

The Third World Congress of the R. I. L. U.

By Tim Buck

“THE revolutionary labor movement is not only interested to know that capitalist economy is falling to pieces, but wants to know how; it wants to know to what extent the conscious activity of the bourgeoisie can retard this process, and what it—the revolutionary labor movement—must do to intensify the process of disintegration, and widen the crack already apparent in capitalist society.”

The above paragraph quoted from the resolution on “Immediate Tasks” adopted at the Third World Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions, aptly epitomizes the spirit animating this gathering from beginning to end. The sentiment and aim of every report and all discussion, was for concrete activity which would hasten the success of capitalist decay.

While the majority of the questions dealt with were of course of a purely trade union nature, the manner and spirit in which they were handled, was such as to give a distinctive note to the whole proceedings.

For instance. In dealing with the question of organization, we saw no jurisdictional squabbles, no struggles over demarcation or for the personal aggrandizement of individual officials, not even debate on amalgamation—its need is recognized as a matter of course.

Valuable International Experience

One question of form and structure, however, which did command considerable attention, was the question of shop committees. Experiences in Russia, Italy and Germany have all gone to prove that both in periods of slow development and in periods of revolutionary crisis, the shop committee is the natural co-ordinating center for the mass of the workers and the one basic unit of organization which neither capitalism nor bureaucratic reaction can destroy. Arising from a thorough discussion of all sides of this question, comes the decision to make the organization of shop committees one of the first tasks of the revolutionary Labor Movement in the immediate future.

Another distinctive question on the agenda of the Profintern Congress, a question such as can be heard at no other labor gathering,

was the question of strike strategy.

Losovsky, Monmousseau, Heckert and Bill Dunne, all reported on the subject, and the ensuing discussion was participated in by delegates from practically every country. It is a striking commentary on the sharp distinction between Moscow and Amsterdam, that while the Amsterdamers are more afraid of a successful strike than the capitalists themselves, and absolutely taboo all consideration of it as an offensive weapon, the R. I. L. U. sees in the strike, one of the principal weapons the workers possess, and one that must be studied, understood, improved and encouraged.

Discuss Strike Strategy

Fritz Heckert's report on strike strategy glowed with the word pictures of huge struggles recently passed and still in progress in the Ruhr, Westphalia and other parts of Germany. Strikes involving upwards of a million workers, aimed straight at the central government in combination with the great industrialists, are serious undertakings, and demand the most careful organization and tactical manouvering. These strikes have flared up throughout Germany, and the ensuing struggles against hunger, sabotage and troops, have compelled organization and discipline of a military nature. Evacuation of the strike areas by all children, mass picketing of women workers and armed struggle with the Fascists and security police, are rapidly developing the larger German struggles into open political conflicts with the State. And as repeatedly emphasized, as the strike becomes predominantly political, so it begins to throw off the character and limitations of the mere economic struggle, and develops rapidly towards armed struggle for political ends—in brief, revolution.

One thing shown very clearly by the discussion, was the need for more active participation by the revolutionaries, not merely in strikes after they are called, but their organization and the rallying of the forces which will assure success. Simultaneous demands must be initiated and popularized in strategically related industries, in such a way that rather than relying, as at present, upon class solidarity alone, parallel strikes, striking at the very heart of capitalism, will

flow out of organized activity and agitation as part of a definite strategical plan.

Another question handled very differently in the Congress of the Profintern to the way it is handled by the reactionaries, was the question on the agenda of the struggle for the eight-hour day.

Introduction of a ten-hour day in Germany means inevitably the beginning of a new international offensive against the eight-hour day, using as justification the abolition of the eight-hour day in German industry, and necessity of longer hours to enable the employers of other countries to compete. Truly does the resolution adopted on this question state that "The struggle for the eight-hour day is, in the final analysis, a struggle for power between the workers and the capitalist class."

