

THE BRITISH TRADE UNION CONGRESS AT WEYMOUTH

By A. LOZOVSKY

THE British Trade Unions are the oldest workers' organizations in the world. They have existed for about 150 years. They have accumulated a tremendous amount of experience. It would seem that at such a respected age the Trade Union Congress should be able to give a reply with a wisdom worthy of its age to the problems facing the British working class.

In reality the Sixty-sixth Trade Union Congress, despite the boasted practicability of its leaders, consciously sidetracked the attention of the masses from real problems and occupied itself with expressing pious wishes, the carrying out of which the Congress left to the good will of the ruling classes. The crisis, which has considerably impoverished the working class, the growth of fascism, the approaching war, all occupied a place on the agenda of the Congress, but the assembled delegates, under the leadership of the General Council, did not consider it necessary to raise the question as to what are the causes for the conditions which have arisen, but mainly dealt round-about these vital questions.

The Congress was not convened for the organization of the struggle but in order to talk on the sub-

ject of how, in a peaceful manner, to get out of a blind alley. The peaceful, well-meaning and complacent nature of the Congress was disturbed by a few speeches from the revolutionary delegates, but this did not change the general picture. The bourgeois press welcomed the decisions of this Congress as an expression of wisdom on the part of the tried leaders of the trade unions, and it must be recognized that the British bourgeoisie know their trade unions. Hence their mutual trust and satisfaction with each other.

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The Congress was, of course, unable to get around the question of *fascism*. Firstly, fascism had conquered in Germany and the German colleagues of the British trade unionists had gone bankrupt and had become the laughing stock of the whole world. On the other hand, fascism was beginning to take root in Great Britain—and not only in the form of Mosley's Black Shirts. Fascism finds an expression in a number of laws by the Conservative government, which, concealing itself behind the flag of democracy, is increasing the pressure on the working class and the living standard of the proletariat.

It would seem that the Congress should have definitely and sharply raised the question of fascism and that the British trade unionists should have criticized the conduct of their German colleagues, should have shown the British workers how to fight against the British fascists. At any rate that is what should have been done by people who claimed that they are caring for the interests of the working class. But the leaders of the Trade Union Congress acted in a very different way. They did not speak at all of the conduct of their German colleagues. They merely referred in passing to the question of the growth of fascism in Great Britain and they launched the whole force of their dissatisfaction against Hitler, Mussolini and Co. Was it worth while wasting so much powder and shot to prove that Hitler and Mussolini are killing and torturing workers? Was it worth while talking on this subject when every worker knows what the German and Italian fascists are? It would seem that the British trade unionists should have fought against the British fascists first of all. It would seem that the British trade unionists should have disclosed to the entire working class of Great Britain the causes of the collapse of the German trade union movement and should have drawn corresponding conclusions. But the leaders of the Trade Union Congress preferred to evade this question.

Why did the question of the conduct of the leaders of the German trade unions not come under consideration by the organizers and leaders of the Congress? Because the leaders of the British trade unions had no objection to make to the policy of their German colleagues, because they themselves were acting in the same way as the leaders of the German trade unions had acted.

In reality, had not the German trade union officials howled everywhere against dictatorship from the Right and from the "Left"? They had. Mr. Citrine did not think up anything original, he simply translated into English the things which his German colleagues had said before him.

What does this attack against dictatorship from the "Left" mean? It means an attack against the U.S.S.R., an attack against the forceful overthrow of the bourgeoisie and against the capturing of power by the proletariat. This is not only an attack against the workers of the land where they have already taken power, but it is a direct defense of their own bourgeoisie and that of other countries against the danger of the proletarian revolution. This is being done at a time when the worst enemies of the U.S.S.R. are forced to admit the great achievements of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Trade Union Congress reiterated its belief in freedom and democracy. It stated that "great freedom and more effective democracy can only be secured by strengthening the trade unions, the Labor

