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INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF WORKING WOMEN

**WORKING WOMEN
IN MANY COUNTRIES**

REPORT OF CONGRESS

HELD AT VIENNA

AUGUST 1923

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*PUBLISHED BY THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF TRADE
UNIONS, AMSTERDAM*

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INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF WORKING WOMEN



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*INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION
OF WORKING WOMEN
HELD AT VIENNA
AUGUST 1923*

From the 14th to the 18th August, 1923, the International Federation of Working Women met at Vienna. This was the first gathering of the newly-constituted Federation, but two previous international congresses of Women Workers had been held, one in Washington in 1919 and the other in Geneva, 1921. Official delegates attended from Belgium, France, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden and the United States of America, and also fraternal delegates from the Argentine, Chili, Hungary, Japan and Roumania, in addition to some visitors from Germany and Austria. Both the International Federation of Trade Unions and the International Labour Office were represented. No official representatives of the German and Austrian trade union centres were present, because those countries are opposed to taking part in a separate women's trade union organisation.

REPORT OF TWO YEARS' WORK.

After the establishment of the International Federation of Working Women at the Second International Congress of Working Women held at Geneva in October, 1921, the work had been carried on by the British Secretariat with the approval of the Executive Board, while the Women's Trade Union League of America had maintained relations with the other American States.

Communications were immediately opened with the International Federation of Trade Unions. A report of the Congress at Geneva was published by the I. F. T. U. in three languages and proved a valuable means of extending knowledge of our work. The Bureau of the I.

F. T. U. submitted the following resolution to the Rome Congress in April, 1923 :—

“That the International Federation of Trade Unions as such, should affiliate with the International Federation of Working Women for the number of women organised in the National Centres affiliated with the International Federation of Trade Unions and should pay out of its own funds the affiliation fees on behalf of this number.”

However, there was considerable opposition to this at the Congress and also misunderstanding of the composition and objects of the Federation, so the resolution was withdrawn and the following proposition was unanimously agreed to :—

“The International Trade Union Congress considers it to be a matter of urgent necessity that the trade unions in the various countries devote their whole attention (sic) to the organisation of women workers. Non-organised working women constitute a menace to the working conditions of the entire working class. The Congress therefore instructs the Management Committee to further and encourage the organisation of working women in the various countries and it considers the organisation of men and women in one trade union, to be the most efficient form of trade unionism.

In those countries where, for special reasons, there are separate organisations of working women, such organisations should affiliate to their respective National Trade Union Centres.

Considering that the situation is not sufficiently clear in regard to the aims and composition of the International Federation of Working Women, the Congress instructs the Bureau to report on this question to the next Congress, and invites the Management Committee to continue in the meantime the existing friendly relations with the International Federation of Working Women.”

The Bureau of the International Federation of Trade Unions has carried out the spirit of this resolution very generously and continued their support and co-operation. They have assisted by collecting information and by giving publicity to the work of the I. F. W. W. The Secretariat of the I. F. W. W. prepared a report on Women and Children in the Textile Industry and this the I. F. T. U. published in English, French and German. The Secretariat supplied material for “Women’s Work”, a monthly supplement to the Press Reports of the I. F. T. U., of which five numbers were published in 1923, but it has since come to an end owing to changed arrangements made for press reports at Amsterdam. The I. F. T. U. also decided to call together representatives of National Trade Union Centres for a consultation on how women can best be won over to take a greater share in Trade Union activities and such a Conference has been arranged for the two days preceding the Biennial Congress of the I. F. T. U. in June, 1924, at Vienna.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION.

The resolutions passed by the Geneva Congress dealing with subjects before the International Labour Conference held in 1921 were communicated to the International Labour Office, laid before

the Conference and printed in their Report. Information has been generously given by the Office on matters connected with women’s work and a special statement was prepared for the I. F. W. W. on the Conventions affecting women, children and young persons, which have been adopted by the various International Labour Conference.

PEACE CONGRESS AT THE HAGUE.

The Federation was represented at the Peace Congress at the Hague in 1922, which was attended by national trade union, labour, socialist and pacifist organisations. The delegates of the Federation brought together the women representatives of the trade union, labour and co-operative organisations and this group were able to express the working women’s point of view, both on the general subjects before the Congress and also on the proposals for education towards peace.

THE NEW THREEFOLD ALLIANCE.

