

Struggle For Unity in the World Labor Movement

By A. Losovsky

IN its development the labor movement has undergone very many crises. One of the most important crises, from the point of view of its character and effects, was the split of the national and international labor movement. The roots and source of the split can be found in the European war when the leading elements of the socialist parties and labor unions tied up the destinies of the labor organizations with those of their native capitalism. That is where the chronology of the split in the labor movement should be begun, that is where the cause of the long and bitter struggle within labor lies.

Four years of war and six years of peace opened the eyes of the working masses to the source of the weakness of labor. Experience has shown that the more submissive the socialist parties and the trade unions were to the bourgeoisie, the more enthusiastic the labor leaders were in defending the capitalist system, the more deeply did they drive the wedge into labor, and the weaker did it grow in face of the native and international bourgeoisie. The history of the last ten years is the history of the fall of the social-democratic parties and reformist unions, the history of the slow regeneration of the proletarian forces through the creation of Communist Parties, revolutionary unions and minorities. *The split of the political parties, the separation of all the healthy proletarian elements were preliminary conditions for the liquidation of the crisis.*

The process of the formation of Communist Parties began in every country, with the exception of Russia, together with the outbreak of military action and found its international expression in the formation of the Communist International, whose Fifth Anniversary and whose successes we have recently celebrated. While the political labor movement put the question of the speediest formation of Communist Parties point blank before all the revolutionary elements, the interests of the labor movement demanded the maintenance of a united trade union movement at any price and a struggle within it for a revolutionary program and revolutionary tactics.

There was no contradiction in the fact that the revolutionary workers split on the one hand the social-democratic and the so-called independent parties in order to create revolutionary Communist organizations, and on the other hand struggled with all their energy against those Communists who were determined to split the trade unions at all costs. The difference in the characters of these two labor organiza-

tions forces the Communists to adopt different policies towards them in order to gain one and the same end, the conquest of the masses. In any case, the birth of Communist Parties has been accompanied everywhere by the slogan: "Struggle for united trade unions, struggle against the theory of the destruction of the unions," and where such ideas did arise, the Communist International declared a most relentless war upon them.

But if the Communist International has always struggled against the splits of the labor movement, why has the Red International of Labor Unions been created? The Red International of Labor Unions was created *after* the Amsterdam International had thrown in its lot with the League of Nations, *after* the Amsterdam International, together with the representatives of the biggest employers' organizations, had begun to strangle the revolutionary labor movement in every country, *after* the Amsterdam International had declared a ruthless war upon the Russian Revolution and the Communist International. At the beginning of 1920, the discontent with the old program and tactics had already taken shape, but this discontent was still insufficiently clear and ideologically indefinite. It was necessary to introduce unity into this variety, to gather the revolutionary forces of the world labor movement around an ideological and organizational center, to work out a clear line and establish a joint revolutionary front in the fight against the corrupting influence of reformism. Hence the organization of the R. I. L. U. in 1920 and its further growth. From its very inception the R. I. L. U. emphatically opposed the split of the trade unions. This can be seen from the following facts:

(1) The R. I. L. U. opposed the slogan of the destruction of the unions.

(2) The R. I. L. U. has proposed to the Amsterdam International to re-establish the unity of the French and Czecho-Slovakian labor movements.

(3) At all of its Congresses, the R. I. L. U. has adopted decisions urging all the revolutionary unions to join the respective industrial internationals.

(4) The R. I. L. U. has openly declared on several occasions that as soon as the revolutionary unions are admitted to the respective industrial internationals, the International Propaganda Committees would be dissolved.

(5) At its Second Congress the R. I. L. U. raised the slogan of the united front and it has since repeat-



RUSSIAN AND BRITISH TRADE UNION LEADERS FRATERNISE AT HULL, ENGLAND
Second from the left is M. Tomsky, Chairman of All-Russian Council of Trade Unions; third is George Hicks, President of British Building Workers' Union.

edly urged joint action upon the Amsterdam International.

(6) At the Hague International Peace Congress the R. I. L. U. attempted to propose the united front with the Amsterdam International. Similar attempts were made after the occupation of the Ruhr, and prior to and after the Frankfurt conference.

(7) The R. I. L. U. has always considered the united front in the trade union movement as a first step towards organizational unity of the broken sections.

