

# The Left Wing Victory: Reformists Split Indian T. U. Movement

By L. BURNS

**S**UMMING up the results of last year's Indian Trade Union Congress held in Jharia, Earnest Kirk, one of the leaders of the Right wing of the Indian T. U. movement wrote the following in the *Statesman* early in 1929:

"The Ninth Session of the Trade Union Congress in Jharia was a considerable triumph for the Reds. They have established themselves so firmly in the most important Indian Trade Union Organization that I see no possibility of further remaining in it for any conscientious constructively-inclined trade unionist. The limits of compromise have been reached, if not overstepped; and if the supporters of true trade unionism desire to escape final overwhelming by the Communists and their sympathizers, they will either have to rally their forces for an open attack or to withdraw. In my opinion the latter alternative is the most rational. . . ."

As soon as it became obvious that the Left Wing — which had been leading the growing economic and political movement of the working class of India — was gaining influence and prestige, and after the Left Wing had given a fine demonstration of its militancy, organization and determination to defend working class interests at the Jharia Congress, the reformists immediately began to urge a breakaway.

Almost a year has passed since that time. The revolutionary movement has taken on definite form. The issue of *political power* has been pushed to the forefront. The intensification of the struggle has brought about a further differentiation of class forces. Whereas the Indian bourgeoisie have been go-

ing over more and more openly to the camp of counter revolution, having betrayed the national emancipation movement and capitulated to imperialism, it has become increasingly clear that the *working class is destined to shoulder the whole burden of the struggle against British imperialism and the native bourgeoisie.*

That the influence of the Left Wing has grown considerably in the process of the struggle can be seen from the organization of several new Left Wing unions and the capture of several of the existing organizations. Meanwhile, the reformists have been steadily losing ground among the masses.

Seeing that they were increasingly losing out in the labor movement, that the working class was putting its trust in the Left Wing, that the militants, supported by the masses, were gradually getting control of the movement, the reformists during the past year have been urging the *expulsion of Left Wing elements from the unions* and openly advocating a split, hoping thus to save themselves by isolating certain sections of the workers from the Left Wing and by organizing so-called "independent" Unions which would be purely reformist organizations and which would take care to keep out the militants.

Of course, the Indian bourgeoisie heartily approved the campaign undertaken by the reformists to split the movement and to disorganize the ranks of the working class, for they well realize from the last two Bombay strikes what a formidable factor is the working class when united and organized under a single revolutionary lead. Indeed, several representatives of the employers' associations supported by the bourgeois national press announced that they would have nothing to do with unions which "advocated violence and were out to destroy the capitalist system."

