, a number of experienced comrades have taken up this work. The German communist co-operators have established 112 factions within the societies of which they are members. There are co-operatives in which the Management consists entirely of communists, although such societies are few. From time to time district conferences of communist co-operators are organised. (Three conferences took place in 1921, and four in 1922). Pan-German conferences are also periodically organised. A special periodical "The Communist Co-operator" is published for the benefit of the movement. Five of the party organs published co-operative supplements. A co-operative section is attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which however is not very strong. On the whole, the German Communist Party has made a beginning in co-operative work, although it must be admitted that it has not yet done much in this direction. "Co-operative questions—says the reply to the questionnaire,— "hitherto have been treated by the party as if it were a step child".

Nevertheless, for a young movement, the revolutionary work within the co-operatives is fairly strong. The number of organised communist co operators is growing rapidly, and so does the interest which they take in the work. This is evident from the number of delegates who attend the Pan-German

conferences. Three such conferences have already been held. At the first (in 1921) 16 districts were represented by 24 delegates. At the Second Conference there were 30 representatives from 21 districts, and at the 3rd. (on August 20, 1922 in Weissenfels) there were 96 representatives, and the reply to the questionnaires says that the number would have been greater if the conference had been better organised. If the German Communist Party will give its serious consideration to this movement, we shall see brilliant results of this work.

The same prospects can be opened up for the communists in Czecho-Slovakia, if the communist co-operators themselves will be more energetic in their work.

All the replies received from various countries show that the IV Congress of the Comintern must repeat with great insistence the decision of the III Congress on the duty of communists to organise their nuclei in co-operatives. The Congress must also insist on the party organisations concerning themselves very seriously with this movement. From the report on "Communism in Co-operative Movement" and from the discussions which took place on this report it is evident that the III Congress of the Comintern laid down correct fundamental lines on this question. The First International Conference of Communist Co-operators did not introduce any amendments to this statement. There was not even a single motion in this direction.

On the question of tactics, the Comintern laid down very emphatically that the co-operative movement must intervene very energetically in all questions connected with co-operatives or with the consumers. They must conduct this struggle side by side and in contact with the communist parties and red trade unions. Of special importance is the struggle against everything which contributes to the rise in the cost of living, which hinders the struggle against it. This applies to the struggle against all forms of increased taxation, to import duties, export duties and indirect taxation, to the struggle against the attempts to impose excessive special taxes on the co-operatives and to demand that the distribution of the necessities of life among the population should be entirely in the hands of the consumers co-operatives, and finally to the struggle against the forms of this struggle. Of particular

importance now in Germany is the question of an energetic campaign in favour of the participation of the consumers' co-operatives in the struggle which was initiated with such zest by the factory councils. The communist co-operators must initiate in their societies and unions an energetic campaign for the participation of the co-operatives in this struggle and in the factory council Congress.

In Italy the task of the communist co-operators consists in drawing the urban consumers' co-operatives, as well as the rural producers into the struggle against Fascism.

The communist co operators must also carry on an energetic agitation in connection with such questions as the growth of militarism, which is the cause of increased taxation, the peril of new wars, attempts at intervention etc.

Only by means of such a struggle side by side with the communist parties and red trade unions, will it be possible to destroy the principles of political neutrality cherished by the old leaders of the co operative movement and also the conception that the co-operative movement is an entirely independent third form of the labour movement. It is only by such joint struggle that we will be able to establish a united front of all the sections of the labour movement, and subsequently also the complete unity of this movement.

However, those are not by any means the only tasks of the communists in the co-operative movement. They must carry on their work by purely co-operative methods, endeavouring to discover methods of work most suitable to the existing conditions in the co-operatives and other organs of the working masses (peasants, labourers, and artisans). This applies, for instance, to the necessity of abolishing of dividends and the using of the profits made to increase the reserve fund of the co-operative society, and also to establish special funds for the relief of strikers, victims of capitalist reaction locked out workers, etc. This applies to the work among the women members of the co-operative societies, and also to the work among the Youth and combat ing guild socialist tendencies within the co-operative movement, etc.

On the field of organisation, the Conference has drawn up the outlines for communist work within the co-operatives, from the nucleus to the co-operative Section of the Comintern. The latter must consist of 20 representatives of the various countries who are to be elected at the International Conferences. For current work, the section

has appointed a Presidium consisting of 7 members.

