BRITISH COMMUNIST PARTY

A Short History

TOM BELL

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by
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CHAPTER I

Over seventy-five years ago Frederick Engels wrote to his great friend and co-worker, Karl Marx, "that the British working class is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat as well as a bourgeoisie." Twenty-four years later in a letter to Karl Kautsky replying to a query put by Kautsky as to "what the English workers think of colonial policy," Engels answered: "the same as what the bourgeois think. There is no working-class party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals."

THE absence of a working-class party in Great Britain as late as 1882 cannot be regarded as entirely accidental. On the basis of the industrial and colonial monopoly enjoyed by the British capitalists up to that date the working class in England was split. According to Marx and Engels a privileged minority, as distinct from the great bulk of the working class, permanently benefited from the privileged position of the British capitalists; the great mass receiving now and then a temporary share of the wealth accruing to the capitalists. Lenin attached the greatest importance to these ideas of Marx and Engels. For Lenin, such ideas arose out of the objective conditions of the epoch of imperialism and formed the pivot of the tactics of the Labour movement, internationally, as well as in Great Britain.

This split in the Labour forces as Marx, Engels and Lenin have shown, reveals the cunning of the English bourgeoisie, who very early appreciated the importance of creating a division in the ranks of the working class, providing special privileges for the Labour aristocracy, and for the professional elements, encouraging them to become separate from the great mass of the workers. In the course of our studies of the English Labour movement it is very important for us to bear

this in mind. It enables us to understand the role of the British trade unions, the role of the British Labour Party, and especially the role of the Labour bureaucracy in the course of the class struggle, and the development of the Communist movement in Great Britain.

Already by the end of the nineteenth century the industrial monopoly of the British capitalists had been broken. New imperialist rivals such as Germany, France, and the United States had risen to a high industrial and technical level. But although the British industrial monopoly had been broken, her colonial power was still intact, and the imperialist rivalries which subsequently culminated in the World War of 1914-18 centred particularly around the problem of the redistribution of colonies. This period of intense rivalry between the imperialisms of England, Germany, France and America was accompanied by intense class struggle, by the growth of a wide mass Labour movement and of the Socialist movement, especially in the period from 1900 to 1914. Some writers refer to this period as reproducing some of the characteristic features of the Chartist movement. That is perhaps an exaggeration, but there is no denying, as we shall see, that a mass movement developed embracing wide sections of the working class.

From the time of the first Trades Union Congress in Manchester (1861) papers were continually being issued urging the necessity for sending working men to Parliament. Those papers were limited to this objective largely because the trade unions had to struggle against capitalist legislation which imposed severe restrictions upon their activities. Several voices were raised in the Trades Union Congress on behalf of Labour representation, and twenty years later, in 1887, Keir Hardie openly spoke of the necessity for severing connections with the existing parties. Most of the trade union members voted Liberal or Tory at election times, and in the main, the propaganda was directed by the "socialist" elements to build up a workers' political party which would be free of both Liberals and Conservatives.

In August 1888 in the Waterloo Rooms in Glasgow, a conference was held at which a Scottish Labour Party was formed with Keir Hardie as its secretary. The programme of this party included independent Labour representation, the

state acquisition of railways and transport, the nationalization of the banking system and money. At that time Hardie was in fact a Liberal, though he stood as an "independent" candidate in the elections.

In the biographies of Keir Hardie we read how an attempt was made by the Liberals to bribe him to stand down, by promising to find him a seat at the General Election, pay all his election expenses and give him an income of £300 a year. When Hardie declined this offer it was urged that others were doing this, so why should not he? This offer of safe seats in Parliament was one of the principal means by which the Liberals attempted to divert the drive for an independent movement. Ramsay MacDonald was then secretary of the Scottish Home Rule Party, and private secretary to a sugar king, T. Lough, who was a member of Parliament. We can date the first entry of MacDonald into the Labour movement from a letter sent to Hardie in which he expressed appreciation of his work and offered him support. Hardie was returned in 1892 to Westminster as M.P. for West Ham to join the other fourteen working men in the House of Commons at this time, eight of whom were miners. The other six were John Burns, Havelock Wilson, Joseph Arch, William Cremer, George Howell, J. Rowlands—all Liberals.

The Trades Union Congress continued to pass resolutions on Labour representation, but nothing was done until after the Glasgow Congress, in September 1892, when an informal meeting was held by a group of leaders with Hardie at their head. This was followed by a conference on 14 January, 1893, held in Bradford. There were 121 delegates present, and Keir Hardie was elected chairman. Socialist societies, the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabians, the sections of the Labour Representation Committees, and similar bodies were represented. The delegates of the Social Democratic Federation wanted to organize a *Socialist* Labour Party, and to get the party to adopt a Socialist programme. But Hardie and his supporters opposed this. They insisted on having a Labour Party independent of Liberals and Tories and independent of Socialism, so far as its label and programme were concerned, although they were not averse to making a declaration that Socialism would be one of their future aims. Their general policy was to win over the trade unions

and to secure financial support for the Labour candidates. Thus the Independent Labour Party was formed. A resolution, sponsored by the Social Democrats, declaring for collective ownership was passed as a pious expression of opinion without any discussion.

In 1895, 28 Labour candidates went to the poll, but all were defeated, including Hardie. Various local Labour Representation committees existed throughout the country and in 1899 the Trades Union Congress decided to call a special conference to consider the means of increasing the number of Labour members in Parliament. They elected a committee of four members of the parliamentary committee of the Trades Union Congress; two from the Independent Labour Party; two from the Social Democratic Federation, and two from the Fabians. This committee drew up a constitution, on federal lines, as a basis for the new movement, and in 1900, in the Memorial Hall, London, a special congress was held, which 129 delegates attended, representing half a million trade unionists and including 75 delegates of Socialist parties. From this congress sprang the Labour Representation Committee, the forerunner of the British Labour Party.

There were three lines at this congress: the line of the "Lib-Labs," as they were called, or Liberal-Labour men, who were a strong section in the unions; the line of the Social Democratic Federation, which stood for a declaration of Socialism as its aim, and for making the recognition of Socialism a condition for membership; and the Independent Labour Party with the line of independent Labour, and opposed to this conditioning clause. A stormy debate took place, and Hardie's proposal was carried for a distinct Labour group in Parliament, whose policy would be to promote legislation particularly in the workers' interests, and to associate with any party that was opposing measures directed against the workers; moreover, no member of the Labour group was to oppose candidates of the Labour Representation Committee. The vote at this conference was very close. Of the 129 delegates present 53 were for Hardie, 39 for the Social Democrats, and 37 abstained. This was a very narrow majority for a decision on policy. R. Bell, of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, was appointed as treasurer, and Ramsay MacDonald was appointed secretary.

At the General Elections of 1901 there were 15 Labour candidates put forward, with only two successes, Keir Hardie for Merthyr Tydvil and Richard Bell for Derby. These were two-member constituencies. In a three-candidate contest the Labour nominees were returned with the help of Liberal votes. No Co-operative organizations joined the Labour Representation Committee and the Social Democratic Federation afterwards withdrew its affiliation. There were only 20 trades councils and 65 separate trade union organizations affiliated, the total aggregate membership being 500,000. In the next three years the number of affiliated trade unions and trades councils doubled, and then came some small successes in by-elections. D. J. Shackleton was returned for one of the textile constituencies (Clitheroe), Will Crooks was returned for Woolwich and Arthur Henderson for Barnard Castle, a constituency in Durham. All these successes were stimulated by the Taff Vale Railway decision,* which had interfered with the legal position of the trade unions.

The General Election which took place in 1906 had a very important influence on the working class. Big struggles arose between the Liberal manufacturers and middle-class interests, on the one hand, and heavy industry and finance, on the other, on the question of the Budget, particularly on the power of the House of Lords on questions of finance and social reforms. Fifty Labour candidates went into the field, of whom twenty-nine were returned. These, including a dozen

* In 1900-2 an "all-Grades Movement" among the organized railway workers was pressing for a uniform advance of 2s. per week in wages, extra payments for overtime, and a reduction in the working day to ten hours, for some grades eight hours. A strike took place among the workers on the Taff Vale Railway Company's line in South Wales, a feature of the strike being a vigorous mass picketing against blackleg labour. At first, the Executive Council of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants refused to recognize the strike as official. Later in face of the widespread discontent among the railwaymen and the militancy of the Taff Vale men the Executive Council took a decision to defend the case of the strikers. The Railway Company sued the union for damages due to the "unlawful" acts of its officers. The courts upheld the claims of the company. This decision was a heavy blow at the trade union movement, rendering strikes and picketing illegal, by making the funds of the union seizable at law. This interpretation of the law gave a great impetus to the movement for Labour representation. This law was repealed in 1906.

other working-men candidates who were elected to the House of Commons, made a formidable Labour group. With such a group in the House of Commons the name of the Labour Representation Committee was changed to that of the Labour Party.

The question of discipline in the Labour Party ranks soon became a matter of urgency for the Party leaders. Liberal-Labour members such as Shackleton and Crooks used to take part in Liberal meetings and send messages to Liberal candidates, and, generally speaking, opposed the central discipline of the Labour group. In 1906 a rule was adopted prohibiting Labour members from identifying themselves with other parties. Richard Bell refused to conform to this rule, and was finally expelled.

It is interesting to note some of the characteristics of the leaders of that time. Keir Hardie was originally a Liberal in politics, and at this period we read of his inviting John Morley, a Liberal who posed as a Radical, to come over to the Labour Party and to lead it. When Gladstone died Hardie wrote a eulogy of him as "a great fighter for freedom." Ramsay MacDonald, who posed as a theoretician, always fought against the idea that the Labour Party should be a class party. His book on *Socialism and Society* is an attempt to vulgarize Spencer and Darwin in order to justify social reformism and opportunism as opposed to the scientific Socialism of Marx and Engels. Arthur Henderson was a temperance advocate, a baptist preacher and a Liberal agent. When he began to flirt with Labour representation he withdrew the description of himself as independent candidate in one of the constituencies in order to get the support of the Liberals.

Generally, the policy of the Liberal Party was to corrupt the Labour leaders and to encourage the idea of social reformism in opposition to open class struggle. This process of the corruption of the workers' movement, and of the Labour Party movement in particular, which has gone on continuously since the beginning of the trade unions, has found its most complete expression in the wholesale migration into the Labour Party of such Liberals as Ponsonby, Parmoor, Haldane, Trevelyan and so on.

The principal forms of this Liberal corruption were financial

assistance and theoretical guidance. Lloyd George's speeches (at Limehouse, London, in the early 90's, for instance, against the House of Lords) objectively provided theoretical guidance to the Labour Party. The admission of Labour leaders into minor offices in the Government and into the state apparatus (Sir David Shackleton, D. Cummings, G. N. Barnes, to name but a few former leaders); payment of members of Parliament; the formation of Labour Governments by permission of the ruling class; the general encouragement of the Labour reformists to identify themselves with the capitalist state apparatus, these and similar methods were all means of corrupting the Labour leaders.

There was another attack on the trade unions at this time —the so-called "Osborne judgment," in which the use of funds for political purposes was challenged by the Government. This was a case where a Conservative railwayman was encouraged by the Anti-Socialist union to refuse to pay his political levy,* and as a result was excluded from the trade union. He took the case to court and the judge upheld his appeal against expulsion. This judgment ruled that the trade unions were unable to use their funds for political purposes. The effect of this was to give a big impetus to the parliamentary Labour movement, since it put in jeopardy the right of the trade unions to belong to the Labour Party and finance Labour candidates, many of whom were trade union officials. It made the trade union supporters of parliamentary Labour representation and the workers generally aware of the necessity of once more resisting anti-working class legislation. Under the influence of this judgment the miners' group joined the Labour Party, and now in the House of Commons there were forty-two Labour members.

The policy of the Labour leaders was mainly one of social reformism, of discouraging all strike action, of trying to keep the eyes of the workers fixed on Parliament and on increasing of Labour representation as the sole means of solving the problems of capitalist exploitation. There existed considerable dissatisfaction among the workers, especially on the matter of the cost of living. Since 1866 the cost of living had risen by 90 per cent. Large sections of the workers were badly paid, for the previous ten years the actual increase in wages

* See *History of Trade Unionism* by S. and B. Webb, for details of this case.

for the most important industries was on an average a miserable three-farthings per hour.

The sharp rise of prices was closely connected with the discovery of the cyanide process of the production of gold in South Africa. It is not our intention to go into an economic explanation of the effect of cheaper gold production on prices, but in practice the nominal wages of the workers were not keeping pace with the sharp rise in prices. The loss of the industrial monopoly of British capitalism, now faced with new world competitors (Germany, and the United States) and forced to attack the workers' standards, coupled with the lowering of real wages, by means of higher prices, were the reasons for the strike wave which sprang up in the period of 1910-14.

But before we go on to this, it will not be out of place here to note the groupings in the Socialist movement at this time, because many of those groups ultimately played a part in the formation of the Communist Party. Moreover many of the tendencies and traditions of these groups continued after the formation of the Communist Party, and undoubtedly hampered it in many directions when seeking the path to revolutionary class struggle.

Two main currents ran through the Socialist movement in Britain before the War. The one, represented by Bruce Glasier, Keir Hardie, Blatchford, and the Independent Labour Party, expressed a frankly opportunist line of social reformism: was anti-Marxist, opposed to the class struggle and revolutionary mass action. This was the type of "British," "Anglo-Saxon Socialism." The other was "continental" Socialism, which found its expression in the Social Democratic parties and in a variety of Socialist groups that lisped the economic theories of Marxism, often in a barren academic way which was a distortion of the real teachings of Marx.

"British Socialism" combined sentimental appeals for "justice," and "humanitarianism" with the more prosaic object of returning Labour members to Parliament. The "Marxists" propagated "Scientific Socialism" in opposition to sentimentalism, but in the sectarian manner of the Church. Only rarely did they try to translate Marxism into the hot-blooded life of mass strike action, and the political class struggle.

The theoretical literature of Marxian Socialism was very limited.

If we were to take a look at the literature of the period, we should find that there was nothing beyond the first volume of Marx's *Capital*, *Wage Labour and Capital*, *Value Price and Profit*, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, *The Eastern Question*, *Secret Diplomatic History of Europe*, *The Life of Palmerston*, Engels' *Conditions of the Working Class*, and *The Poverty of Philosophy*. In 1904 *The Critique of Political Economy* appeared in a translation from New York, and it was not until almost the eve of the War that the second and third volumes of *Capital* were translated into English by an American.

Even by the Social Democratic Federation, which posed as Marxist, there was very little literature produced apart from Hyndman's *Crises of the Nineteenth Century*, *Economics of Socialism* and *The Historical Basis of Socialism*, which were mere vulgarizations of Marx. There were very few original contributions by the Social Democratic Federation. It was only after 1900 that a social science library appeared, published by the capitalist publishing house, Swan Sonnenschein, which included Engels' *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*, Lafargue's *Private Property*, and a number of similar works (though most of the other writers were of the "revisionist" or reactionary type) and gave us a popular literature of a sociological character. We had no literature of the Russian Social Democratic Party; apart from Plechanoff's *Anarchism and Socialism* we had no contact with the Social Democratic movement of Russia in general, or with the Bolshevik movement in particular. During the 1905 revolution, the wave of sympathy for the Russian revolution, while it exercised a certain influence on the Labour movement, was largely Liberal in tone. There was a flood of Liberal literature and Labour meetings, but the general tenor of these meetings was to support the Liberal movement. It was not until the War that Bolshevik literature began to penetrate into England.

There is one important event to which I think it necessary to draw attention here, and that is the Paris Congress of the Second International in 1900, the Congress which discussed the entry of Millerand into the French Cabinet. This Congress, as we shall see, had a certain influence in England. At this Congress a resolution was brought forward by Kautsky which

in essence excused the action of a member of the Socialist Party, Millerand, in entering a capitalist Government as a Cabinet Minister, although this Cabinet contained Gallifet, the butcher of the Communards. This resolution was condemned by Lenin and satirized by the Russian *Iskra* as the "caoutchouc" resolution, because of the conciliatory, centrist position of the leading groups of the Second International and the German S.D.P. who condemned it in a qualified way.

The entrance of Millerand into the French Government had created a schism in the international movement. In the French party it developed into an opposition between the "Possibilists" and the "Impossibilists." The "Impossibilists," led by Guesde, opposed such tactics; the "Possibilists" justified Millerand's action, i.e., collaboration with the capitalists. As a result of this discussion and Hyndman's support of Kautsky, a split took place in the Social Democratic Federation in Britain, a section of the Party in Scotland being resolutely opposed to the Kautsky Resolution.

This split, however, was also connected with the wider question of the attitude of the Social Democratic Federation towards the Labour Party and towards pure and simple trade unionism. The opposition in the Social Democratic Federation at that time took the line that the Labour Party bureaucracy represented "a gang of fakirs" who were being used for the purpose of preventing the revolutionary development of the mass movement of the workers; that in the pure and simple craft trade unions there was also a stratum of bureaucracy which was stifling any attempt on the part of the working class to wage a serious class struggle against the forces of capitalism. The S.D.F. leaders labelled the Scottish group "Impossibilists," and refused to print any criticism of party policy in the party organ *Justice*. Since the opposition was refused publicity in its own press, articles were sent to the *Weekly People* of New York, the organ of the Socialist Labour Party of America, and copies were imported into Britain. But this was found to be insufficient, and a new paper was started—*The Socialist*. This paper was at first printed monthly in Dublin by the Irish Socialist Workers' Republican Party, led by James Connolly, which had a small hand-press, supported exclusively by the coppers of the enthusiastic "Impossibilists." By the time the Easter Conference of the S.D.F.

was held in London in 1903, the ground was already prepared for a split. A severely critical article entitled "The Official S.D.F.," timed for the conference, appeared in *The Socialist*, and the writer (Geo. S. Yates) was expelled. The "Impossibilist" group of delegates withdrew, and the Socialist Labour Party was formed in Edinburgh, August 1903, with James Connolly as its first organizer.

There has been much confusion concerning the role of the Socialist Labour Party, and what it actually stood for. That the Socialist Labour Party was deeply sectarian is true. For example, one of the first articles in its constitution was the refusal to allow members to occupy any official position in the trade unions, on pain of expulsion, though this did not exclude in practice work among the rank and file of the unions, of which a considerable amount went on right up to the formation of the Communist Party. Another example was the refusal to associate with the Independent Labour Party, Social Democratic Federation and Fabians, who made up the British section of the Second International. One of the first acts of the Socialist Labour Party after its formation was to send delegates to the Amsterdam Congress in 1904 to demand direct representation at the Congress. This was refused on the grounds that application must go through the autonomous British section. To make such an application, and to associate with such "Fakirs" as Hyndman, MacDonald, Bruce Glasier and Keir Hardie, was asking for a sacrifice of "principles," which the Socialist Labour Party was not prepared to make.

It has been said that the Socialist Labour Party was anti-parliamentarian in principle; this is incorrect. At no time was the Socialist Labour Party anti-parliamentarian. From its inception it ran candidates for the Municipal Elections every year. During the General Election in 1918 it ran three Parliamentary candidates, of which we will speak later. The Socialist Labour Party, however, always attacked the idea of the social reformists that it was only necessary to return members to Parliament in order to solve the class problems of the workers. If it did not run Parliamentary candidates this was due to numerical and financial weakness and not for political reasons.

At an early stage the Socialist Labour Party developed the ideas of Socialist trade unions in a rather primitive kind of

way, under the influence of some "Left" German Social Democrats who were working in Scotland and were members of the Socialist Labour Party. But after the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) in Chicago, in 1905, it took up the question of the formation of industrial union organizations. At the Chicago convention of the Industrial Workers of the World there were two main streams. One was led by DeLeon, of the Socialist Labour Party, which stood for the recognition of the necessity for a political party, and for parliamentary action. The other tendency was anarcho-syndicalist in content, and denied the necessity for a political party, for parliamentary political action. These syndicalist ideas found expression, to a certain extent, in the movement for industrial unionism in England, but the policy of the Socialist Labour Party largely dominated the new movement.

It is not our task here to go into details of this history; the following must suffice. In 1906 the Industrial Workers of Great Britain was formed out of a series of industrial union propagandist groups which sprang up in different sections of the country, and particularly found support in the new machine industry, such as the automobile industry which was becoming very prominent, and in factories like the Singer Sewing Machines Co., in Clydebank, Glasgow, where trade unionism was not recognized, and where most of the workers were unorganized.

In 1910 strikes took place in the Argyll Motor Works, in the Vale of Leven and in Singer's, Clydebank, under the leadership of the Industrial Workers of Great Britain. Groups had been established in the factories. In every department there was a group with a committee and a shop steward. Each department was linked together in a works committee; the principal slogan being "An injury to one is an injury to all." When the Singer's firm interfered with the wage conditions of one department, the workers in the department stopped work and appealed to the other departments for support, with the result that 10,000 workers struck.

The firm used the manœuvre of sending a postcard to every employee on the books of the firm, past and present, inviting them to state whether they were prepared to resume work on the Monday. The strike committee, which carried

on vigorous propaganda and street demonstrations, appealed to the workers to send these postcards to them to be counted. Actually, 4,000 cards were returned to the strike committee. But the firm, through the medium of the Press and a certain amount of provocation among the workers, was successful in breaking the strike by the end of a week. All the leaders of this movement were dismissed, to find themselves subsequently scattered over the Clyde district in various engineering shops. This latter circumstance is important, because at a later stage, when we come to speak of the shop stewards' movement and its widespread character, we shall see how the traditions of the industrial unionist movement were carried into the various shops as a result of the 1910–11 strikes.

An important feature of this period is the growth of the economic studies movement of which the Socialist Labour Party were the pioneers. These classes began as early as 1900. They studied *Capital*, Morgan's *Ancient Society*, the works of Engels and Lafargue, *Industrial History* and *Formal Logic*. This period was one of an intense appetite among the workers for study and reading. In 1903, to supply the demand within the trade union movement for education and to keep it from the influences of Marxism, the Workers' Educational Association was formed. It was formed particularly to provide a theoretical equipment for the trade union leaders, their textbooks being the capitalist textbooks on economics, and the historians of the universities (Marshall, Jevons, Cunningham).

One of the foremost sections of the Workers' Educational Association movement was Ruskin College, Oxford. This institution had as its Principal a man named Denis Hird, who had sympathies with Marxism, and as a sociologist was considered radical. (His textbook on sociology was that of the American, Lester Ward.)

Many workers who had been sent by their trade unions to study at Ruskin, had there become attached to the Socialist Labour Party, or had come under its ideological influence. A demand was made for Marxian literature and teaching, for the study of Marx's *Capital* instead of Marshall's *Principles of Economics*. This found the support of the Principal, Denis Hird. A schism between Denis Hird and the managers of the college and the Workers' Educational Association took

place on this question, with the result that Hird was dismissed. The students gathered around him and formed themselves into a committee of defence, ultimately taking the name of the Plebs League. This was in 1909. From that time arose a series of Labour colleges in the country, initiated by the Plebs League, where academic Marxism was popularized. The Socialist Labour Party at the same time continued to play its independent role as a popularizer of Marxist teachings by means of study circles, an increasing number of which were held in the engineering shops and factories.

The theoreticians of the Independent Labour Party were MacDonald, Snowden and Glasier, supported by the Fabians, particularly Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. The whole policy of the Independent Labour Party theoreticians was to counteract Marxism in whatever form it manifested itself. So widespread was the demand for study circles, and for Marxist literature within the Labour movement, that the Independent Labour Party led by MacDonald conceived the idea of counteracting Marxian literature by a "Socialist Library."

The Independent Labour Party published a series of works of a semi-scientific character, such as the writings of Vandervelde, Bernstein, Jaures, Turatti, Ferri and other revisionist leaders of Social Democracy. MacDonald, Snowden and a number of Fabians added to the list. In this way the Independent Labour Party represented and fostered in Britain the trend of revisionism and reformism within the Second International. Furthermore, it was not accidental that the leaders of the Labour Party, of which the most outstanding were at the same time leaders of the Independent Labour Party, should in this period seek direct affiliation to the Second International. Hitherto the Independent Labour Party was only one of the parties within the British section of the International. While it could rely upon the support of the Fabians within the British section for its anti-Marxian policy it had to face the permanent sectarian hostility of Hyndman and the Social Democratic Federation. Now that the Labour Party was a parliamentary force numerically, the Independent Labour Party sought to strengthen its position by securing direct representation of the Labour Party on the International.

The discussion within the International Socialist Bureau upon the proposal of Bruce Glasier that the Labour Party be accorded direct recognition as an affiliated organization of the International, and the controversy between Lenin and Kautsky that took place, throws an interesting light upon the role played by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the Second International and the attitude of Lenin towards the working-class movement in Britain.

As yet, the Labour Party did not call itself a Socialist Party or recognize the principles of the class struggle. Could such a party be admitted to the International? Bruce Glasier and the Independent Labour Party said yes, arguing that the Labour Party waged the class struggle in practice. Hyndman for the Social Democratic Federation, supported by the Austrians, the French, and the majority of the small nations, said no, and demanded recognition of Socialism as the ultimate aim and of the class struggle as a condition of membership. Kautsky, in moving the resolution to admit the Labour Party to Congresses, declared that "although it (the Labour Party) does not directly recognize the class struggle, it nevertheless wages the struggle and in fact and by its very organization, which is independent of capitalist parties, is adopting the basis of the class struggle."

Lenin joined issue with Kautsky on this section of the resolution and contended that the Labour Party was not really independent of the Liberals and did not pursue a fully independent class policy. Nevertheless he was for the inclusion of the Labour Party because "it represents the first step on the part of the really working-class organizations of England towards a conscious class policy and towards a *Socialist* Labour Party."

That the Independent Labour Party and the other leaders of the Labour Party were downright opportunists goes without saying; that their presence at the International Congresses was a source of strength to the forces of reformism and those who were trying to revise Marxism, is also indisputable. (Ramsay MacDonald even tried to amend the rules of the International so as to make "not the recognition of the class struggle, but bona-fide trade unions" eligible for affiliation to the International. After the discussion on the Bureau of the International, the Independent Labour Party insisted that

the International Socialist Bureau not only recognize the Labour Party but the policy of the Independent Labour Party. Against this illegitimate interpretation of the decision of the Bureau, Lenin fought tenaciously.)* The mistake of Hyndman and those who voted against the inclusion of the Labour Party was the failure to see the awakening mass movement of the British working class away from Liberalism towards Socialism. Also the failure to heed the advice of Engels to make a break with the sectarianism of Social Democracy in England, and to attach themselves to the workers' mass organizations and guide them along the path of revolutionary Socialism. This correct interpretation of the ideas of Marx and Engels towards the English Labour movement will be seen to be consistently applied by Lenin when we come to speak about the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

* *Lenin on Britain*, page 97.

CHAPTER II

THE period of 1910–11–12 represents a period of intense industrial agitation, of strike action and a general mass ferment in the working-class movement. About this time, when the industrial union movement was becoming fairly strong, Tom Mann returned from Australia with a great record for syndicalist activity. The industrial unionists sought to attract Tom Mann to the movement, and to begin a big campaign throughout the country. On his way home, however, Tom Mann stopped in France, made contact with the syndicalists, and pledged himself to introduce into Britain syndicalism on the French model. He began publishing a series of small monthly pamphlets under the title of *The Syndicalist* which later was replaced by a monthly paper of the same name. The most famous was the issue of January 1912, which contained the following "Open Letter to British Soldiers."

OPEN LETTER TO BRITISH SOLDIERS

Men, Comrades, Brothers!

You are in the Army.

So are we. You in the army of Destruction. We, in the industrial army, or army of construction. We work at mine, forge, factory, or docks, etc., producing and transporting all the goods, clothing, stuffs, etc., which makes it possible for people to live.

You are working men's sons!

When we go on strike to better our lot, which is the lot also of your Fathers, Mothers, Brothers, and Sisters, you are called upon by your officers to murder us.

Don't do it!

You know how it happens. Always has happened. We stand out as long as we can. Then one of our (and your) irresponsible brothers, goaded by the sight and thought of his and his loved ones' misery and hunger commits a crime

on property. Immediately, you are ordered to murder us as you did at Mitchelstown, at Featherstone, at Belfast.

Don't you know that, when you are out of the colours and become a "Civvy" again, you like us, may be on strike, and you like us, be liable to be murdered by other soldiers? Boys, don't do it!

"Thou shalt not kill," says the Book.

Don't forget that.

It does not say "unless you have a uniform on." No! *Murder* is *Murder*, whether committed in the heat of anger by one who has wronged a loved one or big pipe-clayed Tommies with a rifle.

Boys, don't do it!

Act the man! Act the Brother! Act the human being!

Property can be replaced! Human life, Never. The idle class, who own and order you about, own and order us about also. They and their friends own the land and means of life in Britain.

You don't! We don't!

When we kick they order you to murder us.

When you kick, you get court-martialled and cells.

Your fight is our fight. Instead of fighting each other, we should be fighting with each other!

Out of our loins, our lives, our homes, you come. Don't disgrace your parents, your class, by being the willing tools any longer of the Master class.

You, like us, are the slave class. When we rise, you rise; when *we* fall, even by your bullets, ye fall also.

England with its fertile valleys and dells, its mineral resources, its sea harvests, is the heritage of ages to us.

You no doubt joined the Army out of poverty. *We* work long hours for small wages at hard work, because of our poverty. And both your poverty and *ours* arises from the fact that Britain with its resources belongs to only a few people. These few, owning Britain and *our* jobs. Owning *our* jobs they own *our* very lives.

Comrades, have *we* called in vain? Think things out and refuse any longer to murder Your kindred. Help us to win back Britain for the British, and the world for the workers.

This "Open Letter" was written by a Liverpool building

worker and printed in *The Irish Worker*. The *Syndicalist* reprinted it without comment. A railway fireman named Fred Crowsley, a worker on the London and North-Western Railway, reproduced this "Letter" as a leaflet at his own expense, and single-handed went down to the Aldershot military station one Sunday morning, and distributed it to the soldiers in camp. He was arrested and sent to prison for four months. For reprinting the leaflet in the *Syndicalist*, the editor, Guy Bowman, was sent to prison for nine months and the two brothers Buck, the printers, received six months each.

In February, a general strike of miners took place. The authorities drafted troops into the mining areas and improvised barracks for the soldiers. Tom Mann, in addressing a public meeting in Salford on behalf of the Workers' Union, took the occasion to refer to the presence of the military forces in the vicinity of the town, and cited the case of Fred Crowsley, Bowman and the Bucks. He read the leaflet as a challenge to the authorities. He was arrested in London, brought to trial in Salford, and sentenced to six months, second division, in Strangeways Gaol, Manchester.*

In reality, the syndicalist movement had no organized mass basis. It was a froth on the surface of the popular mass movement of the time, which had its roots in the struggle for better living conditions; conditions that were aggravated by the pressure on the workers by the capitalists, by the rise in the cost of living.

Another tendency in this period was the guilds movement. This movement, fostered by a group of middle-class intellectuals, Brage, Hobson, Reckitt, Beckhofer, and later G. D. H. Cole, arose out of the wave of industrial action and syndicalist propaganda and took root in certain university Socialist circles. It was an attempt to reconcile the direct action of industrial unionism with parliamentary action. These young intellectual elements of the Socialist societies and Fabians developed the idea of guilds and consumers' councils in an attempt to solve in a peaceful way the problems which the working class were trying to solve by other means.

In 1915 the National Guilds League was formed. Thus we had for a time building guilds, clothing guilds, furniture guilds, and a whole series of guilds which only served to create

* See *Tom Mann's Memoirs* for details of the Trial.

confusion in the workers' movement. After the War, when the housing question became acute, the Coalition Government was not averse to assisting the guild movement. The Co-operative societies provided finance, and at one time, according to G. D. H. Cole, they had work in hand to the amount of £2,000,000. There is no doubt about the paralysing influence of this utopian movement, particularly in the building trades. In 1922 when the boom collapsed, and the economic crisis began, the guilds died out completely.

In 1910 strikes broke out among the railwaymen, shipbuilding, cotton and coal workers. Especially among the seamen and the dockers this movement had a tremendous force. There was no recognition of the Union of the Transport Workers or the Railwaymen; no collective methods of discussing labour problems. In the shipping industry the conditions of the workers were extremely bad. The National Sailors' and Firemen's Union demanded a National Conciliation Board, a national wages scale, and put forward various demands for the reform of methods in engaging seamen. The Shipping Federation of the employers refused to discuss these proposals with the workers either individually, or with the union officials on behalf of the workers, or to consider them in any form, with the result that the union started an active campaign, and in June of that year a national strike was declared.

The employers tried the old method of blackleg labour, but were not successful, because the blackleg labour introduced in parts only stimulated the workers and spread the strike movement. In June 1911 the crew of the *Olympic* refused to take the ship to Southampton from Liverpool and went on strike. Coal trimmers went on strike. The blacklegs that were introduced led to riots in Hull, Cardiff, Liverpool and other places, with the result that the company was ultimately compelled to recognize that some concessions had to be made. Wages were raised in the case of 250 vessels. The employers also recognized the right of the men to belong to any union, the right to wear the union badge, and the right to have a union official present when signing on or paying off.

The extensive strike wave of this period led to tremendous upheavals. In Liverpool, the Transport Workers' Federation

called a "victory" meeting to celebrate the recognition of the union. Near the plinth of the Town Hall over 40,000 people assembled. Speeches were made by Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, explaining the victory of the transport workers. A clash with the police took place, and the Riot Act was read. The ship-owners, who largely dominate the city, applied a lock-out, which was replied to by the workers with a strike, and over 100,000 ceased work. The offices of the Shipping Federation, the employers' organization, were burned down, the military were called out, one man was killed and several workers were wounded. This illustrates the temper of the workers of that time, particularly in the shipping industry.

The railwaymen also played an important part in these labour struggles. In 1907 Conciliation Boards had been set up, but the workers complained that the work of these boards admitted long delays and failed to give them satisfaction. Every case had to go to a sectional board, then to a central board, and finally to arbitration. The companies were not amalgamated as they are to-day. Every railway company was under separate direction. No trade union officials were allowed to come before the boards. This meant that the workers themselves had to send deputations to the management, which sometimes involved dismissals. Here we see the workers struggling to secure recognition of the unions, and to find machinery to defend themselves against exploitation.

In August 1911, twenty-four hours' notice was given by the officials of the railways workers' unions demanding that the railway companies receive officials for negotiations or a strike would take place. The companies refused to meet the officials. The Government intervened with the proposal of a Royal Commission. This was rejected by the union and the workers went on strike. Winston Churchill, who was the Home Secretary, had no hesitation in calling out the troops. Twelve thousand soldiers were brought from Aldershot to London, and sent to different centres to be at the disposal of the railway companies. During the dispute an Army Railway Council came into being to which were attached six railway general managers, on the staff of the army, and twenty-eight general managers, chief engineers and superintendents who were holding army ranks.

The strike ended after negotiations which took place in the

offices of the Board of Trade between the representatives of the companies, four representatives from the unions, with Arthur Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald on behalf of the Labour Party, on the following terms: complete reinstatement of the strikers; immediate consideration by the Conciliation Boards of all grievances; and a prompt investigation by a Royal Commission of the dissatisfaction with the Boards, and consideration of ways to amend the scheme.

As a result of this strike movement there was a fusion of the railway unions. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the General Railway Workers' Union, and the Signalmen's and Pointsmen's Society combined, and the National Union of Railwaymen was set up in March 1913.

Next came the miners. The miners were working under very bad conditions. Piece rates were low, conditions were generally chaotic. The miners had to bear the burden of a whole series of anomalies, such as shortage of timber, removal of stone, wet places, irregularity in the supply of tubs or "hutches," all of which made serious inroads on their wages. "Allowances" for such anomalies were an object of bargaining with the managers with no guarantee whatever. The miners demanded a guaranteed daily minimum of 5s. a day and 2s. for boys. Local disputes became of regular occurrence, until finally the Miners' Federation of Great Britain raised the issue as a national question. In February 1912 a strike was declared and one million men were out for one month. The mine-owners objected to any legal minimum wage, while the miners insisted on a national minimum. The Government rushed through Parliament a Bill setting up Joint Boards with powers to decide district minima. In *Lenin on Britain* we read how Lenin, in an article written at that time, draws attention to the fact that the Government was forced to rush a Bill through in five days, showing how by mass pressure of the workers it is possible to force the hands of the ruling class.

In July 1913, a tremendous strike took place in Dublin. The strike arose out of the conditions of the tramway workers and the refusal of the tramway bosses, particularly one called Murphy, to recognize the union. He declared that he was prepared to spend three-quarters of a million pounds to smash the union. Two hundred workers were discharged in Dublin

for being members of the union. The Workers' Union demanded that they be reinstated. To this the company replied by a lock-out. The Irish Transport Workers' Union countered with a strike. Jim Larkin, the workers' leader, was arrested, and when asked to give an undertaking not to encourage picketing, or hold meetings, he refused. Under a disguise he succeeded in addressing a large meeting from the balcony of a hotel in the main thoroughfare of Dublin, Sackville Street. At this meeting the police ran amok and four workers were injured, one dying from wounds. For two days the police carried on a ferocious beating up of crowds. The funeral of the victim was made the occasion for a monster demonstration 50,000 strong.

Delegations were sent by the Irish workers to all parts of Britain to raise financial support to assist them in carrying on the strike. The Co-operatives sent a shipload of food. Large meetings were held in England and Scotland. Some very strong speeches were made at the Manchester Trades Union Congress, which was meeting during the strike. Lenin was so impressed by these events as to declare that the "British workers had now entered upon a new path," and that "bearing in mind the energy and organization of the English working class they will bring about socialism along this path more quickly than anywhere else."*

Compare Lenin's characterization of this period with those of Lloyd George and Ramsay MacDonald. The whole capitalist Press of the time was flooded with articles from the Labour leaders, denouncing syndicalism and direct action. They did everything to prevent the development of the workers' movement in revolutionary directions. MacDonald declared "that the Syndicalists were products of impatience, because it takes the earth twenty-four hours to go round the sun. That the Socialist movement gave hospitality to all kinds of cranks who were doing the movement harm." (Prophetic words.)