Party and the Cooperative Movement and by uniting the struggle of these three sections of the working class". Let us admit that the British trade unions, the Labor Party and the Cooperative Movement are still too weak to bring about "effective democracy", but German social-democracy, the German trade unions and the German Cooperative Societies were, in their time, powerful organizations. Why did things terminate with the smashing of the reformist trade unions in Germany? The leaders of the British trade unions pretend that they do not understand the reasons. They pretend this in order that the members of their trade unions will not understand the essence of the question. But, nevertheless, the question is a very simple one. *The German trade unions were smashed because their leaders carried on the same policy of class collaboration as do the British trade unions. The British trade unions are approaching serious cataclysms because they are following in the footsteps of the German trade unions.* This, for example, can be seen from the fact that Mr. Citrine denies fascization in Great Britain. He states that there is not and will not be any resemblance between the unemployed training camps in Great Britain, whatever the condition in them, and the forced labor camps in Germany. He and his colleagues are for police protection for fascist meetings. He and his colleagues spoke against the anti-fascist demonstration appointed for September 9. This means that the leaders of the British trade unions literally repeat word for word what their German colleagues formerly said. And they want to assure us that for this very reason the result will be better.

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If the British trade union leaders have taken the position of their German colleagues on the question of fascism, then on the question of *war* they have dragged out ancient finery and have repeated what Burns, Henderson and Shaw said and did during the World Imperialist War. The Congress first of all establishes in its resolution *the difference between a defensive and offensive war*. It promises complete support to the British Government "in all the risks and consequences" connected with participation in collective measures against those who break the peace. But, remembering that Britain also may be the one that violates peace, the resolution proposed by Henderson promises to call a "special Congress for discussing the best way out of the situation" if England is recognized as the aggressor. This resolution shows that the leaders of the British trade unions are giving *carte blanche* in advance to the Conservative Government. And this is in peace time! What will these gentlemen say when war actually begins? The thing becomes still more expressive when the resolution gets to the forms and methods of the struggle against war. Here we find

a perfectly open abandonment even of the decision made by the previous trade union Congress. The resolution of the 66th Congress states:

"The absence of an independent trade union movement in countries like Germany, Italy, Austria and other countries makes it impossible to declare a general strike against the governments of those countries. In other countries like Japan, for example, the weakness of the trade union organizations makes it impossible for them to exert pressure on the government."

The position is, therefore, as follows: As the trade unions of Germany, Austria, Italy and Japan cannot declare a general strike against war, the trade unions of Great Britain must support their government. In general, here is set out, in different words, the position on war of the leaders of the British trade unions, a line which was branded so fiercely by Lenin during and after the war.

One of the delegates was right when he pointed out that the resolution is a step backwards from the position of last year's Congress, that it says nothing on the question of the U.S.S.R. and only aims at "giving the trade unions sleeping sickness" and thus making it easier for the Conservative Government to support Japan. But it was difficult to move the assembled delegates by pointing out such "trifles". The trade union leaders were resolved to show their patriotism and loyalty. They were resolved to show to the British bourgeoisie that they were, are and will remain the defenders of the capitalist fatherland, and moreover they did this so openly that no mistake is possible on this question. All this took place at a moment when the British government is intriguing with Japan against the U.S.S.R., when the tenseness of international relations, as the result of the aggressive policy of Japan and Germany, has reached its boiling point. Truly, no better service could have been given to the Diehards!

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The *united front* also received the attention of the assembled delegates. But the speakers, the general council, and the official orators did not think it necessary to raise the question of the united front seriously, to explain its advantages, to concentrate the whole energy of the masses for resistance to the capitalist offensive. The thing in the united front which interested and worried them was not the struggle against the bourgeoisie but the fact that it was a *united front with the Communists*.

The united front with the Conservative government for the defense of the imperialist interests of the British bourgeoisie—this they understood, this they could agree to and this they looked upon as their duty. But to create a united front with the Communists—this seemed to them absolutely inadmissible! The report of the general council which was discussed

at the Congress condemns the Trade Union Councils which "established the united front with organizations subordinate to the Communist Party". The reporters were interested only in one question—how to avoid being in the united front with the Communists against the bourgeoisie. It could be seen from the speeches, from the discussions at the Congress and from the actions of the trade unions that the trade union leaders genuinely prefer the united front with the bourgeoisie against the Communists, against the revolutionary wing of the workers' movement.

To do justice to the leaders of the trade unions, they talked of this openly, not wrapping up their anti-Communist views and objections in cloudy phrases. They consider that the trade unions, the Labor Party and the Cooperative Movement can do everything themselves. But even the British trade union leaders are liable to make a mistake! The demonstration on September 9 in Hyde Park showed that the little Communist Party carried with it in the struggle against fascism large masses of organized workers, although the trade unions, the Labor Party and the Cooperative Societies called on their members not to take part in this demonstration.

