

THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS, FASCISM AND WAR

By J. R. CAMPBELL

THE Trades Union Congress will meet at Brighton in September on the eve of the fifth winter of the world economic crisis.

It will meet at a time when the short speculative "pick-up" in industry which was a feature of the midsummer months will have exhausted itself and when the reality of the coming winter will be seen to be, not a steady upsurge of "industrial recovery," but a deepening of the crisis confronting the working class with grave new problems.

Foremost amongst the features of this deepening crisis will be the intensifying currency and tariff battles for the shrinking world market on the part of the main industrial powers of the world.

The War Implications of Roosevelt's "New Deal"

In the United States of America the Roosevelt policy of the "new deal" is being boosted to the skies by a vast propaganda machine operating on a scale that has never before been experienced even in war time.

Roosevelt's "new deal" means a "new deal" for big business to be secured through the ruination of the workers, working farmers, and middle class.

A policy of currency inflation is being pursued, which in spite of alleged increases in wages by blanket codes and industrial codes, is sharply reducing the purchasing power of wages and salaries. Compulsory short time is being introduced disguised as the reduction of working hours. Compulsory labour at a dollar a week and food is being introduced for the young unemployed who are being forced to work in "Forestry Camps," by the very capitalist class who had the lying audacity to talk a few years ago about the "slave" labour in the Russian timber camps.

The "new deal" is already heading straight for compulsory arbitration. It is being put through by terrorism, by the shooting of strikers, by the use of tear bombs, in the teeth of a rising wave of strikes.

But the policy of inflation does not merely mean the reduction of the working class standard of life at home. It means a desperate struggle by means of currency inflation for an enlarged share of the world market.

NOTE:—Next month R.P.D. will resume his "Notes of the Month."

The "Daily Herald" talks War

Already Japan has entered on the path of inflation, and the *Daily Herald* begins to talk the language of war, as the following shows :

"The steady flood of cheap Japanese goods, underselling home markets, means that there is a "yellow peril" of a definitely economic character. Japanese competition has become comparable with Germany's drive before 1914 in the world's market for manufactured goods.

"Trade authorities agree that tariffs, no matter how high, cannot cope with the Japanese trade peril, but that a solution on an entirely different basis will have to be found." (August 8, 1933).

What will they say and do when the great imperialist giant, the U.S.A. (followed closely by Germany), begins on the basis of its depreciated currency and low wages to win a larger share of the shrinking markets of the world.

This terrific drive for the world markets is accompanied by the growth of Fascism and political reaction in the various capitalist countries. The Fascists are in power in Germany. The Fascist tendencies of the "new deal" in the U.S.A. have been commented upon by even the most superficial bourgeois observers, and in Britain the meaning of measures like the militarisation of the police is understood by all.

The Imperialists hasten their War Activities

That this deepening of the crisis intensifies the war danger is self-evident. The situation is more intense all round. The number of danger points in the relation of states has vastly increased.

To the danger of a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union in the Far East has been added the danger through the new aggressive policy of Hitlerism in the West.

The danger of war between Fascist Germany and the countries standing for the retention of the Versailles Treaty has reached a stage of extraordinary acuteness.

Under cover of the "new" deal in the U.S.A. and of talk of "our military inferiority" in Britain, war preparations are being rushed ahead by those great imperialist powers.

On the one hand British Imperialism continues its policy of mobilising the European nations against the U.S.A., on the other hand it replaces French Imperialism (for the moment more than preoccupied with Hitler) in the leadership of the anti-Soviet front.

How the T.U.C. Faces this Menace

That is the menacing situation that the Trades Union Congress will require to face.

In confronting this situation it is quite impossible for any union leader to pretend that "the workers are apathetic"; "they will not fight" in view of the magnificent struggles of unorganised workers in Ford's, in the Hope strike, and in Firestone's. Not only was great fighting spirit displayed in these struggles, but leadership was quickly forthcoming out of the ranks of the workers. Powerful militant strike organisation was developed and hundreds of workers were recruited into the unions. Whatever other excuse for inactivity and sabotage the Trades Union Congress General Council may seek to find, the apathy of the workers can no longer be pleaded.

For Inflation and Why

It was to be expected that the Trades Union Congress leaders, in view of their past record, should fall for Roosevelt's new deal.

Did they not accept Woodrow Wilson's 14 points as the foundation of a new heaven and a new earth? Were they not amongst the most unblushing boosters of Fordism and its British counterpart Mondism?

