

The Red International of Labor Unions

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FOR some it will be good to learn for the first time, and for others to recall, something of the Red International of Labor Unions (R.I.L.U.), the international organization of revolutionary trade unionists

to which the Trade Union Educational League is affiliated as its section in the United States.

What were the historical reasons for the R.I.L.U.?

To answer this question we must review briefly the essentials of world labor history, and in so doing we see that at the close of the World War what few and weak international connections had existed between the trade unions of various countries had been broken by the stampede of nationalistic patriots who had been masquerading as internationalists at the head of the International Secretariat of Trade Unions, a loosely constructed body of autonomous national centers which was more of a bureau of information than anything else and which was far from being a cohesive, centralized organization such as the R.I.L.U. is today. The pre-war trade unions also met fraternally at the international Socialist congresses and in addition there were the internationals by industry, metal workers, etc., but which like the International Secretariat were nebulous things and filled with national prejudices for "defense of the Fatherland."

Leading To Slaughter

When war came, Vandervelde, the Belgian president of the International Secretariat, used his title as such to make propaganda for Allied victory against the "Huns," while Carl Legien, the German secretary, set to work in the name of his official position to defend the "just and sacred war" of the Kaiser. The industrial internationals split up according to whether their centers were on Allied or German territory; the Textile and Miners', being in England, followed Allied policies, while the Metal Workers and Building Trades "internationals," being in Germany, maintained the policies of the Central Empires. When America declared war, and even before, Gompers was busy calling off strikes that might interfere with Allied munitions and the whole A.F. of L. bureaucracy became an auxiliary to the War Department.

"The T. U. E. L. must maintain and strengthen its international contacts. It must point out to the workers of the U. S. A. that it is the only organization with organizational contact with the workers of other countries."—From the Resolution of the Fourth World Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions on Tasks of Adherents in the United States.

At the close of war, the urge for re-establishing international contacts came from more than one source. Firstly, right after the Tsar was overthrown in February 1917, at the first attempt to form a trade union center in Russia, the Russian unions considered the matter, and at the First All-Russian congress held soon after resolved "to co-operate to the fullest extent in the revival of the international trade union movement" and invited world labor to convene at Leningrad on February 5, 1918.

However, nothing came of this for the simple reason that, when the Russian workers, not regarding the revolution finished with overthrowing the feudalist Tsar, went on and overthrew their capitalist class in November 1917, not only did international capital hurl every force against them but the patriotic traitors leading the European and American unions also attacked the Russian workers for their alleged "madness and criminality" and hurried to create their own international of deception, hypocrisy and class collaboration—the International Federation of Trade Unions (Amsterdam).

Indeed the mood not only of the Russian workers but of the toilers of all countries was such at that time that it forced the social traitors to go through the motions of forming an international which, after some painful preliminaries at Berne, came into being at Amsterdam in 1919, but which avoided all issues by not adopting any program.

"International Labor Office"

The other source desiring an organized obstacle to genuine internationalism of labor was international capitalism, which had gotten such brilliant co-operation from its labor lackeys during the war that it wished to continue it. So under the wing of imperialism those who had destroyed labor internationalism restored it along class collaborative policy at Amsterdam and bound it to the imperialist league of Nations by the International Labor Office, in which "labor" was graciously permitted to have six votes out of twenty-four.

When the I.L.O. held its first conference at Washington in 1919, with Gompers playing the leading

role, the Russian unions could not remain silent in the face of such corruption of labor internationalism and, denouncing it, asserted that "another center of the trade union movement is essential" and invited "all economic organizations standing for real revolutionary class struggle... to break with the compromising international and together with the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions organize a real international conference of revolutionary socialist trade unions and labor syndicates."

Because of the ferocity of imperialist armed invasion and blockade it was not possible to take the next step until the next year, when, after many conferences between Russian trade unionists and British, Italian and other representatives chancing to be in the Soviet Union to investigate conditions, a declaration was decided upon on July 15, 1920, and signed by Losovsky of Russia, d'Arragona of Italy, Pestanna of Spain, Shablin of Bulgaria, Rossmer of France, Mikado of Georgia, and Milkitch of Yugo-Slavia.

This declaration stated in part:

"That the position of the working class demands more distinct and energetic class struggle... on an international scale with the closest organization; that social reforms are... unable to solve the social problem; that non-political unions during... the war became servants of imperialist capitalism; that the working class must gather all the trade union organizations into one powerful revolutionary, class association which, working side by side with the political organization of the international Communist proletariat and in close contact with it, could develop all its strength for the final victory of the social revolution and the establishment of a world wide Soviet Republic;—that the Amsterdam International Federation of Trade Unions is unable, with its program and tactics to lead to the triumph of the above principles."

Therefore it was resolved: "To condemn the tactic of the advanced revolutionary elements leaving the existing unions..." "To organize Communist and revolutionary groups in every organization..... for acceptance of our program..." and "... "To organize a militant international committee for the reorganization of the trade union movement. This committee will function as the International Council of Trade Unions and will act in agreement with the Executive Committee of the Third International on conditions that will be laid down by congresses."

