

A NEW WORLD TRADE UNION FEDERATION IS BORN

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER



THE WORLD TRADE CONFERENCE, held in London, beginning February 6, was an epoch-marking success. It assembled 250 delegates from 40 countries, representing 60,000,000 workers, the great majority of the world's trade unionists, established programmatic unity among them, and laid the basis for a new world federation of labor. Thus this historic conference took a tremendous stride toward achieving the international unity that the most progressive workers of all countries have longed and worked for over the decades. The London Conference marks 1945 as an historic year in the development of the world's working class.

The holding of the London Conference constituted a great victory for the progressive masses of the trade union world who swept aside all conservative and bureaucratic opposition. When Hitler began the present war this should have been a decisive signal for the trade unions of all countries to unite in order to do their maximum part in defeating the fascist threat to world freedom. Unfortunately, however, conservative and reactionary forces in the world

labor movement, especially hard-boiled Continental Social-Democrats and the top leaders of the A. F. of L., stood in the way of such action. As for the International Federation of Trade Unions and the Second International, both of which are dominated by conservative Social-Democrats, they remained quite inert and made no response whatever to the great tasks imposed upon them by the war. Both showed themselves to be politically bankrupt. Consequently, the movement for world trade union unity, which has just climaxed in London, came from outside their official leadership. Many British trade unions, the Soviet trade unions, the C.I.O., and other progressive labor organizations in many countries, as long as three and one-half years ago, began to call for world trade union unity on a new basis. The first big step in this direction was the formation of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee in the fall of 1941. A determined attempt was also made to get the A. F. of L. to affiliate to this committee, but without success. Instead, the A. F. of L. leaders set up the abortive Anglo-American

Trade Union Committee in January, 1943, as a substitute for a real organization.

The demand of the workers for world unity persisted, however, and in November, 1943, the General Council of the British Trades Union Congress issued invitations to organized labor in all the democratic, peace-loving nations to come together in London to unite their forces. The A. F. of L. leaders, backed by conservative forces in British labor, did their best to wreck the proposed London Conference. They denounced it as a Communist "plot," and refused to send delegates. Also, even up to the holding of the Conference, in fact deep into its sessions, Sir Walter Citrine, head of the British labor movement, obviously working in co-operation with the A. F. of L. leaders, did his best to sidetrack or postpone the formation of the proposed new world labor federation. All this opposition was in vain, however, in the face of the irresistible mass demand, and eventually Citrine and the other go-slowers had to retreat. The London Conference adopted unanimously Sidney Hillman's motion, on behalf of the C.I.O. delegation, for the establishment of a new world organization.

Although the adopted resolution, in deference to those conservative British trade union leaders who feared an open break with the A. F. of L., read that the new world labor federation should be formed "at the earliest practicable date," actually the

movement took decisive steps for immediate consolidation. First, the Conference adopted a thorough-going program, which we shall discuss further on. Secondly, it took positive organizational steps, including the establishment of a fully representative World Trade Union Conference Committee of 45; laid plans to draft a constitution for the new body; authorized the setting up of a headquarters in Paris; provided an administrative committee of 13 to meet in Washington on April 10, and arranged to reconvene the World Conference in September at Paris, to take final action on founding the new world federation. Thirdly, the Conference authorized the standing committee to select such sub-committees as might be necessary to carry on political activity in the name of the new movement, especially the securing of labor representatives in the United Nations Conference at San Francisco on April 25, and in such other peace conferences as may take place, so that world labor may place its program before these bodies. All of which activities go to show that the new world movement launched at London is already in swing. From now on it will be a case of consolidating the new movement and of expanding its activities. Nor will the A. F. of L. leaders, the Greens, Wolls, Hutchisons, Meaney, and Dubinskys, and their reactionary Social-Democratic allies in Europe, be able to block the forward march of world labor.