The significance of that attitude is this. At some point of the Anglo-American struggle it may be necessary for British Imperialism to follow the U.S.A. in the path of competitive inflation. How much easier will be its task if it finds that the similar policy in the U.S.A. has been boosted by the Union leaders as a brave energetic way to recovery, instead of being as it is the most damnable intensification of the exploitation of the working class.

The Trades Union Congress General Council has always been inflationist. Did they not say in the joint memorandum which they and the Federation of British Industries presented to the Government on the occasion of the Ottawa Conference:

We are convinced that one of the most urgent needs of the moment is to prevent any further fall in the wholesale price level and to restore wholesale prices to a level which will conduce to industrial activity.

Almost the Rooseveltian formula.

Did they not repeat this in their memorandum to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the World Economic Conference of which Chamberlain said that "there was very little in it to which I could take exception" (speech in Commons on June 2).

The delegates must oppose this co-operation with the capitalist class in competitive inflation. They must throw out with indignation the Boilermakers' resolution with its fulsome praise of Roosevelt's plan and sharply condemn all support on inflation even if accompanied by insincere demagogic demands for higher wages by a bureaucracy which, day after day, has ruthlessly sabotaged all the actual wage struggles of the workers.

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Preparing to Surrender to Fascism

On Fascism the General Council's line is crystal clear. It will try to blame the Communists for the coming to power of Hitler. It will assert that the best guarantee against the coming of Fascism to Britain is simply to continue to support the policy which the General Council and the Labour Party has been pursuing in recent years. Fascism may spread across Europe, Fascist tendencies may show themselves in Britain, but the General Council asserts that there is no need for a change in policy.

In pursuing this, however, the General Council has to resort to the most barefaced concealment of the facts.

Not even the vilest enemy of the German Communist Party, not even the denizens of the Trotskyist sewer have accused the German Communist Party of being prepared to surrender to Hitler. It fought Hitler before his coming to power, and it now continues to fight him relentlessly in the factory, at the Labour Exchange, and on the streets.

The Example of their German Colleagues

But it is a fact that the German General Council of the Trades Union Congress openly surrendered to Hitler; that they offered to co-operate with the Fascist Government; that they issued an appeal to all trade unionists to march in Hitler's Festival of Labour on May 1.

What did their own colleagues in the Woodworkers' International say about them after Hitler seized the German unions ?

In vain have been the many—all too many—declarations in which the trade unions adopting the platform of I.F.T.U. have stressed their political independence, and their preparedness to co-operate with the new régime in the economic and social fields, and even to being incorporated into the frame of the Fascist state.

In vain has been their solemn protestations that the policy of the "free" trade unions had always been indestructibly linked up with the life and destiny of the German nation.

In vain has been their appeal to the membership to take part everywhere in the May Day celebrations ordered by the Nazi Government. The 1st of May in Germany was no "People's Holiday," no "Festival of Labour," but an ignoble puppet show in celebration of an ignoble victory, not unlike those triumphal processions of ancient Roman imperators in which the vanquished had to march in pompous array to gratify the basest instincts of the gloating victors. (Quoted in Journal of Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers in July, 1933.)

The difference between the communists and the reformist both before and after the coming of Hitler to power is clear to every worker.

The surrender of the German Trade Union leadership to Hitler resulted from their whole previous policy. Their co-operation with the generals of the Kaiser in 1918-19 in building up the shattered capitalist

state machine, their suppression of the revolutionary working class, their splitting of the trade union movement, the support they gave to capitalist rationalisation, their advocacy of "economic democracy" (the German form of Mondism), led logically to the support of Hindenberg against Hitler as the lesser evil, to the flirtation with the militarist Von Schleicher, and then to the final surrender to Hitler himself.

Against Workers' Struggle, but for Capitalist Rationalisation

All the main trends of reformist policy in the German unions find their counterpart in the policy of the British reformists.

The British Trade Union leaders have rejected revolutionary trade unionism "as futile, certain to fail, and sure to lead to bloodshed and misery," they rejected the strike policy of "the unions fighting sectionally for improvements." They announced to the whole world that co-operation with the employers would lead to the workers getting a voice in the control of industry, and that it would lead to prosperity under capitalism.

The ultimate policy of the movement can find more use for an efficient industry than a derelict one, and the unions can use their power to promote and guide the scientific reorganisation of industry as well as to obtain material advantages from the reorganisation.

