

The International Council of Trade and Industrial Unions

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By A. Losovsky

(S. A. DRIDZO.)



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The international organization of the trade union movement is proceeding much less quickly than the international organization of the Communist Party. It is already a year and a half since the foundations of the Third Communist International were laid and the centre for revolutionary activity for all Communists and revolutionary class elements in the world labor movement was created, whereas the trade unions have remained right up to the last moment unorganized in a single international organization. More than that, just at the moment when the Second International has become a corpse from which the most opportunist parties are fleeing, and when its most ardent supporters are compelled to admit that it is completely bankrupt, an international federation of trade unions is being formed at the head of which stand those who were the most active participators in the Second International and who supported the war policy of their Governments.

The trade union movement is lagging behind the Communist movement. The trade unions are the army, the closely massed columns of the proletariat, while the Communist Party is the advance guard, the pioneer fighting detachments of the working class. The later international organization of the trade unions means that the connection between the advance guard and the army is broken. This is a sad, but undoubted fact in all countries in Europe and America. This break between the advance guard and the army is explained by the slow development of the social revolution, the continued domination of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the painful form which the class struggle is assuming in Western Europe and America. A sharp struggle is proceeding within the labor organizations, part of which stand solidly for the old capitalist system and serve as a defence of bourgeois dictatorship.

This backwardness and reaction of many trade unions in

capitalist countries found their expression in the formation of an international centre which is but a rather bad edition of the Second International, and whose function is to realize on an international scale that co-operation of classes that was so "successfully" realized during the war.

What is the reason of the backwardness of the international proletarian movement? What forms of international organization existed previously among the trade unions? What has been done and what should have been done to fight against the international of strikebreakers, as the Amsterdam Federation of Trade Unions is, and what should be the relations between the newly established Third Communist International and the international organization of trade unions? These are the questions we have to solve.

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Trade Unions arose as organs of the working class to counterbalance the growing exploitation. In its early form the trade union was a union of workers in a certain craft, having for its object to assist its members employed in a definite category of labor. As the capitalist system grew and developed so the form of organization of the trade union changed also, and with that the scope and character of its work also changed. It is necessary to observe, however, that the form of organization of the trade unions *always lagged behind the form of organization of capitalism* which during the last nine years has developed such powerful organizations, like trusts and syndicates, the competition among which, as is known, led to the world war.

While capitalism in the course of its development assumed new forms of organization which facilitated it in exploiting labor and subjecting to itself the apparatus of the State, the trade unions lagged behind like a shadow, in many countries preserving the old forms of organization, with all their close corporative character, narrowness and limitations. In counteracting the increasing exploitation, in striving to raise the standard of living, to improve the conditions of labor, and

secure the principle of collective agreements the trade unions always acted on the basis of capitalist relations, and as the unions grew and became internally consolidated the idea of an unbreakable tie between the trade unions and the existing order of things became stronger. The older the trade union movement became and capitalism the more powerful the more clearly and definitely did the idea become of the necessity for the existence of capitalism and the co-operation of classes as a condition for the improvement of the standard of living of the workers.

The capitalists of England, America and Germany, thanks to their strength and their dominant position in the world market were able to make frequent concessions to the workers and were able to imbue them with the firm conviction of the stability of the capitalist system. The national greatness of the country, and particularly the economic importance of industry in the world economy, influenced the minds of the workers and subjected their class interests to the badly understood interests of the moment.

It would be a mistake to believe that the bourgeoisie kept the workers enslaved only by material necessity; the modern bourgeois state has created a tremendous arsenal for the enslavement of the working class. The schools, science, the church, religion, literature, philosophy created by capitalist society, all represent weapons for the perversion of the minds of the workers. One must confess that the spiritual weapon is much more powerful than those methods which a bourgeois government adopts to subject the will of the revolting workers. This spiritual dependence of the workers on bourgeois ideology was in greatest evidence during the war when the trade unions became not only a material support of war policy, but developed a complete theory of class co-operation, the essence of which was that the workers are interested in preserving the bourgeois State and the capitalist system, and should subject their interests to the interests of the whole; i. e., the bourgeoisie.

The history of the trade union movement during the war is the history of the conversion of the trade unions into sub-

subsidiary organs of the bourgeois State, an apparatus of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Just as during the imperialist war the bourgeoisie split up into two hostile coalitions each fighting for world hegemony, so did the trade unions in their respective groups split into two hostile camps, not because they had different points of view on principle, but because they based all their theory and practice on the principle of national defence and on the support of their own capitalism at the expense of the other.

The war disclosed the extraordinary degree to which the trade unions were dependent upon bourgeois ideology. The exclusive domination of national motive in the trade union movement is the fundamental reason for the collapse of those international connections that had been made previous to the war.