At the Peace Congress the representatives of the International Federation of Working Women called together an informal conference representing the I. F. T. U. and the Internationals of the Young Workers, the Co-operative Women, the Working Women and groups of socialists and teachers. This Conference unanimously passed the following resolution :—

“That this meeting of women, teachers, and young workers, delegates to the International Peace Congress, recommend that as a first step towards carrying out the educational programme of that Congress there shall be a threefold alliance of the Mothers, Educators and Young Workers throughout the world.”

The I. F. W. W. has been represented at the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance at Rome, in May, 1923, and by the President and Vice-President for the United States of America at the Pan-American Congress of Women at Baltimore in 1922, where they were able to establish communication with women from South and Central America. A delegate was also sent to the International Conference of Labour and Socialist Women held at Hamburg in May, 1923.

WORKING WOMEN AND THE RUHR.

The I. F. W. W. took part with other Labour organisations in protesting against the occupation of the Ruhr by the French and Belgian troops and communicated messages of fellowship and sympathy to their sister workers in Germany.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEDERATION.

The work of the past two years showed that further consideration needed to be given to the constitution of the organisation, which was to be considered at the Vienna Congress. The Women's Trade Union League of America and the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's organisations in Great Britain, and the Trade Union Centres in France, Belgium and Italy remained connected with the Federation, and the Trades Union Congress of Canada had joined it. The Norwegian Trade Union Centre having joined the Red International was no longer eligible but a group of women trade unionists were co-operating with the I.F.W.W. The Swiss Trade Union Centre decided not to continue its representation, while no communications had been received from South Africa and Czechoslovakia. The Polish Women's Committee withdrew but communications were opened with the Trade Union Centre. The Swedish Trade Union Centre decided to be represented at the Vienna Congress while Cuba, the Argentine, Chili, China and Japan remained connected through fraternal delegates.

VIENNA CONGRESS PROCEEDINGS.

Mr. Sassenbach of the I.F.T.U. reported that increased efforts to organise women workers were being made. Of the 21,280,000 workers affiliated to the International Federation of Trade Unions about 3,500,000 were women. The number of organised women in Germany was 1,760,000 ; in England, 832,000 ; in Austria, 232,000 ; in Italy, 150,000. The severe unemployment in Europe had, of course, depleted the ranks of organised women as much as, if not more, than those of men workers. The Congress devoted considerable time to formulating plans for getting the women back into the trade unions. Unorganised women workers were the first to be deprived of any concessions which had been granted to them owing to the scarcity of labour during the War. The War machinery set up by Governments to establish a minimum wage and a bare minimum of decent conditions of employment for women in low-paid trades, was fast being scrapped, with the result that vast numbers of women in all countries were living under appalling industrial conditions, which threatened the standard of living of the whole working class.

TRADE UNION ORGANISATION.

In considering the question of organisation it was a first principle that where men and women workers were employed in the same industry or trade they should be organised in the same trade union. Any other method would be bound to cause dissension among the workers. In Great Britain much had been done to attract women

members by developing an educational side to the union, and also by paying attention to social needs. In Italy the movement had been so much disrupted by Fascism that it had been impossible to do much for women. Of the 8,500,000 women employed in industry in the United States about half worked in factories. The bad effects of unemployment on trade union organisation were now diminishing and trade unionism among women was making steady progress. In Belgium where there were 50,000 women organised, a good deal of progress had also been made. The success there was partly due to a combined political and industrial agitation. France reported a good deal of educational work which was steadily gaining ground in spite of the split in the trade union movement in that country. After exhaustive discussion the Congress agreed to certain definite lines of action which are set out below :

(1) That where men and women are employed in the same industry, they should be organised into the same union.

(2) That each country shall, through its national body, endeavour to secure an intensive campaign amongst women and girl workers, giving particular attention to the lowest paid workers. The campaign should be carried on with the assistance of women speakers and organisers having a practical knowledge of conditions in the trade or industry.

(3) The issue of special leaflets setting out the aims and objects of the unions, concentrating upon improvements achieved by organised labour in the respective trades.

(4) That attention be directed towards the need for encouraging the development of the recreation of the workers through their respective organisations. Trade unions can best develop this side of the Union's activity by appointing recreation or social committees which shall be responsible for arranging social entertainments and sports.

(5) The encouragement of the educational side under the following headings :—

(A) General Education.

(B) Craft or specialised education.

(C) Trade union organisation.

