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THE SWISS TRADES UNION MOVEMENT AND COMMUNISM.

By PIERRE BEGUIN.

The Swiss "Union of Syndicates" is a powerful body which represents the greater part of the working class movement in this country. There are indeed a number of Christian unions and unions of radical tendencies, but the vast majority of Swiss trade unionists belong to this single influential Union of Syndicates which is capable of bringing considerable influence to bear in political as well as professional life.

There has been no counterpart in Switzerland of the internal dissension which has occurred during the last few years in the trades unions movement of so many other western countries. In Switzerland the Communist leaders have been unsuccessful in capturing leading positions in the trades union movement, and there has been no breakaway under Communist inspiration, from the trades union movement. In this respect the situation in Switzerland is not very different from that in Great Britain.

This has been shown once again at the tri-annual congress of the Swiss Union of Syndicates which has just taken place in Lucerne, where the very important question came up for discussion whether the Syndicate should join the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions.



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In 1946 the Swiss Union of Syndicates joined the World Federation of Trades Unions, in obedience to the wish which the leaders in all countries of the trades union movement have always cherished, to preserve an international workers' united front. But even then doubts were expressed whether it was possible to organise fruitful and harmonious co-operation between the free western trades unions and the strictly government-controlled trades unions in the peoples' democracies of Eastern Europe. But all the same we joined; we took this risk. But as our trades unions leaders have just stated in Lucerne, the experiment was a complete failure. The Communists very soon succeeded in taking over a dominating part in the World Federation of Trades Unions and of making this body completely subservient to Soviet policy. And for this reason the free trades unions of the western countries decided to leave the World Federation and to set up a genuinely democratic supra-national trades union organisation.

This left Swiss trades unionists with the task of deciding whether their national organisation would join the new international body. This question was discussed at length and in great detail in Lucerne, and the Communists had ample opportunity to put forward their point of view. They cannot claim that the decision which was finally taken was arrived at without full investigation and complete objectivity.

The result was that the Swiss trades unions decided by 325 votes to only 22, to join the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions. This was not only a clear majority. It was a crushing one. A crushing victory of progressive thought over revolutionary tendencies. The Swiss working class have now shown by voting in this way that they think no more reforms are necessary; they have shown that they will have nothing to do with totalitarian methods.

The decision was taken in full freedom of mind, and it will strengthen the position of the socialist party and also the present position of the trades unions chiefs. On the other hand it will prevent the Communists from continuing their penetration of working class organisations, and so will reduce their influence. The Swiss working class movement is healthy and united, and we have good reason to be thankful that it is so.

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