

The Trade Union Congress

A VARIETY of exceptional circumstances surround the 56th Annual Meeting of the Trade Union Congress. For the first time in the history of the working class movement it meets under the shadow of a Labour Government. For the first time since the Russian Revolution representatives from the Russian Trade Unions will be present, as fraternal delegates. Were these the only exceptions they would mark off this Congress from all preceding Congresses as unique.

But other outstanding events cannot be ignored. Two International Conferences of world significance have just been held. One has produced the Anglo-Russian Treaty, the other has brought agreement into the ranks of international capitalism, for the deeper enslavement of the workers of Europe. We refer to the Dawes' Report.

The agenda, as issued, gives not the slightest indication that these events have any relation whatever to the work of the Congress, and we shall be dependent upon the General Council's Report and the three emergency resolutions which the Council is empowered to introduce, for recognition of the most outstanding features of the Congress.

A CONSERVATIVE INSTITUTION.

If the situation was not so serious the farcical position of the delegates would be a standing joke of the working class movement. Could anything be more ridiculous than the Trades Union Congress, listening seriously to speeches and arguments and bound to vote for one or other of the resolutions already on the agenda, and powerless to move any amendment or alternative resolution from the floor of the Congress? The Congress is not a deliberative body, meeting together on behalf of the union movement as a whole, thrashing out a policy to govern and lead all the unions during the coming year. It is a gathering of the rank and file to approve of the carefully-sifted resolutions of the separate union executives. The Trades Union Congress is, accordingly, one of the most conservative of institutions, and one can guarantee that any resolution passing through its sieve, having the appearance of being advanced is either the result of very severe pressure from below, or does not mean anything, as, for example, the N.U.R. resolution on the six-hour day.

It would appear that the fates have determined to show up the muddling methods of the British Labour movement, somewhat more than usual on this occasion. Here is a Trades Union Congress, which, by no manner of means can detach itself from political events of first class importance, meeting a month before the Labour Party Conference. Is not this putting the cart before the horse with a vengeance? Where is the Labour Party leadership? Have the unions paid their affiliation fees to be placed in the muddled position of perhaps coming to decisions at the Trades Union Congress, which may be in flat contradiction to the Labour Party decision in October? or, has the Labour Party decided to take its political lead from the Trades Union Congress?

If the Trades Union Congress was the serious business that it ought to be, then these questions would be serious questions, but the fact that nobody really worries as to which meets first, the political party or the Trades Union Congress, or cares very much what the decisions of the Trades Union Congress may be, only serves to show the backwardness of the general political development of the working class in this country.

WANTED: A GENERAL STAFF.

The movement gropes along without any guiding principles. It refuses to analyse its own position, abhors bold comprehensive policies, and prefers to emulate the snail. The role of a political party is limited to parliamentary operations. The role of the Unions is confined to sectional wage negotiations, insurance and recruiting means for ambitious parliamentarians.

So long as these conditions obtain, and the leadership is in the hands of those who refuse to recognise the class war, the vital role of a political party as a leader of the political class war will pass unrecognised, and the strength of the Trade Union Congress, as a powerful means of mobilising the workers for united class action remains only as a potentiality. And, we venture to assert that until there is a powerful Communist Party the potentialities of the Trades Union Congress will not be translated into daily realities, nor will the leadership of the working class be other than the present muddle-headed business which tries to serve contradictory forces—encouraging the workers to improve their conditions, and blacklegging on them when they try to do it.

Meanwhile, there are resolutions on the agenda which have been pressed up from below, that are helpful in the purpose of transforming the Congress. For years we have urged the creation of a "General Staff" for the whole Trade Union movement. That agitation made itself felt until the Parliamentary Commit-

tee of the Trades Union Congress assumed the name of "General Council of the Trades Union Congress." This was acclaimed as the "General Staff," but a blind man can see that it was no such thing, however high sounding its name. Our campaign continued, and resolutions are before the Congress to increase the power to act in all disputes, and bring the united forces of the unions behind the workers in the forefront of the struggle. The plea of union autonomy will be brought against these proposals as if "autonomy" had not severely thrashed every union in the country during the last few years.

Resolutions are also demanding the affiliation of the Trades Council, the Unemployed Workers' Committees, and that every trade group on the General Council shall have "at least one representative who is a bona-fide worker engaged at the trade or entitled to donation benefit." We hope all these resolutions will be passed by the Congress in order to bring it nearer to the actual struggles of the workers, and to make possible in the near future the transformation of the Trades Union Congress into an effective instrument in the workers' fight.

We value these resolutions because they strike at the conservatism of the Congress, and are blows directed in order to liberate the workers and free them for action.

PUSH THAT CHARTER.

Nothing could emphasise the need for this better than the manner in which the General Council presents its Seven-point Charter. After placing on its programme "the nationalisation of land, mines, and minerals and railways," etc., it descends to the level of a mere propaganda society. "This Congress decides that it shall be the duty of the General Council to institute a vigorous campaign in all parts of the country, with a view to mobilising public opinion in support of the objects of the Charter and of their fulfilment."

