
Which International?

by Earl Browder

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Recent events are convincing even the most conservative union men that the labor unions of the different countries must be united. There must be an International of Trade Unions. This must be so because the enemy, the capitalists and the employers, are organized internationally and can continue to defeat us year after year, unless we are organized to meet their international front.

Need for International.

The employers are organized across their national borders, even those of Germany with those of France, England, and the United States. It is no accident that Stinnes, the German capitalist, makes billions out of the sweated products of German workingmen, while at the same time these goods flood the markets of the world and cause our factories to shut down. The employing class is trying throughout the world to break the trade unions. Its strongest weapon is the cheap German labor, and the indemnities which are wrung out of Labor by the German capitalists.

The German situation is only one side — the same things are true, in different measure, of the workers and capitalists of all countries. The capitalists are organized to pit the workers of one country against the workers of another. That is the way they are now winning in their drive for the “open shop.” American miners send coal to Britain which helps to break the British miners’ strike; British miners will return the favor when the American miners go out.

The trade union movement of the United States has no international affiliations. But within the next year this question is going to become a burning one — we must unite with the trade unionists of

other countries. And then the question will arise — Which International? For there are two competing bodies on the international field, one, the International Federation of Trade Unions, with headquarters at Amsterdam, and the other, the Red Trade Union International, with headquarters at Moscow.

Amsterdam Federation.

The Amsterdam International was organized under the protection and with the cooperation of the capitalist League of Nations. It was formed by those trade union leaders who had delivered the unions into the hands of the governments during the war. Legien, Jouhaux, Appleton, Huber, Thomas, and others were the leading lights; these are the same men who simultaneously were carrying out the formation of the Labor Bureau of the League of Nations, that capitalist annex which meets each year to talk contentment to the union men. The same men who officered the League of Nations Bureau, also officered the Amsterdam International. Add to this the fact that the Amsterdam International was formed without a program, without any definite guiding principles, without in any way telling to the workers of the world what course they expected to follow, and we can see what kind of an International this one is. It has consistently followed its first steps; it had been a weak echo of the League of Nations in all matters of working class welfare, and in internal tactics in the unions it has been a savage disrupter. The latest work of destruction done by Amsterdam is the split in the Confederation of Labor in France, which was forced by the Amsterdam International against the determined efforts of the French trade unionists.

Aside from such work of disruption, the Amsterdam International has done nothing but talk and pass resolutions. Not one single clear-cut act can be pointed to as evidence that this is an International of the organized working class, and hardly even a word to show that it thinks of the great problems facing the trade unions of the world. Amsterdam, in short, is the last stand of the forces of reaction in the labor movement; it is the organized “stand-patters,” those who never learn, and whose highest conception of the movement is as a means to get a fat government job.

The Red Trade Union International.

The Red Trade Union International has quite a different aspect. It was organized on the initiative of the Russian trade unions, under the protection of the first Workers' Republic. It was formed by the trade unions, and union groups, who resented the betrayal in the Great War, and who were bitterly opposed to delivering the labor movement to the League of nations. The first move in its formation was the action of the 1st All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions [Jan. 7-14, 1918], which resolved:

The Russian trade union movement cannot carry out its task without entering into close contact with the international trade union movement. The Congress regards it as its duty to cooperate to the fullest extent of its power in the revival of the international trade union congress...

It also decided to call such a congress in Petrograd on the 5th of February, 1919. This attempt to get the trade unions together failed, because of the savage war which was launched against Russia at that time by the Entente powers. Other attempts were made, which also failed. It was not until the summer of 1920 that the first practical steps could be made to form the Red Trade Union International.

In the years 1919-20 an active opposition to the policies of the Amsterdam International had sprung up in every country. In England began a remarkable agitation for direct action and struggle against the capitalist government; in France the little group organized by Monatte in 1914 to protest against the war policies rapidly enlarged itself, brought out the revolutionary paper *La Vie Ouvriere* once more, and rapidly developed, until in 1921 they controlled half of the unions. Monatte and Rosmer led this movement with outspoken denunciations of the Amsterdammers. In Italy almost the entire movement was supposedly against Amsterdam. In Spain fully three-quarters of the organized workers had declared for the revolutionary attitude. In Germany the unions were in the hands of the Majority Socialists, but an organized minority of revolutionists, amounting to more than a million workers, had been organized inside the unions. The Austrian, the Hungarian, and the Czecho-Slovakian unions were still held by

the Amsterdam Federation, but strong minorities were organized in opposition. Yugoslavia, Estonia, Norway, and other smaller countries had lined up with the revolutionary position. During these postwar years the labor movement was in ferment, masses were swarming into the unions, old loyalties and leaderships were giving way to new ones, and new trails were being made.

In the summer of 1920, for the first time since the war closed, there came an opportunity to bring all these elements of revolt together. Many trade union leaders of the world were in Russia, and they were called into consultation by the All-Russian Trade Union Executive and that of the 3rd International on the question of forming a new International of Trade Unions. Out of these conferences was selected a provisional executive committee, known as the International Council of Trade and Industrial Unions, charged to prepare for a World Congress of Trade Unions in 1921.

The long-looked for World Congress was called together 11 months after the Provisional Council was formed [Moscow: May 3-19, 1921]. The scope of this Congress exceeded all expectations. Whole national labor movements were represented; in other cases separate sections of the national unions; and in many cases, such as the United States, the representation was principally that of minority groups or city central bodies. It was estimated by the Provisional Council in its report that fully 15 million trade unionists had declared their allegiance to the new International. Delegates were present from 42 countries, to the number of 384; although those given votes in the congress were from 29 countries only, those with an established and working trade union movement. This Congress definitely organized the Red Trade Union International, uniting within itself all the active, courageous, healthy elements in the world's labor movement.

Stands for Unity.

The Red International has, since its organization, very definitely shown what its policy means for the working masses; already it has stepped forward as the only spokesman for the workers of the world on the international trade union field. An outstanding evidence of the

purpose and sincerity of the program of the Red International, looking toward the unity and power of the trade unions of the world, is seen in the strenuous efforts made to prevent the split in the Confederation of Labor of France. This split was deliberately brought about by the Amsterdam clique, the purpose of which could only be to deliver the unions into the hands of the government. The Congress of the Red International emphatically opposed all attempts to split any national trade union movement; the French revolutionaries carried out this policy to the letter, by refusing to break with the old union even when the yellows controlled them by trickery. Up to the last moment before the split was finally forced by Jouhaux by the expulsion over half of the CGT, the adherents of the Red International fought against the split. In December [1921], Lozovsky, Secretary of the Red International, sent a wire to the Amsterdam International proposing a conference of the Red and Amsterdam Internationals, with the two factions in the French unions, in order to prevent the split. This offer was turned down by the reactionary leaders of the Amsterdam International.

Today it has become clear that the life-giving elements of the trade union movement are going with the Red International. All over the world the movement is taking place; and even in America, most backward in this respect, large bodies like the Detroit Federation of Labor, and numbers of local unions, have voted for the Red International and its principles, and against the Amsterdam crowd. Every day the issue is becoming clearer, and the question is being raised sharper and sharper; the time will soon be where when every union man must answer the question — “Which International? Amsterdam or Moscow?” Let us work with all our strength, in order that the decision may be one which will face us toward the future — the decision for the Red Trade Union International.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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