(8) Whenever a tendency to split the trade unions began to develop within the Comintern and R. I. L. U., the latter always emphatically opposed this tactic, championing the unity of the labor movement by all the means and forces available to it.

All these facts are known to anyone who has followed more or less attentively the activity of the R. I. L. U., who is acquainted with the decisions of its Congresses and of its Executive Bureau. In fighting for

unity, the R. I. L. U. was not based upon any abstract considerations, but upon a desire to enhance labor's capacity of resisting advancing capital by means of united labor organizations.

How did the Amsterdam International and the organizations affiliated to it respond to the action of the R. I. L. U.? By frantic baiting and expulsion of Communists from the labor unions. Had the R. I. L. U. guided itself by the same motives as the Amsterdamers, that is, by a desire to rid itself of its opponents by any means, a split all along the line would have been an accomplished fact. However, in this question the R. I. L. U. did not base its decision upon the sentiments of individual revolutionary workers, but upon the interests of the class struggle, and therefore, in spite of all provocations, it has remained at its old position, *against splits and for unity*.

The Third Congress of the R. I. L. U. drew a logical conclusion from the four years' struggle for unity. The external situation has become more favorable to

unity in spite of the increasing destructive tendencies on the part of the reformists. The situation became more favorable because the realization of the necessity of unity penetrated the minds of the broad masses. It has found a reflection, incomplete and distorted as it may be, even in the heads of many of the leaders of the Amsterdam International. In connection with the bourgeois policy of the Labor Government of Great Britain, a change has taken place in the labor movement of that country. All this together creates a favorable situation for the successful prosecution to the logical end of the struggle for a united world labor movement. It was such a logical conclusion that the Third Congress of the R. I. L. U. made in proclaiming the slogan of the merging of the two Internationals by means of an International Unity Congress.

It should be admitted that both at the congresses of the Comintern and R. I. L. U., this question aroused opposition, due chiefly to the fact that the opponents of this slogan had not fully comprehended the tactic of the R. I. L. U. and Comintern in the trade union movement. It met with special opposition on the part of the German delegation, which saw in the slogan of the merging of the two Internationals "opportunism" and even "Menshevism." May we not ask these comrades, why Communists may be in one national organization with reformists, and not in an international one? Those opposing it paid a tribute, without realizing it themselves, to the splitting tendencies manifested by a certain section of the German workers. Approaching this question seriously, it is perfectly obvious that the fears have absolutely no ground. Our desire for unity must be shown by deeds, and the proposal for the calling of an international unity congress is the best proof that to us unity is not an empty phrase or maneuver, as some "wise" comrades think.

The Central Council of the German Communist Party adopted a resolution on this question which has everything but clearness. It is said there that the slogan for amalgamation of the two internationals should be understood in the sense that such amalgamation can take place only on the basis of the program of the R. I. L. U. *All great things are simple, but not all simple things are great.* I must disillusion the German comrades and tell them that to understand the decision of the R. I. L. U. and of the Comintern in this way is not to understand it at all. Of course, it would be best had everybody recognized the R. I. L. U. platform, but what need would there be of talking of amalgamation of the two Internationals? Were all to recognize the R. I. L. U. platform there would be nothing to discuss. Are not we proposing amalgamation of the two Internationals, the creation of a united international, *in spite of the fact that half of the workers organized in the trade unions do not recog-*

nize the R. I. L. U. platform? We have not the least fear of finding ourselves in one international organization with those who do not recognize our platform. *Our program has been recognized by history, and it will be ultimately recognized by the whole working class.* This is entirely sufficient to make us perfectly unafraid to conduct a struggle for our ideas on the wide arena of a United International. This proposal of unity is not, as some comrades think, an exclusive combination of the leaders of the R. I. L. U. and of the Amsterdam International. No, such things are not done by means of exclusive combinations. Unity in the world labor movement can be established only if we succeed in arousing tens of millions of proletarians, in getting them interested in this campaign.