Thus, basing itself on the experiences of the first year of communist work within the co-operatives, the conference has taken two important steps in connection with the elaboration of the tactics of the form of organisation of the movement.

On the strength of this work the Section invites the Plenum of the IV Congress of the Comintern to adopt the following resolution on the question of Co-operation.

Draft resolution of the Fourth Congress of the Comintern on Co-operation.

(On the report of N. Meshteriskoff).

During the last years preceding the world war and especially during the war, the Co-operative movement developed extensively in all countries and drew into its ranks the vast masses of workers and peasants. The present capitalist offensive the world over compels the workers and especially the women to appreciate still more highly the aid rendered by Consumers Cooperatives.

The old social compromisers have long understood the great value of the cooperative movement for the attainment of their aims. They entrenched themselves firmly in the cooperative organizations whence they indefatigably directed their efforts towards poisoning the minds of the toiling masses, and created a duality of consciousness and of conduct even among the revolutionary elements of the proletariat. In certain countries the social democratic parties, through having the leadership of the cooperative movement in their hands, derived funds from the co-operatives for the support of their parties, while under the flag of political neutrality they actually carried on a policy of supporting the bourgeoisie and its imperialist aims.

Retaining in their hands the leadership of the cooperative movement, some of the old leaders are unable, and others unwilling, to understand the social conditions that have taken place and the new tasks of the cooperative movement, and the necessity for adopting new methods of work. Obstinate refusal to renounce their time-honored cooperative principles, they disorganize even the purely economic work and undermine the existence of the cooperative and consequently destroy the cooperative movement.

Finally, they do nothing to prepare the



co-operatives for the immensely important tasks which will devolve upon them after the capture of power by the proletariat.

The foregoing compels the Communists to direct the most serious efforts towards wresting the cooperatives from the hands of the social compromisers, and the conversion of the cooperatives from instruments of the bourgeoisie into the weapon of the revolutionary proletariat.

The Third Congress of the Comintern studied and approved the theses on the work of the communists in the cooperatives. The experience of a year and a half has shown that these theses were based on a proper estimation of facts. The Fourth Congress of the Comintern reaffirms these theses and urges all the Communist Parties, groups and organizations to take an active part in the co-operative movement and instructs the press of the Party to devote sufficient space for the discussion of the questions of cooperation.

For the furtherance of these theses, the Fourth Congress of the Comintern points out especially:

1) The imperative necessity for all the Communist Parties carrying out the instruction that all the members of the Party shall be members of the consumers cooperatives and take an active part in their work. In every cooperative organization the Communist members should organise openly or secretly—a communist nucleus. These nuclei should be united into district organizations which in their turn should be organized into a national organization headed by a special cooperative section controlled by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the country. The entire work of the Communists in the cooperatives should be carried on the basis of the most rigid discipline under the control of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The task of these nuclei consists in establishing the closest connection with the broad masses of the working class co-operators, in criticising not only the principles, but also the practice of the old co-operatives and in organizing the discontented masses in order to create, in the cooperatives, a united front against capitalism and the capitalist State. All the national organizations of the Communist co-operators should be closely allied with the Comintern through its cooperative section.

The Communist cooperatives should under no circumstances strive to separate the revolutionary or the opposition elements from the

cooperatives or to split them, because such tactics would only lead to the undermining of the power of the cooperatives and to the weakening of the contact of the revolutionary co-operators with the broad masses of the working class. For identical reasons we should not endeavour to separate the national co-operative unions from the International Co-operative Union. On the contrary, communists should demand the admission into this Union of all the national unions in which the communists constitute a majority or a strong minority, and which do not as yet belong to the International Co-operative Union.