Lloyd George declared that "we can console ourselves with the fact, that the best policeman for the Syndicalist is the Socialist." These characterizations expressed aptly the trend in the workers' movement of this time. The effects of the

* The number of strikes rose from 399 in 1908 to 903 in 1911, and in the atter half of 1913 and the first half of 1914 to 150 strikes per month.

syndicalist wave and these strike movements disturbed the parliamentary Socialists.

Next came the engineers who began an agitation for wage increases, and had put forward a demand for twopence an hour increase. The building workers also became involved in the strike wave. During 1913 a militant movement developed against non-union labour in the building industry, especially in London. A series of lightning strikes took place without regard for the union officials who were opposed to strike action. In the early part of 1914 the London employers declared a lock-out. They resurrected the hated "Document" insisting on a personal agreement by each worker to work with non-union men quietly under a penalty of twenty shillings fine. The London building trade was paralysed for six months. By June the National Federation of Building Employers had decided on a national lock-out when the European War broke out, and work was resumed on the old conditions.

When the 1914 war started it found the Socialist movement divided, with no centralized revolutionary party. The Socialists were split up into groups, with the workers divided between trade unionism, syndicalism, and pure and simple parliamentary action. The War found the movement in a state of disunity.

The Government immediately entered into relations with the trade union leaders, and the infamous Treasury Agreement was signed in February 1915. By this agreement the trade union leaders undertook to suspend all the rules of the unions; not to interfere with any restrictions in output, or to impose any limitation on the number of apprentices; to work with non-unionists; to have no restraint on the job or interference with the machinery; to abolish the normal working day; to agree to overtime and Sunday work; and to accept the introduction into industry of unskilled men, women and young workers.

There was no compensation suggested by the trade union leaders in connection with these demands; no suggestion of increases in wages; no safeguards apart from promises that after the War was concluded the workers would be compensated for their patriotism. Later the officials agreed to the prohibition of advertisements in the papers to prevent the

migration of the workers for higher wages. Under the Munitions Act the workers had no right to strike; the principle of industrial conscription was accepted by the trade union officials and it was only a step from that to the acceptance of military conscription. This was the alliance of the Labour leaders with imperialism in its most blatant form.

Here we must speak of the unofficial movement. The shop stewards' movement was not purely a war product. Many trade union organizations before the War had stewards in the shops. They took up grievances of the workers, represented the workers in deputations, and collected contributions for the unions. This was the case in particular with the engineers. But during the War, the sell-out on the part of the leaders gave a new impetus to the appointment of shop stewards and to unofficial action.

Unofficial action was taken, particularly in South Wales among the miners, in the industrial centres of the North, and in those areas where the engineers predominated. The reader will now see the importance of what has already been said about the growth of industrial unionism and syndicalism. Large sections of the workers were prepared for the acceptance of unofficial action, especially now that the union leaders were in alliance with the Government.

The War very soon led to a rapid increase in the cost of living, and to profiteering. In connection with the engineers' demands, negotiations, as we have seen, had been suspended when the War broke out. Demands were now put forward by the workers to carry on these negotiations and to force the demand of twopence an hour. The employers, after much palaver, proposed a miserly three-farthings in place of the twopence. The result was that the workers in Weirs, Cathcart, Glasgow, walked out. With this strike a "Labour Withholding Committee" was set up, to become later the Clyde Workers' Committee.

In the North, especially in Glasgow, close unity between the shop stewards, the lower officials of the trade unions and the trades councils came into existence. This unity made it possible for the movement to assume a wider character than it would have done if left to purely unofficial action.

Strike action, in spite of the promises and bargaining under

the Treasury Agreement between the leaders and the Government, began to revive. It grew mainly round the demand for wages and against increases in rent. Rents were beginning to rise rapidly with the prices of other commodities. Committees of the workers were set up to prevent evictions, but they soon went beyond mere local cases.

The women came together when a family was being evicted. Bells were rung to sound the alarm and bring out the neighbours in the street and deputations marched down to the shipyards to inform the workers. Systematic demonstrations of the workers left the job, marched up to the house where the furniture was being thrown out, and compelled the bailiff to put it back. This Rents Committee movement represented a powerful force in uniting the social demands of the workers with their industrial grievances, and forced the Government to pass the Rents Restriction Acts.

The whole movement of the Clyde engineers represented an attempt on the part of the workers generally, inspired by the influence of the pre-War revolutionary propaganda and agitation, and industrial unionism, at co-ordination in opposition to the Government. While at first the movement was largely economic, and did not go beyond economic aims, ultimately it assumed a political character, especially when it challenged the Government's policy of military interference in the shops, i.e., military conscription.

The Government, at this time anxious to raise the output of munitions, was very much concerned at this movement. Lloyd George, Arthur Henderson and Lord Murray decided to make a tour of the shipyards to persuade the workers to increase output and assist the Government to continue the War. In December 1915, after some haggling with the district officials of the engineering unions, this trio came to Glasgow. At their first visit to Parkhead Forge (Beardmore's) they received a rude rebuff. Thereafter, at every shop and yard they went to, the workers refused to listen to them. Before leaving Glasgow the officials of the engineers arranged a meeting in St. Andrews Hall. It was packed to the doors but the mood of the audience was not quite what was hoped for. As soon as Lloyd George and Henderson appeared on the platform they were met with catcalls, jeers, and the singing of the Red Flag. Despite the efforts of Brownlie, the president

of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, who was in the chair, the meeting ended in an uproar.

Following this meeting the Clyde Workers' Committee began the publication of its own paper, *The Worker*. The funds were raised by a large number of workers who voluntarily donated the 6s. 6d. given to them for expenses by the promoters of the St. Andrews Hall meeting. But the paper only appeared four times. The fourth issue contained an article, "Should the Workers Arm?" written by an Independent Labour Party pacifist. The paper was suppressed. J. W. Muir (editor), W. Gallacher (chairman of Clyde Workers' Committee), and W. G. Bell (manager of the Socialist Labour Press) were arrested and sentenced. The first two received twelve months' imprisonment and Bell three months.

The authorities followed up this action by arresting McManus, Messer, Haggerty, Wainwright, Kirkwood, Shields, Clark and Bridges, as leading shop stewards and deporting them from Glasgow. The method of deportation is an interesting sidelight upon the vigilance of the ruling class. The police appeared on the stroke of midnight, armed with revolvers, and arrested some of the men in bed. They were taken to the central police station, brought before a military officer, and given a list of towns (not munition areas) in one of which they could choose to live. They were then ordered to be out of the city within twelve hours.

The general policy of the Government did not stop at arrests and deportations; it included an elaborate system of espionage. There was hardly a workshop of importance that did not have its spies and provocateurs. These provocateurs sometimes pretended to be more revolutionary than the leaders themselves. They made revolutionary speeches with a view to sowing confusion and creating schism.

The outstanding case of Government provocation was that of Alex. Gordon. Gordon concocted a story to the effect that there was a plan to poison Lloyd George and Arthur Henderson. Three women and one man (Mrs. Wheeldon, her two daughters and son-in-law, of Derby) got severe sentences ranging from five to ten years. After the trial Gordon was sent to South Africa and disappeared from the scene until after the War.

The unofficial movement, though at first scattered, en-

deavoured to organize on a national scale. Delegates went from one town to another in an attempt to link up the movement and give it some national form and direction. Most industries created their unofficial movements, and a strike took place in 1917 when one and a half million engineers went out against the "Man Power Bill." The whole policy at this time of the shop stewards' movement represented a developing opposition to the War. It exposed and fought the role of Henderson, Barnes and the chauvinist leaders in the Labour movement as agents of the ruling class. It contrasted their role with that of Connolly in the Easter Rising in Dublin (1916).

It was an historic misfortune that there was no organized direct connection between the advanced section of the shop stewards' movement and the working class Citizens' Army led by Connolly. After the great transport workers' strike in Dublin in 1913, Connolly and Larkin set about the reorganization of the Irish workers' movement. In 1914 an Irish Trade Union Congress was formed. It began to function as a Labour Party after the manner of the British Labour Party. In this year Larkin went to the United States to raise funds to assist the Irish movement, leaving Connolly in command of the union and of the struggles that might arise. The War broke out, and Larkin was drawn into the revolutionary struggles in America and imprisoned. He did not return to Ireland till 1921. On the outbreak of the War Connolly took up an irreconcilable attitude against it. He mobilized the workers for anti-War struggles, visited England and Scotland, and spoke at mass demonstrations. His last meetings outside Ireland took place on May Day, 1915. He addressed a demonstration on Glasgow Green, and in the City Hall, on the same evening, spoke together with the present writer.

Connolly attacked the imperialist war as a war in the interest of "royal freebooters and cosmopolitan thieves." He declared, "War waged by oppressed nationalities against the oppressors, and the class war of the proletariat against capital . . . is par excellence the swiftest, safest, and most peaceful form of constructive work the Socialist can engage in."

Connolly attacked the Redmondites of the Irish Parliamentary Party for their chauvinism, and recruiting of Irishmen into the British Army. He lashed the Republicans for their

pro-Germanism, for their blatant campaign in favour of the German War Lord. He stood forth as the leader of the working-class, anti-imperialist front. Over the headquarters of the Irish Transport Workers' Union, Liberty Hall, in Dublin, hung the slogan "We serve neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland." The Government suppressed his paper *The Irish Worker* in December 1914. It reappeared again in May 1915, as *The Worker's Republic*, being printed by the Socialist Labour Press in Glasgow and smuggled into Dublin. It continued to appear until the Easter Rising in 1916.

Connolly began his agitation for an armed uprising by the end of 1915, after the formation of the Citizens' Army. He entered into an alliance with the left wing of the Irish Volunteers—Pearse, Clarke, and MacDermott, all of whom were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a secret nationalist revolutionary society. But the Citizens' Army retained its separate identity and did not conceal its objective, a Workers' Republic.

The plan for the uprising, which was timed to coincide with a general review of the volunteers, was thrown into confusion by MacNeil, the Commander-in-Chief of the Volunteer Army. He countermanded the order, and cut off important sections outside Dublin who were necessary for a national uprising. The Citizens' Army and Volunteers, led by Connolly, and the left wing volunteers (Pearse, Clarke, etc.) set out on Monday, 24 April, to seize power in Dublin. They captured the post office, the banks and railways, and entrenched themselves in various buildings. The British Government sent nearly 60,000 troops. A gunboat, up the river Liffey, bombarded the positions of the rebels. Connolly and his heroic followers held out for a week until the situation became hopeless, and then surrendered. Thousands of prisoners were taken and transported to English prisons; twelve of the leaders were immediately executed. Connolly was taken out of hospital, where he lay severely wounded, propped up in a chair and shot on 12 May. The British War Cabinet, of which Arthur Henderson was a member, was unanimous in this decision and action. The betrayal by MacNeil undoubtedly robbed the uprising of any chance of success. By countermanding the order for the review of the Volunteers he cut off the main support of the revolutionary

army, the rural districts, without which Dublin was doomed to failure.

The Easter Rising in Dublin (1916) played an important part in moulding the future of the revolutionary movement in Great Britain. The heroic and revolutionary example of Connolly enabled the workers to see with startling clarity the contrast between the devotion, loyalty and self-sacrifice of a true son of the exploited class, and the corrupted leaders of the Labour aristocracy.

The Independent Labour Party from the beginning of the War was divided between a pacifist attitude of "folded arms" and support for the Government's war policy. The National Administrative Council adopted the line that every member must act according to the dictates of his own conscience. The death of Hardie, the wavering line of MacDonald and Snowden, the pacifism of Allan and Brockway, reduced the leadership to a state of prostration.

MacDonald, Snowden and their like took the line that "we are in it and must see it through." They tried to hide behind the proposal "of peace by negotiation" and worked with Ponsonby, Trevelyan and the Liberals along this line. MacDonald advised the young men of Leicester to join the army.

The rank and file, Socialist in feeling, were bereft of leadership. Their opposition to the war was blind and often took the line of "conscientious objection." Many rank-and-file members joined the "No Conscription Fellowship" which had been formed by a number of middle-class intellectuals together with pacifist and religious elements.

In many centres, Independent Labour Party working-class members played an active part in the shop stewards' movement.

During the War, as we have seen, the demands of the shop stewards and unofficial committees were at first economic, chiefly for wages, maintenance of trade union conditions and customs, resistance to dilution of labour, and for workers' control in industry. The movement in the North was led by members of the Socialist Labour Party (A. McManus, W. Paul and the present writer) and the British Socialist Party (John McLean, James McDougall and W. Gallacher). We had one immediate aim, viz., to make it impossible for the Government to carry on the War.

This political aim was associated with any and every grievance, in the workshops, questions of recruiting, questions of food, and rent, etc. No grievance, however small, was allowed to go unopposed. We did not always choose the correct methods, but at heart we suffered from no illusions about the character of the Government's policy.

From the beginning the Independent Labour Party held confused, pacifist views, following the line of "folded arms" and "conscientious objections." Many members considered it was the correct thing for all Socialists to refuse to kill, or to fight. This attitude was particularly strong amongst the large numbers of petty bourgeois and intellectual members. The No Conscription Fellowship is worthy of mention in this connection. It represented all shades of Socialist opinion, but was mainly attractive to workers of the so-called "left" variety, and to the petty bourgeois, religious and pacifist elements. However, it is to be noted, that many workers in the industrial areas were members of the Independent Labour Party and played an active part in the shop stewards' movement.

The February Revolution in Russia (1917) received a wide and sympathetic response in Britain. The politically conscious elements saw in it the prelude to the revolution. The pacifists, conscientious objectors, and those workers who were war-weary, saw in it the beginning of the end of the War. Within a few weeks of the February Revolution (June 1917), a great conference was held in the Albert Hall, Leeds, to discuss the formation of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils for Great Britain.

The invitation to attend the conference was issued by a United Socialist Council and contained the following words: "It will be one of the greatest democratic gatherings ever held in this country. It will be historic. It will begin a new era of democratic power in Great Britain. It will begin to do for this country what the Russian Revolution has accomplished in Russia" and was signed by:

H. Alexander
Chas. G. Ammon
W. C. Anderson
C. Despard
E. C. Fairchild
J. Fineberg
F. W. Jowett
Geo. Lansbury
J. Ramsay MacDonald
Tom Quelch
Robert Smillie
Philip Snowden
Robert Williams

1,150 delegates attended, representing 209 trades councils, 371 trades union branches and workers' committees, 294 Independent Labour Party branches, 86 British Socialist Party branches and 184 women's and Co-operative organizations.

The conference was dominated by the Independent Labour Party and the pacifists. Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden delivered rhetorical speeches—interruptions came from a number of the militant shop stewards led by Gallacher, McManus and the present writer, who protested against MacDonald's demagogy. It was decided to appoint a central committee for establishing Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. The country was divided into thirteen districts with district councils for the same purpose. But this proved to be merely a demonstration, and the councils soon ceased to exist. It was clear that MacDonald and Snowden had no sympathy with the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. They were merely using the platform to carry on demagogic work. They had no belief in revolution or in councils that ran counter to parliamentary democracy.

The British Government at this time supplemented their diplomatic and military intrigues against the February Revolution by sending Arthur Henderson to Petrograd in company with Albert Thomas and other representatives of the Second International. We now know that Henderson carried in his pocket instructions from the British Cabinet, if necessary, to take the place of Buchanan, the British Ambassador. This post was worth £8,000 a year. Unfortunately for Henderson the Russian proletariat were not to be hoodwinked. The rebuff to Henderson by the Russian workers led to the famous incident of Henderson's humiliation when he was kept waiting on the mat outside the door of the Cabinet, while it deliberated on his failure. Subsequently he resigned from the Coalition Government, and his place was taken by G. N. Barnes, another pro-War Labour M.P.

There is no question about the influence of the February Revolution on the British working class. The resistance to the War was growing. The big engineers' strike against conscription in 1917 indicated the mood of the industrial workers. The Labour leaders began to give expression to this mood of the masses by calling on the Government to make an

open declaration of its war aims, and to send delegates to the Continent. These Labour leaders were caught in the meshes created by their own support for the War. MacDonald and Roberts, whom the Labour Party wished to send to Petrograd, were prevented from leaving Aberdeen by the Seamen and Firemen's Union, led by Havelock Wilson, who was an outstanding jingo during the War.

Later, when the Second International attempted to come together, Henderson and Huysmans, the secretary of the bureau of the Second International, were prevented from going to Paris, again by Havelock Wilson and the seamen's organization.

The imprisonment of conscientious objectors and the mass leaders of the workers; the desertions and mutinies in the army and navy, showed that "National Unity" was broken. A real crisis was developing in the army and navy. We know from the series of articles which appeared in 1930, in the navy journal *The Fleet*, on the movements of the sailors in 1917, that there were many revolts and mutinies. The editor, Yexley, tells us that the numbers condemned for acts of insubordination rose from 60 in 1916 to 221 in 1917, and 678 in 1918. Ships' committees became very popular, and delegates were sent from the ships to the ports, where port committees were formed.

The demands of the sailors were at first like those of the workers, principally economic, and centred around the question of demobilization, but the most popular slogan was the transformation of these committees into a naval men's trade union affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. They began to discuss the question of a general strike. The success of the policemen's strike in 1918 showed them that only by direct action was it possible to achieve any results. When rumours about the insurrection in the German Navy began to run through the fleet it led to a discussion on the ultimate unity of the British and German sailors against their war-making Governments.

Yexley, who was a naval officer at this time, brought all these matters to the notice of Lloyd George and the Cabinet, to the King and the Admiralty. Certain concessions were made, but on the day following the Armistice, the struggle was renewed. In 1917 the Russian soldiers, still armed,

had returned home, and this experience was not lost on the British workers. Churchill and Lloyd George knew what this meant if the soldiers and sailors were allowed to go back to the Clyde, to South Wales or Lancashire with their rifles in their hands. They therefore pursued a policy of detaining the soldiers and sailors, and deliberately delayed demobilization.

Insubordination and mutinies became rife. The soldiers on leave refused to return to France. They mounted army trucks and went *en masse* to Whitehall to demand demobilization. From the 27th to the 31st of January, 1919, Calais, which was the central clearing station for the troops, was in the hands of the soldiers, who tried to persuade those returning from leave to join them. Churchill declares that there were between 3,000 and 4,000 men involved. The Government brought two divisions back from Germany to disperse the mutineers at Calais. These divisions were told that the Calais men were holding up demobilization because they did not want to go home!

At Plymouth and Portsmouth, the red flag was run up on several ships. A delegation sent from Devonport was arrested when it got to London. Leaflets and pamphlets were distributed widely through the army and navy, and the word went out, "If you don't demob. us, we'll demob. ourselves."

The Government countered the proposal for a naval men's union affiliated to the Trades Union Congress by appointing a Commission which in conference proposed a permanent committee of sailors and quartermasters. It made complete concessions in the matter of the quartermaster's pay but met only one-third of the sailors' demands. One section of those concerned accepted this committee, others refused and wanted to go forward for affiliation to the Trades Union Congress; which was exactly what the Government wanted, knowing the attitude of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party on this question. Affiliation was refused, the Labour leaders once more supporting the Government and thus obliging the sailors to agree to the Government's proposals. The second conference, called in 1920, was dispersed by the Government with violence, and a Welfare Committee sponsored by the Government was formed.

The Government having divided the sailors, now took steps

to ensure its anti-Soviet designs on Russia. The crews of the ships sent to the Baltic, to the Black Sea and to Archangel did not know of their destination till they got there. The officers carried on violent anti-Bolshevik propaganda: "Humanity in Peril," "Where Lenin rules starvation exists," and recited the old lies of atrocities that had served them in the first period of the War.

In December 1918 the Army Service Corps organized a demonstration which marched to Whitehall and Downing Street, and protested against going to Murmansk. In 1919 the Black Watch and Coldstream Guards at Dover refused to embark for Russia. Demonstrations of soldiers who protested against being sent to Russia took place in the streets of Aldershot and Blackpool. At Folkestone 10,000 soldiers demonstrated and held the town for several days. At Ryde, in the Isle of Wight, 4,000 soldiers clashed with the police and several were killed and wounded.

These actions were not limited to British ports. At Libau a revolt took place on a cruiser. The *Glory* had to be sent back from Murmansk, and four destroyers that arrived at Murmansk refused to fight and had to be sent back. Mutinies of the sailors took place in Baku. All these actions, in addition to the refusal of the sailors to leave Edinburgh, Invergordon, Devonport and Portsmouth, showed, as Lenin declared, that the British soldiers and sailors were very near to the revolution of Russia.

This great movement found expression in the slogan of "Hands Off Russia" and the Hands Off Russia committee movement, which culminated in forcing the Trades Union Congress in September 1919 to send an ultimatum to the Government to withdraw the troops from Russia. The workers were now moving towards "councils of action."

CHAPTER III

THE War had left very deep scars on the economic and political life of Great Britain. Some 800,000 men had been killed and 132,000 maimed for life. This was an enormous tax on the man-power of Great Britain. The national debt had expanded to the proximity of £8,000,000,000. This debt was to play a very important role in the subsequent critical situation of British industry. In common with the other countries of Europe, though to a lesser extent, Britain found her productive resources seriously impaired.

During the War raw materials and commodity stocks had been used up for war purposes. In many enterprises, although there had been a certain expansion, the basic capital and buildings had not been replaced. This was not so widespread as in the devastated territories of Europe, but nevertheless it had its influence in Britain also. In many plants extensions were merely temporary, and did not affect the basic capital of the enterprises to a very great extent. The proof of this is that even after the War rationalization in Great Britain lagged behind the developments in America, in France and, later, in Germany. It was only after many years that rationalization was seriously introduced in Britain.

On the other hand, as we know, Great Britain had a tremendous colonial empire before the War. Out of the war England emerged with enormous gains and new territories. She had acquired German colonies in Africa, and various colonies in the Pacific (Samoa, etc.). In the Middle East and Palestine, Trans-Jordania and Iraq, areas where the British forces had been successful during the period of the War, were handed over to her as mandated territories by the League of Nations.

But if German rivalry was crushed, which was the aim of the war from the point of view of British imperialism, new rivals now emerged. The United States, which had once been a debtor country, now became a heavy creditor. In addition, Japan emerged as a dangerous competitor, par-

ticularly in the East. The Versailles Treaty, which confirmed the division of the territories of the central powers in Europe, gave to France Alsace and Lorraine and a group of satellites which were some compensation for the territorial gains of Britain.

At the same time we have to note the revolutionary movements that were developing in the colonies. There is no question that those movements grew under the influence of the February and October revolutions in Russia. Armed struggles took place in several colonial countries. In India, from 1919 to 1922, there was, virtually, armed conflict. Even before that there were signs of serious revolt. There is the case of the Punjabis who, in 1914, chartered a Japanese ship, the *Komingata Maru*, and sailed from Hong Kong to British Columbia. The Canadian Government refused permission to land, provisioned the ship and ordered it back. The Punjabis came on to India, and landed on the Hoogli. The Bengal Government under a War Ordinance attempted to send them by special train to the Punjab. The Punjabis refused to go, and started marching to Calcutta. Troops and police stopped them and turned them back to Budge on the Hoogli. An armed fight took place in which sixteen men were killed. The Punjabis scattered into the surrounding villages, but were rounded up and captured by the police and military.

Again, in February 1915, soldiers of the 5th Light Infantry (Indian troops) stationed at Singapore refused to obey orders and mutinied. A detachment of the 36th Sikhs and marines from British, French and Japanese warships were sent to assist the local volunteers and military forces to "quell the riot." A column was landed from a Russian warship and assisted in hunting down the Indian soldiers as they took to the countryside. Thirty-four were killed, including six white officers, two N.C.O.'s and eleven rank and file, and fifteen civilians. Of the Indian soldiers no figures are given. It was merely stated that some were killed and a large number captured or surrendered. Five were shot after trial by court-martial, one sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment and seven to one year's imprisonment.

Another illustration is the case of 150 Indians who set sail from Hong Kong on 8 October, 1915, to India. At Singapore, Penang, and Rangoon, they carried on propaganda among

the troops. Their aim was to go back to India to drive the English out. Four Indian soldiers were court-martialled and hanged on 26 April, 1915, for having knowledge of a conspiracy and "failing to give information of it without delay to their commanding officers or other superior officers."

In Egypt, the War brought forward powerful nationalist revolutionaries who resorted to armed struggle for their national independence. From 1920 to 1923, and even as late as 1924 when Zaghlul Pasha came to London and tried to get MacDonald to carry through the Labour Party promises of support for the colonial peoples, we see British imperialism holding down Egypt. The Labour Party maintained the principle of "continuity" of the policy of the Cromers and Curzons. The strategic position of the Suez Canal as the route to the East, and the vital position of Egypt in relation to the Sudan and Britain's African territories, meant that Egypt must be held for England. In Iraq in 1922 there was a revolutionary movement, supported by the peasantry, which resisted the imposition of a puppet ruler, sponsored and subsidized by the British imperialists whose eyes were fixed on the oil-fields of Mosul. Then later, in Palestine, a struggle developed between the Arabian and the Jewish settlers inspired by Britain which had the mandate over Palestine granted by the League. The British imperialists sought to foster the Zionist movement for a home in Palestine, with the aim of further securing the trade routes to India and the East. We know that the penetration of American finance capital into Canada and to a certain extent into Australia has played an important role in the changed relations of these dominions to the "mother" country. The British capitalists since the War have had to fight to maintain their hold on these dominions. Especially in Ireland the struggle against British imperialism has continued unceasingly and with varying degrees of sharpness since the War.

The many Imperial conferences that have been held since the War all show that between the dominions and the "mother" country there are serious contradictions which cannot be settled. All of them show that the English ruling class has to maintain strong military forces to keep the dominions tied to the "mother" country.

It is necessary to note that, unlike most crises, the post-War

situation was not an all-round crisis of over-production. It was due rather to the destructive forces of the War and may fairly be classed as a crisis of under-production. During the War, in the time of destruction, elusive prospects of "prosperity" to come were held out. The immediate crisis of under-production fostered these illusions and explains to a certain extent the role of the British reformists of that period.

The capitalists began propaganda for increased production. All the Labour leaders who had been social patriots during the War turned to the new enterprise of encouraging the workers to go in for "increased production." This was to assist the capitalists to extend markets, and thus, as they alleged, to bring about certain improvements for the working class. The temporary boom, which took place immediately after the War and consisted largely of speculation and gambling in capital shares, did not last very long. The outstanding example of this gambling was the shameless over-capitalization and speculation that went on in the cotton industry. The collapse of the "prosperity boom" soon shattered all illusions as to the "new world" which was to come after the War.

Another canard of the capitalists was the idea of transforming the munition shops into new industries. For example, the enterprises that had been engaged in ship-building were to be transformed into automobile shops. But it was clear that unless there was a market for automobiles such enterprises were not likely to last very long. In practice the boom collapsed and revealed only too soon the reality of utter stagnation in the basic industries—shipbuilding, iron, steel and coal—and the army of unemployed began to grow. In 1918 the unemployed, according to trade union returns, formed 8 per cent of the trade union movement, by 1919 and 1920 it had jumped to 24 per cent.

British enterprises were caught up in the tangle of reparations and debts. All the European countries that had been involved in the War were impoverished. Many of the new countries which were set up under the Versailles Treaty were practically bankrupt. Where were the exports of the supposedly prosperous industries of England to be sent? Exports began to fall as markets contracted with the growth of unemployment; made worse by the army of demobilized soldiers and sailors who were now without occupation. In addition

to this state of things England had gone off the gold standard during the War. With a paper currency further inflation had a certain influence on the inner market also. At the same time, America, as a result of the War, had taken the place of England as the centre of the money market. All these circumstances marked the beginning of the crisis in England which was to become more severe in the next few years.

During the War there was a great wave of demagogy, headed by Lloyd George, the champion of them all. Lloyd George promised all kinds of things to the masses of the people after victory had been achieved: "A world fit for heroes to live in," etc. Such phrases had tremendous effect upon sections of the workers who were patriotic. To the railwaymen promises were given that the railways would be nationalized. There were promises of nationalization for the coal industry, and state control for the most important enterprises. These false promises were of course made to smooth over the difficulties during the War, and to get the trade unions and Labour aristocracy to assist the Government.

A few months before the conclusion of the War a Ministry of Reconstruction was established, ostensibly to co-ordinate all the suggestions and proposals of the trade unions and the various advisory committees, with a view to effecting an easy transition from the War to the peace industries.

In the meantime, the problem of demobilization and unemployment created great unrest. The Ministry had no plans. This was the first sign that the Government's promises were so much hot air. This did not prevent Lloyd George, however, from feigning attention to the demands for workers' control of industry and promising shorter hours, etc., etc. He persuaded Henderson and the Trades Union Congress to agree to meet with the employers and the Government to form an "industrial parliament," in which the Government, the employers and the workers would come together, solve all their industrial problems and fulfil the promises that had been made during the war period.

This Industrial Parliament met only once. It was held in the Central Hall, London, in 1919 and speeches were delivered. Proposals were made to the Government; the Government promised to consider them. Months elapsed, but nothing happened. Finally, in July 1921, the trade union represen-

tatives withdrew their delegates and the Industrial Parliament was decently buried.

The Government, to meet the problems of the returning soldiers and sailors, made a number of concessions in the form of war bonuses, etc. They also introduced the "dole" for the unemployed. In this way, as Lloyd George later declared, when taunted by the Tories about the money being spent on the unemployed, "they bought off the revolution cheap."

The next question was that of working hours. There had been much talk during the War about shortening the working day. Various promises had been given to different trade unions: the railwaymen and engineers had been promised an eight-hour day, the builders shorter hours, and the miners a seven-hour day.

Immediately after the Armistice, this question became a matter of first importance to the workers. The failure to fulfil the promises made was aggravated by the numbers of workers who were now being thrown out of employment. Since the Armistice the suggestion had been raised of retaining the workers in industry to share the employment available by means of shorter hours for all. The shorter hours movement by the end of 1918 had grown particularly strong in the industrial centres, and especially on the Clydeside. The question was discussed by various trade union branches, trade council meetings, and trade union conferences.

The movement took a sharp turn by the end of 1918. The shop stewards and the unofficial workers' committees were the pioneers in this movement, and made big preparations for the struggle to get a shorter working day. On the Clydeside the trades councils and the lower strata of the trade union officials were associated with this demand.

No doubt the trades council and the lower strata of the trade union officials realized that the strike movement had grown beyond their control and therefore they felt obliged to identify themselves with it. In January 1919, a strike was decided upon. Meetings of trade union organizations were held and subsequently, at the end of January, a strike took place involving over 100,000 workers in Scotland. The Scottish Trades Union Congress was drawn into it, many unions were attached unofficially. One union, the Associated Iron Moulders of Scotland, identified itself officially with the strike.

The strike began with enormous demonstrations, notably in Glasgow. The Lord Provost of the city intervened and made certain suggestions for bringing the strike to an end. He promised to interview the Government, and to give the reply by the end of the week. On the Friday of that week a great demonstration of strikers accompanied the deputation from the strike committee to the City Chambers to hear the Government's reply. While the deputation was inside the City Chambers contingents of strikers kept arriving from the local areas with bands and banners. A contingent from the East End was crushing its way into the Square when one of the mounted police who was keeping the front of the buildings clear tumbled from his horse and fell, causing a rush by the workers. Gallacher and Kirkwood came out to see what had happened. Gallacher approached the Chief Constable, was surrounded by raised batons, whereupon he struck the Chief Constable on the jaw.* Both Gallacher and Kirkwood were immediately set upon by the police and savagely batoned. One comrade came forward with a red flag and ran it up the flag-pole which is in front of the building. The pole was broken by the police and this worker was laid out unconscious. The demonstration subsequently re-formed and went to Glasgow Green. After a protest meeting the workers dispersed, and marched through the streets singing the Red Flag; that night they wrecked all the principal shopping centres in the city.

Next morning troops were brought in from neighbouring barracks and occupied the city, including the post office and electric power stations. Tanks were placed in the centre of the city and the market place in the East End. All the bridges over the canal and the river were occupied by soldiers, and for three days the town was practically under military control.

This strike movement was not confined entirely to Scotland. As we have already shown, the railwaymen were expecting reductions of hours. The feeling was high among the underground men in London, where the proposals for changing hours had created much ferment on account of the special conditions of labour. Delegates were sent to London to co-ordinate the movement, but the trade union officials,

*See *Revolt on the Clyde*. W. Gallacher, 2/6.

particularly the railway trade union officials, stood in the way of strike action on the ground that *they* were negotiating with their *own* employers.

Delegates were also sent to Belfast, where the workers were already on strike. The movement in Belfast was particularly advanced, the workers holding the city for the best part of a week. Transport was stopped, all industries were closed down, the strike committee issued permits only to vital enterprises for food, etc., to the hospitals and such institutions. The Belfast workers were eventually tricked into compromise with the local employers, led by Lord Pirie. During the discussion of this compromise large forces of military were sent to occupy the city, and the strike faded out. It is to be noted how this movement, which showed such big revolutionary possibilities, was defeated by the policy of the trade union leaders, who were more concerned with collaborating with the employers.

The War saw a tremendous increase in trade union membership. In 1914 the trade union membership numbered 4,145,000. In 1917 it had grown to 5,499,000. In 1920—which was the peak year—the total membership was 8,384,000, from which time it began to decline. But these figures show the tremendous force that was concentrated in the hands of the labour aristocracy, a powerful force on the side of the working-class movement had it been utilized in a revolutionary direction.

A brief review of the different groups which went to form the Communist Party is a necessary preliminary to an account of the actual negotiations for unity. The British Socialist Party was formed in 1911 from the Social Democratic Party (formerly the Social Democratic Federation) and some dissident Independent Labour Party members, in response to an international appeal for socialist unity, and had always had close relations with the Continent. From the earliest beginnings of the Second International, the Social Democratic Federation had been identified with the international congresses, and as part of the British section of the International carried on correspondence with the sections of the continental movement. Many contacts were made with Russian émigrés and sections of the Russian Social Democratic Movement.

The British Socialist Party had broken with Hyndman, the founder of the Social Democratic Federation, on account of his support of the War, and from the first days of the Russian Revolution the Party was actively identified with the Hands Off Russia Committee movement.

The Workers' Socialist Federation was founded by Sylvia Pankhurst, who had been a militant suffragette during the stormy days of the suffragist movement. She developed socialist tendencies and subsequently formed one or two little groups in the East End of London and published *The Workers' Dreadnought*. This federation was active in support of the Russian Revolution from the first days. It was assisted by a number of middle-class suffragists, who had been on the extreme left of the Suffragist movement. The Workers' Socialist Federation did not extend beyond the East End of London, and it was only when negotiations and discussions about unity began that certain individuals in South Wales and the West of London began to espouse her ideas. On principle the Workers' Socialist Federation was anti-parliamentarian.

In the Rhondda district of South Wales there were groups of militant miners and elements of the Miners' Reform Movement who had been identified with the Plebs League and were conscientious objectors during the War. They too were principally anti-parliamentarian and syndicalist in their character, with a strong provincial background.

There were several independent local socialist societies which functioned, however, largely as social clubs. Many of these came under the influence of the Russian Revolution, and were centres for propaganda and the distribution of information concerning the Russian Revolution. Another group comprised left elements of the National Guildsmen, coming principally from the university socialist societies. Most of these intellectuals had been conscientious objectors during the War.

The Independent Labour Party "Lefts" had, ever since the February days, responded to the Russian Revolution. These elements displayed opposition to MacDonald and social reformism, and were especially opposed to the Independent Labour Party returning to the Second International. They included a number of working-class elements, particularly in Lancashire, Liverpool, and some centres in Yorkshire, con-

taining not only workers but a number of conscientious objectors and intellectuals who had come under the influence of the shop stewards' movement, and defended the Russian Revolution.

The Socialist Labour Party from the first applauded the February Revolution. The Socialist Labour Party, as we have seen, published a paper, *The Socialist*. The party owned its own printing plant which it maintained by subscriptions among the workers. During the War the press was continually interfered with by the police and was closed down for a period on account of its revolutionary productions and assistance to strike movements. It printed the *Workers' Dreadnought*, the *Workers' Republic* (Connolly's paper) when these were suppressed, and extensive material in support of the Russian Revolution. It was the first to publish Lenin's *Collapse of the Second International*, and during the War published Liebknecht's anti-War speeches as well as a series of pamphlets by Radek, Clara Zetkin, and others. This party also reproduced many of the Bolshevik leaflets which were brought back by soldiers from Murmansk. Though in existence since 1903, the Socialist Labour Party had no contact with the Bolsheviks or with the Russian movement prior to the revolution. This was due to the fact that the principal centre of the party was in the North, with very little contact with the London area where the continental socialists were more numerous.

During the 1918 General Election, the Socialist Labour Party ran three candidates. This election was a very important one from the point of view of the Labour movement, because it meant the first working-class challenge to the Coalition Government and was a test of the growth of internationalism and anti-militarism in the working-class movement. Of the three candidates, one was against Whitley, a big millowner in Halifax and Speaker in the House of Commons, the man who had sponsored the Whitley Report. The other constituencies chosen were Ince (Wigan) and Gorton. The issues of these elections were anti-war and the defence of Soviet Russia. A red map was produced, on the back of which the election manifesto was printed. This map indicated the Soviet territory, the various centres of industrial wealth of the country, and the objects of imperialist intervention. About

100,000 were distributed and sent to the forces overseas who, for the first time, by virtue of the new franchise, were voters.

Notwithstanding the feebleness of the local party organization, the Socialist Labour Party candidates were successful in getting 4,000 votes at Halifax. In the other two constituencies votes were secured of 1,750 and 2,500, but the principal point was that the whole centre of the campaign was the defence of Soviet Russia, the defence of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. As a matter of historical fact it should be stated here that the Socialist Labour Party was included in the groups invited to the first Congress of the Communist International. But this was only learned through the New York *Weekly People* a month after the Congress was over, otherwise efforts would have been made to be represented.