Some comrades have been so fearful of reformism that they ask anxiously: "And what will happen if the Amsterdam International accepts our proposal and agrees to an international unity congress?" To this we reply: "Splendid, we will be the first to hail the acceptance of this proposal by the Amsterdam International, for our unity resolution is intended to *establish* such unity." "And if you are in a minority in the United International?" ask these same comrades. "If we are in the minority, we will fight for a majority, and we hope to win such a majority." "Are you ready to attend an international unity congress without any preliminary conditions?" the comrades fearing opportunism continue to ask. "Yes, we are ready to go to an international unity congress without preliminary conditions. The relation of forces at the unity congress will determine the program and tactics of the United International." "But should the Amsterdamers raise preliminary conditions, what then?" "The negotiations will show, if such will take place, which of the preliminary conditions raised by *both sides* are acceptable to *both sides*, and which are not. The working masses will judge between us." "But should the Amsterdamers reject all negotiations?" our comrades persistently continue to question. "So much the worse for them. We will not give up our struggle for unity. The Amsterdamers did not want the united front but this did not cause us to give it up. The same is true of this question."

Our struggle for unity is calculated upon the masses and is based very little upon the good will and sentiments of the leaders. Inasmuch as unity of the world labor movement is what the masses need, we must fight for it and mobilize the great masses against those who obstruct it. And that unity is menaced is beyond doubt. There is danger from various sides. First, from the right wing of the Amsterdam International. This was manifested at the Vienna congress, where the right Amsterdamers endeavored to make the resolution as obscure as possible in order to leave themselves all sorts of loopholes. After the Vienna Congress the Bureau of the Amsterdam International



TRADE UNION STUDENTS IN MOSCOW UNIVERSITY
A section of a meeting addressed by A. Losovsky on the subject of the Trade Union Unity Movement

sent a letter to the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions proposing to open negotiations on the basis of the Vienna decisions, naively assuming that the Russian unions would fail to note the trick.

The Amsterdamers propose to conduct negotiations on unity on the basis of two preliminary conditions:

(1) They are prepared to negotiate *only* with the Russian unions and only on the *affiliation* of the Russian unions to Amsterdam.

(2) The negotiations on affiliation must be based upon the program and constitution of the Amsterdam International.

That the right wing Amsterdamers raise such conditions is natural. They continue the sabotage which they began at the Vienna Congress. They continue the line followed by them for a number of years. If we take the correspondence between the Amsterdam International and the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions for the last two or three years we will find that their latest proposals contain nothing new—all these proposals have been made repeatedly, and the A. R. C. C. T. U. has invariably replied that it did

not participate in the working out of the program and constitution of the Amsterdam International and has no reason for accepting them as preliminary conditions.

Thus the right Amsterdamers are engaged in sabotage. There is nothing strange about this, as sabotage of the unity of the world labor movement is their profession. Such activity is quite understandable. But what is less understandable is the participation in such combinations of representatives of the left wing. Do the leaders of the left wing of the Amsterdam International suppose that this is the shortest road towards the establishment of unity in the world labor movement? If they think so, they will soon become convinced of the erroneousness of their point of view. Some of the leaders of the Amsterdam International apparently suppose it possible to *dictate conditions*, forgetting that conditions are worked out in accordance with the real relation of forces. The real relation of forces in the labor movement is far from what the right and even the left wing Amsterdamers think. That is why *both the former and the latter may be advised to throw out of their heads the idea that they can force their will upon the revolutionary move-*

ment. Nothing but confusion will result for them from this sort of policy.

What is the explanation of this policy of the Amsterdam International? The explanation is that there are a number of people within the Amsterdam International who are ready to split it rather than agree to unity with the revolutionary workers. At the international congress of metal workers, the French representative stated that should the Russian union be admitted into the International, the French union would withdraw from it. To those who formed a life and death alliance with the bourgeoisie, to the undertones of the left bloc, to those standing on their hind legs before Herriot and occupying the footboard of the government chariot—to those of course, a split is preferable to unity. It is necessary at all costs to break the will for further splits and destruction of the labor movement existing among a considerable section of the Amsterdam International. How can this be done?

This can be done only if all the revolutionary organizations affiliated to the R. I. L. U. and all the Communist Parties realize that the struggle for unity of the world labor movement is a struggle to be waged *seriously and for a long time to come*, that it is not a manoeuvre, not a chess move, but a real desire to establish unity in the world labor movement in accordance with the demand of the masses. This unity cannot be established by mere negotiations between the leading elements of the R. I. L. U. and of the Amsterdam International. *Unity can be the result only of long, determined, systematic work among the masses.*

Progress of the International Unity Movement

THAT the movement for international unity, initiated by the Red International of Labor Unions, is profoundly affecting the labor movement is demonstrated by the correspondence now going on between the Amsterdam International and the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions. Below we reproduce the letter sent to the Russian Unions by Amsterdam under date of September 11, and received in Moscow on September 20, together with the reply of the Russian Unions.

