

Two Months of Activity of the International Council of Trade and Industrial Unions

By J. T. Murphy.

The era of social revolution has brought its challenge to the labor unions of the world no less profoundly than to the political parties. Expressing as they do the fundamental movement of the masses they are immediately responsive to and reflect every intensification of the economic struggle of the workers. Hence we are witnessing not only millions of workers flocking into the unions as their only refuge, but also the union launching forth into great struggles and more intensive fighting than has ever characterized their experience. Their immediate economic issues are bringing them face to face with great political realities and forcing the unions to take upon themselves new activities, change their objectives and become weapons of revolutionary struggle. Sectional strikes merge into general strikes and with increasing frequency are compelled to openly challenge the power of the state.

Conversely, political issues arising out of the conflicts of the imperialistic struggle surge through the unions and make of them a battle ground and rallying force for the warring parties. Thus are the masses within the unions impelled toward making the choice between the reformists and revolutionists and thus has begun the vital conflict for a new alignment of the labor unions.

This is as much an international problem as a national one for we find the Amsterdam Bureau of Trade Unions—now the rallying ground of reformists—the most important weapon in the hands of the international capitalists. Its leaders betrayed labor during the war and since the signing of the imperialist peace they have pursued a policy equally treacherous. The war shattered the Second International and gave birth to the Third or Communist International. What the Second International was in relation to the political

movement of the working class, the Amsterdam International is in relation to the union movement of the workers. Unable to resurrect the Second International and make of it an effective power against labor, all attention is now directed to the unions as a means for the conduct of the policy of amelioration pursued by the capitalists to defeat the workers as they press forward to revolutionary ends. Thus the Labor Union International expressed in the Amsterdam Bureau becomes utterly useless as a means of combat and a powerful bulwark against the revolutionary masses.

Hence, just as the revolutionary Socialist parties in the Second International had to face the issue of shaking themselves free from the reformists and ultimately decided on the formation of a Communist International, so also have the revolutionary workers' organizations to face a similar issue. Some had already faced the issue and were outside the Amsterdam International before we had arrived at the critical stage of current history. These unions were mostly revolutionary unions from their inception and the intensification of the struggle simply strengthens their determination to stay outside and, at the same time, gives them an impulse toward the formation of a new International of Labor Unions. With this strong tendency already manifest and the obvious need of all these unions being brought together pressing upon the movement, the choice between the policy of "boring from within" the Amsterdam International and that of leaving it, becomes immediately sharpened. To persuade the revolutionary unions to go into it would be an impossibility, even if it were prepared to accept them, and the fact that the labor union movement is largely dominated by a reactionary bureaucracy, both nationally and internationally, thus making a double intrenchment of reformism, would make for interminable

delay in the rallying of the revolutionary forces for action in any policy of capturing the international bureaucracy. The rapidity with which the economic struggle of the workers is becoming a revolutionary struggle impells us to make for the rapid mobilization of the workers under revolutionary leadership. The unions of the workers are mass organizations. The conquest of the national organizations therefore and their severance from the Amsterdam Bureau, and its direction to a new centre of leadership is an immediate source of weakness to reformism and a gathering of strength for revolution. The path pursued by the revolutionary parties in the formation of the Communist International is seen to be the path which must be pursued by the revolutionary organized masses.

The problem therefore becomes clearly the problem of rallying the revolutionary union forces outside the Amsterdam Bureau along with the forces which can be drawn away from that organization as they become revolutionary in purpose and outlook. The unity of the "left" union forces against the "right" becomes the slogan of the hour. Forms of organization are realized as of less significance than purpose and objectives, and conservative prejudices of less immediate value than revolutionary action.

This was anticipated by the First Congress of the Communist International, but it was not until the Second Congress of 1920 that time became ripe for action.

II.

By June, 1920, delegates began to arrive for the Congress and the Executive Committee of the Communist International immediately took advantage of the presence of union delegations in Russia and convened a conference of representatives of Great Britain, Italy, and Russia to consider what steps

should be taken to give effect to their views with regard to the union movement of the world. At this conference there were present Zinoviev (chairman of the Executive Committee of the Communist International), A. Losovsky, H. Tomsy, G. Thyperovitch, V. Schmidt (member of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Council of Labor Unions), G. Melnichansky (of the Moscow Provisional Council of Labor Unions), D'Aregona and Giuseppe Bianke (of the Italian General Confederation of Labor), Enrico Dugoni (of the National Federation Landworkers of Italy), Emilo Columbino (of the Federation of Metal Workers of Italy), Robert Williams (Transport Workers' Federation of Great Britain), A. A. Purcell (of the British Trade Union Congress).

