The Red Trade Union International

THE FIRST WORLD CONGRESS OF REVOLUTIONARY UNIONS

By EARL R. BROWDER

I. Background of the Congress

THE first world congress of revolutionary trade unions held in Moscow in July marked the culmination of a long historical development in the principles and tactics of the international labor movement. It is difficult to analyze the transactions of the congress and to estimate its significance without understanding the background of the revolutionary labor movement of today. We will therefore trace the development of the movement which brought the Red International into being, and describe some of the currents which came into conflict at that Congress, before they were welded together into one great army of revolutionary labor.

There was an international organization of trade unions before the war organized under the leadership of Karl Legien of Germany and other conspicuous figures of the Second International. This International Federation of Trade Unions was hardly more than an information bureau, and with the outbreak of the war it broke up along nationalistic lines. Each national section became practically a department of its respective government. The labor movements of the Entente countries became recruiting grounds for the armies; the same was true of those of the Central Powers. This breakdown of all international labor union connections left an intolerable situation in the trade union world after the armistice. Taking advantage of the instinctive movement of the trade union masses toward international solidarity the same leaders who had betrayed them in the war came together and patched up their differences. In Berne, and later in Amsterdam, they re-established the old International under the name of the International Federation of Trade Unions, commonly known as the Amsterdam International.

During the post-armistice period, which was one of revolutionary change and political instability throughout Europe, the attention of the revolutionary vanguard of the workers was occupied exclusively with the immediate political situation. This was the period of the rise of the communist parties and the Third International, the Soviet Governments of Hungary and Bavaria, and the Spartacan uprisings in Germany. But while the Third International was wresting the leadership of the politically conscious workers from the compromisers and collaborators with the bourgeoisie on the political field, these same leaders were entrenching themselves in their control of the trade unions and rebuilding the old "international." The same "yellow" leaders who delivered the unions to their governments during the war now appeared as apostles of "internationalism." Thus the Amsterdam International under the control of Henderson, Legien, Thomas, Jouhaux & Co. was able to capitalize for its own ends the instincts of the masses toward international solidarity, and in collaboration with the Labor Bureau of the League of Nations served as the chief instrument by which capitalism weathered the great political crisis of 1919 and 1920.

In Germany it was Legien and the social-democratic bureaucracy in control of the trade unions, who by coming to an agreement with Hugo Stinnes and the capitalist class and entering into partnership with them, guided the course of events to the right and headed off the revolution. Noske and Scheidemann, in slaughtering Liebknecht, Luxemburg, and the other Spartacans, were merely carrying out the agreement which had been subscribed to by Legien for the German trade unions. Liebknecht and his associates gave up their lives in an effort to break this trade union agreement. In the other countries the situation was in essence the same. It was the old bureaucracy of the trade unions which blocked the revolutionary movement and saved the capitalist system from world revolution.

The treachery of Amsterdam with its policies of compromise, class peace, conciliation and collaboration with the bourgeoisie was soon apparent as the chief enemy of working-class aspirations. Everywhere a spontaneous opposition developed from the rank and file. In Italy, France, and Spain, the old revolutionary syndicalist traditions revived and grew to power. In Central Europe, where the Amsterdam bureaucrats had acted as the open agents of counter-revolution, the communists and all the other militant elements in the labor movement were forced into a struggle to break their hold upon the trade unions. Thus by the spring of 1920 a great movement of revolt against the reactionary control of the trade unions by the international organization at Amsterdam was in full swing throughout Europe.

This revolt was spontaneous, chaotic and unorganized, and without center or directing head. It took on varied and even antagonistic forms. In Germany, for example, the small syndicalist unions, the Allgemeiner Arbeiter Verein and the Freie Arbeiter of Genselkirchen, took on new life, and the latter obtained a strong hold on the miners of some districts; while the great majority of the revolutionists, acting under the leadership of the Communist Party, organized themselves as minority committees or "nuclei" within the old unions to fight against the bureaucracy from within. During the following year

these two expressions of revolt themselves came into conflict. Added to this was the hostility which existed even between the syndicalist organizations, and some deplorable situations developed. In Spain the revolutionary syndicalists obtained the leadership of the majority of the organized workers, while there existed also a smaller labor federation under reactionary leadership. In France the revolutionists organized within the old unions (the C. G. T.) as revolutionary committees, or *noyaus*, while one small group organized the "Confederation of the Workers of the World" as a separatist union. In Italy the Confederation of Labor under the influence of the Socialist Party declared for Moscow. When the Socialist Party split and the Communist Party was organized, the unions remained under the control of the right wing and under D'Aragona compromised the revolutionary movemovement for factory occupation. There was also a strong separate federation of syndicalists in Italy which declared and maintained its allegiance to the Third International. In the other countries of Central Europe the revolutionists quickly adopted the tactics recommended by the Third International and organized as minorities within the old unions.