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The Congress at Weymouth had no time to deal with such prosaic questions as *wages*, although over two million workers in Great Britain are now demanding wage increases, that were discussed at the Congresses of the separate trade unions this summer. The Congress made a few decisions on *social insurance*, but—and this is the essence of the whole policy of the trade union leaders—it did not say how and what to do to abolish the old insurance law and create a better one. It is true that in its decisions, the Congress points out the path for carrying out social insurance—a path which has already been tried and tested in Great Britain. The Trade Union Congress calls on the Labor government of the future to repeal this law. But on what grounds can we feel sure that a third Labor government will repeal this law? Do we not remember how the so-called Labor government refused to pass a law limiting the working day to seven hours for the miners, how it cut wages, how it supported strike-breakers in a number of strikes, etc.? What guarantee have we that the Labor government will repeal this law? For, despite the refusal of the Labor government to establish a shorter working day in the mines, it nevertheless continues to have the support of the trade unions. On what grounds can we suppose that the third Labor government will be better than the first two? It will be better, say the trade union leaders, if it receives a majority of votes. But in Germany the social-democratic government had a majority for quite a long time after the November Revolution. In Sweden the social-democratic government has a majority at present.

Why have they given nothing to the working class? Evidently it is not merely a matter of obtaining a formal majority, but of the fact that the first and second Labor governments of Great Britain preserved the inviolability of private property, and there are no grounds for thinking that a third Labor government will not occupy itself with this same pious matter! The appeal to the third Labor government, the demagogic promises that the third Labor government will make some radical changes, must meet with strong resistance from the revolutionary workers. It may be objected that MacDonald and Thomas are no longer there, that they have gone over to the Conservatives, and that now the Labor government will be more "Left" without them. It is true that MacDonald and Thomas are no longer there, but their friends, their fellow thinkers, Henderson and Co., still remain! On what grounds are we to suppose that the Chairman of the Disarmament Commission and the delegate of the Conservative government to Geneva, Arthur Henderson, will be more radical than MacDonald on questions of home and foreign policy? There are no grounds for such a supposition and there could not be.

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In order to distract the attention of the working masses from the difficult and concrete questions of modern life, the Congress occupied itself with the big questions of the "socialization" of the iron and steel industry. The Congress adopted a resolution on the *reorganization of the cotton and coal industries*. What is this socialization of industry as understood by the trade unionists? In essence, the proposal of the Trade Union Congress amounts to the *trustification of all industry, the greater concentration of all industry and the transfer of the management of all industry to the biggest trusts*. Of course united control, national ownership and control of all industry, self-government, responsible representatives, conditions of the workers, the development of the spirit of self-government, the right to participate in the control and management of industry, etc., all find a place in the resolution. But all this is extremely vague and indefinite. Who must socialize industry? And why must the capitalists agree to socialization? But the decisions of the Congress take as their starting point the consent of the capitalists to this proposal. It is well known that capitalists only agree to combinations which give them an additional income. And if the Trade Union Congress is calculating to obtain the agreement of the employers, this means that it is not averse to guaranteeing them an additional income compared with what they receive under the present form of management of industry. But these motives for socialization are our old acquaintances! We heard this song from the mouths of the leaders of the German trade unions. They also "socialized" industry, organized control, participated in the management of

industry for long years. In reality this was merely empty talk, socialization on paper to throw dust in the eyes of the broad masses of the working class. The English trade unionists know what German "socialization" led to. The aim of "socialization" advanced by the Trade Union Congress at Weymouth was to convince the working masses that it was possible to bring about socialization without the means of production passing into the hands of the workers, that socialization was possible without revolution, without the expropriation of the expropriators, that it was possible to have a radical reconstruction of all industry by bringing the method of conviction to bear on the employers. We know how the German song on socialization ended. Where is our guarantee that the British melody on the same theme will not lead to the same results?