That policy affords the best hope of raising the status, security and standard of living of the workers whom the Council represents. (Report to 1928 Trades Union Congress.)

At the same time the German Trade Union leaders were saying :

The book of "Henry Ford : My Life and Work," is surely the most revolutionary document in the whole economic literature up to this moment. (Tarnow, of the German Woodworkers' Union.)

Up till recently the German working class has always stood for rationalisation. (He means the Trade Union bureaucracy, J.R.C.) As distinct from the English workers, the German workers have learned in the school of Marxism that all technical progress involves sacrifices, before it can effect an improvement in general working conditions.

The German employers have every reason to thank the much abused Marxism which made it possible for them, without any noteworthy resistance of the working class, to carry through a rationalisation which threw hundreds of thousands of workers on to the streets. (Franz Hering in *Arbeit*, April, 1930.)

The working out of this reformist policy in Germany has led to the very "bloodshed and misery" for the workers that the reformists said a revolutionary policy would bring about, and it has not raised but most emphatically lowered "the status, security and standard of living of the workers" of Great Britain.

For Capitalist "Democracy" against Workers' Dictatorship

The most notable resemblance of the two policies, however, is in their attitude towards Fascism.

The Secretary of the General Council, Mr. Citrine, in his capacity as Chairman of the International Federation of Trades Unions, announces that "the workers must present a united front to the enemy, but it must be based upon the principles of freedom and democracy." "We cannot ally ourselves with those who deny these principles. We remain ruthlessly opposed to dictatorship whether of the Right or the Left. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance. Let us take warning from the fate that has overtaken the German workers."

The meaning of the above is crystal clear. It is that unless the Communists bow down before the freedom and democracy of the capitalist parliamentary system (the concealed dictatorship of the capitalist class), and unless they will pledge themselves to the principle that a Revolutionary Workers' Government will guarantee "freedom and democracy" to the capitalist class so that they can resist the building up of Socialism, the General Council will refuse to have a united front with them or the revolutionary workers under their influence.

In short, rather than unite with the Communist Party and the independent Labour Party in a common struggle against Fascism, the General Council will work to keep the working class divided and ensure the triumph of Fascism.

Copying the "Lesser Evil" Path of Treachery

But the declaration that the united front must be based upon the principles of freedom and democracy has another side.

There are capitalist groups who prate about "freedom and democracy" while actually preparing the way for Fascism. Mr. Citrine's formula is not only a formula for splitting the ranks of the workers, it is a formula for the open co-operation of the Trade Unions with these groups as a lesser evil to Fascism. In other words, a formula which does not learn from the German reformist experience, but actually proposes to tread the same treacherous path.

What Can the Workers Do?

How can the delegates to the Trades Union Congress commence the fight against Fascism?

In the first place by demanding the complete scrapping of the Mondist policy. Only a few weeks ago the General Council was co-operating with the Federation of British Industries in making approaches to the Government on the question of "Empire Marketing." Do they think that the delegates to the Conference are imbeciles that they cannot see the absurdity of denouncing Fascism on the one hand and yet continuing to co-operate with the very capitalist class which is ruthlessly driving to Fascism.

There can be no genuine fight on the part of the trade unions against Fascism that does not include their participation in the struggle to build up the united front of the workers on an agreed policy of common demands relating to wages, unemployment pay, the defence of the political rights of the workers.

Every wage cut, every retreat of a trade union without a struggle helps forward the Fascist developments. It encourages the capitalist class to proceed with the Fascisation of the state. It enables the Fascist demagogues to win support amongst the masses who are turning away from the trade union movement, disheartened by its surrender policy.

For a Fighting United Front against Fascism

If the fighting unity of the working class can be developed on an immediate programme of action, then the unions can be strengthened, organisation can be built up in the factories, heavy blows can be struck at the offensive of the capitalist class. On this basis not only the working class, but large elements of the lower middle class can be rallied to the banner of the working class and a solid front presented against the advance of Fascism.

To reject participation in the united front, to continue the policy of splitting the unions, to continue the policy of co-operation with the capitalist class is to clear the way for Fascism, and no resolutions (the German trade union leaders who licked Hitler's boots also passed resolutions against Fascism) against Fascism which the Congress passes will be anything but brazen hypocrisy and deception unless this fact is recognised.

Only by building the united front in struggle, and by undermining and destroying the rotten reformism which is dominant in the union movement, can the workers completely defeat the menace of Fascism.