The first steps taken to unite all these forces into one disciplined body were taken in Moscow in July, 1920, when the leaders of the Russian trade unions took advantage of the presence of many union representatives from England, Italy, France, and other countries, some of whom were attending the Congress of the Communist International, and invited them to confer. Out of the negotiations and meetings between these representatives came the Provisional International Council of Trade and Industrial Unions. The Provisional Executive immediately organized a world-wide propaganda for a world congress of all revolutionary unions and minorities for 1921. They issued a manifesto, and a pamphlet prepared by A. Losovsky, the famous Russian labor unionist, which had a profound effect upon the entire revolutionary trade union government.*

In the meantime a small group of anti-political syndicalists attempted to head off the move toward Moscow. Their efforts resulted in the well-known Berlin Conference, which issued the "six points," and set forth their program of a purely economic revolution and an industrial international with no political affiliations, and expressed their opposition to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This conference realized that it was not strong enough to fight against the movement toward Moscow and called upon all its adherents to attend the Moscow Congress in an effort to capture it.

Thus we see gathered at the First World Congress the entire revolutionary trade union movement of the world. There were two fairly distinct groups at the opening of the Congress, first, those who in general accepted the pro-communist views of the Provisional Council as embodied in Losovsky's pamphlet; second, those who took the attitude of the Berlin Conference, including the French who stood on the basis of the Amiens Charter which declared for the independence of the unions from political affiliations. This alignment was not stable on all issues, however. On the question of tactics within the trade union movement, the French were in agreement with the majority, that is, for working within the old unions. Some of the delegates who stood for "destruction of the trade unions" and rebuilding the union movement, were willing to have close relations with the Communist International. But the vast majority were agreed on all essential points, and the decisions of the Congress all followed the general lines laid down by the theses of the Provisional Council. The opposition was vehement but not large, and it divided on various issues. The fight on the various issues and the decisions of the Congress will be described in another article.

*"The International Council of Trade and Industrial Unions," by A. Losovsky.

Famine Relief in Soviet Russia

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"Within the last few days we have seen the application in Russia of Mr. Hoover's doctrine that political and diplomatic ends may most easily be gained by economic pressure. He has now agreed to assist in relieving the starving millions in Russia in return for definite concessions on the part of the Soviet Government in favor of American prisoners in Russia and a general favorable treatment of American nationals everywhere. This event throws a new light on the series of articles contributed to these pages by one of Mr. Hoover's agents, Mr. T. T. C. Gregory, who tells in the present issue of his overthrow of the Bela Kun regime in Buda Pesth."

In an introduction to the article, this Mr. Gregory in the London magazine repeats in September, for Russia, the remarks he made in June with regard to Hungary: "Since then, within the last month, in fact, he (Mr. Hoover) has again given evidence of clear vision and of the power of economic assistance in fighting anarchy. The arrangement which he has completed with the Moscow Government in exchange for foodstuffs for starving Russia is an admirable example of the creed I have sought here to set forth."

The creed set forth seems to be—to sell food to Soviet Governments, take the money which is fixed as purchase price, but withhold the food on the understanding that it will not be delivered until the Soviet Government is overthrown. At least, Capt. Gregory says that he did this in Hungary.

Until Mr. Hoover comes out with a definite denunciation of Capt. Gregory, and a statement that his aim in Russia is to work with the Soviet Government, which is aiming to feed the people, and not to restore the monarchy or the rule of the capitalists, Mr. Hoover will have to accept the implications inherent in Mr. Gregory's article that he approves of Mr. Gregory's work in Soviet Hungary, and that he would not object to its repetition in Soviet Russia.

The workers of the United States may judge how much assistance they may expect Secretary Hoover to give Soviet Russia, and whether they themselves should not rather do all in their power to make it unnecessary for the Soviet Government to depend on assistance from its outright opponents.