

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST CONFERENCE

LOUIS C. FRAINA, *International Secretary, Communist Party of America*

The Conference of the Communist International, convened in Holland, February 10-17th, was an event of prime importance in the development of the International. In spite of the enormous difficulties experienced by Communists in moving from one country to another, the Conference met; and in spite of the Dutch police breaking up the meetings before our work was completed, the Conference transacted enough of its business to make it of fundamental value—particularly in the development of a Communist International functioning actively and unitedly on a world basis. And in initiating the formulation and discussion of problems of party tactics and immediate action decisive for victory in the final struggle.

Organizations represented in the Conference were as follows: Communist Party of Russia, represented by mandate; Communist Party (Opposition) of Germany; Communist Party of America; Communist Party of Holland, England—British Socialist Party, Workers Socialist Federation, and the Shop Stewards and Workers Committees; Communist Party of Switzerland, and the Communist Group of the Socialist movement of Belgium. In all, sixteen delegates were officially present; in addition, with a voice but no vote: a member of the Communist Party of Hungary, formerly in the Soviet Government there; a Chinese comrade; a representative of the Communist movement of the Dutch East Indies; and Comrades Anton Pannekoek and Herman Gorter. After the Conference was dispersed there arrived delegates from the Communist Party of Germany (Central Committee), the Communist Party of Austria, the Communist Party of Rumania, and the Left Wing of the Socialist Party of Spain. F. Loriot, of the Left Wing of the French Socialist Party, sent a letter expressing regrets at not being able to come, and describing the recent French movement, its prospects and its defeats, particularly lamenting the faith in "the unity of the party" which prevents the emergence of a Communist Party. The delegates who did come but could not participate in the Conference discussed problems with the Executive of the International Sub-Bureau created by the Conference.

Decisions of the Conference.

The Conference, in brief, accomplished:

1. The Conference adopted a declaration on Soviet Russia, calling upon the workers of all countries not to allow peace with Russia to come through capitalist necessity, but to compel peace by means of revolutionary pressure upon the government, urging three methods of action, mass demonstrations of protest, demonstration strikes, and coercive strikes—coercive strikes being the decisive move to compel the acquiescence of the government. The declaration repeatedly emphasized the necessity of action, and authorizes the International Sub-Bureau to issue a call for an international general strike as the situation matures. The declaration, moreover, provides against repeating the fiasco of the July 21st strike initiated by the Socialist Party of Italy, by

a) Instructing the Bureau to establish connection with each country to measure the sentiment prevailing, and insuring a period of intense preparative agitation and organization. b) Providing that the General Strike for Russia shall include political and economic demands in accordance with the revolutionary requirements in each country, thereby making the movement for Soviet Russia an integral part of the immediate revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.

c) Avoiding the fundamental mistake of the July 21st strike of working through the bureaucracy of the trade-unions, and urg-

ing that preparations for a general strike shall proceed through the branches of the unions, extra-union organizations (such as the Shop Stewards and the Workers' Committees), and the creation of extra-union organizations if necessary.

2. The Conference adopted a thesis on Unionism, which I prepared and introduced in the name of the Communist Party of America and which was adopted unanimously. This thesis constitutes the first authoritative utterance of the International on the Communist conception of unionism (in general, it agrees with a declaration of G. Zinoviev on Unionism); and it indicates, moreover, that the conception of Unionism developed by the Communist Party of America (which has been misrepresented and stupidly attacked equally by the I. W. W. and the Socialist Labor Party) is the identical conception of the Communist International. This is a summary of the thesis:

a) Unions are necessary organizations for the immediate struggle of the workers; in spite of their limitations they can, particularly as industrial unions, become active means of revolutionary struggle and a factor in the Communist reconstruction of society.

b) The Trades-Unions, while means of resisting and often improving the most most degrading conditions of capitalism, are incapable of actually and materially improving the general condition of labor.

c) The Trades-Unions developed during the epoch of small industry, and of intense national economic development (1870-1900) this circumstance, combined with the artisan conception of craft skill being a form of property, produces a property and petty-bourgeois ideology and a concept of limiting the struggle within the limits of capitalism and the nation. The Trades-Unions represented, and still largely represent, the skilled workers in the upper layers of the working class, the aristocracy of labor.

d) The dominant trades-unionism accepts capitalism; and, under imperialism, Capitalism seduces the "aristocracy of labor" with a share in the profits of Imperialism, by means of higher wages, labor legislation, and improved conditions generally: the upper layers of the working class using the Trades-Unions to "stabilize" labor in industry and promote Imperialism.

e) Realizing its economic impotence (and impotence produced by non-revolutionary purposes, archaic craft form of unionism unable to cope with the concentrated industry of modern capitalism) the dominant trades-unionism turns to parliamentary action in the form of Laborism; and, as Laborism, trades-unionism in its dominant expression merges definitely in State Capitalism and Imperialism. The tendency is for Laborism and Socialism to unite.

f) Laborism becomes the final bulwark of defense of capitalism against the oncoming proletarian revolution. Accordingly, a merciless struggle against Laborism is necessary; but while expressing itself politically as Parliamentarism and petty-bourgeois democracy, the basis of Laborism is trades-unionism: the struggle against trades-unionism, therefore, is an indispensable phase of the struggle against Laborism.

g) This struggle against trades-unionism must proceed by means of the Communist Party's general agitation to drive the unions to more revolutionary action, the formation of extra-union organizations such as the Shop Stewards, Workers Committees and economic Workers Councils, the organization of direct branches of the Communist Party in the shops, mills and mines, and the construction of industrial unions.

