

Moscow and the WFTU

WE WOULD BE VERY POOR revolutionaries if in the great proletarian war for emancipation and socialism we did not know how to utilize every popular movement against each separate disaster caused by imperialism in order to sharpen and extend the crisis.¹

Since Lenin wrote these words over forty years ago, world conditions have altered considerably and the particular circumstances which he had in mind no longer exist. Nevertheless the principle he enunciated remains valid for Communist political strategists, although they have had to adapt it in many ways to the constantly changing correlation between Communist policies and the international situation.

In the climate of the cold war the Communists have attempted—among other efforts—to apply Lenin’s blueprint through international mass organizations which, as originally “advertised,” were to have no overt political affiliations but merely were to unite various groups and individuals sharing the same interests or holding the same views. Immediately after the war several such organizations were founded, some on the basis of prewar predecessors, with the participation of representatives from both Communist and non-Communist countries. Non-Communist delegates took part in the work, for example, of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the International Union of Students (IUS), the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), the International Federation of Democratic Women, the International Organization of Journalists, and others.

From the first, however, Communist or pro-Communist influence predominated in these organizations. By 1949 the fundamental divergence of views and purposes between the Communists and non-Communists had become so pronounced that in most cases Western representatives withdrew in protest; since then the front organizations have operated as unquestioning endorsers of the Moscow line.

The way in which the Communists have manipulated and utilized the front groups is perhaps best illustrated by a case study: the World Federation of Trade Unions has been chosen because of its size and importance, and because it is to a considerable degree typical of all the groups in its policy, organization and development.

¹V. I. Lenin, “Discussion of self-determination summed up,” (1916), *Selected Works*, International Publishers, New York, 1943, Vol. 5, p. 305.

THE WFTU WAS SET UP in London in February 1945. On that occasion the representatives of the British Trade Union Congress, mindful of the activities of the “Red International” in the 1920’s, warned that international working-class solidarity could not be attained if politics were allowed to dominate the work of the WFTU. Some Western trade union organizations such as the American Federation of Labor showed a caution later proved warranted in refusing to join the WFTU from the start.

Those Western labor organizations which did join found themselves faced with the double disadvantage of the Communists’ numerical preponderance and their absolute unity of action. The Communists did not at first push for total authority; but in the initial election of WFTU executive bodies and permanent officials, they were able to capture enough of the key leadership positions for their nominees to override opposition and to ensure that the party line would be propagated in WFTU publications and official statements. The misgivings increasingly felt by Western members were accentuated by the difficulties the trade unions of their own countries were encountering as a result of Communist infiltration efforts. For instance, the split of the French trade union movement between the Communist-led CGT and the Force Ouvrière understandably had an impact on the attitude of some Frenchmen to the WFTU.

Though the WFTU was thus beset with political differences from its inception, the first issue to cause all-out battle was the Marshall Plan for European recovery. When the plan was first announced the Western trade unions suggested the setting up of trade-union consultative machinery to study its proposals. The WFTU Bureau, meeting in November 1947, refused even to discuss the subject. The Western unions thereupon went ahead and organized their own body to assess the plan’s merits. The British TUC, reluctant to see the framework of international labor solidarity threatened, proposed that WFTU activities be suspended for a year, hoping that after that period agreement on many controversial issues might become easier. This proposal was also rejected by the Communist members.

In the course of 1948 the world situation deteriorated rapidly. The take-over of Czechoslovakia, Tito’s break with Stalin and the onset of the first Berlin crisis led to a general stiffening of attitudes on both sides. On all these issues the WFTU Bureau supported the USSR. It was at this point that the non-Communist Western trade unions

became at last convinced they could no longer remain affiliated with an organization which publicly condemned the policies they endorsed, and vice versa; thus, early in 1949 the British TUC, the American CIO and the Dutch trade unions withdrew from the WFTU, followed in due course by the other non-Communist Western unions. Many of these joined with other Western labor organizations, including the AFL, to form the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The Communist-dominated Western trade unions such as the influential French CGT and Italian CGIL remained, of course, in the WFTU.