(6) That particular attention should be given to the fact that a large number of women workers are in industry for a comparatively short period and therefore no opportunity should be lost to awaken the social consciousness of these young workers, so that when they leave industry for marriage, their moral support of the labour movement may be retained.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR LEGISLATION.

The Congress considered the legislative proposals of the International Labour Office, and decided on the following recommendations :

(1) That the report of the Secretariat on the subject of women workers and International Labour legislation be adopted.

The continued default of various countries in regard to the conventions is regretted, and the workers' organisations in the different countries are urged to work with greater energy for the acceptance of the conventions by their Governments.

(2) This Conference of the International Federation of Women Workers places on record its great appreciation of the work done by the International Labour Office. It deplors the attacks which have been made upon the office by various capitalist interests, which are always against the social betterment of the workers, and calls upon organised women workers to take every advantage of this new machine for the collection of information and the establishment of international standards.

(3) Nationally and internationally, there should be minimum standards of work such as the 8 hours day, but the method by which such standards are to be obtained, whether by Trade Union agreement or by law or by both means, should be determined by the organised workers of those countries, according to the economic and political conditions in each country :—

Therefore, the International Federation of Working Women declares in favour of legislation for women in countries where the organised working women wish to use this method to improve the industrial conditions.

This Conference endorses the following memorandum prepared by the Secretariat replying to a questionnaire issued by the International Labour Office.

(1) The term "inspection du travail" is better than "factory inspection" because it is wider. Inspection should cover inspection of all classes of labour including agriculture; and of all classes of workshops, mines, theatres, offices, and penal institutions engaged in economics to secure enforcement of Labour legislation. The inspectorate for securing enforcement might be united, *e. g.*, in Great Britain, factory, shop, office, theatre inspections, as well as inspection connected with health and unemployment insurance and enforcement of Trade Board decisions might be organised together. Inspections of mines and ships should remain separate specialised departments, but might be connected in one department, and in many ways governed by the same general principles. Intervention in trade disputes should be outside the scope of this work, which would maintain a certain quality of judicial independence.

(2) (a) Right of entry at all hours of the day and night should be absolute, together with the right to question the workers (if desired, apart from the employer) and to inspect registers, etc. There seems no need to limit this in any way. It is obvious that there is a corresponding obligation on inspectors not to make public what they find.

(b) An inspector should have power to take judicial proceedings after these have been sanctioned by his own department. This last provision is necessary to secure some uniformity of standard and to prevent frivolous prosecutions. It would be far less satisfactory if prosecution depended on the local police acting on information given by the factory inspector. It is an important principle that the inspector should be as far as possible independent of local control either by a sanitary or police authority.

(c) (i) The inspector should have the duty of stating the legal requirements as to safety, etc., which ought to be carried out, and failing these being fulfilled, to prosecute to secure enforcement of the law.

(ii) These are not orders but warnings and explanations.

(iii) The inspector should not be authorised to grant exceptions, etc., such should only be granted by the Department under special regulations allowed by the governing authority.

(d) An inspector should be prepared to discuss and advise on the conditions of workplaces, etc.

(e) Inspectors should submit regular reports, and to make the form of their publication such as to be internationally comparable would be an exceedingly valuable change.

(3) (a) There should be a single inspectorate, save for mines and ships which appear to need specialised treatment throughout. There should, however, be much specialisation of individuals. Every inspectorate should have its experts on special and technical departments of the work.

(b) Special independent services now exist in many directions because of divisions between Ministries, but it seems for the most part unnecessary and undesirable.

(c) Special technical experts should be part of the staff to be called upon by the heads of it for special work when required.

(d) One central administration for main part of the work, either a Labour Ministry or Ministry of Production. But this opens questions of division of functions of government and depends upon larger matters.

(e) Women inspectors should be employed on the same conditions as men. At the same time, the work would naturally be organised in such a way that women inspected the factories where for the most part women and girls are employed. Women inspectors should not be excluded from any factory which it is convenient for them to visit, and their services should certainly be utilised for factories which employ any large number of boys.

(g) Special facilities for the recruitment of working men and women into the inspectorate are needed. A certain number of years of employment in a factory or other establishment, together with a recommendation by a trade union, might be taken as an equivalent to the competitive examination in general subjects, which would probably be required for ordinary applicants. The training and the examination in factory law and technical subjects should be the same for all recruits, and entrance be either wholly through competitive examination or through experience and examination.

(h) The inspectorate should be independent of local authorities and local police. That seems to exclude collaboration, but not co-operation.

