

BRITISH
LABOR
Bids for
POWER

The Historic Scarborough Conference
of the Trades Union Congress

by
SCOTT NEARING



SOCIAL SCIENCE PUBLISHERS

7 West 106th Street

New York City

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The Job of Trade Unions

"The functions of the trade unions are two-fold. First of all, they have to defend the workers' standard of life everywhere against the attacks of the capitalist forces, which have closed their ranks internationally, and are thus in a position to deliver smashing blows. This embodies an attempt to improve the condition of the working class 'within the framework of capitalist society.' But the trade unions' ultimate function is a greater one, and is therefore in a sense primary, namely to achieve the overthrow of the capitalist system, the deliverance of labour, the inauguration of socialism." (Edo Fimmen, *Labour's Alternative*, p. 97.)

Mission of the Trades Union Congress

"That its mission was revolutionary, in effect if not in early intention, is historically certain. Notwithstanding the innate conservatism, caution and moderation of its policy, Congress has moved steadily, decade by decade, toward a complete transformation of the industrial organization based on craft unionism of an exclusive kind. . . . It has evolved in the general direction of a militant organization of all workers, skilled and unskilled, capable not only of collective bargaining on something like equal terms with the employers, but of more vigorous constructive action, under unified leadership, for the ultimate transformation of the whole system of productive industry. Almost unconsciously, at least until within very recent years, the Trades Union Congress has pursued a path which leads inevitably to the assumption of full responsibility by its central executive for the mass action of the Trades Unions. In recent years this unconscious tendency has become deliberate, a guiding principle of Congress policy and administration."—(*Story of the Trades Union Congress*, The General Council, London.)

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BRITISH LABOR BIDS FOR POWER

1. Making Labor History

During the mine crisis of July, 1925, British Transport Workers and Railway Workers stood solid with the Miners. Labor strategy, throughout the period, was determined by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. British Labor, showing a solid front to British Capital and to the British Government, won its point in the face of as difficult an economic situation as recent times have produced. The success gave the whole British Labor Movement a new sense of the power that comes with Trade Union Unity.

Neither the leaders of British Labor nor the members of the rank and file have any illusions about the 1925 coal settlement. The issue was not met. It was merely postponed until May, 1926. But the episode tested the new Trade Union machinery set up by the Hull Congress in 1924, and the workers feel that, both in the coal dispute and in the woolen textile dispute which occurred at the same time, the machine stood the test.

British Labor won a breathing spell in July, 1925—not a victory. Conversations among workers, speeches at public meetings and articles in the labor press are filled with the warning: "Next May!" It is in May that the coal subsidy comes to an end, and the issue between miners and mine owners over a wage reduction will really be fought out. Meanwhile unemployment mounts and wage reductions continue in other trades.

British workers face a real issue. Leaders and members of the rank and file alike realize this. All are preparing to meet it, and on a national and international scale.

British Labor's executive and administrative machinery is centralized in the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. Organized in 1868 as an annual meeting of delegates from Trade Unions, with a Parliamentary (or executive) Committee, very limited in authority, dating from 1869, the Trades Union Congress has developed until it is now the recognized centre of Trade Union authority in Great Britain. Its General Council, organized in 1921, and vested with extensive powers in 1924, is rapidly becoming the General Staff of the British Trade Union Movement. It was the General Council that handled the coal and the woolen textile disputes in July, 1925; it was the General Council that engineered the Russian Trade Union Delegation and issued the Report on Russia that has gone all over the world in the past twelve months; it was the General Council

that carried on such insistent negotiations for Trade Union Unity, through 1924, against the stubborn opposition of Oudgeest, Jouhaux, Mertens, and other Amsterdam officials; it is the General Council that is expected to formulate and direct Trade Union policy when the crisis comes in May, 1926.*

2. Labor Statesmanship

Preparation for the coming struggle sounded through every session of the Trades Union Congress which met in Scarborough on September 7, 1925. During the previous session of the Congress at Hull, in 1924, extended powers had been given to the General Council. These powers had been put to excellent use the following July. Other struggles impended. Officials and delegates alike showed an eagerness to meet them.

More significant, perhaps, than any other single event of the Congress week was the opening address of the President, A. B. Swales (Amalgamated Engineering Union). President Swales is a trade unionist of long standing; he represents one of the most important of the national unions; for many years he has been looked upon as one of the "moderates" in the movement; he may fairly be said to speak for British Trade Union middle-ground opinion. Regarded from this background, his speech was doubly significant. It undoubtedly presents the point of view held by very large numbers of British Trade Union members at the present moment. Following are the main sections of the address:

3. One Hundred Years of Progress

"Last year our movement celebrated the 100th year of our Industrial Charter. In the year 1824 the great Act of Liberation took place, and during the succeeding 100 years the best men and women that any movement has known have contributed to the building up of our movement as we know it to-day. Not only in Britain but in every country where the Trade Union Movement is now established the memory of the men and women who struggled to establish the Industrial Movement should be held in honour. They handed on to us a godly heritage.

"When we last met, our colleagues of the political side of our movement were administering the machinery of government. As was truthfully predicted as being within the bounds of possibility by last year's President of Congress, 'the full

*Two excellent pamphlets have been issued by the General Council from its office at 32 Eccleston Sq., London: *The Story of the Trades Union Congress*, and *The General Council of the Trades Union Congress*. The two may be had, postpaid, for 10 cents.

and complete ratification of the Treaty with Russia' decided the fate of the Labour Government. Within two months of our dispersal from the last Congress, the Labour Government fell. After a vigorous campaign, in which Mr. Baldwin's friends produced 'red' bogies, 'red' in tooth and claw, brandishing a forged 'red' letter from Moscow, our Party lost some seats, but returned 151 Members to continue the fight at Westminster.

4. Trade Union Sacrifices

"During the past twelve months economic and social conditions in this country have become increasingly serious. The working people have been called upon to make enormous sacrifices during the period of depressed trade, and have been unable to withstand all the encroachments of the employers upon Trade Union standards of wages and working conditions. The extent of working-class sacrifice since the economic slump began at the end of 1920 is not, I believe, generally realised by the country at large. Wage cuts totalling in the aggregate many hundreds of millions of purchasing power have been imposed upon the workers. In addition the Trade Unions have borne a dead-weight burden in the form of abnormal unemployment, which has depleted their financial reserves, and with a falling membership the yearly income of the unions has been substantially reduced. It is a wonderful tribute to the strength and solidarity of the Industrial Movement that it has sustained these burdens so well. Nothing but wisdom and prudence in the leaders and loyalty and devotion in the rank and file could enable the Trade Union Movement to come through a period of such unparalleled crisis with its essential unity unimpaired, its organisation fundamentally sound, and its future uncompromised. Fellow delegates, I make bold to say that the organised workers we represent have given in the last four years an impressive demonstration to the whole world of their unity of purpose, their capacity to make sacrifices for the cause in which they believe, and of their determination to maintain the industrial organisation they have built up. We are proud of our movement, and I believe we are entitled to take pride in its achievements, not the least remarkable of which has been its ability to weather the storm of the last few years and to confront with unbroken spirit and resolute will the powerfully organised forces of capitalism. Let the employers who think the organised working class can be driven still further back take

warning from this. This movement of ours has learned many lessons during these years of reaction engineered by the employers, and one of the lessons is that a militant and progressive policy, consistently and steadily pursued, is the only policy that will unify, consolidate, and inspire our rank and file. When economic conditions forced the unions to assume a defensive attitude, the employers did not hesitate to take advantage of their stronger position, and they are still plotting and planning to undermine Trade Union standards. But there is a limit to the concessions the unions can be forced to make. That limit has been reached. Union policy henceforth will be to recover lost ground, to re-establish and improve our standards of wages, hours, and working conditions, and to co-ordinate and intensify Trade Union action for the winning of a larger measure of control in industry for the workers. And this policy renders necessary a greater degree of Trade Union unity.