Letter From Amsterdam to Moscow.

Our Executive Committee at its meeting of Sept. 11, considered your communication of the 26th, and authorized us to send the following reply:

It was always our desire which we expressed on several occasions to restore the organizational unity of the trade union movement for the splitting of which we assume no responsibility. We are also in agreement with you when you say that "the struggle between labor and capital, which is becoming ever sharper, can succeed only when the forces of the economic proletarian organizations will be concentrated and when the unity of the international trade union movement will become an accomplished fact."

It is necessary, however, to understand clearly that there is a fundamental difference between the policies which you

It is necessary to make millions and tens of millions of proletarians take a stand on whether they prefer unity to a split. It is necessary to explain in the every day work of the R. I. L. U. adherents (the struggle for shop committees, for the eight hour day, the organization of the unorganized, the creation of militant leadership, the work among the youth and women, the struggle against reparations and the Dawes plan, the anti-militarist work, the fight for the liberation of the colonies, etc.) that the principal condition for the success of the struggle is the creation of unity in the national and international trade union movement. Of course, if we merely talk of unity without linking it up with the everyday struggle of the masses, we will not move a step forward. But if we link up our everyday struggle against national and international capital, our battles for the eight-hour day, the better condition of labor, our defensive and offensive action, with the question of the unity of the labor organizations, we will rally the masses round this slogan and make it the militant cry of tens of millions of proletarians.

How much time will be needed to establish unity, it is difficult to state. If this depended only upon us, very little time would be required. But since this depends upon the reformists, it is possible that it will require much time, for we shall encounter desperate sabotage on the part of all the deadly enemies of Communism. However, no matter how many efforts may be required, the Comintern and the Red International of Labor Unions will follow the chosen path and will secure, in spite of the sabotage of the reformists, unity in the national and international labor movement.

recognize as basic to your activities and the policies which we are following, a difference which is much more than one of degree. It is very difficult therefore, to harmonize these two so widely-departing points of view. But we are ready to make all efforts to solve this problem.

However, before we feel in a position to enter into negotiations as you propose, it is our desire to have you give us in written form something concrete to serve as a basis for discussion, and in order that we may see upon what points of principle and tactics an agreement would be possible. We therefore request you to send us such a written proposal by which we could judge whether there is a common basis for agreement.

As you know, we received from the Vienna Congress very definite instructions as to the conditions upon which we can enter with you into any sort of negotiations. But this question must not be raised at present. We need not emphasize the fact that our Executive Committee could **not** accept any decisions on the question of unity which go beyond the instructions of our congress, without consultation with our General Council and possibly with another congress.

In the expectation of your reply, we remain with fraternal greetings,

Chairman: Purcell,

Secretary: Oudegeest.

Letter From Moscow to Amsterdam

Your letter of Sept. 11 was received on Sept. 20, could not be taken up earlier than Oct. 23 at the full meeting of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions.

We read with satisfaction your declaration that you too are desirous of creating organizational unity within the trade union movement.

We do not believe this is the time to enter into a detailed discussion as to who is responsible for the split in the international trade union movement. We must point out, however, that generally speaking, there was never in existence such a thing as a real unified concentrated and all-inclusive international trade union movement. We believe that our present common desire may lead to the ending of the split in our movement, and we are very glad to meet your request for a written statement to serve as a basis for future negotiations.

We, on our part, desire the creation of a unified trade union movement, nationally and internationally, the maximum possible unification of all trade unions, those affiliated with the Profintern, those affiliated with the International Federation of Trade Unions, as well as the unions standing outside both these organizations, upon the condition of the acceptance of the principle of class struggle.

We need not go into detailed explanation as to why we are struggling for such unity, the unity of all trade unions which accept a real anti-capitalist orientation. You know just as well as we do that the unity of the International Trade Union movement is a basic condition for a successful struggle against the offensive of capital, the Fascist reaction, as well as against the capitalist system as a whole.

