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TRADE UNIONISM

by

JOHN A. MAHON

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TRADE UNIONISM

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The New People's Library • VOLUME IX

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JOHN A. MAHON

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

1938

Printed in Great Britain by
The Camelot Press Ltd., London and Southampton

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CHAPTER I

THE GROWTH OF TRADE UNIONISM IN BRITAIN

IN 1936 the 68th Annual British Trades Union Congress reported a membership of 3,614,551. These men and women, working in the key industries of the country, amount, together with their dependents, to more than a quarter of the population. Held together by mutual solidarity and common principles, this immense and powerful mass constitutes one of the decisive forces in our time.

During 150 years the trade unions have developed from local illegal groupings to million-strong national organisations. Their rise reflects the advance of the workers who in the face of continued hostility from the ruling class and the most appalling material difficulties have improved their conditions of life, built up a system of ideas and principles of their own, and assembled their scattered groupings into a cohesive and disciplined political force.

To realise the significance of this advance we need to recall the conditions of the early days of British capitalism.

In that period of our history known as the Industrial Revolution, when the invention of the steam-engine, the spinning-jenny, and the first forms of the modern machine tool gave a tremendous impetus to the factory system, the modern working class came into being under

conditions of ruthless oppression. Extension of arable farming and enclosure of common lands sent thousands streaming off the land into the towns where the factories were rising. It was the whip of hunger, wielded by the rulers, which drove men, women, and little children into the factories. The workers had no rights and no protection. There were no Factory Acts, no Trade Boards, no minimum wage, no workers' organisations.

Working hours ranged from twelve to eighteen per day. Wages were a starvation pittance. Women pulled coal-trucks in the mines. Little children of four and upwards toiled in the textile mills till they fell asleep from fatigue, and overseers beat them with whips to awaken them. Most of the miners were serfs.

Health, limbs, life, were at the mercy of unguarded machinery or poisonous fumes and chemicals. Hideous industrial diseases rotted the flesh and bone. Compensation for accidents was unknown. Housing defied description. Thousands of people were heaped in towns without water, artificial light, or proper sanitation.

All combination and organisation was illegal and punishable by branding, flogging, imprisonment, or transportation. Parliament was the preserve of the rich; the workers could not enter it. They had neither votes nor political organisation.

Such were the conditions under the unchecked dictatorship of capital, conditions which drove the young working class along the path of struggle, of trade unionism. Out of this struggle for tolerable wages, for decent conditions, grew the trade unions.

In 1799 the existing powers of legal repression in the Masters and Servants Act and in common law were reinforced by the Combination Acts, which rendered all trade unionism illegal.

The workers were not intimidated. The unions concealed themselves under the form of clubs engaged in

friendly benefit activities, and spread rapidly. Strikes and conflicts extended all over the country. So great was the movement that the Government was induced in 1824 to repeal the Combination Acts. This decision left the unions legally free to organise, but did not give them legal status or rights. But the working class had defeated the attempt of the employers to repress trade unionism by making membership a crime.

After this victory the workers pressed forward. Unions sprang up in all trades. More and more strikes took place. The workers strove to express themselves as a class as well as in their trades and crafts. The political movement for the Charter began. The idea of uniting all the unions on a national scale caught the imagination. In 1834 Robert Owen launched the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, taking in all kinds of workers. It was the first embodiment of the idea of One Big Union. In a few months it enrolled half a million members. A vigorous Press voiced the ideas of the political and industrial movement. It was as though the working class in the flush of its first consciousness sought to sweep away the enemy by one great attack all along the front.

The repeal of the Combination Acts did not mean that the employers had abandoned legal repression. In March 1834 seven agricultural labourers, men of Tolpuddle in Dorset, were accused of conspiracy for organising a union. They were sentenced at Dorchester to seven years' transportation. This judicial atrocity roused the workers. Fifty thousand people marched to Downing Street, and a national committee was formed which finally secured their release. The Tolpuddle Martyrs have become a symbol of trade unionism, and their name is honoured wherever trade unionists meet.

The pressure of the workers towards political liberty and industrial betterment opened a phase in which political Chartism and trade unionism marched shoulder

to shoulder in demonstrations, strikes, riots, and armed struggles. But the conditions for victory were not yet. The defeat of the Chartist general strike in 1842 marked a decline. Enthusiasm, energy, and devotion could not atone for the lack of a clear revolutionary theory around which all forces could be united.