5. Miners, Textile, and Trade Union Solidarity

"The demonstration of Trade Union solidarity connected with the miners' struggle, a month ago, has given hope to the whole movement. The result will strengthen every section of working class organisation and help the unions to become 100 per cent. organised. That must be our aim.

"Those of us who were privileged to share in the victory and who helped to rally the forces of Trade Unionism behind the miners, lived a glorious week—one that will ever be remembered. It was historical.

"As we marshalled our forces, day by day, to meet the pending attack of the representatives of capitalism, the response of all sections to defend the standard of wages and hours was most gratifying.

"It must be our work to harness that spirit to our organising work, and weave it into the fabric and structure of the Trade Union Movement of the future. The capitalist class will learn lessons from this skirmish, and will use their great influences in present day society to compel a retreat.

"Congress must give to the General Council full powers to create the necessary machinery to combat every movement by our opponents. It was to that end that the General Council asked for greater powers to deal with industrial developments at Southport Congress in 1922, and though our claim was rejected, Congress gave more powers, though

limited, at Hull last year. The miners asked the General Council to use those powers, and I think we can claim the result has been most encouraging, and justify me, as your President, in requesting that each organisation should give serious consideration to its constitution.

"Constitutions should be made flexible enough to respond readily to any calls made in the interests of the whole movement.

"The coming year should remove all these difficulties, and next Congress should be ready to pass in concrete form machinery which establishes the General Council of the Trades Union Congress as the central controlling and directing body of the British Trade Union Movement on all large issues.

"The miners' respite, gained under the difficult circumstances with which the General Council had to contend, has brought the position clearly into view, and we would be lacking in our duty to Congress if we failed to make the position quite plain.

"Similarly, in the case of the lock-out of textile workers, the General Council were instrumental in assisting the unions to resist effectively the most insistent attempts of the employers to force the men back to work at reduced wages. Occurring at the period when the mining crisis was at its most critical stage, the textile lock-out did not command the public attention it ordinarily would have done, but here, just as in the mining dispute, the General Council worked assiduously to strengthen and consolidate the forces of the workers.

"Our Movement cannot stand still. One hundred years of experience has taught us that neither our structure nor our methods can remain static, and that breadth of vision, responsiveness of mind, and a readiness to make necessary changes are imperative if the prestige and power of the Trade Union Movement is to be maintained and strengthened.

"Through a period of great difficulty and intense activity, the General Council have endeavoured to pursue a policy which is both soundly constructive and steadily progressive, and which they believe is in close conformity with the best interests of the great Trade Union Movement.

"I am confident that that policy as here expounded is one that merits and will receive the full and cordial confidence of the organised workers.

6. Industrial Organisation

"During the year the General Council, among many other questions, have considered industrial organisation. I am inclined to believe that the extent to which unification is taking place is not appreciated by many of our members. What has been the general trend of affairs in pursuit of this policy of unification? The answer is provided by the fact that, whereas the number of distinct societies has decreased since the beginning of the Great War, the membership represented by the smaller number of unions has, despite our losses, more than doubled. The Registrar of Friendly Societies states that since 1920 alone the number of separate unions has decreased by more than 15 per cent.

"This consolidation is most marked among the General Workers' Unions, who were formerly in a multiplicity of small, sectional, and local organisations. To-day over a million of these workers are banded together in three big unions.

"Then we have the Union of Postal Workers, which has brought together under one banner and one Executive nearly all the employees of the postal services.

"We have also the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, representing the various sectional societies with a membership that runs into hundreds of thousands.

"The textile and woollen industries of Lancashire and Yorkshire, though retaining their individual autonomy, are associated in a Federation covering 45 unions.

"In the building trade both amalgamation and federation have taken place, and carpenters, joiners, cabinet makers, and woodworkers have been brought together. The same applies to painters and to builders' labourers.

"Likewise in the foundry trades, ironfounders, coremakers, and other workers organised in their separate societies have been brought together under the National Federation of Foundry Trades, with a collective membership of over 50,000 members.

"In the engineering trade much has been done to bring all classes of craftsmen to a line of common agreement, but I would not suggest for a moment that the maximum in this direction has yet been accomplished. At the same time, we have formed an Amalgamated Engineering Union with close upon a quarter of a million members, and with a bargaining power that is far more potent than that previously exercised by its numerous smaller constituent bodies.

"In the same way we are experiencing a gradual closing of the ranks among other classes of workers, and the General Council, through the efforts of their special sub-committees, are endeavoring to bring about further amalgamations. A feeling among the workers for greater unity is steadily growing, and we hope that before long we shall be able to report further developments along these lines. . . .

7. Relations with Russia

"Following on the discussions and decisions of the Hull Congress last year, a deputation proceeded to Russia and made an inquiry into the development of that country under the present form of government, inaugurated since the close of the war. The report has received a very welcome acknowledgment, not only in our own country, but throughout the continent of Europe and in America. Fifty thousand copies have been struck off as a first issue to Germany. The report can be looked upon as the first text-book indicating the recovery of Russia from the evil effects of war and all its attendant evils, and showing how a Workers' Republic is rising, Phoenix like, from the ashes of the most despotic regime of history.

"The delegation have brought to the light of public opinion a fund of information dealing with the political, industrial, social, and financial life of the Russian Soviet State. In this respect the delegation have helped the British Trade Union Movement, through Congress, to maintain the best traditions of British democracy in rendering service to the development of working-class organisation, irrespective of creed, colour, or country.

"It is to be regretted that the defeat of the Labour Government resulted in the negation of the Trade Treaty which had for its object the granting of credits to Russia to enable her to come into the British market for goods. While conscious that the establishment of full trading relations with Russia would not solve our unemployed problem, we have sufficient evidence to show that the removal of political prejudices would improve the possibilities of private firms doing business with the Soviet Republic.

8. Attacks on Russia

"In directing the attention of the present Government to Congress resolutions passed at Hull last year, we met with opposition which did not encourage us to expect any improvement in the political relationship. The present Government

has shown real hatred and hostility to Russia. In view of the present position due to unemployment this attitude is very serious. Many of our foreign competitors are now manufacturing for themselves the goods they used to buy from us. Russia, however, is eager to buy our manufactured goods if credits can be arranged. These can be provided under the Trades Facilities Act and the Overseas Credit Act. There still remain many millions of pounds of money voted by Parliament. Further, the amount can be increased by Parliament at short notice. Legislatively, the Acts are applicable to every country in the world, but the President of the Board of Trade has administrative power to preclude any country. It is interesting to note that at present Russia is the only country debarred from the benefits of these Acts.

"In view of the serious position of my own industry, i. e., engineering, it is of interest to note that the attitude of the Government prevents our employers from participating in the order indicated by Mr. Rakovsky (London Charge d'Affaires of the Soviet Union) in the Soviet Trade Supplement in May, 1925. He stated that Russia could utilise immediately credits to the extent of £90,000,00, and that large sums would be expended in the purchase of agricultural machinery, timber-cutting machinery, turbines, motors, boilers, machines, pipes, oil tanks, etc., etc.

