

# FOR THE UNITY OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

## The Sabotage of International Trade Union Unity, Still Continues.

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The following article was written before the negotiations in Berlin. Ed.

There is no session of the General Council of the International Federation of Trade Unions held, without the Russian Question being raised. One can say that the Russian Question has become the favourite occupation of the leaders of the Amsterdam International during the course of the last two years.

The recent meeting of the General Council of the International Federation of Trade Unions (4th and 5th December) in Amsterdam had been carefully prepared: On the one hand there were negotiations with the leaders of the American Federation of Labour regarding bringing this body into the

I. F. T. U. as an antidote to the Anglo-Russian approachment, and on the other hand an attempt was made, on the eve of the session of the General Council of the I. F. T. U., to persuade the English to abandon their harmful "deviation to the Soviets". In Atlantic City the Amsterdammers had been as soft as wax and had promised the leaders of the American Federation of Labour to adapt their (the Amsterdammers) International to the American taste. In London, at the joint meeting with the General Council of the British Trades Union Congress, they were far less inclined to make concessions, and in Amsterdam the majority of the leaders of the I. F. T. U. adopted an irreconcilable attitude towards the Left wing of the Labour Movement in general, and towards the Trade Unions of the Soviet Union in particular.

The meeting of the General Council of the I. F. T. U. was very stormy. The caustic words of the late Fred Bramley, that in the Amsterdam International it is possible to discuss any other subject under the sun, but that as soon as the subject of Russia comes up excitement and passion are immediately aroused, were once again proved to be true. The representative of the English, George Hicks, attempted by means of a conciliatory — in fact far too conciliatory — resolution, to find a bridge between Scarborough and Amsterdam. His proposed resolution was as follows:

"This General Council of the I. F. T. U. declares itself prepared to meet representatives of the All-Russian Trade Union Movement, in order to discuss the possibility of affiliation with the Russian Trade Union movement."

This resolution, which at the outset limits the problem of Trade Union Unity to the question of the "affiliation of the Russian Trade Union movement", was received with extraordinary hostility. It was in vain that George Hicks urged upon the Right Wing of Amsterdam that "you cannot ignore the Russian Trade Union movement", that in view of the attacks of the employers, who are aided by the reactionary governments, it is necessary to do everything possible in order to strengthen the power of the international trade union movement. All his words failed to have any effect with the leaders of the Amsterdam International, who are very little interested in strengthening the power of the Labour Movement. Have they not just recently achieved a victory in Locarno? What need have they for trade union unity and other disagreeable things?

The General Secretary of the reformist trade unions of France, Léon Jouhaux, declared: "We are ready to speak with the Russians, but we will never agree to meet together with them at a conference". Jouhaux obviously wishes "to speak" with the Russians just as the Allies in their time "spoke" with the Germans in Versailles!

The English representative, Brown, made an attempt to introduce a still more compromising resolution, and was supported in this attempt by the General secretary of the Miners' International, Hodges, the latter declaring that it was said in Europe that the British had succumbed to Russian pressure (!) and if the Hicks resolution were passed, it would lend colour to this view. Thus the General Council of the English Trades Union Congress and the decisions of Scarborough were opposed by a representative of the English Miners' Federation; the very Union which, more than any other, has stood for and still stands for unity. Hodges followed the line of other speakers and raised the question — who are the better, the Americans or the Russians. He stated:

"I consider that the joining up of America with Amsterdam would be an event of the greatest historical importance, because of the huge population and the highly industrialised state of America, and its influence hereafter in world economic affairs. In this sense it would be a much more important event than even Russian acceptance of the constitution."

After long discussions, in which the relative value of the American and of the Soviet trade unions for Amsterdam was subjected to an all-round discussion, the following resolution was moved by Stenhuis:

"This General Council, having taken note of the correspondence exchanged with the Russians since February, and having taken note of the discussions that have taken place at the present meeting, reaffirms the decision of February, 1925, and considers no new decision necessary." Stenhuis' resolution was adopted by 14 votes against 7.

The following voted against the resolution: Purcell, Hicks and Brown (England), Jacobsen (Scandinavia), Fimmen (Transport Workers' International), Hodges (Miners International and Smit (Clerks International).

At an interview with a press representative after this decision Oudegeest declared:

"It is impossible to deviate from our rules because of a sudden change in one country, as at Scarborough. We hope and expect that the British will await the next I. F. T. U. Congress in 1927 (Oudegeest is in no hurry) before attempting to modify the decision... The real importance of the present meeting was in the approach to America and Mexico, which was a question quite different from that of Russia. Our difference with America is one of tactics, not of rules."

Oudegeest obviously considers the readers of his journals to be hopeless fools when he tells them tales of this sort. The preferential treatment afforded the American trade unions constitutes a premium on reactionary behaviour. If the trade unions of the Soviet Union were against the class war, if they were to pronounce in favour of collaboration with the bourgeoisie, if they were to fraternise with Fascist organisations and to support bourgeois parties as do the leaders of the American Federation of Labour, then Oudegeest would consider the trade unions of the Soviet Union to be worthy of admission into the select Amsterdam society. This is the meaning of the whole tactics of Oudegeest. The Amsterdam International will have to wait very long and will never live to see the trade unions of the Soviet Union descending to the level of the American trade unions.

At the meeting of the General Council of the Amsterdam International, the R. I. L. U. was the object of a good deal of abuse. The sins of the R. I. L. U., are well known. Its chief sin is that it is not like Amsterdam. We leave it to the Oudegeests to occupy themselves with the enumeration of our faults. The continual stream of abuse directed against the R. I. L. U., the holding up of the R. I. L. U. as an organisation which exists exclusively of minorities, even aroused the indignation of some English comrades. We are not rendered indignant by these continual outpourings of abuse. If the R. I. L. U. were really weak, the leaders of the Amsterdam International would not continually repeat that Amsterdam is not afraid of the R. I. L. U., that the R. I. L. U. does not possess any strength etc.

The political import of the decisions adopted has been fully appreciated by the English bourgeois press. The Russians have been repudiated — this is the unanimous opinion of the entire press which at last finds itself revenged for Scarborough. The English bourgeois can rejoice: The decisions of the Amsterdam International are an open attack not only upon the Russian, but upon the English trade unions. It is in vain that Oudegeest is endeavouring to emphasise that the decision is only directed against the Soviet trade unions. The decision adopted is directed against the English and against the international trade union movement. The Amsterdammers have achieved another "victory", but the more victories of this sort that they achieve, the nearer they will be to defeat. These politicians may cling to the coat-tails of Gompers' successors, they may rejoice at the defeat of the Russian and English trade unions but he who laughs last laughs the longest.