Meanwhile great economic changes were maturing. From 1850 onwards the products of British factories began to open up markets all over the world. British manufacturers reaped the results of having been first in the field with the factory-machine tool system. The cheapness of their goods battered down all barriers to commerce and their profits soared. The consequent increase in employment and the possibility of concessions in wages and conditions facilitated the dying away of Chartism and the early mass trade unionism. But the workers' effort had made its impression; concessions were granted. In 1847 Parliament passed an Act limiting the working day to ten hours. Factory Acts began the regulation of conditions in factories. The suffrage was first granted to artisans in 1867 and then gradually extended.

A more conciliatory period opened. The ruling class was occupied in organising the great expansion of the British Empire which during the latter half of the century resulted in the occupation by armed force of many parts of Africa and Asia. It accordingly developed a technique of conciliation in dealing with the trade unions. Such was the stream of profits coming in that it could view with equanimity the winning of wage concessions by the unions. The revolutionary and class character of early trade unionism gave way to craft unionism, confined to skilled men and frequently conservative in outlook. These unions found the way to establish and maintain national organisations capable of continuous existence and combining their forces all over

the country. They accumulated experience in organisation and tactics in trade disputes. They also secured parliamentary recognition of trade unions, Acts of 1869 and 1871 protecting the union funds and legalising their existence.

The Government tried to accompany this legislation by measures to prevent the effective use of the strike weapon. The Criminal Law Amendment Act created a new set of offences, including picketing, molestation, obstruction, and intimidation during strikes. The immediate hostility aroused by this law was such that its most obnoxious clauses were repealed in 1875.

In the same period the craft unions took steps towards class unity by creating the Trades Councils and the Trades Union Congress. The first Trades Union Congress met at Manchester in 1868 and represented 118,000 members.

But the trade unions were not dealing with the unskilled workers who increased in numbers as industry expanded. An official enquiry in 1884 revealed terrible poverty existing in the East End of London among these workers, one-third of the population existing below the starvation level. The Socialist pioneers, influenced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who strove continually to strengthen the trade union movement, began to organise these sections. Tom Mann, John Burns, and Ben Tillett conducted ceaseless agitation in the East End. The workers began to move, and in 1889 a great dock strike broke out, the dockers demanding a wage of 6d. per hour. With the help of public opinion, Tom Mann and Ben Tillett led the dockers to victory. This victory inspired the gasworkers, postal workers, municipal employees, and others to organise. The new unions were largely led by Socialists, and when they entered the T.U.C. in 1890 they took with them their Socialist outlook.

At the turn of the century the combined forces of skilled and unskilled trade unionists numbered more than a million. The class character of the movement again came to the fore. A new wave of militancy alarmed the capitalists, who sought in 1901 through the Taff Vale Judgment to render the unions liable for damages to the employers' trade during strikes. A judge awarded £30,000 damages to a South Wales railway company whose men were on strike. This decision meant that union funds would be at the mercy of employers who took legal action when their workers went on strike. The unions replied by a decision to challenge the capitalist domination of Parliament by putting up their own candidates. The Labour Representation Committee, which was propagating the idea of independent working-class candidates against both capitalist parties, became the Labour Party, supported and financed by affiliated trade unions. In the General Election of 1906 there were 29 Labour M.P.s returned, and the same year saw the Taff Vale Judgment nullified.

This emergence of the unions into the political arena produced the capitalist counterblow in the form of the Osborne Judgment of 1908, which forbade the unions to spend money on politics, thus attempting to cripple the Labour Party by cutting off its income. But the effect was to rally the unions more strongly to the Labour Party, and in 1910 there were 42 Labour M.P.s.

Socialist propaganda and trade union activity were combined in a new class advance. Membership of the unions doubled between 1906 and 1914, when it reached 4,000,000. Great amalgamations took place. Industrial unions, uniting skilled and unskilled, began to take shape. Strikes took on a national character, and were supported by wide solidarity movements contributing to the funds. Industrial disputes assumed greater significance not only because of their larger scale, but

because the monopoly of the world's workshops by British capitalists was being replaced by increasing competition from other countries to which the capitalist system of production had spread. In 1907 the threat of a national rail strike brought Government intervention and a Conciliation Board. In 1911 there were dock strikes, a mining strike, and a railway strike, in which troops fired on the workers. In 1913 a transport strike in Dublin, led by Jim Larkin, was supported by the sending of food ships by the T.U.C. and the Co-operative Movement.