There were forms of international connection in the Trade Union movement previous to the war. The majority of trade unions participated in the international socialist congresses, thus demonstrating their association with the socialist movement and the international solidarity of trade unionism of the various countries. This connection with the socialist movement, however, was purely formal, for the trade unions on the eve of the war were opportunist and stood on the right wing of the socialist movement. The purely formal connection of the trade union movement with social democracy was evident from the fact that although the trade unions in Germany were regarded as social democratic they nevertheless conducted a definite policy often in opposition to that of the social democrats.

This purely formal connection between the international trade union movement and the International Bureau certainly could not satisfy the demands for unity among the trade unions of the various countries and so at the beginning of the 20th century we saw the rise of the international secretariat whose function it was to inform the workers of various countries on the labor movement in other countries. The international

secretariat at the head of which was Legien was not an international organization in the full sense of the word. Organization presupposes unity of action and power to act, while the Secretariat of Trade Unions was engaged in nothing else but issuing literature and did not even dream of any international action. It was a centre which was not responsible to its constituents each of whom maintained their independent existence. On the eve of the war the trade union movement embraced nearly 10,000,000 workers divided into loosely connected territorial organizations whose work was confined chiefly to its own national questions. Its internationalism was an abstract principle rather than a guide in every-day policy. The work of the international secretariat during the many years of its existence prior to the war better than anything else shows its bankrupt character. For the thirteen years of its existence the secretariat did nothing more than publish several reports and a few pamphlets. It was more like a post office or an international inquiry bureau than the international centre of the working class movement.

The trade unions were inter-connected not only through their national centres. At the end of the 19th century various international unions arose whose defects, however, lay in their being craft unions pursuing narrow, limited aims. The international unions existing on the eve of the war,—metal workers, miners, textile workers, transport workers, painters, cap-makers, woodworkers, builders, tailors and bootmakers, etc.,—were all constructed on the principle of information bureaux. The national interests stood above international interests, and these international organizations were the germs of international organizations rather than active international fighting centres of their respective category of labor. During the many years of existence of some tens of international unions, it is impossible to recall a single international campaign, not a single example of international action. It is true that there were attempts at international boycott, collection of money for workers on strike in other countries, agreements on conditions of labor, agreements on the transference of membership from one country to another, and a number of other examples of

international solidarity, but one has to confess that the outstanding feature of the pre-war trade union movement was that international solidarity was but in its embryonic stage. The preponderance of national questions over international questions, and the subordination of class interests of the movement is brilliantly illustrated by the war.

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The war broke all the three threads that connected the trade union movement of the various countries. Simultaneously with the collapse of the Second International and its conversion into a tool of the Entente, the trade unions formed diplomatic coalitions,—Allied and Central-European—according to the particular government they existed under. The formal advantage lay with the Central European coalition, for the reason that the International Secretariat was in Germany, and Legien, following the example of Vandervelde, strove to use the name of the international secretariat for purposes having nothing in common with international solidarity. Just as Vandervelde refused to surrender the president's hammer, and used his title of President of the International Bureau for sanctifying the lofty war aims of the Entente, so did Legien set the international into motion in defence of the "just and sacred" war of his government.

The International Secretariat, together with the International Bureau, ceased to exist with the commencement of war operations. The leaders of the trade union movement, Legien, Huber, Jouhaux, Appleton and Gompers, were the civil generals whose task it was to carry out the moral mobilization of the masses. In justice to these gentlemen one must admit that they carried out their instructions brilliantly. The trade unions, these mass organizations of the working class, became the main bulwark of the bourgeois State, and its support in its struggle, not only against the external but also against its internal enemies.

The activity of the leaders of the trade union movement in this direction consisted in discrediting the leaders of the enemy countries by accusing them of being the servants of their governments, and on the other hand denouncing every anti-government action of their workers as a "crime." The breakup of the revolutionary movement, and implanting and fostering chauvinistic instincts in the masses brilliantly carried out by them. The bourgeoisie could not have dreamed of better executioners of their desires.

The Allied trade union leaders made an attempt to set up a trade union international, for which a conference of Allied trade unions was called in Leeds in 1916. The task of this conference was to draw up a programme of social legislation, condemn the trade union movement of the Central Empires, and to set up its own international secretariat of trade unions. Of these tasks the conference carried out only one—it made a demonstration against the criminal association of the German and Austrian trade unions with their governments. The irony of the story lay in the fact that those who condemned the association of workers' organizations with their governments were just those who themselves led the workers in their own countries into shameful slavery of the bourgeoisie.

The individual international trade union organizations by no means cut a prettier figure. They split up according to the coalition on whose territory the centre of their organization was situated. Thus the International Bureaux of Textile Workers and Miners being situated in England, maintained the policy of the Allies; while the International Bureaux of Metal Workers and Builders having their centres in Germany adopted the policy of the Central Empires. The peculiar feature of the whole period of the crises in the international trade union movement is the almost complete disappearance of the old groupings and tendencies. Former revolutionary syndicalists, pure and simple trade unionists, "new-patented" trade unionists, supporters and opponents of socialism all, with few exceptions, became patriots of their fatherland and politically resembled each other like peas in a pod. Betrayal of the interests