Comrade Zinoviev explained the point of view of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. He pointed out the serious danger threatening the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in all countries, thanks to destructive work of the Amsterdam International, around which millions of workers are still rallying. He declared that the "yellow" Amsterdam International Labor Union is by no means only a technical organization of the international labor union movement. It is closely bound through the social conciliators—Jouhaux, Legien, Appleton & Co.—to the League of Nations through the Washington Bureau of Labor. The Amsterdam International is now a political weapon in the hands of the Entente, in fact the strongest weapon that still remains in its hands. It is thus the task of the revolutionary proletariat to knock this weapon out of its hands and smash it. He observed the need for the creation of the Red Labor Union International and conduct a united struggle under the banner of Communism, and for a united effort against the Amsterdam International. He said the time was ripe for such

an organization and for such a fight and he was of the opinion that it was extremely important and feasible to immediately organize without delay a section of the Labor Union movement in connection with the Communist International so that at the time of the Second Congress of the International it would be an accomplished fact. There were many unions outside of the Amsterdam Bureau of Trade Unions. The Third All-Russian Congress of Labor Unions have already joined the Third International and a number of other unions outside of Russia had declared for affiliation. The organization of this opposition section to the "yellow" International of Labor Unions would not only bring clearness into the relationship of the labor unions, syndicates, etc., towards the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but would also stimulate the already started process of the detaching of the labor masses of the whole world from the "yellow" International, the whole strength of which is given to the support of the counter-revolutionary Entente.

The Conference agreed that such an organization was necessary and proceeded to take necessary measures for publicity, for the organization of the Provisional Committee, and for the convening of a World Congress of Labor Unions. Several further conferences were convened at which were present the representatives from Spain, Jugoslavia, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, besides those already mentioned as present at the first conference. All of these with the exception of Williams and Purcell (who while in agreement had no mandate to act on behalf of their organizations so far as committing them to become part of a new international is concerned) were agreed to become part of a Provisional Council of the Red Labor Union International. In the discussion which took place a sharp cleavage of opinion

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was at first apparent between those who belonged to syndicalist organizations and those of the general trade union movement. This was intensified when the syndicalists were joined by the Shop-Stewards' Delegates and those of the I. W. W. These were of the opinion that the first proposals for the Provisional Council and for the conditions attendant upon the entrance to the International were of a character which encouraged the reformists and prevented the rallying of the "left" organizations such as the Shop Stewards, Syndicalists, and I. W. W. Finally, the differences were practically eliminated and after the conclusion of the Congress of the Communist International the Provisional Council of the Red Labor Union International was established by the union representatives which had been in attendance at the Congress. These were:

M. Tomsky—All-Russia Trade Unions;
Shablin—Hungarian Trade Unions;
Peskaniya—Spanish Syndicalists;
Nilkitch—Confederation of Trade Unions of Jugo-Slavia.

A. Nadson—Norwegian Industrial Union;
Taro Joshiharo—American I. W. W.
Colombino, Bianchi, and D'Arragona—General Confederation of Trades Union of Italy;

J. T. Murphy—British Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committees;

Miradze—Georgian Trade Union;
Maring—Dutch Transport Workers' Federation;

S. Sturme—German Syndicalists;
Maring—Transport Workers of Dutch East Indies;

A. Rosmer—French Syndicalists.

A Provisional Executive Committee was elected by the Council: Comrades Tomsky, Rosmer, Murphy. A general appeal to the union movement of the world was drafted and issued immediately by the Council and the following temporary constitution of the International Council of Labor Unions was adopted:

Name.

A temporary international organization established upon agreement among the representatives of labor unions of various countries shall bear the name: The Temporary International Council of the Red Labor Union International.

Aim.

The Temporary International Council of the Red Labor Union International has for its purpose:

1) To carry on a large scale propaganda and agitation for the idea of revolutionary class struggle, social revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat and revolutionary mass action for the purpose of the overthrow of the capitalist system and the bourgeois state.