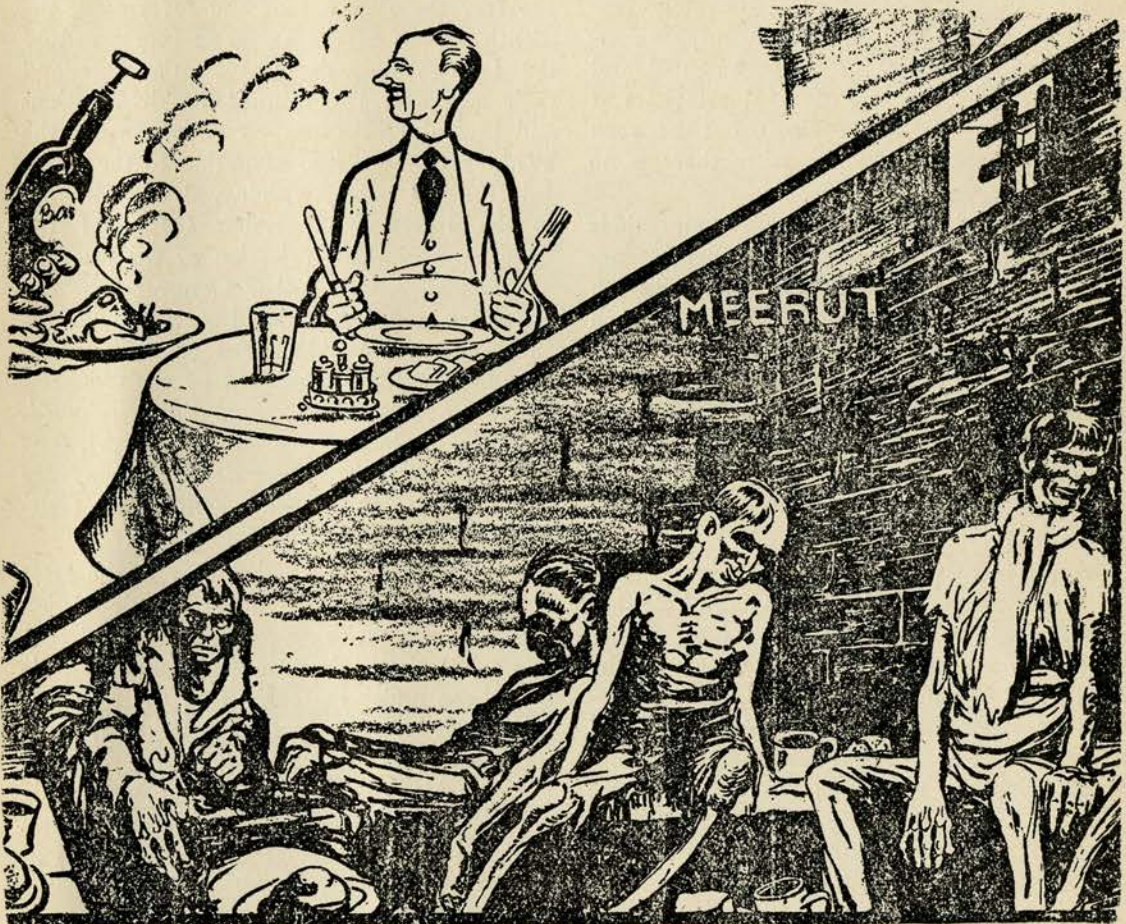


As a matter of fact, the question of engineering a split had been decided in principle long before the *Nagpur Congress*. This was evident from the statements made by many prominent reformist leaders of the Indian T. U. movement. But perhaps Earnest Kirk was franker than the rest when he wrote in the May number of his reactionary journal, *The Indian Labor Review*:

*"And the remedy? Complete and entire separation of our movement from the Communists and from even the subsidiary form*

*ed at the unprecedented activity of the Indian workers who were fighting not only their exploiters, but all the capitalist agents of the Kirk type.*

The reformists decided to wait for a suitable chance to put their disruptive plans into effect. And the opportunity to do so soon presented itself at the Tenth Session of the All-Indian Trade Union Congress held in Nagpur for the Agenda raised such questions of principle that a compromise between the reformists and the Left Revolutionary Wing



*"The British Empire has been founded on character, not force. Wealth had not made the British Empire materialist, but had come as an opportunity for spiritual development."* J. R. McDONALD in Toronto.

*of their activity, there is no other way, unless indeed, the Red International is willing to abandon its antediluvian idea of a world revolution by violence."*

Now we know the remedy proposed by Earnest Kirk who was obviously much alarm-

was altogether out of the question. (Among these issues were: the question of *boycotting the Whitley Commission* and the convening of a *Pan-Asiatic Conference*.)

Having by this time definitely decided to split the T. U. movement, the reformists got



ready to put up a strong fight at the Nagpur Session.

"*Shall Moscow Call the Tune?*" wrote Shiva Rao in one of his articles on the Tenth Session of the T. U. congress, "The All-India Trade Union Congress will be faced with this question at its next session in Nagpur towards the end of the month and on the answer it furnishes will depend the future of the trade union movement in India—whether it is to profit by the experience and cooperation of the trade unions in other parts of the world or adopt a policy of deliberately fostering class antagonism, and encouraging industrial unrest. Let us be forewarned and forearmed for the test of rival principles at Nagpur and realize in time that between trade unionism and Communism there is no common ground."

