

# THE WORLD TRADE UNION CONFERENCE

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

The World Trade Union Conference, which opened in London on February 6th and is still in session as *Political Affairs* goes to press, is the largest and most momentous gathering ever held in the history of the world trade union movement. Some 240 delegates, representing over 60,000,000 workers of 35 democratic and peace-loving nations, have assembled in London to deal with the gigantic problems confronting the workers of the world, as well as the rest of humanity, in the winning of the war, the rooting out of fascism, and the building of a durable and democratic peace. The workers represented include the British, Soviet, French and other European, Latin American, Chinese and Indian Unions, as well as the American C.I.O. and five Railroad Brotherhoods. The one important labor organization missing at the Conference is the American Federation of Labor, although over 175 lesser officials of the A. F. of L. unions sent greetings to the Conference.

The London Conference is the trade union counterpart to the great

meeting of the "Big Three" statesmen just concluded in the Crimea, which has given the world such a brilliant perspective of victory and democracy. The London Conference is the labor expression of the world's democratic peoples who are now destroying the fascist monster by force of arms and who are also laying the foundations of a new and better world. The Conference adopted the following ringing resolution, upon receipt of the famous communiqué of the Crimean Conference:

Delegates from 35 countries, attending the world trade union conference in London and representing over 60,000,000 workers of freedom-loving countries have learned with deep satisfaction the results of the Crimea conference.

We hail the announcement that leaders of the British, United States and Soviet nations, together with their general staffs, have agreed upon measures for even further accelerating the war against Hitlerite Germany and bringing it to a speedy and victorious conclusion.

We fully support your declaration that every vestige of the hateful fascist regime must be eradicated and the practical measures that you have adopted to bring about this result and to guarantee that it shall be uprooted and completely destroyed.

We welcome your determination to proceed at once to perfect an international organization along the lines of the Dumbarton Oaks proposal to prevent aggression and to maintain peace. We are in full accord with your declaration on liberated Europe to assure the people of the liberated lands the fullest

democracy and self-determination, and we hail your reaffirmation of the great principles of the Atlantic Charter—the rights of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live.

The great achievements of the Crimea conference and the unity of its historic decisions fully confirm the faith of all freedom-loving people that the problems of winning speedy victory in the war and establishing a just and enduring peace can and will be solved and all difficulties overcome.

Meeting here in London to perfect the unity and close collaboration of working people of freedom-loving nations, we pledge our full support to you in carrying out the decisions which you have reached.

We pledge ourselves to guard and protect the unity of the United Nations in war and in peace and to work together unceasingly to secure our great common objectives—speedy victory and enduring peace.

The great breadth of the work of the historic London Conference is indicated by its agenda, released to the press shortly before the Conference began, as follows:

1. Furtherance of the Allied War Effort.

2. Attitude of the trade unions toward the anticipated peace settlement, including such topics as formation of a world peace organization, Allied occupation of enemy countries, reparations, treatment of Germany, rehabilitation and post-war reconstruction, and representation of the trade unions at the peace conference.

3. Basis for world trade union organization.

4. Immediate trade union demands for the post-war period.

5. Problems of reconstruction: general principles of the social and economic demands in the national and international field; fundamentals of social security and full employment.

At the time this article is being written, final decisions have not yet been taken by the Conference upon all the questions on this agenda; but it is already clear that the work of the Conference will enormously help to speed the realization of the decisions arrived at in the Crimea Conference of Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin.

The London Conference will also undoubtedly make vital contributions to such urgent special trade union questions as the formulation of the workers' economic demands, the rebuilding of the European labor movement destroyed by Hitler, and the securing of labor representation at all conferences having to do with the making of the peace. On this latter point, Sidney Hillman, head of the C.I.O. delegation, stressed the need for labor being present at such gatherings as those at Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks, as well as at future conferences contemplated by the United Nations.

Among the important resolutions adopted in the agenda, one called upon the United Nations "to reconsider economic and other relations with Franco-Spain and Argentina and all other fascist countries which, under the pretense of neutrality, are rend-

ering aid and assistance to our enemies." It also urged the Allied governments to prevent Sweden and Switzerland "from continuing to supply Germany with food and raw materials and to exact from them guarantees against giving refuge to war criminals."

Another resolution provided for world-wide adoption of a forty-hour week, housing programs, government rest homes for workers, and two-week vacations.