How to Fight War

The dangerous war situation in the world to-day will be realised by every delegate. The presence of six resolutions against war on the agenda is a sufficient testimony of this.

But while the rank and file are trying to discover ways and means of fighting against war, the union leadership is manœuvring to rally the mass of the trade unionists behind their own government in the event of war breaking out.

It has always been a cardinal feature of Socialist policy, that it is useless to base working class policy in the event of a war upon the question of which side was the aggressor.

In the Great War of 1914-18 it was a matter of indifference as to which side fired the first shot. The war was not a struggle between bad

“aggressor” countries and good “defender” countries. It was a war between two sets of thoroughly unscrupulous imperialist groups—the war being the outcome of the imperialist policies pursued by both.

Against the “Aggressor” or against One’s Own Government

In such a situation it was not the business of the working class to find the aggressor—it was the business of the working class to fight its own imperialist government.

The International Federation of Trade Unions, to which the British T.U.C. is affiliated, wants to start the working class in a new search for the “aggressor.”

In a resolution passed at its Brussels Conference it decided in favour of a general strike in the event of a likelihood of war. But not a general strike of the workers against their own imperialist governments. No! Only a strike of the workers in the “aggressor” country against the aggressor government. The workers in other countries have to side with their own governments who are charged with the task of boycotting the aggressor.

How on earth are the trade union officials to tell which country is the aggressor.

There are two ways of distinguishing the “aggressor” according to the International Federation of Trade Unions.

The first sign of the aggressor country is that it refuses to submit its case to arbitration as laid down by the League of Nations.

The League of Nations is a body of European Imperialist States and their satellites, dominated by France and Britain.

Suppose a crisis arises in the relations of Poland and Germany, both Fascist states, and that German capitalism refuses to submit the question to the League of Nations, on the ground that that body is effectively dominated by the allies of Poland and arbitration under its ægis would be simply a farce. Suppose that following this refusal war broke out.

The revolutionary Socialist would say that it was the duty of the working class in each belligerent country to struggle against its own war-like government, and that the workers in other countries should fight against their own governments participating in the struggle, and against the transport of munitions to either of the belligerents.

But the International Federation of Trade Unions says that this is entirely wrong. Because German Imperialism refuses to submit to arbitration of the League it has to be pronounced to be the “aggressor.” The German working class is supposed to fight its warlike government, while the Polish working class is to be expected enthusiastically to support

its warlike government. The workers in other countries are to refuse to load food and munitions for Germany, and to load them enthusiastically for Poland.

Now please note that this policy is adopted by a so-called international conference dominated by the trade union leaders of France, Britain and Poland. Was there ever a clearer case of trying to swing the unions behind their own imperialists ?

Nations outside the League of Nations are to be adjudged to be aggressors if they do not submit to arbitration under the Kellogg Pact.

Thus if the Soviet Union was involved in a dispute with a neighbouring capitalist state, no matter how conciliatory the Soviet Union proved to be, no matter how eager it was for a settlement by direct negotiation, if it refused to submit its case to the arbitration of a tribunal appointed by the capitalist governments of the world, it would be adjudged to be the aggressor and the workers in other countries would be expected to support their capitalist government in war on the Socialist Fatherland.

This attempt to swing the unions behind their own governments in view of the coming war is being camouflaged by talk about "democracy being the path to peace."

This is an attempt to convince the workers of France and Britain that their heavily armed imperialist governments, because they have up to the moment preserved parliamentary institutions are peace loving and must be supported in any war waged against the countries of dictatorship. (By this the union leaders mean the Soviet Union equally with Fascist Germany.)

This infamous policy must be smashed. The delegates must declare their wholehearted opposition to the warlike policy of their own government, must denounce the attempts of the General Congress leaders to identify the Soviet Union with the Fascist states, must stand up for the breaking of the chains of the Peace Treaty, which enslaves the German people, must defend the Soviet Union as a Workers' State, and must in every way oppose the armament building and other war preparations of the National Government. A necessary part of all this is the condemnation of the General Council's ban on the British Anti-War Council.

It is to the extent that we do these things now, creating a working-class opinion against the actual war policies that are being pursued, building up of the organisations of the working class in the munitions and transport industries, that we will be able to act effectively against war in the future.

The Two Alternatives facing T.U.C. Delegates

The delegates will be facing these grave questions at the beginning of the fifth winter of the crisis, when unemployment is growing, when the workers' cost of living is steadily rising.

