

ANSWER TO THE OPPONENTS OF THE UNITED FRONT AND TRADE UNION UNITY

To the Bureau of the International Federation of Trade Unions.

CITIZENS, Paris.
The Executive Bureau received your negative answer to the proposal of the Red International of Labour Unions of March 7th concerning joint organisation of May First, assistance in the amalgamation of the trade unions in France and Spain, restoration of the free trade unions in Germany and initiation of negotiations on international trade union unity.

You write that in view of the decision of the Congresses and General Council of the International Federation of Trade Unions in Weymouth, the united front and unity of action are out of the question and that "a conference on the three points proposed by the R.I.L.U. can give no practical results."

Your repudiation of joint action does not meet the interests of the working class. Hardly any member of any trade union can deny the appalling conditions of the working masses caused by the offensive of capital against their living standards, growth of fascism and of the fascist organisations, and the resulting necessity for the workers to unite all their forces, all their trade union organisations for a joint struggle against their common enemy.

The wages in all capitalist countries were reduced markedly during the period of the crisis. Even according to evidently minimised official data the working class lost tens of billions of dollars in wages alone. The exploitation of the workers increased tremendously as the result of the savage speed up and direct economic and political pressure brought to bear on the working class. Simultaneously with the unheard-of growth of poverty, suicides, prostitution—social insurance and social legislation are worsened and completely done away with in such countries as Austria, Germany and Poland. With the exception of a few countries where curtailed state insurance still exists, millions of unemployed have to live on charity doles. Instead of benefit fixed by law at the expense of those responsible for unemployment, i.e., the employers and State, the workers are getting miserable doles, instead of work they are sent to labour camps. Only the war industry works at full speed, it works to enable the imperialists to secure a new redivision of the world by means of a new world war, even though it would cost tens of millions of human lives again. Monopoly capital, which strives for a further intensification of exploitation, established a fascist dictator-

ship in a number of countries and smashed not only those workers' organisations which declared against collaboration with the bourgeoisie, but also the trade unions which co-operated with the capitalists. In the heart of Europe, in Germany, the dictatorship of the frantic fascist murderers was established. This happened because the working class of Germany did not come out in a united front against oncoming fascism, because the leadership of the German Federation of Trade Unions (A.D.G.B.), the most powerful section of your International, expelled the revolutionary workers and not only kept rejecting the united front, but always sabotaged joint action, describing as provocateurs all those who called for joint strikes and for a real struggle against the fascists. The leadership of the A.D.G.B. kept repeating from year to year that a united front against capital would be to no effect, and now you are literally repeating the bankrupt policy of the A.D.G.B. leaders, a policy which cost the working class of Germany so much. Do not the world-shaking events in Germany and Austria cry out about the necessity for the greatest possible consolidation and unification of the working class forces in the struggle against the capitalists? Is not this clear what a great rôle the rebuilding of the free trade unions in Germany would play in overthrowing fascism, this main instigator of the world war?

If we consider the results of the economic struggles of the past period we shall see that in this field as well, the split, and the repudiation of joint action, which was by no means called forth by the interests of the working class, was very disastrous for the workers. Hundreds and thousands of strikes in France, U.S.A., Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Great Britain, Belgium, Scandinavian and Balkan countries were defeated because the united front of capital was faced by the split front of the working class as the result of the class collaboration policy pursued by the leaders of the reformist trade unions. On the other hand a large number of strikes were successful, thanks to unity of action of the workers of all tendencies, based on class struggle. Were there not scores of cases of the failure of strikes because of weak and inadequate international solidarity, because the capitalists of one country were backed up by capitalists of other countries during a strike, the strikers getting no necessary support and assistance on the part of the organisations of their own International? Remember the strikes of the miners, transport workers, textile workers, etc., in Great Britain, Germany,

France and Czecho-Slovakia. Where, then, is international solidarity? Where is the elementary community of class interests? Who can refute these irrefutable facts.

There is no attempt even in your letter to prove that joint action of the workers on May First, or assistance in amalgamating the trade unions of France and Spain and assistance in rebuilding the free trade unions in Germany are not demanded by the interests of the international proletariat. You simply reject a united front with the revolutionary workers, at the same time practically supporting a united front of the leaders of your International with the bourgeois parties in the Government of Belgium (Delattre), the united front between Leon Jouhaux, Vice-President of the Amsterdam International, with Garnier, President of the Chamber of Commerce of France, and with the big officials on the National Commission for Public Works, the composition of which is determined by a special decree issued by Lebrun President of the Republic, on March 30th, 1935. Many other examples could be given of the leaders of your International finding the basis for a "united front" and for "joint action" with the representatives of the employers' organisations. At the same time you have no desire to establish a united front between the trade unions affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions and the trade unions affiliated to the International Federation of Trade Unions in the struggle for the common demands of the working class as a whole.