#### THE QUESTION OF A NEW WORLD TRADE UNION ORGANIZATION

At the Conference there is a practical unity of opinion among the many delegations upon the major political questions confronting them. If there are any believers in a "soft peace" for Germany, such as was advocated by R. J. Watt, A. F. of L. delegate, at the I.L.O. Conference in Philadelphia last May; if there are any who support William Green's ideas that Germany should not be required to repair the war damages it has done; if there are believers in the official A. F. of L. thesis that the Soviet trade unions are not genuine labor organizations and should, therefore, be excluded from the international labor movement, they have not yet spoken out. The one major question upon which there is any considerable difference of opinion is that of forming a new world labor organization to supercede the old International Federation of

Trade Unions, often called the Amsterdam International.

The demand for a new world labor organization is coming from the overwhelming mass of the organized workers of the world. The great majority of the British unions are backing the demand, although a number of their leaders are rather lukewarm. Supporting it, too, are the C.I.O., the Soviet trade unions, the Latin American Confederation of Labor, the French unions, and the labor movements of India, China and various European countries liberated from the Nazi yoke. Undoubtedly, also, the great bulk of the A. F. of L. members would support it, if they had a chance to vote on the proposition. The proponents of continuing the old I.F.T.U. as the world organization of labor have considerable strength among certain antiquated British and Continental trade union officials, but the strongest pro-I.F.T.U. support comes from the Executive Council of the A. F. of L.

The question of whether or not a new world labor body shall be formed is not merely an organizational matter; it also has deep political significance. Those who are for building the new world labor organization are in step with the great movement of the world's peoples toward unity and organization for the destruction of fascism and the building of an enduring, democratic peace; those who are trying to preserve the obsolete I.F.T.U. are either victims of confusion and con-

servatism or are working consciously in alliance with reactionary forces for their own sinister objectives.

Recently, the Soviet trade union paper, *War and the Working Class*, called the I.F.T.U. "bankrupt," and this sharp characterization is borne out, especially by that organization's miserable role during the past dozen years of crucial world developments. In the pre-war period, when fascism was preparing itself to deluge the world in blood, the I.F.T.U., dominated by conservative Social-Democrats, refused to take action against the fascist menace. Throughout the Spanish war and the fight led by the Soviet Union for international collective security, the I.F.T.U. was chiefly interested in fighting against Communists and in slandering the U.S.S.R. and refused to make a united front with them and other anti-fascist forces against the common enemy. During the present war, too, the I.F.T.U. has remained quite inert, absolutely ignoring the burning need for international trade union unity in meeting the multitudinous war problems directly affecting the workers. Moreover, the I.F.T.U. was principally a West European organization, it refused to include the Soviet trade unions and it ignored or played down the unions of the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Its policy of admitting only one national federation from each country also narrowed its ranks by excluding such strong independent organizations as the C.I.O. Whereas,

contrary to all this, the great trade union forces now meeting in London are truly global in character, including in their ranks not only the 27,000,000 Soviet workers, but also the increasingly important unions of Central and South America, and the Far East. The I.F.T.U., as if to make it indisputably clear that it is unfit to represent this vast new labor movement, decided at the meeting of its Executive Committee in London on the eve of the World Conference, upon the initiative of the A. F. of L., not to admit these great organizations into its ranks and shoved the whole question of their affiliation into the indefinite future. The A. F. of L. *Weekly News Service*, on February 6, 1945, actually boasted of this sabotage of international unity as follows:

Led by Robert J. Watt of the American Federation of Labor, the general council of the International Federation of Trade Unions refused to favor a change in the I.F.T.U.'s constitution to permit the entrance of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the Soviet trade unions."

Thus, the I.F.T.U., at the dictation of the A. F. of L., demonstrated its inability to serve as the world trade union center and virtually abdicated this position which it had previously presumed to hold.

The Soviet trade unionists have been ardent advocates of a new, truly representative world organization. Vassily Kuznetsov, head of the So-

viet trade union movement at the Conference, said: "The Soviet trade unions will specially welcome the creation of a new strong, international trade union organization." The C.I.O. also has actively advanced world labor unity, through the writings of Philip Murray and otherwise. Accordingly, at the London Conference, Sidney Hillman proposed the following plan for a new world labor organization, as reported by the *New York Times* on February 12:

First, it must be established at once.

Second, it must unite in one body all labor organizations which are sincere opponents of fascism and consistent defenders of the rights and interests of the working masses.

Third, it must be democratically constituted. It must admit all trade unions of free countries on the basis of equality and relegate none to a secondary place.

Fourth, while assuring the widest democracy in its procedure, an effective international federation must be capable of acting quickly and decisively without hesitation or prolonged consultation. To this end the executive body of the federation must be clothed with broad powers to take all action required for the effectuation of the settled policies and decisions of the organization.