As the workers gathered their forces, Parliament gave more concessions. In 1909, Trade Boards were set up to establish a legal minimum wage in sweated industries—that is, industries where the workers were too weak to defend themselves against excessive exploitation. In 1911 Unemployment Insurance was introduced; 1912 saw a Minimum Wage Act for miners. In 1913 the Osborne Judgment was overruled by a new Act permitting political funds in the trade unions.

The spirit and activity of the Labour Movement were at a high level. Compared with Chartism, the workers' movement was better organised. The trade unions were firm, experienced in struggle, with a well-organised network of local leaders. The study of Socialist works was widespread and the flame of Socialist enthusiasm burnt high. But new dangers threatened the movement, and in fact overwhelmed it almost in a night.

The long years of Imperialist expansion, and the concessions and conciliation rendered possible by that expansion, had concealed from the movement certain truths of the nature of capitalist government. Many of the Chartist leaders had understood that capitalist government is a dictatorship, resting, like all dictatorships, on force. The open dictatorship in the factories and the legal repression of trade unionism had helped

the Chartists to understand that the two classes within the nation were enemies, their interests opposed one to the other. The movement by 1914 had largely lost sight of these verities. Politics were seen only in terms of parliamentary affairs and of strikes; the class content of the struggle between capital and labour was forgotten.

Consequently, when the war of 1914 burst, the Labour Movement did not see its great opportunity in British Imperialism's difficulty. The Labour Party and the T.U.C. were ensnared by the Government call for "patriotism" and "national unity." Industrial and political truce was made under the slogan of defence of the country, and was rapidly followed by coalition government.

For the second time the movement paid the penalty for the lack of a fundamental understanding of the class nature of the struggle.

The leaders signed a truce, but they could not sign away the class struggle, which went on with increasing sharpness. Deprived of their official machinery as a medium for the expression of their views, the workers formed shop stewards organisations in the factories. These led the struggle independently of the union executives, and frequently came into collision with both Government and trade union leaders. Membership of the unions reached 6,000,000 in 1918. Amalgamations continued.

In 1917 came the Russian Revolution. For the first time in history a workers' Government took the power and kept it. This event had a profound influence on the British trade unions. Workers' control of industry, a working-class Government, a workers' State, for so long dreams and aspirations, were now facts. A young working class had achieved the aims towards which the British trade unions had been groping for so long. This resulted at once in a great revival of working-class faith

and hope, and in the beginning of a searching examination into the problems of the strategy and tactics of the struggle for power.

The formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920 marked the coming together of those for whom the Russian events of 1917 meant that the British working class might achieve its own victory if it assimilated the ideas the application of which had set up the power of the Soviets in the place of the Tsars. Foremost among the leaders of the new party were the outstanding men of the wartime shop stewards movement—Pollitt, Gallacher, McManus.

Under the impetus of 1917 the working class began to press forward. In 1920 the T.U.C. replaced its Parliamentary Committee, whose powers were limited to promoting parliamentary Bills and Amendments, by a General Council, with standing orders giving it the possibility of becoming a general staff of the trade union movement. That year membership reached the peak of 8,346,000, and the Labour Movement rose to its full height when it stopped the attempted war on Russia by threat of general strike and by the formation of Councils of Action in all localities. The Councils of Action were delegate bodies representing the various branches of the movement, their intention being to act as the authorities to which the working class would give attention while withdrawing its obedience from the official State authorities. Here the British Labour Movement showed that it was capable of conceiving and constructing a working-class governmental machine with the declared purpose of acting contrary to the "constitutional" Government. The essential principle of the Russian experience was already being utilised.

The new General Council did not rise to its opportunities. As post-war boom passed into slump the capitalists organised a great attack on wages. Miners and

engineers were defeated in lengthy lock-outs. Railwaymen abandoned their charter of advance, the All Grades Programme, without a struggle. On Black Friday in 1921 the Triple Alliance of railwaymen, transport workers, and miners failed in its purpose of unitedly supporting any one section being attacked, and the miners were abandoned. Instead of a co-ordinated advance led by the General Council, there began a trade union retreat, section by section.

The first Labour Government came by permission of the capitalist majority in Parliament after the General Election of 1923. It did almost nothing to improve the position of the workers and fell in 1924.