2) The Central Committees of the Communist Parties as well as the communist co-operators should initiate an energetic campaign against the cooperative illusions, that the cooperatives are able, by themselves, to achieve the socialist order by means of a gradual transition into socialism without the capture of political power by the proletariat, or that by employing the old methods, will achieve considerable improvement in the conditions of the working class. A similarly energetic campaign should be carried on against the principle of the political neutrality of the co-operatives. This so-called neutrality is indeed only a screen for open or secret support of the interests of the bourgeoisie and its hanger on. This campaign should be carried on not only in the form of a theoretical propaganda, but also by attracting the cooperatives to the economic and political struggle now being conducted by the political parties and the Red Trade Unions for the defence of the interests of the working class. Co-operatives should participate in combating the increases of taxation—especially of indirect taxes affecting the consumers—exorbitant taxes on cooperatives on their business operations, and the rise in prices. The co-operatives should demand the transfer of distribution of commodities to the hands of the working class consumers cooperatives. They should participate in the struggle against militarism which is the cause of the growth of state expenditure and consequently of the increase in taxation, against the mad financial policy of the imperialist governments, which causes the depreciation of the currency. The co-operatives should fight against the Versailles Treaty against Fascism, which is raising its head everywhere and subjecting the cooperative masses to cruel repressions. The co-operatives must combat the menace of a new war, and intervene, and demand the establishment

relations with Soviet Russia, etc. The communist co-operators should endeavor to draw their organizations into this struggle alongside with the Communist Parties and Red Trade Unions, thus creating a united proletarian front. The communist co-operators should demand that their organizations extend aid to the victims of capitalist terror, to the workers on strike or lockout, etc. The communist co-operators should insist that the co-operatives develop revolutionary cultural and educational work on an extensive scale and take this work into their own hands.

3) Apart from energetically participating in the political and economic struggle of the revolutionary proletariat, the communist co-operators should also carry on purely co-operative work in order to imbue the co-operatives with those principles which the new conditions and tasks of the proletariat demand. The amalgamation of the small consumers societies into large organizations, the repudiation of the old principle of dividends and the employment of all profits made for strengthening the power of the co-operatives, the establishment of a special strikers aid fund out of profits, the defence of the interests of co-operative employees to oppose such forms of bank credits as may jeopardize the co-operatives—such are the tasks which the communist co-operators should perform. In the event of it being necessary to raise the price of shares in the co-operatives, the communists should demand that such increases do not lead to the expulsion from the cooperatives of those workers unable to pay the increase, and that certain exemptions be made for such category of workers.

The Communist nuclei in the co-operative should also connect their work most closely with the work of the women trade union organizations and with the communist Young People's League in order to facilitate, by common effort, the work of co-operative propaganda among the working women and the youth. It is also necessary to initiate an energetic struggle against the co-operative bureaucracy, which, shielding itself under the slogan of democracy, has reduced this principle to a hollow phrase, while in reality arbitrarily do whatever they please in the co-operatives, refusing to call general meetings and entirely ignore the will of the working masses. Finally it is necessary that the communist nuclei in the co-operatives must secure the election of their members, including women, to the

management and the control organs of the co-operative societies and shall take other measures to provide the communists with the knowledge and training necessary for directing the co-operatives.

Lauridan.—The thesis and the resolution of the Third Congress mentioned in the motion before us deals with the co-operative question in too general a fashion.

Criticism should have made our views more definite: Comrade Mestcheriaekoff complained just now that we had not done sufficient work in the cooperatives, especially in France. In his report he deals primarily with the consumers' cooperatives.

I agree fully with the speaker on the importance of the consumers' cooperatives, and I wish that we would give it all the required attention because the cooperatives present great danger, that they can be used by all sides.

In 1876, when Guesde returned from exile, he found such a neutralist spirit among the cooperatives, that when for instance, he demanded help for the strikers of Montceau les Mines at a Cooperative Conference, one of the members of the council, Chabert, opposed him on the ground of political neutrality.

This same political neutrality has been of great use to the employers and the Church to combat the workers co-operatives. An employer from Roubaix told Jules Guesde who was then carrying on propaganda for the cooperative idea in the North and established the first workers cooperative in Roubaix, that these co-operatives were neither more nor less than milch cows of the revolutionists.

We should therefore submit the cooperatives to a thorough investigation, we would be committing a grave error if we believed that the cooperatives contain the elements of a new society. The most important element is created not by co-operation, but by capitalism, the concentration forms them.

Guesde used to say: "The Communism of the workshop suffices for the workers". We must therefore carefully study the activities of the cooperatives and not attribute too great importance to them. We must make of these cooperatives a haven for the proletariat and its stores ammunition in its struggles. In the North of France every cooperative has its Maison du Peuple, for the working class organizations, and they distribute unemployment and strike subsidies. Certain co-opera-



tives, directly or indirectly, support the Party. This may be expressed by simple formula: Today, the co-operative must be the auxiliary of the Party, tomorrow, it must become the auxiliary of the proletarian power. This is why Communists must win over the co-operatives.