Immediately after these elections the question of unity began to be discussed and meetings took place between representatives of the Socialist Labour Party and the British Socialist Party. Eventually a conference was called in April 1919, and held in the Green Room, Eustace Miles' Restaurant, in Chandos Street, London. This conference was attended by the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party, the Workers' Socialist Federation and the South Wales Socialist Society. Subsequently meetings were held in a house near St. Pancras Station, London, where the differences became quite clear. On the question of parliamentary action, the Workers' Socialist Federation and South Wales Socialist Society were against any participation in parliamentary action. Between the Socialist Labour Party and the British Socialist Party, this question raised no differences.

The question of affiliation to the Labour Party was the principal source of difference. The Workers' Socialist Federation and the South Wales Socialist Society, being against all parliamentary action, were naturally against affiliation to the Labour Party. The Socialist Labour Party, while in favour of parliamentary action, were against affiliation to the Labour Party: the British Socialist Party standing for unconditional affiliation.

The Socialist Labour Party delegates argued for a party of a new type. They were afraid of being absorbed in the opportunism of the Labour Party, and dubious about the British Socialist Party, which had a record of social reformism

and opportunism. In the course of the discussions, which were protracted for some three months, it was suggested by the Socialist Labour Party that the question of affiliation be not raised for a year after the party was formed. Then a referendum of the members on the question could be taken. The reason given was that in this period it would become clear to all those who were afraid to merge in the movement lest it followed the track of the Labour Party, that this was a party of a new type. To refrain from affiliation for a year would be a guarantee that we were not going to lose our identity in the Labour Party or founder in the bog of social reformism. Ultimately, if the party did join the Labour Party, it would be quite clearly on tactical grounds.

Eventually the British Socialist Party delegates agreed that the question should be put to a vote three months after the formation of the party.

The Socialist Labour Party delegates reported back to their executive committee. The executive by a majority of one vote decided to take no further part in the unity negotiations. This meant that the delegation was repudiated. But this did not deter the delegation from going forward. The delegates contended that this was only the will of a small caucus, and did not represent the feeling that existed among the members in different parts of the country. They called a conference of all branches of the Socialist Labour Party, inviting socialist societies and other groups who were in favour of unity to attend. This conference took place in April 1920 in Nottingham.

Practically all the branches were represented and several socialist societies in addition, the most important of the latter being the Socialist Prohibitionist Group, led by Bob Stewart. During this conference the big discussion was on the question of affiliation to the Labour Party, and subsequently agreement was reached upon the line that the Socialist Labour Party delegation had taken. The conference adopted the name of the Communist Party Unity Group, and went to the Unity Conference under this title.

Prior to the fusion conference a unity meeting took place with the Independent Labour Party, in the offices of the Independent Labour Party in Johnson's Court, London.

Philip Snowden was in the chair and all leading members of the Independent Labour Party were present. The discussion turned on parliamentary democracy. Snowden and the Independent Labour Party delegates were strongly against the idea of Soviets and of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and stood for gradually transforming society into socialism by "democratic" means. After the discussion and debate on this question, in which the late Arthur McManus riddled all the arguments of the Independent Labour Party with his inimitable dialectical skill, Snowden declared "It is no use, you are asking us to give up all the things we have stood for for the last thirty years." And so the meeting broke up.

A report on the question of unity and the issues that disturbed the unity negotiations was communicated to the Communist International, and the following reply was received from Lenin:

Dear Comrades,

Having received a letter of the Joint Provisional Committee of the Communist Party of Britain, dated 20 June, I hasten to reply, in accordance with their request, that I am in complete sympathy with their plans for the immediate organization of the party in England.

I consider the policy of Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst and of the Workers' Socialist Federation in refusing to collaborate in the amalgamation of the British Socialist Party, Socialist Labour Party and others into a Communist Party to be wrong.

I personally am in favour of participation in parliament, and adhesion to the Labour Party on condition of free and independent Communist activity. This policy I am going to defend at the Second Congress of the Third International on 15 July in Moscow. I consider it most desirable that a Communist Party be speedily organized on the basis of the decisions and principles of the Third International, and that the Party be brought into close touch with the Industrial Workers of the World and the Shop Stewards' Movement in order to bring about their complete union.

Moscow, 8 July. Lenin.

This letter, though dated 8 July, only reached the Joint Provisional Committee on the eve of the conference.

In the meantime the following manifesto was issued by the Provisional Committee:

Call for a Communist Party

To the Communists and Socialists of Great Britain.

Comrades,

In the face of the strongly entrenched capitalist bureaucracy in this country, the most urgent and pressing need in our working-class movement to-day is a united and consolidated front.

Social revolution, formerly but an empty phrase, has become a real live force, rending society at its very roots and challenging the power and authority of capitalism the world over.

In Russia the working class has rallied nobly to its clarion call, and Socialism there is seen in action, no longer in the club-rooms and coffee houses, but in actual struggle is braving torture and death itself in a glorious effort to preserve the results of the first definite and permanent breach in the wall of International Imperialism.

True to its class instinct, capitalism is marshalling all its forces, and Imperialist nations rush to succour each other in a desperate effort to drench in blood the defenders of the proletarian revolution.

It is thus that the Russian Revolution becomes the touchstone of International Socialism, a veritable beacon light indicating the path to follow and the course to pursue.

We in this country have yet to realize that the great fact of the Russian Revolution has turned the whole current of socialist thought into different channels, giving us new conceptions in place of the old. By such a standard we are revealed as lacking in outlook, policy and tactics. Faced with the vigour and solidarity of the Imperialists internationally and their organized determination to crush every vestige of working-class freedom, and particularly to batter down the workers' Republic in Russia, who now can defend the time-worn ideas still held by Socialists of a gradual evolution or peaceful transition from capitalism to

Socialism? Allied to such an illusion is the notion that social revolutions can be quite constitutional affairs and carried through by the most correct parliamentary procedure.

The experience and intensity of the class struggle in recent years has shattered such belief.

The parliamentary democracy—that idol of the social reformist—has been stripped of its veneer once and for all and now stands revealed for what it in reality is, an instrument of class oppression to be engineered and wielded in the interest of the bourgeoisie. *Against this sham parliamentary democracy of capitalism the workers' republic places the method of direct representation and recall, as embodied in the Soviet idea, only those performing useful social services being enfranchised.* Thus the Marxian slogan that the proletarian revolution must march in the light of its own legality has been amply justified and demonstrated by experience.

The new institutions and order of things just arisen have become a constant challenge and menace to the whole system of International Capitalism, and this indicates the task of the revolutionist. That task is to provide scope and freedom for their development and to assist in their universal realization. Towards such an objective and to hasten the world revolution accruing, *a Communist Party* is wanted, a party of action. One that will wage the class war up to the point of revolution, rejecting with disdain all compromise and truck with capitalist reform, but ever seeking to organize and rally the working class to the standard of International Communism.

Such a party should be clear in its mission and courageous in its determination. Its fundamental principles must be:

(*a*) Communism as against Capitalism, i.e., the maintenance of society on a basis of social service rather than class exploitation.

(*b*) The Soviet idea as against the parliamentary democracy, i.e., a structure making provision for the participation in social administration only of those who render useful service to the community.

(*c*) Learning from history that dominant classes never yield to the revolutionary enslaved class without struggle,

the Communists must be prepared to meet and crush all the efforts of capitalist reactionaries to regain their lost privileges pending a system of thoroughgoing Communism. In other words, the *Communist Party must stand for the dictatorship of the proletariat.*

While being aware of the several legitimate claims of parties, we think the need for a united political organization based upon the foregoing principles and fusing all parties which accept the same, cannot be gainsaid.

Unity of action must ever go hand in hand with unity of purpose. Against the predatory forces of capitalism we must hurl the united efforts of all who stand for a complete social change as the only way to end for all time the iniquity of class exploitation.

If you are in agreement with the principles of this Manifesto you are urged to prepare to attend a great Rank and File Convention to be called at an early date, and help to lay the foundations of a real revolutionary Communist Party.

Lenin himself, in reply to a question from a member of the Labour delegation as to his views on the need for the formation of a United Communist Party in Britain, replied, "Genuine partisans of the liberation of the workers from the yoke of capital cannot possibly oppose the foundation of a Communist Party that alone is able to educate the working masses."

That reply indicated the fervent hopes of our Russian comrades. Let us not disappoint them, but rather be worthy of our responsibilities.

The Joint Provisional Committee for the Communist Party:

THOS. BELL
F. H. HODGSON
ARTHUR MACMANUS (*Chairman*)
W. W. PAUL
A. A. WATTS
FRED WILLIS
ALBERT INKPIN (*Secretary*)

21a Maiden Lane, Strand, London, W.C.2.

The congress took place on 31 July and 1 August, and was held in the Cannon Street Hotel, London. The main questions were the formation of the Communist Party, parliamentarism, and affiliation to the Labour Party. There was complete unity upon the question of forming the Communist Party. The resolution on parliamentary action* made clear the Bolshevik attitude towards parliament and parliamentary activity, and was directed against the capitalist-democratic conception of parliamentary representation. The resolution made it clear that Communist Parliamentary candidates are bound by the decisions of the Central Committee of the Party, taking their instructions from the Central Committee, and not from their constituencies; this being the fundamental difference between the Communist representatives and the capitalist parliamentary representatives.

In the recess, when the commission was discussing the final terms of the resolution, it is interesting to recall that Bob Williams came especially to the commission to get this clause deleted from the resolution, pointing out that the candidate is bound to take into consideration the wishes of his constituents; that he must be responsible to his constituency and cannot be responsible entirely to his party.

This attitude was emphatically turned down, but it reflected the attitude not only of Williams, but of Purcell and a number of local councillors that belonged to the British Socialist Party. Several local and town councillors from the East of London, Stepney Green, and Poplar, etc., belonged to the British Socialist Party, when the Party was formed. The party had a hard job to convince these comrades that they

* *Resolution of Parliamentary Action.*

"The Communist Party repudiates the reformist view that a social revolution can be achieved by the ordinary methods of Parliamentary democracy, but regards Parliamentary and electoral action generally as providing a means of propaganda and agitation towards the revolution. The tactics to be employed by representatives of the Party elected to Parliament or local bodies must be laid down by the Party itself according to national or local circumstances. In all cases such representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the party, and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit. Also that in the event of any representative violating the decisions of the Party as embodied in the mandate which he or she has accepted, or as an instruction, that he or she be called upon to resign his or her membership of Parliament or the municipality and also of the Party."

had to discuss all questions with the central committee, and to be responsible to the central committee for all their actions. This was one of the first struggles the party had to engage in.

The question of affiliation to the Labour Party was put by a representative from each side, William Paul of the Communist Unity Group, speaking against affiliation, and Fred Hodgson, of the British Socialist Party, speaking in favour. The discussion showed that many of the delegates apart from the Communist Unity Group, e.g., the National Guildsmen, were against affiliation. The vote was 85 against affiliation and 115 for affiliation. Lenin's advice on the question played a decisive role in the discussion. Immediately the vote was declared the C.U. delegates declared their acceptance of the decision and agreed to abide loyally by it. Thereupon the party was formed.

The Second Congress of the C.I. was held simultaneously with the proceedings in London. The S.L.P. was not represented at the Second Congress. As a matter of history it is necessary to pay attention to the role of J. T. Murphy. Murphy appeared at the Second Congress not representing any group, but in a personal capacity. From London he went to Amsterdam, where there was a bureau set up to carry on propaganda for the Third International. From Amsterdam he went to Moscow. During the course of the unity proceedings in England, Murphy sent over a letter denouncing the S.L.P. delegates, of whom he had formerly been one, for capitulating to the B.S.P. on the question of affiliation to the Labour Party. In this way he assisted in hindering the formation of the party.

The other British delegates present were Gallacher, Jack Tanner, Dave Ramsay, from the W.C.M., and subsequently Sylvia Pankhurst of the W.S.F., who arrived late, when the congress was almost finished. From the B.S.P. there were W. McLaine and Tom Quelch, who have long since left the Communist Party.

The story of the stand made by Gallacher and Tanner is fully reproduced in the volume *Lenin on Britain*, and the reader is referred to that work for a full account of the arguments used by these comrades. The advocacy of anti-parliamentarism and anti-Labour Party, as expressed by the comrades in the W.C.M. was not isolated. In this

period there were many elements coming to the Third International of an ultra-left character. From the Latin countries came anarcho-syndicalists, from Germany ultra-lefts of different varieties, from America the members of the I.W.W., and syndicalists from the South American countries. All these left elements had led Lenin to make a comprehensive analysis of their whole line, which was subsequently published as *Left Wing Communism*. Lenin considered this necessary to counteract all the Leftist tendencies which were breaking away from the Second International and coming to the Third International. It remains a classic guide for the Communists of to-day.

It is important to note here that Lenin, while always taking a definite stand against syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism, clearly differentiated himself from the Second International on this question. The Second International had combated and excluded anarchists from the International movement, but Lenin always appreciated that many of the syndicalist elements had good revolutionary qualities. Lenin at the Second Congress had to urge strongly the necessity for the formation of a Party, particularly against the syndicalists. Tanner and Gallacher were opposed to a Party. They denounced the B.S.P., they denounced the Labour Parliamentary leaders especially, and were obsessed with the idea of the Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Committees. They argued that it was not necessary to form a party; that the Workers' Committee Movement and Shop Stewards' Movement could do everything that was necessary, quoting experiences of the War, and the mass movement during the War.

Lenin appreciated all this, and certainly did not seek to diminish their criticism of the labour bureaucracy and social reformism, but explained to them that even here if they came together for definite political objectives against capitalism they were already taking the first steps towards the formation of the party.

Then there was the question of trade unionism. The Workers' Committee elements were in opposition to trade unionism! They saw the trade unions as centres of labour corruption, and were obsessed by the enormous growth of the unofficial movement during the War and the power it had then been able to wield. Lenin here insisted on the necessity

of combating the corrupt leaders of the trade unions, but also stressed the importance of work in the trade unions and the recognition of the trade unions as the mass organizations of the working class. (The party to-day has no better advocate of mass trade union work than Gallacher.)

As to the question of Labour Party affiliation, Lenin understood exactly the character of the Labour Party, not only as a federal organization but as an opportunist party of reformism. He was not in any way misled by the statements of McLaine and Quelch about the "freedom" that would be accorded to the Communist Party if inside the Labour Party. Lenin's principal line was that by affiliating to the Labour Party, and on the assumption that it gave us freedom of criticism and we retained our independence as a party, we should be able to push the Labour Party forward in this period, thereby exposing the Hendersons, Snowdens and MacDonalds, and assisting to free the working class from traitors. Thus we should be able to advance the revolutionary movement. The question therefore of affiliation to the Labour Party for Lenin was bound up with the necessity for the Communist Party to be part of the mass movement of the working class, to keep as close to the masses as possible, and not to become a sect. If we study Lenin, we can see from his earliest writings on the British Labour movement, how closely he followed Marx and Engels in their appreciation of the trade union movement, never confusing the labour aristocracy, which comprised the bulk of the trade unions, with the wider mass working-class movement.

Lenin at the Second Congress, with his accustomed attention to human personality, engaged in many conversations and discussions with the anti-parliamentarians, and took great pains endeavouring to persuade them as to the necessity for becoming identified with the Communist Party. As a result of these conversations, the British delegates pledged themselves to unite with the newly-formed Communist Party on their return to England. This pledge Gallacher and Ramsay faithfully fulfilled. With characteristic sectarianism Pankhurst and the W.S.F. assumed the title of the Communist Party (British section of the Third International). A number of groups in Scotland around Gallacher assumed the title of the Communist Labour Party.

On the recommendations of the Second Congress, and on the special appeal of Lenin, the E.C.C.I. passed the following resolution:

"In Britain a single Communist Party must be organized on the basis of the decisions of the Second Congress of the Communist International. To achieve this in the space of four months a general congress of the Communist groups and organizations of Great Britain and Ireland must be summoned. In this congress there must participate:

(1) The United Communist Party.
(2) The Communist Party (B.S.T.I.).
(3) The Shop Stewards.
(4) The Scottish Communist Group.
(5) The Welsh groups.
(6) The Irish Communists (on a federal basis).
(7) The Socialist Labour Party.
(8) The Left Wing of the Independent Labour Party.

For the summoning of this general congress, and to pave the way for unity, a general committee of action is to be appointed into which there will enter one representative of each group under the presidency of a representative of the E.C.C.I."

Thus the Committee of Action was set up, and the following manifesto was issued:

PLANS FOR COMMUNIST UNITY: ANOTHER BIG STEP FORWARD IN PREPARATION FOR CONVENTION AT LEEDS ON 29 JANUARY

In accordance with the decision of the Third International that all organizations in this country accepting the statutes, theses and conditions of that body must take immediate steps to unite, a committee composed of representatives of the Communist Parties of Great Britain, the Communist Party (B.S.T.I.) and the Communist Labour Party has been negotiating for some time past.

Several matters were referred for final decisions to the

three Executives and these bodies held a joint meeting on Sunday last.

An exhaustive discussion took place on the basis of regional and executive representation, on the new Provisional Executive Committee, and eventually the following was agreed unanimously:

"At the Convention to be held in Leeds on Saturday, 29 January, ten members will be elected by the delegates grouped in geographical divisions in the following proportions: Scotland 2, Wales 2, North of England 3, South of England 3. In order to ensure continuity of work the present Executives of the contracting parties will appoint members of the Provisional E.C. as follows: Communist Labour Party 2, Communist Party (B.S.T.I.) 2, Communist Party of Great Britain 3.

"It was decided that the Chairman of the Party shall be elected by the Convention, but that the secretary shall be appointed by the Provisional Executive Committee from outside the Executive members, and the treasurers shall be appointed from among the members of the Provisional Executives."

In order that each contracting party should have the fullest opportunity of representation at the Leeds Convention it was decided to allow branches to be represented by proxy delegates, i.e., a branch can appoint a delegate who, while being a member of the contracting party concerned, is not necessarily a member of the appointing branch.

Proxy delegates will have full voting powers, but no proxy delegates can represent more than one branch.

It was decided that any independent political groups or branches of other political organizations might obtain representation providing they agreed (1) to accept the statutes, etc., of the Third International; (2) to accept the findings of the Convention as binding; and (3) to become branches of the new united Party immediately after the Convention.

It is hoped that every branch of the three contracting parties will be represented at the Convention, and that from its deliberations there will arise a single Communist

Party in Great Britain, united and resolute in its determination to achieve the social revolution.

On behalf of the Joint Committee,

WILLIAM MELLOR
(Communist Party of Great Britain).

JOHN MACLEAN*
(Communist Labour Party).

T. WATKINS
(Communist Party B.S.T.I.).

ALBERT INKPIN (*Secretary*).

At this Unity Conference held in Leeds on 29 January, 1921, the complete unification of all the Communist elements in Great Britain was fully achieved.

To this Conference came not only the left groups referred to, but also some individual elements from the Left of the Independent Labour Party, the general line at this stage being not to encourage the Independent Labour Party lefts automatically to leave the Independent Labour Party, but to work within with a view to detaching the best elements and winning them over to the Communist Party. The Communist Party of Great Britain was now a united party of all the best revolutionary elements in the country.

* No connection with John Maclean the revolutionary school teacher. The latter never joined the Communist Party of Great Britain.

CHAPTER IV

THE Communist Party of Great Britain as we have seen was born in a period of sharp struggle. The radicalization of the working class of 1911–12 was continued in 1916–17–18 and in 1919–20 assumed a revolutionary character which continued up to 1921. In this period the industrial working class was advancing. The discontent in the armed forces was running parallel with it. The capitalist "prosperity" after a brief period of gambling and speculation collapsed, and if the working class failed to advance to the open struggle for power this was clearly due to a series of influences: first, to the absence of a Communist Party having wide mass influence among the workers, and with an ability to lead, and secondly, the still powerful influence of the labour bureaucracy, which was collaborating with the bourgeoisie.

The Communist Party tried to break through the sectarian traditions it had brought over from the old socialist groups, and endeavoured to follow Lenin's advice by going to the masses. The first move of the party immediately after its formation was the application for affiliation to the Labour Party. The following letter was sent to the Executive Committee of the Labour Party:

10 August, 1920.

Dear Sir,

At a National Convention Sunday, 31 July and 1 August the Communist Party of Great Britain was established; the resolutions adopted by the Convention defining the objects, methods and policy of the Communist Party:

(*a*) The Communists in conference assembled declare for the Soviet (or Workers' Council) system as a means whereby the working class shall achieve power and take control of the forces of production; declare for the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary means for combating the counter-revolution during the transition period between capitalism and communism, and stand for the adoption

of these means as steps towards the establishment of a system of complete communism wherein all the means of production shall be communally owned and controlled. The Conference therefore established itself the Communist Party on the foregoing basis and declares its adherence to Third International.

(*b*) The Communist Party repudiates the reformist view that a social revolution can be achieved by the ordinary methods of Parliamentary democracy, but regards Parliamentary and electoral action generally as providing a means of propaganda and agitation towards the revolution. The tactics to be employed by the representatives of the party elected to Parliament or local bodies must be laid down by the party itself according to national or local circumstances. In all cases representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the party and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit. In the event of any representative violating the decision of the party as embodied in the mandate which he or she has accepted, the resignation follows of his or her membership of Parliament or municipality and also of the party.

(*c*) That the Communist Party shall be affiliated to the Labour Party. At a meeting of the Provisional Executive Committee held on Sunday last we were directed to send you the foregoing resolutions and to make application for the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party.

Yours faithfully,

ARTHUR MACMANUS, *Chairman.*
ALBERT INKPIN, *Secretary.*

The Labour Party Executive Committee sent the following reply:

11 September.

Dear Mr. Inkpin,

Your letter of 10 August was placed before the National Executive of the Labour Party at their meeting at Portsmouth on Wednesday last, 8th inst.

My Executive fully considered the resolutions adopted by the Convention defining the objects, methods and policy of the Communist Party as set out in your letter. They also

considered your application for the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party.

After full consideration of the resolutions and your request it was resolved that the application for affiliation be declined, and I was instructed to inform you that the basis of affiliation to the Labour Party is the acceptance of its constitution, principles and programme, with which the objects of the Communist Party do not appear to be in accord.

I am,
Yours faithfully,
ARTHUR HENDERSON, *Secretary.*

To this reply of the Labour Party the Provisional Executive of the Communist Party of Great Britain sent the following letter:

23 September, 1920.

RT. HON. ARTHUR HENDERSON, M.P.,
The Labour Party,
33 Eccleston Square, S.W.1.

Dear Sir,

Your letter of the 11th, stating that the Labour Party Executive had declined the affiliation of the Communist Party was considered at the last meeting of our Provisional Executive. In reply, we were directed to request that the reasons for the decision be more explicitly stated, in order that the relations of the two bodies may be more clearly defined and understood.

The affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party is declined on the ground that its objects "do not appear to be in accord" with the constitution, principles and programme of the Labour Party—a decision which, as you have no doubt noted, has been warmly applauded in the columns of the capitalist press. But the working men and women of this country, to whom both the Labour Party and the Communist Party appeal, will look for a more reasoned explanation of this decision than is given in your letter of 11 September. The object of the Communist Party, as set forth in the resolutions of our National Convention already sent you, is "the establishment of a

system of complete Communism, wherein the means of production shall be communally owned and controlled." Does the Labour Party Executive rule that the acceptance of Communism is contrary to the constitution, principles and programme of the Labour Party? Or is it the methods of the Communist Party to which exception is taken? Those methods are the adoption of "the Soviet (or Workers' Council) System as a means whereby the working class shall achieve power and take control of the forces of production," and the establishment of "the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary means of combating the counter-revolution during the transition period between capitalism and communism." Does the Labour Party Executive decisively and categorically reject the Soviet system and the dictatorship of the proletariat? Does it propose to exclude from its ranks all those elements at present in the Labour Party who hold these means to be necessary in order to achieve the political, social and economic emancipation of the workers, and does it impose acceptance of parliamentary constitutionalism as an article of faith on its affiliated societies?

The Communist Party in deciding to make application for affiliation to the Labour Party did not suppose that the whole of its principles, methods and policy would find acceptance on the part of those who at present constitute the Executive of the Labour Party. But it understood the Labour Party to be so catholic in its composition and constitution that it could admit to its ranks all sections of the working-class movement that accept the broad principles of independent political action, at the same time granting them freedom to propagate their own particular views as to the policy the Labour Party should pursue and the tactics it should adopt. And having regard to the past history of the Labour Party, particularly during the War and since peace, that belief was justified. Since when has the practice of the Labour Party changed in this respect? Is affiliation of the Communist Party declined because it claims the same measure of freedom as has been granted to responsible leaders of the Labour Party during the last six years? And do the members of the Independent Labour Party, who constitute a large section, if not an actual

majority, of the Labour Party Executive, deny the Communist Party the liberty of action inside the Labour Party that was claimed and exercised by them and their organization during the period of the War?

These are questions that arise out of your letter of the 11th inst. They are questions we are entitled to submit, and feel justified in seeking for a reply to.

Yours fraternally,

ARTHUR MACMANUS, *Chairman.*
ALBERT INKPIN, *Secretary.*

There have been some differences of opinion on the form of the first application. Some comrades were inclined to think that the letter was too sharp and rather calculated to invite rejection by the Labour Party. Apparently from this point of view some kind of subterfuge should have been resorted to in order to get accepted by the Labour Party. In the opinion of the author the letter was correct, because the reply of 23 September and the subsequent discussion with the Labour Party Executive showed that, whatever illusions we might have, the Labour Party Executive certainly had none.

Henderson, as we know, had been in the Coalition Government, had been associated with the Second International chauvinists and had considerable international experience to guide him. He had already been to Soviet Russia, and it would not be difficult for him to realize what Bolshevism and Communism meant in England.

When the Labour Party refused the application for affiliation, another question arose, a very important one at that stage, one which might have decided the fate of the Party for the future period, namely, whether, being rejected, we should accept the situation, and go out into the wilderness and run our little party as a sect. This was a serious danger at the time. The ultra-Lefts calculated upon being rejected, and upon the party, being rejected, following their advice and cutting itself away entirely from any association with the Labour Party. But the party decided otherwise. Bearing in mind the advice of Lenin and the discussion at the Second Congress of the C.I., our tactic then was not to accept a refusal by the Labour Party, but to carry the campaign into

the country; that is, to go to the local Labour Parties, to the trade union branches, and put forward the claims of the party's right as a working-class organization to belong to what was a federal movement of trade unions and workers' organizations.

In carrying the campaign into the local organizations, we were met by a variety of circumstances. Some local Labour Parties, dominated by reactionary elements who had found the Communists troublesome, naturally took the opportunity to follow the lead of Henderson and the Labour Party Executive, to exclude the Communists from the local Labour Parties. In other localities, where the Communists had been already working well and had influence in trade union organizations and the local workers' movement, the local parties were inclined to be sympathetic and not to take any action against the Communists.

The whole content of this campaign raised the question of Soviets versus the parliamentary democracy, and brought to the front the question of the role of violence in the struggle for power. When the sub-committee of our Executive met the Labour Party Executive, which they did subsequently, the whole discussion turned on the question of parliamentary democracy or Soviets. Henderson raised it very sharply, and quoted the Second Congress thesis to us to show that there was nothing in common between the policy of the Communist Parties and the policy of the Labour Party, and, further, raised the question of violence as a method in the struggle for power.

Our retort to Henderson at that time (these conversations took place after the Councils of Action had been formed) was that the Labour Party Executive itself had resorted to unconstitutional action in the past and itself was not averse to taking direct action—for example, the Councils of Action—and, therefore, such action, which we considered was correct, was the kind of action which the Communist Party envisaged in the future struggles of the working-class movement. At the same time we defended the form of Soviets as against parliamentary democracy, and justified direct action and revolutionary class violence as a method in the struggle for power.

The next period consisted in a struggle for the right of the Communist Party to belong to the Labour Party with the

full rights of an affiliated organization. The influx of the Liberal elements into the Labour Party provided us with an excellent contrast. We were able to point to the fact that many of our members had many years' standing in the trade union movement, were bona fide working men and women who had always been devoted to the working-class movement, that with the liberal and aristocratic elements that were now coming into the Labour Party we had nothing in common and that our party was really closer to the fundamental objects of the trade union organizations and the labour movement, which comprised the bulk of the Labour Party, than those liberal elements. We utilized all these arguments in the general campaign within the trade union and local Labour Party organizations. We continued to carry on the struggle for the right to attend Labour Party Congresses as delegates.

Meantime the imperialist war of intervention in Soviet Russia had taken another turn, in the Polish—Russian war. The British Government had promised support to the white generals. It not only had promised support, but was sending munitions to Poland. The "Hands off Russia" committee had been carrying on extensive propaganda and in this period was exceptionally active. On 10 May, 1920, the dock workers in the East India Docks, London, refused to load munitions on to a boat called the *Jolly George* destined for Poland. The coaling workers refused to load the bunkers with coal. This had a tremendous effect on the whole labour movement throughout the country. The mass of the workers, moreover, were war weary, and the soldiers, disillusioned.

Already in June of this year (1921), the conference of the executive committees of the unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress had responded to the mass pressure and demanded from the Government the withdrawal of the troops from Russia. This was a signal to the Government of the difficult position they were in with regard to the reliability of the labour bureaucracy. On 15 August, another and wider labour conference was held in the Central Hall in London, where strong speeches were made by all the labour leaders and an ultimatum was given to the Government to stop the sending of munitions, and withdraw the troops. This conference further took a decision to form a Central Council of Action and stimulate the local councils.

Our party at this time, knowing that the conference was coming, had made application for credentials on the grounds that we considered our question of affiliation was still pending and that we were entitled to be represented at such a conference. These credentials were refused; instead, we got fraternal guest tickets for the platform. The Communist Party, however, was not entirely isolated. We had contact with a number of militant Left elements among the trade unions and local Labour Parties, and these were organized to carry on a campaign on the floor of the congress. The circumstances which determined the Government to capitulate were clear: first, the general radical mood of the masses, second, the unreliability of the troops (as we have already seen from the activities among the demobilized soldiers), and third, the unreliability of the labour bureaucracy, who already, in June, had been forced to put demands to the Government, thus proving that the Government was not strong enough to carry on an open war policy. These circumstances compelled the Government to stay its hand.

The Communist Party took an active part in organizing the "Councils of Action," and through the trade union movement and local labour parties carried on a campaign of protest against the war policy of the Government. When the Government threatened the leaders of the "Councils of Action," the party issued the following statement:

A Warning

The Government's reply to the Council of Action, threatening suppression if foreign policy is interfered with, and then proclaiming that there was no perceptible difference between the position of both the Government and the Council of Action, is a subtle indication of the policy to be pursued throughout the present crisis. No action will be taken meantime to impede the Council of Action, and the present war situation between Russia and Poland will be allowed to develop.

The Government is trusting to the Polish workers revolting ultimately against the mad imperialist policy of those at present in power in Poland, and know perfectly well that any such revolt must reflect itself in the formation of Soviet Councils of administration. Then, in the hope of

splitting labour's ranks, they will turn to those labour leaders whose antipathy to the Soviet idea is well known and say: "There you are, Russia has imposed a Soviet government upon Poland. Will you support their policy now?" hoping that this will suffice to sow disintegration amongst the workers of this country.

We feel compelled to issue this warning at this juncture, and counsel the working class to be fortified against such a possibility. Poland must be just as free to choose a Soviet form of government as any capitalist form of government.

Despite misleading platitudes to the contrary, when revolution springs up in any country it is the duty of the working class to protect and assist that revolution. The workers must keep on the alert and avoid any conspired split in the ranks.

Arthur MacManus, *Chairman.*
Albert Inkpin, *Secretary.*

The Communist Party, however, was only able to issue revolutionary slogans, to give general advice. It was still too weak to play any decisive political role.

Now the first post-War crisis of capitalism had been partially overcome by this period, i.e., the problem of re-starting industries. The collapse of the "prosperity boom" raised a new problem—the problem of foreign markets. (British industrial production, in 1913 values, is estimated to have fallen by 12 per cent to 20 per cent, and British exports of manufactured goods, in 1913 values, to have fallen 27 per cent.*) These figures are sufficient to indicate that the problem now was a problem of foreign markets. In this connection the capitalists were not slow to utilize the labour bureaucracy in the campaign for "more production" and cheapness. The labour bureaucracy had already been carrying on such a campaign, linked up with the advocacy of industrial peace, in opposition to all strike movements. By 1921 the capitalists felt sufficiently strong to begin their offensive.

The strategy of the capitalists was to break the unity of the organized working class. It began with sectional attacks,

* For an analysis of this period see *Socialism and the Living Wage*, by R. P. Dutt.

taking the miners, engineers, shipbuilders in turn. This is an important phase of the movement at this time, because the sectional attacks made upon the workers were a factor in developing sympathetic struggles which culminated in the general strike of 1926. Each section began to realize that there was a definite policy being pursued by the capitalist class; that it could only be met by sympathetic and combined action, otherwise the whole trade union and working-class movement would suffer.

The capitalists decided to attack the miners first. Why? Because the mining industry formed one of the most important basic industries on which the capitalists depended for making their super-profits on the world market; secondly, because the miners had proved to be the most militant section of the working-class movement, and were already raising sharply the question of nationalization.

The employers' offensive against the miners was precipitated by the Government's decision to decontrol the mining industry several months before the appointed date, which had been fixed in 1920 to take place in August 1921. The policy of the Government in controlling the mining industry was to take advantage of the coal famine existing in Europe to extract the maximum of excess profits duty for the Government, together with substantial profits for the mineowners. But with the stimulation of the coal industry in France, the development of hydro-electricity in Italy; the infiltration of American coal into Europe and the deliveries of reparations coal from Germany, the bottom fell out of the market just at the time when the coalowners and miners were endeavouring to work out a permanent wages agreement.

The publication of the Government's intention to decontrol the mines in December 1920, and the subsequent meetings between the mineowners and the Board of Trade, leave no room for doubt as to the collusion between the Government and the mineowners, and that the latter calculated that a national lock-out would be necessary to enforce wage reductions if decontrol was carried through.

The mineowners demanded reductions in wages; stood for district agreements, and declared against the system of regulating wages by a national pool after control was raised. The miners' executive declared for resistance to the demands

made, intimated their willingness to accept reductions in wages in accordance with the reduction in the cost of living, but insisted on a national pool to maintain a reasonable level of wages. The Government and the mineowners declared the demand for a national pool to be a political one, and the stage was set for a fight.

Public meetings of the executives of the Transport Workers' Federation and the National Union of Railwaymen, the other two partners to the Triple Alliance, were held, and declared for action in support of the Miners' Federation. On 8 April the Triple Alliance met and decided to take strike action in support of the miners; notices being issued to become operative at midnight on Tuesday, 12 April. The miners called out the safety men. Immediately a howl went up in the capitalist Press. The Prime Minister (Lloyd George) demanded that the safety men should resume work. The miners were prepared to discuss it with all other conditions. A deputation from the National Union of Railwaymen and the Transport Workers' Federation, behind the backs of the miners, met the Prime Minister and a compromise was reached on the question of the safety men.

Negotiations were reopened on 11 April, at a joint meeting of the Government, the mineowners and Miners' Federation. The miners repeated their conditions, and the owners and the Government remained obdurate on the question of control and the national pool. During these negotiations the Triple Alliance postponed notices for strike action from 12 April to the 15th. The Government made proposals on 12 April, viz., to reject the national pool, to fix wages in each district in accordance with the financial position of the district, to set up a National Wages Board, with a temporary subsidy to mitigate the rapid reductions in wages in the districts severely affected. These conditions the miners rejected.

When the miners met the Triple Alliance on 13 April negotiations had broken down. The locomotive men, the electricians, railway clerks were all ready to strike. The Co-operative Wholesale Society offered to help. The Distributive Workers' Union submitted a scheme to the Triple Alliance for the distribution of food. On the night before the strike notices were to expire, Frank Hodges, the Miners' Secretary, addressed a meeting of Members of Parliament in

the House of Commons. He was asked if he would be prepared to accept a reduction in wages, leaving the question of the National Board or the pool to be later determined. His reply was that they would be prepared to consider such a proposal if it was made. In the morning Lloyd George sent a letter to the Miners' Executive incorporating this suggestion. The miners repudiated the statement of Hodges, and so informed the Triple Alliance, which tried to persuade the miners to accept the position. The miners refused, whereupon the other unions called off the strike on the grounds that the miners refused to enter into negotiations. The miners' lock-out dragged on for eleven weeks, but their position became hopeless and defeat inevitable after this desertion by the Triple Alliance. It was thus that 15 April, 1921, came to be known as Black Friday.

The Communist Party carried on a big campaign in the mining areas for strike action. In the country generally there was carried on an active agitation encouraging the workers to support the claims and demands of the miners. From the experience of the role of the labour leaders at that time, the principal slogan of the party to the workers was "Watch your leaders; it is your wages they want." The party had a brilliant cartoonist at that time, who pilloried J. H. Thomas and Bob Williams mercilessly in the *Communist*, and led to J. H. Thomas bringing a libel action, which will be mentioned later. Bob Williams was still in the party, but he had so completely capitulated to Thomas and his colleagues, and betrayed the miners so shamefully, that he was expelled.

The Emergency Powers Act was put into full force in this period.

From the outbreak of the War in 1914 the country was governed by means of the Defence of the Realm Act, i.e., by Orders in Council (a meeting of the King with just a few members of the Privy Council selected by him is considered as a meeting of the Privy Council, and a resolution passed at such a meeting and published is an Order in Council). The regulations under the Defence of the Realm Act were in process of being annulled and repeal of the Act itself was under consideration. A new Act was considered necessary in view of the strike movements, and this was passed in the autumn of 1920, under the title of Emergency Powers Act.

This Act was designed, not for any specific occasion, but to meet any contingency that might arise in future.

In addition to the special powers given to the regular officers of the State, an additional apparatus of Emergency Officers was created. "The country is divided into ten or twelve districts, each under a Civil Commissioner, who, together with his officers, possesses dictatorial powers and works in conjunction with the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, while right down to the smallest units of local government a special organization for enforcing the Emergency Powers Act is set up. Arrest and imprisonment on a large scale is made easy."* The Government occupied Hyde Park with troops and made a big display of military force. The treachery of the leaders on Black Friday was a warning to our party and to the workers what to expect in the future.