The policy of stopping the retreat was vigorously advocated by the Communist Party and by Left Wing and militant trade unionists who organised the National Minority Movement in 1924. This movement conducted extensive campaigns, and in the industrial districts had a considerable following. The Hull T.U.C. in 1924 adopted Left resolutions, resumed official relations with the Trades Councils, and formed a committee of unity with the Soviet trade unions. In 1925 the solidarity of the movement, again by threat of general strike, forced the Government to prevent the coalowners reducing the miners' wages. The day was dubbed Red Friday. A new current of enthusiasm ran through the working class. The Government gave itself nine months to prepare to defeat this solidarity. It arrested and imprisoned the Communist leaders and organised strike-breaking preparations, while setting up a Coal Commission to divide the trade union ranks.

While the Government prepared and acted, the General Council did nothing but talk, and that only on occasions. When the hour came for decision, the Right Wing leaders sought to retreat without an action. The pressure of the masses prevented this, and on May 3rd,

1926, the general strike began. After nine days the General Council called off the strike unconditionally. The Right Wing had prevailed in the General Council and the movement sustained a severe defeat inflicted from within.

A period of despondency followed while this experience was digested. In 1927 a new Trade Union Act limited the legal rights of the unions in strikes and in political expenditure. The leaders engaged in collaboration with the employers for the purpose of carrying through the rationalisation of industry. Conferences took place, and the futile pretence was kept up that the new tactic was maintaining union conditions without fighting. This phase is known as Mondism, Mond being then the chairman of the employers' Federation of British Industries. While the conference documents spoke of industrial peace, in the factories raged the speed-up, wage-cuts, and victimisation which made the word rationalisation detested by trade unionists.

The definite victory of the Right Wing brought in a policy of discrimination against Communists and supporters of the Minority Movement who in some unions were banned from official positions. Many Left Wingers in official positions were intimidated, and ceased their association with the Minority Movement. This body found itself faced with the need of carrying through resistance to Mondism by action in the factories. But it had no basis in the factories, and consequently could not do much more than conduct propaganda in a situation where action was vital to win the workers' support. The Minority Movement withered away. Various forms of rank and file activity of trade union branches followed as the expression of Left Wing outlook. The 1929 Labour Government carried on for two years a policy of administering capitalism and aiding rationalisation.

The first signs of recovery from Mondism and of a revival in militant trade unionism were seen in the movement of the London busmen in 1933, when rank and file activity checked the attempt of the combine to enforce wage reductions.

During 1936 this revival began to influence the district committees of many unions. The workers began to be conscious of an improved bargaining power resulting from the stream of rearmament orders. New members began to flow into the unions. The shop stewards movement showed signs of revival, particularly in engineering.

International events influenced this revival. The Socialist successes of the Soviet Union encouraged the workers while the menacing advance of Fascism spread alarm. The stay-in strikes in France, followed by the legislative action of the Blum Government assuring the workers the forty-hour week and holidays with pay, and the great motor strikes in the U.S.A. in the early part of 1937, were watched attentively.

The pace of the revival increased in 1937, but in opposition to the rank and file activity and the Leftward inclination of a number of big unions, including the Miners and the Distributive Trades, there was also seen renewed activity by the Right Wing in the General Council, which began to move in the direction of a new alliance with the Government over rearmament.

Is it possible to see any definite line of advance running through the record of the rise of British trade unionism? The tide of trade union activity ebbs and flows; victory and defeat appear to alternate. Mistakes are made, and often made more than once. After a period of stagnation comes revival; hope of victory runs high, often to be dashed to the ground. Some malignant fate seems to ensure that in the very degree that the power of the movement increases, so also does the

grip of elements within who are afraid to use that power. But the dominant note of the long process of growth is that of the increasing unity of the working class, which is the real achievement of trade unionism. Not always mounting in a straight line—for life is not an arithmetical process—often proceeding by contradictions, there has been built up, as the decades pass, an ever-increasing solidarity of the working people. Not only organisation is involved here, but something more difficult—the building by experience and discussion of a unity of thought and outlook which, welded together with a unity of organisation, would transform the working class into the strongest political force that history has ever seen. The student of trade union history cannot doubt that the realisation of class unity, in the full sense of the words, is the goal toward which the working class is striving, and that the counter-blows of the capitalists do no more, in the long run, than increase the understanding and harden the determination of the workers to reach their goal.

CHAPTER II

ORGANISATION

THE STRUCTURE of the British trade unions has grown out of the struggle, and has not, with a very few exceptions, been the result of planning.

The membership of a trade union is organised in local branches. These are combined in districts or divisions on a geographical basis. At the head is the national Executive Committee, the centre of authority. Within this general structure the rules, procedure, and detail vary from union to union.