I was speaking of the traditions of the North and the Pas De Calais. In that district there are numerous cooperatives and a co-operative movement similar to that in Belgium. After the split in Tours, the Socialist Party attempted to expel the Communists from the co-operatives.

In certain co-operatives, as in Toureong, a city of 80,000 inhabitants, in Halluin, known as Red Halluin, in Marco en Baroul, we are in a majority; but in Solesmes, in Roubaix, the Communists are in a minority. By a series of underhanded manoeuvres, the dissidents managed to expel the Communists from the cooperatives. The Communists have then built another co-operative in competition with them. This proletarian cooperative of Roubaix, which has existed one year, had a turnover of 500,000 francs in the first six months. It possesses 1000 square metres of property, bakeries, a coal wharf on the canal, a café, meeting halls, music halls, etc.

The evident success of this cooperative is tempting the Communists of other districts and cities of the North to emulate them. On the principle that we must give no money to the reformists, to the dissidents, the Communists in the dissident cooperatives insist upon political neutrality. I know that it is painful for a Communist to give money to the Social Democratic Party. But to seek a remedy in political neutrality is a great mistake. We must not attack the principle of subventions, but the Party which profits thereby, and we must demand that this help be turned over to the real working class Party, the Communist Party. I call the attention of the reporter to this isolated Communist cooperative in the North which tomorrow may grow to the importance of a symbol and start a secessionist movement in the cooperatives. Unity!—that is our slogan.

Naturally, the Communists of Roubaix support their communist cooperative. However, they must make all possible efforts to obtain the admission of its co-operative into the Co-operative Union of France. I hope that every French Communist and every other Communist will help our comrades in Roubaix to gain admission into this organization.

Everywhere where groups have been excluded from the cooperatives, we must demand their readmission but we must foresee the possibility that we may have to build a cooperative like that in Roubaix after having tried all possible means of conciliation.

This will suffice for the consumers cooperatives. They have been sufficiently dealt with in the report. There are other forms of cooperatives; especially the agricultural cooperatives. I am not speaking of the unions of agricultural workers who, after all, are wage workers, like the industrial workers. I am referring to the unions of small peasants and tenant farmers who sometimes combine with the small land owners.

Should we oppose the formation of these unions? Should we not regard the small land owner as fulfilling a double economic function, that of employer and employee? Should we not rather try to bring them into these unions which are really buying and selling cooperatives.

This is necessary, not because the cooperatives will help to socialize the land,—one believes that—but out of our cooperation with them may be born in the individual mind of the peasant the idea of a new society to replace the individualism of the present system.

This is a method of education which will familiarize the peasants with the idea that Communism means the restitution to each one that which belongs to him, under a collectivist regime.

There are also producers cooperatives which little or nothing has been said. The next Congress should take up this problem which is at once delicate and dangerous. I am far from defending these producers cooperatives, we must tell them that it is absurd to believe that a business concern can act otherwise than as capitalists under a capitalist system. But one does not solve a problem by shutting one's eyes to it.

Our comrades of the North have approached this idea of producers cooperatives, they have gone further; they have considered the possibility of creating a collective Labor Bank where the workers would place their savings instead of putting them in the hands of capitalists or the anti-proletarian State.

The realization of such projects presents great danger. The workers have begun to act on these producers cooperatives. In France going there is a weaving mill called "Workers' Class Solidarity". It is a producers' cooperative

which has been functioning for many years. This is only an isolated case; in the devastated regions there are others, more numerous,—the cooperatives of reconstruction.

These cooperatives of reconstruction, the establishment of which we have not been able to prevent, have awakened the idea of guilds. These guilds are defended by the Ustica (Union of the technicians of industry, commerce, and agriculture). The revolutionary Federation of Building Workers is considering the creation of such guilds. It is time that the Communist Party study this problem and that the Comintern express its view of these guilds and their possible result in France and other places.