The First (Constituent) Congress of the new organization was in July 1921, when a definite constitution, program and tactical line were adopted and it was decided to name the organization "The Red International of Labor Unions." It is also referred

to as the "Profintern," a term derived from the words "professional" (trade) and "international."

What has grown from the beginnings outlined above? Books could be and have been written in answer. Lack of space forbids that we do much more than trace some of the organizational developments of importance. (Readers are referred to "The World's Trade Union Movement" by A. Losovsky, and to the "Report of the Fourth Congress of the R.I.L.U." obtainable from the T.U.E.L.) Of the organizations represented at the conference in July 1920, most have suffered fearfully from Fascist persecution and white terror in Italy, Spain, Yugo-Slavia and Bulgaria. There were represented 8,965,000 workers, including 5,200,000 from the Russian unions. Since then the Russian unions have grown to nearly 10,000,000. The Revolutionary Syndicalist Minority of France has become a trade union center, the Unitary Confederation of Labor (S.G.T.U.), with a majority of the organized workers of France.

Previous to the Fourth World Congress held in March 1928, there were 16,204,000 workers represented by organizations affiliated to the R.I.L.U. This includes two kinds of affiliates; those countries in which general trade union centers, and those affiliates which are revolutionary minorities inside Amsterdam and other unions. Of the first type are Australia, N.S.W., 130,000; Belgium, 8,000; Holland, 14,000; Indonesia, 25,000; Ireland, 22,000; Canada, 10,000; China, 2,500,000; Columbia, 50,000; Korea, 20,000; Lithuania, 5,000; Mongolia, 5,000; Persia, 20,000; Soviet Union, 9,500,000; Uruguay (Seamen) 2,000; France, 525,000; Czeco-Slovakia, 220,000; Chili, 150,000; Japan, 40,000. A total of 13,246,000 in national centers.

Numbers Really Larger

A total of 2,958,000 workers are affiliated from 27 countries in revolutionary minorities, the largest being in Germany, England, United States and Poland. In addition to both the above affiliates, there are 256,000 workers in 14 countries belonging to trade unions which are not affiliated to the R.I.L.U. by reason of white terror and other causes but which uphold the class struggle and are allies of the R.I.L.U. in its struggle for trade union unity. So we see that the R.I.L.U. has its far-flung front dug deeply into every continent and practically every nation, while the Amsterdam International is almost wholly European, claiming only small affiliates in Argentina, Palestine and Canada—and in these the R.I.L.U. has minorities at work.

When the Amsterdam International was formed in 1919, it had 24,000,000 workers. Today it claims

only 13,366,387 (figures for end of 1926). When the R.I.L.U. was formed in 1920 it had 8,965,000. In 1927 it had 16,204,000. To which does the future belong?

From practically every country on earth go delegates to the world congresses of the R.I.L.U. LABOR UNITY has given a report of the Fourth Congress and has published the general program adopted there. (*). In addition congresses resolve special problems, such as the fight against the war danger, and problems of affiliated sections, such as the tasks confronting revolutionary trade unionists in the United States. A General Council of 50 is elected by the congress, and from this an Executive Bureau of 20 is elected to direct the daily work of the international movement according to the decisions of the congress. Losovsky of the U.S.S.R. is General Secretary; Hecker of Germany being Assistant. Invariably proposals are discussed with representatives of workers whom they affect, and the utmost of democracy insured along with the maximum of centralization.

For special phases of the work there are corresponding sections; the Women's Secretariat, the Youth Secretariat, Negro Section, Cultural-Educational Department, Social-Economic Department, Far Eastern-Colonial Department, and an Information Department in which some one is always at hand who knows every hole and corner of the labor movement in any country one desires.

(*) Obtainable free from Labor Unity, 2 W. 15th St., New York City. Published serially in issues May to Oct. inclusive. Send 4c postage for each month's copy.

Vertically, or better said, by industry, the work of the R.I.L.U. is co-ordinated with the International Propaganda Committees of the Transport Workers, Miners, Metal Workers, etc. These Committees are formed by international conferences of unions and revolutionary minorities of unions in the given industry. Executives elected by such conferences and programs of work are adopted to be carried into life in the different countries. Representatives of the I. P. C. S. attend all meetings of the R. I. L. U. Executive Bureau and all its subordinate commissions that touch upon matters relating to their particular industry.

The bankruptcy and futility of the Trade Secretariats of the Amsterdam International is requiring that the I. P. C.s of the R. I. L. U. expand and intensify their work of guiding organizational activities in the various industries.

Indeed, the bankruptcy and futility, not to speak of the conscious treachery of the Amsterdam International itself to the interests of the world's workers, the fusion and amalgamation of the leaders of the Amsterdam International in Europe (and of the American Federation of Labor in America) with the employers' and the employers' government apparatus makes it necessary that the R. I. L. U. and its United States Section, the T. U. E. L., intensify its work organizationally as well as ideologically around the slogans—"For class struggle; against class collaboration!" and carry the struggle for the interests of the workers "Into the factories and workshops!"

WORKERS OF AMERICA!

WATCH AND COOPERATE WITH THE MILITANT WORKERS OF OTHER LANDS

Read LABOR UNITY, Organ of the Trade Union Educational League

The T. U. E. L. is the American section of the Red International of Labor Unions.

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