"An order of this character would give employment to our unemployed members, who in turn would give employment to the industries supplying the goods necessary for our home market.

"Russia's total trade turnover from this country has steadily grown during the past four years from £6,086,000 in 1921 to £31,172,781 in 1924, and in no single case have the Russian trade organisations defaulted.

"That political prejudice is responsible is shown by the fact that Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, which were part of the old Russian Empire, and portions of what are now Poland and Roumania, which formed part of pre-war Russia, all enjoy the benefits of the Acts.

"We must bring all the pressure of our movement to bear upon the Government, for Russia is a potential customer, with a developing country, whose demands will expand. She is securing markets elsewhere, and Great Britain is in danger of finding herself left outside the demands of this great and growing country.

9. India

"We have watched with much interest the struggles of the Indian workers in seeking to improve their political and industrial status. We have noted the steady growth of their Trade Union Movement and the demand of the Indian Trades Union Congress for the power to be extended to their Trade Union Movement to dispose of their funds as they please, a power denied them under the Indian Trade Union Bill. The British movement joins with them in demanding political freedom and the right of self-determination, voiced in this country on many occasions, along with a measure of franchise covering a large number of people of the depressed classes and of factory workers. We support them in their fight for the fullest right to organise in Trade Unions, and of the industrial workers to develop their trades organisation to enable them to bargain with their employers upon a basis of equality. The conditions under which the workers of India are employed call for the goodwill and hearty support of all their efforts for improvement. The wages paid to textile workers, miners, railwaymen, and other industrial workers, with their long hours of labour, have been voiced at our Congresses for some years, and are admitted to be a disgrace to any responsible Government or body of employers. We must help them to demand the right of combination and such measures as their representatives consider necessary as they work their way from the present slavish conditions to a higher standard of life. In recent years our mechanics have been busy manufacturing machinery for the textile factories of India, and the capitalists, who know no country, have used British made machinery and British capital and British management, which under-cut our Lancashire producers, and then quite calmly talk of being unable to compete with the 'foreign labour' and lower standards of India. In the interest of our own industrial workers we must help in any and every direction the Indian workers in their political and industrial struggles.

10. China

"The whole British Trade Union Movement must rejoice at the revolt of the Chinese workers against the degrading conditions which have been made public during the past few months. There appears to be a repetition of the methods used in Great Britain by the employers over 100 years ago, when the workhouses were the recruiting ground for cheap labour, by the employment of little children. The whole

Labour Movement was shocked to learn that under British rule little children are farmed out from their parents to employers at one to two Mexican dollars per month, i. e., from 2s. to 4s. per month, and are worked as long as 16 hours per day. These children often fall asleep at their work and many of them die young. Workers' wages range from 16s. to 30s. per month. The factories are mainly owned by British and Japanese.

"Attempts to form Trade Unions have met with similar treatment as was experienced in this country before the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824. Meetings were broken up, the books destroyed, the officials interfered with under a policy of repression. These methods, together with the facts that the Chinese are denied any franchise in their most important towns and ports, being governed by the foreigner within their gates, local laws, taxes, etc., being imposed upon the Chinese people, who are denied a voice in their own local affairs, led inevitably to the revolt, which was fired by the killing of a Chinese workman by a Japanese foreman. Then followed the application of British Imperialist methods, viz., gunboats and armed forces, with the consequent shedding of blood.

"It is a significant reply to the British Government and their talk of protection of life and property that the Commission of Inquiry of the Diplomatic Corps at Peking, which investigated the disturbances at Shanghai on May 30th, 1925, in their report recommended that the chairman of the Municipal Council at Shanghai, an American, should be censured and the British Chief of Police should be dismissed.

"I think Congress will agree with the General Council making it quite plain to the Government and the whole world that, being conscious of the fact that our British movement has won its way from such conditions of slavery as are being imposed in China to our present comparative or limited freedom, we are prepared, on behalf of the British Trade Union Movement, to raise our voice in condemnation of the atrocities committed by the British and other employers in China, and in wishing the Chinese people every success in their struggles against the employing and imperialist class in their country.

"The General Council, acting on instructions from the Hull Congress, have started upon an inquiry into conditions in Eastern countries, and hope to report to the movement the result of their investigations for consideration within the next few months.

11. International Trade Union Unity

"Following upon the discussions at Congress last year in relation to International Trade Union Unity, and arising from which the General Council were instructed to take all possible steps to bring the parties together, I express regret that the desire of the Congress to secure more unity in the International Trade Union Movement has not yet been fully realised.

"No effort has been spared by the General Council to bring the parties together. The result of these efforts is embodied in the General Council Report. Acting in a mediatory capacity, by consultation with representatives of the All-Russian Trade Unions, an interchange of opinions again opened the way for discussion between the International Federation of Trade Unions and the Russian unions' representatives. In the opinion of the General Council, the Russian representatives showed an inclination and genuine desire to find agreement and a place inside the International Federation of Trade Unions.

"Though the door appeared to be closed owing to misunderstandings, at the request of and on the advice of the British representatives the Russian representatives offered to meet representatives of the I.F.T.U. in a conference to enable both sides to talk over existing difficulties. As a preliminary, Russian representatives agreed to a constitution similar to that of the I.F.T.U. The difference between the two parties appears to the General Council to be so small and their responsibilities to the whole Trade Union Movement so serious that, in my judgment, a very great disservice is being perpetuated by the parties being kept apart one moment longer than is absolutely necessary. The General Council having been charged by Congress to deal with this question and bring it to a successful issue, can do no more than report to Congress upon the present position.

"We note with regret that the Press has taken a hand, along with some of our friends, in challenging our right to continue these negotiations. We have never had a doubt that we were fully meeting your wishes in holding open the door to negotiations between Moscow and Amsterdam, and I feel sure our mediatorial efforts will ultimately meet with success. I can conceive of no greater blunder and disservice to the movement than that of raking up all the nasty and bitter statements that have been made during the past four to five years and trying to breathe new life into, and fan into flame, the hatreds arising from war conditions. There is now a new atmosphere, and it is our duty to bend all our energies to the reconstruction of the

International Trade Union Movement on the basis of toleration, mutual understanding, and unity of purpose.

"We are told in some quarters that we are giving too much time to our Russian comrades, but does not every member who is desirous of establishing a world-wide international movement perceive the immense stride forward that would be made by bringing in six and a-half millions of organised workers? With these workers within the International the smaller nations would feel it imperative to link up.

"Already there are indications that the smaller countries are taking a new outlook.

"There are surely signs over the whole field of industry which indicate that vast and revolutionary changes must take place in industrial structure to meet the changed conditions. Men and women are not going to remain content with a condition of society which condemns millions of human beings to want the necessaries of life, while as a result of education and knowledge they know too well and see quite clearly that nature in its bounteousness can supply all their legitimate needs by the proper organisation of society upon a basis of collective ownership.

"Crowns have fallen and plutocratic Governments are being displaced by Workers' Republics and representatives of the people.

"It is imperative that we shall have a clear understanding with the Trade Unions throughout the world. A step in that direction is to strengthen and bring into the International Federation of Trade Unions all the countries of Europe, and the work of your General Council during the year will be looked back to in years to come as contributing to the building up of an effective international organisation.