From this cooperative of reconstruction it is only a short step to the formation of cooperatives of maintenance (for maintaining houses in good repair), uniting all the small proprietors. Thanks to the law on cheap houses, many workers have become small proprietors; we must win them over to our side if they are not to become our enemies. In fact, all the workers are interested in the housing problem which is becoming more and more acute in France. Tenants' Leagues are very popular. This is a field of activity which we must not leave to our enemies. We must propagate the socialization of houses we must find a formula to prevent a conflict between tenant workers and those who possess small houses. We must show to these small proprietors that capitalism will have no pity with them, and that these cooperatives of reconstruction, when they become cooperatives of maintenance, will be easily exploited by the bourgeoisie in the name of the interests of these small proprietors who are almost all workers.

It is self evident that the first task of Communism in every country and especially in France is to purify our proletarian ideology and to give to the proletariat the importance which belongs to it. This task requires also the neutralization of elements which may serve the cause of the counter-revolution.

This is why I wanted to add a few practical observations to the report of comrade Mesteheriakoff. I repeat after him that we must bring into the cooperatives our Communist pride, our militant ardor, our revolutionary theories and our revolutionary faith.

Henriet Comrades, at the cooperative conference held in Moscow prior to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International we unanimously agreed that we would not enter

into discussions about the matter during the Congress, for we were well aware (Seeing that our communist comrades are not much interested in the co-operative movement) that there would be considerable likelihood of our having to talk to empty benches.

Of course we do not congratulate ourselves upon the fact, but since it is a fact, we must not ignore it.

We also thought that it would be better not to trouble the Congress with the matter of productive cooperatives. The problem is a very intricate one. Moreover, we were almost unanimous in the view that, under capitalism, productive cooperatives engross the workers who belong to them to so absorbing an extent that they are quite lost as regards possibilities of revolutionary action.

There are three main requisites for the successful development of a productive co-operation:

1. Adequate capital;
2. thoroughly skilled workers and managers;
3. a ready market for the products.

Very rarely can these three requisites be fulfilled in the case of a productive cooperative organised by the workers under capitalism.

Speaking generally, the first lack is capital. The productive cooperatives have therefore to be subsidised or to borrow from capitalists, and are subject to the dominion of the bourgeois rulers who have subsidised the cooperative; or to that of the capitalists who, when the management proves unsatisfactory, will become to owners of the concern.

The way in which a productive cooperative is organised is a vital matter, in the capitalist regime. So likely is the constitution of such bodies to be defective that there are strong reasons against communists attempting to organise enterprises of this kind.

Another common defect is a lack of directive ability. The mere fact that communists have formed productive cooperative societies does not necessarily imply that they are endowed with the qualities necessary for successful management.

Finally, as regards having a ready market, this is far from being assured in the capitalist regime, for the cooperatives are liable to be victims of crises of over-production or under production arising from causes quite beyond their control. In fact, productive cooperatives can only be successful by wedding themselves unreservedly to the capitalist re-



gime. In these crises, the communists who have formed them are totally lost to the revolutionary cause.

In the present epoch, when we are faced with ever more serious crises I would ask my communist comrades to think twice before attempting to found a productive cooperative. The position is quite different from what it was in former days when the capitalist regime seemed a stable affair. To-day a communist must be careful not to engage in anything which might damp his enthusiasm, which might hamper his freedom for propaganda and for communist activities.

Just now guilds were mentioned. I think it desirable to point out that the guilds are simply productive societies, differing from others only in this, that their rules and constitution do not provide for the distribution of profits among the shareholders, and that often the trade unions are drawn into their orbit. In these circumstances, the disadvantages I have just shown to attach in the case of productive societies composed of individual communists, are greatly multiplied in the case of the guilds by the fact these tend to involve the trade unions (even the most revolutionary) in the reformist pathway. The guilds tend to make their members believe that something durable, something serious, something useful, can be achieved in the capitalist regime.

Lauridan: Why did you not say that in your report? If that was your opinion, you ought to have expressed it. That is what was asked of you.

Henriet: We said in the report that we must warn the comrades against productive societies calling themselves guilds. We did not stress the matter for the reasons I have just explained.

Lauridan: The danger exists. You are like an ostrich. You put your head under your wing.

Henriet: Lauridan is quite right. There is a great danger for him, but there is no serious danger for communist cooperators.

For seventy years the working class has been striving to emancipate itself from capitalism. Various methods have been tried, and among them that of Proudhon, and that of Bucher, who endeavoured to induce the workers to organise productive societies. Down to 1879, in our working class congresses in France, societies of production were one of the main topics of discussion. It seemed as if

the trade unions had not been founded for the defence of the workers in the class struggle, but only to serve as nuclei for the formation of productive societies.