THE INDELIBLE COMMUNIST imprint on the WFTU has been apparent in its internal organization as well as in its general policies and so-called "labor" activities. Like most of the international "fronts", the WFTU is organized according to the principles of Communist "democratic centralism": its main bodies are a Congress, which meets infrequently and serves a largely approbative function, a quasi-elective Council (equivalent in its role to the Communist Central Committee) and a small Executive in absolute control at the top. In almost all of the "front" organizations, this Executive has been continuously in the grip of a decisive Communist majority. Presumably by its choice, the finances of the organizations are rarely made known.

The WFTU claims a total membership of about 95 million workers, an estimated 75 percent of which is drawn from the Sino-Soviet orbit. As far as non-Communist countries are concerned, associations are affiliated as a whole; thus an affiliate's entire membership is committed to the WFTU organization without necessarily being consulted. This is again characteristic of many of the Communist-dominated organizations, but particularly of the WFTU.

The day-to-day administration of WFTU business is carried on by a permanent Secretariat. Expelled from Paris in 1951, the Secretariat moved to the Soviet sector of Vienna where—under the protection of the Soviet occupying power—it remained for five years, all the while deliberately disregarding Austrian registration laws despite repeated protests of the government. When the occupation of Austria ended, it retreated behind the Iron Curtain to Prague, whence it operates today.

Permanent WFTU operations are organized on both a geographic and an occupational basis. Toward the former end, Regional Liaison Bureaus are operated under the control of the Secretariat, covering such broad areas as Asia, Latin America, *etc.* Toward the latter, so-called Trade Unions' Internationals (TUI's) have been set up to coordinate union activity in specific trades and industries—agriculture and forestry, building, the chemical industry, catering, textiles, transport, and various others. In terms of formal organization the TUI's operate separately from the WFTU, but it is significant that the three most important—the Metal and Engineering Workers,

the Miners, and the Transport, Port and Fishery Workers—are housed in the same building in Prague as the WFTU Secretariat, and indeed moved there with it from Vienna. Essentially the TUI's duplicate the work of the WFTU, attempting to channelize its appeal within the particular sector of their responsibility.

THE FUNCTION FOR WHICH this large apparatus was created is perhaps most simply indicated in a Soviet doctrinal statement of some ten years ago: "The Communist parties, particularly in circumstances obtaining in the West, would be unable to develop and grow in strength if they lacked the earnest support of the trade unions and their leaders."² To the Communist leadership in Moscow, the WFTU is important on two counts: through its legitimate trade-union as well as propaganda activities, it can help to enrol mass support for the Communist cause; and through its indirect hold over members of affiliated unions outside the Sino-Soviet orbit, it can—at least in theory—be called upon to promote direct action in implementation of Communist policies.

The WFTU's endeavors in both of these directions have, however, been seriously hampered by the clumsy manner in which it has allowed itself to become identified with Soviet policies. Certainly in certain West European countries, the growing recognition of its true loyalties has made its appeal less and less effective, compelling the Communists to rely more on direct infiltration into existing trade unions for support. While this infiltration effort is directed by indigenous Communist parties rather than by the WFTU, it does at least provide the latter with a useful nucleus of allies in countries whose national trade union centers are opposed to its program.³

In particular, the WFTU's ability to promote industrial action in support of Communist policies has been far more limited than its propaganda likes to pretend. Over the years it has issued numerous calls for direct action in the form of strikes, slow-downs or protests to back up Communist positions (usually in objection to Western policies).⁴ The justification for these appeals has varied

² *Profsoyuzy SSSR* (Moscow), November 1948.

³ To cite an example, although the British TUC is a member of the ICFTU, a number of British shop stewards took part in a WFTU-sponsored conference of metal and engineering workers in 1951, the aim of which was to encourage resistance to increased production in the defense industries of NATO countries.

⁴ The general tenor of such appeals is reflected in Saillant's statement before the World Peace Council in Stockholm in 1950: "We should state that one of the essential duties of the defenders of peace is the refusal to work on and produce war material in all capitalistic countries." A follow-up appeal, issued by the Administrative Committee of the Transport TUI of the WFTU on September 18, 1950, directed: "Expand the network of peace committees, intensify the campaign . . . to paralyze the transport of war material in countries preparing for a third world war."

to some extent with the issue, but the general logic behind them has been simply put by the Czechoslovak trade union daily *Práce*:

. . . a strike in a capitalist country is a very effective way of fighting for peace, since it aims at paralyzing war production and the transport of arms. . . . [On the other hand] to put the arms of outstanding quality which we produce into the hands of the defenders of peace, into the hands of our people's army, that is [also] an act of peace.⁵

On the whole the appeals for direct action have been manifestly unsuccessful in evoking a response. Their effective use has been limited to a few isolated instances such as the refusal of French dockers to load arms for Indochina in 1953.