12. The Workers' Wage Sacrifices

"From time to time the workers have been faced with demands for reductions in wages to encourage improvement in trade. As a result huge sums have been surrendered, amounting in the aggregate since 1923 to the enormous sum of £556,400,000 per year. I am inclined to believe that the extent to which the workers have conceded wages to help industry to revive is not fully realised.

"In the year 1921 there was a wage cut amounting to £6,000,000 in the weekly full-time wages of some seven and a-quarter million wage earners. In the following year, 1922, there was a further reduction amounting to £4,200,000 a week

affecting some seven and a-half million, and in 1923 another cut of close upon half-a-million a week, which was sustained by three million workers. Nor did the downward tendency of wages end there. It has been going on in 1924 and 1925, and it is estimated by the experts that the National Wages Bill has been reduced by practically one-half since 1920.

"Instead of trade improving, the figures quoted show unemployment is again increasing. So far from improving trade, the loss of this spending power has helped considerably to destroy the home market. Every branch of the trades and industries supplying the home is necessarily affected by the loss of purchasing power by these successive cuts.

"The workpeople can claim to have rendered unto Caesar that which he has demanded, but we still have the alarming figures showing the extent of unemployment in spite of the wages reductions indicated.

"Contrast the position of the wage-earner with the investor of capital. Figures show that 1,411 companies, after payment of debenture interest, distributed profits as follows: In 1923, £130,759,424; in 1924, £139,362,273; an increase of £8,602,849. There was a total return to capital invested in these 1,411 companies in a *single year* of more than £110,250,000.

"The average rate of net profits being about 10 per cent., the investor in these companies gets his capital back in profits every ten years.

"While wage-earners suffer reductions, the banking accounts of directors and employers increase, as the following figures show: In 1918-19 the receipts from super-tax were £35,500,000; in 1923-24, £62,500,000; an increase of £27,000,000.

"In 1918-19 the receipts from death duties were £30,750,000; in 1923-24, £59,500,000, almost double, and being an increase of £29,250,000.

"We are reminded of Oliver Goldsmith's lines:—

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.

13. Capitalist Mismanagement

"Industries are in an appalling condition, and the employing class stand aghast at their own handiwork. For almost a century and a-half theirs has been the task to apply the economic policy of industry. Deny it as they may, the present chaos is of their making, for they have persistently and consistently

denied the workers the slightest measure of control. 'Yours not to reason why, yours but to do and die' has been the policy forced upon our workpeople, even to the extent of the lock-out policy in some industries. The employers' cry has consistently been: 'We claim to manage our business in our own way, and we will allow no outside interference.' Very well, we examine these industries, solely managed by the employing class, and discover what an appalling state exists in practically every industry. Having produced these conditions the possessing class are afraid of their own production and now they cry to the unions: 'Let us come together; sit down with us and examine the present conditions of trade and commerce. . . . See if we cannot together save our system from tottering to its last fall.' Many of our good comrades who in the days gone by taught us to believe there was no remedy other than the abolition of capitalism seem afraid now that the system is collapsing, and appeal for a united effort to patch up the system with the aid of the present possessing class.

14. From Slavedom to Freedom

"It seems to me, carefully looking over as wide a field as is within the ken of one man, that we are entering upon a new phase of development in the upward struggle of our class. All around are signs of an awakening consciousness in the peoples of all countries that the present system of society is condemned. Russia and Mexico, with their Workers' Republics, are leading the way. Already there are signs for those with eyes to see that the land and mineral wealth of a country in the possession of the People's Government, being exploited and used in the interest of the whole people, is conferring lasting benefit upon its peoples. The lessons being taught to-day in those countries will fructify in the years to come. These achievements will stand as a beacon light, showing the way to a higher development of democratic welfare than the world has known. Simultaneously the backward centres of industrial and political slavery are organising and rising in revolt against the capitalist order of society; and so we see India, China, and other Eastern countries in the throes of upheaval and demanding the right of self-determination. Who can predict the rate at which the conflagration will travel, or how wide it will spread? Those who believe that a new order of society is inevitable before we can remedy the existing evils—and to which in this address I have directed attention—cannot do other than rejoice that at last there are clear indications of a world movement rising in

revolt and determined to shake off the shackles of wage slavery. Just as our people have passed out of serfdom into serfdom, and out of serfdom into wagedom, so will they finally pass out of wagedom into freedom.

“The new phase of development, which is world-wide, has entered upon the next and probably the last stage of revolt. It is the duty of all members of the working class to so solidify their movements that, come when the time may for the last final struggle, we shall be wanting in neither machinery, nor men, to move forward to the destruction of wage slavery and the construction of a system of society based upon co-ordinated effort and world-wide mutual goodwill and understanding.”

15. An Efficient Labor Parliament

Delegates listened eagerly to the address. When President Swales ceased speaking they gave him round after round of applause. During the remainder of the Congress the address was one of the chief themes of conversation and discussion. The Congress President had struck a note to which hundreds of the delegates responded: a note that they had been waiting to hear—a note of hope and of determination to wage the class struggle incessantly until labor had won its freedom.

President Swales delivered his address late Monday morning. On Monday afternoon Congress got down to work. There were no reports on credentials; no public contests over the seating of delegates; no selection of committees from the floor.

The Congress is organized in 17 industrial groups, each of which is entitled to a specified representation on the General Council.* The actual work of handling the Congress procedure was in the hands of the General Council and of the General Purposes Committee, elected at the previous Congress. All resolutions, except emergency resolutions proposed during the Congress by the General Council or by the General Purposes Committee, are submitted in advance, printed in an Agenda, and mailed to the delegates. On all important issues, therefore, delegates come instructed, or delegations caucus and reach decisions before the debates begin. Within five minutes after the Congress was declared open for business the President was reading the Report of the General Council (also submitted in printed

*The General Council elected at Scarborough is made up as follows: Mining and Quarrying, 3 members; Railways, 2; Transport, other than Railways, 2; Shipbuilding, 1; Engineering, Foundering, and Vehicle Building, 3; Iron and Steel and Minor Metal Trades, 2; Building, Woodworking, and Furnishing, 2; Printing and Paper, 1; Cotton, 2; Textiles, other than Cotton, 2; Clothing, 1; Leather, Boot and Shoe, 1; Glass, Pottery, Chemicals, Food, Drink, Tobacco, Brushmaking and Distribution, 1; Agriculture, 1; Public Employees, 1; Non-manual Workers, 1; General Workers, 4, and Women Workers, 2.

form) and resolutions were coming before the delegates for their consideration and decision.

A business-like air pervades the British Trades Union Congress. There is no oratory. The mover of a resolution has ten minutes; the seconder has seven minutes; speakers who can get the floor have five minutes each. Delegates speak to the point. If they begin to wander, they are promptly called to order by the Chair or by fellow delegates. Most of the delegates remain in their seats. Speakers receive careful attention as long as they have anything to contribute. The moment their fund of material has run out they are invited from all over the hall to "Sit down!" or else the delegates make the appeal to the Chair: "Vote! Vote!"

There is a great deal of sharp repartee, much laughter, some banter, a very little recrimination, and an almost complete absence of personalities. The delegates are past masters at keeping one another up to the mark.