With the collapse of the Triple Alliance, the party put forward the slogan of a General Staff of Labour. The executive of the T.U.C. bore a loose federal character with no authority, no central powers. The demand for a General Staff of Labour was a correct slogan at this period, particularly following the collapse of the Triple Alliance, and was intended to give some lead to the large body of trade unionism and labour organization. For this slogan the party carried on a campaign in the trade unions. It is from the Cardiff Congress of the T.U.C. (1921) that the General Council was formed and became the co-ordinating body for the trade unions affiliated to Congress. Its powers were limited. It was merely a co-ordinating body and not really a directing staff, but it was considered then the beginnings of a General Staff for Labour.

A considerable propaganda, initiated by the Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions, which had been formed about this time, was carried on in nearly all the trade union organizations. This Bureau had been set up to develop revolutionary trade unionism and to build a revolutionary trade union organization. The discussion amongst the South Wales miners led to a vote being carried for affiliation to the R.I.L.U. John T. Murphy was organizer of the bureau at this time. Murphy had returned after the Second Congress to set up this bureau and develop an organization for the

* R. P. Arnot's *The General Strike.*

R.I.L.U., which was to hold its first congress in Moscow in 1921. Without consultation with the party leadership he imitated the federal structure of the party, and set up district organizations, so that in effect he duplicated the party machinery, leading to considerable confusion amongst the party organizations in the districts.

It was arising out of the decisions of the South Wales Miners' Federation, and the events of the miners' strike movement, in which we had been active, including an attempt to penetrate the armed forces, particularly in Fifeshire, that the author sent an information letter to Lenin,* following a talk with Lenin on England. The remarks in Lenin's letter deserve serious study as an important political document. Such remarks, for instance, that we have as yet no mass communist movement in the country, that we are still very weak. Lenin welcomed the decision of the South Wales Miners' Federation as a beginning perhaps of a new era, but with some reservations.

Fraternizing with the army and propaganda work among the soldiers Lenin considered as an essential condition for membership in the Communist International. That is why he drew attention to this kind of work as a test of the validity of the claims of the South Wales miners to join the R.I.L.U.

Attention had been drawn to the communal kitchen movement which had been set up in Fife with a certain success, and which had been supported by the co-operative movement, in which the Fife Communist members were very strongly represented. This movement in Fifeshire, connected with the co-operative movement, showed the economic resources which the proletariat could utilize in the course of the class struggle. Lenin shows characteristic acumen here in declaring that the capitalists are astute enough not to be averse to supporting communal kitchens.

For Lenin the question of the political struggle was the most important thing. He considered that for this it was necessary to have a mass party in the country as the leading force in all the movements of the workers, to apply the resolutions of the Third Congress of the Communist International and to issue a daily paper. This was the first mention of a daily paper for our party.

* See *Lenin On Britain* for Lenin's reply.

As an acid test of the South Wales miners' sincerity in wishing to become affiliated to the R.I.L.U. Lenin proposed that they should establish a paper of their own, pay for it by subscriptions and distribute it themselves. This paper, Lenin advised, should not be too revolutionary, that is, it should be prepared in such a way as to be acceptable to the more backward masses of the Welsh miners, and from that lead on to becoming more sharply outspoken in a communist direction. Furthermore, of the three editors one should be a non-Communist, while two certainly should be genuine workers. This advice of Lenin is now embodied in the general practice of the whole Communist International, of getting the mass movement itself to support its own press, to make sacrifices for the extension of the press; of carrying on political work, of ensuring that the leading forces of the party are genuine proletarian elements. This differs from the line of the old Social Democratic Parties, which were led by intellectuals and bureaucratic elements divorced from the living mass struggle of the workers.

Our resolution at this Miners' Conference was not supported by genuine party-influenced miners. It rather represented a sentiment of the times inspired by agitation and propaganda, with no deep-rooted force in the minds of the mass of the workers. And this is easily understood when we consider that the party at this time was extremely feeble in South Wales, as in some other sections of the country.

The collapse of the Triple Alliance and the defeat of the miners was the signal for an attack all along the line. Wage-cuts were made on shipyard workers, engineers, boiler-makers, seamen, cotton workers and agricultural workers. The "National Industrial Conference" was dissolved and the railways decontrolled. The agricultural acts were repealed, the Trade Board Acts were modified and a wholesale clearance was made of all those measures of state control and forms of interference with private industry set up during the period of the War.

Here we must mention the unemployed movement. Unemployment had been increasing rapidly. Already a number of local groups of unemployed had been set up and considerable activity was going on in the localities, parti-

cularly in those areas where demobilized soldiers were clamouring for work. Subsequently a conference was held in the Bookbinders Hall in Clerkenwell. At this conference twelve boroughs in the London area were represented and a Council was elected. The conference appointed a secretary and an organizer. Wal Hannington was appointed organizer of the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement, and has remained its most outstanding leader.

The principal slogan of this movement was "Work or Maintenance at Full Trade Union Rates." Up to the formation of the N.U.W.C.M. the character of the unemployed movement was one in which appeals were made for assistance in charitable forms. Generally speaking, the nature of the movement was the collection and disbursing of funds with the result that there was considerable discord in the ranks and much corruption in the movement. Nevertheless many big demonstrations were organized against the local authorities and the central government.

The unemployed demanded halls where they could meet for social gatherings and carry on their business meetings. The demand was put, for example, to the Islington Town Council, London, for the use of the local library. The demand was refused, whereupon the unemployed seized the building, barricaded themselves inside and put on a guard. For three weeks they occupied this building, until their vigilance began to flag. The police made a raid on them, took the guard by surprise, overpowered those inside and cleared the building. A week later, the unemployed returned to the charge, stormed the Town Hall and fought with the police, several being injured and many arrests made. The same action was taken by the unemployed in many other towns.

Similar movements took place at the factories, groups of the unemployed making a demonstration—as, for instance, at the Ediswan factory—going inside, a detachment storming the office, and taking control of the telephone, while other delegates would go into the shop and address the employed workers against working overtime and against accepting reduced wages, demanding general support for the demands of the unemployed. The burning of the Luton Town Hall further illustrates the mood of the workers at this period.

On 11 November, Armistice Day, 1921, about 40,000

unemployed formed into a demonstration, and marched to the Cenotaph, Whitehall, London, with a huge wreath bearing the Soviet design of the hammer and sickle. The inscription, which we quote here, reflects the mood of the unemployed:

> "To the victims of capitalism, who gave their lives on behalf of Rent, Interest and Profit; from the survivors of the Peace, who are suffering worse than death from the unholy trinity."

Needless to say the Communist Party took a very active part in this unemployed movement. Its leading comrades were party members and worked in the closest collaboration with the Party Central Committee. The party indeed was the main inspirer of the whole of this movement of the unemployed.

In connection with the struggle of the miners and other strike movements, and with the activities of the unemployed at this time, hundreds of the party members were arrested in different parts of the country. During this period the party had published the theses of the Second Congress and the first edition of the *Communist International* to be printed in England, which appeared in the year 1921. The police made a raid on the central offices of the party. They stripped the walls, took everything out of the office and arrested A. Inkpin, the general secretary. He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for the publication of the theses as illegal documents, for seditious libel, and the advocacy of methods of violence. Since then the theses of the Second Congress in their entirety have not been published in English—a big gap in our literature, because they are very important documents, especially on trade union work, work in agriculture and methods of organization.

To add to this attack by the Government, Thomas followed by taking out proceedings for libel, in connection with the events of Black Friday, against the party and the *Communist*, the circulation of which in this period reached 60,000 copies. Arthur MacManus, the chairman of the party, and Francis Meynell, the editor of the *Communist*, were summoned to appear at court. As a result of these proceedings Thomas

was awarded damages of £2,000 against the *Communist* and the party.

Next came the struggle of the engineers on the question of managerial functions. During the War when the State needed munitions, engineering workers had pressed for concessions in wage demands, working conditions, etc. which they gained under pressure of strike action or threats or strikes. To deal with this situation there had grown up an elaborate network of machinery in the shape of the Munitions of War Acts, Conciliation Boards, Arbitration Courts, Welfare Committees, etc. Nevertheless, in spite of this machinery, and in some cases influenced by this machinery, the authority of the Shop Stewards grew enormously in shop management.

With the end of the War, and the increase in unemployment, the engineering unions sought to relieve the position of their members by seeking to restrict the working of overtime. In 1920 an agreement was reached between the Executive of the A.E.U. and the employers that they be allowed "30 hours per month on production work, with special provision for repair work where necessary." But the question arose, who is to determine when repair work is necessary? The union insisted on their right to discuss all cases and to give consent or otherwise. The employers challenged this right of the unions, and negotiations took place between them.

At a meeting held on 17 and 18 November, 1921, the following memorandum was drawn up and agreed to by both parties:

I. General

1. The trade union shall not interfere with the right of the employers to exercise managerial functions in their establishments, and the federations shall not interfere with the proper functions of the trade union.

2. In the exercise of these functions the parties shall have regard to the Provisions for Avoiding Disputes of 17 April, 1914, which were amplified by the shop stewards and works committee agreement, of 20 May, 1919, and to the terms of their national and local agreements between the parties.

3. Instructions of the management shall be observed

pending the question in connection therewith being discussed in accordance with the provisions referred to.

II. Overtime

It is agreed that in terms of the overtime and night management of 29 and 30 September, 1920, the employers have the right to decide when overtime is necessary, the workpeople or their representatives being entitled to bring forward under the provisions referred to any case of overtime they desire discussed.

Meantime, the overtime required shall be proceeded with.

This memorandum since known as the "York Memorandum" when put to the members of the A.E.U. was decisively rejected, and a lock-out took place which lasted for fourteen weeks. The employers, led by Sir Allan Smith, under cover of the claim that the issue was really a political question, viz., "control over the means of production," and not merely a question of joint management, carried on a stubborn fight and subsequently succeeded in securing the right to determine shop conditions, including payment by results, with the proviso of "an agreement for the avoidance of disputes." In addition to a reduction in the basic rates of wages, the engineers lost 16s. 6d. from the "War Bonus," deducted in three instalments.

The Communist Party and the Bureau of the R.I.L.U. carried on a mass agitation for assistance to the engineers, but with the disunity in the workers' ranks following the collapse of the Triple Alliance on Black Friday, they were not able to avert defeat.

The Third Congress of the party was held in Manchester in 1921 where the organizational resolution on the structure of the party was adopted. Hitherto, the Central Committee had been elected by districts sending delegates to the Central Executive. The Central Executive appointed a sub-committee to function during the interval between meetings of the Central Committee. In the districts, committees were formed from the local branches, each branch sending a delegate to a district committee.

The defects in this structure are clearly obvious now.

It followed the old federal lines of the Social Democratic organizations. Democratic autonomy of branches and districts was strong at this time, a heritage of the old socialist traditions and groups. For instance, in the Central Committee executive members when speaking always spoke *on behalf of their district*, represented their districts, and acted like parliamentarians feeling obliged to make formal reports to their districts when they returned from the Central Committee meetings. With this, they considered their responsibilities at an end.

Much difficulty was experienced in trying to educate the comrades to recognize the necessity for central direction and executive responsibility for political leadership: that it was not enough for executive members to come to the Central Committee, hear reports, ask questions and delegate their authority to one or two officials, leaving them the responsibility for carrying through the policy. Much discussion and educational work had to be carried on to get these comrades to realize their responsibilities as executive members, and to break them from the old social democratic theory of formal representation by districts. In short, it was a struggle for the recognition of democratic centralism in the party.

It was on this question that Sylvia Pankhurst broke with the party. Sylvia Pankhurst continued to publish the *Workers' Dreadnought*. The Central Committee insisted upon the *Workers' Dreadnought* being under the control of the party, its editorial policy being controlled by the Central Committee. In short, a demand that the *Workers' Dreadnought* should become a party organ and not the private organ of Sylvia Pankhurst. This ruling she categorically refused to accept. After several discussions with her on this question, and when it was seen she had no intention of relinquishing control of the paper to the Central Committee, she was expelled.

To these defects of federalism, we have to add some others, such as the romanticism on the part of a few "ultra-lefts," which consisted in toying with illegal work, including military drill, without the consent of the Central Committee. There was also a strong sectarianism and persistence of the old social democratic methods of work which consisted principally in a failure to take part in mass struggles. Yet, another defect was the opportunism of a number of local councillors that had

been carried over into the party from the old socialist organizations.

The theses of the Third Congress put an end to this situation by the resolution on organization. The resolution on organization works out in detail the basic units of the Communist Party and the methods of carrying on our organizational work. Incidentally, while this resolution was modelled on thorough Bolshevik principles, as Lenin subsequently remarked at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International it followed too closely the Russian experiences and methods. Nevertheless it must be studied, however necessary it may be to apply it flexibly.

In December 1921 the first manifesto on united front tactics was issued by the Communist International. This resolution on organization and united front tactics was an expression of the recognition in practice by the Communist International of the second period—the period of partial stabilization of capitalism which followed the heavy defeats of the working class—a period of the systematic organization and preparation of the workers for future struggles. In this period the C.P.G.B. suffered in conjunction with other workers' organizations in respect of membership. Moreover, a number of intellectuals, including Ellen Wilkinson, Col. Malone, R. W. Postgate and Francis Meynell, began to drift out of our organization. They seized upon the deficiencies and weaknesses of organization as an excuse.

The general situation became so acute that a special commission* was appointed at the Party Policy Conference, St. Pancras, March, 1922, to inquire into the whole situation of the party and to make recommendations for reorganizing it on the basis of the Third Congress resolutions. The report of this special commission was made to the party congress in October, 1922 at Battersea and adopted as the basis for future organization. The net result of this commission's report was to scrap the federal character of the party organization, and to place it on a group and nuclei basis. The position of chairman was abolished, and in place of this a political bureau and organizing bureau was set up. The party organ, the *Communist*, had carried on the old socialist features of a

* The members of this Commission were R. P. Dutt, H. W. Inkpin and H. Pollitt.

magazine rather than a newspaper. The *Communist* sometimes carried huge articles of a propagandist and theoretical character only of interest to party members, but with no immediate mass value. It was necessary to alter this situation. The paper was therefore transformed, and in its place was established *The Workers' Weekly*, a new type of newspaper.

Yet another important decision was the institution of systematic party training. Party training was an innovation in the British workers' movement because it meant that henceforth so far as the Communist Party was concerned our education was to be based on living Marxism, to cease to be a formal academic teaching, i.e., to prepare party workers and to take an active part in the political class struggle. Inevitably it led to a conflict with the Plebs League, which had become the recognized organization for "Marxist" education.

On the Executive of the Plebs League were a majority of party members. The question at issue was the type of Marxian teaching. The Plebs League, although led by party members, continued their academic non-party teaching, and ignored the role of the party. A sharp article appeared in the *Labour Monthly* by R. P. Dutt criticizing the Plebs' form of teaching. This brought about a crisis in the Plebs League. The party appointed a special committee to meet the party members in the Executive of the Plebs League. The discussion concentrated around the question of the role of the Communist Party, and upon the recognition of the party as the leader of Marxist training and teaching. R. W. Postgate was particularly strong in his opposition. F. Horrabin less consistent but also against the party line. Winnie Horrabin wavered for a time, but followed the others and eventually drifted out of the party. Maurice Dobb alone of this group remained loyal to the party.

The proposals of the Commission adopted by the Party Congress met with considerable resistance in fact due on the one hand to an ideological unpreparedness on the part of many members for such novel and drastic changes, and on the other hand to a certain passivity and bureaucratic formalism in operating the decisions. This gave rise to the first serious crisis within the party and sharp differences within the Political Bureau and Central Committee. In 1923 the whole question of the application of the Third Congress

resolutions of the Communist International and of organization was thoroughly discussed by the Executive Council of the Communist International and the Political Bureau of the party.

The crisis which led to the special commission's report, the slow growth and inability to develop mass work, the difference with the Plebs College, and the question of the application of the Third Congress resolutions eventually led in 1923 to the Communist International discussing with the Political Bureau of the C.P.G.B. the whole question of organization. Out of this discussion, and with a view to bringing the party closer to the masses and mass work, emerged the establishment of the Minority Movement.

The Minority Movement at first was conceived not as a purely trade union and industrial organization. It was rather intended to be a broad workers' movement that would unite all left elements including trade unionists and Labour Party members. Eventually, however, it took the line of developing minority groups in industry, and particularly, in the trade union branches. The question of the Left Wing Labour Party comes at a later stage, and grew out of the unavoidable clash within the Labour Party between the Communists and the Labour Party bureaucracy, and the dissatisfaction on the part of a number of "left" Labour individuals and groups with Labour Party policy.

The Brighton Labour Party Congress followed the events of Black Friday. The party had been very active in assisting the miners and had established such a strong support in the mining areas that the miners' organization was prepared to support the question of Communist Party affiliation. We had influence in some other unions, for example, the Furnishing Trades and to a lesser extent among the engineers. From our calculations, the prospects were that at this Congress we were going to get 2,000,000 votes in favour of affiliation of the party to the Labour Party Congress. This led Henderson and the bureaucracy of the Labour Party to be content with an attack, but not to challenge the vote, and to postpone the question of affiliation so that they could better prepare their organization. These facts I think are a tribute to the general mass work in the period, and the influence the party had established in wide circles of the trade union movement.

The workers, however, saw mainly the attacks of the capitalists in this period. They were still influenced by the Labour leaders notwithstanding the experiences of Black Friday. They were affected still by the demagogy of the Labour leaders and the call for the return of a Labour Government. In the meantime the capitalists were faced with problems of international markets, reparations, and a series of internal problems—as a result, the Coalition Government broke down.

Notwithstanding the defeats of the workers during this period, in which the Labour Party assisted the ruling class, the party, in accordance with the line of the Executive Council of the Communist International, in March 1922 put forward the slogan of a Labour Government at the next elections. It continued Lenin's line of assisting the Labour Party with a view to exposing the Labour leaders and providing the workers with the experience that would bring them ultimately towards Communism. The Labour Party at the elections, early in 1923, made definite advances. They won 142 seats and polled 4,236,000 votes, and for the first time their votes exceeded the affiliated membership of the party. During this election our party put forward six members as candidates in the field, all of whom with the exception of Stewart, had local Labour support. J. Vaughan and W. Windsor (Bethnal Green, 2 seats), Saklatvala (Battersea), Stewart (Dundee), Geddes (Greenock), and Newbold (Motherwell). Of these Newbold and Saklatvala were elected. Newbold and Saklatvala had no Labour Party opponents.

The period after this election was marked by an outburst of anti-Soviet propaganda and violence. During the conference called at Lausanne by the imperialists to deal among other questions with Turkey and the problem of the Dardanelles, the Soviet Government was invited to take part in the proceedings. Vazlav Vorovsky, the Soviet Ambassador, was shot and killed by a Swiss-Russian fascist, named Conradi, the son of a former Petrograd chocolate merchant.

Almost simultaneously the occasion of the sinking of a British fishing boat in Northern Russian waters was made the pretext, by Lord Curzon, for handing the Soviet Government an insolent note demanding the recall of the Soviet Ambassadors from Kabul and Teheran; the recall of the Russian

secretary to the Delegation in London, Klisko; compensation for the shooting of an Englishman named Davidson in 1920, and for the arrest of the correspondent, Stan. Harding.

The Soviet Government refused to be intimidated by Curzon's threat. It pointed to the fact that Davidson had been executed in 1920 for his connection with a notorious fuel swindle, the proceeds of which were devoted to the maintenance of White Guardist and British spies. It quoted the evidence of spies which had been published in the newspapers. The Soviet Government reminded Curzon of the hundreds of Soviet citizens killed in Archangel by the British forces, and of the shooting of the twenty-six People's Commissars of Baku by the directions of "Tige" Jones.

With characteristic firmness, and a refusal to be provoked into war, the Soviet Government made the following proposals: It offered to work out an agreement over the fishing rights of foreign nations in Russian waters, to allow the English the right to engage in fishing outside the three-mile zone. It offered to pay compensation for the shooting of the engineer Davidson and for the arrest of Stan. Harding, although it possessed proofs that both of them were employed by the British Secret Service in Russia and declared its readiness to send Chicherin, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, to London to negotiate on the questions of the Middle East. Thanks to the firm and determined defence of the Soviet Government and the millions behind the Soviet power, Curzon was obliged to retreat.

During the debate in the House of Commons Walton Newbold was suspended. The President of the Board of Trade, an influential representative of the Federation of British Industries, was replying to the debate and took the opportunity to insinuate charges of propaganda against the Soviet Government. Newbold and Saklatvala had put their names down to speak, but were not called upon. Newbold challenged the Minister for examples and amid interruption accused him of telling falsehoods. The Deputy-Chairman called him to order, but Newbold exclaimed, "You have allowed things to be said against me all night and then you do not give me a chance to answer, like the bourgeois that you are." The question of suspension was put to the vote and carried by 300 to 88. The sergeant-at-arms was called in

but Newbold refused to leave. The Speaker had to be sent for and, amidst the greatest excitement, shouting and cross-shouting between the Tories and the Labour members, Newbold walked out.

The year 1923 was a year of crisis for the British ruling class. Unable to find a way out of the crisis, and torn with division in their own ranks, it stepped aside and allowed the Labour Party to form its first Labour Government on 24 January, 1924.

CHAPTER V

THE period from 1921 to the end of 1923 was a period of heavy defeats for the working class. The miners and the powerful Miners' Federation of Great Britain were dealt heavy blows and suffered reductions in wages and living standards, thanks to the black treachery of the opportunist reformist leadership of the Triple Alliance unions, including a section of its own leaders (Frank Hodges). The Engineering Union received a considerable set-back after its defeat on the question of managerial functions. Wage cuts were enforced all round, and the strength of the trade unions dropped from the peak year of 1920 when it mustered 8,340,000 members, to 4,250,000. The unemployed movement declined and the Communist Party, in common with the whole Labour movement, suffered a weakening in its membership.

In its estimation of the Labour Government the Communist International gave a timely warning to the British working class. It explained how the Labour Government was permitted to take office on account of the split in the ranks of the ruling class. It warned the workers against illusions of real betterment and put forward simple demands for the Labour Government, such as: full maintenance for the unemployed, nationalization of the mines and railways, with workers' control of production; freedom for Ireland, India and Egypt; credits for trade with Russia, and the repudiation of the Versailles Treaty. These general principles were a continuation of Lenin's line of assisting the working class to become disillusioned through the experience of a Labour Government, and, at the same time, guiding the Communist Party in the direction of becoming identified with the real political life of the country and the mass movement of the workers.

The first Labour Government was undoubtedly a landmark in the history of the working-class movement in England. At last the ambitions of the period of the nineties—the

period when the representation committees were being formed and developed with a view to sending a majority of Labour members to Parliament—were about to be materialized. The Labour leaders had been directing all the hopes and aspirations of the workers towards Parliament. We have seen how during the strike movements of 1911–12 they took a very decided line of opposition to all forms of strike action, against syndicalism, etc., and resisted the struggle of the workers to improve their living conditions by direct or strike action. We have also to recall how, during the War, the Labour Party had openly supported the Government's policy, and that the Labour leaders tied up the workers' organizations by the Treasury Agreement. Yet, despite this, despite the severe defeats following the War and the obvious demagogy of the Labour leaders, we have in this period a definite swing in the direction of support for the Labour Party.

We can say that this support for the Labour Party was due mainly to the opposition of millions of workers to the Government's attack on living standards since the end of the War. Temporarily defeated on the industrial field, still suffering largely from capitalist parliamentary illusions, they turned to the Labour Party as the only immediate alternative.

The capitalist politicians carried on an active propaganda campaign against the Labour Party. Articles appeared in the Press, books were written around the theme "Can Labour Govern?" There were two aims, however, in this ideological campaign: the first was to sow a certain amount of confusion in the ranks of the working class at a time when the working-class movement was advancing, and particularly in the direction of more and more support for a Labour Government, which if allowed to go unchallenged, might one day become a Government not in accordance with the laws of ordinary parliamentary democracy. The other aim was to warn and prepare the Labour leaders for such a possible eventuality. The very discussion—"Can Labour Govern?" extracted from the Labour leaders declarations of their objectives, afforded the ruling class a standard by which to estimate how far the Labour leaders were likely to go, and at the same time strengthened in the latter the principle of "continuity in government."

It was no accident that the Labour Party became a Govern-

ment. It was not a process in which the Labour Party got a majority of votes and therefore automatically became the Government. The ruling class leaders were divided and could not solve the problems that stood before them. That is why the Labour Party was allowed to form a Government. As we know, the Labour Government immediately dropped their chief slogans, on the pretence that they were only a minority and depended upon the support of the Liberals; that therefore it was not possible for them to carry through measures of socialism. What happened to their slogans—Nationalization of the mining industry, a capital levy, revision of the Versailles Treaty, unemployed relief and recognition of the U.S.S.R.? (We may note in passing that on the question of unemployment the "Left" Independent Labour Party members carried on a campaign of support for the Labour Government, contending that "Labour can conquer poverty," and in this way helped to swing a certain support behind the Labour Party.)

In the first place let us go into the question of why these particular slogans were adopted. We have seen from the history of the struggles of the miners that the question of nationalization of the mining industry was the chief plank in the programme of the Miners' Federation, and, like many other demands of the trade unions, was *ipso facto* adopted by the Labour Party. During the War when profiteering became a scandal the proposal for a capital levy was very popular amongst the masses, because it was an answer to the capitalist's argument against proposed social reforms: "Where was the money to come from?" The masses considered that, by imposing a levy upon the capitalists, it would be possible to finance the various social reforms demanded by the workers and advocated by the Labour Party.

The question of the revision of the Versailles Treaty formed part of the demagogic stock-in-trade of the Labour Party, which MacDonald in his criticism of the Tory Government utilized to the utmost. He had just returned from a world tour in which he had made himself familiar with the problems of the nationalist liberation movements in different sections of the Empire, as well as various international questions. With characteristic demagogy he placed responsibility for the immediate internal situation, not only of Great Britain but

of all Europe, on the foreign policy of the Government. He stressed the necessity for a radical change in foreign policy and a settlement of the disputes in Europe as a way out of the impasse, which meant a revision of the Versailles Treaty.

The popular support of the Soviet Government by the working class compelled the Labour Government to put the question of the recognition of the U.S.S.R. in the forefront of their programme. There is no doubt, however, that Labour leaders were attracted by the prospects of placing business orders in the Soviet Union, thus assisting them to fulfil their promises to the unemployed.

The first Labour Government coincided with a series of radical socialist governments in Europe; in France, a government led by the Radical-Socialist, Herriot; the Danish socialist government; the socialist-radical coalition in Germany. It was a period when the Second International gave vent to much talk and boasting about the opening of a new era of democratic peace; an era of peaceful growth towards socialism in which the problems of the world were to be solved by the democratic methods of the Second International.

However, when the Labour Government took office it was soon to reveal its true character. It dropped the question of the nationalization of the mines, of legalizing the seven-hour day, and carrying out the recommendations of the Sankey Commission. It dropped the question of the capital levy. With regard to the U.S.S.R., it raised the question of debts and the old Tory argument of international propaganda and interference in the affairs of the Empire, and made the settlement of these questions a condition of recognition. The reaction against this was, of course, very strong in this country amongst the working class. This, combined with the firm attitude of the Soviet Government, compelled the Labour Government to recognize the U.S.S.R. in the normal way, and then to discuss all outstanding questions afterwards.

The Labour Government adopted the Experts' Report and accepted the Dawes Plan for Germany. By this plan the enormous burden of yearly payments of £125,000,000 was placed upon the German people. German customs and excise duties were imposed; the State railways were denationalized and part of their revenue had to go to pay

Reparations; a transport tax was imposed. A part of the Reparations were capitalized by a £40,000,000 loan, upon which the German Government had to pay interest. Such was the crushing burden imposed upon the German working class (since the German capitalists and financiers sought ways of passing it on to the workers) by the party which had from the first repudiated the Versailles Treaty.

The Labour Government tried to make political capital out of the proposal to cancel the projected naval base at Singapore, but this did not prevent it from laying down new cruisers for the Navy. The colonies, like the British workers, thought that, now a Labour Government was in power, it would be possible to achieve many substantial reforms. India had been a cauldron of revolutionary unrest since the first days of the World War; mutinies in the army, boycott of British goods, general strikes, had been met by mass shootings (Armritsar), floggings, imprisonment, hanging, and general terrorist methods of rule. By 1922, 25,000 Indian patriots lay in prison on vague charges of "sedition," "dissatisfaction," and "waging war against the King." After the betrayal of the Civil Disobedience movement at Bardoli by Gandhi the militant mass movement assumed sharper, more revolutionary form. One of the first acts of MacDonald's Cabinet was to send a telegram to India telling the Indian masses that it was standing no nonsense, that "No party in Great Britain will be cowed by threats of force or by politics designed to bring the Government to a standstill." It followed this up by the infamous Bengal Ordinances and a series of arrests in Calcutta in which some Indian revolutionaries were given sentences up to four years.

In Egypt the Nationalist movement led by Zaghul Pasha also began to be aggressive and to put forward demands. Zaghul Pasha actually came to London to confer with MacDonald, but MacDonald refused to consider the claims of the Egyptian Nationalists. He laid down the same conditions as Baldwin had, namely, that British troops were necessary in Egypt to protect British property; the Suez Canal had to be protected by British troops; there could be no question of the Sudan being attached to Egypt (which is one of the Egyptian Nationalist claims); no question of the withdrawal of British sovereignty from Egypt. The Labour

Government followed MacDonald's refusal to make any concessions to the Egyptian Nationalists by voting some millions of pounds to a Sudan syndicate, a concern already paying 25 per cent dividend.

At this time the struggle for independence was going on in China. The National Revolutionary armies were beginning to move northward. Obedient to the will of its masters the Labour Government, by concentrating gunboats and troops in collaboration with the other imperialist powers ultimately checkmated the advance of the Nationalist Revolutionary movement in China and brought over Chiang-Kai-shek to the counter-revolution.

In the working-class movement at home there began a revival of militancy. Because the Labour Government was in power the workers thought this was the time to get their demands conceded. Big strike movements took place among the dockers, locomotive men, bus and tram men, and building workers. All of these put forward demands for higher wages and improved conditions of labour. The National Wages Board for the railwaymen under the 1920 act had declared for certain changes in wages. But these were unacceptable to the locomotive men, with the result that the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen went on strike. They were obliged to submit, partly because the N.U.R. not only failed to support them, but had decided to allow N.U.R. foremen to take the places of A.S.L.E.F. members, and partly because of the threat of the Labour Government to use naval ratings against the locomotive strikers. Tom Shaw, the Minister for Labour, declared in the House of Commons, "We have no sympathy with this unofficial strike, and all the resources of the Government will be used to prevent the four essential services—light, water, food and power—from being stopped."

Since 1923 there had been continuous grievances and complaints on the part of the dock workers. In February 1924 the dockers came on strike for a 2s. a day advance and the maintenance of casual workers. Certain advances were made to them and under threats of the Labour Government to use the Emergency Powers Act they returned to work.

In March the London tramwaymen and busmen came on strike and gained small concessions. In April the building

workers were faced with a demand by the employers for a reduction of 2d. an hour and an extension of working hours from 44 to 47 per week. The General Council of the T.U.C. characterized this attack upon the building workers as a general attack on all the workers; nevertheless in the Eastern counties 15,000 workers were locked out. Under pressure of the Labour Minister and the Government, the question of wages and an agreement went to arbitration, and the hours question was put to a regional ballot, for separate district settlement.

In December 1923 Frank Hodges, Secretary of the M.F.G.B., put forward the proposal for a three-months' trial of a proposed agreement for the miners and asked for an interview with the Government. An interview took place with the Prime Minister, but Hodges got nothing out of it. At the conference of miners' delegates held on 27 March a number of districts demanded the cancellation of all agreements and the calling of a strike. Hodges played one district off against the other and succeeded in getting a resolution passed in favour of district agreements, thus leading the Miners' Federation back to a position pleasing to the mineowners, viz., district agreements and county rivalry. In May the miners succeeded in gaining small wage increases, bringing their wages up to the minimum level of 1921, but these conditions were only to last for a year.

The railway shopmen, the jute workers, and the agricultural workers also came under the blows of the capitalist offensive. The Norfolk agricultural labourers were scaled down to 25s. a week for 50 hours. Thus the Labour Government, failing to carry through their promises of nationalization, by these miserably inadequate wage adjustments practically prepared the way for the upheaval that came about in 1925, and for the General Strike in 1926.

If we look at the number of strikes we see that from 628 in 1923, they rose to 710 in 1924. The number of workers taking part in strikes in 1923 was 405,000 and in 1924 613,000. All along the line the workers were putting forward claims for wage increases. This was symptomatic of the mood of the workers which coincided with the return of the Labour Government. The fact is that the Government not only refused openly to assist, but, as in the case of the dockers,

threatened them with the Emergency Powers Act, thus using the same means as Baldwin had done. The unemployed met a similar fate. The unemployed organized a march to London, expecting the Labour Government to treat them sympathetically, since relief of the unemployed was one of the party election slogans. Here again MacDonald took up the same attitude as Baldwin, refusing to meet the representative of the marchers, or to discuss the question of assistance to the unemployed.

At the Labour Party Conference held in London, 1924, the question of the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party again occupied a prominent place in the conference proceedings. There were three resolutions voted on the question.

(1) The recommendation of the Executive Committee of the Labour Party that affiliation be refused. (This was carried by 3,805,000 votes for, and 193,000 against.)

(2) That no member of the Communist Party should be eligible for endorsement as a Labour candidate for Parliament. (Carried by 2,456,000 votes for, and 654,000 against.)

(3) That no member of the Communist Party be eligible for membership of the Labour Party. (Carried by 1,804,000 votes for, and 1,540,000 against.)

The significance of these votes will be appreciated if the reader remembers that while the Communist Party had a considerable support from local organizations, the bloc vote of the biggest unions, usually influenced by the high officials, was swung behind the policy of the Labour bureaucratic officials thus submerging the real strength of support for the Communist Party.

The Communist International in this period opened a world-wide campaign against the war danger and in favour of support for the colonial peoples, particularly the Chinese revolution. Our party, mindful of the experience of the Labour Government, carried on active propaganda addressed to the troops. This campaign culminated in the following Open Letter to the fighting forces issued in connection with the 4 August anti-war demonstrations, and ultimately led to the arrest of the editor of the *Workers' Weekly*, J. R. Campbell.

Prevent War To-morrow by Fighting Capitalism To-day

(An Open Letter to the Fighting Forces)

Comrades, you never joined the Army or Navy because you were in love with warfare, or because you were attracted by the glamour of the uniform. In nine cases out of ten you were compelled to join the Services after a long fight against poverty and misery, caused by prolonged unemployment.

Once in the Services you are subjected to a military discipline that bears down upon you in an ever-increasing manner.

Repressive regulations and irksome restrictions are intentionally imposed upon you. And when war is declared, you are supposed to be filled with a longing to "beat the enemy." The enemy consists of working men like yourselves living under the same slave conditions. But the Government not only organizes Services for war, it always keeps them fully equipped to be able to crush their own workers when the need arises.

Have you ever noticed how in large strikes and lock-outs, all the newspapers condemn the strikers, and talk about maintaining the "essential services and the food supplies"? Have you forgotten that during the Tonypandy strike of railwaymen in 1911, the soldiers were used and workers were shot? That gunboats were used by Asquith to defeat the dockers in 1912? That troops were used at Liverpool against the transport workers in 1912? Have you forgotten how the Labour Government threatened to use naval men during the dockers' strike this year? How in the tramway strike the Government threatened to introduce E.P.A., which would have forced many of you to have shot your own brothers and fathers? Have you forgotten the miners' lock-out in 1921, when the Reserves were called out, and Hyde Park was turned into a military camp in order that a large section of the Army could be ready to suppress any action that might take place as a result of the Triple Alliance strike?

Soldiers, sailors, airmen, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, the Communist Party calls upon you to begin

the task of not only organizing passive resistance when war is declared, or when an industrial dispute involves you, but to definitely and categorically let it be known that, neither in the class war nor a military war, will you turn your guns on your fellow workers, but instead will line up with your fellow workers in an attack upon the exploiters and capitalists and will use your arms on the side of your own class.

Form committees in every barracks, aerodrome or ship. Let this be the nucleus of an organization that will prepare the whole of the soldiers, sailors, and airmen, not merely to refuse to shoot strikers during industrial conflicts, but will make it possible for the workers, peasants and soldiers, sailors and airmen, to go forward in a common attack upon the capitalists and smash capitalism for ever, and institute the reign of the whole working class.

Refuse to shoot your fellow workers!

Refuse to fight for profits!

Turn your weapons on your oppressors!

The arrest of Campbell played a decisive part in the subsequent downfall of the Government. It created a tremendous reaction throughout the Labour movement. The mass pressure engendered was reinforced by the disillusionment amongst wide sections of the workers as to the Labour Government, and forced the Government to withdraw its case against Campbell.

In the meantime the negotiations with the Soviet Delegation were dragging on. The Communist Party urged upon the Labour Government the following programme—a programme reflecting the militancy in the trade union and working-class movement and the demand for working-class solidarity with the first Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Republic.

1. Not a penny of compensation for shareholders, property owners or any other elements who worked or fought against the Soviet Government.

2. £100 million loan to U.S.S.R. (amount spent on British support of Kolchak and Denikin).

3. Dispatch of a British Ambassador, nominated by the General Council of the T.U.C. to Moscow.

4. Repudiation of the British approval given to the Rumanian seizure of Bessarabia.

5. Joint action with the Soviet Government to summon a world Disarmament Conference, to which the workers' organizations in each country shall send a number of delegates equal to those of their respective governments.

The bankers took up a very strong attitude against granting credit to the Soviet Union and issued a manifesto attacking the policy of the Labour Government. The Liberals and the Tories were drawn together and the Government resigned on 9 October, 1924. Campbell was made the exciting cause for the defeat of the Government. The Tories backed this up during the election campaign by the famous forged letter that was supposed to come from Zinoviev, and to be signed by Zinoviev and MacManus. The cowardly faltering and attitude of MacDonald on this question practically condoned this forgery. This decided the fate of the Labour Party at the elections on 29 October. It was heavily defeated.

