

The Question of Unity at the British Trades Union Congress.

By A. Lozovsky.

The General Council of the British Trade Unions set everything in motion in order to deprive the Trade Union Congress at Bournemouth of all political colour and to get it to pass such decisions as would admit of any "interpretation" according to circumstances. After some talk over the general strike and the miners' strike, the question of unity had still to be settled. Then the Congress would have fulfilled the task submitted to it by the General Council of turning back the wheel of the English trade union movement. The General Council did everything in order to obscure the problem of unity. It was, however, prevented from doing this by the opposition. The General Council, it is true, gave a detailed report on the meetings of the Amsterdam International and of the Anglo-Russian Committee before the general strike, but said nothing regarding the last two meetings of the Anglo-Russian Committee in Paris and Berlin and nothing as to what has been done and what has still to be done in order to fulfil the pledges undertaken by the General Council.

Against the vague standpoint of the General Council there was placed the resolution of the Tailors' Union, which repeated the decisions of the Congress at Scarborough, and the clear, emphatic resolution of the Engineers' Union. The latter resolution marks a considerable step forward. It states:

The Congress declares that in view of the international position of the trade union movement it is necessary to set up a United International of the Trade Unions of the whole world.

The Congress notes with regret the attitude of some sections of the Amsterdam International.

In view of this the Congress instructs the General Council to urge on the I. F. T. U. that a Conference, without preconditions, be convened between the R. I. L. U. and the I. F. T. U. as the representatives of two great world unions, in order to lay the foundation of the international unity of the trade union movement.

The proposal of the engineering Union is of particular interest as by it the question of a Conference between Amsterdam and the R. I. L. U. is raised for the first time by a big organisation. The most far-reaching resolution to which the Left wing in the General Council was hitherto capable was the demand for the acceptance of the Central Council of the Trade Unions of the Soviet Union into the Amsterdam International. The "entry" of the Soviet trade union into the I. F. T. U. was the official article of belief of the "Left" with which they gained a name for themselves in Amsterdam, although this only proves that those who held this belief had no understanding for the actual position in the international trade union movement. This standpoint received its first blow at Scarborough. Nevertheless the resolution adopted there did not quite openly express what was actually meant.

The reactionary trade union bureaucracy painted the R. I. L. U. in the blackest colours. It is therefore not surprising that

the resolution of the engineers stirred up the reformist swamp. The question became particularly acute in connection with the attitude of the General Council at the three last meetings of the Anglo-Russian Committee. The representatives of the Minority Movement criticised in the sharpest manner the inactivity of the General Council in the sphere of unity, and emphasised that it is not a question of the entry of the Central Council of the Trade Unions of the Soviet Union into the Amsterdam International, but of the amalgamation of Amsterdam with the R.I.L.U. To the question of the representative of the engineers' Union as to whether it is true that the English delegation in Paris refused to discuss the question of supporting the miners, the inimitable Arthur Pugh replied that such a way of putting the question was incorrect! This shameful lie characterised not only Pugh, but also the General Council in whose name and on whose behalf he conducted the Congress.

The "clarification" took place, as was to be expected, by the Chairman of the Amsterdam International, Purcell, who is muddle-headed on principle. According to his opinion, an international Congress participated in by all the organisations affiliated to the R.I.L.U. and to Amsterdam would not only "not promote the cause of international unity but throw it back for many years (!)". The speaker of course, forgot to add why the Congress would throw back the cause of unity. Purcell further declared that the General Council will attempt to reorganise the apparatus of the Amsterdam International with the help of the Russians. He then declared that it would be important to accept the Central Council of the Trade Unions of the Soviet Union into the Amsterdam International as the revolutionary trade unions and the R.I.L.U. would thereby be liquidated. Purcell, who helped to found the R.I.L.U. along with us, has for long been endeavouring to liquidate it. Even the "left" Judas Bromley attacked the R.I.L.U. He accused the R.I.L.U. of splitting and endeavoured to discredit the Minority Movement. But Comrades Tanner and Elsbury dealt with Bromley and the other members of the General Council.

The Right wing did not bring in any resolution of their own; they clung to the vague, indefinite resolution of the Tailors Union, which only repeats the decision of the Scarborough Congress, in order to prevent a victory of the engineers' Union, whose resolution raised the question of actual unity by the amalgamation of the R.I.L.U. and Amsterdam. Two left resolutions were voted upon. The resolution of the engineers' Union received 1,237,000 votes and the resolution moved by Elsbury 2,416,000 votes. It is remarkable that the Miners' Federation voted unanimously for the Engineers' Union. The whole reactionary bureaucracy however voted for Elsbury's resolution as the lesser evil, in order by this means at any rate not to go beyond the level of Scarborough.

The discussions and the voting on the resolutions are in many respects instructive: in the first place because the reactionaries did not venture to put forward their own resolution. The demand of the broad masses for unity is too strong! The same bureaucracy did not venture to come forward openly at the Congress against the Central Council of the trade unions of the Soviet Union and to defend their attitude in the Anglo-Russian Committee. On the other hand the votes of the Left wing at the Congress were divided, which gave the reactionaries the possibility to save their position. Nevertheless the results of the voting are of the greatest interest. In spite of the fact that the votes were split, 1,237,000 were cast for actual unity. What would have happened if this question had not been submitted to trade union officials for decision but to the masses?

Our expectations which we had before the Congress, that the opposition would make a firm stand and that they would destroy the petty bourgeois idyll of the reformists, have been confirmed. All that is required is a closer co-ordination, a greater tenacity and unity of action and the Minority Movement will then be able to cleanse the English Labour Movement from the bourgeois reformist elements.