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The Policy of the International

Alexander Schapiro

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The International Working Men's Association was founded in 1922 at the moment of an inner crisis in the labor movements of various countries. The shadow of the awakened Russian giant overhung the world capitalism, and notwithstanding the obvious tendencies towards a break between the Soviet government and the Russian workers, the world proletariat, and especially its left wing, continued to regard the economic development of the U.F.S.S.R. as the partial realization of its drive towards freedom.

The Red Trade Union International, set up a year before by the Russian Communist Party, drew within the sphere of its activity the revolutionary syndicalist movement of a number of countries. France, Spain, Italy were represented at its first congress. There still loomed the possibility of a collaboration between those who believed in the state and centralization – and the anti-authoritarian federalist syndicalists.

In vain. Already in 1921, the class conscious section of the working class became clearly aware of the imperialist and usurping plans of the bolsheviks. They felt that the soviet

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state was yet to play an odious role in the development of the socialist and anti-authoritarian ideas all over the world. And they clearly realized that only an organization of truly revolutionary forces will be able, on the one hand, to put the brakes upon the dictatorial, corrupting activity of the leaders of the Lenin school, and on the other hand, to impart new vigor and power to the world proletariat in its struggle against capitalism and bolshevism, against the White and the Red state – a struggle becoming fiercer from day to day.

The International Working Men's Association, born under the direct influence of Bakunin's International, set before itself, as the direct aim, the banding of all revolutionary elements of the international workers' movement into one solid union. If we take into account the heterogeneity of the ideological trends, criss-crossing the federalist labor movement – from the pure, self-sufficient syndicalism to the inveterately dogmatic anarchism – the heterogeneity of the methods of struggle advocated in various countries, the differences in the organizational systems of the labor unions and the diametrically opposite temperaments of their workers – then we shall see how difficult and complicated was this task of unification.

This first period of the inner organization of the I.W.M.A. has already come to an end. There is no country, in Europe or America, where the ideas proclaimed by the International did not strike root; in most of the countries sections of our International develop and expand. And if in some countries the dictatorship did succeed in stifling all revolutionary activity, this cannot last very long. At the first glimmer of the rising dawn, the strangled I.W.M.A. organizations of Italy, Portugal and South America will regain their own; and new sections, dedicated to the principles of anti-authoritarianism and federalism, will spring up in those countries where they had been prohibited until now, like Russia or Poland, for instance.

The International Working Men's Association is independent of any political party; it is not linked with any one

of them, struggling against all of them. It proclaims as its ultimate goal, the free communistic society, developed upon the basis of an anarchistic federalism. At the same time the I.W.M.A. proclaims that the world proletariat, apart from the realization of the immediate demands touching the betterment of present day labor conditions, must set before itself the realization of its ultimate aims as an immediate task by working out a political, economic, and social system, which, on the day after the crumbling of the old order, should take the place of Capitalism and the State and do away with the economic exploitation, the religious and social oppression.

In view of the clear and exact statement which leaves no room for any misunderstanding, the attitude of the International toward other labor organizations becomes equally clear and precise: in the struggle for immediate betterment of labor conditions, for the purpose of obtaining greater success, agreements and joint action with the national and local organizations are desirable and permissible.

True, even in the field of these partial improvements the I.W.M.A. and its national sections run up very often against the narrow and out-lived reformism of other labor organizations, as the so-called "Amsterdam" unions. Thus, for instance, at the Liege congress of 1928, the I.W.M.A. brought forth the slogan of immediate struggle for the six-hour working day. This demand, the value of which is probably greater than the struggle for an eight-hour day which began half a century ago, is only now considered by the reformists without a smile; but, alas, they do it not so much under pressure of their own united working masses as of the ever growing unemployment and the fact that even among the capitalists this problem becomes the burning question of the day.

In its international activities the I.W.M.A., notwithstanding its readiness to take part in the united action of all the labor factions of world socialism, finds it impossible to enter into any agreement on principle with "Amsterdam" and still less

with “Moscow,” which shows very little regard for its own proletariat whom it claims to represent. Still less does the I.W.M.A. hope that the worker’s organizations of the reformist and bolshevist make will undertake a joint revolutionary action for the carrying out of social measures which would lead necessarily to the overthrow of the Capitalist system and the downfall of the centralized state.

However numerically weak the I.W.M.A. might be, it must set before itself the problem of fulfilling the second task: to transfer the idea of the social revolution from the domain of a myth into that of actual reality.

In other words, the I.W.M.A., in full agreement with its national sections and under their direct influence, upon the basis of their practical suggestions must work out a general plan of economic, political and social reconstruction of the existing order. The present economic mess, which is the direct result of the confusion reigning in the ranks of world capitalism, opens up great opportunities to that revolutionary organization which *is desirous* of doing constructive work. There are no insoluble social tasks if, underlying their method of solution, there will be the idea of self-organization, personal and collective freedom and anti-authoritarian federalism.

The I.W.M.A. is the only workers organization which is built upon these foundation stones of free socialism. It is the only organization capable of undertaking the task of reconstruction. What then must be the policy of the International in regard to vital questions facing the contemporary world and especially the working class? This policy must consist in studying, in all its details, the present mechanism of agricultural and industrial production, of exchange and distribution. It must clear the ground for the interference of the labor organizations into the process of production by creating organs of control in the mills, factories, offices and agricultural units. On the basis of the data afforded by the study of these problems, revolutionary cadres of the new social reconstruction process must be created – eco-

nomie shock batallions, which, on the morrow of the downfall of capitalism, will be able to undertake in a practical manner the organization of a new system of social interrelationships which, by virtue of the above mentioned basic principles, will be capable of uniting the workers of all the world. This policy of the I.W.M.A. is not the policy of its executive committee or the secretariat, but the one carried out by the revolutionary organizations of each country. The critical situation in which every country finds itself at the present time brings forth the fundamental problems of the social structure and regime, a circumstance which demands from the revolutionary movement of each and every country bold, heroic solutions and practical methods of application.

As to the executive and coordinating organs of the I.W.M.A., their duty must be to unify all that work, all these attempts at social organization, all these sketches of economic solutions – and to put them at the disposal of the international proletariat in the form of a broad program of social reconstruction, the necessary premise of which must be the General Strike and the Social Revolution.

The I.W.M.A. can and must undertake this work. It will bring this task to a successful end just as it succeeded in uniting the general revolutionary elements of the whole world. Besides, such a program of action and social reconstruction will have a quickening effect upon that section of the working class which is still under the influence of politicians of the reformist and dictatorial ranks.

The great work of the I.W.M.A. is just beginning. It needs the backing not only of the national sections and unions but also of all those elements who are permeated with the anti-authoritarian and federalist spirit. It needs in the first place the support of the revolutionary Anarchists. With that support the I.W.M.A. will be able to proclaim widely its program of action and building up which will confound the reactionary forces of the bourgeois and Marxist capitalism.