The question as to whether a delegate shall get the floor on a particular motion is determined, in the main, by the delegates themselves. There is little appeal to parliamentary procedure. Discussion continues until the delegates feel that the problem has been fully stated, whereupon they begin to shout: "Agreed! Agreed!" or "Vote! Vote!" If there is evident agreement, the Chair does not put the motion, but simply states: "The motion is agreed to." If the demand for a vote predominates the motion is put and a vote is taken, ordinarily by a show of hands. Where there is any question as to the sentiment of Congress the President orders a "card vote."

A card vote consists in a showing of the cards held by each delegation. On the card there is printed a number giving the paid-up membership represented by that delegation. The Miners, for example, in the last Congress held a card reading 800. This meant 800,000 paid-up members and therefore 800,000 votes in the Congress.

When a card vote is ordered, tellers, previously elected, take their places in all parts of the hall; cards are held up for and against the motion; the vote is tabulated and is announced from ten to fifteen minutes after a card vote has been called for. Delegates may call, from the floor, for a card vote on any motion, but during the 1925 Congress only half a dozen card votes were taken. The Congress shows a disinclination to waste time in voting unless there is real disagreement.

With this spirit of "Go at it and get it done with" the Congress

of 1925 went to its task of organizing the struggle for working class emancipation in Britain.

16. Organizing for the Struggle

Several questions of Trade Union organization came before the Congress. One involved the proposition of separate offices for the Trades Union Congress and the Labor Party; a second dealt with the enlargement of the powers of the Trades Union Congress General Council; another related to trade union amalgamation and the One Big Union; a fourth concerned the issue of International Trade Union Unity.

Administrative separation of the Congress and the Labor Party precipitated the first real discussion of the Congress. The offices of the two organizations are in adjoining buildings; in the main the same delegates attend both the Congress and the Labor Party Conference; largely the same men aid in the executive direction of both bodies; joint bureaus are maintained. Still, issues arise.

For several weeks before the Congress sessions, the British capitalist press had been busy with a campaign to split the ranks of labor by lining up unions and industrial action on one side, the Labor Party and political action on the other. This "splitting tactic" is an old game in Britain, and the workers know how to meet it. They have no intention of dividing their forces and they are far too keen and too experienced to fall into the trap.

Fred Bramley,* Secretary of the General Council, made this point clear. He said, in proposing the resolution, that there had been no split; had been no discussion of a split; had been no sign of a split. At the same time he pointed out the need for separate administrative machinery to meet the varied needs on the political and the industrial fields. J. H. Thomas of the Railwaymen and J. R. Clynes of the General Workers, both leaders of the political wing of the British Labor Movement, spoke against the "preposterous impression that there is some deep-seated split" in the ranks of labor. At the same time they defended the proposition involving "administrative realignments." When they had finished speaking the issue had been ironed out into a mere matter of detail.

In his broad Yorkshire brogue, Herbert Smith, President of the Miners' Federation, broke in on the parliamentary phrases of Clynes and Thomas with a sharp thrust at the manoeuvres of the Labor Party. "Each side," he said, "must have its own director for its own business. They can have joint action when required. One of the worst features of the present situation is that the

*Died October 9, 1925.

political party bounces in and tries to do something that undoes nine-tenths of what the industrial side has done. [This sally was met with cheers.] If it is an industrial question, it must be dealt with by the Industrial Council, and any help that the political party can give must be given through that Council. Both sides have their work to do. The industrial man must devote his whole time to his job, and the political man should do the same."

Evidently, then, there were real differences between the two groups. The recent Labor Government was sharply criticised in the debate. Nevertheless, the discussion resulted in a compromise. One matter, however, was made perfectly clear. From Harry Pollitt of the Boilermakers on the extreme Left, to Thomas and Clynes on the extreme Right, the spokesmen for British Labor told the "capitalist press" in so many words, and to its teeth, that there would be no split. As there were perhaps a hundred press men in the hall the labor men had a good inning.

17. Powers of the General Council

Another question of organization which led to a great deal of discussion centred around the proposal to give the General Council power to levy assessments on the constituent members of the Congress, to call and to direct general strikes, and to require affiliated unions to make such alterations in their rules as were necessary to legalize these new powers. The resolution, if carried, would have given the General Council an amount of centralised power heretofore unknown in the British Trade Union Movement.

Arguing that "it is necessary that extended powers be given to the General Council" for use in emergency, I. Floyd of the Vehicle Builders moved the resolution. T. E. Naylor of the London Compositors retorted with an amendment denying any present increase of powers to the General Council. He thanked Cook, Secretary of the Miners, for the help that the General Council had given them in July. But, he argued, the July crisis had merely proved the need of larger powers for the Council. "The time has long passed," he declared, "when any one union in any one industry can settle its disputes apart from the whole Labor Movement. We have reached a stage when one union, in negotiating agreements, is bound to affect other unions. For that reason all agreements should terminate together. "Be realists," Cook insisted, "and understand that it is only power that counts. Is there any fear that the General Council

will stampede you into a general strike every day or every week? Who are the members of the General Council but the representatives of the Trade Unions affiliated here? The fact that the Council had such powers would prevent a general strike. The Miners won without a struggle because of the latent power behind them.

"The day of the long struggle on empty bellies is over. At the last Miners' fight, the owners told my colleagues: 'You have no funds; you have no credit,' and they were proposing to win on the starvation of the women and the children. The Miners advocate centralized power so that the General Council can be brought into disputes before and not after they have begun. No union ought to fight alone. It will be smashed every time. We must give to the Trade Union Movement centralized power. This is the power of the future."

"Power is essential," said J. H. Thomas (Railwaymen) in reply. "But common sense is also sometimes necessary." The General Council had done excellent work on its present powers. "No movement can be built on sentiment. No phrases will get us out of our difficulties. When even the unions in an industry cannot agree, what hope is there in giving the General Council powers to get complete unity?"

Here was an issue. Miners were lined up against railwaymen; radicals against conservatives. To followers of the American Trade Union Movement this looked like a fight.

J. R. Clynes (General Workers) rose. "I do not fear to throw such weight as I have on the side of caution." He spoke quietly and very slowly. The hall was still. "I am not in fear of the capitalist class. The only class I fear is our own. The proposals are hasty. The General Council should take a year to frame these proposals and then submit them."

Ernest Bevin of the Transport and General Workers' Union followed. He pointed out that the General Council would have to handle unpopular as well as popular causes, and that to do this successfully it must have the Movement solidly behind it. "I want to see the General Council developing power," he said, "but not at the expense of unity."

After the question had been taken up by the General Purposes Committee the Congress referred the matter back to the General Council with instructions to "examine the problem in all of its bearings, and with power to consult the executives of the affiliated unions, and to report to a special conference of the executives concerning their considered recommendations on the subject."

Better than any other event at the Scarborough Congress this discussion over the powers of the General Council illustrates the basic force at work in the British Labor Movement. Issues there are, sharp and clear. Strong men champion the issues; state them forcefully; debate them ardently. In the course of every such debate a larger issue emerges—the issue of Labor Unity. Old labor men recognize it. Young labor men are schooled to watch for it. Before this larger issue all others are subordinated. Unity comes first!

18. One Big Union

The One Big Union issue was brought before the Congress on a resolution moved by the National Union of General Workers, an organization with 196,568 members: "(a) The number of unions should be reduced to a minimum. (b) Congress should not encourage the formation of any new Union. (c) This Congress instructs the General Council to continue its work of amalgamation of existing unions with One Big Union as the ultimate goal."

