

The Struggle for International T.U. Unity

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THE agreement which has been arrived at between the representatives of the Russian and the British Unions, will, as ratified by the General Council of the British Trades Union Congress, force everyone in the European Trade Union Movement to take up a definite position in regard to international unity. Hitherto the only opposition to international trade union unity has come from the Social-Democratic bureaucrats of the Continental trade unions.

The British right-wing has been silent on this question, though it has been working overtime for the employers in its advocacy of industrial peace at any price. But from now onwards, it will have to make its position more definite. Will it support the Continental bureaucrats in their present stupid attitude, or will it advocate a more flexible policy which, because of its flexibility will be more dangerous to the cause of international trade union unity?

So far as the right-wing of Amsterdam is concerned, it has compromised itself not only in the anti-unity interpretation which it has given to the resolution passed at the last meeting of the Amsterdam International, but in the conspiracy of silence which it has adopted towards the report of the British Trade Union delegation to Russia. While the Amsterdam press has always been prepared to print the vilest anti-Soviet propaganda it has not yet taken any definite notice of the report of some of its most prominent leaders, who formed part of the British delegation to Russia.

But the attack of the Amsterdam reactionaries on the Anglo-Russian Agreement is not likely to meet with any measure of success. On the contrary, it can only continue the process of self-exposure on the part of those leaders. Nor is the capitalist attack upon those trade union leaders who are standing for unity likely to be any more successful. The claim of the capitalist press that the British trade union leaders are allowing themselves to be hypnotised and "Bolshevised" by the "demonically"-diplomatic Russians is too absurd for words. The Bolshevisation of the British trade union movement will take some time yet. Certainly it will not be accomplished with the present leaders. It will take the activities of a strong Communist Party amongst the trade union workers of this country to accomplish that.

If our capitalist press was not hopelessly politically prejudiced it would realise that what is driving the British trade union leaders to take a great interest in the question of international trade union unity and organisation is precisely that tremendous dependence of Great Britain upon the international situation which the capitalist press in other cases is so fond of emphasising. All the main industries of Britain which manufacture for the world market are at the present moment hopelessly depressed. The workers in those industries living on starvation wages are faced with the fact that the wage of the workers competing with them in foreign countries are lower still.

It is the hard pressure of these facts which is forcing a section of the British trade union leadership to recognise that, unless international unity can be achieved, and this international competition severely checked, there is very little hope for the working class of Great Britain.

SABOTEURS AT WORK.

The British right-wing are not so stupid as to be taken in by the foolish prattle that the union leaders who have come to an agreement with the Russians have been Bolshevised. Even so, its opposition will be none the less strong. It will attack the attempt to realise trade union unity in a more subtle fashion. Already it has started by admitting the need for trade union unity, but it emphasises the fact that our most important competitor in the international market is Germany, and that, therefore, while conversations with the Russians are important, the formation of an alliance between the German and British unions is more important still. *In other words, the tactic of the right-wing is to endeavour to secure an Anglo-German alliance as a counter-weight to an Anglo-Russian Alliance.* An endeavour is being made to shift the question on to the plane of whether an Anglo-Russian or an Anglo-German trade union understanding is of greater urgency at the present moment.

The working class of Britain will be well advised to be on its guard against such sophistry. The Anglo-Russian trade union understanding has never been urged as an end in itself. It is but a step to the realisation of international unity. On the other hand, an Anglo-German understanding might in the present circumstances, be a barrier to the realisation of that unity, and would, therefore, prolong the misery of the British and German workers. The right-wing must be told quite clearly that while the workers in this country have no objection to helping the German workers to recover their lost ground by a straight fight against the capitalists,

that no British worker is prepared to help the German unions in a struggle against international trade union unity.

The "Right" will argue that we have long been associated with the Continental unions, and that we should not risk the possibility of a break with them in order to realise a closer understanding with the Russians, and that, therefore, while continuing our conversations with the Russians, we should proceed slowly and wait until the German and Continental unions are prepared to come all the way with the British unions before we make any definite movement towards international unity.

To our minds this is a dangerous position, and will lead to the prolongation of disunity. The Continental unions which are at present opposing the formation of a united trade union international are by no means unanimous. Within the ranks of these unions there are many workers who desire to see the split in the unions healed at the earliest possible moment. If the British Trades Union Congress General Council presses boldly ahead for the realisation of this unity it would give a tremendous stimulus to those workers inside the Amsterdam unions who are desirous of unity, and encourage them to make their leaders fight for it.

There is another reason why an Anglo-German anti-unity bloc would at the present moment be very dangerous indeed. The declaration of principles by the British and Russian Trade Union Conference held in London recently, contains a very grave warning as to the possibility of war in the near future, and the urgent need for International Unity in order to prevent it. Lest anyone reading these lines is inclined to minimise this very grave danger, let me direct attention to the most obvious preparations for war in the suggested grouping of the principal European nations into a Five-Power Pact, which will be directed against the U.S.A., on the one hand, and against Soviet Russia on the other hand. It is also to be noted that quite recently the German Social-Democratic trade union and political leaders have been whole-heartedly supporting this Pact, and have indicated in their articles that they regard this Pact not merely as a means of ensuring the security of Europe for war, but as a means of action against the Soviet Government.

We are positive that no section of the British working class will stand for this policy; that it is a policy of treason to the international labour movement, and that while we must be prepared to assist the German workers in all their struggles against capitalism, we cannot form any alliance with them which is calculated to support a dangerous foreign policy of this description.

We want an International of action, not an International of stagnation. To realise such an International, the left-wing

leaders will require to be much more active amongst the rank and file. In particular, they will have to reconsider their present attitude of aloofness, disparagement and even opposition to such rank and file movements as the National Minority Movement, which stands for international trade union unity. Even if the left leaders believe that the Minority Movement as it exists to-day is going too far in its demands, they must recognise that it is a living force striving for unity, and that it ought not to be opposed and hindered simply in order to curry favour with the right-wing.

Our "left" leaders in the British trade union movement have worked hard for international unity, though in a discreet and diplomatic fashion. They have now got to recognise that they have gone as far as it is possible by diplomatic methods. From now onwards their efforts must be concentrated on winning the rank and file. To do this means not only propaganda for unity in the abstract; they must be prepared to lead the working class to struggle for unity in action. The question of international unity cannot be isolated from the question of mobilising the forces for the struggle against capitalism here in Britain.

At the same time the active rank and file trade unionists who are desirous of realising unity must back up the leaders not by expecting great things of them, but by organising the Minority Movements, by increasing its influence in those industries where it has influence, thus enabling it to penetrate into those industries where it has not yet got a foothold, and so making the push for unity at home and abroad a national push of the rank and file.

The next phase of the struggle for unity in Great Britain is that of bringing the masses more actively into the campaign to transform the Anglo-Russian Advisory Committee into the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee. Everywhere and all the time we must carry on our propaganda and be active for the realisation of International Trade Union Unity.

In this struggle we must expect an increasing resistance from the "right." We must expect increasingly subtle attempts to divert us from our purpose. If we allow ourselves to be diverted to the smallest possible extent, we will suffer from it. The capitalists are even now combining and uniting their forces together in the war against the working class. We must answer with a single united International of the workers, determined upon prosecuting the struggle to the end, that capitalism shall be no more. For this purpose we must and shall realise international trade union unity.