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How can we explain that this British Trade Union Congress failed to resort to "Left" phrases to which they resorted at former congresses? This is explained above all, by the approach of the general election. The trade union leaders wanted to show the petty bourgeoisie and the big "progressive" bourgeoisie that the coming of a Labor government to power has nothing in common with revolution. What was it that caused uneasiness to the British bourgeoisie? The fact that a year ago the British trade unions decided in favor of a strike against war. In order to prove their loyalty to the interests of British imperialism, the leaders of the trade unions and the Labor Party repudiated the strike and announced that they would support their own country in case of a "defensive" war. The bourgeoisie did not want the Congress to take up seriously and thoroughly the struggle against British fascism. The trade union leaders directed all their rage against German fascism and thus left their native fascists and the fascist measures of the Conservative government in the shadow. The bourgeoisie did not want the Congress to occupy itself seriously with the question of increased wages. The trade union leaders avoided this question, demonstrating their readiness to prove in practice the harmlessness of the future Labor government for the ruling classes. By means of the decisions of the Congress, the leaders wanted to say to the bourgeoisie: "See how moderate and respectable we are. You have no need to fear a replacement of Conservatives by Laborites. We guarantee you the continuity of British policy and a loyal attitude towards the Constitution and the pillars of Great Britain." The meaning of these decisions cannot be understood in any other way.

This means that the trade union leaders did not think it necessary to conceal their well-intentioned patriotic face. There was no change in type in the policy of the trade union leaders. There was a more

open exposition of their policy in view of the approaching general elections and the sharpening inner and outer contradictions. Thus and only thus is it possible to explain the political meaning of the Weymouth Congress. But this means that the break between the upper ranks and the rank and file of trade unions has deepened still further. In reality, while the trade union leaders think it necessary to demonstrate their deep loyalty to the capitalist system, the trade union members are displaying an ever-greater readiness to fight for an improved standard of living, a readiness to fight against fascism. The demonstration on September 9 was a brilliant example of the gulf which separates the lower trade union organizations from their leaders. Can the decisions of the Weymouth Congress bridge this gulf? There is no basis for such a supposition. On the contrary, the trade union members will be profoundly disappointed at this Congress. They will be deceived in their hopes and will begin to seek for a way out along new revolutionary lines. It could not be otherwise. In the places where the trade union leaders want to cast in the reformist mold the entire workers' movement, where the class struggle is replaced by loyal expectation, where all the demands of the workers are postponed until electoral victories by the Labor Party, and where all plans are based on the idea of working in common with the "progressive" bourgeoisie and on the many forms of class collaboration—the gap between the upper and lower ranks of the trade unions cannot help but increase. Everything depends on our activity in the trade unions. Everything depends on how the revolutionary workers are able to utilize the conditions for drawing the trade union members over to the side of the class struggle.

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The Congress of the British Trade Unions at Weymouth could freely produce its reformist brew because there was an insignificant revolutionary opposition at the Congress. Only five or six delegates spoke against the official attitude, against the translation of the theory and practice of the German trade unions into English. But the opposition was too weak properly to brand the policy of the trade union leaders, and this is an important question for Great Britain. It is plain that discontent is growing among the masses. It is known to everyone that deep down among the British trade unionists this dissatisfaction is becoming extremely sharp. But why has the opposition been so weak up till now? Why have the British trade union leaders been able to carry on their policy, which has already led the British proletariat to severe defeats and will do so in the future? Because the *revolutionary workers, members of the Communist Party, are not all members of trade unions; because not all those who are in trade unions work there in a planned manner, seeking to win functions in the trade unions,*

because among our comrades in Great Britain there still exist a number of incorrect conceptions which prevent our penetration into the midst of the trade unionists.

On the one hand, there are Communists who think that they should act in trade unions in such a way as not to touch the feelings of the leaders, that they should adapt themselves to the tactics and policy of the General Council. Hence they keep quiet at the meetings of the local branches, at the Congresses of the various unions, in respect to our revolutionary aims and tasks, our tactics; hence some of the speeches are entirely colorless. On the other hand, there still exist tendencies to underestimate the significance and role of the trade unions in the labor movement in Great Britain. The comrades forget that the trade unions are the oldest and most influential workers' organizations in Great Britain, that they carry with them not only the members of unions but big masses of unorganized workers, and that failure to work in the trade unions or a conciliatory attitude towards the failure to work in the trade unions is a *crime against the working class of Great Britain.*

In order to carry on revolutionary work in the trade unions in a way that will be useful for the British proletariat, it is necessary to know exactly what is the Labor Party, what the leaders of the trade unions are like, etc. An incorrect approach to this may hinder our work of liberating the broad masses from reformist illusions. And the fact that such incorrect views exist can be seen, for example, from the last article of Comrade Mahone in the *Labor Monthly* on the Trade Union Congress. We read in this article that

"... the British bureaucrats have learned nothing from the events in Germany and Austria [which is true]. They are doing more than simply repeating the policy of their colleagues in these countries [this is already an exaggeration]. They offer themselves to the bourgeoisie, imagine that they are capable of doing the work which was performed by the National-Socialist Party in Germany [but this is altogether incorrect]."