The Bureau of the International Federation of Trade Unions rejects a united front without the knowledge and consent of the Trade Union masses, but in their name, while in a number of countries the members of the trade unions affiliated to your International eagerly and energetically come out for a united front and unity of action. The most striking proof of this may be furnished by the general strike in February last year and by many economic strikes in 1934 and in 1935 in France during which the members of the Unitary General Confederation of Labour and of the General Confederation of Labour fought shoulder to shoulder, by the armed battles of the Austrian workers, by the strikes and armed fights of the workers in Spain, during which the members of both the Trade Union Internationals fought together against the common enemy and finally by the setting up of a number of unified trade unions in France, Austria and Spain which unite the workers affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions and to the International Federation of Trade Unions.

As to the part of your letter dealing with the question of international trade union unity, it deliberately complicates and confuses the ques-

tion which is clear to the working masses. The Executive Bureau of the R.I.L.U. proposed to discuss the question of the FORMS, METHODS AND CONDITIONS OF THE UNIFICATION OF THE WORLD TRADE UNION MOVEMENT at a conference of the representatives of both the Internationals. In answer to this concrete proposal you refer to the resolution of the General Council of the International Federation of Trade Unions in Weymouth. This resolution of yours proposes, as a preliminary condition, to form unified trade union centres in every country through the affiliation of the revolutionary trade unions to the so-called "regular" organisations and through the liquidation of the R.I.L.U.

The Executive Bureau of the R.I.L.U. is also of the opinion that international trade union unity can and must be built on the basis of trade union unity in every country. The R.I.L.U. is not only "ready to encourage the restoration of trade union unity in all countries," but carries it through in practice, in conjunction with its sections. Considerable successes have been achieved in this field in France and even under the conditions of illegal work in Spain and Austria. The Bureau of the International Federation of Trade Unions rejects unity of action proposed by the R.I.L.U. with a view to creating a powerful unified trade union movement in these countries, which would greatly facilitate and accelerate the organisational merging of the Trade Union Internationals. You have refused even to hold negotiations on this question, rejecting UNIFICATION on the basis of agreement and insist on an absolutely inadmissible formulae of the liquidation and dissolution of the revolutionary trade unions, thereby helping to aggravate the split.

As for the question of "regular" organisations, you do not proceed in your decisions from the fact of the actual existence of the Red International of Labour Unions and from the active struggle waged by the revolutionary trade unions against capital, but from the formal questions belonging to the past. You talk about "regular" organisations. But what are these "regular" organisations? Who seceded from whom? If we were to adopt your viewpoint it would mean that your trade unions in Holland are to reaffiliate to the syndicalist National Labour Secretariat from which they disaffiliated, it would mean that the reformist Railwaymen's Federation and a number of other federations of France are to return to the corresponding unitary federations, which they left in 1921, after the revolutionary workers received the overwhelming majority of votes at the congresses, and that the reformist union of agricultural workers of Czecho-Slovakia is to return to the Red Union of Agricultural Workers from which a small minority seceded. If we were to adopt your view-

point it would mean that the reformist Federation of Trade Unions in Rumania should have affiliated to the revolutionary trade unions, which had a considerable majority during the Congress of 1923 in Klausenberg. You are probably aware as well of the fact that the enormous majority of the Finnish Trade Union Federation consisted of R.I.L.U. adherents and that the adherents of your International seceded from the unified trade union centre, being backed up by not more than one-fifth of the organised workers. The adherents of your International are now at the head of the Finnish Trade Union Federation only because the Finnish Government smashed the old trade union federations and arrested hundreds of functionaries. The situation is similar in Yugoslavia and in a number of other countries.

You know perfectly well that it is not the matter of "groups" but of hundreds, thousands and millions of workers who are playing a great rôle in the class struggle of the proletariat of their countries and of the whole world. Organised in the trade unions of the U.S.S.R. there are at present over 19 million workers and employees who play an outstanding rôle in the destinies of their own country and of the international labour movement. The revolutionary trade unions of China, France, Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Japan, Cuba, Chile, U.S.A., Italy, Canada, Philippines, Austria, Germany, India, South Africa, Argentine, Uruguay, Mexico, etc., are waging a struggle against the bourgeoisie. Although in some countries the number of members of the trade unions, driven underground, declined for the past three years as the result of terror, unheard-of persecutions and mass murders (Japan, Italy), even the bourgeoisie does not venture to deny the tremendous significance of these trade unions in the class struggle of the proletariat. An international trade union organisation under the present conditions cannot but have illegal trade unions in its midst in order to help the workers' organisations to become legal by means of its struggle.