The first productive co-operatives were founded between 1840 and 1848. In the latter year, thanks to a provisional governmental subsidy, productive societies sprang up all over France. Throughout the duration of the Second, or rather, from 1840 to 1870, the Proudhonist system, known as «mutualism» continued to flourish. Many thousands of societies were formed during this period, but almost all of them have perished. The sole survivors are like those which date from 1848—the Spectacle Makers Union is one of the worst of capitalist societies.

Here then, we have a strong reason against productive co-operatives.

At a later date, after a workers' congress held in 1879, a central organisation of productive co-operatives was founded in France. It is called the Consultative Chamber of Workers' Productive Associations, and represents about 150 societies. It would never have survived without a State subsidy and without the special favours it has been granted by some of the municipalities.

The facts are decisive. It is needless to discuss the matter further. This experience of 70 years is not peculiar to France. In Britain, likewise, where the system of Robert Owen was based upon the organisation of productive cooperatives, these latter have proved an utter failure. The system which is proposed to revive to-day, the system advocated by our comrade of the Ustica, is based upon precisely the same principles. Upon theoretical grounds which seem to them adequate our comrades, are trying to revive the scheme in the name of certain data culled from Germany.

But what they never say is that the productive societies organised in Germany under the form of guilds, though they have done some service to the German petty bourgeoisie, have done so solely thanks to temporary circumstances—the outcome of the suspension of building operations for eight years. It was essential to find a means by which habitations could be promptly provided for the excess of population. But directly normal or nearly normal conditions return, the famed profits earned by the German guilds will fall exactly as capitalist profits fall, for the guilds will be affected by capitalist competition.

The only prosperous co-operatives of production have been those founded by independent craftsmen. British experience in this respect has been precisely the same as French. Comrade Beatrice Webb, in her work on the Co-operative Movement has shown how the productive co-operatives of Britain fell one after another into the hands of the capitalists or completely disappeared, leaving a trail of utter disillusionment for the workers and the class struggle.

Our communist comrades, will act most unwisely if they enter this path without being guided by experience.

I wish to speak not only of productive co-operatives, but also of the social role of co-operation. Lauridan (accepting Jules Guesde's theory) said that the only social value of the co-operatives depended upon their being able to provide a certain degree of collective social education, or upon their being able to help the party or to assist the revolutionary movement. I differ, for I hold that co-operation can exercise an immense revolutionary force. I am not myself a co-operator; I have not espoused the theory of Charles Gide, who, in a splendid dream, thought that all the capitalists and all the workers might be grouped in distributive co-operatives. By degrees he conceived, with the aid of the capital accumulated by these societies, the world would be transformed; the antagonism which issues from the economic contradictions between production and consumption would disappear; in short, a communist society would come into existence.

A fine dream, but only a dream!

To sum up, the bourgeoisie has adopted this theory because careful study makes it perfectly plain that co-operation (having to meet capitalist competition) cannot possibly achieve the results looked for by Charles Gide. Inasmuch as the theory has none the less deluded the working class for half a century or more, the advantage has been on the capitalist side. Our ex comrades, the reformists of the Co-operative Alliance, have merely revived the dream of Charles Gide.

In 1910 when the French Socialist Party decided to support the co-operative movement, it was still Charles Gide's theory which was embellished by a few revolutionary phrases, it was still Charles Gide's theory which was adopted. If the Socialist Party did not itself care much about the matter, nevertheless there were plenty of individual comrades who were interested in joining the distributive co-

operatives, and who still remain in these societies as the most ardent defenders of Gide's theory. It is they who demanded political neutrality, and who wish to lull the working class to sleep.

Lauridan: Tu quoques! A moment ago you were saying that the Party has nothing to look for from the co-operatives, and that you did not espouse the idea of Gide, and that you did not see how the co-operatives could supply munitions for the Party. Let us come to an understanding about this.

Henriet: I say that the comrades in the old Party considered that there was a good reason for joining the co-operatives, not because they hoped to secure subsidies for the Party (though the co-operatives are not forbidden to subsidise the Party), but simply to get into a cosy and quiet corner, sheltered from all the political turmoil which is habitual in the Party, and to be able to sit down day after day at a well-furnished table.