What is meant by the last statement? That the Laborites and the trade union leaders are the same as the national-socialists in Germany. This statement shows that many comrades do not yet understand the difference between social-fascism and fascism, though the Twelfth and Thirteenth Plenums of the E.C.C.I. explained popularly and in great detail what is the difference. To say that the labor leaders, the leaders of the trade unions of the Labor Party, are the same as the German fascists, means to put oneself in a ridiculous position before the members of these organizations. It means to cut off the path towards these masses, because the members of the Labor Party and the trade unions, however bad may be their opinion of

their leaders, nevertheless cannot agree (and quite correctly) that the Laborites and the trade union leaders are the same as the national-socialists. And then, who wants such a theory? What use is it and what can it give to the labor movement of Great Britain and our Party? It is true that the Laborites and trade union leaders are clearing the path for fascism. As they do not struggle against fascism, as they do not mobilize the working class against the fascist measures of the English bourgeoisie, as they lump together dictatorship from the Right and dictatorship from the Left, as they struggle against the united front, *they are clearing the path for fascism*. But does this mean that they themselves are fascists? No, it does not. Our comrades in Great Britain must understand this and not write in an influential magazine such sentiments which are only able to hinder the revolutionary workers from coming closer to the broad masses of the organized workers of Great Britain.

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Trade Union Congresses are extremely important events in Great Britain. Both the workers and the bourgeoisie pay great attention to them, for in Great Britain the trade unions have an enormous weight. They have many advantages and therefore we have the right to demand a great deal from them.

The Weymouth Congress took place under the banner of struggle against the united front. The leaders of the British trade unions are more responsible than any others for the fact that a resolution hostile to the united front, a resolution demanding the dissolution of all revolutionary trade union organizations, the dissolution of the Red International of Labor Unions (R.I.L.U.), was introduced at the General Council of the Amsterdam International which met at Weymouth on the eve of the Trade Union Congress. The idea of this ridiculous resolution permeated the work of the Congress of the British trade unions in Weymouth.

Instead of bringing to light their own weaknesses, the causes for the destruction of the trade unions in

Germany and Austria, instead of admitting the bankruptcy of their own policy and tactics, instead of this, the General Council of the Amsterdam International, under the leadership of Citrine, the leader of the British trade unions, proposed that all the revolutionary trade unions and the R.I.L.U. should dissolve, *i.e.*, should admit the unlawfulness of their own existence and bow down to the political bankrupts. Can we take a serious attitude towards such decisions? Of course not!

While the revolutionary trade unions in all countries are under the hurricane of fire from the bourgeoisie, while in a number of countries the revolutionary trade union movement has been driven underground, the Amsterdam International, at the head of which stand the British trade unionists, *demand the dissolution of our revolutionary organizations, i.e., they come to the aid of the bourgeoisie*. At present the British trade union leaders are not only answerable for the policy of the British trade union movement, but also for the policy of the Amsterdam International, because the British Trade Union Congress contains about half the members of the entire Amsterdam International. As the strongest organization of the Amsterdam International, the Trade Union Congress determines its policy and tactics, determines its decisions, plays a leading role and therefore must take the responsibility. While the Amsterdam leaders demand the dissolution of the revolutionary trade union organizations, the R.I.L.U. does not present such a demand to the reformist unions. The R.I.L.U. does not, and never did, demand the dissolution of the trade unions. We propose the united front of the revolutionary and reformist trade unions in the struggle against the bourgeoisie. In a number of countries we sharply raised the question of the *unity of the trade union movement on the basis of the class struggle*. This comparison alone testifies to the fact that the Amsterdam International is continuing its splitting policy, while the R.I.L.U. is stubbornly and systematically continuing its policy of the united front and the unity of the trade union movement.