Support for the resolution came from Ben Tillett of the Transport and General Workers' Union (290,000 members) and from Neil McLean of the Workers' Union (131,000 members). "All of the workers in all the trades all together to oppose all the bosses in the country," McLean demanded in his picturesque Scotch.

Opposition developed from the industrial unions. J. Walker of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (94,597 members) declared that the resolution came as a defense of the action of certain Unions that "acted as though they had a roving commission to pinch members wherever they can find them." It developed, in the course of the debate, that the general unions had made many enemies by poaching on the preserves of various of the industrial and craft unions. "Organize by industry," Walker advised. "Amalgamate the unions that are cognate to one another."

How is it possible to organize by industry when industrial lines are no longer clearly defined? demanded C. Dukes (General Vellum Workers). He cited the Lever Group to show that modern financial organization has taken the place of old-time industrial organization and argued that the Unions must follow the lead of economic development.

The general unions were lined up against the industrial unions. While sentiment in favor of amalgamation appeared on all sides, the motion was lost by a vote of 1,788,000 for and 2,138,000 against.

19.—World Labor Unity—Russia

Events at Scarborough really turned on the campaign for International Trade Union Unity and on the relations between the British and the Russian Labor Movements. Feeling centred there. There, if anywhere, the real tug-of-war would come.

Through 1924 and 1925 Fred Bramley and the other British delegates to the International Federation of Trade Unions had insisted on the necessity for World Labor Unity. Steps in this direction were the Russian Fraternal Delegation to the British Congress at Hull in 1924, the British Trade Union Delegation to Russia in November and December, 1924, and the exhaustive printed Report on Russia issued by the British Delegation. Other steps were the lone hand in favor of a conference between the Russians and Amsterdam played by the British Delegation at the International Federation of Trade Unions Council meeting in February, 1925, and the Anglo-Russian Unity Conference held in London during April, 1925. The General Council had moved deliberately but consistently, in the face of a hostile press, of attacks from within the British Labor Movement and of systematic opposition from the Continental leaders of the International Federation of Trade Unions.

M. Tomsy, President of the All-Russian Federation, was sitting among the fraternal delegates at Scarborough and the Congress was asked to approve a resolution which read: "This Congress records appreciation of the General Council's efforts to promote international unity, and urges the incoming General Council to do everything in their power towards securing world-wide unity of the Trade Union Movement through an all-inclusive International Federation of Trade Unions."

Fraternal delegates spoke on Thursday morning. A. Adamski of the United Garment Workers and E. J. Evans of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers spoke for the American Federation of Labor, J. F. Marsh of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, for the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, and M. Tomsy for the All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions. Never was a contrast more striking. The three comfortable-looking, businessman-like American delegates talked of high wages, short hours, the stabilization of industry, superpower, labor banking and collaboration with the employers in the enforcement of the workmen's compensation laws. M. Tomsy, an undersized, stooping product of European proletarian life, spoke of the class struggle and of revolution.

Russian workers, said Tomsy, for the first time in history

had proved that "the workers could grasp the helm and manage the state."

The Russians, he added, had been accused of hiding their real ideas under certain forms of propaganda. But this was untrue. The Russians were not ashamed of their ideas. "It was in the name of these ideas that in October, 1917, they gave up criticising the capitalist class by resolution and began criticising them by arms. They set free the bankers from the burden of the banks; they set free the employers from the burden of conducting the factories; they set free the landowners from the burden of the land; and on that basis they hold power and have built up a working-class State."

Tomsky asked the delegates to give up mutual accusation and to assist in setting up one united Trade Union International. Russia, he said, was prepared to join such an International. The entire house rose at the word; the "International" pealed forth from the organ; and the delegates spiritedly joined in the song.

Fred Bramley on behalf of the General Council moved the Unity Resolution. He pointed out the need for an International Federation of Trade Unions strong enough to meet the international offensive of the bosses and sufficiently elastic to include the Labor Movement of all countries. It was with this object in view, he said, that the British General Council had been negotiating with Moscow and with Amsterdam. The resolution before the Congress provided for the continuance of such negotiations.

Russian problems, Bramley said, must be judged in relation to the past history of Russia. Otherwise they could not be correctly interpreted. He went on:

"The Russian Revolution was the first revolution in history aiming at, and securing, the overthrow of economic exploitation. It was also the first great national experiment in working class control. Russia is a Socialist Republic, and I wish to call your attention to the fact that it is the only revolution, the only economic change, that has received the universal condemnation of the exploiting classes.

"The Russian experiment and what has arisen from it have demonstrated one important fact. You can cut off the heads of kings, abolish royal families, imprison emperors, promote world wars leading to the devastation of whole countries and their inhabitants. Still you can be forgiven and accepted into the comity of nations. But if you disturb the landed interests of a country and abolish the exploitation of the wage earners you will have to face what Russia has had to face and is facing now— isolation, international boycott, and persecution.

"Russia is a nation at bay. Its economic system is controlled by the working class movement, and we consider it our duty to stand by the working classes of Russia."

Bramley sat down. The delegates were cheering. The second of the motion took the floor. No sooner had he finished his address than the delegates began shouting "Vote! Vote!" Not a delegate rose to oppose the resolution. The Chairman put the motion and it was carried by acclamation.

On the following day the capitalist press stated that the Chairman had "smothered discussion." The statement was false. If there was one manifestly unanimous action of the delegates during the whole Congress week it was the passing of the Unity Resolution.

A resolution condemning the British banking interests for their activities in preventing the reopening of active trade with Russia and calling upon the Government to apply the Trade Facilities Acts to the Russian markets was carried without discussion.

20. Imperialism

Congress temper showed itself quite clearly in the discussions relating to imperialism. The actions of the MacDonald Government came in for sharp criticism. Contrary to custom, Mr. MacDonald, who sat on the platform during a part of the Congress sessions, was not asked to address the body. His chief defender on the floor, Mr. J. H. Thomas, was overwhelmingly defeated on the only vote that really tested the position of the Congress on the imperialism issue.

Four resolutions dealing with various phases of imperialism were presented to Congress. All were passed.

Instructions to the General Council to "consider the advisability of sending delegates to visit India, China, Egypt, and investigate the conditions of labour of the natives of those countries with a view to recommending how best the Trades Union Congress can assist those workers in Trade Union organization," were contained in a resolution that was agreed to without debate.

With unanimity also, the Congress passed a resolution instructing the General Council "to at once get into touch with the organised workers' political bodies, with a view to doing everything possible to put a stop to the murderous crimes being perpetrated against our working class Chinese comrades who are struggling to improve their horrible working conditions."

This Congress "also protests in the strongest possible language the use of British armed forces as strikebreakers in the interests

of the gang of unscrupulous capitalists and imperialists who are exploiting the lives of men, women, and even children of tender age in China at the present time, and insists on their immediate withdrawal."

This resolution was presented by the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association and was unanimously agreed to.

On the subject of British imperialism the resolution was equally emphatic: "This Trades Union Congress believes that the domination of non-British peoples by the British Government is a form of capitalist exploitation having for its object the securing for British capitalists (1) of cheap sources of raw materials; (2) the right to exploit cheap and unorganised labour and to use the competition of that labour to degrade the workers' standards in Great Britain.

"It declares its complete opposition to Imperialism, and resolves: (1) to support the workers in all parts of the British Empire to organise the Trade Unions and political parties in order to further their interests, and (2) to support the right of all peoples in the British Empire to self-determination, including the right to choose complete separation from the Empire."