On the other hand, during the war, after the general treason, those who were in the co-operatives found them very useful. They had a chance of getting hold of all the leading posts in these organisations. They felt that co-operation could supply considerable subsidies. Under the cloak of political neutrality, they quietly made use of the subsidies given by the co-operatives, and even by communist co-operatives to carry on the policy of the dissentients, the social-democrats, the reactionaries! In France the national federation to which the co-operators pay a subscription of 336,000 francs, has a newspaper with a circulation of 150,000. These copies are paid for by the co-operative societies, which are reformist neutral, absolutely reactionary, though the communists have to foot the bill. Thus it comes to pass that a reactionary policy is carried on by indirect means, by taking advantage of the general condition of the co-operative movement, and even by taking advantage of Jules Guesde's ideas. In the societies to which we belong, the same question is mooted in the same way.

We are all agreed in the co-operative societies. The general meetings are seldom perfectly harmonious, but we are there for propaganda purposes, to pay dividends, on behalf of social solidarity, on behalf of communist propaganda and this propaganda enables us to develop communist principles without quitting the economic field.



But this is only one side of the question. If the only object were to get subsidies for the Party, the reason would be inadequate, for co-operation has its dangers. A general meeting, after being served for communist propaganda, might very well serve for reformist propaganda.

Lauridan:—It is our duty to work in the co-operatives.

Henriet: Co-operation for me is only another form of social action. Under capitalism, co-operation can never be what I have just been outlining. But when we have to do with a country like Russia, for instance, where the proletariat, has political power in its hands, where the dictatorship of the proletariat is a fact, the matter is quite different.

If the aim of revolution is socialisation, this does not mean that everything which has been socialised is an expression of communism. There are many things which remain individual and cannot be socialised. It is easy to speak of socialisation when we are dealing with big estates, or great factories where the workers are already organised, where there exists a special capacity for taking over managerial functions, and when the workers' councils already exist. But the trade unions are incapable of socialising small undertakings, agricultural work, petty crafts, trade, or exchange. Here is our difficulty. In the Republic to day we have had a bitter experience because we have never taken much notice of co-operation hitherto.

It was looked upon as useless and even capable of preventing the revolution. I have often heard socialists cite Basle as an example. They declare that in Basle, a town where co-operation is more developed than anywhere else in the world, goods are sold so cheaply in the co-operatives that the working class standard of living has been shamefully lowered, because the employers have made this an excuse for paying low wages, and no attention was paid to the workers' fight for better wages. The iron law kept the wages at a subsistence level. The Russian communists, having neglected the co-operatives, saw these organisations sabotaged by the mensheviks who had the upper hand in these concerns. At that time the co-operatives furnished three fourths of the provisions needed in Russia. Faced by the resistance of the co-operatives, the bolsheviks had themselves to destroy these organisations and to reduce them to an instrument of distribution—for the State had assumed responsibility in

the matter of provisioning the country. The result of this earlier neglect is to be seen to-day in N.E.P. This policy might have been unnecessary if the Bolsheviki had understood the part that co-operation could play in social organisation. Of course, co-operation is not a final form, it is nothing but a provisional form. Co-operation makes use of capital, but it is not the servant of capital. Co-operation is essentially democratic; anyone who is interested in co-operation can have a voice in the management, no matter how little or how much capital the particular co-operators have put in the concern. Consequently, from a social point of view, co-operation is of inestimable value, especially if instead of distributing the profits all round (as is done in certain societies), these profits are devoted to the creation of indivisible collective capital. Would we not by such an indirect method achieve a system of socialisation.

Cachin: You are falling into the reasoning of Charles Gide.

Henriet: I could accept that criticism if I were meaning a capitalist regime. Under capitalism, co-operation cannot develop properly owing to competition. In Italy, for instance, the Fascists have burned the co-operatives. But in a State such as Russia, where we have the dictatorship of the proletariat, co-operation is the only way to avert the inconveniences which the old regime has left behind and which hinder the organisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

There are no other methods. The 100 or 120 millions of Russian peasants will never be coerced into organising themselves collectively. They must be brought to this by other means than force. The end must be achieved by indirect methods. Proudhon (though I differ from him) said in the course of his controversy with Marx: "Marx thinks only of the Revolution". Proudhon, who resented the petty industries of Paris, felt that the revolution foretold by Marx to be achieved by the world proletariat should have come into existence on a large scale as the outcome of the establishment of an extensive industrial system—which did not at this date exist in Paris.

