

NAZISM AND THE I. L. O.

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IN A previous issue of the AMERICAN FEDERATIONIST (July, 1932) a general account of the question of trade union liberty in relation to the International Labor Organization was given. Events of the past few months have thrown new light on the issue, if they have not in fact created a distinctly new phase of the problem. The Seventeenth Session of the International Labor Conference, which met during the last three weeks of June of this year and at which a delegation of observers represented the United States with distinction, was paradoxical in that a record of achievement was overcast by a bitter struggle between the workers' delegates and the Nazi spokesmen of Germany.

It should be recalled that the representatives of the International Federation of Trade Unions have waged a relentless conflict in the Labor Conference since the advent of Italian Fascism to secure the rejection by the Conference of the credentials of the Italian workers' delegate. The Italian government has met the workers' protest in open debate, and, because of government and employers' support, the credentials of the Italian labor representative have been accepted in all of the Conferences. It was to be expected that when the In-

ternational Labor Conference met in Geneva in June a fight would be made on the German workers' representative as well as against the Italian delegate. The way for such a conflict was prepared when the Nazi government, in May of this year, destroyed the German trade union structure, which was affiliated for the most part with the I. F. T. U., and reorganized the associations of the workers on the model of the policy which Italy had adopted a number of years before.

It was not expected, however, that the argument would take a materially different turn than the debate on Fascism. The Italian representatives have shown a good deal of irritation of account of the attacks of the workers' delegates in the Conference, but there has been little suggestion of a rupture between Italy and the Organization because of this situation. On the other hand, the disagreeable events of this year in Geneva resulted in the withdrawal of the entire German delegation from the International Labor Conference, and the whole question of German relations to the Labor Organization hangs in the balance. From a purely external point of view it would seem that if the German representatives appear next year at the Conference the credentials of the workers' delegate will be accepted, after debate of course, as have the credentials of the Italian representative in the past. The Labor Organization is a liberal

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institution, and it stands, therefore, for trade union liberty, but it also supports international cooperation with all governments even though they be dictatorial in character.

Let us examine the broad outlines of the German issue in the last Conference. The trouble began, as was anticipated, in the workers' group in the Conference. It should be noted that the workers and employers form, in the practice of the Organization, distinct entities which determine very largely the policies of the respective groups as to matters coming before the meetings. One of the functions of the workers' group, like the employers, is to formulate the proposed list of group members for the Conference committees. As has been the practice for a number of years concerning the Italian workers' delegate, the workers decided not to recommend the German workers' delegate for any committee posts. In 1932 the Conference had finally adopted standing orders by which the Selection or "steering" Committee of the Conference could add additional delegates to committees. The Italian and German workers' delegates requested committee assignments, and these were given. The workers' group spokesmen then informed the Conference that Italian and German workers' delegates should not be regarded as speaking at any time for the workers.

There is some divergence between the German and the workers' delegates' accounts of what took place in the early sessions of the workers' group. The I. F. T. U. delegates insisted that only the ordinary freedom of speech was exercised, and that

the German representative expressed himself in an extremely discourteous way. The German response was that the workers' group had spoken insultingly and insolently of Germany, which under the circumstances could not be accepted without an apology. According to the *Journal de Genève*, both Dr. Ley, the German workers' delegate, and Signor Razza, the Italian workers' delegate, protested strongly against their exclusion from places on committees. Monsieur Léon Jouhaux, the French workers' delegate, replied that the protest of the German delegate was the protest of the jailor in the name of his victims. He claimed to speak in the name of the dozens of thousands of workers who, in Germany, had been imprisoned in concentration camps.

As a consequence, neither the German representative nor the workers would tender the necessary apologies, and the events of the conflict moved outside of the Conference. The *Journal des Nations*, a Genevese daily paper, published an extract from the *Danziger Volkstimme*, a socialist paper, to the effect that Dr. Ley had made extremely discourteous statements concerning the workers in the Conference, and particularly of the delegates of Latin American countries. It was reported that Dr. Ley had used the word "idiot" in his description of the workers' representatives. The publication of this "news" caused a violent rise of feeling in the labor wing of the Conference, despite the fact that the German representative denied most formally having so expressed himself. Dr. Ley's message from Germany to the Conference read: "Am informed of

which Dr. Ley, German workers' delegate, was alleged to have made at a meeting of journalists. Dr. Ley energetically denied and officially repudiated the remarks which were attributed to him. Moreover, the competent German authorities declared that Germany attached the greatest importance to maintaining friendly relations with the populations of all countries and especially with South American States.

