

The Red Horizon in England

The British Trade Union Congress at Scarborough

By Harry Pollitt

THERE can be no further doubt but what the Scarborough congress of the British Trade Union Congress has been the most important and momentous in the history of the British Trade Union Movement. For months prior to the congress there had been a carefully prepared press campaign which indicated how important to the capitalist class this congress was likely to be. The essence of the capitalist comments prior to the congress was that no doubt the "sane and moderate leaders" would again regain their control of congress and would prevent any further deviations to the left such as have characterized the movement during the last twelve months.

Not only have their hopes been dashed to the ground, but the whole proceedings at Scarborough have proved that there is now definitely in existence a growing revolutionary opinion which no intrigues or appeals to constitutional procedure could stifle.

The decisions reached at Scarborough must be judged in the light of the existing situation:—a steady rise in unemployment and an acknowledgement on all sides that this is a period of truce, only the prelude to terrific conflicts ahead, with the government making every preparation for the fight next May, when the findings of the coal commission will only be the screen used for an all-round attack upon the wages and conditions of the whole movement.

In view of this situation, it is all the more regrettable that the congress did not take a decision in favor of the affiliation of the Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement with the Local Trades Councils, and the giving of complete powers to the General Council. The discussions on these questions proved how strong the desire for craft and sectional autonomy still is; despite past experiences, no general agreement on the need for a single centralized leadership capable of mobilizing all the forces of the movement in a common struggle against the exploiters. Yet, underlying the discussion, it was quite clear that the sense of the congress as a whole was favorable to the new council exploring every avenue in order that preparations for the coming fight could be made; and if the left wing in the General Council had boldly come out and asked congress for complete power giving the urgent reasons for this step being taken, it would have been a complete counter-offensive to the right-wing who sought to get a retreat on this question by taking refuge in constitutional procedure and sectional autonomy. The left could have smashed at one blow this superficial view of the situation.

For the next day congress, by an overwhelming majority, went on record in favor of a resolution dealing with

Trade Union aims, the three fundamental points of which were:

1. The necessity of the trade unions definitely organizing in conjunction with the party of the workers for the overthrow of capitalism.
2. A declaration against co-partnership schemes and class-collaboration.
3. The setting up of factory committees as the best means of securing the unity of the workers in every struggle.

This fact alone demonstrates that the majority of the delegates fully realized the new tasks that they are confronted with.

The speeches of Comrades Brown, Tomski and Bramley indicated the importance of Britain to the international working class movement and showed that outside Russia the British movement is the real international leader. This is a position of great responsibility, but it was clearly recognized when the congress unanimously and with a mighty roar of approval endorsed all that the General Council had done during the last twelve months, both in regard to Soviet Russia and secondly in the fight for international trade union unity. The final decision of congress that the new General Council must go ahead in its task of building up an "all-in" inclusive international, is a tremendous step forward.

It can only mean that the new Council will approach the whole question from the point of view of the unification under a single international leadership of all the forces both inside Amsterdam, the Red International of Labor Unions and the trade union centers outside both Internationals. This is definitely a challenge not merely to the reactionaries of Amsterdam, but to the entire Second International whose whole practice and policy has been to isolate the revolutionary workers of all countries, and particularly of Soviet Russia, from the international trade union movement, in order that the Amsterdam international could be used by them as a weapon against the unity of the workers in the struggle against the capitalists.

This new orientation inevitably means an attack upon the whole political ground of the Second International with its reparations policy, its League of Nations identity and its policy of class collaboration, so well shown up by the Social-Democratic parties in their relations with the capitalists in every continental country.

Momentous Decisions.

THE decisions of the congress on the Dawes Plan and imperialism confront the labor party leaders with very pressing and grave problems. When the congress decided to repudiate both the Dawes Plan and the whole basis of imperialism and what it means to the subject nations, it did not do it because it desires to have separation from the Labor Party, or in order to pursue new policies as distinct from the Labor Party, but because of the disgust of the workers with the whole politics of MacDonaldism, and the

desire and determination to give an entirely new outlook to the whole of the foreign policy of the Labor Party.