It is not a matter of "seceded groups." The congresses of the General Council of your International may pass as many resolutions on this question as they wish, but it is a QUESTION OF AN INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION ORGANISATION UNITING THE REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS OF THE WORLD. It is the question of an organisation which is anxious for trade union unity, realising full well the degree and extent of our differences of opinion. Unity of the world trade union movement can and shall be established only if the negotiations are carried on ON THE BASIS OF THE EQUALITY of both the Internationals, only if unity is built on the basis of trade union democracy, on the basis of proportional representation in the leading organs for the

struggle against the offensive of capital, against fascism and war.

The R.I.L.U. Executive Bureau rejects therefore any ultimatums whatsoever and CONFIRMS ONCE MORE ITS READINESS TO DISCUSS, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS and with the representatives of the trade union centres of all countries THE FORMS, METHODS AND CONDITIONS OF THE UNIFICATION OF THE TRADE UNIONS IN EVERY COUNTRY AND ON AN INTERNATIONAL SCALE. The attitude of the Bureau of the International Federation of the Trade Unions, which has rejected negotiations, is one of preserving and deepening the split, whatever phrases about unity are used to disguise its policy.

It is not a question of liquidating the trade unions affiliated to one of the Internationals, of liquidating of one of the Internationals in favour of the other, nor of the affiliation of one trade union organisation to the other, but it is a question of the merging of parallel trade union organisations on the basis of BROAD TRADE UNION DEMOCRACY, OF BUILDING A UNIFIED TRADE UNION IN EVERY INDUSTRY, A UNIFIED TRADE UNION FEDERATION IN EVERY COUNTRY AND A UNIFIED TRADE UNION INTERNATIONAL. He who wants to struggle in deed against the offensive of capital, against fascism and war, cannot and must not be opposed to unity of action and to trade union unity.

The number of members of your trade unions who insist on the necessity for a united front and unity is ever growing. This may be shown by the existence of 561 unified trade unions in France, by the newly-started amalgamation of the reformist and revolutionary trade unions in Spain, by the formation of illegal trade unions in Austria, through the joint efforts of the Communists and Social-Democrats. Your answer is not the answer of millions of workers organised in your International. The vital interests of the working masses imperatively dictate the necessity for unity of action. The R.I.L.U. wants to know their opinion. The R.I.L.U. will do all in its power to render a general and mass character to the joint demonstrations on May First. The R.I.L.U. will do all in its power to accelerate the amalgamation of the trade unions in France, Spain and elsewhere, on the basis of the class struggle, and through joint action against capital. The R.I.L.U. will do all in its power to rebuild the free trade unions in Germany, the trade unions which will wage a real struggle against fascism. The R.I.L.U. WILL DO ALL IN ITS POWER TO BUILD A UNIFIED TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN EVERY COUNTRY AND A UNIFIED TRADE UNION INTERNATIONAL ON THE BASIS OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE.

The restoration of trade union unity will not

only strengthen considerably the fighting power of the working class, but also serve as a starting-point for the influx of huge masses of unorganised workers to the amalgamated trade unions.

The trade union split caused by the policy of collaboration with the bourgeoisie brought innumerable disasters to the working class. The bourgeoisie shifted the whole burden of the crisis on to the shoulders of the toilers. In a number of countries the fascists smashed the trade union organisations. The danger of imperialist wars threatens the working class again as in 1914. The actions of the trade union leaders during the war, when they placed the trade unions at the service of the militarists, are still fresh in the memory of the workers. Such an utilisation of trade unions can be avoided by the establishment of the united front, by the struggle against the capitalists and by the carrying out of trade union unity. Therefore, the members of all the trade unions must take this matter into their own hands.

The Executive Bureau proposes to the organisations affiliated to the R.I.L.U.:—

- (a) To address the corresponding trade unions of other tendencies with the proposal to organise joint meetings, demonstrations and strikes on May First against the offensive of

capital, against fascism and the impending war.

- (b) To arrange for joint meetings of the members of the trade unions affiliated to both the Internationals for the discussion of the question of unity of action and trade union unity.

The Executive Bureau of the R.I.L.U. proposes to the trade union organisations of both the Internationals to organise a REFERENDUM AMONGST THE TRADE UNION MEMBERS ON JOINT ACTION AND ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRADE UNION UNITY. Thus, it will be left to the mass of the members to decide this cardinal question of the international labour movement.

We will pass our proposal and your answer to the judgment of the members of both Internationals. Let the working masses give their decisive answer. The Executive Bureau of the R.I.L.U. is firmly convinced that the MEMBERS OF YOUR TRADE UNIONS AND A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF THE OFFICIALS, REALISING THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION, WILL DECLARE FOR THE UNITED FRONT AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION UNITY.

With Trade Union greetings,

EXECUTIVE BUREAU OF THE RED
INTERNATIONAL OF LABOUR UNIONS.