The inspectorate should not only have the duty of enforcing existing laws, but should act on inquiries and students reports on existing needs for fresh legislation, effects of present legislation, and generally keep the Ministry concerned fully informed as to working conditions. They should be its eyes and ears, technically and intellectually qualified to see and hear accurately, and in a position of independence which would secure their incorruptibility.

WOMEN'S WORK TOWARDS PEACE.

The American delegation in particular had made an exhaustive study of the roads to peace. The chief obstacles to peace were the present concrete difficulties and problems in Europe, and with a view to elucidating these first, the Congress agreed to the following resolutions :—

Reparations.

This Congress is of the opinion that reparations should be confined to making good the actual material damage caused by the war dealing first with France, Belgium and Italy, in order to enable Germany to free itself in the shortest time possible from the burden of indebtedness. We urge the revision of the Treaties of St. Germaine and Trianon and most particularly that of Versailles which has brought hatred and strife rather than peace; and the cancellation of inter-allied war debts.

Ruhr.

This Congress condemns the military occupation of the Ruhr basin which is a breach of the Treaty of Versailles. This occupation menaces the foundation of peace and has helped to develop the industrial crises which threaten to lower the standard of life for hundreds and thousands of workers. Up to the present time the occupation of the Ruhr has demonstrated clearly that reparations cannot be secured by this method. Only under conditions of peace can Germany be in a position to pay. We welcome every effort made towards the restoration of those conditions and demand the simultaneous withdrawal of all foreign troops from Germany.

Disarmament and World Conference.

This Congress stands for the policy of settling all international questions by open negotiation. The special and economic interrelation of nations demands world peace. To achieve this, the Congress declares in favour of, and will call upon its respective Governments to take the initiative in calling a World Conference to find by investigation and consultation methods by which to bring about complete disarmament of all nations by mutual consent and concurrent universal action. We propose as a means to this end to declare war to be a crime under the law of nations, to codify international law and to establish an international court with power to summon any nation offending against the code of law and render judgment. We recommend that a complete league of nations should be given the necessary jurisdiction and we also recommend the cancellation of inter-allied debts provided steps towards disarmament are agreed upon.

Throughout the ages war has been accepted not only as a means of settling disputes but as a patriotic and glorious profession. This view is fatal to lasting peace. We welcome, therefore, the new threefold alliance of Women, Teachers, and Young People, and believe that as other errors are eliminated as civilisation advances so will the war spirit be eliminated by education, inter-communication and goodwill.

HOMEWORKERS.

Homework was a difficult subject from the trade union point of view, as it was very badly paid and had little organisation. The number of homeworkers had increased since the War because of unemployment and the difficult position in which the workers had been placed. The regulation of this type of work varied in each country: in some countries Homework had been dealt with by legislation and treated as a whole problem while in Great Britain, for instance, industries had been treated separately and homeworkers included in general legislation for the industry within which they happened to work. The Congress agreed on the following recommendations:—

The Commission is unanimous in recognising the impossibility of taking definite decisions concerning homework in existing circumstances, owing to the inadequate information available.

(1) It is decided to request the International Labour Office to collect all existing documents on the subject and to conduct an enquiry as to the conditions in which homeworkers of both sexes are working in all nations; and further endeavour to secure extension of suitable legislation to countries without it.

(2) Where legal regulations affecting homeworkers are already in existence, the Commission declares that it would be the duty of a public authority to enforce the rates.

(3) In view of French decisions concerning the right of Trade Unions to act on behalf of homeworkers the Commission desires to remit the question of the judicial powers of Trade Unions to the I. F. T. U. and the Women's Trade Union League of America for consideration.

FAMILY ALLOWANCES IN PAYMENT OF WAGES.

The question considered was the advisability of the payment of an additional allowance for each of a worker's children in addition to the wage. The British Labour Movement looked at the question in the following way:— it was quite clear that at present the workmen with a large family did not normally get a wage sufficient for a decent life for his children, and that was true not only of the poorer labourers and casual workers, but even of the well paid highly skilled workers. The problem pressed upon so many mothers with such great weight that the working woman was apt to be pleased with any proposals to give her a little money, but the proposals needed careful consideration. The payment of family allowances was not a new thing. Some countries had always paid them to certain workers. Great Britain, for example, paid them to soldiers, sailors and married men in the police force. Railway servants in some countries also had them, and civil servants and municipal employees were in certain cases given extra allowances for children. After full consideration had been given to all aspects of the question the following resolutions were agreed:—

(1) That the family allowances in addition to wages for industrial workers should not be regarded as more than a temporary expedient to meet the economic difficulties developed in capitalist society.