That was why Proudhon's fallacious theories led him to believe that socialism could be brought about by cooperatives of production. But though Proudhon, living under capitalist regime, was mistaken, I feel sure

that the Soviet Government is not mistaken. Indeed, when the Soviet Government introduced the N.E.P. it re-organised the co-operatives of consumption and of production so that the fundamental contradiction between production and consumption which is characteristic of capitalist society, should not be reproduced by a competition between these two kinds of co-operatives.

What did the Soviet Government do in order to achieve this end? It provided the necessary funds and it placed at the disposal of the co-operatives all that could help in their development. At the first session of our Congress, the secretary of the Moscow Soviet told us he was delighted to find some communists who were interested in the question of co-operation. He declared that if it had been possible to organise co-operation in such a way that it had been in the hands of the communists, the new economic policy might not have been necessary.

As Lenin said: we have to pass through a period of transition.

The dictatorship of the proletariat does not suffice to change the world into a communist world. At the outset of the revolution we had so many things to attend to and to destroy in order not to be destroyed ourselves, that there was no time to consider the period of transition. But if you have enough intelligence to utilise the means that are ready in your hands, you may avoid the blunders which we have made—and you may be able to organise communism. You may be able, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, to organise production on the grand scale and place co-operation as the foundation of your economic system, even though such co-operation might still have its roots in capitalist and individualist outlooks.

This is what is meant by communist co-operation.

(Applause)

The Chairman: Since no other speaker has sent in his name, I call upon comrade Khintchuk, in view of the agreement, to conclude the debate.

Khintchuk. This argument between Lauridan and Henriet has nothing to do with the question. So far they have not spoken to the question.

Comrade Lauridan was wrong in reproaching us with having forgotten the producers co-operatives. We have not mentioned this question in the resolution because it has

not yet been studied. We spoke of it at the Conference of Communist Co-operators, and we adopted a resolution which states in paragraph 11: "The producers co-operatives and credit associations, which are nearly always organizations of the petty bourgeoisie, are not capable of leading a struggle against capitalism, and for this reason are doomed to extinction, or to become capitalist joint stock companies." I will read you only part of the resolution, and you will see from it that we are acquainted with the subject.

If we have not mentioned the subject in the resolution presented here, it is because we did not wish to speak at this Congress on a question which has been insufficiently studied.

We shall postpone this question to the V International Congress to which we shall present a special resolution. Henriet was not right in saying that we now have the "NEP" because we did not have co-operation before. The object of "NEP" is to construct State capitalism, and the co-operatives cannot aid in this.

Henriet is right when he says that, with communist co-operatives well developed beforehand, the task of the revolution will be easier: but "NEP" does not enter into this question.

Lauridan observed that we must preserve the unity of the co-operative movement. He is quite right on this point. We are in favor of that unity and have mentioned it in the resolutions of the III Congress. We did not repeat these matters at the IV Congress because one does not wish to say the same thing over and over again.

At any rate, at present in Russia we are doing all we can to make the Co-operative Alliance international in scope, and to extend it so as to cover Bulgaria where it has not as yet entered. We are with you in the idea that communists should stay in the co-operatives, that we must capture the co-operative societies just as we captured the labor unions. We have no right to abandon the power of the co-operative to our enemies. To try and establish a separate co-operative movement in Egypt for example would never succeed; we must capture them as a whole.

The importance of the co-operative movement is not yet thoroughly realized by communists. It is nevertheless an extremely powerful and useful instrument. We saw in 1919 when the Soviet Government was obliged to undertake the distribution of commodities



with the aid of the co-operatives and found these to be in the hands of the enemies, how instead of distributing products, our time was taken up in combating our enemies, putting them in prison, etc. This greatly hampered the work of co-operation. The people received nothing and were discontented. If you would avoid similar difficulties

you must gain control of the co-operatives before you capture the political power.

Chairman Markhlevsky. The next session will take place on Monday punctually at 11 o'clock in the morning. The order of the day for tomorrow is the „Women's Question“.

This Session is now closed.

(Session closed at 9:40 p. m.)