

CHILE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN  
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TRADE UNION CONFERENCE  
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Concluding speech of Luis Figueroa, President of the Central Unica de Trabajadores (CUT), the Chilean TUC, to the conference.

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I wish that this discussion could be translated into every language and published in every country of the world, because during the brief hours of this conference, absolutely fundamental issues have been touched on.

First of all I should mention the identity of interest between the workers of Chile and those of Great Britain. Delegates have expressed their concern at the resurgence of fascism in different parts of the world, and the idea that has emerged more or less clearly is that fascism has no nationality, and that wherever there is oppression, injustice or oppression, the seeds are sown for a resurgence of fascism. This is absolutely true. But in addition this conference has underlined the absolutely humanitarian nature of our class, the working class.

For me it has been truly moving to listen to the denunciations of tortures, rapes and murders. It is clear that the grief felt for these tragedies that have befallen others in a distant and foreign country, is absolutely sincere and heartfelt. This goes to show the fibre and quality of the consciousness of our class, and the fundamentally humanitarian character we have. Such gentle grief for the pain of others is never found among the monopolists and those who own and run the multi-national corporations. They are living through a period of moral and material decadence. They seek escape in drugs and pornography. Escape from a world which they see dying, but which will be born again through the work of the hands of the workers.

Forgive me for speaking in this way. I am deeply moved, because only through the kind of direct contact afforded by this conference can one get to know a class beyond the boundaries of nation, flag and language, and perceive the true nature of the international workers' movement.

But this conference has also underlined the internationalist character of the British workers, which is something they have as part of a rich heritage from the past, as a result of the struggles of many generations.

The Conference has looked in a concrete way at the situation of the prisoners in Chile, and the successes of the campaign to free them. But it has also been frank in admitting the difficulties this work involves. It has looked also at the situation of the refugees, and discussed the shortage of funds faced by the Solidarity Campaign. As the Comrade who took the collection (Brian Anderson, AUEW Construction Section, Liverpool) said, beyond the confines of this conference there are 9 million British workers, and the problem is how are we going to get the trade unions throughout Britain to discuss Chile, and to take action.

Almost every conceivable form of solidarity has been discussed here. But I would like to add one more project to those discussed. In the coming days, a ship will set out for Chile loaded with presents and necessities for the orphans and children of the prisoners in Chile. The campaign for this ship has both a humanitarian and a morale-building aspect. When the COFTU delegation went to Santiago a few days ago, Jack Jones among them, they talked to the Cardinal of the Catholic Church in Chile, and asked him what he thought of this solidarity ship project. He told them that he was somewhat sceptical, because a food-ship

would be like a drop of water in the ocean. That is true, but one drop of water, added to others, becomes a stream, and at this moment the campaign for the ship is being pursued in Europe and America. However small the material help we send, it is something which awakens the antifascist conscience of peoples, and will provide a boost to the morale of our countrymen in their struggle against fascism.

In the coming days there is to be an International Conference of Solidarity with Chile in Athens, convened by the World Congress of Peace Forces, and the democratic parties and organisations of Greece. The aim is to discuss how to reinforce the support given to the antifascist struggle in Chile. I am sure that British workers will be represented there, and will be able to recount the rich experience of solidarity they have had, and will support the decisions that are taken there, especially to put into practice the boycott which was agreed upon at the ILO conference in Geneva.

During the course of this conference, different opinions about boycott have been expressed. Some comrades, for instance, have stated that isolated boycott actions give no concrete results in the struggle against the dictatorship. Definitive results these actions do not give, but results yes.

When boycott actions began in Britain, Australia, Sweden, Italy, France and Holland, they were isolated actions. That was almost a year ago. But in the time that has elapsed since then, these actions have secured the freedom of almost 10,000 prisoners. It is true that the Junta is still there, in power, and that it continues with its policy of repression, but we have achieved partial successes, and the freeing of these prisoners would not have been possible without international solidarity, and above all without these boycotts. What must we do then? We must extend the boycott, so that it involves others as well as the dockers, and we must look into methods of coordinating these actions and making them simultaneous, so that they give the necessary results. Nevertheless, these actions, however small they may be, are important.

In Australia, the service-workers at the main airport in Sydney agreed to start a boycott against the Pinochet dictatorship. With much pomp and pride the Junta opened a new flight by the Chilean airline LAN across the Antarctic to Sydney. The Comrades of the airport unions refused to unload baggage, and blacked the fuelling and servicing of the planes. After four days the military Junta agreed to allow an Australian trade union delegation to go to Chile, visit the prison camps and talk to the prisoners. Only then did the workers agree to service the planes. The delegation went to Chile, and on its return reported that it had been able to certify the truth of all the denunciations that had been made about the horrors of the repression. From that day on no Chilean plane has been able to land in Sydney. (Applause). The comrades of the Water Board in Sydney agreed to join in the boycott, and twice a week they cut off the water supply to the offices of LAN, the Chilean airline, in Sydney. (Applause). But in addition, a public campaign was started. Quite a number of passengers had bought tickets and could not travel, since there were no flights. They were invited to sue the airline, and quite a number did so. Now, LAN-Australia is bankrupt, because they cannot afford to refund the ticket-money. (Laughter and applause).

In an Italian port, the dockers were having considerable difficulties in applying boycott, because of the high level of unemployment which afflicts them as it does the workers of Merseyside. So they invented a simple stratagem. A ship arrived from Chile and they unloaded half of it. They then stopped the work and refused to unload the other half. That ship stayed in port for seven months unable to leave because it was still half-loaded and there were no docker gangs willing to go back aboard and reload the empty holds. In the end the Junta was forced to sell the ship, because they couldn't afford to pay the port fees.

Now, clearly this boycott business is no easy matter. We are absolutely clear about that. And we don't think that it's just a problem for the dockers, or the seamen, but it's also a problem for the lorry-drivers, the railwaymen, the engineers, the chemical workers and others. Even so, each action, however tiny it may be, has two effects: it strikes a blow at the Junta, and creates worries for the businessmen, who start getting a bit shy about signing commercial contracts if they think the goods might get blacked. But it also helps to raise class consciousness, because if today we can get a blacking carried out on behalf of a distant country, and it's a successful action, it shows the working class its own immense potential for confronting in the future any difficult situation which crops up in its own country (Applause).

We are now moving towards a higher stage in the organisation of boycotts. We are going to discuss this in the Athens conference, and the discussion won't be a theoretical one. We shall be asking "When, Where and How?". I can tell you that we've had talks with the dockers in Helsinki, Stockholm, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Genoa, Le Havre and Marseilles. We've even had a meeting with the President of the French Transport Workers Federation. We're working on getting a coordinated boycott at the European level like that which was carried out on October 2 against the Franco regime. And we're working in Latin America, and even in the USA, on the possibility of getting a simultaneous boycott along the entire Pacific coast.

So we are moving on to the stage of organising this work. But it would be impossible to even think of a European or American boycott if it had not been for the 24 or 48 hour boycotts that you, the workers of Britain, have already carried out. Your actions opened the way forward for the new plans we have now. And we are even more optimistic. The way forward is being opened in the international trade-union movement for a simultaneous and coordinated international boycott. And let the multinationals stop and think of what they are going to be up against if they continue with their policies of aggression.

Thankyou, comrades, for everything that has been said here, and more than that, for all the things that I know you will do tomorrow. We Chilean workers are very aware that only through the ~~maxx~~ broadest unity will we be able to overthrow the dictatorship and open up the path to a new country. But we are also aware that only the unity of the working class at the national and international level can defeat imperialism. Many thanks.

(--Standing ovation--)