It was with these views and their minds thoroughly made up that the reformists arrived in Nagpur to attend the Tenth Session of the Trade Union Congress held between November 28 and December 1, 1929. But they were given a cold welcome when they stepped off the train at Nagpur, for the workers' demonstration was distinctly hostile (many placards carried by the demonstrators and exposing the reformist treachery being much in evidence).

A bitter tussle ensued at the first sitting of the Congress Executive Committee between the reformists and the Left Wing when the resolutions to be endorsed by the Congress came up for discussion. Despite reformist opposition, the Left Wing managed to get several of its resolutions placed (among them being the resolution on *boycotting the Whitley Commission, affiliation to the Anti-Imperialist League and to the Pan-Pacific T. U. Secretariat, on breaking with the International Labor Office, on rejecting the proposal to convene a Pan-Asiatic conference, etc.*). When the resolutions came up for discussion at the Session of the Congress and the debate made clear that they were supported by the majority of the delegates, the Reformist Wing headed by N. M. Joshi and Chamanlal, members of the Commission, demonstratively left the hall announcing that they would have nothing further to do with the

Congress. At a private meeting the *Reformist Group* decided to form an independent organization on a national scale which would be "free of Moscow influence."

Finding themselves in the minority and unable to push through their own opportunist resolutions or to get control of the Congress machinery and to oust the militants, the reformist T. U. bureaucrats were *compelled to secede*. However, they did not get much support. The bulk of the unions resolved to remain inside the Trade Union Congress.

After the secession of the reformists, the Tenth Session of the Congress (composed of the Left Wing, the Left nationalists and their supporters) continued its deliberations and several resolutions — re-boycotting the Whitley Commission, affiliation to the Anti-Imperialist League, withdrawal of affiliation to the International Labor Office of the League of Nations, rejection of the proposal to call Pan-Asiatic Labor Congress, the demand for complete national independence for India and the establishment of a Workers' Republic—all recommended by the Congress Executive Committee, were duly endorsed. Another resolution was adopted at this Session *censuring the recent declaration of the viceroy and Nehru's draft constitution* (outlining Dominion Status for India).

There was a sharp swing over to the Left at the Nagpur Session of the Trade Union Congress, which, being the only national federation of the trade unions of India had always been under the control of the reactionary T. U. bureaucrats (Joshi, Bakhale, Shiva Rao, etc.). With its resolution to boycott the Whitley Commission this Congress not only voiced its protest against British imperialism and the imperialist "Labor" Government headed by MacDonald, but it placed on record its distrust of the reformist leaders of the Indian T. U. movement who were supporting and participating in the work of the Commission (Joshi, Chamanlal).

By turning down the proposal to affiliate to the Amsterdam International or to take part in a Pan-Asiatic Labor Conference (proposed by Suzuki, a Japanese social imperialist), and by resolving to break with the Geneva Labor Office of the League of Nations, the



All-India Trade Union Congress dealt a smashing blow at international reformism which for long past has been trying to get control of the Indian trade union movement and to hamstring the struggle of the workers against the foreign and native exploiters. Now that the Trade Union Congress has formally affiliated to the Anti-Imperialist League and has in this way set up contact with other sections of the international revolutionary proletariat and the oppressed peoples in the colonies, this will reinforce the fight of the Indian workers against British and world imperialism.

And lastly, by condemning *Nehru's draft constitution* and adopting a resolution calling for *complete national independence* and the establishment of a *Workers' Republic in India*, this Session came out definitely against all those bourgeois nationalist groups who had capitulated to imperialism, who had foully betrayed the national-emancipation movement, agreeing to Dominion Status for India.

Needless to say, all the foregoing resolutions adopted by the Tenth Session of the Trade Union Congress at Nagpur will have a great bearing on the development of the labor movement of India. Their adoption marks a great victory for the Left Wing in the Indian T. U. movement and bears witness to its growing influence among the workers at large.