These proposals, departing widely in substance from the weak, narrow and disjointed I.F.T.U., were enthusiastically greeted by the whole Conference, except by such figures as Walter Schevenels, Secretary of the I.F.T.U., Sir Walter Citrine, head of the British Trade Union Congress

and also of the I.F.T.U., who has been very hesitant upon the question of founding a new labor international.

On the basis of the Hillman proposals, the Conference voted unanimously for the formation of a new world trade union organization. The report said: "The Conference records its earnest desire and firm resolve to work together for the creation of a powerful democratic world trade union federation at the earliest practicable date." The Conference set up a Continuations Committee of 41, fully representative of the many organizations present. The Continuations Committee, among other tasks, was instructed to act as the authority of the World Trade Union Conference, to prepare a draft constitution and submit it to labor organizations throughout the anti-fascist world, to reconvene the World Trade Union conference not later than the end of 1945 in order finally to adopt the constitution, to act as the agent of the Conference so as to insure trade union representation at the coming peace conference and all preparatory commissions or conferences, and to establish headquarters of the Secretariat of the Continuations Committee in Paris. Thus, this great new world organization of the workers was started upon its fateful history.

#### THE A. F. OF L. AND WORLD TRADE UNION UNITY

The one seriously negative aspect

about the London Conference was the disruptive, abstentionist attitude of the A. F. of L. towards it. The A. F. of L. refused to send delegates itself, upon the untenable grounds that it would not sit with representatives of the C.I.O. and the Soviet trade unions and that the Conference was a "dual" movement to the I.F.T.U. It also denounced the Conference in unmeasured terms, Mr. Green even having the insolence to state that the Conference was nothing but a Soviet plot to split the international labor movement. In order, if possible, to disrupt the Conference at the last minute, the A. F. of L. sent the notorious hatchet man, R. J. Watt, to London to attend the executive meetings of the I.L.O. and the I.F.T.U., which were held just prior to the opening of the World Conference. At these gatherings Mr. Watt lost no occasion to slander the Soviet trade unions and the Conference in general.

This shameful attitude on the part of the A. F. of L. was quite in line with the destructive position taken by that body's official leaders all through the war towards international trade union unity. Hardly had the United States become involved in the war in December, 1941, then the British and Soviet trade unions, which had already formed the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee, proposed to the American trade unions that they join with them in meeting the heavy war problems of labor by affiliating themselves to

their existing committee. This the A. F. of L. Executive Council refused to do. To justify their course, they argued that the Soviet workers, who, with the Red Army, were then saving world civilization at the gates of Moscow, were not good enough trade unionists to measure up to the high standards (*sic*) of Matthew Woll, William L. Hutcheson, David Dubinsky and the rest of the reactionary clique now dominating the leading body of the A. F. of L. These worthies proposed instead the formation of a joint committee between the British unions and the A. F. of L., a device to save the virtuous A. F. of L. officialdom from contamination by the Russians. Citrine and the conservative British trade union leaders, flouting the unity spirit of the mass of British workers, agreed to the disgraceful proposal of the A. F. of L. So that, after much jockeying and time-consuming maneuvers, the Anglo-American Trade Union Committee was established in January, 1943. The C.I.O., the Railroad Brotherhoods, and the Soviet unions protested vigorously against the narrow attitude of this body.

The Anglo-American trade union committee was still-born, as the A. F. of L. leaders knew it would be. After a few meetings, it faded out of the picture. Meanwhile the demand for real cooperation among the labor movements of the world spread throughout the United Nations. This resulted in a call, upon the initiative of the British Trade Union Congress,

for a world conference to take place in London in June, 1944. The proposal for this international Conference (which eventually had to be postponed until February, 1945, because the invasion of France began in June) immediately called forth the opposition of the A. F. of L. leaders. They tried in vain to have their conservative British friends abandon the Conference altogether. Seeing that this could not be done, the A. F. of L. leaders suddenly blossomed forth as the champions of the almost forgotten I.F.T.U. Disinterring this body which, to all intents and purposes, had been dead all through the war, the A. F. of L. leaders paraded it over the world as the international labor organization. But their lack of success in this effort is sufficiently attested to by the unprecedented massing of the legions of labor at the present historic World Trade Union Conference in London.