It was in opposition to this resolution that J. H. Thomas, Secretary for the Colonies under the MacDonald Government, met the full tide of anti-imperialism that was running so fast in the Congress.

The Imperialism Resolution was moved by A. A. Purcell (Furnishing Trades), member of the General Council, and President of the International Federation of Trade Unions. "Imperialism," Purcell said, "is the worst enemy of the working class. The worst feature of imperialist crime at the present moment is the supplying of arms to belligerents on both sides in Morocco and China, just as Stinnes supplied barbed wire to Germans and French alike during the Great War. We do not blame our own capitalist class especially, for capitalism is the same all over the world. In Palestine, where the working class is trying to get the merest semblance of Trade Union rights, arms are used against them. The same has been true of Egypt, but now, at last, they are organizing there. And look at the horrible condition in India. We should aim at getting all of the world's workers into one organization that should have as its basis good wages and working conditions. We ought to assist in forming trade unions wherever imperialism has planted its foot."

"If anything can make the week's proceedings ridiculous it will be the passing of this resolution," said J. H. Thomas, in his opposition to the proposal. He too was opposed to exploitation,

he said, but there were other difficulties, such as the conflict of races. And what of self-determination? "Does the mover of this resolution mean that he wants self-determination for Kenya? Do not let us pass this absurd resolution. Look at that last phrase about separation from the Empire. It is ridiculous to pretend that we are speaking on behalf of four and a half million British workers when we say things like that."

"It is unfortunate that I have only three minutes in which to counteract the Empire propaganda that has been carried on by Mr. Thomas," said Harry Pollitt (Boilermakers). "The resolution is merely an expression of the policy of the working class movement toward subject peoples, whatever their race and creed. Empire does not mean Curzon or Reading riding on an elephant. It means the appalling conditions of textile workers in Bombay and Calcutta, and on the tea plantations of India, where the natives have no legal redress of any kind. It means the forced labor of which Mr. Thomas knows something, and which exists in Kenya at the present time. It means that the flower of Egyptian national thought has been executed for daring to say that the principle for which we went into the Great War shall be observed in every country of the world.

"We cannot talk of self-determination and fight four years for it without the backward races believing that we are in earnest. The passing of the resolution will be a message of hope and encouragement to our comrades who do not regard the Union Jack as the last word in economic equality or political freedom. These people have a right to govern their own countries according to their own traditions and conceptions, and before the British working man can be emancipated he will have to help others to throw off the shackles of British Imperialism. It is not a Wembly* Empire we are talking about, but an Empire every yard of which is drenched with the blood of natives or of British soldiers."

On a card vote the resolution was carried: 3,082,000 for and 79,000 against. This was the most decisive card vote of the entire Congress.

21. The Dawes Plan

Although it had been officially sponsored by the MacDonald Government the Dawes Plan came in for a severe drubbing at the hands of the delegates. A. J. Cook, Secretary of the Miners' Federation, led off with a smashing attack on the suffering of the miners under the Dawes Plan. Under the Plan, he contended,

*Wembly was the seat of the British Empire Exposition in 1924-1925.

the wages of the German miners had first been forced down, and then these low paid workers had been brought into direct competition with the British miners. The result was that the British coal exports to Italy and other countries had been severely cut, the market going to Germany. Mr. Cook cited detailed figures in support of this contention. "It has not only lowered the German Miners' conditions to Coolie standards," he said, "but it has taken the bread and butter out of the mouths of British men and women. It has damned British and German workers alike.

"I blame no one for the mistake of the Dawes Plan," said Cook. "We all make mistakes. But it is possible to rectify this one."

"The Dawes Plan is the scheme of the American financial dictatorship to prevent social revolution in Germany," said Harry Pollitt (Boilermakers). "Dawes is a notorious open shop advocate, a leader of American Fascism, and a representative of J. P. Morgan and Co. But the Plan will not accomplish this purpose. While the Plan remains in effect, lower wages, longer hours and internal social disturbances are inevitable in Germany. Those who support the Dawes Plan are inevitably driving the German working class to revolution.

"The capitalist press and the capitalist class never flatter labor leaders," Pollitt continued, "unless they have done something bad for the working class. The Pilgrim Society of America—an exclusive New York club—has invited Mr. Ramsay MacDonald to dinner. The invitation, to use their own words, was 'in order that we can express our tribute of admiration to the great statesman who as Prime Minister contributed so vastly to the adoption of the Dawes project, upon the success of which the whole world depends so much for the economic and political recovery of Europe'.

"Financiers, bankers and capitalists," exclaimed Pollitt, "use that sort of language to disguise their intention to hold the appalling conditions of the German workers like a pistol at the head of workers all over the world. This resolution will be a message of hope to our German comrades in their efforts to build an organization that will fight the new imperialism that has got hold of their country. We shall march forward together to the overthrow of capitalism, which is the only way to insure the abolition of reparations and the establishment of peace for the whole world."

Only one delegate spoke for the Plan, and he apologized. No one rose to defend the MacDonald Government. The motion was put and was carried with practical unanimity.

22. What Is British Labor Driving At?

The Scarborough Congress passed numerous resolutions dealing with the regulation of hours and working conditions. There were important resolutions on unemployment, workmens' compensation, and public health. The aim behind the whole movement was stated in one resolution presented by the Tailors and Garment Workers. The resolution read:

"This Congress declares that the Trade Union Movement must organize to prepare the Trade Unions in conjunction with the party of the workers to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism.

"At the same time Congress warns the workers against all attempts to introduce capitalist schemes of co-partnership which in the past have failed to give the workers any positive rights, but instead have usually served as fetters retarding their forward movements.

"Congress further considers that strong, well organized shop committees are indispensable weapons in the struggle to force the capitalists to relinquish their grip on industry, and, therefore, pledges itself to do all in its power to develop and strengthen work-shop organisations."

Again, the coal crisis of July, 1925, was an obviously determining factor in shaping trade union policy. The failure to effect a permanent settlement involved the necessity for some definite plan of action for May, 1926. The resolution was supported by the Garment Workers on the ground that it was a revolutionary step. The Compositors defended it because of their eighty years of experience with shop committees. Pollitt (Boilermakers) supported the resolution on the ground that the shop committees would train the workers to handle their own industries. Several delegates opposed the resolution because they feared that it was Communist propaganda. F. Lemaire (Compositors) answered that he did not care whether it was Communist propaganda or not. "If any method promises advantage to the Trade Union Movement, the movement should take advantage of it." On a card vote the resolution was carried: 2,466,000 for and 1,218,000 against.

23. British Way or Russian Way?

Americans take it for granted that the Labor Movement in the United States and Canada will follow the lead of the British Labor Movement. They also assume that the British Labor Movement is pursuing an "evolutionary" policy. "By orderly process," so the argument runs, "the present society will be transformed into a Socialist state."

Advocates of this theory would have been rudely shocked had they attended a public meeting of Trades Union Congress delegates held in Scarborough on the Sunday evening before the Congress opened and heard President Swales declare that the workers of Britain intended "to take all of the wealth, since it is they who have produced all of it."

They would have been still more disturbed had they heard A. A. Purcell (Congress President for 1924) assert at the same meeting that: "The land is ours of right. Once we possessed it. Then they took it from us. The industries are ours of right. We created them with our ten little fingers. And we propose to take them back. As to paying for them we shall take them first and argue about payment afterward. We believe that our argument will be stronger if we hold the means of subsistence in our own hands."

