

## CHAPTER I

### THE FOUNDING CONGRESS OF THE ICFTU

The new trade union international which was established by the Free World Labour Conference in London from 28 November to 7 December 1949 - and which held its Founding Congress immediately afterwards - gave to the workers of the free countries a new, powerful instrument of international action for Bread, Freedom and Peace ». These fundamental goals were formulated in the Manifesto issued by the Congress as follows:- « Bread: economic security and social justice for all. Freedom: through economic and political democracy. Peace: with liberty, justice and dignity for all.

It had been clear to the founding organisations that these great goals could be effectively fought for only if a new structure of international organisation were established, different from that of the International Federation of Trade Unions as well as from that of the World Federation of Trade Unions. The experiment of the World Federation of Trade Unions had failed. It had been found impossible for free trade unions to fight for genuine trade union principles and goals together with organisations which were neither free nor independent, but part of an omnipotent governmental machinery. This excluded trade unions in communist countries on the one hand, in dictatorship countries of a fascist or military nature on the other. Yet within this definition of genuine trade unionism, the new trade union international should be as universal as possible, by being open to all free and representative democratic trade union bodies, regardless of whether they constituted the sole representatives of labour in a given country, a majority or a minority of the organised workers of that country. This new formula, which had not been applied by the International Federation of Trade Unions, allowed the ICFTU to accept into membership in the United States both the AFL and the CIO - which merged a few years later to form the AFL-CIO, in India both the Indian National

Trades Union Congress and Hind Mazdoor Sabha, in Brazil, where the formation of a national trade union centre was not allowed, a number of individual trade unions.

Another significant difference from the International Federation of Trade Unions was the geographical universality which the ICFTU achieved from the outset. The International Federation of Trade Unions had begun its operations virtually as a European organisation, and among major non-European trade union organisations only the AFL was affiliated, even then not continuously. When the Preparatory International Trade Union Committee invited trade unions in economically advanced and developing countries to participate in the Free World Labour Conference, the response of the trade unions in developing countries was overwhelming. Of 53 countries which were represented at the Free World Labour Conference 33 were situated in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean area. And, with two exceptions, all of these trade union organisations joined the ICFTU. The initial membership of the ICFTU was around 48 million.

There was, however, one notable gap in the achievement of universality, which has not yet been closed. While the ICFTU, faithful to its principle of democratic universality, embraced from its initiation member organisations regardless of any racial, political or religious ties, while indeed its membership was composed of numerous nationalities and religions, and while specifically by far the largest proportion of Christian (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox) workers were organised in free trade unions, a group of trade unions which since pre-First World War days had been affiliated with a Christian international organisation decided to maintain their international grouping outside of the ranks of the ICFTU. However, between the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (which recently changed its name to World Confederation of Labour) and the ICFTU good cooperation has been achieved in a number of fields of activities and an even closer relationship may be hoped for.

The Founding Congress of the ICFTU not only adopted a Constitution and guide lines for the building up of regional organisations, but also issued, as has been noted above, a Manifesto and in addition a Declaration of Economic and Social Demands. These documents established the fundamental economic, social, political and organisational principles on which the ICFTU was based from its beginning, to which it has remained faithful, and which have guided its activities all the time. While there has been a remarkable growth in membership and

in the number of countries with affiliated organisations, while the activities of the Confederation have multiplied and developed in depth, and while the centre of gravity of its work, in accordance with changing situations and needs, has undergone certain shifts from time to time, the principles on which the international was founded twenty years ago have remained unchanged - for the obvious reason that they are the principles which are the *raison d'être* of free trade unionism itself. It appears, therefore, fitting to give a brief account of these principles, as laid down in the documents adopted by the Founding Congress and unforgettably summed up in the worlds : bread, freedom, and peace.

The concept of freedom is the very basis of free trade unionism. In the narrower sense of political freedom it means, as the Founding Congress declared, the allegiance of the free trade unions to truly democratic forms of government, and negatively formulated, opposition to all forms of dictatorship or authoritarian rule, be it of communist, fascist or military nature. It likewise means allegiance to the civic liberties which are implied in democracy, and negatively formulated, firm opposition to any political, economic or social « discrimination or subjugation based on race, creed or sex ». It also means allegiance to national freedom, self-determination and independence, implying an end to colonial domination, which at the time of the formation of the ICFTU still existed in wide parts of the globe - and has not completely disappeared since then. Moreover, civic freedom means the unrestricted right of workers to organise trade unions of their choice, independent of governments and employers, and specifically, the unrestricted right of the trade unions « to bargain collectively with their employers, regardless of the character of ownership or management, with the right to strike when necessary ». (Manifesto.)

The concept of peace is closely connected with that of freedom. As the Manifesto aptly declared « A movement of free and democratic peoples, united in a common effort to achieve economic security, social justice and political freedom is the only basis on which lasting peace can be established ». By fighting for freedom and democracy the free trade unions are fighting for an enduring peace. But also in a narrower sense the ICFTU, faithful to the statement embodied in the Manifesto that « the free and democratic trade unions of the world are the vanguard of the forces determined to build a just and lasting peace » has from its initiation supported all sincere moves for fostering peace and disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament. Indeed, even at this early stage, long before the major nuclear powers agreed on a limited cessation of nuclear arms

tests, the Founding Congress of the ICFTU demanded « a progressive programme of universal disarmament » and « the use of atomic energy and science for the welfare of mankind and not for its destruction ».

