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THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE LEAGUE

ENTHUSIASM, HARMONY, DIVERSITY.

How can we adequately describe our first Conference to absent members:—the harmony of spirit that prevailed; the pleasantry and the high seriousness, the devotion to the cause of International Socialism and the whole, empire of ideas which that implies; and withal the most interesting diversity of outlook and opinion, contributed to the day's proceedings by the delegates and members.

THE ACENDA.

The agenda before the Conference was of quite a comprehensive character, and showed an intense degree of activity on the part of our young organisation for the short while that it has existed.

The Management Committee's report, too lengthy to reproduce in our issue, comprised a review of our journey from the fateful Conference of August last. The present anatomy of the League was described in the following paragraph:—

"The old Labour Party delimitations were in many cases abandoned, and we have to-day live branches meeting at Benoni, Durban, Johannesburg Central and Eastern Disticts, and Germiston. At Krugersdorp, which has a good crop of Internationalists, a branch is in process of formation.

'These by no means exhaust the sphere of our influence. Numbers of Socialists in all parts of the country are kept in touch with the movement through the 'International.' We have supporters comprising the most efficient officers of Labour Party branches in all the chief towns of the Union, who though having severed their allegiance to the S.A.L.P., have not yet got beyond reading and distributing the 'International.' The clarifying of ideals by propaganda, and the firing of new enthusiasms by the process of events will undoubtedly bring all these and more into our ranks sooner or later.

"We are also in friendly communication with the previously existing Socialist Societies in Durban. Capetown and Pretoria. With these Comrades our paper furnishes a common meeting ground."

In referring to the Branch Secretaries who have thus far carried on the arduous work of the League. the report continued:—

"These Comrades have pulled the League through the most trying period of its existence. Today, thanks to their devotion, it would be no exaggeration to claim that in actual organisation the League already excels that of the Labour Party."

Read, not in a spirit of small rivalry with the old organisation, but of gratulation that the South African movement has been carried forward a tremendous stage of development, this part of the report is very significant reading.

The Financial Statements of the League and the Press afforded an index of the monetary sacrifices made by members, and the spirit behind the movement. The Treasurer, Commode Weinstock, accounted for the disbursement of nearly 2300, showing a small balance to the good on the League account. A movement which can rally such endeavour at the present time is assured of a harvest of Socialists sooner or later

The Press Committee's Report was brief. One paragraph is of sufficient general interest to quote here:—

Complaints are often heard of lack of humourous articles and stories in our paper. We take a serious view of its mission, and although vivacity is our constant aim, we have no desire to issue a "Tit-bits' or comic journal. Moreover, the necessity for giving our paper a local taste while preaching universal principles confines us largely to local writers, and debars us from the easier if more entertaining journalism of the scissors and paste. Occasional attacks on the papaper in the Capitalist papers, notably "The Star" seem to indicate that "The International" is on the right lines."

The agenda paper was not overburdened with notices of motion. In the seventeen items down for discussion, there were few indeed that did not attempt to declare our foundation principles. There was a general tacit desire to avoid planks and platform jerrybuilding. The most important motions will be found in the report of the Conference proceedings. No greater testimony to the high level peaks of principle on which the Conference dwelt during the day could be given than in the desire of the Johannesburg delegate to withdraw a motion deprecating electioneering. The proceedings of the day had made the motion unnecessary.

THE DAY'S PROCEEDINGS.

The Conference was declared open at 10.30 a.m. There was an attendance of 32 delegates and members of the Management Committee; with a goodly muster of members from Benoni, Germiston and Johannesburg, who had the right to speak.

The first incident of the proceedings provided a happy touch,—the admission of Comrades W. Blake and H. H. Tame as fraternal delegates from the Pretoria Socialist Society.

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS.

Comrade W. H. Andrews, who had travelled up from Durban in company with Comrades Pettersen and Dunning, representing Durban, then delivered his Presidential address.

In all his previous occupancy of chairmanships the Chairman said he had managed to avoid Presidential addresses, but he felt that this occasion demanded one.

After touching on the importance of linking up with the other Comrades in South Africa, "I have been working at my trade for a few months, and while the lathe is going round a turner can think. manual work has a tendency to clarify our ideas on political and other matters" said the Chairman. It therefore seemed to him that at this stage in our history to elaborate a long constitution with a programme would be a mistake. They had found in past experience that the frequent result of programmes was to allow a large number of people to enter an organisation on one, two or three planks of a platform, who totally disagreed with other planks and perhaps with the objective.

They should also take into consideration the linking up of Socialists in South Africa. "There are a considerable number of men and w nen who have been advocating Social-

ism for many years past, without being permanently attached to any organisation. We should avail ourselves of the services of these valuable people." There were also existing Socialist organisations who, having definitely propagated Socialism in definite ways for years, might excusably hesitate from joining up with an organisation founded on a protest. They should have to consider these organisations equally anxious with ourselves to see Socialism established. He wished to see all genuine Socialists members in a movement, whatever its name with the idea of Internationalism and antimilitarism permanently incorporated in its platform, to bring about a state of Society in which every man or woman shall receive the full fruits of their labour, and develop the finest faculties of their nature.

The war was not a passing phase; militarism was the answer of capitalism to all their organisation and propaganda.