2) To carry on a struggle against the policy of conciliation with the bourgeoisie and the hope of peaceful transition from capital-

ism to socialism, which is poisoning the world's labor union movement.

3) To consolidate the revolutionary class struggle of the world's labor union movement and to carry on a determined struggle against the International Bureau of Labor attached to the League of Nations and the program and tactics of the Amsterdam International Federation of Labor Unions.

4) To take the initiative in international campaigns on the occasion of the more important facts of the class struggle, to take up collections for the support of strikers in the great social conflicts.

5) To collect all materials, data, and documents which characterize the international labor union movement and to inform all organizations which belong to the International Council with regard to the situation in various countries.

6) To publish books and pamphlets dealing with the question concerning the international labor movement.

Construction.

The Council is composed of one representative each from Russia, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Germany and from such other organizations as will join the International Council of Labor Unions. The Council also includes one representative of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The Council elects an Executive Bureau of three, including the General Secretary of the Council and a representative in the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

Bulletin.

The Council will publish a bulletin in four languages, bearing the name of "Bulletin of the Temporary International Council of the Red Labor International."

Conference.

To the participation in the international congress are invited only such unions and organizations as are conducting in their respective countries a revolutionary class struggle and stand for the dictatorship of the proletariat.*)

The system of representation at the International Conference shall be as follows: Individual unions, extra-union organizations, federations, etc., having less than 500,000 members shall send two delegates each; those having over 500,000 members may send an additional delegate for each 500,000 organized members. The International Bureau of separate industrial or trade unions may send one delegate each with consultative vote.

*) Note: As the revolutionary labor union organizations which have not yet declared themselves with sufficient clearness with regard to the dictatorship of the proletariat, such as the I. W. W., and some syndicalist organizations, the Council instructs the Bureau to address to them an appeal and to ask them to refer this question for the consideration of all their sections. At the same time they are invited to participate in the International Conference.

Location.

Pending the convening of the International Conference which shall be as early as possible in 1921, the location of the International Council shall be in the city of Moscow. The place of the Congress shall be determined later by the Provisional Council.

Several meetings of the Council have been held and in addition to the foregoing, various other rules and regulations for the conduct of the business of the Council have been provisionally agreed upon. Since the business was carried through, several delegations from the trade unions have arrived here and interviewed the Council with regard to affiliation. These were from the Italian Syndicalists, the Central Commission of the German Trade Unions, and one of the American unions. The Italian Syndicalists joined the Council after a lengthy controversy, respecting the position of the Italian Confederation of Labor. It was not until it was made clear that the Confederation of Labor must immediately withdraw from the Amsterdam Bureau of Trade Unions and openly accept the policy of the Council, that the Syndicalists finally agreed to become members of the Council.

The German Trade Unions have not yet come to a decision, but it is rapidly becoming clear to them that if they would be true to the revolution no other course is possible for them to pursue. Meanwhile the Council will be represented at the Conference of the Betriebs Rate, to be held during the next few weeks in Germany, and to the rank and file thus gathered in conference a direct appeal will be made.

Efforts are also being made to direct contact with the other German organizations and with those of Austria and Switzerland. Within a few months we expect similar contact to have been made with Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the Americas and a whole network of organized propaganda activities to have commenced.

In Britain the organized campaign on behalf of the Red Labor Union International is already well begun. A committee has been established, manifestos issued, and the challenge to the British union movement to throw off its reformism and face the revolutionary issues of the international working class have been made in no uncertain fashion.

The Russian trade unions, true to the revolutionary task they have so well begun, have rallied to the International Council with all the enthusiasm that characterized their initial efforts in this direction. They have responded with funds for the strikers of other countries and other material support, and each Industrial Union is sending out its special call to their kindred industrial workers to rally to the cause of the proletarian revolution.

III.