In this respect the struggle against the Dawes Plan, and the struggle for the eight-hour day, are synonymous. International capital hopes by the further enslaving of the German workers through this plan, to use them as a lever by which to force down the living standards of the workers in every country of the world, excepting Soviet Russia. Without a tremendous increase in working hours in Germany, however, the Dawes Plan is worth no more to the international Shylocks than the paper it is written on. This makes the struggle of the German workers to retain the eight-hour day, a struggle of vital international importance, and a struggle into which the workers of the whole world must be drawn.

The resolution adopted on this question, states categorically that "The struggle for an eight-hour day can never be successful if conducted by parliamentary means or purely trade union methods. The reformist struggle for ratification of the Washington convention, for eight-hour day legislation, for the introduction of an eight-hour day by means of so-called national vote, etc, is nothing but a cunning attempt to evade the real struggle for the eight-hour day. The Red International not only rejects these methods as entirely ineffective, but declares them to be definitely counter-revolutionary. The eight-hour day can be won only by unceasing and unconditional class struggle, and its consolidation is only possible through the establishment of workers' control of in-

dustry, and the Proletarian Dictatorship."

On the other hand, there is the growing tendency in many countries for the workers to reply to the chauvinism and Fascism of the trade union bureaucracy, by leaving the trade unions. This, and the growth of a left wing within the Amsterdam International, with the natural conflict of policies flowing from the division of ideas, presented the Congress with a great problem. Shall we forge ahead and build up our forces regardless of the effect upon the world movement, or shall we grasp the great task of grappling at close quarters with the reformists in Amsterdam, thereby saving the world movement from utter demoralization and urging the existing left wing from a vague opposition as it is today, into a militant leading group?



TIM BUCK

To this question the answer of the Congress was unequivocal. Tomsky's speech on the "Unity of the Movement," cleared the air of the last vestige of misunderstanding, and determined the attitude of the Congress towards this vital question. The R. I. L. U. remains on its old platform, of the struggle for unity, and the opening paragraph of the resolution reads as follows:

"Reaffirming its decisions on the necessity to struggle for the establishment of a workers' United Front in the interests of the development of the class struggle on an international scale and of a successful attack on international capital, the Third Congress of the R. I. L. U. deems it its duty once more to state its firm decision to conduct a consistent struggle in this direction."

Unity, at this time, means the inspiring of the organized workers of the world for new struggles, and their leadership by the revolutionaries organized in the left wing. There is not the least hope of the present leadership of Amsterdam leading the immediate struggles, and even the existing left wing will drive forward only so long as there is a powerful urge from the rank and file. A large proportion of the organized workers of the world are now in alignment with the R. I. L. U., and the coming together of Moscow and Amsterdam in a World Unity Congress, will be the most dynamic event the trade union movement has experienced since the Russian Revolution.

The organizations embraced in the Red International are varied in the extreme. Unlike Amsterdam, which embraces scarcely anything outside of Europe, the Red International is an International in every sense of the word; and the delegates present at this great gathering composed one of the most cosmopolitan groups that one could well imagine.

This variety of organization, and the variety of the objective conditions faced by many of the organizations represented, was reflected in many of the reports, particularly in the debate on the question of organization.

Industrial Unionism Basic Need

For us in North America, it is interesting to note that the industrial form of organization was agreed upon as being of first importance, and all revolutionary unions were urged to make industrial organization one of their first aims. More than ever, states the resolution on this subject, must the revolutionary unions and the revolutionary minorities in the reformist unions, struggle for the organization and consolidation of all workers into revolutionary industrial unions:

"The workers should be organized into militant industrial unions, nationally and internationally. At present the isolated separate craft unions, disconnected from the other unions of the particular industry, are too weak to conduct a vigorous struggle against modern organized capital, against combines and trusts. The craft unions must be welded together into industrial unions, and the industrial unions should be united together into groups of important industries. The industrial unions of the various countries should be united on an international scale, and their unification should be carried out from below in the process of joint struggle."

The revolutionary unions themselves must be based upon shop committees, and the broadest initiative of the rank and file. During strikes and other actions, the shop committees should be the principal starting points of the movement.