THE NEW MOVEMENT'S PROGRAM

The formation of the new world federation of labor is fundamental to the realization of the great world program laid down at the conferences of Moscow, Teheran, Bretton Woods, Dumbarton Oaks, and Yalta. Although the prospects for victory in the war against Germany and Japan are now certain, there still remain a host of tremendously difficult problems ahead. The eradication of fascism from the world, the establishment of an effective post-war peace organization, and the economic rehabilitation of the war-ravaged world, constitute a complex of problems far more difficult of solution than any mankind has faced in all its long and stormy history. In the face of the opposition of powerful reactionary forces, especially in the United States, their solution will require the fullest support from a solidly organized world labor movement.

The policy makers at the London trade union conference worked with the realization of the tremendous tasks lying ahead of the peoples of the world. Their final program constituted, not merely a list of economic demands (although the workers' special interests were very much attended to), but a broad political program to cope with the gigantic military, economic, political and social problems of this period. One of the most significant features of the

London trade union conference was that, while the Second International (which claims to represent the world's workers) was soundly asleep (at it had slept all through the war), the great trade unions of the world grasped the initiative and worked out the political program for the workers of the world. This great fact is one more indication of the decay of reactionary Social-Democracy.

The program adopted at London dovetails with the general policies of the United Nations, with special emphasis upon the workers' demands. This is as it must be, because the 60,000,000 trade unionists represented at London constitute the very backbone of the United Nations in general. The Manifesto issued upon the conclusion of the Conference summed up its program in broad terms as follows:

Our deliberations in the World Conference enable us to declare, with emphasis, and without reservations, that the Trade Union Movement of the world is resolved to work with all like-minded people to achieve a complete and uncompromising victory over the Fascist Powers that sought to encompass the destruction of freedom and democracy; to establish a stable and enduring peace; and to promote in the economic sphere, the international collaboration which will permit the rich resources of the earth to be utilized for the benefit of all its peoples, providing full employment, rising standards of life, and social security to the men and women of all nations.

In order to achieve these great goals, the Conference adopted many specific proposals, including: a rousing support of the decisions of the Crimean Conference, as well as endorsement of the Atlantic Charter and the decisions of the conferences of Moscow, Teheran, Bretton Woods, and Dumbarton Oaks. The London meeting declared itself for unrelenting war until the unconditional surrender of the enemy is achieved, and the unions pledged themselves to furnish limitless supplies of war materials to this end. The gathering demanded the extermination of Nazism, the rigorous punishment of war criminals, and the repayment of reparations in kind by Germany. It also named the Mikado among those responsible for Japan's war crimes and demanded the eventual establishment of a Japanese democratic regime. The Conference demanded, too, that recognition be withdrawn from such fascist countries as Argentina and Franco-Spain. It further called for the abolition of the colonial system and insisted upon systematic industrialization of backward and war-devastated countries. The Conference demanded the right of trade union organization for the workers in all countries, and the right to "participate in the shaping and the direction of the economic policies of their respective countries." Together with a program of advanced social legislation for the various lands, including a universal 40-hour maximum work week, the Conference submitted a

series of demands for the education, technical training and health protection of veterans returning from the war.

Altogether, the policies adopted were of a progressive character, fitted to the big problems now confronting humanity. They will serve effectively, not only as an inspiration, but also as a practical guide for the scores of millions of workers who have turned their eyes to the London Conference for leadership.

THE HIGH UNITY LEVEL

A fundamental feature of the Conference was the altogether higher plane of unity upon which it operated as compared with the old International Federation of Trade Unions. The London Conference gave a broad expression of its unity in its Manifesto, issued at the conclusion of the deliberations, the declaration proposed that the new world labor federation should be composed of "all the trade unions of free countries on a basis of equality, regardless of race, creed or political faith, excluding none and relegating none to a secondary place."

The political program adopted is in harmony with this basic statement of labor unity. As we have seen, this program is composed of broad anti-fascist, progressive proposals, capable of uniting the widest ranks of the workers. In this general connection, it is interesting to note that the Conference, although made up overwhelmingly of workers with Socialist

and Communist convictions, did not concern itself with the more distant objectives of Socialism, or even of extensive nationalization of industry, but dealt only with those questions of the most immediate and burning importance that could unite the very broadest ranks of the toiling masses in all lands.