The attempt to use these decisions as indicating a split between the Trade Union Congress and the Labor Party is only a misrepresentation of the position. The strength and basis of the Labor Party are the trade unions. There is now a growing recognition in the unions that it is not enough to grumble and grouse at the policy pursued by Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Thomas and then leave them to carry on as usual. The experience of the labor government has made the unions realize that they must fight on these issues and then force the leaders to carry out the policy that has been decided upon by the whole movement, and where this is not done it simply means that such leaders must be swept aside.

The decisions registered at Scarborough in relation to China and the sending of delegations to India, Egypt, etc., means the recognition of our responsibilities to all colonial workers. The post-war period has demonstrated the complete break-down of the monopoly of British capitalism, and with the intensification of imperialist policy more and more are the workers of this country finding that the slave conditions of the colonial workers are the chief weapons responsible for the worsening of conditions here at home. For this reason, congress has decided that an inquiry shall be made into the conditions of our colonial comrades. This in itself is a tremendous step forward, when one considers the past insularity and dissolution of the British Movement.

These decisions mean that the new General Council has now positive tasks to carry out in regard to colonial work. They must insist upon the complete freedom of the working class for economic and political organization in every subject country. Delegations of inquiry and also organizers must be sent out to the various countries to help in the task of building up an effective working class movement. Especially should the General Council call upon its affiliated organizations who from time to time have members going out to such countries as India, Egypt, China and the Crown Colonies, to insist that such members do not go out to these countries carrying with them the same point of view as the representatives of the bourgeoisie, but that their special position in the various factories and undertakings where they go to work should be used by such members for the purposes of assisting and aiding their colonial comrades to build up fighting organizations.

The Weak Side.

THE above indicate the positive results of the Scarborough Congress, but of course it had its weak side, and in this connection three chief weaknesses were as follows:

1. The failure of congress to give an organized lead in regard to fighting the government on unemployment.
2. Its failure to deal with the seamen's strike. This failure is recognized on all hands as constituting a break in the united front of the unions against any further wage reductions. The absence of support to the strikers from the T. U. C. simply means an encouragement to the capitalist in other industries.
3. The reluctance of the left wing of the General Council to come out openly and fight the right wing on

every possible occasion. There could be no doubt that the right wing leaders, as represented by Messrs. Thomas, Clynes and Cramp, had very effectively marshalled their forces and were organized to take up the battle whenever an opportunity presented itself. They could have been completely crushed from the first day of congress to the last if the left wing on the Council had seized its opportunity, for one had only to sit in congress and to sense the feeling amongst the delegates to realize that there was a new feeling permeating the whole congress which only wanted to be well organized.

Two incidents during the chairman's speech support the above statement. One was where he said "Let the employers who think the organized working class can be driven still further back, take warning from this. This movement of ours has learned many lessons during these years of reaction engineered by the employers, and one of the lessons is that a militant and progressive policy consistently and steadily pursued is the only policy that will unite, consolidate and inspire our rank and file." And again when he said "Many of our good comrades who in the days gone by taught us to believe there was no remedy other than the abolition of capitalism seem afraid now that the system is collapsing and appeal for a united effort to patch up the system with the aid of the present possessing class." The roar of approval that greeted these sentiments indicated the rising temper of the workers.

British Labor Being Revolutionized.

TO sum up, it is clear that experience and the whole economic situation are slowly revolutionizing the masses of this country and that despite every form of intrigue and appeal to constitutional fetishism the right wing leaders are unable to stifle this revolutionary growth. There is now the greatest opportunity in our history for those leaders claiming to be left wingers to come out boldly and take a prominent place in the revolutionary movement—they must do this, or they too will be forced to take up a position no different from that of the right wing. For the Scarborough Congress has demonstrated as clear as daylight that the revolutionary workers now organized under the leadership of the National Minority Movement are a force that can no longer be stemmed by intrigue or slander; they constitute the only organized opposition working within the existing union movement and their first successes at Scarborough are merely the prelude to greater victories later on.

FROM hill-swooping farmland

A girl homeward musingly hums

To the tune and the time of the wind

A chorus of soldiers in Red.

Rumbling from afar

Proletarian drums

Beat out the past, the long-dead,

O. Re.n.