The explanation for these harmful activities by the A. F. of L. leadership in the international field is to be found in the conservative makeup and reactionary connections of that leadership. The A. F. of L. Executive Council, or rather the dominating Woll - Hutcheson - Meany - Dubinsky clique (soon apparently to be reinforced by John L. Lewis), have no conception either of the international unity of labor or unity of the anti-fascist peoples. On the world scale, wherever they operate, it is to sow disruption and dissension. Their chronic anti-Soviet campaign is a

standing danger to the United Nations; their so-called Free Trade Union Committee, with its fund of \$1,000,000 to "rebuild" the labor movement of the liberated countries, is designed to maintain the old-time, "Right-Left" split and is a menace to the solidarity of European labor; their machinations in Latin America are a maneuver to line up the fascists and other reactionaries against the progressive unions in the countries South of the Rio Grande, and their present attacks upon the London Conference are an offensive against the interests of the workers of the world. These actions against world unity by the reactionary A. F. of L. ruling clique are directly tied up with their assaults upon national unity in this country, marked by such activities as their constant warfare upon the C.I.O., their long-continued discrimination against the Negro people, their alliance with the most reactionary sections of big business, and their attempt to defeat President Roosevelt in the recent elections.

#### AMERICAN WORKERS AND THE CONFERENCE

The work of the World Trade Union Conference, especially the laying of a basis for a new world organization of labor, will enormously strengthen the efforts of the United Nations to destroy fascism and to construct a peaceful and prosperous world. It also represents a tremendous advance for world labor in strength and prestige. The Confer-

ence should, therefore, be given the strongest support of the American working class. The dog-in-the-manger attitude of the American Federation of Labor's top leadership represents neither the interests nor the will of the great body of American workers, including those in the A. F. of L. Instead, it dovetails into the policies of those powerful reactionary interests in the United States, typified by the names of Hoover, Taft, Dewey, Wheeler, Vandenberg, *et al*, who are trying to weaken the structure of the United Nations so that they may more effectively maneuver to realize their imperialistic aims.

The refusal of the A. F. of L. to participate in the London Conference is an attempt not only to split the international labor movement (even as the A. F. of L. reactionaries have divided the labor movement in this country), but also to cut off the American workers from the great democratic movement of the world's peoples generated by this war against fascism. The Wolls, Hutchesons, Meanys, Dubinskys and their puppet, William Green, must not be allowed to perpetrate this treason to the labor movement. Nor will they be. This time, in their eagerness to do the work of reaction by splitting world labor, they have over-reached themselves. The world labor organization is now being established in spite of their attempts to prevent it. No doubt these reactionaries will resort to further obstructionist and splitting maneuvers, at which they are past

masters. But it should not be forgotten that more than once in the past, the A. F. of L. antideluvian officials have been compelled by progress to retreat, and they will have to do it again in the matter of international trade union unity. World labor refuses to be blocked by a little clique of reactionary officials, and the American workers will show that they, too, share this determination.

In fact, there are a number of important leaders of national A. F. of L. unions who have publicly manifested their solidarity and cooperation with the trade unions of the other United Nations and who favor the establishment of all-inclusive international trade union unity.

Obviously, therefore, the great body of the A. F. of L., working harmoniously on the question with the C.I.O. and Railroad Brotherhoods, should give hearty endorsement to the program and organization produced by the historic World Trade Union Conference and insist that the A. F. of L. join in the new world movement. International unions, State federations of labor, central labor councils, and local unions should speak out categorically on the matter, demanding that the Executive Council reactionaries abandon their destructive opposition to world labor unity. If the A. F. of L. membership thus raises its voice on a sufficiently wide scale, and it eventually will surely do so, the Executive Council will be forced to retreat from its untenable position and per-



mit the affiliation of the A. F. of L., with its 7,000,000 members, to the new world organization. In the recent Presidential elections the great masses of the A. F. of L. members and progressive officials defeated the plottings of the Woll-Hutcheson-Meany clique to put the ultra-reactionary Dewey in the White House; now they must smash the attempt of the same clique to split the world labor movement and to deepen the cleavage in American trade unionism. The A. F. of L. will eventually affiliate to the new world labor organization, the Wolls, Hutchesons, Dubinskys, Meanys and Greens notwithstanding.

The United Nations are winning the war and smashing the forces of reaction all over the world. But many serious and difficult tasks still lie ahead. The solution of these tasks demands the aid of organized labor on a world scale. This is true for the maintenance and strengthening of national and international unity, for the raising of war production to the highest levels, for the carrying through of the great post-war economic program on a world scale. The American labor movement must and will do its full share toward the fulfillment of these tasks, shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the workers of the democratic world.

### AT LONG LAST . . .

At long last international labor unity is on the order of the day. . . .

When the full strength of American labor is joined with that of its brothers of Britain, the Soviet Union, and the other democratic countries there will be a great added assurance that victory will be won more speedily, that the coalition of the United Nations will endure, that democracy everywhere will be reinforced, that powerful unions will be established in the liberated countries; that the forces making for an enduring peace, for prosperity and freedom for all peoples, will be strengthened.

—From *Resolution on International Trade Union Unity* adopted by the Constitutional Convention of the Communist Political Association, May 22, 1944.