

The International and Unionism.

By Louis C. Fraïna.

Perhaps the discussion of Unionism was the most interesting and intense of any discussion at the Second Congress of the Communist International. The small syndicalist group was clearly unable to impress the Congress; but there was another group, of which I was one, who defended a position combining Communism with the peculiar experience of the American and British movement on Unionism. I was appointed by the Executive Committee of the International as co-referee with Karl Radek to open the discussion in the Congress; and I reprint my two addresses in order (1) to inform the Party of my position; (2) to dispose of the slanders of Reed, Flynn & Co. that I represented a conception not in accord with the requirements of the American movement. The minority theses were formulated by myself and J. T. Murphy, of the Shop Stewards of England. Among others, our two chief points were included in the final theses adopted—extra-union organization and our suggestions on the Labor Union International. Another point: Reed, Flynn & Co. declared in Moscow (more hysterically than convincingly) that the theses would be "ruinous" for us. This is nonsense: the theses are ample for our purposes.

The First Address.

AFTER discussion in the Trade Union Commission we found ourselves much more in agreement than expected. The differences that still exist are largely differences of emphasis and practice, and not of principle.

The differences were first developed by the declaration convening a conference to organize an International of revolutionary Labor Unions. Some of the fundamental features of this declaration were totally unacceptable; for example, the condemnation of revolutionists leaving the trades unions was put in such a form as to exclude constructing a new labor organization, which would cripple the American movement, since in our country, where 80 per cent of the workers are unorganized and the trades unions dominated by the aristocracy of labor, the construction of a new revolutionary labor organization is an imperative revolutionary task. Then, the admission of separate industrial unions to the conference is made conditional upon the consent of the Central Labor organization of the country. Moreover, no provision is made for a representative each on the organization committee of the Labor International of the I. W. W. and the Shop Stewards of England—two movements of vital importance in the development of the revolutionary mass struggle.

Our objections to Comrade Radek's

theses (only some of which have been met by his accepting several of our amendments) were, first of all, comprised in the conception of unionism. Radek approached the problem almost exclusively from the standpoint of the masses in the unions to be won for Communism. That, of course, is fundamental. But it is also fundamental to consider the unions as organs of revolutionary struggle and as factors in the economic reconstruction of society after the conquest of political power. Radek, also, made too narrow and artificial the conditions under which new Labor Unions may be organized. And, finally, it appeared in Radek's theses as if our task is to capture the trades union bureaucracy; there was no understanding of and no provision for extra-union organizations (such as Shop Committees, Shop Stewards, etc.) as means of aggressive struggle against the bureaucracy and mobilizing the masses for action.

In the United States, the approach to revolutionary conceptions has been through revolutionary unionism. These conceptions were: the necessity of extra-parliamentary action to conquer political power, destruction of the bourgeois state machinery, and organizing the proletarian state not on geographical but industrial divisions. These conceptions made it easy for us to understand the fundamental tactics of the Russian Revolution. But at the same time we were compelled to carry on a severe theoretical struggle against the I. W. W. conception that only the industrial unions are necessary to overthrow capitalism, without soviets and proletarian dictatorship. The American Communist movement has done a very important work in merging the old revolutionary conceptions of industrial unionism in the new conceptions of Communism. And a necessary part of our work is to recognize the revolutionary functions of the labor unions.

The I. W. W. in the United States has been a real revolutionary force not primarily because of its agitation for industrial unionism nor because it tried to boycott and destroy the American Federation of Labor; in neither has it been very successful. The I. W. W. has been a tremendous revolutionary force in the American movement because it expressed the awakening to consciousness and action of the great masses of unorganized unskilled workers excluded from the American Federation of Labor. All movements to break the A. F. of L. by leaving the old unions have been a failure; during the war, when the old unions made a partner-

ship with the government, the I. W. W. members were compelled to join the old unions; and these I. W. W.'s by agitating from within developed very powerful revolutionary movements in the old unions.

The American experience, accordingly, emphasizes the necessity of working within the old unions (in the revolutionary sense); but this experience equally emphasized the necessity of constructing new unions (in accord with objective condition) in order to unite revolutionary work within the old unions with work from without.

There is no controversy on the need of working in the old unions. On that we are agreed. For the American Communist movement to reject working in the old unions and adopt the slogan, "Destroy the American Federation of Labor by leaving it," would destroy the Communist movement and not the reactionary labor unions.

The controversy centers on the methods and purposes of working in the old unions. We maintain that the emphasis must not be on capturing the bureaucracy, but on liberating the masses from the domination of this bureaucracy, and mobilizing the masses independent of the bureaucracy.

In the old unions the bureaucracy is practically immovable, imposed upon the masses, and a barrier to action. In the United States the trades union bureaucracy in addition to constitutional provisions, long term offices and parliamentary tricks, uses gunment to suppress rebel opposition in the unions. I mention this not as an argument against working in the reactionary unions, but as an argument against the idea of capturing the bureaucracy; we must fight this bureaucracy in the unions, but it will be impossible to capture or destroy it until the revolution itself or after.

Really revolutionary work in the trades unions has two important aspects.

1) The organization of Communist groups (necessary in all workers' organizations).

2) The formation of extra-union organizations (Shop Committees, Shop Stewards, etc.). These are organizations of the workers in the unions expressing the requirements of the immediate economic struggle of the workers, and their struggle against the bureaucracy and the limitations of trades union forms of organizations does not mean that the workers leave the old unions; on the contrary, the workers stay in the unions but definitely