The responsibility lay on them of preparing for the inevitable reaction against the war, and to save it from being exploited by the class who ride on the crest of every wave. The future of the workers was in their hands. They could retard by mistakes, or accelerate the social revolution, concluded the Chairman amid enthusiastic approval.

MANACEMENT'S REPORT.

The discussion of the Executive Report, being a review of the changes in the Political Labour movement of the last few months as touching the League, was quickly proceeded with and adopted with a few verbal amendments.

Much valuable work not of sufficient pubilc interest to dwell on in these pages was got over during the morning.

The Secretariat of the League was placed on a definite basis and allied to the editorship of the paper. It was pointed out by the Treasurer that, in order to allow extraneous items of income for contingencies and for propaganda, the head office and full time Secretary placed a burden of £3 a month on each of the Branches.

The policy and conduct of the "International" also came in both for good humoured criticism and praise.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS.

The following officers were appointed for the coming year:—Chairman: W. H. Andrews. Vice-Chairman: Colin Wade, M.P.C., and S. P. Bunting, M.P.C. Treasurer: G. Weinstock. Secretary, D. Ivon Jones. Members of Management: A. F. Crisp, J. A. Clark, W. Light, and A. B. Dunbar.

POLICY OF THE LEAGUE.

Early in the afternoon the Conference completed its administrative work, and proceeded to discuss the various motions on the agenda.

The first one immediately plunged the delegates into rock-bottom principles. It read as follows:—

"That the League do not recognise fraternal relations with any organisation whatsoever that supports the institution of militarism and war."

The relation of Trade Unions being instanced, doubters were assured that the resolution manifestly defined only the official relations of the League, and did not interfere with the action of individual members in the ordinary way. It was felt that the motion was of fundamental importance in its effect on the Labour movement of the future, and it was declared carried amid acclamation.

It was then resolved that the League endorse the Zimmerwald Manifesto, and the League's affiliation with the Internationalist Socialist Commission at Berne was carried unanmously, the Management being directed to expedite the rendering of financial assistance to the new International.

INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM.

The next application of the paramountey of the class strugle which is the foundation of our position, was the Conference's declaration, modified somewhat from the original motion,

"That we encourage the organisation of the workers on industrial or class lines, irrespective of race, colour or creed, as the most effective means of providing the necessary force for the emancipation of the workers."

On this motion a most interesting discussion took place and the "S.L.P. mene" were in their favourite element. A subsequent motion from Benoni "That the League adopt the constitution of the Socialist Labour Party of America" was ruled out of order, but the Management Committee was requested to make enquiries into the matter.

THE NATIVE QUESTION.

Comrade Bunting opened the Evening Session with his Petition of Rights for the native:—

"That this League affirm that the emancipation of the working class requires the abolition of all forms of native indenture, compound and passport systems; and the lifting of the native worker to the political and industrial status of the white."

The discussion on this motion was extremely keen, and Comrade Clingman moved that "A Committee be appointed to report on the proper Socialist policy on native affairs." Comrade Wade adduced biological evidence on the intellectual development of the native as compared with the white. While Comrade Dunbar retorted in a few pungent sentences with the facts of the class struggle. The motion dealt with the native as a fellow worker and a wage slave. He averred that there was no native problem, only a worker's problem. The amendment was lost, Colin Wade then got the last sentence changed to read:—

"And the lifting of the native wage worker to the political and industrial status of the white; meanwhile endeavouring to prevent the increase of the native wage workers, and to assist the existing native wage workers to free themselves from the wage system."

With this amendment the resolution was agreed to by an overwhelming majority.

HOW TO GUIDE THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT.

The next motion brought us also face to face with problems of the near future.

"That we recommend to the new International at Berne the formation of a Commission sitting continuously to report on all phases of the war in its relation to the working class."

This motion was agreed to, with the addition of the motion following on the agenda, reading

"And to prepare for a probable uprising of the proletariat at the conclusion of the war; and to investigate as to the best means of guiding such uprising, on lines least provocative of bloodshed, to the capture of increased political and economic power by the workers"

The scientific as against the catastrophic character of our Socialist belief was exemplified in the rejection of an amendment to make the last sentence read:—"With a view to the abolition of the Capitalist system and the emancipation of labour."

TRADE UNION AFFILIATION.

The remaining motions, being of secondary importance, did not arouse much discussion. A motion to change the name of the organisation from 'League' to 'Party' was not agreed to. Rejected also was a motion to make the repudiation of War Loans a fighting plank in our platform.

A motion, however, by Comrade Pettersen, of Durban, "That Trades Unions wishing to become affiliated to the League be accepted as branches" created a lively discussion before the close of the Conference, and was carried after a keen tussle.

Thus the Conference, after 12 hours bank to bank, concluded its deliberations a trifle jaded, but with undiminished good humour, and with greatly fortified faith in the cause for which it had met. The Chairman closed the Conference with a few parting words of congratulation, and the lusty singing of the 'Red Flag' terminated & memorable day.

Socialists, being evolutionists, and believing in the law of progress, are necessarily optimists. They not only maintain that the present system will evolve into one more perfect than itself, but they also contend it has already nearly completed its mission, which was the perfecting of the means of production and exchange to the point where there could be no question of the people's ability to supply their wants as to luxuries and necessities. Having completed its mission, it must, like the ripened fruit, be nearly ready to drop of its own weight, or like the chick nearing the end of the period of incubation, ready to burst its shell.

H. S. Aley, M.D.