ON THE SIDE OF positive tactics the endeavors of the WFTU have, as was noted, been divided between legitimate trade union concerns and propaganda in support of the general Communist line. With regard to the first type of activity, the WFTU lends its vigorous support to many reasonable demands for the amelioration of working conditions. There is only one catch. That is that the concern it shows for labor and union interests is confined entirely to the non-Communist world.

The WFTU is only too anxious to seize upon any labor grievance outside the Sino-Soviet orbit and to pursue the issue with gusto. But it wears tight blinders to the many injustices suffered by the bulk of its membership in the USSR, China and Eastern Europe: since its foundation in 1945, it has not once taken up a cause in the interest of the hard-pressed workers behind the Iron Curtain.

An example which particularly demonstrates the contradiction between these two attitudes is provided by the WFTU's position on automation. In a speech to the International Conference of Metal and Engineering Workers in Prague in September 1958, Louis Saillant, Secretary-General of the WFTU, waxed eloquent on the fact that workers in the capitalist countries feared automation because it resulted in unemployment; but in the same speech he asserted that automation in the socialist countries has led to increased labor productivity and thus has added to the prosperity of the entire nation. A "Commission for the Automobile Industry," set up by this conference, also heard tales of suffering allegedly caused by automation throughout Western Europe, yet it gave a favorable reception to the director of Czechoslovakia's biggest automobile works, who claimed that in his country automation was the foundation of increasing living standards.⁶

The double standard applied by the WFTU to its members is also well illustrated by an article in its monthly publication, *The World Trade Union Movement*, in September 1956. Discussing India's five-year plan, the maga-

⁵ *Práce* (Prague), March 28, 1952.

⁶ Czechoslovak News Agency (CTK), September 22-24, 1958.

zine readily acknowledged that the Indian workers would benefit from the fulfilment of the plan targets, particularly if the resulting wealth were to be distributed equitably. But, it argued, the desire to see the plan implemented should not cause Indian workers to abandon their right to strike for higher wages. Naturally the WFTU supports economic plans in the Communist countries—yet there is nothing on record to indicate that it has ever advised its members there to strike for an improvement in their working conditions.

By the very nature of its composition the WFTU must apply this double standard in all matters affecting social policy and labor conditions. It is simply a matter of logic that the WFTU top leadership, composed almost entirely of Communists and reliant on a "membership" figure three-fourths of which is from the Communist world, should obey the dictates of Soviet interests. If trade unions in a Communist country "cannot," in the words of a Rumanian union official, "have interests contrary to those of the people's democratic state,"⁷ then by analogy the WFTU—the international Communist trade union movement—must submit to the prototype and leader of world communism, the Soviet Union. In fact, the WFTU makes no secret of its allegiance to Moscow. Indicative of the sentiment which governs all its actions was its statement on the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution: "All the attempts of the monopolist forces to isolate the USSR have been checked because the deep feeling of solidarity which the workers of all countries feel for their brothers in the first socialist state has constantly grown during these 40 years."⁸

THIS IS AN APT introduction to the last-named category of WFTU activity, its propaganda efforts in support of the general Soviet-Communist line. Since its foundation the WFTU has neglected no opportunity to come out in support of Soviet foreign policy. It gave its blanket approval to Communist condemnations of UN action in Korea, of the French rearguard engagement in Indochina, of British colonial policy, of US policy on Formosa, and, of course, of West German rearmament. It also approved Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe and Soviet action in Hungary. It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the merits or demerits of Soviet foreign policy, but merely to show that the WFTU *at all times* supports that policy. On some of the issues listed above, the USSR—and with it the WFTU—may well have been right in the eyes of many non-Communist people. But there are two instances at least when the WFTU approved Soviet actions which the overwhelming majority of non-Communists (and incidentally many Communists, too) condemned. In Soviet

⁷ From a broadcast by Georghe Apostol, former chairman of the Rumanian Trade Union Council, Bucharest Radio, September 4, 1956.