Our party issued a pamphlet at this period which gave the history of the "Zinoviev" letter, and carried on an active campaign exposing this base forgery. The Executive Council of the Communist International invited a delegation from the T.U.C. to visit the Communist International headquarters and opened the archives in order that they might search for evidence of any contribution by Zinoviev or MacManus which would prove that this letter was genuine. They came but found nothing. MacManus, in a speech in the Ardwick Theatre, Manchester, on 26 October, challenged the authorities to arrest him for treason, but no action was taken. It was later positively established during the trial by a Soviet Court of Drujilovsky, a manufacturer of forgeries, that it was a document forged by the Russian whites in Germany, and used by the Tories very skilfully in order to defeat the Labour Party at the polls. (See *The Zinoviev Letter, The Case for a Full Investigation*, published by the Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, London.)

This use of forged documents was no chance matter. It had been part of the stock-in-trade of the Russian counter-revolution since the October days of 1917. It shows to what depths our opponents are prepared to stoop to defeat the

workers' movement. It is part of the general class struggle, and we must beware of similar methods in future.

In this period our Party carried on a campaign against the illusions of parliamentary reformism. The party's influence in the strike movement and its general work was expressed in the sympathy and support it received, particularly from the left elements of the trade union branches and Labour Party. This period is marked by the growth of a "Left Wing Movement" in the Labour Party and of support for the Minority Movement.

At the Hull Trades Union Congress (1924) there was a big swing to the left. At this congress the Soviet Trade Union Delegation was greeted with enthusiasm, and a movement for an alliance between the General Council and the Soviet trade unions was initiated. The General Council was invited to send a delegation to Moscow. The discussions that ensued in Moscow were on the line of a general planning of mutual alliance and assistance for the development of international trade union unity.

In August of this year, 1924, took place the first congress of the Minority Movement, representing 200,000 workers. Delegates attended from trade union branches, trades and labour councils, from various minority groups in different industries and "Left" Labour Party groups. The Minority Movement at this period was rather a mixed combination of sympathetic elements. Branches of trade unions would agree to send delegates. Groups of Minority Movement members would be successful in getting local trades councils to send delegates, but they represented in the main a sentiment rather than an organized force. In many cases it was only a small minority of the militants in a given locality that attended the local conferences which decided to send delegates to the national congress.

The party saw, however, in the Minority Movement groups a challenge to the old leadership of the trade unions, and a means of concentrating all the forces that made for a change of leadership as a pre-requisite for the struggle for power. This is to be seen from the resolutions of the sixth party congress, which continued the line of the manifestoes of the Communist International and R.I.L.U. of 1921 and 1922 in which the main slogans were a demand for unity and centralization, and a General Staff of Labour.

What emerged from the lack of a strong influential Communist Party? First of all, the Black Friday events revealed the necessity for a centralized direction of the whole forces of the working-class movement. It was only at the Cardiff Congress (1921) that the General Council was elected. But even this General Council had no real authority over the trade unions. It could not in a spirit of democratic centralism order or instruct branches of unions to participate in strike action. It was not able, even if it wished, to manœuvre as a central force. It was rather a co-ordinating body which had no executive authority. The executives of all the unions were still jealous of their own authority, and refused to hand it over to any body outside of themselves.

This slogan for the centralization of the Labour movement was bound up with the slogan, "Make the leaders fight," and became the principal line of the party. (It is important to note, however, that the idea of making the leaders fight persisted after the situation had completely changed and the slogan was no longer valid, when it became clear the leaders had no desire or intention to fight; and was reflected in certain right wing deviations which ultimately became more apparent in the policy of the party.) The party next began to advocate a quadruple alliance of transport, miners, railwaymen and engineers, as representing the four chief organizations that were capable of carrying through big actions against capitalism. This quadruple alliance was regarded by the party as a step towards a general staff of Labour.

But however correct our slogans, without an active operative party leadership closely connected with the mass movement, particularly in the trade unions, participating in the life and work of the unions as well as in industry, explaining and winning over by conviction the trade unionists to the correctness of our slogans, they would remain on paper. Unfortunately the majority of the party leaders were divorced from industry and but poorly connected with the trade unions. The party as a whole was still steeped in sectarianism. Thus, despite the sympathetic movement around the Minority Movement, in which the party exercised a decisive influence, the numerical strength of the party remained stationary.

It was clear that the C.P.G.B. was far from being a real Bolshevik party. At the enlarged plenum of the Executive

Council of the Communist International, in March 1925, the question of the bolshevization of all the parties of the Communist International was made the principal topic. Not only the C.P.G.B., but all the parties in the Communist International had inherited many social-democratic traditions: in ideology, forms of organization, methods of work, lack of real mass contact and of living bolshevik activity. The proposals of the Executive Council of the Communist International were in effect that the time had come to carry through a programme of the bolshevization of all the parties.

The Communist International emphasized in the case of the C.P.G.B. that the demand for affiliation to the Labour Party in 1920, the reorganization of the party on the basis of democratic centralism, the movement of the Minority Movement in 1924, could only be regarded as stages in the bolshevization of the party. At the same time it warned the party against the danger of becoming passive, as in the recent attacks made upon the workers, urged it to prepare for the new struggles that were rising, reminded it of the necessity of not lagging behind events, but of retaining and increasing, instead of losing, its living contact, and of acquiring the ability to manœuvre in view of the next revolutionary wave. To do this the party was urged to pay more attention to the international revolutionary experience of the various parties, and particularly the Russian Party, on the basis of the principles of Leninism. Further, it was necessary for certain weaknesses to be eliminated. Two of these were underlined: first, too dilettante an approach to questions, no fundamental theoretical analysis of the problems before the workers in the party press, which is essential for the development of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist theory, and, second, insufficient vital contact with the masses of the workers.

The plenum laid emphasis upon the necessity to intensify party training. The party training carried on then was insufficient and not on a high Marxist-Leninist basis.* Moreover, it was necessary to carry through a programme of training for all official cadres, to put an end to all territorial forms of organization and to organize factory groups. These

* Only the Communist Party of Great Britain and the German Party, apart from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union were doing any systematic Party training in this period.

proposals for the bolshevization of the party and the tasks that were put before it were timely, and preliminary to the big strike struggles that were to take place in the period of 1925–26.

The British capitalist class in this period stood before the problem of the restoration of the international market and a sharpening of the struggle between the several imperialist groups for the markets. The chaos of the markets created by the War was receding; old connections were being restored. But now the British ruling class found itself confronted with a series of new competitors. These new competitors consisted of the U.S.A., Japan, Germany, and the British Dominions, the last-mentioned having developed their own industry during the War and now being in the fight for markets. To quote Comrade Stalin: "The old colonial method of monopolistic robbery of markets and sources of raw materials had to make room for a new method of capturing markets with the aid of cheap goods."*

In such a struggle for markets success depends upon technique and cheapness. Hence the severe attacks that were launched against the working class in the attempts to secure a reduction in the cost of production and a cheapening of British products. "The fact," says Comrade Stalin, "that the first to be attacked were the miners cannot be regarded as accidental. British capital attacked the miners not only because the coal industry is poorly equipped economically, and in need of rationalization, but primarily because the miners always have been, and continue to be, the advance detachment of the British working class."

The strategy of British capital was to bridle this advanced detachment, to cut wages and lengthen hours in order, after crushing this main detachment, to defeat the other detachments of the working class. The working class realized that the attack on the miners was the precursor to a general attack.

The occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 had given a temporary revival to the British coal industry. Coal exports in 1923 were higher than in 1913. The miners in 1924 got a slightly higher minimum wage agreement with the mineowners for

* "Why Did the Strike Break Out in England?" Article by Stalin, *Pravda*, 16 June, 1926.

one year. Before the date of expiration of this agreement the bottom fell out of the market. Also there were two great gaps in the British export trade in coal, the Italian and Russian markets. "In the case of the Italian market, in 1924 the diminution (since 1913) of British coal exports, amounting to 3,489,000 metric tons, was almost exactly balanced by German coal to some 3,444,000 tons. Practically all of this German coal was delivered under the Reparations Section of the Treaty of Versailles, as implemented by the Dawes Plan, embodied in the London Agreement of August 1924. Similarly with the Russian market. The Russian market had absorbed some 4,000,000 odd tons of coal before the War. After the War practically no coal was exported to Russia."*

The mineowners in this situation put forward a demand for a return to the agreement of 1921, and for a repeal of the seven-hours day and a return to eight hours. On 30 June, 1925 they gave notice to terminate the National Wages Agreement which had been in force since 18 June, 1924, and put forward to the miners new proposals. These proposals the miners refused to accept, and appealed to the General Council of the T.U.C. The General Council at a special meeting on 10 July pledged its "complete support of the miners, and undertook to co-operate wholeheartedly with them in their resistance to the degradation of the standard of life of their members," and appointed a sub-committee of contact "with power to summon the full General Council in the event of the necessity arising," whereupon on the same day the Ministry of Labour set up a "Court of Inquiry." This the miners refused to accept.

Two weeks later, on 24 July, a special T.U. Congress was held in London on Unemployment. The miners' leaders attended this congress and spoke. At the same time they circulated a document setting forth the miners' case in which they declared that "as one of the constituent bodies of the T.U.C., it (the Miners' Federation) considers it sufficient to set the facts before the Congress and to indicate the probability of the miners requiring its early and substantial help. It feels assured that such assistance will be readily forthcoming, and on this occasion, if a lock-out matures, it will not be left to a section

* See *General Strike: May* 1926. *Its Origin and History*; by R. P. Arnot. Published by Labour Research Department, London.

to fight alone, but the struggle will be taken up, and the issue joined, by the whole trade union movement."

A few weeks later at the Scarborough Congress of the T.U.C. the report of the General Council in referring to the mining situation declared:

> "The committee after considering the various forms of active support which could best be applied felt that in the first stages at least, the fight should be limited to the production and distribution of coal."

This line had been endorsed by a joint meeting of Executives of the National Union of Railwaymen, the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, the Railway Clerks, the Transport and General Workers' Union and the Sailors' and Firemen's Union, which took place on 25 July, the day after the special T.U. Congress. The decision of this joint meeting in effect not to handle coal meant an embargo on coal. The Government, faced with such an embargo, finally capitulated on the question of a subsidy to the industry. It arranged with the mineowners to agree to the subsidy and to a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Coal Industry that would carry them over to the spring of 1926, i.e., for a period of nine months. The reasons for this capitulation on 31 July (Red Friday), 1925, are to be found partly in the position in which the ruling class was placed for the time being by the re-introduction of the gold standard and the instability of British credit; but the most important, the fact that their machinery was not prepared for immediate struggle.

The Scarborough T.U.C., held in September (1925) revealed an extraordinary degree of unity and militancy among the broad masses of the working class. The Congress declared that the "trade union movement must organize to prepare the trade unions in conjunction with the Labour Party and the workers to struggle for the overthrowal of capitalism," and pledged itself to develop workshop committees. It passed a resolution for world trade union unity. It declared in favour of an alliance with the colonial workers, and insisted on the right of self-determination to the point of separation from the Empire. The General Council was instructed to get into touch with the trade unions in China.

The use of British armed forces as strike-breakers was condemned. The Dawes Plan was condemned; and on the question of increasing the forces of the General Council it was decided to go into the question and make recommendations to a special Congress.

But the Labour Party Congress at Liverpool (1925) showed the other side of the Labour bureaucracy. This congress endorsed the general line of the Labour Government while in office, endorsed the Dawes Plan for Germany, put through by MacDonald, i.e., the Labour Party threw overboard the Capital Levy and adopted a thorough-going Liberal programme. Alarmed at the growth of the "left" wing and the influence of the Communist Party, the Congress not only rejected the application of the C.P.G.B. for affiliation but went further. It passed the following resolution:

> "(*a*) No member of the Communist Party shall be eligible to become a member of any individual section of any affiliated Labour Party, or to be entitled to remain a member.
>
> (*b*) The National Executive also desires to intimate to the conference that in its opinion affiliated trade unions can only act consistently with the decisions of the Annual Conference in its relations with the Communists by appealing to their members when electing delegates to national or local Labour Party conferences or meetings, to refrain from nominating or selecting known members of non-affiliated parties, including the Communists."

The motion to reject these proposals received 321,000 votes, 2,870,000 voting for the proposals.

The failure of the "gradualism" and reformist policy of the Labour Government, the discredit that followed its collapse and the left wing pressure of the working class found expression in an attempt by the Independent Labour Party (a great number of whose members comprised the Labour Government: it had 105 out of the 155 Labour M.P.'s) to find an "alternative" way between communism and the reformism of MacDonald, Henderson, Snowden, etc. This "alternative" or so-called third way consisted in the advocacy of "a living wage" and "socialism in our time," and brought much confusion into the workers' movement.

Critical as the Independent Labour Party appeared to be of the Labour Party policy it was even more critical and hostile toward the Communist Party. Out of the welter of confusion in the camp of the reformists, and the deep hatred of communism, emerged *Lansbury's Weekly*, grouping around it Independent Labour Party members and middle-class radicals, splitting the growing movement and unity of the left wing around the *Sunday Worker*.

The whole forces of the ruling class, after the capitulation of the Baldwin Government on the question of the subsidy to mineowners, began concentrating upon preparations for the impending struggle in the spring of 1926. There appeared in the newspapers the announcement that there had been set up a body called the "Organization for the Maintenance of Supplies" (the O.M.S.). This organization comprised admirals, generals, diplomats, former government *attachés*, lawyers and representatives of various rich men's clubs and institutions. The announcement in the Press was at first anonymous, subsequently the Home Secretary acknowledged his approval of the O.M.S., and the Ministry of Health followed this up by sending a circular letter to the local authorities advising them to make preparations for a state of emergency. The plan was to divide the country into ten divisions, with a volunteer service committee in each area to recruit volunteers to assist in maintaining essential national services.

At the Conservative Party Conference at Brighton in October (1925) a terrific tirade was delivered against the trade unions and the Communist Party. The conference called upon the Government to pass laws to cripple the trade unions, and, apparently taking their cue from the Liverpool Labour Party conference, demanded the prosecution of the Communists. The Communist Party had incurred the wrath of the Tories and the Baldwin Government by its outspoken campaign for the workers to prepare. The Political Bureau of the Communist Party issued a statement on the O.M.S., in which it declared:

> "The Communist Party regards the call to form the O.M.S. as the most definite step towards organized Fascism yet made in this country. . . . Any large strike paralyses

supplies, and consequently the organization of the O.M.S. can only be regarded as a strike-breaking organization. According to its own observations its claim to represent the 'community' is nonsense. An examination of the leading personnel and its proclaimed purpose can only stamp it as the organization for the defence of property against the lives of the masses of the labouring people. It is no chance coincidence that the announcements of the formation of the strike-breaking organization should take place on the same day that Mr. Baldwin repudiates the terms and meaning of the coal settlement. This can and will be taken as a challenge by the working-class movement. . . . The Communist Party . . . will develop the class war here and convince the workers of the correctness of our policy and our demand for the organization of the Workers' Defence Corps."

The party, through its press, its instructions to its local organizations, in its agitation up and down the country, unceasingly referred to the July events around Red Friday and called upon the workers to prepare. In the third week of August, it sent a letter to the General Council of the T.U.C. and to the Executive Council of the Labour Party urging them to "Tell the forces," i.e., carry propaganda into the ranks of the Army, Navy and Air Forces. So disturbing was this campaign to the Government that it decided to take action and almost immediately following the close of the Conservative Party Conference, a raid was made upon the headquarters of the Communist Party, the London district office, the Y.C.L. and the headquarters of the Minority Movement. All papers and documents were confiscated and twelve of the leading party members were arrested. The indictment against the twelve read as follows: That between 1 January, 1924, and 21 October, 1925, the prisoners had:

1. Conspired to publish a seditious libel.

2. Conspired to incite to commit breaches of the Incitement to Mutiny Act, 1797.

3. Conspired to endeavour to seduce persons serving in His Majesty's forces to whom might come certain published books and pamphlets, to wit, the *Workers' Weekly*, and

certain other publications mentioned in the indictment, and to incite them to mutiny.

The Political Bureau discussed the procedure of the trial and decided that Campbell, Gallacher and Pollitt should defend themselves; their speeches were prepared, and approved by the Political Bureau.

To challenge the legality of the proceedings Sir Henry Slesser and W. R. Pringle (Radical lawyers) were engaged to defend the others.

The trial became a trial of communism and the Communist International versus Capitalism. Judge Swift's declaration in summing up is of historic importance. He declared it is "No crime to be a Communist or hold communist opinions, but it was a crime to belong to *this* Communist Party." No better testimony could be given to the influence of the Communist Party in this period.*

The imprisonment of the twelve Communist leaders led to the organization of demonstrations by the International Class War Prisoners' Aid Movement all over the country, in which trade unionists and local labour parties took an active part. In London, thousands of workers assembled on Clapham Common and marched to the gates of Wandsworth Prison, where the Communists were imprisoned. After rousing speeches greetings were shouted through megaphones for the prisoners to hear. The action of the Tory administration certainly did not diminish the influence of the Communists among the working class.

These arrests of the Communist Party leaders were followed a month later by wholesale arrests, prosecutions and sentences on anthracite miners in the Ammanford district of South Wales. The Home Secretary, Joynson Hicks, declared in the House of Commons that the Government was only "doing its duty." But it was left to Winston Churchill to let the cat out of the bag in a speech on 10 December, 1925, in which he declared, "We decided to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it, or, if not averting it, of coping effectually with it when the time came." The arrest and imprisonment of

* The accused were found guilty. Pollitt, Gallacher, Hannington, Rust and Inkpin were sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment, the remaining seven to six months'.

the Communist Party leaders was undoubtedly part of the measures of the Government to cope with the crisis when it came.

During the trial, since it was clear that the Government had decided upon locking up the party leaders, arrangements had been made for alternative machinery to carry on the work of the party. The campaign of preparedness begun after Red Friday, continued without interruption. On 8 January, 1926, an extended meeting of the Central Committee elaborated the following programme of action, and instructed all party members to regard a campaign for these measures as their main and immediate task in the respective trade unions:

1. Summoning by the General Council of a conference of the Trades Union Executive Committees, in accordance with the Scarborough decisions, to give power to the General Council to lead the whole workers' industrial army.

2. In addition to the campaign for granting full executive powers to the General Council, the completion of the Workers' Industrial Alliance, to reinforce the workers' defensive preparations against the coming crisis, and, in particular, the inclusion of the N.U.R., A.E.U., Boiler-makers, and General Workers, etc.

3. A working agreement between the General Council and the C.W.S. to assure provisioning the workers, and a policy of united support between the two national centres of the trade unions and co-operative movements, the T.U.C. and the Co-operative Union.

4. Formation of factory committees elected by all workers, irrespective of craft or sex, in accordance with the Scarborough resolution, to ensure unity of the workers from the bottom, and calling by the trades councils and district committees of conferences to ensure union support for these committees.

5. A national campaign for 100 per cent trade unionism including a national "Show Cards" week. Special attention to be paid to bringing all young workers, including apprentices, into the unions.

6. Organization of Workers' Defence Corps, composed of trade unionists, and controlled by trades councils, to

protect trade union liberties against the Fascists, and calling upon the General Council to take steps to place the workers' case before the workers in the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

7. Formation of a common programme for the whole movement (for a week of 44 hours) supplementary to the special demands of each industry (Railways All-Grades Programme, Miners' Cost of Living scale, Engineers' 20s. demand, etc.).

8. The strengthening of the relations between the General Council and the N.U.W.C.M., in order to secure the realization of the unemployed demands, as a counter to the capitalist attempt to force the unemployed into black-legging.*

This programme of action found a ready response in wide circles of the working-class movement. A barometer of the mood of the workers is to be found in the Conference of Action held by the Minority Movement on 20 March, 1926. At this conference 883 delegates attended, representing 967,000 trade unionists, nearly a quarter of the number of members represented at the T.U.C. The main resolutions of this conference followed closely the programme of action of the C.P.G.B.†

The Baldwin Government during this period had clear and definite lines of activity. For example, the Royal Commission which it had set up, designed to divide the workers' movement while securing a reduction in miners' wages without a struggle. The O.M.S. had for its object the smashing of any general strike that might take place should the coal commission fail to divide the workers' organizations. The capitalist press, and the right wing leaders of the T.U.C. and the Labour Party, tried to concentrate attention and hopes on the findings of the Coal Commission as a peaceful way out of the crisis, though this body was deliberately weighted by the Government against the miners and the working class.

On the other hand the Labour leaders made no effort to prepare for action. They lulled the trade unions into a false

* *Workers' Weekly*, 15 January, 1926.

† *Workers' Weekly*, 15 January, 1926. *The General Strike* (Labour Research Department, by Page Arnot and E. Burns) for documents.

sense of security by encouraging reliance on the findings of the Coal Commission. At the same time in many places it was tacitly assumed that secret preparations were being made by the General Council. The fact that there was a left wing on the Council (comprising Purcell, Swales, Hicks, Tillett and Bromley) lent colour to this idea. This unpreparedness ran throughout the whole trade union, labour and co-operative movement, save for those trade union branches and trades councils where the programmes of the Communist Party and the Minority Movement exercised some influence.

When the report of the Royal Commission was made on 6 March, 1926,* the coal owners not only insisted upon the heavy reductions in wages but insisted on district agreements, a factor which greatly strengthened the determination of the trade unions and the workers generally to support the miners. The strategy of the mineowners and the Government now became very clear. The M.F.G.B. on the basis of a national agreement had become a powerful political force, inasmuch as every dispute involving the danger of a national stoppage in the mining industry affected the basic economic life of the country. The move of the mineowners for district agreements, if successful, would break up the unity of the Miners' Federation and reduce the possibilities of a general strike.

The General Council of the T.U.C. now became involved in the technicalities of the commission's report and in efforts to find a way out that would avoid strike action. The negotiations between the miners, mineowners and the Government proving futile, a special conference of trade union executives took place on 29 April to consider the situation. At this conference the chairman, Arthur Pugh, in his speech reviewing the position, referred to the report of the Royal Commission as a *new* factor. He quoted from the findings of the Commission "that it would be necessary to ask the mineowners to agree, not to a permanent lowering of wage standards, but to contemplate a temporary modification in order to avoid the possible unemployment of hundreds of thousands of men," and went on to say, "but the Commission . . . laid down its clear condition: Before any sacrifices are asked from those engaged now in industry, it shall be definitely agreed between

* *The General Strike*, pages 94-101.

them that all practicable means for improving its organizations and increasing its efficiency should be adopted as speedily as the circumstances in each case allow."

It is clear from this statement that the General Council was prepared to accept a reduction in wages, providing it could get a guarantee that the other proposals of the Coal Commission were carried through. The Government insisted on a definite pledge from the miners that they would accept some reduction in wages. The Miners' Federation refused. The General Council therefore were placed in the dilemma of either leaving the miners in the lurch or calling upon the other unions to support. The latter course was taken. The trade union executives discussed the memorandum on strike action submitted by the General Council and endorsed it by 3,655,527 votes to 49,911.

The negotiating committee of the General Council again met the Prime Minister in an endeavour to secure a formula of settlement.* These negotiations were abruptly broken off by the Government, the pretext being the action of the "Natsopa" men (National Society of Operative Printers) in the *Daily Mail* machine-room, who refused to handle a scurrilous article attacking the union leaders.

The Government, knowing that the General Council did not believe in a strike, called its bluff. Baldwin foresaw that even if a strike did take place the General Council would grasp the earliest opportunity to betray the miners. The history of those days of the General Strike from 3 May to the 12th is, on the one side, another melancholy example of black treachery on the part of the labour aristocracy, whose "culture" and corruption is systematically fostered by the ruling class, and, on the other, a shining example of the capacity for unity and the eagerness of the British working class for a decisive struggle against its class enemies.

Having decided under mass pressure to call for strike action, the General Council postponed its commencement from 1 May to 3 May. In the interval the Government declared Martial Law (on 1 May) and sent troops to all the decisive parts of the country. The strike developed in spite of the General Council. The leaders pretended they did not realize

* For Conference between Baldwin and the General Council see *Labour Party Report*, 1935.

the political nature of the strike and tried to limit it to a purely industrial dispute.

The left leaders, who had the majority on the Council, did absolutely nothing to assist the strike. They capitulated shamefully to J. H. Thomas and the others who were, in the words of Thomas, "grovelling for peace." Hicks, for example, showed his true colours when the General Council refused to accept financial help from the Russian workers, by referring to this "damned Russian money."*

The Communist Party, which, from the days of July (Red Friday) 1925 had been actively urging preparation of the whole Labour movement, immediately threw itself into the task of supporting, strengthening and extending the strike. A small secretariat was left at the centre, and all leading members went into the districts and localities to assist in this work. The main slogans were:

Not a penny off the pay; not a second on the day;
Nationalization of the mines without compensation, under workers' control;
Resignation of the Forger's Government; Formation of a Labour Government.

The party took an active part in establishing local councils of action around the trades councils, in extensive mass picketing, in leading the struggle against all blacklegging and in developing the Workers' Defence Corps. The working class showed extraordinary fighting powers, overturning and smashing blackleg buses, closing down all bourgeois papers,† controlling socially important services such as the electric power supply and transportation of food, combating the police, calling on soldiers to disobey orders, etc. In short the masses came onto the streets and spontaneously developed

* It is beyond the scope of this book, to give a detailed account of the great betrayal. For details see the excellently documented books on the General Strike issued by the Labour Research Department, London. (By R. P. Arnot, and E. Burns.)

† The Communist Party immediately met the need for a press by issuing a *Workers' Bulletin* daily and by local mimeographic sheets. After a few days the printing house of the *Daily Herald*, which had been closed down by the printing workers, succeeded in getting out an emergency paper, *The British Worker*. The Government managed with the aid of its own bourgeois technicians to issue a sheet called *The British Gazette*.

all the methods of violence so hateful to the reformist leaders. In these struggles the Communists played an active leading role. The Government replied by wholesale arrests (1,200 members were imprisoned) and by raiding party headquarters.

The Communist Party on the whole passed this test of political maturity. From the beginning it issued the demand for "All power to the General Council," to co-ordinate the whole movement and not to isolate the miners. As soon as the strike began it demanded and strove for offensive action to bring down the Baldwin Government, to form a Labour Government, and demanded the transferring of power in the localities to the Councils of Action. The General Strike had brought the British working class for the first time in modern history up to the problem of power. The Communist Party stood out as the only consistent revolutionary force following a correct course.

The party gained enormous influence among the miners. When the betrayal took place it tried to re-form the ranks and continue the strike, but was unable to bring order out of the confusion created by the treachery of the Labour leaders. During the subsequent seven months' strike of the miners, the C.P.G.B. supported them in their refusal to capitulate, took up the fight for moral and financial support to the miners and raised the slogan of an embargo on coal. The membership of the party doubled in this period, the five thousand new members being recruited mainly from the mining localities.

In spite of all shortcomings the practical results of the activity of the C.P.G.B. during this period of the revival of mass action, and during the General Strike had an important significance for the whole international labour and communist movement. The popularity of the Minority Movement, which accepted the lead of the C.P.G.B., and the influence which it exercised upon wide sections of the trade union organizations in Great Britain strengthened the movement abroad for international trade union unity. It is unquestionable that the Minority Movement played a big part in the establishment of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee.

The experiences in this period in Great Britain furthermore played a definite role in the Communist International, and

assisted very much in the struggle against the then Trotskyist opposition. Inside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Trotsky carried his opposition to the internal policy of the party into the Executive Committee of the Communist International and into the Executive Committee of the Red International of Labour Unions. Trotsky opposed the alliance between the Soviet trade unions and the British T.U.C. He went as far as declaring the C.P.G.B. to be a "brake on the revolution." When, however, the General Strike took place he was forced to withdraw this observation, and to acknowledge the correctness of the line taken by the British party, and its positive contribution to the international communist movement.

CHAPTER VI

In the course of our historical survey we have had occasion to draw attention to several examples of the strategy and tactics of the ruling class in carrying on their struggles against the workers, e.g., the strategy of the capitalists to overcome the situation in 1921, the admission of the Labour Government to office in 1924, the events of Red Friday, 1925, and the subsidy to the coal owners, the discussion on the question "Can Labour Govern?" Yet, another example is the General Strike of May 1926. During the General Strike the ruling class raised the question of the "Constitution" through the intervention of its jurists, Sir John Simon and Justice Avory, but these gentlemen gave more than a formal interpretation for the capitalist class of what the strike actually meant. Simon's declaration that the General Strike was unconstitutional was also intended to draw from the Labour leaders statements as to their intentions. In other words the question of the Constitution was used as a means of guiding the labour bureaucracy and instructing them in what they had to do.

In view of the historical role of the labour bureaucracy it is not accidental that they all immediately declared that they had no intention of going beyond the pure and simple economic objects of the strike; that they in no way stood for civil war or a violent overthrow of the government. Moral corruption breeds physical cowardice. Particularly did the "lefts" stand paralysed at the audacity of the masses and their readiness to go forward.

But the treachery of the reformist leaders, the lefts and the rights together, was not ended with the General Strike. It was carried on afterwards; for example, in the desertion of the miners, in the refusal to give any material practical assistance to the miners after the General Strike, except at a late stage of the struggle when they made a pretence of rendering some little financial assistance.

Following the General Strike we were afforded another

illustration of the bourgeois strategy and tactics of throwing confusion into the workers' movement by guiding and leading the labour bureaucracy. This was the propagation of "industrial peace" or "Mondism."

For the Communist Party this was the most important period in its history. We had had, as we have seen, one crisis in 1922, a crisis which led to the complete transformation of the party. After the General Strike we had another and a bigger crisis in the party. This crisis arose out of the events of the General Strike and the interpretation of what the General Strike meant for the British Labour movement, i.e., whether there was a complete change in the relation of class forces, and what was to be the attitude of the party towards this changed situation.

The slogans of "industrial peace" and "Never again!" were prompted by the ruling class, and provided them with the grounds for beginning active aggression against the trade unions and the workers generally. Simultaneously with the "Industrial Peace" propaganda, the Baldwin Government introduced into the House of Commons in the spring of 1927 a Bill to amend the Trade Union Acts. This Trades Disputes Bill gave the Government power to declare sympathetic strikes and strikes directed against the Government, i.e, political strikes, illegal; it made the funds of the trade unions seizable by law, and cut off the Civil Service workers from the political labour movement.

The Labour Party leaders were obliged to make a show of resistance to the Bill and indeed had sound reasons to dislike it, inasmuch as it threatened the Labour Party with a reduction of its fundamental support from trade union organizations. They declared their determination to fight the Bill "clause by clause" in the House of Commons, but refused to take any action outside Parliament, where there was the possibility of mobilizing the working class to defeat the Bill. The parliamentary fight "clause by clause" was reduced to a fiasco by Attorney-General Sir Douglas Hogg, who quoted speech after speech of the Labour leaders to justify the Bill; and the Trades Dispute Act of 1927 became law.

This year of "Industrial Peace" was marked not only by an offensive against the working class at home. On 12 May the Government, in violation of all international usage and

law, made a raid on the offices of the Soviet Union's Trade Delegation (Arcos) in London, held up and searched every employee, and broke open the desks and safes of the institution on the pretext that the Trade Agreement was being violated for political purposes. This gross act of burglary was followed by the breaking-off of diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. on 24 May. Apart from sending a letter to Baldwin, the T.U.C. and the Labour Party did absolutely nothing to protest against this criminal action of the Tory Government which was almost immediately followed up by another. The Chinese Revolution had been advancing northward. The Chinese revolutionary armies were marching upon Shanghai and the Yangtse Valley, which is the principal zone of British capitalist interest. Chamberlain sent a note to the National Revolutionary Government of Hankow, breaking off relations, after having sent troops and ships to Shanghai, ostensibly to protect British interests and property. Thus we see the Baldwin Government carrying on its struggle on three fronts:

First against the workers in the trade unions by means of the Anti-Trade Union Act; secondly against the Chinese Revolution, and thirdly, against the Soviet Union.

It was not by chance that a raid was carried out in Peking upon the Soviet Embassy just as had been done in London; that Voikov, the Soviet representative in Poland should be murdered in Warsaw in June of that year. We have here a clear illustration of how the British imperialists, following the General Strike and the defeat of the workers through the treachery of the trade union and Labour Party leaders, immediately took advantage of their position to begin their offensive not only against the workers, but against the Soviet Union, against which they had never ceased to conspire since the days of 1917.

The trade union leaders were faced after the General Strike with the stubborn resistance of the miners, who alone refused to capitulate. The General Council of the T.U.C. refused to take any decisive action in support of the miners. There was a big demand by the workers for a meeting of the T.U.C. to give the General Council a chance to explain and to justify, if it could do so, its conduct of the General Strike. The labour bureaucrats hypocritically postponed any such

conference on the grounds that it would prejudice the case of the miners, but promised that, after the miners' dispute was settled, this question could be raised. However, it was not until January 1927 that a special trade union conference of executives was called. This conference, apart from being belated, was in reality, by its restriction to executive officials, intended to cover up the treachery of the General Council during the General Strike by giving the appearances of discussion prior to the full meeting of Congress.

The Communist Party put forward several demands in connection with this conference. It demanded that the conference recognize the mistakes of the General Council and condemn the treachery of the leaders of the T.U.C.; it combated the idea that there would be no more general strikes, and insisted upon preparations for a more effective general strike. It also put forward the demand for a big campaign against the anti-trade union Act, and for resistance to the war that was being carried on in China; for active measures to be taken to stop the troops going to China and for support to the Nationalist Revolutionary movement in China.

The Communist Party itself developed a big campaign in the struggle against the Trade Union Bill. It also developed a wide campaign against the war in China and succeeded in setting up several "Hands Off China" committees, published a considerable quantity of literature, leaflets, and pamphlets some of which were successfully distributed amongst the troops. The campaign of the party in this period was carried out in face of a strong feeling of apathy in the working-class movement that had set in following the defeat of the General Strike.

The regular Trades Union Congress this year (1927) was held in Edinburgh, under the presidency of George Hicks, the one-time "left" supporter of Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity. The speech of Hicks consisted of an open and frank invitation to the employers to come together with the trade union leaders, for carrying through class collaboration with the object of securing "industrial peace."

The appeal by Hicks on behalf of the General Council did not fall on deaf ears. Sir Alfred Mond (later Lord Melchett) —head of the Imperial Chemical Industries, an anti-socialist and aggressive advocate of rationalization—induced a number

of employers' federations to enter into negotiations with the Council. The infamous Mond–Turner agreement, which was to spread confusion among the working class for a time, was the result.

At this Congress the General Council made a bitter attack on the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions and on the Soviet delegation on the Anglo–Russian Trade Union Unity Committee.

As a matter of fact, ever since the Hull T.U.C. in 1924, and the establishment in April 1925 of the Joint Committee with the Soviet Trade Unions (consisting of the chairman and secretaries of the T.U.C. and the All-Russian Council respectively plus three members of each side)—to promote co-operation between the two bodies, to facilitate the free exchange of documents dealing with their structure, machinery, organization and policy, and to develop the closest mutual aid—there had been marked hostility from Citrine and the right wing of the General Council, notwithstanding the ratification of this step at the Scarborough T.U. Congress in 1925. The decisive moment had come when the Soviet Trade Unions organized mass collections of money throughout the U.S.S.R. in support of the General Strike of May 1926. The General Council's refusal to accept financial help from the Soviet workers led to a severe criticism by the Soviet representatives on the Joint Committee, not only for this flagrant breach of the agreement to render mutual aid, but of the policy and conduct of the General Council during the strike.

Very sharp discussions had taken place at the meetings of the Joint Committee in Paris (30 July, 1926) and in Berlin (23 August, 1926) in which the Soviet delegates raised the question of support for the Chinese revolutionary movement, then faced with armed intervention by the imperialists, including the British Government. The British delegates refused to enter into any agreement or undertake any serious engagement to combat the British Government in connection with their war on the Chinese revolution. When the T.U. Congress met at Bournemouth (1926) and the British Government refused visas to Tomsky and the Soviet delegation to attend the Congress, the General Council was satisfied to accept the decision of the Home Secretary and made no fight. Prevented from attending the Congress in person, Tomsky sent

a fraternal message to Congress, in which criticism of the conduct of the General Council was expressed.

The next meeting of the Joint Committee was held in Berlin (30 March, 1927), when it was decided to codify in a single document "proposals for mutual aid." Meanwhile the raid on Arcos took place. The Soviet Trade Union delegation demanded a meeting of the Joint Committee in view of the situation between the British Government and the Soviet Government. Failing to secure a meeting, Tomsky gave an interview to a correspondent of the *Workers' Life*, the organ of the C.P.G.B. Repeated telegrams asking for a meeting received no satisfaction until the Soviet delegation threatened to publish the correspondence. Finally, a meeting of chairmen and secretaries took place on 18 and 19 June. The Soviet delegation raised the question of the war danger and the necessity for help to the Chinese revolution against the armed attacks of the British Government. They met with no response, apart from a joint declaration to the workers of the U.S.S.R. and Great Britain, and the correspondence was published in the *Sunday Worker*, organ of the Left Wing Movement.

The Communist Party's reaction to the criticism of the General Council made in the Soviet Trade Union telegram to the Bournemouth T.U. Congress had been one of hesitancy and resistance. The same mood was now carried into the Edinburgh T.U. Congress, that is to say a desire not to provoke the trade union leaders too sharply lest our work in the trade union branches should be made more difficult, and the leaders be encouraged in their splitting policy. This did not prevent the trade union leaders from openly attacking the Minority Movement. All the leading speeches contained bitter denunciations as a cover for the treachery of the General Council during the General Strike.