It was in the same spirit that the Founding Congress pledged support by the free trade unions for the strengthening of the United Nations and of its specialised agencies for the peaceful solution of international problems. Support for the United Nations family and intense participation in its work have been at all times one of the most important activities of the ICFTU.

The cry for « bread » has been the rallying call of the trade union movement from its very beginning. Even in our present era of highly developed technology the cry for bread in the literal meaning of this word has retained its full justification. In wide areas of the world hunger or malnutrition is still rampant and living standards are still abominably low, particularly in the developing countries. This problem was already very much in the minds of the free trade unions at the Founding Congress. Indeed, in the statements adopted by the Congress a programme of international cooperation for the development of the economically underdeveloped areas of the world was already outlined, centering on financial and technical assistance to these countries in a spirit of mutual cooperation, not in the spirit of imperialism. For the workers in economically advanced countries, on the other hand, the cry for bread means in the first place a struggle for steadily rising living standards, improvement in working conditions as well as security of employment. The demand for the establishment of full employment policies was formulated by the Founding Congress, as were demands for the introduction of comprehensive social security systems and for full access to public education.

To become an effective force for the achievement of this all-embracing programme of action, the Founding Congress of the ICFTU had to establish an efficient organisational structure. That this was done in the Constitution which the Congress adopted is demonstrated by the fact that none of the seven following Congresses has seen fit to make substantial changes in the Constitution. First of all, the Founding Congress established a truly representative and democratic structure of the governing bodies of the ICFTU, by conceding to the smaller affiliates proportionately far greater representation than to the larger organisations. In the Executive Board, the ruling organ of the Confederation between Congresses, the Constitution also provided for a proportionately larger representation —

on the basis of membership - of the developing areas than of the economically advanced countries with their stronger trade unions. In addition, by introducing for the Executive Board a provision for first and second substitutes of titular members, the Constitution spread the access to the Executive Board among a wide area, to the advantage of the weaker trade unions in developing countries. Lastly, by ruling that the expenses of the members of the Executive Board in the performance of their duties should be borne by the Confederation, the Constitution allowed the financially weaker trade unions full participation in the work of the Executive Board.

A new element in international trade union democracy introduced by the Founding Congress was that of laying the groundwork for regional organisations. Not only did the Constitution envisage the establishment of « regional machinery », but the Founding Congress further adopted a set of rules which constituted the guide-lines on which the regional organisations of the ICFTU were subsequently formed. Two guiding principles which ensured the democratic structure of the regional organisations were particularly emphasized in the rules adopted by the Founding Congress: first, while making the regional organisations responsible to the Confederation, they granted them a high degree of autonomy in the matters falling within their purview », and second, in order to assure them from the outset the opportunity for proper functioning, the rules provided for the possibility of financial assistance by the Confederation to the regional bodies.

Thanks to the vigorous initiative which was shown by a number of affiliated organisations and to the systematic, wide-ranging regional activities of the Confederation itself, regional organisations were on the basis of these rules created in Europe, Asia, the Western Hemisphere and Africa.

The ICFTU recognised from the outset that the professional internationals - the International Trade Secretariats - were an indispensable and inherent part of trade union internationalism and, among their other functions, had an essential role to play in the development process of free trade unions in economically less developed countries. The need for close cooperation with the international Trade Secretariats was therefore realised even before the ICFTU was founded. The Preparatory International Trade Union Conference in Geneva emphasized this need, and on the part of the Trade Secretariats the same views were expressed at a Conference which they held in Paris on the eve of the Founding Congress of the ICFTU. The International Trade Secretariats

were therefore invited to participate in the Free World Labour Conference and in the Founding Congress of the ICFTU. (Fourteen of them in fact accepted this invitation). The Founding Congress embodied in the Constitution effective cooperation between the Confederation and the International Trade Secretariats. It provided for reciprocal representation of ICFTU and International Trade Secretariats in the governing bodies and for the conclusion of arrangements for mutual assistance in the field of trade union organising. This programme of cooperation between the Confederation and the International Trade Secretariats has been faithfully and systematically carried out, to the benefit of all free trade union organisations and particularly those in the economically developing areas.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GROWTH OF THE ICFTU

When the ICFTU started on its road towards uniting the free trade unions of the world under its banner, 69 trade union organisations and federations in 52 countries and « territories (as colonies and protectorates were called) with a membership of 48 million workers followed its call and affiliated with the Confederation. This was a surprisingly successful response, never before achieved by an international organisation assembled on a voluntary basis. To be sure, the large majority of membership came from the long-established trade unions of the economically advanced countries 'in Europe and North America; but while the affiliated organisations in these countries - and in the newly emerging industrial power, Japan - counted more than 38 million members, a further 10 million members came from the countries in the economically underdeveloped parts of the world. This was a very encouraging beginning; but, thanks to the organising and educational efforts among the unorganised or poorly organised masses of workers in many developing areas, dynamically and systematically assisted by the ICFTU and the International Trade Secretariats, membership did not remain at that figure. When the latest ICFTU Congress (Amsterdam, July 1965) reported on membership of affiliated organisations, it had grown to 58 1/4 million, with this growth occurring mainly in the developing sector. While in the economically advanced countries membership had increased only by 2 1/2 million from the end of 1949 to the end of 1964, it advanced by 7 3/4 million in the developing countries, corresponding to a growth rate of 80 per cent in the fifteen years which had elapsed between the First and the Eighth Congress.

The success would have been even more pronounced if at the time when trade unionism took root in the developing countries and international cooperation in this field became effective, the tendency had not arisen in a number of these countries to