⁸ *World Trade Union Movement* (Prague), No. 10, 1957.

eyes there might have been some justification for Moscow's policy towards Yugoslavia in 1948 and towards Hungary in 1956. But there is no reason why the WFTU, if it were the independent trade-union organization it claims to be, would have reiterated the complete Soviet propaganda line on both these occasions.

After Moscow's break with Yugoslavia, the WFTU and the other international front organizations immediately proceeded to ostracize Yugoslavia. The WFTU in fact got rid of its Yugoslav affiliates. When, after Stalin's death, the USSR reversed its policy towards Yugoslavia, the WFTU again followed suit and invited the Yugoslavs to rejoin. Khrushchev may have tried to blame the original "error" on the late Beria, but what connection could the Soviet police chief have with an independent international organization? The Yugoslavs have refused to rejoin the WFTU, though they do send observers to some meetings.

The WFTU's interpretation of the Hungarian uprising was again identical to that of the Soviet government. No sooner had the Hungarian workers won their short-lived freedom than the National Federation of Free Hungarian Trade Unions withdrew from the WFTU.⁹ Needless to say, with the return of Soviet troops to Budapest the link between the WFTU and the Hungarian unions was restored. At no stage did the WFTU express any sympathy with Hungarian opposition to foreign domination. A commission led by Saillant went to Hungary in November 1956 and its report fully endorsed the official Communist stand on the causes and course of the uprising. This attitude must be compared with the WFTU's stand on events in the countries which are described as colonial or semi-colonial in Communist parlance. For example a special resolution of the 1953 WFTU Congress in Vienna called on all labor movements to unite against "brutal and bloody imperialist repression" in colonial areas.¹⁰ It remains to be seen how the WFTU will analyze the present situation in Tibet.

In the same vein, the WFTU's current campaign against West European integration—just as in the case of its earlier opposition to the Marshall Plan—is motivated not by its professed solicitude for the welfare of European workers but by the desire to prevent any strengthening of the Western world. Today it cannot be denied that the Marshall Plan was beneficial for the working classes of the recipient countries; it is equally evident that the moves toward West European economic unity will in the long run help to raise living standards. Nevertheless industrial action against, for example, the European Common Market, has been threatened by the WFTU. In his closing speech at the last WFTU Congress in Leipzig in October 1957 Saillant declared:

There is no question of the WFTU giving any help in the development of the structure [*i.e.*, the Common Mar-

⁹Budapest Radio, October 31, 1956.

¹⁰*New Times* (Moscow), No. 44, 1953.

ket] which the monopolies and capitalists are erecting to increase their profits. For us the best battlefield is on the factory floor, at the point of production. Every national trade organization must help.¹¹

Saillant's reasons for condemning the Common Market are simply a paraphrase of those advanced by the Soviet Government: ". . . the plans of the big monopolies, far from being prompted by concern for the living standards of the people are dictated by the narrow interests of obtaining big profits."¹²

On questions like disarmament, the prohibition of nuclear tests, summit meetings, *etc.*, the WFTU has faithfully followed the Soviet line throughout. At its meeting in Budapest in March 1958, the Executive passed a resolution asking the Western powers to follow the Soviet example of suspending nuclear tests. An International Week against Atomic War was scheduled for October 1958.¹³ In the meantime, however, the USSR resumed its testing of nuclear weapons: at a press conference in Prague on October 3, 1958, Saillant was forced to do an about face to uphold the Soviet tests "as one of the means of defense in a socialist country."¹⁴

THE WFTU HAS FAILED to attain many of its declared political aims. In fact, it has succeeded only where Soviet foreign policy has achieved its aims, and it has failed where Moscow has failed. This perhaps best illustrates the relationship between the WFTU and the USSR. It is also noteworthy that the modifications of Communist policies after Stalin's death have not affected the WFTU nor indeed any of the other front organizations. Their support of the USSR and their analysis of the world scene is as stereotyped as in Stalin's lifetime. This fact was underscored by one of the Yugoslav observers at the WFTU Congress at Leipzig in 1957, who later issued the following significant criticism:

Little attention was devoted to social changes, and particularly changes in the economic-social structure of developed capitalist countries. There was also no broad analysis . . . of the role and problems of trade unions in the socialist countries.¹⁵

That the leaders of the WFTU are both aware of and anxious over their failures seems indicated by the course of their latter-day tactics. In their effort to undermine the prestige of the free trade unions their attitude toward them has alternated increasingly between insults and blandishments. Lately the solidarity theme has been vigorously advanced; the Leipzig Congress even went so far

¹¹*World Trade Union Movement*, No. 12, 1957.