It was at this congress that instructions were issued to the trades councils not to allow representatives of the Minority Movement to occupy leading positions or to be elected as delegates on behalf of the trades councils. This represented the extension of their splitting tactics into the trades councils. Actually, as early as 1925 certain suggestions had been made to the trades councils that Minority Movement representatives should not be encouraged. But this apparently did not meet with any great response. Now came the next step. The

trades councils were instructed that Minority Movement members had to be excluded, otherwise the councils would cease to have official standing.*

This was a preparation for the subsequent expulsion of trades councils and the disaffiliation of local labour parties who continued to admit Communists to membership, and to identify themselves with the Minority Movement. A similar attitude was adopted towards the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. During the Hunger March in 1923 the T.U.C. was drawn into a united front demonstration. At the next T.U. Congress the General Council was instructed to meet representatives of the N.U.W.M. That meeting took place and a Joint Advisory Committee was established comprising four representatives from each body. But the General Council would not undertake any serious agitation. Now, following the General Strike and the open hostility on the part of the General Council to all militant action by the workers, especially to those organizations in which the Communists took a leading part, the Joint Advisory Committee was broken up. During the Welsh miners' march to London the General Council called upon the trades councils not to render any assistance to the marchers.

Such was the general situation when the Ninth Congress of the C.P.G.B. met in Salford in October 1927. This congress was a very important one for many reasons, but principally because it was to show whether or not the party had seriously learned the lessons of the General Strike and was prepared for a sharp turn in tactical policy.

The congress characterized the existing economic situation in the following way: While recognizing the depressed condition of the basic industries, it put emphasis upon the parasitical character of British capitalism, upon the increasing industrialization of the colonies, and attached great importance to the growth of the new industries as being one of the chief sources of profits.

* In February 1927 the General Council passed the following resolution: "That those Trades Councils affiliated to the Minority Movement or which receive affiliations from branches of that organization or associated with that body, shall not be accorded recognition by the General Council nor allowed to participate in any work carried on under the auspices of the General Council." Endorsed by Edinburgh (1927) Trades Union Congress by 3,746,000 against 148,000 for reference back.

If we study these expressions closely, we can see how they are linked up with the theory of "decolonization" which ultimately found open expression at the Sixth World Congress. It is clear that if we deny that the basic export industries must still be the main source of extraction of profits and super-profits and the basis of the capitalist system in Britain, if we maintain that the depression in the basic industries is leading the British capitalists towards becoming only a rentier class, and see the chief source of profits only in light industry—we arrive at the theory of "decolonization."

There was also at this congress an underestimation of the capacity of the British capitalists to carry through their rationalization policy. Quite correctly, note was taken of the backwardness of the basic industries, of their backwardness in developing rationalization, but the whole trend was to insist upon the inability of the ruling class to carry through a rationalization programme.

In addition to this, the congress was obsessed by the results of the by-elections. In a number of these there had been a fall in the Government vote. At the same time there had been a decline in the Labour vote, from which the conclusion was drawn that there was the possibility for a Labour victory, but only in alliance with the Liberals.

Seeing the possibility of a Liberal–Labour victory, the conclusion was that we should concentrate on support for a Labour Government, but that, having regard to the experience of the Labour Government, this next Government should be controlled by the Executive Committee of the Labour Party.

We find this idea of the need for control expressed in the main resolution in various ways. In one place it is expressed as control by the working class, in another as control by the Labour movement, and again as control by the Executive Committee of the Labour Party. To ensure that the next Labour Government would be controlled not only by the Executive Committee, but by the rank and file of the Labour Party, and that it would carry through a socialist programme, the congress demanded that a conference be called to formulate a socialist programme for the next Labour Government. At the same time it was resolved that the Communist Party should develop a national Left Wing Movement as a means

of carrying forward the policy of differentiation in the Labour Party.

This attitude of the Communist Party towards the elections, towards the possibility of a Labour Government, the demand for control of the Labour Government by the Executive Committee, the belief that it was possible for such a Government to carry through a socialist programme, reveals the confusion in the Central Committee. It shows clearly that the Central Committee had not understood the sharp turn that was necessary after the General Strike.

During the General Strike the party had increased its membership up to about 10,000. It had made about 5,000 new members. But these were mainly recruited in the mining districts where the party life was weakly organized. The party proved unable properly to assimilate, to teach and to retain these recruits. This weakness of the party, together with the certain degree of apathy which set in among the workers generally after the defeat of the miners in the long lock-out, resulted in a big fall in the party membership.

Moreover, the repeated expression of determination to establish the party within the factories by means of nuclei in the workshops, factory committees, etc., remained on paper. While many resolutions and declarations in support of these had been adopted, they had never been carried out in practice.

And so we came to the Ninth Plenum of the Executive Council of the Communist International. Here the question of the correct tactics for the C.P.G.B. was raised very sharply. The resolution of the Ninth Plenum drew attention to the experience of the General Strike, to the tendency towards a definite merging of the trade union organizations and the labour bureaucracy with the state apparatus, indicating as proof of this the class-collaboration policy of "Mondism." The question of the structure of the Labour Party was raised. As we know, Lenin had been strongly impressed by the peculiar type of the Labour Party, which made it possible and right for the Communists to demand affiliation with freedom of criticism. The events since 1920, however, had produced many changes in the situation. The Labour Party was in the process of being transformed from a federal organization to a party of the social democratic type.

A retrospect of the growth of the Labour Party shows this process at work from the very beginnings of its existence, i.e., the general tendency towards more centralization, towards unified discipline, although for a long time handicapped by the independence of the trade union organizations that formed the main supports for the Labour Party. The experience of the General Strike gave an enormous impetus to this process.

The problem of reconciling a centralized discipline and direction of the Labour Party with its federal structure is complicated, because this party has even yet certain federal characteristics. We cannot say that it is organizationally identical, for example, with the Socialist Party in France, or similar social democratic parties of the Continental countries. Nevertheless, the discipline of the British Labour Party is just as effective. When the party became a force in Parliament it demanded first of all discipline from the members who adhered to the Labour group. In the case of Richard Bell and others who represented very important organizations, the party caucus was able to expel them despite their trade union influence. Later on this discipline found expression in the campaign against the Communists, against other workers with unimpeachable status in the trade unions, who, because they held militant views in opposition to the leadership, were prevented from coming to the Labour Party congresses, and subsequently to the Trades Union Congress.

The Ninth Plenum, drawing attention to these changes in the Labour Party structure, showed that it was assuming more and more the type of a Social-Democratic Party. The Plenum also stressed the leftward trend of the workers, and pointed to the possibilities of sharp struggles in the immediate future. On these grounds it was necessary for the party to adopt a sharper tactic towards the Labour Party and the trade union leaders. This was the tactic of "Class against class."

The tactic of "class against class" meant that the party had to bring out more markedly its independent line and to fight against this bureaucratic discipline: for example, in local labour parties, to resist the domination of the local labour party by the higher organs, to insist upon the demo-

cratic rights of the local organization, and to win the local labour organizations to the support of, if not openly declared Communist candidates, at least militant candidates who would be prepared to adopt a policy of opposition to the main line of class collaboration of the Labour leaders.

Another important directive to the C.P.G.B. was to struggle in the trade unions for the control of the political levy by the local trade union branches, for the use of the political fund of the branches in support of local militant candidates—a question which raised a very sharp discussion within the party. The methods of distribution of the political funds of the trade unions vary in different organizations. In some trade unions the local branch is allowed a certain proportion of the political levy for local political purposes, though in most cases the political funds are controlled by the Executive Committee and disbursed by them for the support of Labour candidates. The directive of the Executive Council of the Communist International was that the party should strive to ensure that such funds should be utilized for the promotion of local candidates who would support our line, or would at least support a militant line in opposition to the labour bureaucracy.

At the same time the Executive Council of the Communist International uttered a warning not to treat the labour bureaucracy as being in the same camp as the Tory Party. This part of the resolution was, however, far from sufficiently understood by our party, with the result that many mistakes were made in carrying through the line of independence. In the zealous endeavour to realize the sharp change of tactics no differentiation was made between the Labour Party bureaucracy and the Tories. In some cases the fight against the Labour aristocracy was carried to absurd degrees. Local branch officials exercising quite minor functions in the trade union organizations were characterized as *social fascists* because they defended the line of the labour bureaucracy, in words, though their activity was often dictated by sounder class sense.* This sectarianism became especially marked after the Eleventh Party Congress.

* In the directions for the operation of our municipal electoral tactic the Executive Council of the Communist International in 1934 corrected this mistake, and again pointed to the danger of including the labour

But the biggest question that was raised was whether or not the situation in 1926–27–28 was different from that of 1920. The Executive Council of the Communist International insisted that there were big changes. We had had the experience of a Labour Government, the General Strike, and the miners' struggle. Moreover from the experience of the Labour Government we had seen a changed attitude on the part of labour bureaucracy to the question of war and its relations to the Soviet Union, to the colonial peoples in China, India and Egypt—and finally to the question of domestic legislation. The consideration of all these questions showed clearly the need for a bolder and more independent line on the part of the C.P.G.B. Instead of the slogan of a Labour Government controlled by the Executive Committee of the Labour Party, our party should advance the slogan of a Revolutionary Workers' Government.

The Executive Council of the Communist International also paid attention to the question of the independent line of the party as expressed in our tactics in fighting against the leaders of the Labour Party during elections. It was definitely and clearly laid down that our party should support the candidates of disaffiliated labour parties against the official Labour candidates, and should prepare slogans for them. In other constituencies a thorough preliminary work should be carried out to secure the putting forward of a Communist candidate or one of a left character. Only in cases where all efforts to this end had been exhausted was it permissible to vote for the official Labour candidates. And finally, a campaign for the publishing of a daily paper was made one of the immediate tasks of the party.

The receipt of this resolution led to a big discussion in the Central Executive Committee. The majority in the Central Committee resisted the main theses of this new line. It denied in fact the changes since Lenin's advice at the Second

bureaucracy with the bourgeoisie without differentiation. This question is worth a special study. If we read the resolutions of the Ninth Plenum, and draw comparisons from our experience after the Eleventh Congress up to the present time, we are able better to understand the tactical line being brought forward now after the Seventh World Congress. It shows that in substance not a new turn has been made but simply a more correct interpretation of the line.

Congress of the Communist International. It insisted that the process of disillusionment with regard to the Labour Party was not yet complete in the working class. It sought to prove that capitalist stabilization in Britain was "still a factor to be reckoned with," that the revolutionary tempo was not yet as high as it had been in 1920, that the mass trend to the Labour Party was continuing, and, therefore, it was necessary to continue our support for the Labour Party; but that taking into consideration the drive against the Communists, we should strive for affiliation through the trade unions to the local labour parties.

The Ninth Plenum had drawn attention to the big demonstrations on May Day in London and other towns in 1927, against the will of the Labour leaders as an illustration of the leftward trend of the workers. But the majority of the Central Committee interpreted these events not as a swing to the left, but as a formal victory for the united front tactics of the party.

With regard to the Left Wing movement, the majority denied the importance of the role of Maxton, Cook and Wilkinson, put emphasis on the support of the Left Wing movement from below and believed it was possible to develop a genuine mass left wing opposition. They opposed the line of the Plenum because they declared it would alienate support in the trade unions, and contended that the existing policy of the party was the most effective way; that to abandon the fight for affiliation would be capitulation.

On the question of elections, they proposed that the party should run Communist candidates only where Communist candidates had already contested elections or in two-member constituencies or in working-class constituencies where a split vote would not let a capitalist candidate in, or where disaffiliated labour parties existed and it was possible to get Communist members as candidates. But they said that even against MacDonald, Henderson and Thomas we cannot advise voting Liberal or Tory; neither can we advise abstention, nor put up a candidate that is likely to let the Tory or Liberal candidates in.

It is clear from this line that there was strong resistance to the recognition of the changed situation, and the need for coming into open opposition to the leaders of the Labour Party—i.e., for the policy of class against class.

The minority within the Central Committee, led by R. P. Dutt and H. Pollitt, supported the resolution of the Plenum and insisted upon a sharp independent line, contending that the party was concentrating too much on the Labour Party instead of taking an independent lead in the class struggle. It insisted upon putting up candidates against prominent representatives of the Labour Party like Thomas, Henderson and MacDonald in order to bring out the independent role of the party on a national scale, while utilizing the united front from below to promote Communist or other militant candidates. It proposed that we should put specific united front proposals to candidates where we had not been able to bring forward our own Communist Party candidates. If such candidates agreed to our proposals we should support them and explain to the workers why. Where they refused our united front proposals we should give no support and refuse to vote; but in order that the workers should understand that our position was not a mere negative one, we should carry out a campaign explaining why we refused to vote for the Labour candidates, and recommending the workers to prepare to bring forward revolutionary worker candidates in the future elections. On the question of the political levy, the minority insisted on the correctness of paying the political levy, but of working at the same time to get the local organizations to refuse to hand over this political levy for the support of the Labour candidates and reserving it for the Communist Party election fund or for financing non-party militants. To the question as to the implications of this line in relation to our campaign for affiliation to the Labour Party, the minority answered that its operation meant that we should now cease to demand affiliation.

With regard to the Left Wing movement, the minority contended that we should continue to develop the Left Wing, but should condemn the tendency towards the creation of a third party. (Incidentally, in the Northampton by-election the Left Wing candidate actually did speak in terms of a third party, and not of a candidate promoted by the workers on the general line of our party.) How real this danger had become was revealed at the Sixth World Congress during the discussion on the proposal brought forward by

Murphy for a new federation of local labour parties, using the then disaffiliated labour parties as a nucleus. In short, Murphy was proposing the formation of a new party. However, he found no support.

Once more the experience and the discussions within the C.P.G.B. were destined to play a definite role and assist in formulating the tactics of the Communist International. The tactical line of "class against class" was adopted not only for the British Communist Party, but was applied to a series of countries such as France and the Scandinavian countries, where social-democratic traditions were still strong in the Communist parties.

The application of the new line of "class against class" in the trade union field was considerably more difficult and complicated than in the electoral field. The independent leadership of the workers by the party did not necessarily mean the formation of new unions in every case where there existed a militant opposition within the reformist union; and the inability of the Central Committee to determine quickly enough where a new union was correct and necessary, and where it was not, led to hesitations by which the reactionary bureaucracy was not slow to profit.

For example, there was the situation arising out of the majority secured by militants on the Executive of the Scottish Mineworkers' Union in Lanarkshire and Fife. Our comrades had carried on successful work within the county unions, and had succeeded in securing strong positions in the Executive Committees to the point of having control of these unions. The reactionaries refused to accept the situation which constitutionally had placed our party comrades in control of the organization. The hesitations of the Central Committee of the party, particularly on the question of the formation of new unions, the unpreparedness of the party comrades to control the Lanarkshire miners' organizations and provide reliable functionaries for the local branches, allowed the reactionaries to collect their forces and to prepare a split. When finally the new union was established it was found that the Communists had not prepared themselves for work in the branches. They were unable in many cases to carry on the normal routine work of the branch. This played into the hands of the reactionaries, who invariably have a wide

knowledge of legislation affecting the working conditions of the miners, as well as of union branch work, and created difficulties for the Communists, leading to great confusion and disorganization among the miners.

In Fifeshire the situation was more favourable for the Communist Party. The Communists had secured a majority on the Executive Committee of the County Union, which sent its representatives to the Scottish Mineworkers' Union, the federation of all the county unions in Scotland. The Scottish Executive defied the constitutional ballot. For his actions on the Scottish Executive in defying the ballot vote of his own union, W. Adamson, General Secretary of the Fife County Union, was suspended, pending a ballot vote on his conduct. Anticipating the result, Adamson withdrew from the union and started a break-away union which received endorsement from the Scottish Executive. The Fife Miners' Union took the initiative in launching a new union, the United Mineworkers of Scotland. It established branches in the other coalfields in Scotland, but Fife remained the stronghold of the new movement. After a hard struggle against the splitting tactics of the reactionary leaders, who received the support of the coal owners, the U.M.S. succeeded in becoming the dominant union among the Fife miners. In the General Parliamentary Election of November 1935, Adamson, who stood as the Labour candidate, was defeated by the Communist leader, W. Gallacher, who had been identified since 1928 with the struggles of the Fife miners and the U.M.S. The Central Committee initiated the slogan among the miners of "Save the Union," and urged the formation of "Save the Union Committees." A campaign was carried on around this slogan as a means of counteracting the reformist leaders who were branding the Communists as the splitters of the trade unions. The Central Committee was not convinced the party had the personnel or the resources to organize a new union though it did not exclude the formation of a new union should the reactionary reformist leaders cause a split.

In London the Communists were successful in gaining considerable influence among the clothing and tailoring trades. In October 1928 a strike took place in the Rego clothing factories which employed a great number of girls at low rates

of wages. Six hundred workers struck work and remained out for twelve weeks when the firm capitulated, and the strike was successful. The executive of the reformist Tailors' and Garment Workers' Union refused to recognize the strike as official and declined to give any financial assistance to the strikers.

As a result of the Rego strike, which was marked by great militancy, the Employers' Federation demanded of the Garment Workers' Union that they discipline their London members as a condition for friendly relations. The union answered by dismissing Sam Elsbury, the London organizer, a member of the Communist Party. In March 1929 the reply of the London district was to break away and form a new Red Union, the United Clothing Workers' Union. In May 1929 a strike took place in another clothing concern named Polikoff. This firm refused to recognize the new union, and seven hundred workers went on strike for recognition. The reformist union collaborated with the employers to find "blackleg" labour. Faced with this combined resistance the strike collapsed and the workers returned to work without gaining recognition.

After a precarious existence, disruption set in due to the opportunism and careerist attitude of the leader, Sam Elsbury (who was expelled from the party), and the United Clothing Workers collapsed.

These examples reflect the hesitancy and indecision of the Central Committee of the party, leading to the reactionary trade union leaders gaining a certain amount of influence and strength which to-day forms a barrier to our united front work. In the case of the miners the question of the correctness or otherwise of establishing a new union dragged on for months without a clear decision: in the case of the London clothing workers, who repeatedly demanded that a new union for the clothing workers be formed, again there was insufficient clarity and firmness on the question until the party was faced with a *fait accompli*.

Next arose the question of the Cook–Maxton movement. The C.P.G.B. had taken the initiative in developing this movement, believing it was possible to bring together such "Left Wing" elements and to create an oppositional force within the Labour movement—as an avenue towards a

differentiation within the Labour Party. The party leadership helped to prepare a programme for this "Left Wing," but it failed to see the real role of the "Lefts," hesitated to criticize them, began to drag at the tail of this movement and objectively encouraged the idea of a third party. On the question of the daily paper the Central Committee did literally nothing.

The basis for these Right tendencies was an overestimation of capitalist stabilization in England, and the failure to see the development of social fascism in the trade unions. They did not manifest themselves in our party alone, but found expression in a section of the leadership of the Communist Party of Germany, of the Communist Party of the U.S.A., and in varying degrees in other brother parties, testifying to a deep underlying cause in the partial and relative stabilization of world capitalism in the foregoing period.

The Sixth World Congress was marked by the part which was played by the British delegation in the discussion on the colonial question. It is clear from the foregoing that it was no accident that the majority of the British delegation at the Sixth Congress supported the decolonization theory which was so decisively condemned by the Congress.

The Tenth Congress of the C.P.G.B. which was held in Bermondsey Town Hall, London, in January 1929, adopted the resolutions of the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, and the new line of the Ninth Plenum unreservedly. At this congress very sharp discussions took place on a number of important questions which had been agitating the membership and flowed from the interpretation of the new line of "class against class." Chief among these were the questions of payment of the political levy in the trade unions, the attitude of the Communist Party to the Left Wing movement and towards new Red trade unions.

The resolution of the Central Committee on the payment of the political levy pointed out that not to pay this levy would isolate the Communists and the Communist Party from the masses of the workers, and lead to sectarianism. The essential question was the fight for control of the union: to wrest the union from the controlling power of the reactionary leaders. The opposition to payment of the levy argued it was possible to get strong support immediately for non-

payment of the levy and denied that the Communists would be classed with the workers who took up the position of being non-political. Other delegates who opposed the Central Committee resolution favoured a campaign for the disaffiliation of the unions from the Labour Party.

The resolution of the Central Committee was carried by 100 for, to 22 against.

The resolution of the Central Committee on the Left Wing movement insisted upon encouraging, developing and organizing all those in the localities who supported the Left Wing programme with a view to co-ordinating them into an opposition movement to fight against the Labour Party bureaucratic leaders, and emphasized that under no circumstances could the Left Wing movement be regarded as an alternative to the Communist Party. A strong opposition was led from the delegates, in which the Party fraction in the Left Wing movement argued for the liquidation of that movement. They declared that the majority in the Left Wing movement were not inside the Labour Party, since they were disaffiliated, and that the Left Wing in reality was a potential alternative to the Communist Party. Others in the opposition insisted on the party making a direct appeal to the masses by means of united front activity from below and declared that the party would get more support by this means than through the Left Wing movement.

The proposals of the opposition to the resolution were carried by 55 votes against 52 for the Central Committee. This meant that the party was divided and clearly without a policy towards the Left Wing movement. The question was remitted to the political bureau for a restatement of the attitude of the party.

Subsequently there began in the local organizations, and in the districts a lively criticism of the Central Committee, of the whole line of the party. In Newcastle, Manchester, London and other districts, local conferences and discussions took place. Letters were written to the *Workers' Life*, and an active, healthy discussion took place throughout the party. The Communist International, in reviewing the proceedings, drew attention to the fact that the delegates on the floor of the congress were more critical and ahead of the leadership, and sent a "closed letter" sharply criticizing the party

leadership. It criticized them for seeing in the new line only an electoral policy. It condemned the decision on the Left Wing movement. It condemned the hesitation to criticize the Cook-Maxton movement, and, moreover, the failure of the Central Committee to develop serious self-criticism of its own mistakes either within its own ranks or amongst the party membership.

The criticism of the Central Committee by the membership was directed mainly against the Central Committee's failure to really understand and vigorously pursue the line of the Executive Council of the Communist International; against the failure to develop the discussion of the new line, or even encourage discussion; against the bureaucracy that had crept into the party apparatus, and the failure to keep the party informed of the political discussions that were going on inside the Central Committee.

The main demands of the membership were for a special congress, at which all questions arising from the new line should be thoroughly discussed. It was urged, on the basis of the criticisms just mentioned, that a Right Wing had developed within the leadership of the party, and that it was necessary to bring about some changes.

That this charge was well-founded was clearly demonstrated when in March 1929 the possibility arose of another general election, and five members of the political bureau voted for a proposal to support the Labour candidates. The Communist International took a sharp line against the party leadership.

The Eleventh Congress of the party in Leeds, December 1929, marked a decisive turn in the whole line of the party, and took the first steps in finding a way out of the internal party crisis. A special letter was sent from the Communist International calling for a break with hesitation and vacillation, and an end to the bad internal situation within the party. The resolution drew attention to the necessity for preparations for a new revolutionary upsurge within the working class, and especially emphasized the development of Fascist tendencies within the bureaucracy of the Labour Party and trade unions, and the strike-breaking role of the Labour Government.

Our experiences in the strike movements had shown that the

party came to the strike centres from outside, like an ambulance corps; the leadership did not come out of the movement of the workers; that the party was still a propaganda sect, and did not play a leading role in economic or political struggles.

The Communist International insisted on the need to transfer the main efforts of the party to mass work in the factories, to the development of the Minority Movement as a means of gathering a group of militants around the party. It insisted on the necessity for bringing into the open the Right elements within the party and putting an end decisively to the domination not only of these Right Wing elements, but also of all conciliatory elements who tried to shield or in any way defend the Rights.

The Communist International demanded sharp self-criticism within the Central Committee and within the whole party. It insisted upon the election of a new leadership composed of the best comrades within the old leadership and new proletarian elements who had real contact with the working masses and a record of militant action.

At this congress the panel of recommendations for the new Central Committee was submitted to a much more searching examination than hitherto. The delegates were grouped by districts, and an examination of the panel took place on the basis of the record of the members recommended, and particularly of their connections with the factories and workshops. Generally, the delegates sought a Central Committee that would be much closer to the workshops, and the active movement of the workers. A big sweep was made of the Central Committee members. A list of only 12 of the old members was adopted, and 23 new members were added.

By this Eleventh Party Congress the fight for the independent line of the party, which was initiated by the Ninth Plenum discussion, was notably advanced; and in January 1930, the *Daily Worker*, on the publishing of which the Communist International had been insisting for ten years, was finally launched.

CHAPTER VII

IN the second half of 1929 the economic crisis broke upon world capitalism, putting an end to the period of relative stabilization that had existed from 1923–24. While it was, like all capitalist crises, a crisis of over-production, it was to reveal some important new features. It was, to quote Stalin, "The first world crisis since the War, a world crisis not only in the sense it embraces all, or nearly all, *industrial* countries of the world—so that even France, which systematically injects into its organism the milliard marks paid by Germany as reparations, has not been able to avoid a certain depression which, according to all appearances must become a crisis; it is a world crisis also in the sense that the *industrial* crisis has coincided with an *agricultural* crisis embracing the production of all forms of raw material and foodstuffs in the principal agrarian countries of the world."*

An important factor in the decline of capitalism and in accelerating the crisis in this period was the growing economic and political might and influence of the Soviet Union. This influence was seen not only in the loss of territory now under the Soviets, but in the influence of the Soviet Union in the colonies and dependencies of the imperialist powers which showed by its example, the developments under self government. It is not surprising that the British ruling class, which is still the greatest colonial power, should have led the anti-Soviet campaign that marked this period. We need only link up the events of 1927 (the Arcos raid, the break in diplomatic relations, the raid on the Pekin Soviet Embassy, the "Religious freedom" campaign of the Church, the Monkhouse Wreckers' Trial, etc.) to see the whole chain of plans for intervention. The outstanding fact is that the period of temporary relative stabilization which began in 1923–24 was severely shattered and came to an end in 1929–30.

* See *Leninism*, Vol. II, page 249.
"Political Report to XVI Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."

In Great Britain the situation was marked by a [illegible] economic stagnation over a period of three years. By the first quarter of 1930 production began to fall and thus capitalism in Great Britain entered into the primary phase of the crisis. The antagonism between the U.S.A. and Great Britain in particular became sharpened around the problem of markets, of sources of raw materials and the export of capital. The centres of struggles for spheres of influence and colonies were South America, China, Indo-China, North Africa. At the same time American capital was active in penetrating the British Dominions.

In May 1929, under pressure of the crisis, the General Election took place. The results gave the Labour Party the largest number of seats of any party in the House of Commons (Labour 289, Conservatives 260, Liberals 58, Independents 8), and MacDonald was invited to form the second Labour Government. The Labour Party rode to power on the crest of a gigantic wave of demagogy. It promised during the election that the provision for unemployment would be met by "the additional costs of State grants, so that it falls neither on the workers' contributions nor on the cost of production"; it promised to include agricultural workers and domestic servants under the Unemployment Insurance Acts; it promised to abolish slums; it promised to pass Acts safeguarding workers in factories and workshops, etc.*

In this period reformist illusions ran high. Labour Party *theories* were abandoned for *practical* measures of "planning" and rationalization of British industry. Former slogans of nationalization of industries were abandoned for public corporations, e.g., the London Passenger Transport Board, the British Iron and Steel Corporation, in which the ownership was vested mainly in the hands of a group of interested capitalists. The policy of the Government was aptly expressed by Herbert Morrison, Minister for Transport, when speaking at Hendon:

> "I want every business man and every business manager to realize that the Labour Government is not their enemy, but that every Minister in this Government wants to take him by the hand, treat him as a man and brother, and

* See *Labour and the Nation*, pages 18 and 19.

help to make his commercial or industrial enterprise more successful than it has been in the past."—*Daily Herald*, 30 June, 1929.

Not long after the formation of the Government J. H. Thomas announced that an arrangement had been arrived at between the Government and the "City" for the financing of a large-scale reorganization of industry. The outcome of this Government–Bankers alliance was the formation of a number of companies, such as "The National Shipbuilders Securities, Ltd.," "The Securities Management Trust," by the Bank of England, and the "Bankers' Industrial Investment Company," the chairman of which is the chairman of the Bank of England. By this alliance the bankers were able to dictate credit terms to industrial capitalists, to promote rationalization, and further monopolise British industry.

Encouraged by the Government's rationalization plans, the employers took their cue and began a wholesale attack on wages and working conditions. Among the first were the cotton masters. The cotton export trade had collapsed; 40 per cent of the machinery was standing idle, and 25 per cent of the workers were unemployed. As part of the new rationalization plans the textile employers tried to force the workers to work more looms, and declared a lock-out to secure a 12.82 per cent cut in wages. The lock-out, affecting 500,000 workers, began in the first week in August 1929. The Government, after negotiations, appointed an arbitration court, comprising one banker, one shipowner, two labour leaders (Cramp of the N.U.R., and Walkden, Railway Clerks), and a chairman—Sir Rigby Swift, the judge who in 1925 had sent the twelve Communist leaders to prison during the preparations for the General Strike. The award was unanimous—6.41 per cent reduction.

The woollen workers were also to learn what arbitration meant. The employers demanded a wage reduction at the rate of 1s. 7d. off each £1. The trade union leaders were prepared to make concessions on wages but insisted upon an agreement for the whole industry, to run two years. The Labour Government appointed Lord Macmillan, a Tory lawyer, as arbitrator. He said that the employers needed a

wage reduction of two shillings in the pound if they were to meet foreign competition.

On 9 April, 1930, nearly two hundred thousand woollen workers struck work rather than accept the reductions. This was against the advice of their leaders. After a nine-weeks' strike they were starved into submission and resumed work on the employers' terms and without any agreement. Reductions have taken place since. Each employer can fix his own terms.

During the woollen strike, the workers fought with the police, who tried to prevent picketing, using their batons freely to break up workers' meetings. As a result of one of the conflicts seven workers were sent to prison. At this time the Government attacked the *Daily Worker*, central organ of the Communist Party, for criticizing a judge (once again the notorious Sir Rigby Swift) who had sentenced a worker to eighteen months in prison for distributing leaflets to soldiers at Aldershot, the military camp. The manager, F. Priestly, was sent to prison for nine months and two other workers on the staff of the *Daily Worker*, Brennan Ward and F. Paterson, were sent to prison for four and six months respectively.

The repressive policy of the Labour Government was not confined to Great Britain. Just before the Labour Government was formed a number of arrests took place in India in connection with the growth of trade union activity. The Tory administration arrested thirty-one persons for alleged "Conspiracy to deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty over British India." The Labour Government not only condoned these arrests but added another to the list. Thirty-one men were held in Meerut jail for four years pending trial and finally given savage sentences one of which was quashed and others somewhat reduced after an appeal to the High Courts. Despite the universal protests of the working-class movement and a widespread denunciation of these arrests, the Labour Government refused to release the prisoners.*

During the General Election the Labour Party had declared, "the disastrous Act by which the Tory Government added an hour to the working day (of the miners) must be at once

* For a graphic account of the Meerut Trial see *Conspiracy at Meerut* by L. Hutchison (one of the prisoners), published by Allen and Unwin, London.

repealed." Instead of fulfilling this promise, the Government introduced a Coal Mines' Act, stipulating a seven and a half hour working day, a National Wages Board of Arbitration, on the basis of the Mond-Turner agreement, and group organization of production and prices of coal, with powers of compulsory amalgamation.

In the course of these struggles the C.P.G.B. was extremely active, and strove for a more independent line in all strike actions. Among the reformist trade unions the militancy of the rank and file forced the local trade union officials into strike action, often in defiance of the national leaders, from whom they then demanded recognition of the strikes. This conflict within the unions helped to break through the Mond Turner agreements and discredit them. Events proved, however, in spite of the good work in these strike actions, that the Communist Party and the Minority Movement were still "ambulance corps," and not yet a force within the trade unions.

The world economic crisis which had begun in 1929 created serious problems for the Labour Government. The discrepancy between imports and exports grew at a great pace in 1930. 42 per cent of net imports were no longer paid for by export of goods. By the first half of 1931, this disproportion had risen to 48 per cent. In 1929 the nett credit balance stood at £138,000,000, in 1930 this balance had fallen to £39,000,000. Unemployment was growing rapidly. Was the Labour Government, in spite of its rationalization schemes, to go on indefinitely distributing money in the form of State grants? This question confronted the Labour Government with all the stubbornness of economic reality.

A credit crisis took place in 1931; a complete financial collapse was averted only by aid from the British banks. The banks of Germany became involved. President Hoover advocated a moratorium for Germany. The British ruling class grew alarmed for its own safety and the Labour Government was forced to appoint a Commission of Inquiry, headed by Sir George May. The May Commission's report disclosed a serious financial situation, and made recommendations for economies in social services, unemployment, and civil service expenditure. This increased the uncertainty among the foreign bondholders as to the position

of the Bank of England. In August a rush took place on the bank. The bank had not sufficient gold to stand the tremendous strain. It borrowed £50,000,000 from France and America. In a few days this sum was exhausted. The French and American bankers indicated clearly that no more help could be expected unless the budget were balanced. Since, naturally, the Government was unwilling to find revenue at the expense of the capitalists, this meant that attacks had to be made on the unemployed "dole," on social services and on wages and salaries of government employees. MacDonald, Snowden, J. H. Thomas and Henderson favoured drastic cuts in expenditure. MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas openly went over to the side of the capitalists and bankers. Henderson and a number of other leading members of the Government, unable to find a way out of the dilemma created by their own reformist policy, after at first agreeing to drastic "economies" at the expense of the workers, took fright at the prospects of facing an angry Labour movement and jeopardizing their careers in the Labour Party, and resigned. When the second Labour Government collapsed, Henderson and his followers pretended they had not favoured the proposed cuts, until J. H. Thomas gave the game away during a debate in the House of Commons.*

The Conservative and Liberal leaders offered support to MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas, and a National Government was established, the few Labour members who supported MacDonald forming a new group under the title of the National-Labour Party. An advance of £80,000,000 was obtained from France and Germany, and this gigantic sum went the same way as the previous loan. A new budget was framed, whereby borrowing for unemployment relief was stopped: the amount of unemployed relief was reduced, and

* In the revelations as to what took place inside the Labour Cabinet brought out in the debate in the House of Commons on 10 September, 1931, J. H. Thomas declared:

"Mr. Henderson and his colleagues in the late government had agreed that it was necessary to balance the Budget. Provisionally £56 millions of economies were accepted by the late government, but the sub-committee of which I [Mr. Thomas], the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Mr. Henderson were members submitted for consideration cuts not of £56 millions, but of £78 millions."

all young single men and women were cut off completely from relief and a scheme evolved for special labour task work for many young people. A cut of 10 per cent in the wages of civil servants, policemen, soldiers, sailors, and all public employees was enforced. New heavy taxes were imposed to ensure a balance of income against expenditure. In September 1931, Britain went off the gold standard.

The announcement of the 10 per cent cut by Sir Austen Chamberlain on 12 September coincided with the naval manœuvres. The Government, aware that there would be some opposition, hoped to carry through the measures while the navy was away on manœuvres. Events took a different turn. On the radio message being received by the fleet, which was lying off Invergordon in the north of Scotland, the sailors who were on shore became incensed at the news and immediately held a meeting of protest. Seven hundred sailors participated in this first meeting. Many speeches were made, and the men formed a strike committee. Very soon delegates came from different ships, and joined the strike committee. Within the next two days considerable agitation took place, embracing petty officers as well as the mass of sailors. On 15 September, at 6 a.m., orders were given to weigh anchor and sail. The *Rodney* and the *Valiant* refused to obey the order. Other ships followed their example, and by 8 a.m. forty units were involved, embracing 16,000 men. By 16 September the ships at Portsmouth, Rosyth, Sheerness and other ports joined in with the rest of the fleet. Confronted with a revolt of the Royal Navy, the Government was forced to abandon the manœuvres and recall the ships to the home ports. Shortly afterwards, a partial restoration of the cuts in pay was announced.

The meetings of the Invergordon sailors were given great publicity in the *Daily Worker*. The Government, fearing this publicity, made a number of arrests, and two Communists, George Allison and William Shepherd, were sentenced, the former to three years' penal servitude and the latter to twenty months' imprisonment.

During 1931 the Communist Party had developed a mass campaign for uniting the struggles of the employed and unemployed workers. This campaign was conducted under the banner of the Workers' Charter—a programme of elemen-

tary demands affecting every stratum of the working-class population. The campaign recalled the revolutionary traditions of the Great Charter movement of the thirties and forties of the last century. Great mass meetings were held; conferences of workers supported the new Workers' Charter, and finally, in April 1931, a National Convention took place at the Bermondsey Town Hall in London. Delegates to the number of 788 were present from all parts of the country. These delegates represented 316 workers' organizations, two-thirds of them coming from the provinces. From Lancashire a special train with 130 delegates travelled to London for the Conference. The Convention adopted the Charter, which included demands for increased unemployment benefit, for the seven-hour day, for building a million houses, against the tariff attacks, for joint struggles with the colonial workers, for full political rights for sailors and soldiers, and defence of the Soviet Union.

The campaign for the Workers' Charter received considerable support from all sections of the working class, and stimulated the development of the mass movement against the 10 per cent economy cuts already mentioned, which were announced later in the year. The Government's economy programme aroused the widest opposition, the revolt of the Invergordon sailors being an expression of the deep-rooted antagonism to the Government's policy. Mass demonstrations of the unemployed took place in all big industrial centres—in Glasgow, Sheffield, Manchester, Salford, Liverpool, Birkenhead, and London. The unemployed exhibited great militancy in defence of their standards, which were already on a miserable level. Many sharp conflicts with the police took place, and in Belfast, where the workers were affected by the same laws as in England, but with a scandalously low rate of relief, there took place such huge demonstrations that the Government was compelled to send soldiers, armoured cars and tanks into the streets to try to disperse the workers. 1931 witnessed a mighty revival of the workers' movement, which attained a higher stage than in 1926, having regard to the actions of the men in the fleet, and the militancy in several centres.

In this period (1931) the General Council of the T.U.C. began to establish a series of Unemployed Associations around

the trades councils. These associations, however, according to the directions of the General Council, had to be purely local bodies, with no organized connection with any similar unemployed associations in other towns. Their committees were composed of 50 per cent elected by the unemployed, and 50 per cent appointed by the trades council responsible for the association, with joint secretaries from the unemployed association and the trades council. Before any action can be taken they must receive sanction from the trades council or its executive. They have no vote on the trades council and at trades council meetings their representatives only speak on matters relating to the unemployed association. However, despite these restrictions, there occurred cases of such associations (Abertillery, Bath) taking joint action with the N.U.W.M. At first, the N.U.W.M. looked upon these associations with hostility and opposed them. Later, under the influence of the Communist Party, this attitude changed and there began a movement for unity and common action.