On the other hand and at the other extreme, there was the problem of the One Big Union movement in Czecho-Slovakia. This organization growing out of the revolutionary conditions following the war and a

split forced upon the revolutionaries by the Amsterdamers, will now reorganize its forces into industrial departments and bring its organizational apparatus into close alignment with the existing needs of the Czecho-Slovakian workers.

The organization of the revolutionary minorities in the reformist trade unions, was one of the most debated problems of the Congress. There is scarcely a country of the world now, but what the revolutionaries are organized into a definite left-wing. There still remains a great diversity of organizational form however, and the unification of the organization of the militants is one of the tasks facing revolutionary leadership in the immediate future. For instance, we see today in England, in the phenomenal development of the National Minority Movement, the result of definite organization of the revolutionary elements around immediate struggles on behalf of the rank and file. Just as we in North America floundered around well nigh helpless until we organized the Trade Union Educational League, so the rebels of all countries have learned through experience that definite organization of the left wing is the first condition of existence.

The necessity for joint action between revolutionary unions and the Communist parties, co-ordination of the work of the revolutionary unions with the work of all class organizations, the strengthening of our international connections and the need for preparing the masses for the final decisive struggle, all these were dealt with in the most comprehensive way.

Shop Committees

Of all the resolutions adopted, and of all the discussions during those pulsating two weeks, the most dynamic was unquestionably on the subject of shop committees. At the very beginning of the Congress, Losovsky had raised this question in his masterly report on the immediate tasks of the revolutionary movement. Stressing the growing importance of these basic units, he had rebuked the revolutionary unions in no uncertain way for their failure to have pushed the building and consolidating of powerful shop committee movements everywhere possible.

As he pointed out in this speech, the reformists are afraid of shop committees and fight against them at every opportunity.

This, however, should urge us to ever more strenuous efforts. The closer and closer integration of industry is rapidly producing a condition where shop committees are becoming essential to the continued existence of trade unionism itself; and only those unions which root themselves in shop committees representative of every worker employed in the concern will be able to rally the workers with any degree of success. On the other hand, strong revolutionary shop committees represent the one indestructible unit of working class organization. As long as capitalism lasts, the working masses in the factories, mills and mines must carry on the struggle day by day, and properly organized shop committees, drawing their strength from the masses of the industrial workers, could not be destroyed without destroying capitalism itself.

The Shop Committee Resolution

The three following paragraphs from the comprehensive resolution adopted on the question of shop committees, give some idea as to the nature of the tasks, and the role to be played by these bodies in the coming struggle for power:

"The Third Congress of the R. I. L. U. states that insufficient attention has been given by the revolutionary unions to the organization of shop committees. Yet these bodies may become the principle factors in the creation of genuine unity in the Labor Movement and one of the bulwarks of the working class in the struggle for power.

"The shop committees must be centers uniting all the workers of a given establishment, without exception. Irrespective of the union to which they belong, or whether they are organized at all.

"In defending the interests of the workers, shop committees must get acquainted with all secrets of the management. They must know the entire life of the establishment, the economic, technical and commercial affairs of their employers, and their profits. The shop committees must, in fact, struggle for workers' control. In conducting this struggle, the shop committees will become the center of the struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and for the establishment of a Proletarian Dictatorship."

One of the most significant features of the struggle for shop committees, is the fact

that this is at the same time a struggle for industrial unionism. Representation of every worker in an establishment by one committee, elected right at the place of work, and fighting out all the every day struggle on the basis of class instead of craft, is the surest possible way of breaking down craft prejudices and uniting the rank and file in the unbreakable solidarity of joint struggle on common issues.

Russian Unions Report

Here in the great hall of the "House of the Unions"—a wonderful palace of white marble which in the old days was a noblemen's club—it seemed fitting that we should receive the report of the progress made by the five and a half millions of trade unionists in Soviet Russia during the period intervening between the second and third Congresses of the Profintern.