The best means of arriving at such unity and the creation of one unified trade union international we consider the joint calling of an international labor congress. The question of how, when, and where, such a congress could take place would be easy to settle in the course of negotiations. We take note of your opinion that there is a basic difference between the policies and tactics upon which we base our work in the unions, and your own policies and tactics and that the difference is "much more than one of degree."

The significance of this phrase is not very clear to us. The fact is that there is nothing new in the differences existing between us. They have been known for years and have certainly been taken into consideration by the Vienna Congress of your Federation. In the proper time and at the proper place we shall be perfectly ready to discuss in detail our differences. But for the present we want to say that whatever our real differences of opinion are, we are perfectly willing to do all in our power to find a common basis.

We declare that the chief, most important, guiding principle of the trade unions we consider the irreconcilable contradictions between capital and labor, a consistent class struggle between the class of wage workers and the class of capitalists for the complete abolition of the system of capitalism and the liberation of the proletariat from the yoke of capitalist exploitation and its resultants of poverty, ignorance and slavery.

On the basis of this we propose the following: A break with all kinds of collaboration with the bourgeoisie, a united struggle of the workers and their organizations, nationally and internationally, against world capital. The acceptance of this condition would make possible the unification of all those labor organizations which are really struggling for the liberation of the working class.

We shall expect your reply and particularly a notification regarding the time and place of the first meeting of the representatives of the two organizations.

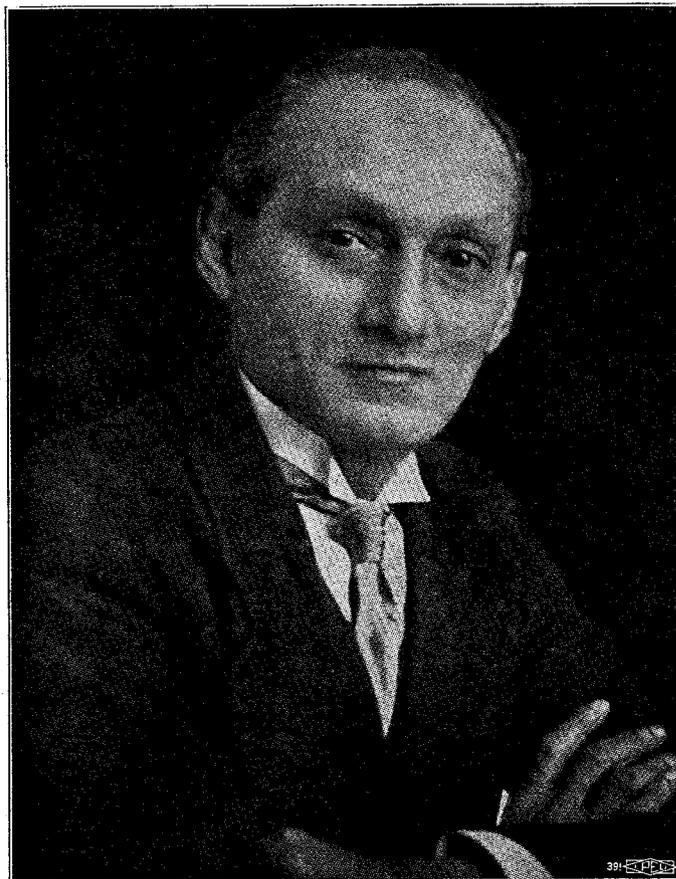
Although we are perfectly ready when necessary to continue our correspondence on the question of unity, yet it appears to us desirable in the interests of the cause to enter as soon as possible into a direct exchange of views, thus preparing the way for further steps that will lead to the desired end.

With comradely greetings,

Chairman All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions,
Tomsky,

Secretary: Dogadoff.

The prosecution of the international unity program is an application on the international field of the program long applied nationally and industrially by the Trade Union Educational League in America, with the approval and support of the Red International of Labor Unions. And just as the Trade Union Educational League has been the principal fighter for national and industrial unity, so is it today the only force fighting for the application of the international unity program to the labor movement of the United States. Under the deadening regime of Gompers the American labor movement has cut its connections even with Amsterdam, but the progress of the world labor movement in the direction of unity and class struggle will make easier our task in America.



S. SAKLATVALA
Communist Member of Parliament