In line with this unifying political program, the Conference displayed a powerful tendency to bridge the long-standing gulf between "Rights" and "Lefts" in the trade unions, as well as to draw the so-called "Christian" unions into the general stream of world labor. At London, there were Socialist, Communist, Progressive and "Christian" trade union leaders working together harmoniously. During the whole period between the two world wars, great schisms of incalculable harm to the workers' cause, existed among these groups in the trade unions in all capitalist countries. As for the leaders of the old I.F.T.U., they did nothing to heal these breaches, but, on the contrary, by their narrow, factional, conservative Social-Democratic policies, deepened and widened them. The decisions of the London Conference, of course, did not put an end to these rifts, but they went far in that direction—a matter of gigantic importance to the workers of the world.

Organizationally, also, the Conference struck out boldly upon a broad unity line. Representative of unions from two score countries, it was truly

a global gathering, including the great unions of the big capitalist democracies and the U.S.S.R., with the organizations from Latin America, China, India and other colonial and semi-colonial lands also playing a vital role. The one important hold-out was the A. F. of L. This global representation gave the unity pattern for the new world labor federation that will result from the London Conference. This is a tremendous advance over the I.F.T.U., which, at best, was hardly more than a federation of workers in West European countries, and which never paid real attention to the workers in the colonial and semi-colonial lands. The broad unity character of the new world labor federation was re-emphasized by the fact that the London Conference also discarded the constitutional provision of the I.F.T.U., which admitted only one labor center from each country and thereby excluded many important and progressive unions, among them the American C.I.O. and Railroad Brotherhoods.

The strong unity trend was further manifested by the demands formulated for labor representation at the United Nations' conferences. The Manifesto declared:

... the world trade union movement will make its claim to a share in determining all questions of the peace and post-war settlements, and for representation at the Peace Conference and all international commissions and agencies concerned with the peace settlement in

all its phases, beginning with the San Francisco Conference in April.

Upon the complaint of Sidney Hillman and other delegates that the labor movement had not been represented at such vital conferences as Bretton Woods, Dumbarton Oaks, the Chicago Civil Aviation meeting, etc., the Conference resolved that this weakness should be overcome in the future. The trade unions of the United States would do well to follow up the sense of this resolution for strengthening labor's representation in the leading governmental bodies, in the interests of national unity.

Behind the Conference's insistence upon labor's right to representation at the big security and peace conferences, was the conception that organized labor is a vital part of the national and international unity of the peoples fighting to destroy fascism and that, if the workers are to exert their full influence, they must have representation all along the line. It was a graphic demonstration of the fact that in these years the great proletarian slogan of "Workers of the World, Unite!" dovetails with the United Nations' principle of peoples of the world, unite.

The unity trends so strongly in evidence at the London Conference will have profound repercussions in the various countries in strengthening both labor unity and national unity. This will be so all the more, because the new world federation of

labor will have far greater prestige and discipline than did the old formless, decentralized, and discredited I.F.T.U. Its decisions, therefore, will not remain "mere scraps of paper," as was so often the case with the I.F.T.U., but, with due regard to the principles of autonomy for each organization, will have living force among all the affiliated unions. This is one of the major reasons why it is so important that the A. F. of L. become part of this vital new world organization.

THE A. F. OF L. AND THE LONDON CONFERENCE

The delegation of the C.I.O. played a vital and constructive role in the Conference. In supporting the formation of the new world federation of labor; in helping develop the program of the Conference; in backing up all the progressive, unity tendencies of the gathering, the C.I.O. delegation represented the true spirit of the great, new American labor movement. The C.I.O. delegates, in fact, spoke almost as much for the A. F. of L. masses as they did for their own organization. The American trade union movement as a whole may well be proud of the way the C.I.O. upheld its best interests and traditions.

With the A. F. of L., however, it was quite a different story. The most serious threat to the developing world solidarity of labor as expressed in London, is the obstructionist stand taken by the top leaders of that

organization. Although cordially invited and urged to attend the London Conference, the A. F. of L. stubbornly refused to do so. Moreover, its spokesmen, before, during, and after the Conference, delivered broadsides against it. They served notice that the A. F. of L. intends to have nothing to do with the new world labor federation, except to fight it. William Green, Matthew Woll, William L. Hutcheson, George Meaney, David Dubinsky and other reactionaries have suddenly blossomed forth as ardent defenders of the near-defunct I.F.T.U. and they are determined, if they can, to use that organization to sabotage and disrupt the new-found solidarity of world organized labor.

