

THE NEW UNITY

By LUDWIG LORE

In a recent issue of **LABOR ACTION** I commented on the fact that the Third International had approached the Socialist Labor International with the proposal to enter into negotiations at once for joint action in the interest of the Spanish proletariat and against support by other capitalist powers of the Lerroux government in Madrid. This was followed not long afterward, by a conference held in Brussels at which Emil Vandervelde and Friedrich Adler for the Socialists and Marcel Cachin and Maurice Thorez for the Communists met to discuss the C.I.'s proposals. As a result of this conference the former promised to lay the matter before the November session of their Executive body.

This session took place on November 13-16 in Paris and ended, after four days of serious deliberation, with the decision that it be left to the affiliated national organizations to accept or refuse such offers on the part of the Communist Party units of their respective countries. United front on an international scale was rejected as premature and unattainable at the present time. The Executive members from France, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Russia (S.P.D.), Poland (Jewish Bund) and Austria presented a minority resolution expressing their dissatisfaction with the decision of the International Executive Committee. They demanded that the 2nd International repeat its offer to the C.I. in February 1933, when it proposed joint international action against war, in defense of democratic institutions where they still exist and for the revolutionary class struggle where fascism has crushed the labor movement.

The action of the Second International has defeated all hope of an international united front movement for the time being. But the idea is on the march and will not be gainsaid. Thus in France the (Communist) trade unions of the Confederation General du Travail Unitaire have dissolved their organizations to enter the unions of the Confederation General du Travail (Amsterdam).

Meantime a development of far-reaching importance has taken place in Moscow. Late in September a special conference of the "Red Trade Union International" adopted what amounts to a motion to liquidate the Moscow International and its affiliated unions and federations. It was decided to order the Communist parties and the Red trade unions to change their tactics in the propaganda for a united front of labor, to reinforce their heretofore unsuccessful attempts for an understanding among the masses with a "united front from above" by direct negotiations with the leaders and executive members of the trade union organizations.

A second decision was even more unequivocal. In those countries, it declares, in which trade union unity can be achieved on the basis of membership in the free trade unions, all Red trade unions shall be dissolved and all Communists instructed to function actively and constructively as members and functionaries of these organizations.

The desire to bring about a united labor movement was, to be sure, only one of the reasons which prompted the adoption of this sweeping motion. There were others, less idealistic and more practical. There was the important consideration that the Red trade union groups are almost everywhere small and without influence. In Germany, England, France, Czechoslovakia, Spain and Switzerland and in the Scandinavian countries they are small minority groups out of all proportion to the total of organized labor. This is true to an ever greater extent of the United States. There have been strikes in which the Communist trade unions rallied mass support. But with the end of the struggle, little or nothing remained of concrete and lasting accomplishment. The workers left these organizations as precipitously as they had joined them, as soon as they realized that on

the economic even more than on the political field, disunion is suicide.

Moscow has understood for some time that the creation of dual "Red" unions was a grave mistake. The 13th Plenum of the Communist International in December 1933 seriously discussed the dissolution of that organization but hesitated to take the ultimate step.

On the other hand there was the realization that fascism can be combatted and defeated where it is in power and checked where it is advancing only if the labor movement is able to close its ranks in organizational unity. But even before Moscow had come to this decision, the German working class itself had taken the bull by the horns and had accomplished unity on a basis of illegal unions.

This was admitted by Comrade Pjatnitzki in the September Trade Union Conference in Moscow in his report on the work of the International and its affiliated federations. In Germany, he stated, there are neither "free" nor "Red" trade unions, neither "reformist" nor "revolutionary". There is only "the slow growth of an illegal united front in which trade unionists from both sides pool their efforts in harmonious work."

The illegal Central Committees of the Communist Parties of Germany and Austria responded to the Moscow conference with an appeal to their members which reads in part:

"... True, the building of free trade unions cannot be the work of the political parties. But recognizing the paramount importance of trade union organization, the Communist Party pledges its members to give active support to the efforts of those who are building unified trade union groups, to work earnestly and constructively as members of such trade unions. . . . Reformistic tendencies and policies in these united trade unions will have to be dealt with by the membership in accordance with their rich and varied experience in the years that led to May 2, 1933. They will have to decide how these trade unions shall be turned into organs of the class struggle. . . . It goes without saying that the Red trade unions shall abolish their organizations wherever the efforts to create united front unions meet with success."

The merging of the two wings of the French trade union movement is the first step in the right direction, the declaration of the C.P.G. and the C.P.A., the second. Close upon them there came a third—an appeal by the Moscow Trade Union International to the Norwegian Trade Union Federation which after years of indecision joined the Amsterdam (Socialist) Trade Union International two months ago. In a communication to the Executive of the Norwegian trade unions Losowski, the president of the Red Trade Union International, urged them to use their influence in favor of a merger of the two international organizations within the framework of the free trade unions. Norwegian labor will meet in convention in February to take action on the Moscow communication.

Many of those who are now active in the work of the Workers' Party of the United States were expelled from or left the Communist Party because they objected to its trade union policy of "red" dual unions. Had William Z. Foster followed the dictates of his conscience and understanding and not those of the C.I., the course of the revolutionary labor movement in the United States would have been a happier one. Every attempt to revolutionize the American labor movement by the creation of dual unions has failed. In 1905 the last scattered remnants of De Leon's "Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance" joined the I.W.W. Ten years of incessant conflict had split the political movement in 1899 but had failed to line up class conscious labor in S. T. & L. A. unions against the American Federation of Labor. Then and now again it took many years of intensive work to prove to the revolutionary wing of the labor movement in this country that unity is the first prerequisite for successful trade union organization work.