It appears from the manner in which this Charter is put forward, that the General Council is not serious about these proposals, that they have simply asked Mr. Bramley to draw together the resolutions that continue to appear at each Congress, to bunch them together in order to dismiss them. We expect if this is the attitude of the Council (and upon this matter we would like to hear from the "left-wing" Messrs. John Bromley, George Hicks, Robert Smillie, Wm. Hutchinson, and Co.) that whenever the Minority Committee puts forward their demands we shall get the classic formal reply: "Yes, you are quite right, it is already in our Charter." And then further slumber! If this is not to be

the case, when did the Trade Union movement surrender its industrial power as a means of making governments and political parties sit up, and give attention. If the General Council is not playing with the Congress, and the Congress means business, then they will strengthen their resolution and their intentions by insisting that the programme is serious enough to warrant every means at the disposal of the unions being used to achieve it as early as possible, otherwise the resolution is a clear indication that the intention of the General Council is to use the unions only as a propaganda apparatus for the Parliamentary Labour Party.

This seems to us to be their real attitude on most questions, as again illustrated in their proposals with regard to the Trades Councils. Instead of seeing in these organisations the possibilities of making them what they used to be—fighting organs of the workers, uniting the unions locally on a broad class basis, they propose to use them simply as distributive machinery for the literature of the General Council. Instead of stimulating the life and activity of the masses and drawing them into a general mass movement, they seek to stifle, to resolutionise the masses into a state of pathetic pacifist somnolence, which will enable them to take the hard knocks of the bosses graciously as “by kind permission.”

WELCOME! THE RUSSIAN DELEGATES.

It is with joy that we turn to welcome the delegates of the Russian Trade Unions. We welcome them not only because they are comrades who have come through the strife of revolution, and who have no illusions as to the class character of the workers' war on capitalism, but because their presence here is a clear indication of the great changes coming in the international union movement, and within the ranks of British trade unionism.

For seven years the Russian trade unions have been isolated—and let the fundamental reason of their isolation be perfectly clear. They were isolated because they had defeated their oppressors, the landlords and the capitalists, and dared to stand fast by the revolution they had achieved. When all the formal talk concerning this and that, constitution is reduced to its essentials, this one big fact stares us in the face. The International Federation of Trade Unions, which has achieved no revolution, which, indeed, has striven to prevent revolution, in all the countries of its affiliated organisations, has been striving with all its strength to detach the Russian Unions from their revolutionary purpose, and to insist upon them retreating to the position of class collaboration and social pacifism taken up by

the Amsterdam International. Throughout the last seven years, the Russian unions have refused, and refuse to-day, to surrender the real gains of the proletarian revolution for the illusions of the Thomas' and MacDonalds'.

What then is the meaning of their presence at the Hull Congress?

They are here because of the vast changes in the world situation since the 1917 revolution, and the changes that have taken place in the proletarian movement. To-day, there is no question as to the stability of the U.S.S.R. The workers' republic conquered her internal foes, and forced her external foes to cease military intervention. Arising out of these victories, more and more of the capitalist states have come to terms.

During this transition the Russian unions have grown in strength and purpose. They have gathered round them, in the R.I.L.U. increasing numbers of allies. These allies were workers within the ranks of the Amsterdam International. The whole of the European economic and political development during the same period urged on the process of weakening the position of the reactionaries in the unions. The German trade unions, which have held the lead of Amsterdam International, crumbled amidst the economic disasters created by the conflicts between the Imperialists, aided and abetted by the reactionary union leaders. The hegemony of the International Federation of Trade Unions passed into the hands of the British Trade Unions. The reins of government fell into the hands of the British Labour Party, and the Second International, and with this transformation of the scene it was immediately apparent that the Labour movement was not in complete accord with the surrender of the "right" wing of the Labour Party to Imperialism.

TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL UNITY.

Especially was this felt in the trade unions, which were nearer to the every-day struggles of the workers, than the middle class leaders of the Labour Party. Here, the class interests of the workers immediately manifested themselves, and such men as Purcell, Bromley, Hutchinson, Hicks and Williams, began to sound a critical warning note to move nearer to the position of our party, and echo the demand that the workers of Europe come together for common defence, and for a united forward movement against capitalism.

The presence of our Russian comrades at Hull is a continuation of that process—the bringing together of the unions of revolu-

tion with workers of the British trade unions, who have yet to face the difficulties the Russian unions have overcome.

No moment could be more opportune for their presence. Now, when the Imperial Labour Government of Britain has committed itself to the policy of the Wall Street bankers of America, when, through the pressure of the proletariat of this country, the Anglo-Russian Treaty has been signed; when the Imperialists are preparing for new wars as fast as possible, what greater opportunity could present itself than this, for the trade unions of Britain to declare that no obstacle shall be permitted to stand in the way of the British and Russian trade unions jointly taking a leading part in the making of a single international federation of trade unions, pledged to fight the workers' battles, free from the influence and permeation of such capitalist institutions as the League of Nations? This is indeed, an appropriate moment, and we shall await the decision of the British trade unions on this question with great interest, confident that an affirmative answer, a ready response to the call for workers' solidarity by a deed of this description is the sure guarantee that the remainder of their difficulties will be overcome.

J. T. MURPHY.