This is the "disciplined revolution" advocated by A. J. Cook of the Miners. It is a plea for direct well considered industrial action.

Responsible British Trade Union leaders talk that way every time they get up to make a speech. It is the British workers' reply to the new "scissors"—falling trade and rising unemployment—that are paring down the British workers' standard of living.

Five years ago American publicists like Paul Kellogg and Arthur Gleason were expounding the doctrines enunciated by the British Labor Party in its plan for the social reconstruction of Britain.* The plan presented an outline of social reforms attainable through orderly process under a rehabilitated capitalist system—social insurance, housing, health, education, and the gradual socialization of life. That program was formulated by the Webbs and their supporters during the romantic days of 1919 and 1920, when the war was at last over, and men were free to turn their attention to "rebuilding."†

Five years have elapsed—years of bitter disillusionment. Deflation began in 1921. Debts piled up. Taxes rose. Production and trade declined. Unemployment came, and stayed—the unbidden guest that has sat at every British feast since 1921.

Then there were the colonial wars—the rape of Egypt; the Riff revolt; rebellion in India and China. Armaments grew. Everywhere were slaughter and the preparation for destruction.

**What the Workers Want*, Arthur Gleason, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920; *British Labor and the War*, Kellogg and Gleason, New York, Boni and Liveright, 1919.

†*A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1920.

Evidently "rebuilding" was out of the question until the whole structure of capitalist imperialism had been cleared away.

Again, there was the Soviet Republic—the world's first experiment in working class government—invaded, blockaded, starved, denounced, lied about. White terror was financed and supported in Finland and Hungary; the depredations of Fascism were condoned in Italy; military dictatorship was recognized in Spain; but the Workers' and Peasants' Government of Russia was mercilessly attacked.

Finally came the assault on wages and working conditions, Coolie labor in China and Dawes Plan labor in Germany financed by British capitalists for the profit of British share-holders and competing directly with British standards of work and life.

Bitter experience has taught British workers several lessons since 1921. They may be summed up in the axiom: Business is business.

To that axiom of imperialism the British workers have an axiom of their own: The world for the workers!

Millions of British workers face cold, hunger, uncertainty. What can they do? They must find a way to guarantee shelter and food to themselves and their children and evidently that way cannot be found under the present economic order.

British imperialists held the world in their grip, controlled its markets, and secured their needed raw materials until the end of the last century. Through this period they kept their workers employed. By the time of the Boer War (1899), however, chronic unemployment had settled upon British industry. The Great War was an interruption. After it was over, British workers dropped back into the unemployment slough.

Capitalist imperialism is an economic failure. The British Empire was the first among the capitalist empires. Britain furnishes a classic example in this field. Capitalist imperialism succeeds as long as it can find new resources, new markets, and new workers to exploit. When the opportunity for exploitation fails, capitalist imperialism fails. This is necessarily true because capitalist imperialism is a system of exploitation.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century outlying countries learned to make their own raw materials into finished goods. At the same time several powerful rivals appeared to challenge the British Empire.

When the World War was over Britain's great European rival—Germany—was temporarily crippled. Two other rivals had emerged, strengthened, from the struggle: Japan in the East and the United States in the West. Besides that, war demand had

vastly increased local manufactures in all of Britain's former markets.

The war had also called into being a third rival to challenge the whole imperial system—a Union of Socialist Republics in Europe and Asia.

Leaders of British working class opinion know these facts thoroughly. Day after day they are repeating them throughout the United Kingdom. At the Congress they formed the burden of one speech after another.

From these facts the responsible working class leaders draw the conclusion that the present economic system is no longer workable; that its continuance will entail intolerable hardship and suffering for millions of workers; that it will have to be changed, speedily; that the workers will be called upon to play the leading part in making the change. There remain two questions: What system shall they change to? and, How shall the change be made?

In answer to the first question British Labor says unequivocally: Socialism. There are differences in phrasing but the content of the replies is the same.

How shall Socialism be achieved? There is the rub.

At the moment the British Trade Unions are very shy of political action. That was made clear at every session of the Congress. The political arm of the Labor Movement will undoubtedly be upheld. There will be no split between the political and the industrial leadership. But the industrial arm of the movement will be used, and used vigorously. Parliamentarism as a means of attaining the new social order is under strong labor suspicion in Britain today. There is every indication that the workers are preparing for direct industrial action. The success of the Minority Movement indicates such a course. The temper of British workers and their leaders certainly suggests it. The struggle between the coal miners and operators, if not averted by the findings of the present Coal Commission, may easily crystallize the whole issue in the form of a general strike.

The difficulties are not blinked. The dangers are not overlooked. But necessity over-rides obstacles and the British Labor Movement is being pressed by nearly a million and a half unemployed men and women, and by a determined campaign on the part of the British owning class to keep profits up at the same time that they force wages down.

Do not stop here. Read further!

Many readers will want to look more deeply into the questions touched upon in the preceding pages. Here are some suggestions:

BOOKS Industrial

- History of Trade Unionism.** Beatrice and Sidney Webb. New York, Longmans, rev. ed., 1920.
- Organised Labour.** G. D. H. Cole. London, Labour Pub. Co., 1924.
- Workshop Organisation.** G. D. H. Cole. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923.
- An Outline of the British Labor Movement.** Paul Blanchard. New York, Doran, 1923.
- British Labor Speaks.** Richard W. Hogue. New York, Boni, Liveright, 1924.
- The British Labor Movement.** R. H. Tawney. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1925.

Political

- A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain.** Sidney and Beatrice Webb. London, Longmans, Green, 1920.
- Socialism, Critical and Constructive.** James Ramsay MacDonald. New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1924.
- If Labor Rules.** Phillip Snowden. London, Labour Publishing Co., 1923.
- When Labor Rules.** J. H. Thomas. New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1921.
- Six Months of Labour Government.** Independent Labour Party Information Committee. London, 1924.
- Whither England?** Leon Trotsky. New York, International Publishers, 1925.

MAGAZINES AND PAPERS

- The Daily Herald** with a circulation of about 400,000, is the official organ of the Congress. (2 Carmelite Street, London.)
- The Research Department of the Trades Union Congress** (32 Eccleston Sq., London) is publishing a series of pamphlets dealing with various phases of Congress activity.
- The Labour Monthly** (162 Buckingham Palace Road, London) is an excellent general magazine. (\$2 per year.)
- The Workers' Weekly** (16 King St., London) is a vigorous Left Wing paper. (\$1.50 per year.)
- The Sunday Worker** (74 Swinton St., Gray's Inn Road, London), with a circulation of 100,000, aims to do for the labor world what Sunday capitalist papers do for the capitalist world. (\$2.50 per year.)
- The Labour Magazine** is the official monthly journal of the Trades Union Congress and the Labor Party. (33 Eccleston Sq., London. \$1.75 per year.)
- The Plebs** is a monthly magazine devoted to the interests of independent working class education. (162 Buckingham Palace Road, London. \$1.50 per year.)
- Trade Union Unity** (162 Buckingham Palace Road, London) is a monthly devoted exclusively to the movement for international unity. (\$1.75 per year.)
- The New Leader** (24 High Holborn, London) is the official weekly of the Independent Labour Party. (\$2.50 per year.)
- Lansbury's Labour Weekly** (206 Palace Chambers, London) advocates adherence to constitutional methods in trade unionism and labor politics. (\$2.00 per year.)

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