The arguments being used by the reactionary elements among the A. F. of L. leaders to justify their obstructionist, isolationist, dog-in-the-manger position are an insult to the intelligence of the American workers. Mr. Green has a brazen disregard for the truth when he calls the new world labor organization "a dual, rival, international labor movement." For it is absurd to designate this new, broad, vital movement of the workers, embracing as it does three score millions of workers, as in any sense either "dual," or "rival" to the narrow, half-dead, I.F.T.U., which has long since defaulted any right it ever had to speak in the name of the world's trade unionists. That the new movement is not "dual" was dramatized by the fact that the two

top leaders of the I.F.T.U., Citrine and Schevenels, its President and Secretary, respectively, participated in the London Conference and are both elected members of its World Trade Union Conference Committee. Louis Stark, a *New York Times* reporter, friend of the Green clique, signalized the bankruptcy of the I.F.T.U.: "The I.F.T.U. has lived a moribund existence since the war began. . . . So it could not speak for world labor." (*Dispatch of February 15, 1945.*)

The Soviet labor organizations are bona fide trade unions working under the special conditions of a Socialist State. Like the unions in other lands, they have the function of protecting the interests of the workers, except that in this respect their influence is incomparably greater than that of the trade unions in any other country. Also, their specific tasks differ considerably. Thus, the Soviet trade unions have full charge of the vast Soviet social insurance system and they also have the complete enforcement of labor laws. Their voices are very powerful in Government and industrial spheres. They are not State organs, however, as scores of impartial observers have pointed out, and as unions all over the world, except the A. F. of L., recognize. This Mr. Green knows quite well. The Soviet trade unions are independent organizations, with a voluntary membership, financing themselves out of their dues collections, electing their own officials, and adopting such organizational forms as they see fit.

Naturally, however, living in a Socialist society where the means of production are owned by the workers, and where there is a workers' and farmers' government, the relation of the workers to industry, agriculture, and their management, are different from those prevailing in other countries. As regards strikes, the Soviet trade unions have never had need to tie up the industries of their country to advance the workers' cause; for the welfare of the toiling masses is the central purpose of the Soviet government. And the capitalists, against whom the unions strike in capitalist countries, have long since been only a thing of the past in the U.S.S.R.

The real reason, of course, for the antagonistic stand of the A. F. of L. leaders toward the London Conference and the great unity movement it has set afoot is not because it is "a rival, dual movement" or because "the Soviet trade unions are not genuine labor organizations." These are only spurious excuses. The basic cause for the A. F. of L. Executive Council's stand is that the well-organized minority clique which now controls the Federation—Green, Woll, Hutcheson, Meaney, and Company—are tied up with the reactionary, anti-Roosevelt sections of the American bourgeoisie, those forces which are seeking to establish American imperialist world domination. The A. F. of L. leaders reflect the view of these capitalists in their obstructionist tactics regarding the world solidarity

of the workers and the nations against fascism. The dominant core of the Council leadership is Republican, and its views run along pretty much the same channels as those of Messrs. Dewey, Vandenberg, and Hoover. It is no accident that even as we find these militantly imperialist Republicans sabotaging the decisions of Moscow, Teheran, Bretton Woods, Dumbarton Oaks, and Yalta, so also do we find the Republican-dominated A. F. of L. Executive Council opposing the vitally important decisions of the World Trade Union Conference.

THE A. F. OF L. MUST JOIN THE WORLD FEDERATION

The A. F. of L. leading clique, who are sabotaging world labor unity in the name of the American working class, will eventually be defeated and forced to change their policy. The world-scale unity trend, both in the labor movement and in the United Nations, is running strongly against them and will eventually overwhelm them. A big blow suffered by them in the London Conference was the stand taken by the British union leaders in favor of the new world labor federation; for Green and Company had depended upon these conservative elements to stand with them to block the proposed organization.