(2) That the workers should rather aim, first, at the provision of grants of public money to meet the special emergencies of child-birth, unemployment, illness, or death of the family wage-earner; and that these grants should be available to all.

(3) That every service needed for the health, education or welfare of mothers and children should be provided by the community and free to all.

(4) That commodities, such as milk, food, or school clothes which are needed in similar quantities or qualities for all children, should be provided for all by the community.

(5) That an inquiry should be made into the possibility of a scheme of pensions for all children in the period during which they are normally dependent upon their parents.

THE FUTURE OF THE FEDERATION.

The most difficult work before the Congress was the question of the future development of the Federation. The view held by the majority of the countries represented was that the Federation should

co-operate more and more closely with the International Federation of Trade Unions, with the ultimate aim of working within that organisation. Unfortunately, the American Trade Union Movement is not affiliated with the International Federation of Trade Unions, so that this aim cannot be easily accepted by American women trade unionists; however the whole matter is to be considered by their National Conference in June, 1924.

The following resolutions were agreed, the American delegates abstaining from voting and presenting the statement appended:

The Executive Board be directed to open negotiations with the International Federation of Trade Unions with a view to putting the principles into operation in the following way:—

(a) By developing the present Women's Department at Amsterdam and appointing a woman secretary.

(b) By establishing a Women's Committee representing the Trade Union movement in different countries to work with the Department and the Executive authorities of the International Federation of Trade Unions in the development of the trade union movement amongst women. This shall be called together at least once a year, and more frequently if necessary.

(c) By holding a Congress of Working Women at least every two years, preferably before the Biennial Congress of the International Federation of Trade Unions.

The results of these negotiations and the decisions taken upon the subject by the Congress of the International Federation of Trade Unions in April, 1924, be communicated by the Executive Board to all the affiliated organisations and from their replies the Executive Board shall decide upon the continuance of the Federation.

That in view of these proposals the Federation continue for the present to work under the constitution adopted in 1921 at Geneva.

Statement of American Delegation.

The American Delegation represented in this Congress in not authorised to vote for a change in the form of the International Federation of Working Women as proposed and recommended in the report of the Commission on Constitution.

The American Delegation wishes to point out further to this Congress that America is in a different position from the other countries in regard to the International Federation of Trade Unions at Amsterdam. Your national trade unions are already a part of the International Federation of Trade Unions, while our American Federation of Labor is not affiliated with it. We therefore do not record our vote on this report.

The International Federation of Trade Unions Congress meets in 1924, so that its action on this Commission's proposal can be reported to the Biennial Convention of the National Women's Trade Unions League, which meets in June 1924, for our consideration and action.

OFFICERS.

The following officers were elected:—

President	Mlle. Burniaux (Belgium)
Consultative Member of Secretariat	Dr. Marion Phillips (Great Britain)
Treasurer	Mrs. Harrison Bell (Great Britain)
Secretary	Miss Edith McDonald (Great Britain)

Vice-Presidents.

Great Britain	Miss Margaret Bondfield
Belgium	Mlle. Julia Leonet
France	Mlle. Jeanne Chevenard
Italy	Signora Casartelli Cabrini
United States of America	Mrs. Maud Swartz
Canada	Mrs. Kathleen Derry

Secretariat office:—

32, Eccleston Square, London S. W. 1.

CONCLUSION.

In addition to the above-mentioned problems affecting working women which formed the main business of the Vienna Congress, reports were also submitted by Japanese, Chinese, Hungarian and Roumanian visitors on the conditions in their respective countries. The fraternal delegates sent by Chili and the Argentine likewise read reports. The Congress had a full opportunity of realising the wide field of working women's problems, which can only be hopefully tackled through the machinery of the trade union movement; and the Federation has clearly a valuable function to perform in its special task of stimulating and heightening trade union activity amongst women and in drawing within the unions an ever increasing proportion of women workers to act by the side of their men comrades. Since the I.F.T.U. forms the international centre for the majority of trade unions throughout the world and must play a great part in shaping the progress of industrial organisation, it seems clear that the activity of the International Federation of Working Women must be dependent upon a close co-operation with that body. The Federation looks forward accordingly to a continually increasing collaboration by means of which the I.F.W.W. will continue its special work within a great international organisation of the workers of the world.

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