"In spite of this, the incident which had thus been closed was discussed on various occasions at so-called unofficial meetings of the Workers' Group of the Conference—to which entrance was brusquely refused to the German Delegate—and the Chairman of the Group has treated the incident officially. These so-called unofficial meetings were held following announcements made in the official publications of the Conference, although we protested on various occasions, but unfortunately unsuccessfully, to the competent authorities against this incorrect procedure.

"We regard the incidents described above as a serious affront to the German delegation as a whole. In these conditions, the German delegation considers itself obliged to leave the Conference. It greatly regrets being prevented from taking part in the practical work—as on several occasions and unambiguously it stated it was ready to do—so long as satisfaction has not been given to the German protests and justice has not been done to the well-founded complaints of the German Delegation."

The next important stage in the discussion came when the credentials committee submitted a report to the

Conference which merely noted the fact of the withdrawal of both the delegates and the credentials of the German delegate. The workers took this occasion to express themselves concerning the regime existing under Nazism. The workers who led in this attack were Corneille Mertens of Belgium and president of the workers' group, Léon Jouhaux of France, Arthur Hayday of the British trade union movement, and P. J. S. Serrarens of the Netherlands, a representative of the Christian trade unions. The attack was much as those launched against the Fascist regime in Italy, only perhaps the bitterness of the workers was more pronounced. The local press in Geneva reported, for instance, that Hayday used the expression "reign of terror" to characterize the German situation, but that this phrase was removed from the Provisional Record of the Conference.

"As to the allegation that the German Delegation was not protected by the Chairman of the Group," declared Mertens, "I can not prevent certain Workers who are acquainted with the German language from shouting out comments if they hear some remarks which they consider insulting; but I must admit that I should blush to repeat before this assembly some of the expressions that were used by Dr. Ley and his colleagues on the occasion of the Workers' Group meeting in question. The fact is, there has been an attempt, which has failed, to browbeat the Workers' Group in this Conference."

In his turn Jouhaux of the French General Confederation of Labor exclaimed: "We learned to love and

untrue statements in *Danziger Volkstimme*. I deny these statements. I never insulted any nation."

The workers' group, however, decided to consider the situation at a general meeting of the group. The substitutes of Dr. Ley presented themselves at the meeting and were refused admission. The Italian workers' delegate, likewise uninvited, did not make an appearance. At this meeting the workers' group adopted a resolution declaring that investigation of whether Dr. Ley had really made the statements attributed to him indicated that, despite the formal denial, the reported statements had been given to the press. It was decided that the German workers' representative would not be admitted to any further "unofficial" meetings of the workers' group. In the meanwhile the Latin American representatives convened to decide what they would do should they not receive the apologies to which they considered themselves entitled, and it was agreed that the entire body of Latin American representatives would vote against the validation of the German workers' delegate's credentials.

At this juncture, however, the whole German delegation (Government, employers' and workers' delegates) decided to leave the Conference. The Credentials Committee concluded that no further note should be taken of the protest against the German workers' delegate, but no assurance could be given by the officers of the Conference that no discussion of this question would take place. At the same time the Conference officials noted that what was objected to by the Germans had taken place neither

in a committee nor in a plenary sitting, and therefore that the grounds for objection arose outside the regular operation of the Conference. The Selection Committee decided also that since the credentials of the German delegates had not been withdrawn, that those of Dr. Ley should be given to the Credentials Committee for its information. When this became known, the German government withdrew the credentials of all of its delegates. Following this, the Conference as usual validated the Italian workers' credentials, and the German government organized in Berlin a giant demonstration against the treatment of the German delegation and international marxian agitation. The German representatives asserted, on the other hand, that the session of the workers' group in which the offensive remarks against Germany had been made was official and not unofficial as the officers of the Conference had stated. The workers' group also arrived at the determination to express in plenary Conference its attitude on the question.

The letter of the German delegation of June 19 to the president of the Conference is as follows: "At the beginning of the Conference, extremely offensive remarks were made at a sitting of the Workers' Group, directed against Germany and its delegates. These remarks, it should now be pointed out as clearly as possible, have not been withdrawn up to the present by the chairman of the group, despite the request which was made to him to withdraw these observations and to protect German interests.