The organization of the propaganda of the Council has been started and manifestos have already been issued to the organized workers of Great Britain, America, Germany, India and France. It has also made arrangements for the publication of brochures on the fol-

lowing subjects: "Industrial Unionism versus Craft Unions"; "History of the Russian Trade Unions for the Last Fifteen Years"; "The Work of the Unions in Russia"; "Extra-Union Organization"; "Tariff Policy in Industry (Wages and Payments in Kind)"; "Why We Apply Methods of Payments by Results" (in Russia); "Trade Unions and the Communist Party"; "Trade Unions and the Soviets"; "Trade Unions and the Red Army and the National Militia"; "Educational Work of the Unions"; "Yellow and Red" (historical tendencies in the union international); "Labor Legislation and the Trade Unions"; "Mutual Relations of the Industrial and Communist Internationals"; "Trade Unions and the International"; "Workers' Control of Industry"; "What the Amsterdam International Has Done for the Working Class"; "Civil Peace and the Unions." Arrangements have also been made for the publication of the "Bulletin" of the International Council, which will be issued fortnightly in four languages.

For the distribution of the literature and the conduct of the propaganda of the Council various other arrangements will have to be made according to the peculiarities of the movement in the various countries. In some countries where the antagonism between the unions are embittered the problem of organizing the propaganda will have to be approached differently from those countries where the movement is more uniform and the antagonisms less keen. The Council is making arrangements for the establishment in each of the countries of at least one central propaganda committee with its members drawn from the revolutionary unions, where possible, the Communist Party. They will not hesitate to form more than one National Committee where these are necessary. These committees are to undertake extensive propaganda throughout the unions by means of the publication of manifestos, the use of labor papers, by conferences of the unions, by controversy in the press, by the organization of speakers, distribution of our literature and general agitation throughout the labor movement. Every branch of the union movement is being circularized and asked to pass the following resolutions:

1) This (branch or committee meeting of (organization)) calls upon the Executive Committee to sever the connection of this organization with the Amsterdam Bureau of Trade Unions.

2) This branch (or committee meeting of (organization)) calls upon the Executive Committee of this organization to immediately affiliate to the Red Labor Union International, to take all necessary steps for the election of delegates to the World Congress of Labor Union Organizations in, called by this body, who shall be instructed to pledge this organization to the revolutionary policy of the Red Labor Union International and to respond to the calls for action that may be issued by its Executive.

In addition to these activities, other organized efforts have been made in various countries. But evidence of the ripeness of the

time for the development of our International comes already from several countries even on the announcement of our formation. From the Federation of Unions at Basle and Geneva comes a declaration welcoming the formation of the Red Labor Union International and their adherence to it. The unions of the Marseillaise in south of France declares also in favor of the Moscow International, and even proposed to break away from the French Confederation of Labor. The French Railways men have also hotly debated the question of Amsterdam versus Moscow and have decided at present in favor of Amsterdam by 155,000-160,000 votes. When it is considered that practically no propaganda has been carried on in those unions on our behalf, this is a surprising result. The first Congress of the Unions of the Near East held at Azerbadjian just recently have declared in favor of the Red Labor Union International, and have appointed a committee to work with our representative in the task of convening a conference of all the unions of Turkey, Anatolia, Armenia, Persia, and Georgia.

The Council has also taken steps for it to be represented at the Bulgarian Trade Union Congress and for its views to be expressed at the All-Bulgarian Conference of Unions which is to be held in Bulgaria at an early date. The Far East has also received the attention of the Council and measures have been undertaken to draw together the unions of Siberia and to bring them to one common plan of organization. Schools are being pioneered for the education of the workers on unionism and for the extension of union propaganda throughout these Eastern Lands.

To facilitate the work of the Council in Russia departments have been connected with the International Council in Petrograd, Archangel and Odessa. It is creating its own international and research department under extreme difficulties arising out of the shortage of labor. Nevertheless, the work has begun and is growing apace. The two months of our existence bear witness not only to the formulation of plans, the actual creation of technical machinery of the immediate propaganda, but a welcome response from the union movement wherever we have gotten into close contact. Even without contact the mere announcement of our formation is not without welcome. The spirit of revolution has indeed penetrated the union movement of the world. The challenge of social revolution has been accepted and the movement of the unions towards revolutionary actions has become a certainty. It is now therefore necessary for the Communist Parties of all countries to enthusiastically carry out the decisions of the Second Congress of the Communist International, to penetrate the union movement, to struggle to its leadership, and mobilize the unions of the world under the banner of the Red Labor Union International.

(Signed)

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