The National Government, influenced both by the militant mass movement of the working class and by the Conservatives, who were demanding a revision of the Free Trade Policy in the direction of protective tariffs, declared for a General Election, which took place in October 1931. The Conservatives made a great bid for victory, using all forms of demagogy, and received a tremendous majority, but the Government continued as a National Government. The Labour Party, although defeated, gaining only 50 seats, nevertheless received a total of 6,500,000 votes, despite its role in rationalization, in cutting wages, and preparing the way for the 10 per cent cuts. The Communist Party polled about 75,000 votes.*

The first business of the new National Government was the introduction of a complete system of Protection. This meant the abandonment of the ninety-years-old policy of Free Trade. In March 1932 a general duty of 10 per cent was imposed on all foreign goods imported, with the exception of the countries within the British Empire. To reach an agreement with the Dominions and Colonies on the question of tariffs and preferential treatment in trade, an Imperial Economic Conference was held in Ottawa, Canada, in the summer of 1932. A section of the British capitalist class hoped that the British

* In contesting 26 seats.

Empire might be turned into a single, self-sufficing system, with Free Trade within the Empire and a common tariff against the rest of the world. This plan received only half-hearted support at the Ottawa Conference. The Dominions and the Colonies had their own problems of economic nationalism, the outstanding example being Canada, which stipulated in return for concessions to Britain the revision of the Trade Agreement between Great Britain and the U.S.S.R. The net result of Ottawa was to strengthen the tariff system in Great Britain, to raise prices, increase unemployment and intensify the danger of imperialist war, especially against the Soviet Union.

The National Government began vigorously to carry out this policy of tariffs and regulations of imports, and also conducted a currency war against the dollar and those countries which, like France, remained on the gold standard. The Government saved tens of millions of pounds through reductions in wages of state servants, in unemployment insurance payments, and in expenditure on social services. Great savings were effected by the imposition of the cruel Means Test on the unemployed workers—the diabolical measure (prepared for by the Anomalies Act of the Labour Government) which permits the Government's investigators to examine the incomes of the unemployed and their families, and to decide, after a period of twenty-six weeks, whether to pay further relief or not. If it is considered that the income in the family (for example, from the wages of other members who may be working, from the small pensions of aged parents or blind persons) is sufficient to maintain it on a bare subsistence level, then all relief is cut off, and the unemployed person is compelled to live on his family. The Means Test allows the Government investigators to pry into the worker's home and domestic life and compel the sale of furniture, the withdrawal of share capital from the co-operative society, etc. The Means Test has destroyed once and for all the old conception of "an Englishman's Home is his Castle," and also has shown that those who have virtuously practised thrift, as so assiduously preached to the workers by the capitalist class, are now called upon to help their unfortunate unemployed relatives in order to relieve the Government of the cost of Unemployed Insurance.

The policy of the National Government continued along a reactionary road in all phases of social, economic and political life. Side by side with the reduction of the workers' wages, the Government pursued its tariff policy, which raised prices, and used its power to give support to the great capitalists and big industrialists. As one of the results of the Ottawa Conference it denounced the Trade Agreement with the U.S.S.R., and placed an embargo on British trade with the Soviet Union in an attempt to compel the release of the Metro-Vickers spies and wreckers. But this time the British ruling class was to learn, as Litvinoff reminded Sir Esmond Ovey, that "the Soviet Union is not Mexico."

The successful fulfilment of the first Five Year Plan of Socialist construction, the abolition of unemployment, the seven-hour day, the enormous provisions for social insurance in the U.S.S.R., exercised a profound influence upon the working-class movement in this period. The ferment among the workers penetrated the trade unions and the Labour Party. The leaders of the Labour Party were severely pressed to explain their behaviour and record during the tenure of the Labour Government. The ferment also affected the Independent Labour Party which had supplied the majority of the members of the Government.

Since its formation at Bradford in 1893 the Independent Labour Party had played the role of "socialist" guide to the Labour Party; its "socialism" being the type furnished by the Fabian reformists, anti-Marxist and legalistic parliamentarians. It provided leaders to the Labour Party (MacDonald, Snowden and a host of others: in fact during the period of the two Labour Governments the majority of the members belonged to the Independent Labour Party). But the experience of the General Strike and two Labour Governments had brought about deep changes in the consciousness of the working class, and especially in the membership of the Independent Labour Party which had become critical and hostile to the policy of the Labour Party.

In July 1932 an Independent Labour Party Conference was staged once more in Bradford, but this time as a tragi-comedy. It was a special conference, the question at issue being the acceptance or otherwise of the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the discipline required of all its

affiliated sections in carrying out the policy of the Labour Party. The Independent Labour Party decided by 241 to 142 to disaffiliate from the Labour Party rather than conform to the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

As we have seen, one of the first problems with which the first Labour Parliamentary Group had to contend, and on which Keir Hardie took a firm stand, was the indiscipline of the Liberal-Labour members (R. Bell, Will Crooks) which led to their expulsion. Later, when the Communist Party was formed, not only did the Labour leaders refuse to admit the Communist Party to membership of the Labour Party, but carried out a policy of expulsion of individual Communist workers, and even went to the length of declining to admit as delegates to conferences Labour Party members who belonged to organizations in sympathy with the Communist Party—all in the name of "discipline."

In the carrying out of this process of tightening discipline and expulsions it was the Independent Labour Party leaders of the Labour Party who played the greatest role, especially in connection with the exclusion of the Communists. Now they were "hoisted with their own petard." A minority, headed by Sir Stafford Cripps and E. F. Wise, left the Independent Labour Party, to form the Socialist League and continue the traditional role of the Independent Labour Party inside the Labour Party. In Scotland another minority within the Independent Labour Party, headed by P. J. Dollan, formed the Scottish Socialist Party, to carry on the traditions of the Independent Labour Party and Keir Hardie in Scotland. Maxton and Brockway retained the bulk of the Independent Labour Party, and proclaimed a new programme with a "revolutionary Marxist" policy.

The radical mood of the working class, the strike actions, battles of the unemployed with the police in the streets (Birkenhead, Belfast, etc.), had not been without their influence in the bolshevization of our party, helping it to develop its independent line of "class against class." But the party was still isolated through neglect of mass work in the factories and trade unions. To remedy this situation a special commission was appointed, comprising, in addition to a number of leading comrades, the organizers from London, South Wales, Lancashire and Scotland, together with representatives

from the Political Bureau, to make a thorough examination of the situation in the country and the situation in the party. The results of the commission's work were expressed in the document known as the January (1932) Resolution.

This Resolution demanded a complete transformation in the direction of revolutionary mass work in the trade unions; a fight against "Left" sectarianism, which interpreted independent leadership as the abandonment of all work in the reformist trade unions; at the same time it demanded a struggle against trade union legalism, for persistent recruiting to the party, for improving the content and increasing the sales of the *Daily Worker*, and, finally, insisted on the need for tirelessly explaining to the workers the revolutionary way out of the crisis. The party had to carry on a struggle for this resolution on these two fronts—against both "left" sectarian tendencies and "right" opportunist tendencies within the party.

The clear and sharp formulations of the January Resolution and the active discussion around them, while they powerfully assisted the great majority of party members to a clearer understanding of the party line and the uprooting of mistakes, brought forth "left" and "right" ideas as something more than mere tendencies in some quarters. Almost immediately a group of Trotskyists appeared in the south-west district of London (the Balham group). This group, headed by Groves, Purkis, Sara and Wicks, who had secretly been flirting with the local Independent Labour Party for a time, opened an attack on the Central Committee. They denied the possibility of transforming the trade union branches from organs of class collaboration into organs of class struggle. In approved Trotskyist style they attacked the Central Committee and made charges of bureaucracy against the party leadership. They opposed the Amsterdam Anti-War Conference, and, in the course of their disruptive work, repeated within the South-West London Anti-War Committee the Trotskyist slanders about a "Stalinist clique" in the C.P.S.U. They attacked the Communist International and Stalin for the abstention of the U.S.S.R. from military intervention in support of the German revolutionary movement, and accused the C.P.S.U. of having abandoned internationalism in favour of narrow nationalist aims concerned only with the U.S.S.R. This group was expelled from the C.P.G.B. in 1932.

In contradistinction to this Trotskyist "Leftism," ideas of trade union legalism found expression during the miners' struggle in South Wales, notably a resistance to the line of independent leadership, placing too much reliance upon the reformist branch officials and the labour bureaucracy, believing that they would lead the strike struggles of the miners. After considerable discussion this line was corrected.

The January Resolution therefore marked the beginning of a more decided turn in the tactical mass work of the C.P.G.B., although only a beginning. A number of successes were noticeable where the tactical line of the resolution was applied by the Communists. Significant movements were taking place among the rank and file of the trade unions. The operation of the Means Test was ruthlessly throwing unemployed workers aside without any relief. For the five months, April to August (1932) no less than 649,929 initial and renewal claims were ruled out completely from any benefit whatsoever under the Means Test, apart from hundreds of thousands of others who had their benefits cut by one half or one third. In addition to this the Anomalies Act was responsible for disallowing 200,000 claims from its inception in November 1931 to this time.

The National Unemployed Workers' Movement in this period organized a gigantic national petition demanding the abolition of the Means Test, the abolition of the Anomalies Act, the restoration of unemployed benefit cuts and the withdrawal of the "economy" cuts. One million signatures were received, and a great march of shipyard workers, textile workers and others took place from all parts of England, Scotland and Wales to London. The converging contingents arrived in London on 27 October, 1932. Dense crowds packed Whitehall to accompany the marchers with their petition. Towards midnight the police began clearing the streets, and fighting took place, during which many shop windows were smashed in the vicinity of Trafalgar Square.

The National Government was not idle. Immediately following this march, Ministers of the Government, headed by the Prince of Wales and Ramsay MacDonald, began a campaign for assistance to the unemployed. A body known as the National Council for Social Services appeared, and halls began to be opened as social centres for the unemployed.

A great number of the unemployed were attracted to these centres because they catered for some form or other of social recreation or social life. At first the N.U.W.M. made the mistake of boycotting these centres, but this was soon corrected and the policy of the N.U.W.M. now is to work within all such institutions for the unemployed and assist in developing the common struggle for demands.

The Twelfth Congress of the C.P.G.B. was held in the Lambeth Baths Hall, Battersea, in November 1932. The main decisions of this congress were to confirm the general line of the January Resolution (1932), to make a serious turn towards work in the trade unions, to concentrate on the most desirable factories, trade union branches, and labour exchanges, in a planned way, and to control all party activities; to extend and develop united front work, to strengthen the party and raise the political level of its activity, to extend its anti-war work and support the national-liberation movements of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples. The Congress showed a big advance in membership, though fluctuations were also still great.

On 27 February, 1933, the provocative action by the Fascists' firing of the German Reichstag roused the whole international working class and made a profound impression in Great Britain. The C.P.G.B. addressed an appeal for united action to the Labour Party, the T.U.C., the Co-operative Party and the Independent Labour Party. This appeal met a response only from the Independent Labour Party, with which an agreement was reached in May (1933) for joint daily activity in the factories, trade unions, and streets. The fact that such an agreement was possible, however limited, marked a big step forward in united front work in Great Britain and considerable activity developed in spite of the opposition of a section of the Independent Labour Party Leaders (Fenner Brockway, McGovern) who subsequently tried to break up the united front by making anti-Soviet Trotskyist attacks upon the U.S.S.R. and the Communist International.*

Events in Germany, the arrest of Dimitroff, the pogroms

* For details of the relations between the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Independent Labour Party, see article in No. 10, *The Communist International*, by H. Pollitt (1935).

against the Jews, expulsion of radical scientists, and so forth, led to a widespread anti-Fascist movement in Britain. The C.P.G.B. took a prominent part in initiating a campaign for relief to the victims of German Fascism, for the release of Dimitroff, Thaelmann and the other prisoners. In this campaign many Labour Party members took an active part, in spite of the ban by the leaders of the Labour Party and the T.U.C. upon united action with the Communists. This was reflected in the support given in town after town to a United Front Congress held at Bermondsey in February 1934, when 1,420 delegates attended, representing 320,000 workers. This United Front Congress coincided with the arrival in London of a strong body of unemployed hunger marchers who came from different areas of the country to press their demands upon the Government at the opening of Parliament. Alarmed at the revolutionary events in Austria and France and the marked discipline and determination shown by the marchers, special precautions were taken by the Metropolitan Police under directions from Lord Trenchard. Hyde Park was surrounded by police. At various points mounted police tethered their horses at strategic points. The operations of the Chief of Police were directed from the top of Marble Arch by means of telephone and wireless communications to police vans and improvised trucks. As a further precaution the Home Office ordered the arrest of Tom Mann and Harry Pollitt, under a thirteenth century Act, for "inciting to mutiny."

The hunger marchers had come to London to present their demands to the Prime Minister, and to march in a body to the House of Commons. The police warned the marchers not to come within the proscribed area of the House, and drew up strong forces to resist the advance of the marchers. Making their way in small groups and detachments 500 marchers succeeded in penetrating the prohibited area, and dozens penetrated to the public gallery and lobby of the House, singing revolutionary songs and shouting "Down with the National Government." The police and marchers engaged in physical combat inside the House. Outside, Whitehall and Trafalgar Square were a dense mass of people who had responded to the call of the Communist Party and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement to come to

Whitehall in support of the marchers. Later in the evening more fights took place with the police and considerable damage was done to business premises in the vicinity of Charing Cross.

The Government refused to recognize or talk with the representatives of the marchers. Nevertheless, such was the feeling in the country that it was obliged to make a number of small concessions, for example: leaving the maternity allowances untouched in assessing needs, a concession to the pensioned ex-soldiers, and a modification in the conditions for benefit under the "not genuinely seeking work" clause.

This period is marked by the growth of the Fascist Blackshirt movement led by Sir Oswald Mosley. Mosley himself had travelled to Fascism by way of all parties. He came of a wealthy family, and inherited large sums from his grandfather and mother. In 1920 he married Lady Cynthia Curzon, the daughter of Marquis Curzon. Lady Cynthia Curzon was also wealthy, and inherited £28,000 a year.

Sir Oswald Mosley served in the Royal Flying Corps in France during the War. His political career began in December 1918, when he became Conservative M.P. for Harrow, near London. In 1920 he crossed the floor of the House of Commons, and went into opposition to the Government. From 1922 to 1924 he was an Independent, and in 1924 joined the Labour Party. He became a Labour candidate in the Birmingham area, and was elected for the Smethwick division. In 1929, during the second Labour Government, he was made minister without portfolio, and occupied the post of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He co-operated with Thomas, Lansbury and Johnston, to produce schemes for solving the problem of unemployment. Mosley submitted his schemes independently. His scheme, later known as the Mosley Memorandum, provided that £200,000,000 be spent on public works to help the unemployed, and that imports be cut down by an Import Control Board. The aim of such a scheme was to create a sound home market for British capital. This memorandum was rejected by the Labour Government, whereupon Mosley resigned from the Ministry, without, however, leaving the Labour Party.

On 6 December, 1930, he issued a Manifesto signed by seventeen Labour M.P.'s and A. J. Cook, secretary of the

M.F.G.B. This manifesto contained the following four main points: the re-equipment of industry and establishment of a National Economic Planning organization; a general policy of tariffs; loans for 'constructive works"; an Emergency Cabinet to be formed of not more than five Ministers with Emergency Power. On 16 February, 1931, another Manifesto appeared under the heading of 'The Attack on the National Standard of Life" followed by a statement issued on 22 February to the effect that it was the intention of this group to form a "New Party," and to leave the Labour Party. The majority of the Labour M.P.'s who signed the manifesto immediately declared they had no intention of leaving the Labour Party. A minority of five (Dr. Forgan, W. J. Brown, John Strachey, Oliver Baldwin and Cynthia Mosley) declared their intention to follow Mosley and leave the Labour Party. At a meeting of the whole group it was decided to leave the question of withdrawing from the Labour Party to each individual to decide. Dr. Forgan and Strachey resigned, followed by Oliver Baldwin, Cynthia Mosley and Oswald Mosley. On 24 February a further manifesto was issued under the heading of "A National Policy," in which the demand was made for a National Economic Council recruited from the best brains in industry to regulate imports and carry through a programme of rationalization and marketing, and the appointment of a "Council of Five" to relieve Parliament of all detail work. At an inaugural meeting held in the Memorial Hall on 5 March, "The New Party" was formed.

The Labour members of the New Party soon differed on all main questions, and resigned from the New Party, publicly expressing their disagreement with Mosley. In January 1932 Mosley met Mussolini in Rome, having previously met Hitler and other leaders of the Nazis in Germany. At the end of 1932 he published his book *Greater Britain*, in which was outlined the full Fascist doctrine for Britain. Speedily the New Party was transformed into the British Union of Fascists, with Mosley as the national leader. The toleration and encouragement of this movement, based on the Mussolini–Hitler model—with its members wearing black shirts, and strutting about in storm-troop formation—showed the growth of Fascism in the oldest of parliamentary countries. The

capitalist politicians in England, as we have seen, were carrying through a process of fascization of the state and its apparatus by "constitutional" means, utilizing all the cunning of an old experienced ruling class. New sedition laws, closer relations of monopoly capitalism with the state, reorganization of the police on military lines, use of Orders in Council, ignoring of Parliament, the new Unemployment Act—all these were unmistakable signs of a great change in British legislative procedure and intentions. The Blackshirt movement, enjoying the benevolent protection of the Government and supported by wealthy tories, carried on propaganda for a Fascist dictatorship in England. They spread their influence particularly amongst the petty bourgeoisie and the declassed elements among the workers. Their propaganda consisted of a demagogic word-spinning against the "old gang" of politicians, against international Jewish finance, and naturally against Communism.

On 9 September, 1934, Mosley staged a huge demonstration in Hyde Park, London. The Communist Party took up the challenge and issued an appeal to the whole Labour movement to join in a counter-demonstration. This appeal found a ready response among the trade union organizations and local labour parties as well as among the working class generally. Again, the Labour leaders of the T.U.C. and Labour Party, in accordance with their declared policy of opposition to any form of mass activity in the shape of strikes and street demonstrations, issued an instruction to their members not to take part in the demonstration. But despite their opposition, which was featured in the *Daily Herald*, 120,000 people mustered in Hyde Park, and the Blackshirt rally was converted into a great demonstration against Fascism. As the *Manchester Guardian* the next day shrewdly remarked:

> "If the counter-demonstration, which outnumbered (Mosley's) by about 20 to 1, could be gathered from such a small party as the Communists, with large numbers of Londoners acting on their own initiative, on what scale would the opposition have been, had it had the whole force of organized Labour behind it?"

Nevertheless, despite this setback and the hostility shown

to the Blackshirts wherever they appear, Mosley, backed by the reactionary big financiers, continued his propaganda, particularly in the rural areas and in certain derelict areas of Great Britain—Lancashire and the North-East coast—where the decline of British industry had caused a huge permanent army of unemployed and the economic situation is very acute.

The foreign policy of the National Government since 1931 has been mainly concentrated on strengthening its position as a fighting power, and gathering together all forces opposed to the Soviet Union. It opposed proposals for disarmament in the League of Nations. It continued the policy of financing Germany, of providing arms and encouraging the re-armament of Germany. It gave every political assistance and encouragement to the Fascist Reich, particularly to the Nazi designs against the Soviet Union, their expansion towards the East. In point of fact Hitler became strong in this period, thanks to the moral and material assistance given by Baldwin. Subsequently the rapid rearming of Germany was seen as a grave danger to Britain herself, and opposition grew up in some ruling circles against Germany. These tendencies resulted in the visit of Mr. Anthony Eden, then Lord Privy Seal, to Moscow, to discuss the question of peace in Europe and of disarmament with the leaders of the Soviet Government.

The war policy of the Government was made clear in its budget for 1934–35. The budget was balanced at £706,500,000, out of which £113,000,000 was allocated to military and naval expenditure. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a surplus of £29,000,000, which had been wrung out of the working class by measures of economy. The Government had promised the restoration of the 1931 reductions, as soon as the budget showed a surplus. The budget showed a surplus now, but only half of the cuts were restored to teachers, state employees, soldiers and sailors, to the amount of £4,000,000. As a contrast to this, £20,500,000 were given to the wealthy class, in the shape of a reduction of sixpence in the pound in the income tax, and an additional £4,000,000 to owners of motor-cars, by a lowering of the motor tax. The war policy of the National Government met with extraordinarily widespread and vigorous opposition

from the workers and middle class. This was evident in the National Peace Ballot conducted by the British League of Nations Union in 1934 and the beginning of 1935 on the five chief questions connected with the maintenance of peace. These questions and the results of the voting on each were as follows:

Questions.	Answers. *Yes.*	*No.*	*Absentees and Doubtfuls.*
1. Should Great Britain remain a member of the League of Nations?	11,157,000	357,460	113,265
2. Are you in favour of all-round reduction of armaments by international agreements?	10,533,826	867,227	226,712
3. Are you in favour of all-round abolition of national military and naval aircraft by international agreement?	9,592,573	1,697,977	337,215
4. Should the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement?	10,480,002	779,513	368,250
5. Do you consider that if a nation insists on attacking another the nations should combine to compel it to stop by (*a*) economic and non-military measures?	10,088,312	638,211	901,242
(*b*) If necessary, military measures?	6,827,699	2,364,279	2,435,787

This ballot received an extremely warm reception, and hundreds of ballot committees, in which the Communists and Young Communists took part, worked throughout the country, taking votes among the people. The voting as can be seen from the above figures revealed a deep desire for peace. The Government immediately set to work to convert this popular movement for peace into support for its own policy of rearmament. Hitherto, between the collective peace groupings initiated by the Soviet Union (pacts of non-aggression and mutual assistance) and the Fascist war groupings, the Baldwin Government had appeared in its habitual role as a balancing force. In actual fact it had given its support to the Fascist states. For example, in its Memorandum in February 1934 it allowed an immediate increase in all German arms, in hitherto prohibited six-inch guns and six-ton tanks, and suggested withdrawing the ban on military aircraft in two years. It further accepted the assurance of the Nazis that the S.S. and the S.A. are not of a military character. Indeed, Sir John Simon, the then Foreign Secretary, declared on 6 February, 1934, "Germany's claim to equality of rights in the matter of armaments cannot be resisted." In the Japanese seizure of Manchukuo the Baldwin Government through Simon supported the Japanese suggestion that the matter was one for settlement by Japan and China independently, and was no concern of the League of Nations.

However, the Italian Fascist expansionist move on Abyssinia, patterned on the Japanese model in Manchuria, upset the plans of British policy. The Italian offensive directly menaced an important region of British strategic interests. However disconcerting this might be to its general line of encouraging the Fascist states, this menace to British colonial interests (Africa and the Suez Canal) was a horse of a different colour. Furthermore with the appearance of a strong Nazi air-fleet in Germany, so menacing as to force Baldwin to declare the Rhine a British frontier, it became necessary to modify its tactical line.

The Italian threats of aggression in Abyssinia were as unpopular as the peace policy of the Soviet Union was popular. The National Government thereupon assumed the role of custodian of World Peace, the defender of collective security and the League of Nations against all aggression. It

announced its increased arms expenditure as a means of fulfilling its international obligations to the League and collective security, and for National Defence. In this way it skilfully confounded the peace movement and utilized the widespread desire for peace for its gigantic rearmament programme, winning many supporters of the peace movement in the General Election that took place following the dissolution of Parliament on 25 October, 1935.

In September 1935, citing the increase of German armaments as a reason, the Government announced in a White Paper further increases in estimates for the fighting services. The total expenditure announced was the huge sum of £124,250,000, an increase of £10,539,000 for 1935. The increase was to be spent on the army (£3,950,000), on the navy (£3,350,000), and on the air force (£3,685,000). This increase in military and naval expenditure started a new armament race, with Britain striving its utmost to create a powerful air-fleet.

This enormous increase in expenditure for the fighting forces was voted by the Government at the very time when new reductions in the standards of the unemployed were imposed by the Unemployment Act of 1934. This Act restored the rates of pay in operation before October 1931, but not to those who had been out of work for a number of years. The Act contained a special section which became notorious as Part II of the Act. This section made serious reductions in the relief of single men and women living with their families, and imposed a Means Test harsher in its terms than ever before. Part II also introduced the principle that an important condition for the granting of an allowance during unemployment is that the recipient shall attend a training-centre organized by the Ministry of Labour. These training-centres soon became known as "concentration camps" and "slave labour camps"; were in fact places for strict regimentation and semi-military training and were used to supply cheap labour to industries and thus threaten trade union conditions.

The Act further made some changes in the administration of unemployment insurance. The Government took the responsibility for certain classes of unemployed out of the hands of local Public Assistance Committees and placed it under the jurisdiction of a Central Unemployment Assistance

Board, with wide dictatorial powers. These measures aroused the unemployed to angry revolt. Throughout Great Britain, in the beginning of 1935, there took place gigantic demonstrations of protest. Particularly the miners in the valleys of South Wales organized a mighty storm of agitation and protest against the Act. The movement spread very rapidly. Every industrial centre of England, Scotland and Wales witnessed demonstrations of protest—100,000 marched on one day in South Wales. They were no longer demonstrations of unemployed, but united workers' demonstrations, embracing employed as well as unemployed. The mood of the workers, *The Times* wrote, recalled the spirit of 1926, of the General Strike. By 5 February, the wave of national protest compelled the Minister of Labour, Oliver Stanley, to issue an order to suspend the operation of Part II, but the return of the sums deducted was promised only for a date a fortnight ahead. On 6 February a great demonstration took place in Sheffield; 35,000 workers marched to the Town Hall, to demand from the Labour Council the return of the cuts in their pay. The Labour Council replied by calling for the assistance of the police. A fierce battle took place in the streets of Sheffield, lasting three hours, during which both workers and police were injured. The Sheffield battle compelled the National Government, within twelve hours, to give sanction for the cuts to be restored retrospectively and at once by the Sheffield Public Assistance Committee. This merely served as an impetus to the mass movement in other centres, resulting in the immediate restoration of the cuts being made general. Thus in less than a month from the date of the operation of the 1934 Unemployment Act (7 January, 1935), the Government was forced to suspend its own legislation.

Throughout this period the Labour Party acted as "His Majesty's Opposition" in the House of Parliament, doing little against a House loaded with Government supporters, but devoting itself entirely to the preparation for the next General Election. The leaders called for an absolute Labour majority, which should put them in a position of power. In anticipation, and with great hopes of being again a Government, they sedulously guarded the Party policy from any taint of real working-class politics. At the Southport Labour

Party Conference in 1934, the decisions of the previous year's Conference with regard to a general strike in the event of war breaking out were revised. The Conference passed resolutions against the United Front, and warned all members against participation in any united front activity, and in any auxiliary organizations of the Communist Party. The Labour Party based itself optimistically on the growing support shown for the Labour candidates at the various municipal elections.

In November 1934, the Labour Party secured victories in the municipal elections, gaining majorities on local councils in many areas in London and other centres. This swing to Labour was obviously an expression of the hatred of the masses for the National Government and its anti-working class legislation. This big move to Labour was accompanied by increasing militant activity of Labour and trade union workers in the united front with the Communist Party—activity which the leaders of the Labour Party did not approve and vigorously opposed. That there was a growing section of workers who were not satisfied with the policy of the Labour Party was already shown in 1932, when the Independent Labour Party disaffiliated from the Labour Party.

The Labour Party and the T.U.C. concentrated on defending democracy from "the dangers of the Right and Left—from the dictatorship of Fascism or of Communism," as they expressed it in one manifesto rejecting the united front proposals of the Communist Party. On this basis they again and again rejected the offers of the Independent Labour Party and the Communist Party for joint activity against the twin menaces of war and fascism and in defence of the workers' standard of life. The Labour Party remained a bulwark against the united front in the councils of the Second International, even when faced with the appeals of the heroic Austrian and Spanish workers who had engaged in armed struggle against the Fascist dictatorship. Following the same line, the T.U.C. devoted itself more and more to the preparation of "schemes of socialization of industry" which were in reality schemes of monopolization, based as they were on the model of the London Passenger Transport Board, a body formed by the Tramway, Bus and Underground Railway companies led by Lord Ashfield to control

all means of public transport in London. The T.U.C. paid scanty attention to the daily struggles of the workers, or to the demands for wage increases put forward by 3,000,000 organized workers. "Industrial peace," born in 1927, continued to be the guiding aim of the trade union leaders.

The Thirteenth Congress of the C.P.G.B., which took place in Hulme Town Hall, Manchester, on 2 February, 1935, marked a turning point in the Communist movement in Great Britain. It was able to point to an increase in membership and influence, and to growth in its press and as a force in the political life of the country. The new spirit of the movement was reflected in the character of the Congress. In addition to the party delegates, 30 delegates attended in response to the open invitation to local working-class organizations; of the 294 delegates attending, only 79 were unemployed, while 234 were active trade union members. This composition, weighted on the side of employment and trade union membership, reflected the serious turn in party work since the January resolution of 1932.

The Congress confined itself to four main resolutions: "The Communist Party and the United Front," "The Communist Party and Economic Struggles," "Building a Mass Communist Party," and "The Colonial question." In addition to these resolutions the party for the first time adopted a comprehensive programme "For Soviet Britain." The United Front resolution emphasized the urgent need for united action, showed how to carry on united front work, and stressed the importance of returning a group of Communists to the House of Commons. While the period since the Twelfth Congress had been marked by great demonstrations, by local strikes, by an increase in local movements of common action against Fascism and war, it was recognized that "in the main the decisive majority of the working class still follow the Labour Party and the T.U.C. leadership." Therefore, the urgent need of the movement was that of breaking through "the ban imposed upon the united front activity by the leaders of the Labour Party, Trades Union Congress and Co-operative Party, and bringing into the common fight every section of the working-class movement."

An outstanding feature of the growing influence of Communism among the working class, stimulated by united front

activity, was the increased number of Communist councillors returned to local bodies, especially in South Wales. The Congress declared "in the coming elections it is absolutely imperative that the Communist Party shall secure victory for its candidates and secure revolutionary representation in Parliament—a group of Communists in Parliament will have the greatest importance for the whole working class, as well as leading to significant changes in the attitude taken in Parliament by some Labour members." The defeat of the National Government was the central theme in discussing the tactics of the party in the elections.

As with the elections, so with the attitude of the Communists towards the economic struggles. Work in the trade unions, it was urged, must be taken very seriously and all sectarianism abandoned. The Communists must not only develop wage movements, but seek to build up the unions, secure the appointment of shop stewards and the development of work-shop organizations, factory committees, depot committees, shop stewards' committees, etc. At the same time attention was directed to the importance of the trades councils, and the need to turn them into real centres of working-class life and struggle. To realize these decisions emphasis was laid upon party organization in the trade unions for the guidance and development of this work.

Since 1932 a number of rank-and-file movements of trade unionists have come into being, in which the Communists have played a leading part. The most outstanding among these is that of the London busmen. Ever since the London Transport combine was instituted, the busmen and tramway-men have been faced not only with wage-cuts, but a terrific speeding-up and a number of demands of irritating character (re-shuffling of time schedules, spying and reporting to the company, etc.). The specific feature of this rank-and-file movement is that it unites members of the trade union and operates through the branch of the union, which comprises the workers in a given garage. The militancy of this movement has led to a series of successes in resisting wage-cuts, speeding-up and other measures of rationalization, and has become an example for the workers in other industries.

On the basis of this experience, and of similar movements in other industries, e.g., the aircraft engineers, the former

methods of the Minority Movement, working from outside the unions, with an independent card membership, tending to lead to the idea of the Minority Movement as an alternative to the existing trade unions, no longer suffice. With the recognition that the trade unions, however reformist in character, are the mass organizations of the workers, and that it is necessary for the revolutionary militants to work within them and abandon all sectarianism, the Minority Movement has ceased to have a function.

In the programme "For Soviet Britain" we have the first systematic presentation of Communist policy for Great Britain. In this programme an answer is given to all the questions that arise from a consideration of the merits of "peaceful gradualism," i.e., reformism, on the one hand, and the revolutionary struggle of the working class for power on the other. The Communist Party strives for the overthrow of capitalism and for the dictatorship of the proletariat. In place of the bourgeois parliament, working-class democracy will be ensured through Workers' Councils, i.e., Soviets. The banks, big factories, mines, transport concerns will be taken over by the Soviet State, without compensation, and the construction of a new social system will begin. The whole economic resources of the country, including agriculture, fishing, and distributive trades will be systematically developed; housing, health, protection of labour, education, etc., will become important responsibilities of the Soviet State and the trade unions. Production and distribution will be planned to ensure that the needs of the working masses will be adequately supplied in accordance with the increasingly available means. The right of self-determination will be proclaimed for all the countries within the British Empire, up to and including complete separation. Fraternal relations will take the place of subjugation, and a free association entered into with all such freed peoples as are willing, and with all the countries of Soviet power.

On 25 July, 1935, the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International opened in Moscow. At this Congress the question of a united front of the workers and a people's front against Fascism and war occupied the central place. While the Congress could record tremendous gains for the Communist movement—the successes in socialist construction

in the U.S.S.R., and the advances in that great territory towards a classless society, the huge areas in China now under Soviet power; the political and numerical growth of a number of Communist parties (Austria, Spain, France), and the successes in united front work—the sober fact of the existence of fascist power in a number of countries, and fascist tendencies in other countries, was frankly faced. Guiding lines were laid down for the future work of the Communist Parties, the chief of these being united action with all the workers' organizations, national and international, extending into a broad people's front, for the struggle against fascism and war, for the preservation of democratic institutions and civilization against Fascist barbarism.

CHAPTER VIII

DURING the months of July and August 1935 the black shadows of war overhung Europe, the exciting cause being the Italian threats to Abyssinia. While there was much coming and going and discussion at Geneva by the diplomats of the League of Nations, Mussolini was preparing for aggressive action. The seriousness of the situation found its reflection in the British Labour movement. At the Trade Union Congress (Margate) and at the Labour Party Conference (Brighton) the dominating issues were the questions of War and Fascism. Prior to both these assemblies the National Council of Labour at a meeting on 24 July formulated its policy in the following terms:

> "The National Council of Labour calls upon the British Government to make immediate proposals in an open meeting of the Council of the League of Nations at Geneva, with the view of defining the responsibilities of Italy and Abyssinia under the covenant, and to declare that it will discharge its duties and obligations as a member of the League without fear or favour.
>
> "Neutral observers should at once be sent to the Abyssinian front in accordance with the Abyssinian request. No foreign loans should be made available to facilitate the slaughter of Africans for the glory of a new Fascist Empire. The way to peace lies, not through the coercion of Abyssinia into making concessions to Fascist Italy, but in making Fascist Italy realize that it stands in danger of being confronted by the obloquy and resistance of the world."*

Before passing to the discussion at Margate on the resolution on war the General Council of the Congress had to face the question of the issue of Circulars 17 to the trade unions and 16 to the trades councils, the famous "Black Circulars." These circulars were issued on 26 October, 1934. The trade

* *Labour Party Conference Report*, 1935.

unions were referred to the report made at the Belfast Congress in 1929 "regarding the disruption tactics of communist and auxiliary organizations within the trade union movement" and the request then made "that affiliated organizations should deal with this disruptive activity in their own way." The General Council now asked the Executive Committees to consider the possibility of drawing up regulations or amending the rules to empower them "to reject the nominations of members of disruptive bodies for any official position within your organization." The circular to the trades councils was couched in almost identical terms and categorically declared "that any trades council which admits delegates who are associated with Communist or Fascist organizations, or their auxiliary bodies shall be removed from the list of trades councils recognized by Congress . . . that it is not in order for trades councils recognized by the General Council to co-operate in any way with disruptive organizations."

These circulars had met with great opposition. Of the total number of affiliated unions to the Congress, viz., 211, only 41 agreed with the Council policy; 4 were placing the question before their rule-making authority; 8 reported as not taking any action, but would do so if necessity arose; 8 replied that their rules already gave power to deal with actions contrary to the interests of the society; 15 reported taking no action; whilst 10 unions informed the General Council they were not in agreement with their policy. These included such important unions as the Miners' Federation, the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the Transport and General Workers. Fourteen other unions took varied forms of action such as referring the question to their local committees. Of the trades councils 283 accepted the policy of the General Council, 80 did not reply and 18 expressed dissent, 7 of the latter afterwards reversing their decision and falling in line with the General Council.

The rejection of these circulars was moved by Lawther, Vice-President of the Miners' Federation, who declared "Our organization has suffered more from the Right than from the Left." The main attack on the Communists was led by Bevin of the Transport and General Workers' Union. Despite the fact that his own union had rejected the "Black Circular," his speech and 600,000 votes were cast in favour of the General

Council. It has to be remembered that the system of block voting, by which the permanent officials are often able to swing a delegation behind them, explains this contradiction between voting at congresses and the real opinion of the membership. These votes decisively turned the scale in support of the General Council, the result being 1,869,000 for the circular and 1,427,000 against. The huge vote against the "Black Circular" reflected the growth of the desire for working-class unity in the trade union and labour movement generally.

The Congress resolution on war submitted by the General Council demanded "Economic and financial sanctions" against Italy and "Support for the application of the League of Nations Covenant." But there was strong vocal opposition from the small group of militants in the Congress who criticized the General Council for not exposing the aims of the British Government. Proposals from one of the militant delegates of the furnishing trades were made for a more positive programme of action, and represented the views of the rank-and-file delegates and lower functionaries of the trade unions. These proposals demanded:

"A stoppage of all war materials and a refusal to load ships for Italy.

"An embargo on loans to Italy.

"The removal of the ban on arms to Abyssinia and closing of the Suez Canal to Italian ships.

"Raising money in the unions for the support of anti-fascist fighters in Italy.

"An Emergency Conference to be convened immediately by the National Council of Labour.

"Action on lines already taken by Greek seamen and Capetown dockers.

"Support of the League of Nations sanctions, but repudiation of the imperialist aims of the British Government."

The debate was closed by Sir Walter Citrine, who spoke not a word of criticism of the National Government, and the resolution of the General Council was carried by 2,962,000 votes against 151,000. It is probably no exaggeration to say that many delegates voted for the General Council for fear of

giving the impression that the Labour movement was against sanctions.