The choice before them is clear. They can continue the present policy of the General Council—the policy of the united front with capitalism, or they can repudiate that policy and build up the united front of the working class.

Let the delegates be clear on this all important point. It is not the policy of the working class united front that is on trial. It is the policy of the united front with capitalism that must answer for its crimes—the policy that calls the concealed dictatorship of the capitalist class “democracy and freedom,” the policy which cleared the way for the open capitalist dictatorship in Germany, the policy which has resulted in defeat after defeat for the British working class.

When one surveys the results of this policy one is amazed at the audacity with which it is defended by the Trade Union bureaucracy. To listen to a Citrine one would imagine that this policy has led to success upon success, instead of from disaster to disaster.

Consider the truly imbecile arguments of this bureaucracy against the United Front. “We can only have a united front with those who base their policy and programme on the principles of freedom and democracy.”

Every trade unionist out of his own experience knows that this is imbecility, or treachery, or both. If the employers in a factory are attacking wages, does the trade unionist only seek to build up the front of resistance amongst “those who accept the principles of freedom and democracy?”

No! He seeks to bring into the front of resistance every worker, skilled or unskilled, young or old in the entire factory, not on the basis of his ultimate political principles, but on the basis of his willingness to resist the wage cut.

Yet the union leaders after arguing that Fascism is a thousand times more dangerous than any wage cut, proceed to argue that the united front against the advance of Fascism, should not be based upon the willingness of all workers to resist this menace, but should be confined to those who accept the theoretical beliefs of the Labour and Trade Union leaders about “freedom and democracy.”

The trade unionists are being told that there is no need for an united front with the Communists, the I.L.P.'ers and the revolutionary workers. That the “real” united front is the Labour Party, the Unions and the Co-operators. As the leaders of these organisations are in daily co-operation with the capitalist class, the description of them as constituting the “real united front” against capitalism is clearly nonsense.

Surely it will be obvious to every delegate who is in touch with the realities of working-class life that to build up the front of the working class in the workshops and the localities, within a measurable period the united efforts of every active worker is necessary.

What is the Basis for a United Front ?

So far from the official Labour bodies, with "their duly accredited officials" being the "only real united front," we have seen the front of the workers being built up in the Ford Strike, at Hope's, at Firestone's, quite independently of the "official" organisations in the first place, though resulting in their strengthening in the course of the struggle.

The delegates should brush aside those vile excuses for keeping the workers divided and fight for a united front of all workers on the basis of a programme of action.

Such a programme might be as follows :

- 1.—The Forty-Hour Week and the Seven-Hour Day for Miners.
- 2.—The Abolition of the Means Test, of Test and Task Work, of Labour Colonies, the Establishment of a United Front between the Trades Union Congress and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement.
- 3.—The Adoption of Schemes of Public Work at Trade Union Rates of Wages.
- 4.—Not a Penny Off Existing Real Wages, but a Ten Per Cent. Advance All Round. No Compulsory Arbitration.
- 5.—The Building of the United Front Against Fascism, the Repeal of all Anti-Working-Class Legislation, the Establishment of Factory Committees and Workers' Defence Corps.
- 6.—The Establishment of Trade Union Democracy.
- 7.—The Organised Drive of the Unions Against the War Policy of the National Government and in Defence of the U.S.S.R. and for a New and Better Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement.
- 8.—Co-operation With All Other Working-Class Organisations for the above aims.

This or a similar programme of action will have to be fought for not only at the Trades Union Congress, but in every workshop and in every union branch.

It can only be fought for on the basis of militant trade unionists and militant branches coming together in order to battle for it against the entrenched forces of the reformist leadership.

This is what the bureaucracy fear. Themselves an organised force within the union, with their picked supporters in every branch and workshop, battling step by step in defence of the bankrupt Mondist policy, they nevertheless denounce any attempt of the militants to get together to confront them in an organised way.

They have no objection they say to individuals or branches expressing a militant point of view, they only object to their coming together in a rank-and-file movement—in other words, to their taking steps to make their militancy effective.

The more the bureaucracy object to the militants coming together in the rank-and-file movement, the more urgent it becomes to develop those movements as a means to developing the united front in the industry, to making every union branch an organ of the class struggle, to making every factory a fortress of the united working-class movement, to ensuring that every strike is controlled by the workers—in short, to ensuring that the barriers erected by reformism in the way of united working-class struggle are levelled to the ground forever.

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