h) The agitation for, and construction of, industrial unions is a factor of the ut-

most importance in developing Communist consciousness and the final revolutionary struggle. But industrial unionism must recognize its limitations: it must develop the concept in practice, in cooperation with the Communist Party of the general political strike. Industrial Unionism cannot under capitalism organize all the workers or an overwhelming majority: the concept of organizing, under capitalism and gradually, workers' control of industry in terms of industrial unions, is an expression, inverted in form, of the concept of parliamentary acquisition of power gradually and peacefully: the "penetration" of capitalism by Socialism.

i) The objective of the class struggle is the conquest of the power of the state. The industrial unions (or the parliaments) are not the means for conquest of power, but mass action, Soviets and Proletarian Dictatorship. The parliamentary and doctrinaire industrial union (syndicalist) conception evades all actual problems of the revolution.

j) After the conquest of power and under the protection of proletarian dictatorship, industrial unionism comes actually to function in the Communist reconstruction of society in terms of control and management of industry by the industrially organized producers.

3. The Conference adopted a thesis on Social-Patriots and Unity, which I prepared and introduced in the name of the Communist Party and adopted after one amendment strengthening the thesis proposals. The thesis stresses the fact that the Social patriots and opportunists are the worst enemies of the proletarian revolution, with whom there can be no Communist unity or cooperation: and moreover, it particularizes and accomplishes five very definite and practical things:

a) Provides that the Communist International reject the admission of any party or group (such as the Longuet "majoritaires" in France or the American Socialist Party) even should these affiliate with the Third International.

b) Reject definitely the proposals of Jean Longuet, Morris Hilquit and the Independent Socialist Party of Germany for the organization of "another international" to include the social-patriots and opportunists of the Second International ("and also" the Bolsheviks and the Communists).

c) Emphasizes the incompatibility of a Communist Party tolerating the Socialist Party of Italy for not expelling its social-patriots and opportunists in the party (indirectly condemning the Socialist Party of Italy for not expelling its social-patriots and opportunists, particularly in the parliamentary group).

d) Uncompromisingly repudiates Communist Party cooperation with the social-patriots or opportunist organizations, with bourgeois or social-patriotic parties, with parties affiliated with the Second International or with the agents of capitalism in the labor movement. (This implies that the Communist Party about to be organized in England by unity of B. S. P., the Socialist Labor Party, Workers Socialist Federation and South Wales Socialist Party, must reject affiliation with the Labor Party—the British Socialist Party favors this affiliation, the others are against).

e) Rejects the concept of Communist unity "in general," urging that unity must be based not upon formal acceptance of general principles but agreement upon fundamental action.

The tendency of the thesis on Social-patriots and Unity is to preserve and strengthen the revolutionary integrity of the Communist International to prevent the International from being swamped under the

onrush of undesirable elements from the Second International.

4. The Conference did not act on the problems of parliamentarism, being dispersed by the police. There were before the Conference three proposals on this problem—a thesis introduced by Anton Pannekoek, a series of amendments introduced by myself in the name of the Communist Party of America, and a resolution introduced by Sylvia Pankhurst (Workers' Socialist Federation of England) the tendency of which was to reject Communist use of parliamentarism. The resolution of Sylvia Pankhurst would have received her own vote and perhaps that of the delegate representing the opposition in the Communist Party of Germany. The original thesis and the amendment would, I think, have been adopted substantially if not actually as proposed: they thus formulate the problem:

a) Parliamentarism is not for the conquest of political power—the proletariat must create its own organs of struggle and of state power, the Soviets and Proletarian Dictatorship. The Communist use of parliamentarism is secondary to the mass struggle of the proletariat, being used for the purpose of agitation only and to emphasize the political character of the class struggle.

b) Even in the epoch of imperialism, when parliaments degenerate in functions and become side-shows, the revolutionary use of parliamentarism and participation in elections is important in mobilizing the proletariat for action and the conquest of power.

c) The tendency to opportunism latent in parliamentarism must be resisted by (1) emphasizing its agitational and secondary character, and (2) rigorous party control of parliamentary representatives and their immediate expulsion should they develop an opportunist or a non-Communist tendency.

d) Limiting the number of public offices for which nominations are made, the limitations to be determined by the conditions in each country (as for example, the Communist Party of America excluding nomination for executive offices of the bourgeois state).

e) In periods of intense class struggle, although not yet revolutionary a temporary abstention from parliamentarism may most effectively promote our revolutionary purposes: in that event, a boycott of the election becomes necessary.

f) In a period of actual revolution the complete repudiation of parliamentarism may become necessary.

While the Communist use of parliamentarism in this sense was insisted upon, the Conference did not make mandatory the acceptance of parliamentarism: in the thesis of social-patriots and unity the condition proposed as the basis of which Communist groups should unite was, mass action, Soviets, proletarian dictatorship, and no compromise (including acceptance of the necessity for a Communist Party as the unifying and directive force in the revolutionary struggle).

5. The Conference devoted a large part of its labors to the problem of organization—of making the International actually function on a world basis, of unifying and centralizing the movement. While the Executive Committee still remains the supreme executive authority, the Conference organized still remains the supreme executive authority, the Conference organized supplementary machinery for purposes of immediate contact, expression and unity.

a) The Conference decided to create an international sub-bureau composed of one delegate from each country (where in a country there is more than one organiza-