¹²Statement of the USSR Foreign Ministry, Moscow Radio, March 16, 1957.

¹³TASS, April 7, 1958.

¹⁴CTK, October 3, 1958.

¹⁵*Kommunist* (Belgrade), October 25, 1957.

as to amend the WFTU Constitution to allow non-affiliated unions to attend future congresses. The WFTU has also appealed for more money for its "International Solidarity Fund," which is used for work among trade unions and laboring groups in underdeveloped areas.¹⁰

Both sides in the cold war are, of course, devoting increased attention and more and more money to the advancement of their case in the countries now just beginning to industrialize. With the emergence of an industrial proletariat in Asia and Africa the WFTU's potential importance is enhanced just as is that of organized free trade unionism. However, the WFTU's argument that it is best fitted to represent the interests of the working

¹⁰ *World Trade Union News* (Prague), Nos. 19-20, 1957.

classes of these countries cannot stand up to the evidence of its record in other parts of the world. This claim could only be considered if the WFTU were to show signs of independent thinking in international affairs and were to concern itself as much with the condition of workers in the Communist world—that is, with the problems of a large part of its own membership—as with the lot of the proletariat outside the Sino-Soviet orbit.

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LENIN, GERMANY AND THE REVOLUTION

No book on the Russian revolution will be liked by everybody. It is clearly within the prerogatives of your reviewer to dislike Alan Moorehead's *The Russian Revolution* (issue of January-February, 1959). Hence I will not argue about his misinterpretations of Moorehead's message, nor even take him to task for his ungentleman-like *faux pas* of associating Moorehead with the *Protocols of the Elder Men of Zion*.

Mr. Carsten agrees that "Lenin was as unscrupulous about using German aid as he was about the use of money obtained through expropriation raids or other doubtful means." So, Lenin did get German money and used it. With this basic fact on record, allow me to comment on a few related questions.

1) Was this German support a necessary condition of Lenin's rise to power? Mr. Carsten believes that German support "clearly facilitated" the Bolshevik success. I agree with this formula so far as it applies to financial aid. However, without German support in a broader sense, Lenin might never have returned to Russia. If his return had been delayed, he would have found the party firmly in the hands of people willing to compromise with the moderates. Hence, even assuming that Lenin could have performed effectively without German money, he might not have been able to influence policy as strongly as he did and the party might not have grown as rapidly as it grew in the historical reality. A delay of Lenin's impact on the Russian scene would

have provided the provisional government with a chance to consolidate. If we assume that the German maneuver of dispatching Lenin to Russia did not affect events at all, we must postulate that his role was altogether inconsequential.

2) Did German money create the revolutionary situation? Obviously, money is not the *demiurgos* of history. The revolutionary situation of 1917 resulted from war, defeat, casualties, disorganization, the policies of both the Tsarist and the provisional government, and the development of the revolutionary movement in general. German political warfare was applied within this context which it did not create, as it did not create Lenin's leadership ability. However, German support to various revolutionary and non-revolutionary groups contributed to the depth of the crisis.

3) Were the deals between Bolsheviks and Germans restricted to money? The significance of financial support is overrated. By November 1917, the Germans had actually spent about 10,000,000 Marks on the Russian revolution. This sum undoubtedly exceeded the amounts paid to the Bolsheviks. We know that Lenin's communications from Switzerland with the party in Russia were "clearly facilitated" by the Germans. Lenin made available intelligence information and put the Germans on to sabotage experts. The Germans printed propaganda tracts for the Bolsheviks and smuggled them into Russia. A large percentage of the funds which the Germans spent on the Russian revolution to recipients *other* than the Bolsheviks was transferred to Russia, thanks to organizational ar-