"Shortly afterwards, Genevese newspapers published statements

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admire Germany in the past; but it was the Germany of Goethe and Schiller. It is because that Germany is being destroyed that we protest. It is not we who are violating it. We are proud of having for a few moments only acted as the conscience of the world and of having acted here as the interpreters of civilization in its protest against the destruction of Germany."

Yet the protest of the workers was not within itself unanimous, for the representative of the Christian trade unions used the situation to protest against the monopoly of control in the Conference exercised by the socialist majority, that is, the I. F. T. U. Serrarens spoke with feeling of the time when he had been a delegate whose credentials had been contested. "I have thus known the disagreeable situation," he said, "of isolation in the workers' group. I have had to fight and may have to fight again, as I am doing now, against a certain exclusive tendency in the workers' group . . ." He noted, however, that his opponents had always used parliamentary methods against the views for which he stood. In concluding, he doubted whether a government had the legal right to withdraw credentials of its delegates once they had been communicated to the Conference, as it was a duty assumed by a member of the Organization to be represented at the annual Conference.

Since there was no question in fact before the Conference, there was no action as a result of the explanations *of the speakers. However, the story does not end here, for almost immediately after the German delegation left Geneva, Wilhelm Leuschner,*

German workers' member of the Governing Body of the International Labor Organization and one of the German advisers to the Conference, was arrested because he had acted in Geneva contrary to the interests of the German state. It appears, from the statements of the workers' representatives, that Leuschner did not want to be appointed to a post in the German delegation, and that he had not approved entirely the policy pursued by the German government. A spokesman of the workers' group called this fact to the attention of the Conference with great indignation, and at the end of the Conference, in the closing minutes, Jouhaux again arose and declared that Leuschner was not arrested at all but was held prisoner by Nazi storm troopers.

Another phase of this long and complicated episode was the passage of a resolution by the Conference calling to the attention of the League of Nations the necessity of making adequate arrangements for the refugees from Germany, particularly those who were Jewish, in order that the local labor situation should not be unduly disturbed. There was little opposition to this resolution, there being only two negative votes and several abstentions. The argument centered on what had been done in previous years by the League for Russian and Armenian refugees, and it was contended that here was an analogous case. The resolution "invites the Governing Body to instruct the International Labor Office to undertake all the necessary studies, without interfering in internal questions touching on the national sovereignty of Germany, with a view to

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placing the German refugees in question in various countries without detriment to the economic welfare of those countries, and (the Conference) decides to transmit this resolution to the League of Nations."

It is as yet too early to evaluate the effect on the Organization and its relations with Germany of the events of the last Labor Conference. In large part, the matter is now up to the German government. This government may decide to withdraw from the Organization, or it may, as has Italy, conclude that despite the criticisms of the workers, the value of international labor cooperation is more important than the loss of national prestige involved in the debate on the credentials of the workers' delegate. The German situation is complicated, however, by the problem of the attitude of South American delegations. Should the delegates of these countries carry over to next year their point of view, a very significant vote against the German workers' delegate might be registered. However, should the other governments and the employers stand firm in their policy of non interference it would be impossible to muster a two-thirds vote, which is necessary, against acceptance.

The more important long-run issue is raised by the attitude of the representatives of the I. F. T. U. Should this organization relinquish its already traditional fight against Fascist sys-

tems of trade unionism? It is certainly true that the Treaty of Peace guarantees trade union liberty and elevates trade unions to a formal representation in the determination of international policy. But whether the stubborn defence of this right, as the workers' group has conducted it, is the best thing for the Labor Organization is another question. It would seem that it is possible to accomplish a large amount of international agreement despite disagreement as to the form of national labor organization, and it may be that this conflict is not so serious after all. But should the German government cease cooperation with the Organization on account of the "incidents" of the last Conference, genuine and lasting harm would have been done to the cause the workers of the I. F. T. U. support.

It might be noted in conclusion that since the United States is not a member of the Labor Organization, and since the American Federation of Labor is not a member of the International Federation of Trade Unions, there is no necessity of any definite stand or attitude on the part of American unionists. Still, the conflicts in the International Labor Conference suggest or imply the internal conflicts of continental trade unionism. It would seem that Fascism and Nazism are emerging as movements as fully destructive of labor unity as has been Communism.