Comrade Dogadov, who reported, prefaced his speech on the actual organizational conditions obtaining in the Russian unions, by an outline of the economic conditions within the Soviet Republic. Drawing attention to the terrible conditions to which the war, civil war, intervention, blockade and famine had reduced Russian industry, he emphasized the steady improvement being made. As an indication of degree of this improvement it might be mentioned that the total production for the second half of 1923, compared with the total production for the first half of 1922, was as 88 to 62—an increase of well over 40%.

In the face of all the difficulties with which they have had to contend, this is remarkable. It has been accomplished by a complete reorganization of industry, and clear recognition by the organized workers of their tasks as producers in the proletarian state.

The period of poverty, the period when the workers were forced to fight on various fronts at the expense of material progress is now over. Progress is the order of the day.

The organization and structure of the Russian unions, is the most democratic to be found anywhere. Based upon shop committees, elected at general meetings of all employes of an establishment, and ending up with the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, every union official is an elected man, and everywhere the membership takes the most active part.

Under the new economic policy, the unions are charged with the task of improv-

ing the standard of living and the conditions of life enjoyed by the working class. At the inception of this policy, wages were very low, and a temporary policy of local and sectional agreements was adopted so as to enable the workers in those plants and industries making the most rapid progress to reap immediate advantages without waiting for the general all round improvement in production. Today, however, conditions have improved so much that it has been possible to introduce a uniform wage policy for the whole country, with a general leveling up of wages in the different industries.

Under the latter policy, national wage scales were increased no less than three times in the period between the Second and Third Congress, being increases of 69%, 14% and 12%, respectively. Wage increases have been given as industry improves, and it is still improving rapidly. The average wage for all Russia which in November, 1922, was only 17.16 gold roubles per week, was in April, 1924, 37.17 gold roubles per week.

Corresponding to the improvement in industry and the wages of the workers, the trade unions are making definite progress in many essential respects. One is a substantial increase in membership. On January 1st, 1923, the unions totalled 4,546,000 members; on January 1st, 1924, the figure amounted to 5,621,000. The unions actually engaged in industry, except transport, gained 35% in membership. Prior to the introduction of the New Economic Policy, in 1921, membership in the unions was virtually compulsory. Now it is entirely upon a dues paying, voluntary system. Fully 97% of all workers belong to the unions.

Parallel with the work of improving the material conditions of the workers, the unions as organizations are participating actively in all reconstruction work, organi-

zation of state trusts, and various fields of economic endeavor. They have representatives on all the more important bodies, including the Council of People's Commissars, the Council of Labor and Defense, State Planning Board, the Concessions Board, and the Supreme Economic Council. Altogether there are forty-two elected representatives of the Russian unions on the most important governing bodies in the Soviet Republic.

The work accomplished by the unions has been magnificent, yet all signs point to the fact that their greatest achievements are in the future. The workers are imbued with the spirit of accomplishment and are confident of final success. The report of the Russian unions glowed with the spirit of achievement and, in contradistinction to Amsterdam and the terrific losses going on throughout all reformist organizations, we see here steady progress and a steady gain.

The task facing the Russian unions, and the task facing the revolutionaries all over the world, is truly gigantic and will be accomplished only by self-sacrificing work, complete unity and determination to win. Reports such as that from our Russian comrades show what wonders can be accomplished and inspire us to greater efforts than any we have so far made.

The struggle for the world revolution demands of all of us exertion of every ounce of energy and initiative of which we are capable, and unflinching discipline based upon the decisions adopted. World capitalism has its back to the wall and will fight fiercely to retain every inch of ground.

The battlefront may ebb and flow, temporary setbacks and partial defeats are almost inevitable; but inspired by the example and experience of our Russian comrades, and marshalled by our International, we require only the will to power and ultimate victory is ours.

Bill Dunne's Speech at Portland

In response to the hundreds of calls for this speech in a more permanent form, the Trade Union Educational League has published it as a pamphlet. It is the most effective kind of educational work to distribute this widely among union men. Every live-wire will want to read it and pass it on. It should receive the widest circulation thruout the country.

16 pages, paper cover.
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THE TRADE UNION EDUCATIONAL LEAGUE
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