But the Left Wing did not gain a complete victory at the Tenth Session. Under the pressure of the Left Nationalists (who had not seceded) this Session, *despite the decision of the Executive Committee, resolved to postpone consideration of affiliation to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat until the next annual Congress.*

Subha Chandra Bose, the prominent Left Nationalist, was elected Chairman of the Congress at this Session for the coming year. Now that the position of the Left Nationalists has been considerably reinforced in the Trade Union Congress, the Revolutionary Wing will have to be very vigilant indeed. The fact that the Left Nationalists should have supported some of the resolutions submitted by the Left Wing, should mislead no one. Adapting themselves to the revolution-

ary mood of the masses and doing their best to penetrate the labor movement with the view of hampering the working class struggle from within, the Left Nationalists do not hesitate to use revolutionary phraseology whenever it suits them, especially when it is a question of fighting imperialism. They even support strikes called at enterprises owned by foreign capitalists whenever this is in the interest of the native bourgeoisie. But they come out against all strikes and against the workers when the interests of national capital are at stake. Subha Chandra Bose, the new Chairman of the Trade Union Congress, once declared at a workers' meeting:

*"To introduce a fresh cleavage into our ranks by talking openly of class war and working for it seems to me at the present moment to be a crime against Nationalism. It would be disastrous in the highest degree if we were to launch on class war while we are all bed-fellows in slavery."* (Forward, July 14, 1929.)

Since the Left Nationalists are hampering the development of the revolutionary labor movement in various ways and with their demagogic phrases may yet deceive certain sections of the working class, they are extremely dangerous enemies. To struggle against them with every means in our power is especially important at the present time.

An excellent example of where the Left Nationalists are heading to is the career of Chamanlal, one of the leaders of the group that broke away. Only quite recently Chamanlal was a champion of Socialism. He made long speeches against imperialism and the Labor Party. In 1928 he even demonstratively left the Empire Labor Conference as a protest against the imperialist policy of the Labor Party, and declared that the "British Labor Party had betrayed India and Socialism and that its Socialist slogans were merely a blind for its imperialist tendencies." But this belongs to the past. Chamanlal is now zealously co-operating with imperialism. He is a member of the Whitley Commission which has been condemned by all class-conscious sections of the working class of India. His treachery has now culminated in the splitting of the T. U. move-



ment, for Chamanlal was among the leading spirits who engineered the present piece of disruption. Chamanlal's career should serve as a constant warning to the workers of India and to the Left Revolutionary Wing in particular. All our Left comrades should carefully follow up the actions of the Left Nationalists and make use of every occasion to expose them as the agents of the bourgeoisie in the ranks of the working class movement.

The Left Wing will have to clear away many serious obstacles. Alarmed at the intensification of the class struggle in the country, the employers and the Government are now all out to crush the revolutionary movement and are going to use force to do it. The employers have so far completely ignored the Left Wing unions. They refused to negotiate with them (for example, when they withdrew their recognition of the Girni Kamgar Union) and are demanding that official steps be taken to put a stop to their activities. The question has now been taken up with the authorities of prohibiting Communists to be elected to any of the leading organs in the T. U. movement. Left Wing T. U. leaders

are continually being arrested, and there is no doubt that the split in the Indian trade union movement, engineered by the reformists — which has been accompanied by increased persecution of all militants — will lead another wave of repressions against the Left Wing.

The revolutionary wing of the Indian T. U. movement is still confronted with many big battles. It will, therefore, have to be very vigilant and keep to a clear-cut class policy. The Left Wing should now make every effort to develop as extensively as possible its activities *at the enterprises*, in the shops and factories and take over the leadership of all the economic and political struggles of the working class, rejecting the line of the reformists and the Left Nationalists. The mistakes committed during the last big strikes must be outlived. A correct lead in the working class struggle and a stubborn fight against the reformists and the Left Nationalists will help to extend the influence of the Left Wing, and with the support of the broad working masses will be a means of surmounting all the difficulties and obstacles that must inevitably arise.