Nevertheless, the A. F. of L. leaders may do considerable harm with their reactionary activities. At this moment of history there is a supreme

need for the international unity of organized labor. Consequently, if Woll and his friends are able, through their pretense of supporting the I.F.T.U., to create even a temporary disruption in the ranks of the world trade union movement, this can become a real danger to the whole Teheran-Crimean program. In taking its present divisive stand, the A. F. of L. is issuing a standing invitation to obstructionist Social-Democratic, Trotskyite, and other reactionary elements all over the world for struggle against the present great advance of the workers and the success of the United Nations.

The position taken by the dominating Woll-Green-Hutcheson group against the new world labor federation does not represent either the interests or the will of the A. F. of L. membership. There can be no doubt but that if the members had a chance to express themselves on the issue, an overwhelming majority would vote to join the great unity movement launched in London, even as the unions of the CIO have done. The same spirit also prevails among the lesser officialdom of the Federation unions. Even in the Council itself there are opponents to the Woll-Hutcheson clique; but they are not well organized and they lack leadership. How matters stand in this respect of official sentiment was illustrated by a letter written by L. P. Lindelof, President of the Brotherhood of Painters, Paperhanglers and Decorators, made public on February 20

by C. D. Ward, who went to London as an observer delegate from the Ohio State Council of Painters. Said Mr. Lindelof, regarding the situation existing at the recent A. F. of L. convention:

I know that, had President Green spoken just briefly in favor of delegating a representative or an observer to the London United Nations Labor Conference, the delegates would have voted practically unanimously in favor of it.

Obviously, it is the task and duty of the members and progressive leaders of the A. F. of L. to compel the Executive Council to change its reactionary line and to affiliate the A. F. of L. to the new world federation. The reactionary clique controlling the Council must not be allowed to isolate the A. F. of L. even temporarily from this great movement. Local unions, city councils, State federations and international unions should speak out on the matter; mass meetings should be held, endorsing the decisions of the London Conference and demanding that the A. F. of L. take its proper place in the ranks of progressive world labor. The Executive Council leadership is in an impossible situation, and if the progressive forces in the unions, co-operating with the C.I.O. and Railroad Brotherhood organizations, are active on the question, the Council will soon be compelled to abandon its position and to send delegates to the developing world movement.

The reactionary activities of the

A. F. of L. top leadership regarding international trade union unity emphasize afresh the danger presented by the Woll-Hutcheson-Meaney crowd (soon apparently to be reinforced by John L. Lewis) who are now dictating the policies of the A. F. of L. It points up the need for liquidating their control. For many years past the domination of this clique has been a curse to the A. F. of L. membership. It prevented for years the organization of the basic industries and it blocked the passage of needed social insurance legislation; it was also responsible for splitting the labor movement into A. F. of L.-C.I.O. sections. And during the recent national elections there can be no doubt but that the Executive Council, dominated by the reactionary Republican Woll-Hutcheson elements, with the connivance or surrender of William Green, tried to defeat Roosevelt and to elect Dewey. Had they succeeded in this plot, it would have constituted a disaster, not only to our country, but to the whole democratic world. This disaster was prevented only by the fact that the great mass of A. F. of L.

members, disregarding the line of the Executive Council, came out actively, together with the C.I.O. workers, with the railroad men, and with the coal miners, in defiance of Lewis, for Roosevelt. The reactionary minority clique in the A. F. of L. Executive Council, which has long injured the American labor movement, is now becoming a menace to world progress and it must be taken seriously in hand by the progressive forces in the A. F. of L.

The interests of organized labor in this country, the welfare of the whole American people, require imperatively that the A. F. of L. become part of the great new world federation of labor. The Greens, Wolls, Hutchesons, Meanneys, Lewises and Dubinskys must be pushed aside by the workers and the progressive-minded leaders in the A. F. of L. When the new world movement assembles again in September finally to consolidate the trade union international, there must be present a full delegation from all sections of American organized labor—A. F. of L., C.I.O., Railroad Brotherhoods and coal miners.