The Conference of the Labour Party (30 September) at Brighton also followed the lead given by the National Council of Labour meeting of 24 July. The resolution "condemned the provocative and defiant attitude of the head of the Italian Government," pledged firm support "to any action consistent with the principles and statutes of the League to restrain the Italian Government," and called upon the British Government to "urge the League to summon a World Economic Conference and to place on its agenda international control of the sources and supply of materials."

Three tendencies were reflected in the discussion. Dr. Dalton (former Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the Labour Government) for the Labour Party Executive, declared: "The status quo cannot continue either in economics or politics and great changes must be made, but they must be made by friendly discussion and not by war or the bullying threat of war. Labour stands for collective security in defence of peace against any aggression. . . . Economic and financial sanctions rigidly applied might be enough to prevent war. . . . If Mussolini is so lunatic as to resist a united League of Nations by force, then let it be so. . . . The question for us is: Shall we throw the full weight of this movement into the maintenance of peace—unbroken if we can—and if peace is broken, not through our action, break the aggressor with a minimum of human suffering and delay."

Following the discussion in the National Council of Labour meeting Sir Stafford Cripps and Lord Ponsonby had resigned from the Executive owing to their opposition to sanctions. Cripps declared "When sanctions are applied a state of war exists and we must defend those sanctions against military attack. We must envisage the possibility of war. We have committed the workers to the capitalist military machine." Sir Charles Trevelyan, like Cripps, a member of the National Council of the Socialist League, but differing from him on the question of war, spoke in favour of sanctions on conditions, that they should be an unmistakable international act by the League of Nations, and that we should only support economic pressure on Italy and refuse to assist in a military attack on

her unless Mussolini retaliated by military violence. The views of Ponsonby and George Lansbury were of the purely pacifist and religious character of opposition to all war, i.e., the belief "that force was no remedy."

The third tendency was expressed by Williams, a miners' delegate. "The issue," he declared, "is not imperialism, but sanctions against an aggressor. It is a dishonest argument to suggest that all those who support sanctions support the National Government. We are not supporting the Government, but the Covenant of the League of Nations. The Government wants to support sanctions for imperialist aims. We want to support them for purely class aims." He demanded that the conference should repudiate the imperialist aims of the National Government, demand the closing of the Suez Canal, refuse to send coal to Italy, refuse to load or unload to Italy, or lend Italy money, and the calling of an International Conference of all workers to present a united front of workers against war.

Considerable heat was engendered by a violent attack on Cripps and Lansbury by Ernest Bevin who accused them of "letting them down" and "stabbing the party in the back." Herbert Morrison distinguished himself, and exploded the apparently disinterested proposal of a World Economic Conference to control materials, by declaring:

> "I would be prepared to say that no individual state should have Crown colonies at all—that the French, Italian and British Crown colonies should be handed over to the League of Nations and administered and controlled by the League itself. . . . It does not follow that the British Crown Colonies would no longer be under British administration. I hope I am not jingo, but I still feel that the British are the most considerate colonial administrators in the world."

Outside the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party, in the first stages of the war, while demanding that it was an "obligation of all members of the League of Nations to take common action against Italy," declared it had no belief that they would do so, and stood for "worker sanctions" on the grounds that if "the Abyssinian conflict be localized, the sufferers will be the workers of all countries." Later, it

expressed horror and regret at the attitude of the Labour Party Executive and the T.U.C. in urging the Government to wage war on Italy in the name of collective security through the League of Nations. "The difference between the two rival dictators and the interests behind them are not worth a single British life." (*New Leader*, 13 September, 1935.) The Socialist League, in a statement issued on 22 September, 1935, adopted a similar attitude to that of the Independent Labour Party in declaring "The Socialist League must not flinch from declaring that the immediate needs of the Soviet Union, *vis-à-vis* France and Germany, do not constitute valid grounds for mobilizing the workers of this country in support of the 'sanctions' policy of the National Government or of the League of Nations."

The Communist Party carried on a widespread agitation in defence of Abyssinian independence, for organized action to prevent the production and transport of war material to Italy, the closing of the Suez Canal to Italian troops and ammunition and the lifting of the bar on imports of war materials to Abyssinia; favoured the application of the League Covenant against Italy, pressure on the National Government to support the Franco–Soviet Pact, and to withdraw from the Anglo–German Naval Agreement. Finally it called for a World Conference of Labour to combat the offensive of Fascism and the menace of war. Huge placards embodying these demands in a special appeal form were put up in every large centre in the country. In a number of places the local bill-posting companies refused to handle these posters, but so great was the pressure of anti-war feeling that the bill-posters had to desist from their opposition. Simultaneously, the Communist Party carried on a successful agitation against the Government's proposals to the local authorities to organize gas-mask drill in their areas.

The changed forms and methods of Communist Party work in Great Britain that marked the turn away from the narrow sectarianism of the period prior to the January Resolution (1932) received an added impulse from the decisions of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International. Three basic tasks stood before the C.P.G.B.: the first, to do everything possible to unite the workers' movement on the widest platform to stem the growth of Fascism; second, to

concentrate all possible forces to bring about the defeat of the National Government and to secure the return of a Labour Government that would advance the interests of the working class against capitalism; third, to extend the fight for peace by the development of a broad people's front against war.

On the return of the delegates from the Seventh World Congress reporting conferences took place all over the country. To these conferences were invited not only the Communist Party members, but trade unionists and Labour Party members and organizations, and all who had heard the stirring call of Dimitroff for unity and a fight against Fascism and war, for the preservation of the democratic rights of the people and for world peace. These conferences marked an innovation in the workers' movement and were well attended and widely representative. They were an excellent indication of the widespread desire for unity in the localities and districts. That this enthusiasm for unity was not a passing sentiment was to be revealed later in the General Election results.

On 6 October a National Conference of the C.P.G.B. took place in London, delegates attending to discuss the reports of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, to sum up the situation in Great Britain and prepare plans for future activity. The Central Committee of the party had made certain proposals to the Labour Party in view of the forthcoming General Election. The Communists proposed to withdraw all Communist candidates in the General Election from opposing Labour candidates, and asked the Labour Party not to oppose the candidature of Pollitt in East Rhondda, Wales, and Gallacher, West Fife, Scotland. The Communist Party went further and declared:

> "The party is prepared in these two constituencies to, in conjunction with the trade unions and labour bodies in them, convene a selection conference, bring the various working-class candidates before it and abide by their decisions."

These proposals resulted from the decisions of the Thirteenth Party Congress held at Manchester to "break through," and secure the return of a group of Communists to the House of Commons. The Labour party rejected the proposals.

The National Conference confirmed this line of the Central Committee to enter into an election agreement with the Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party to avoid contests between working-class candidates in all constituencies at the General Election, and in the Municipal Elections, and confirmed the line of the Central Committee on the Italian war on Abyssinia.

Towards the realization of the Seventh World Congress decisions the National Conference set before the party the following aims:

1. For the defeat of the National Government.
   The carrying through of a great unity campaign to explain the decisions of the World Congress in relation to the struggle of the British working-class movement, to secure the defeat of the National Government and the return of a Labour Government, which fights for peace and the improvement of working-class conditions.
2. The Fight for Peace.
   The most intensive campaign to win the support of the trade unions and mass organizations for (those aims already quoted).
3. Working-class unity.
   The launching of a crusade for working-class unity, by a campaign through the trade unions and Labour movement as a whole and by approach to the trade union and local Labour organizations for:

   (*a*) Full support in every possible way for the demands of the miners and the strengthening of national unity through the amalgamation of the various coalfield associations into one union for the British coalfields.

   (*b*) Full support for the demands of the engineers and the restoration of the "cut" for railway workers.

   (*c*) United action in support of the N.U.W.M. demands for winter relief, work schemes, abolition of Means Test, school feeding, etc.

   (*d*) The fight for trade union democracy and the amalgamation of separate trade unions leading towards

one union for each industry for building 100 per cent trade union organization.

(*e*) The unification of all working-class forces on the political field by the development of the Labour Party as a coalition of all working-class organizations, including the Communist Party.

(*f*) The fight for international trade union unity in a single trade union International and for the united front of the two political working-class Internationals.

4. The eight-page *Daily Worker*.
   To redouble the efforts to increase the sales of the *Daily Worker* and achieve the eight pages at the earliest possible moment, and to regard this as a key question to enable the party to give leadership to the masses in the present serious war situation and the campaign towards the General Election.
5. Political education and building of a strong Communist Party.
   To popularize the decisions of the Seventh World Congress, both by mass sale of literature of the World Congress decisions and by organizing workers' study circles and training classes to advance the political understanding of active sympathizers and party members on the line of the World Congress, and to develop new leading forces in the ranks of the party.

Perhaps the best index of the demand and desire for unity was the movement in South Wales against the company unions and for forcing the unorganized into the Miners' Federation. This movement, in which the Communist Party took an active part, had been going on for several months. Finally, on 12 October, 100 miners in the Nine Mile Point Colliery resolved upon a "stay down" strike against the employment of non-federation men. The strike spread to a number of other pits until twenty pits were affected involving 20,000 miners. "Blacklegs" were drafted into the affected areas in special trains guarded by police. Baton charges and considerable fighting took place. After seven days of tense excitement the owners were forced to agree to terms and

grant official recognition to the South Wales Miners' Federation.

At the Bournemouth Conference of the Conservative Party which took place early in October, Baldwin went out of his way to refer to the influence of the Communist Party in the trade unionist movement, especially in South Wales, in a manner which recalled another famous conference of the tories in 1925 when a vicious attack was made on the Communists which was followed up by the arrest of the twelve Communist leaders. "Let me ask you," he said, "to watch carefully the continuous efforts that are being made by the Communist Party in this country to get control of the trade unions and to destroy them." This statement was made in convenient forgetfulness of the fact that he was the man who sponsored the Trades Dispute Act of 1924, after having used military and police forces to break the General Strike of 1926. Nevertheless, it is a tribute to the changed times that the Communist Party has received acknowledgment from responsible trade union leaders for services rendered to the strengthening of the unions by practical assistance and the recruitment of members.

The municipal elections which took place in 1935 were marked by great care not to split the Labour vote where Labour had a strong position. Since 1931, the year of heavy losses for Labour, the Labour Party had more than made good its losses by the striking successes in 1934. In 1935 no seats on the balance had been lost in England and Wales while the control of five Boroughs was gained.* In Scotland Labour gained everywhere, while the Communist Party gained at Cowdenbeath (two seats), Perth and Clydebank, and at Lochgelly the Communist retained his seat. These results augured well for the prospective General Election then under consideration by the Government.

Faced with an acute situation abroad in which a new world war loomed greater than at any period since 1914–18,

* Municipal Elections

Year	*Labour gains or losses*
1931	−420
1932	+ 22
1933	+242
1934	+241
1935	+ 6

Japanese aggression in China, the failure of the Disarmament Conference, the new race in armaments and the Italian war on Abyssinia, the National Government precipitated the General Election. Though unemployment and social reconstruction occupied a big part of the Government's campaign, the real issue was the question of war and peace. The National Government sought to stampede the country by social demagogy and anti-socialist propaganda, and by raising the bogey of "national defence."

The results* showed the degree of anti-National Government feeling in the country. At the dissolution of Parliament the Government had a majority of 418. It returned from the polls with the reduced majority of 247. Of the former Labour Ministers 23 who lost their seats in 1931 were returned. Ramsay MacDonald and his son Malcolm MacDonald, the Labour renegades of 1930, were defeated. The Communist Party increased its vote in East Rhondda, and secured its first member returned on a straight Communist platform (Gallacher) for West Fife. The success of the National Government can be attributed to the "defeatist" attitude of the Labour Party leaders, in their resistance to the widespread demand for unity of the working-class forces, their hesitancy to go forward with a bold socialist programme, and the disunity and lack of cohesion in the party leadership.

An analysis of the voting shows that the opposition vote totalled 9,991,839 for 184 seats, against the Government's

* General Election

Parties	*Total votes cast* 1931	1935
Conservative	11,926,537	10,488,626
Liberal National	809,102	866,624
National Labour	343,353	339,811
National	55,309	97,271
Labour	6,648,023	8,325,260
Liberal	1,405,102	1,377,962
Independent Liberal	106,106	65,150
Independent Labour Party ...	—	139,517
Communist	74,824	27,117*a*
Irish Republican	—	56,833
Independent	—	217,666
New Party	36,377	—
	21,404,733	22,001,837

a In 1935 all the Communist candidates except two were withdrawn.

vote of 11,792,332 for 431 seats. In fifty-five constituencies members were returned on a minority vote. A great number of these constituencies could have been won for Labour had there been a more vigorous campaign, and had the united front proposals of the Communist Party been accepted. Many successful Labour candidates and many Labour agents attributed their success to the united front and the assistance given by the local Communists. Never before was there such a mass sense of workers' unity, accompanied by hatred for the National Government. Most conspicuous in this direction were the miners. The miners were already pressing their demands for wage increases. In every mining constituency the Labour Party secured decisive results, Labour members being returned with thumping majorities.

Immediately following the election the Communist Party renewed its demands for affiliation to the Labour Party, and sent the following letter to the Executive Committee of the Labour Party:

16, King Street,
Covent Garden,
London, W.C.2.

Mr. J. S. Middleton, *25 November, 1935.*
The Labour Party,
Transport House (South Block),
Smith Square, S.W.1.

Dear Comrade,

I am instructed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain to make application for affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party.

Since your Executive Committee and the Annual Conference of the Labour Party last discussed the question, many far-reaching changes have taken place in the political situation at home and abroad, and in countries like Germany, Italy, Austria and Spain, the Labour movement has been fiercely attacked and the Social-Democratic Parties and trade unions destroyed by Fascism.

The world is in the midst of the most dangerous war situation. One Fascist Power (Italy) has launched an attack on Abyssinia, and the best-armed Fascist Power—

Germany—is preparing to attack the Soviet Union and to plunge the whole world into war.

In Britain, MacDonald, Thomas and Snowden, the bitterest opponents of Communism, who led the fight against the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party, have gone over to the class enemy. Under their leadership, the National Government was first formed and at once proceeded to the most savage attacks on working-class conditions.

The return of the National Government, pledged to an out-and-out militarist programme, will not only involve more attacks on the workers' conditions, social-services, and on popular liberties at home, but will also mean further support for Nazi Germany—the main enemy of peace in Europe. Against this reactionary, war-like Government, the whole forces of the working class must be prepared to struggle in defence of peace and democracy.

More and more British workers are becoming convinced that the defeat of the National Government and of Fascism, and the winning of Socialism, cannot be secured without the united action of every section of the working-class movement.

During the General Election campaign, the active help given by the Communist Party and its local organizations has been appreciated by the Labour parties in a large number of constituencies. We are confident that the local ward committees and rank-and-file of the Labour parties feel that a closer and more permanent link between the memberships of the two organizations would strengthen the whole Labour movement and lead to wider victories than have been achieved in this General Election.

The Labour Party has always taken the view that, as a Federal body, it represents the "United Front" of the working class in Britain. The Communist Party is perfectly willing to accept the Labour Party as the Federal organization of a united working class, provided that the Labour Party justifies its claim to represent all sections by accepting the Communist Party as an affiliated organization. The time is past when a Federal body such as the Labour Party can claim to be all-embracing if it excludes workers and organizations which hold the revolutionary standpoint,

but are prepared to work loyally within the Labour Party on all current electoral and other campaigns.

The Communist Party has always stated its revolutionary standpoint and will continue to do so. It will always maintain its international connections with working-class parties in other countries which are based on the revolutionary point of view.

The Communist Party and its membership is prepared to work honestly and sincerely for the strengthening of the working-class movement and the winning of a majority of working-class representatives on all local bodies and in Parliament. It is prepared to do this, not as a manœuvre or for any concealed aims, but because it believes that this would unite the working class and make it better able to face the immediate fight against the National Government, against Fascism and imperialist war.

We, therefore, apply for affiliation nationally and locally to the Labour Party, and sincerely trust that in the interests of the whole working class our application will be accepted.

Yours fraternally,

HARRY POLLITT.

On behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The Communists did not confine their demand for affiliation to this letter to the Executive of the Labour Party. All local labour parties and working-class organizations received a copy. In a great number of local labour parties the claims of the Communist Party received support. In a number of local trades councils and trade union organizations Communists were elected to leading positions. The changed tactical line of the Communist Party, the abandonment of all sectarianism, the wholehearted support of trade union unity, destroyed the legend once and for all that the Communists were the splitters in the workers' movement. The Communist Party had now come to be reckoned upon as a serious national political force.

On 27 January, 1936, the Executive Committee of the Labour Party sent the following reply to the Communist Party on its request to be admitted as an affiliated section of the Labour Party:

The Labour Party,
Transport House (South Block),
Smith Square, London, S.W.1.
27 January, 1936.

Dear Pollitt,

The National Executive Committee had before it at its recent meeting your letter applying for the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party.

After full consideration, the National Executive Committee came to the conclusion that no circumstance had arisen to justify any departure from the decision registered by the Annual Conference at Edinburgh in 1922, when, after a lengthy discussion (in which you will remember you took part), a similar application for affiliation was rejected by 3,860,000 to 261,000.

On that occasion it was clearly stated that the fundamental difference between the democratic policy and practice of the Labour Party and the policy of dictatorship which the Communist Party had been created to promote was irreconcilable. No events which have taken place in the intervening period have served to reconcile that profound political distinction. It is true that Fascism has conquered power in various European States. In the opinion of the National Executive Committee, however, the victories of the Fascist dictatorships were in part facilitated by the campaigns for Communist dictatorship that preceded the campaigns—which effectively split the working-class movement and rendered their overthrow possible.

Moreover, the National Executive Committee cannot fail to take note of the proclaimed fact that the present application for affiliation is but an evidence of the deviation in the tactics which have been pursued by the Communist International in recent years, and that affiliation is sought, not for the purpose of promoting the Labour Party's declared policy and programme, but, on the contrary, to utilize party facilities on the platform, in public conference, and in the party press, to displace their essential democratic and socialist character and substitute a policy and programme based upon Communist Party principles.

The National Executive Committee is as firmly convinced as were their predecessors that any weakening in the

Labour Party's defence of political democracy, such as the affiliation of the Communist Party would imply, would inevitably assist the forces of reaction, would endanger our existing liberties, and would retard the achievement of Socialism in this country.

In these circumstances the National Executive Committee is unable to accede to your application.

Yours very sincerely,

J. S. MIDDLETON (*Secretary*).

The essence of this reply from the Executive of the Labour Party is a repetition of the contention made in 1921 that the Communist Party having a revolutionary programme and tactics in contradistinction to the bourgeois-democratic social-reformist programme of the Labour Party, is therefore ineligible as a component body and completely ignores the growing support being given to the Communist application for affiliation by local labour parties, trade union bodies and trades councils. The allegation that the coming to power of Fascism in Germany and other countries was facilitated by the Communist Parties, and that they are responsible for the split in the working-class movement, slanderously and cynically contradicts the plain facts in Italy, Germany, Austria and Spain, now apparent to all disinterested observers of history. The claim that the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party would inevitably assist the forces of reaction, endanger existing political democratic liberties and retard the development of Socialism in Great Britain, demonstrates once more the deep-rooted capitalist influences at work in the British Labour movement; at the same time it reveals the gulf between the leadership of the Labour Party and the revolutionary process now going on among the wider strata of the working-class movement.

We have seen in these pages how closely connected is the rise and development of the British Labour movement with the history of capitalism in Great Britain. We have tried to show how the creation of the Labour aristocracy, as a social base for the preparation of the rule of the British capitalist class, has not by any means been accidental. The Labour aristocracy was created in the period of the industrial and colonial monopoly of British capitalism, as a privileged section

separated from the wide masses of the workers at home, and at the expense of the enslaved toilers in the colonies. Since then the "dead hand" of the Labour aristocracy, its sectionalism and individualism, leaves the heavy imprint of capitalist class influence and culture on the working-class movement. This influence is seen in every stage of the movement in the last fifty years, the Labour Representation Committees and the subsequent Labour Party; the strike movements in the 'nineties and the period before the War, during the War, and in the post-War period; "Black Friday," 1921, the General Strike, 1926, "Mondism," and the continuity of capitalist policy by the two Labour Governments.

That there have been contradictions at times, when the Labour bureaucracy assumed the appearance of the leader of the struggle against the whole capitalist order, e.g., in 1926, is true, but always the ruling class was able to re-assert its authority or by suitable compromise to repair its influence when temporarily weakened. As we have seen, the ruling class has developed to a fine art the practice of "coaching" the Labour leaders on questions of tactics and policy. From time to time it has given "honours" for services rendered, and when their servants have lost their power to influence, "sinecures" have been found, in the state apparatus, as advisors to companies and trusts, etc. To-day the capitalists' conceptions of the British Labour leaders is a by-word in the International Labour movement.

But a new challenging influence has arisen. With the loss of its world industrial monopoly and the appearance of new rival forces that are breaking down its colonial monopoly, British Imperialism finds it more and more difficult to make concessions to the Labour aristocracy. The general crisis of capitalism is accentuating the class struggle and rousing wider masses of workers to the need for a new social order. There are two prospects before the British working class, one, the way of Fascism and naked capitalist dictatorship with no pretence of democracy; the other, the way of Soviet power, i.e., the dictatorship of the working masses, led by the Communist Party, as in the U.S.S.R.

The leaders of the British trade unions and the Labour Party, the historic expression of the Labour aristocracy, may try to stem the upsurge of the wider masses of the working

class, and divert them from the revolutionary path to Soviet power. But the developing conditions of modern capitalism will not allow of this. Great changes are taking place in the Labour movement. The Labour aristocracy itself is undergoing a radical transformation. It is no longer the same as it was when the first steps were taken to set up the Labour Party. Its base is becoming more and more narrow. It is becoming less and less frightened with bug-a-boo stories of violence, civil war and revolution. Some of the important positions in the trade unions are now occupied by Communists. Communists are being elected as local representatives to county councils in preference to official Labour candidates, and many local bodies are uniting with the Communists in action in defiance of the official ban. The Communist movement of to-day is a radically different movement from that of 1920 when it was first formed. It has grown politically. It has cast off much of the sectarianism of its earlier days, and is now a serious political force in the country, capable of adapting itself to changing political situations. It owns a daily paper, the *Daily Worker*, around which has gathered a strong force of labour, trade union as well as Communist sympathizers who support the paper with remarkable generosity and sacrifice.* In the trade union movement and the Labour Party influential sections and personalities in spite of the official "ban" see in the Communist Party not an alien body but an integral part of the working-class movement and are demanding the closest unity in action with the Communists. This is seen in the growing number of demands that the C.P.G.B. be accepted as a body affiliated to the Labour Party and that all restrictions upon the Communists inside the organized Labour movement be removed. These are symptoms of a radically changed Labour movement in comparison with the movement of fifty years ago.

* In the first four months of 1936 no less than £2,306 was donated, an average of £509 a month.

CHAPTER IX

THE first half of 1936 was marked by a persistent movement of the capitalist forces in Europe making for a new world war, in which the British National Government played the most decisive and sinister role. The National Government was no sooner installed in power after the General Election (November 1935) than there was unearthed a veritable conspiracy between the British Foreign Minister (Sir Samuel Hoare) and M. Laval (French Premier) to partition Abyssinia.

The military course of the Italian war on Abyssinia in the first two months had not been a conspicuous success for Italy. On the other hand the British Government's hands were filled with a number of bristling problems such as the four-power Naval Conference, the new aggressive designs of Japan in North China and her objections to British financial schemes in China, German rearmaments and, most important, the renewed Nationalist movement for independence in Egypt. British policy, therefore, was interested in bringing about a speedy settlement of the conflict in Abyssinia, first to free its hands to deal with these other more important matters, and, second, to save Italian Fascism from a possible internal crash.

Laval, on the French side, notorious accomplice of Mussolini, and with strong Fascist leanings, was anxious to use Italy and Hitler to drive a bargain with Great Britain. On Saturday and Sunday (7 and 8 December) Hoare and Laval met in Paris with their experts to draw up their now infamous proposals. These proposals were for an exchange of territories between Italy and Abyssinia, Italy to concede Abyssinia an outlet to the sea by means of a corridor in the southern part of Eritrea, leading to the port of Assab. Alternately, Great Britain would oblige by conceding the port of Zeiba. In exchange for this a part of the Tigre and the Danakil territory in the north would come under Italian sovereignty. In the south, Ogaden and those provinces East of the 36th degree eastern longitude and to the South of 8th degree northern latitude would come under the mandate

of Italy. As for the remainder of Abyssinia, the Emperor was to conclude a treaty of "Assistance" with the League, and upon the council nominated by the League to aid the Emperor would be an Italian. In effect this was a criminal carving up of Abyssinia, an aiding and abetting of an obvious aggressor.

The disclosure of this conspiracy, which leaked out in a French newspaper led to great resentment and indignation in the country. It would be difficult to imagine a more flagrant departure from the policy of the National Government as expressed during the elections, viz., support for the League of Nations and for collective agreements under the League Covenant. Some of the Government's supporters were not against such proposals, but the stronger supporters were fearful of the results to British interests in Africa. Eventually, Baldwin was forced to sacrifice Hoare after a feeble attempt to whitewash him. Hoare's position as Foreign Minister was taken by Anthony Eden, one of the younger Tories, and a staunch supporter of Baldwin. The wider and more sinister feature of this conspiracy was its intention to reconcile British–French interests with those of Italy and open the way to bringing Germany into the system of "collective security," i.e., into a United Front with Britain, France and Italy. This ulterior aim was frankly stated by Laval in his speech to the French Chamber on 29 December, 1935, in defence of the agreement with Hoare, viz., "To-morrow, together, we would try to bring Germany into the system of collective security."

British policy during the post-War period had been directed towards counter-balancing French influence in Western Europe, and in creating a united front of imperialist powers dominated by Great Britain and directed against the Soviet Union. This policy led to the strengthening and ultimate rearming of Germany. It explains the contradictions in the policy of Great Britain towards Italy in 1936, which on the one hand tried to check Italy's aggression in Abyssinia as being inimical to British interests in Africa, while on the other hand, it was not only not averse to partitioning Abyssinia, but actually tried to reach an agreement with Italy on the question of territory to be forcibly annexed. In practice, the British Government encouraged Italian ambitions in Africa. It was in this situation that the Hitler *coup* of 7 March took place when the German troops marched into the Rhineland, thus

tearing up the Locarno Treaty and defying the powers that comprised the League of Nations.

The German Fascists had every reason to feel assured that their action was not likely to meet with forcible resistance. The events of recent years had shown the lack of unity, the hesitations and weakness of the League of Nations before acts of aggression. In 1932 the League had not only failed to forcibly restrain the Japanese annexation of Manchuria, but in fact by words and deeds condoned Japan's action. Confronted by Italian aggression in Africa, the League had demonstrated its impotence. In point of fact, the beginning of the confusion in the League of Nations and the undermining of its authority dates from the moment Sir John Simon at Geneva in 1932* delivered his historic declaration giving Japan a free hand to continue her aggression in Manchuria. From that moment the cause of world peace was imperilled.

The Fascist march of troops into the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland was a blatant challenge to the League of Nations and brought Europe to the brink of another world war. That Hitler dared to make such a move implied disunity within the League and a calculation that he would get a measure of support from one or other of the Great Powers. Evidence of this support was soon forthcoming. Eden reported in the House of Commons two days after the event of 7 March "there is no reason to suppose that the present German action implies a threat of hostilities. The German Government speak in their memorandum of their 'unchangeable longing for a real pacification of Europe.'" The National Government thereupon still considered itself bound by the Locarno Pact and would come to the assistance of the defending country if either Germany, or Belgium and France were to attack the other.

This hypocritical attitude of the Baldwin Government was

* In September 1931 fighting between Japan and China broke out in Manchuria and Shanghai. In January 1932 China appealed to the League. The matter was handed over to a Committee of Nineteen, and to the Lytton Commission, which went to investigate the question on the spot. The latter reported Japan as the aggressor, and on 7 December, 1932, when the report was considered by the Assembly, Great Britain alone save for Germany and Italy supported Japan's suggestion that the matter should be settled by Japan and China independently and was no concern of the League. (*Labour Research*, London, November, 1935.)

in fact a continuation of a definite line to play one power off against another in opposition to the whole movement for collective security. The Baldwin Government tried to shift the blame for the confusion in international affairs in this period onto the U.S.A. for its refusal to join the League. We need only quote two examples to expose the hypocrisy of this argument. When Stimson, the Secretary of State for the U.S.A., came to Geneva to appeal for co-operation in the event of a Japanese war offensive it was Sir John Simon who barred the route. The second case was when Hoare in his speech to the House of Commons on 19 December, 1935, declared, regarding oil sanctions against Italy, "Supposing an oil embargo were to be imposed and that the non-member states took an effective part in it, the oil embargo might have such an effect upon the hostilities as to force their termination." Thus we see that the Hoare–Laval Plan had the twofold object of assisting Italy, and "double-crossing" the United States.

The conversations that followed the London Conference between the representatives of the General Staffs of the French, British and Belgians was a concession made by the British to French public opinion. But this did not prevent the British Government from assuring the German Fascists that they could rest calm as to the outcome of these conversations. Prior to 1914 such conversations would have denoted aggressive designs. The situation in 1936, however, was different. Neither the British nor the French desired war; their interests as regards Germany had a defensive character. The more disquieting consequences arising from the Fascist aggression were the revelation that the British government in particular was no longer resolved to organize the defence of peace against the German Fascist offensive.

The refusal of the British Government to assist in compelling the German Fascists to withdraw their troops and conform to the signed treaties and its hypocritical proposal to accept the Hitler Memorandum as a basis for negotiations of a new Locarno Pact was not only an open acquiescence in Hitler's act of aggression but was a means of creating confusion within the peace movement in Britain and particularly within the Labour movement. For a time a wave of anti-French sentiment affected large sections of the intelligentsia and

middle class. This was reflected in such radical newspapers as the *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian*. The *Daily Herald*, the official organ of the T.U.C. and Labour Party, distinguished itself by its open defence of Hitler, and spoke of a new era of peace being ushered in on the basis of Hitler's "offer" of twenty-five years' peace in the West.

These sentiments of the *Daily Herald*, however, were not shared by the masses in the Labour movement, and official spokesmen, like the leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, Attlee, and Citrine, for the T.U.C., had to speak another language. The real situation was aptly expressed in a statement issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of 21 March which said: "The Baldwin Government has been sabotaging peace because the dominant section of the British Labour leaders has sabotaged the united front for peace, nationally and internationally." For, notwithstanding the pretentious words of Citrine in his speech at the opening of the session of the Executive of the Labour and Socialist International and the International Federation of Trade Unions held in London (19 March) in which he declared: "We are concerned with the menace to the peace of the world by continual acts of aggression by Fascist dictators. The powers of the world and the Labour movements of the world must be prepared to face the responsibility of maintaining peace," no one had done more to oppose the extension of united front action in Great Britain and oppose united action on an international scale than Citrine.

When this conference of the Executives of the Second International and the International Federation of Trade Unions took place the Communist Parties of Great Britain and France, as well as the French Socialist Party, proposed that these Internationals should take steps to bring about a real international united front by responding to the appeals of the Communist International and the Red International of Labour Unions. Voices were even raised within the conference in favour of such a step, but still the two Executives contented themselves with issuing a manifesto calling upon the workers to overthrow Fascism, upon all freedom-loving people to fight against war. But of what the Executives themselves should do, not a word. When the French delegation proposed that joint action be taken with the Com-

munist International against the war danger, it was decided that this question should be placed on the agenda of the next regular meeting of the Executive of the Labour and Socialist International, i.e., in *two months' time* (May 1936). The strongest resistance to international united action at this conference came from the British delegates, supported by the Scandinavian delegates.

The British working-class movement was faced with the most serious situation that had confronted it since 1918. The central question in British politics in this period was the rearmament schemes of the Baldwin Government. The White Paper, issued on 3 March, 1936, had declared that:

> "Britain's armed forces must be maintained at a figure which will enable us to exercise sufficient influence and authority in international affairs required for the defence of vital British interests and in the application of the policy of collective security."

It proposed measures for co-ordinating the defence forces and the mobilization of industry and labour.*

These proposals created a deep division in the ranks of the Labour Party and the T.U.C. Three days before the opening of the Scottish T.U.C. on 22 April the General Council of the British T.U.C. met in accordance with the resolution of the Margate T.U.C. in September 1935, "instructing the General Council to call a special conference of trade union executives, with a view to discussing co-ordinated action and mutual support" in the furtherance of the demands for increased wages and better conditions.

At this April meeting of the General Council it was decided not to call a special conference of trade union executives to discuss co-ordinated action, as it was "unnecessary." At the same time, however, as the General Council saw no necessity for co-ordinated action, Sir Walter Citrine was insisting, with regard to the Government's mobilization of industry pro-

* The Budget Estimates for the Army, Navy, and Air Forces were fixed at a total of £158,211,000, an increase of £54,863,000 over 1932-33. On 13 March, Sir Thomas Inskip, the Attorney General was appointed Defence Minister, and Lord Weir, who occupied a similar post during the War of 1914-18, was appointed to organize the mobilization of industry.

posals, that "the unions must be consulted. Their co-operation is necessary for the success of any scheme of that character."

In his fraternal speech to the Scottish T.U.C., Allan Findlay, president of the British T.U.C., declared:

> "I was brought up in a Christian household, but I am not prepared to say that I can take the advantages of this country without being ready to defend them, and if necessary with arms."

Following the Congress discussion, in which exception was taken by many delegates to Findlay's speech, a composite resolution was adopted denouncing the Government's policy and calling upon the organized workers and all lovers of peace to fight against it vigorously, and urging determined resistance to the threat to established trade union conditions. Thus the movement was ripe for co-ordinated action, but the leaders of the General Council continued their policy of class collaboration.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party had already taken a firm line against the Government's White Paper proposals and in a special declaration issued on 29 February when the first suggestion of these proposals was made, stated:

> "The Labour movement must refuse to co-operate with the Government . . . and must seek to rally the whole of the peace forces of the country in a struggle for a genuine peace policy. 'Collective security' under the capitalist system is illusory unless the peace forces in the League of Nations are supported in the various capitalist countries by a powerful peace movement based on the unity of the working class.
>
> "A powerful peace drive in Britain can transform the entire situation in Europe. The peace forces can be united around the demands for:
>
> "The application of oil sanctions: 'Not a gallon of oil for Mussolini.'
>
> "Support of the peace policy of the Soviet Union—the end of the flirtation with gangster Hitler.
>
> "The Nationalization of the armament industry—away

with the Merchants of Death, the opponents of collective security.

"No defence loan. No support of the arms race—a works loan for useful work at trade union rates of wages."

The Communists demanded the summoning of a National Conference of Labour to deal with the emergency, as allowed for by the Standing Orders of the T.U.C., and declared that the Labour movement must fight to resist industrial conscription and to

> "ram home its demand for wage increases, to insist on the scrapping of agreements like the York Memorandum which prevent negotiations prior to any industrial change suggested by the employers. The right to control dilution, to fix the entry and payment of trainees, to control industrial transference must be fought for by the unions. Speed-up must be fought and penalties placed on overtime and two-shift system."

The desire for unity in the Labour movement found its expression in the increasing support by local organizations of the Labour Party, by branches of trades unions, district and executive committees of trade unions, for the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party. By May first, over 400 labour and trade union organizations had signified their support for communist affiliation. Amongst these were 121 Labour Party organizations, trades and labour councils and trades councils, and 37 Co-operative organizations. Of the great trade unions which favoured affiliation, the most important was the South Wales Miners' Federation, which followed this up by nominating the Communist miners' leader in South Wales, Arthur Horner, as Vice-President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

For sixteen years the reactionary trade union leaders had attempted to frighten the workers by raising the bogey of Communist disruption in the trade unions. The reactionary Labour Party leaders had tried to scare the Labour Party workers by associating the Communists with "violence," "bloodshed," "civil war," and "dictatorship." They sought to identify Communism with Fascism, and blamed the Communists for the coming of Fascism to Italy and Germany.

These fairy-tales no longer were effective. The victories of the People's Front movements in Spain and France, in which Communists and Socialist workers fought side by side, gave them the lie.

Moreover, the signing of the Franco–Soviet treaty of mutual assistance on 2 May, 1935, which became valid on 27 March, 1936, exercised an enormous influence in the strengthening of the forces for future peace. The persistent refusal of Fascist Germany to sign this pact left no doubt in the minds of all friends of peace as to Hitler's intentions, or the intentions of the Baldwin Government which had encouraged Germany in its refusal. On the other hand, the Soviet Union stands out in this period as the custodian and standard-bearer of world peace. The British working class has not been slow to draw its own conclusions. It sees that Fascism and war are not inevitable, that Fascism and war can be defeated. That is why the movement for unity in all spheres of the Labour movement is growing.

The Communist movement in Great Britain and the Communist International can no longer be ignored by Labour reactionaries. To quote the inspiring words of Dimitroff, delivered in his closing speech to the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International:

> "In the dark night of bourgeois reaction and fascism, in which the class enemy is endeavouring to keep the toiling masses of the capitalist countries, the Communist International, the International Party of the Bolsheviks, stands out like a beacon, showing all mankind the one right way to emancipation from the yoke of capitalism, from fascist barbarity and the horrors of imperialist war.
>
> "The establishment of unity of action of the working class is a decisive stage on that road. . . . The working class must achieve unity of its trade unions. . . . To depict us Communists as opponents of trade union democracy is sheer nonsense. . . . But we are decidedly opposed to any dependence of the trade unions on the bourgeoisie, and do not give up our basic point of view that it is impermissible for trade unions to adopt a neutral position in regard to the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. . . .

"The working class has before it the inspiring example of the Soviet Union, the country of socialism victorious, an example of how the class enemy can be defeated, how it can establish its own Government and build socialist society. . . . There is but one thing that the working class of all countries still lacks—unity in its own ranks.

"So let the clarion call of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin, the battle-cry of the Communist International, ring out all the more loudly from this platform to the whole world,

'WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!'"

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