Three types may be distinguished—craft unions, industrial unions, general unions. Many craft unions are in process of development in the direction of industrial unions, while most of the industrial unions retain certain strongly marked craft characteristics, e.g. the exclusion of women.

The craft unions are the oldest. They admit only workers who are skilled men, or in close association with skilled men. The members may work in different industries at different times, but they consider themselves as craftsmen first, and conclude agreements with the employers on this basis. The economic position of the skilled men being strong, their tradition is to use its advantages to secure concessions from the employer, especially at times when trade is booming. The craft unions have a strong sense of discipline which they often enforce by penalties. Candidates for admission are

carefully scrutinised, and not infrequently rejected. Branch life is vigorous, a considerable proportion of the membership attending and taking part in the business. The branches are centres of information and discussion on trade questions and on general policy, and the level of debate and comprehension frequently high.

The craft unions rigidly exclude the unskilled worker, whom they consider a liability and not an asset, since he cannot command the same value to the employer. But the development of capitalist production is bound up with the further division of labour, and the breaking up of skilled work into operations which can be performed by machines operated by unskilled labour. So pressure is brought to bear on the old exclusiveness of the craft unions and their rules are modified in the direction of industrial unionism.

The industrial union organises all the workers in the industry, skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled. It may have within it divisions in which the interests of specific grades or sections are given attention. The ideal industrial union would realise the ideal organisational position—all the workers in a particular enterprise united in one body with one leadership and one agreement. In practice there are few enterprises so organised.

As types of industrial unionism may be considered the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the National Union of Railwaymen.

The Amalgamated Engineering Union is the product of several amalgamations and the direct descendant of the old Amalgamated Society of Engineers, once the embodiment of aristocratic exclusiveness in the trade union world. The modern A.E.U. has a carefully thought out constitution, and rules and organises almost all men in the engineering trades. A relic of the past remains in its refusal to admit women. The existence of forty-seven

other unions catering for craftsmen employed in engineering complicates the position, and is the subject of further efforts at amalgamation.

The National Union of Railwaymen opens its ranks to everyone employed on the railways, without distinction of grade or sex. But in three spheres its operations are disputed. The majority of the engine crews, drivers, firemen, and cleaners, are organised in the Associated Society of Locomotive Enginemen and Firemen, a craft union. The clerical grades are organised in the Railway Clerks' Association. The craftsmen employed in the railway shops are divided in their allegiance, the majority being in the N.U.R., others in the various engineering unions.

Even the critics of industrial unionism do not deny that the unification of skilled and unskilled in one organisation promotes a beneficial solidarity among all the employees of the industry. As against this they claim that the special advantages enjoyed by the key men cannot effectively be exploited by an organisation which embraces all. Practice would not seem to bear out this contention, since, for example, locomotive drivers in the N.U.R. do not receive less wages than those in the A.S.L.E.F.

The general unions cut across this line of development from craft to industrial unionism. They are the Transport and General Workers' Union and the National Union of General and Municipal Workers. These two unions now claim in practice to organise any unskilled worker. The constitution of the T.G.W.U. with its national trade groups for various sections of transport workers, and also for metal, chemical, building trades, and others, gives the impression of a planned attempt to put the idea of the One Big Union into practice. The advocates of One Big Union claim that instead of a Trades Union Congress, which federates numerous

unions, industrial or craft, there should be one single union with divisions for different sections. The attractive simplicity of this proposal has not weathered the storm of practice. The Industrial Workers of the World who sought to achieve this principle in America and in Australia proved less capable of endurance than the craft and industrial unions. The Soviet trade unions have found that even a sub-division of industrial unionism is necessary in order to grapple effectively with the problems of leadership of such vast numbers. The British Trades Union Congress has rejected the idea. There are sometimes clashes between craft unions and the general unions, whose attempts to enrol men in certain industries are described and resented as "poaching."

The problems of trade unionism in the organisational sphere are numerous, and the subject of lively discussion. Three may be selected for attention—democratic government, the basis of organisation, and amalgamation.

All democracies are faced with the problem of how to develop an Executive strong enough to hold them together and direct them as a single unity in times of battle while avoiding the danger of investing the Executive with such power that it becomes a dictatorship. Most trade union rule-books seek to solve this problem by specifying in detail the powers of the Executive and the rights of the branches. The A.E.U. rules provide an interesting system whereby authority is strongly centralised, but the Executive is counterweighted by a democratically elected National Committee which lays down principles of policy, and a rank and file Final Appeal Court whose decision upon the interpretation of rules is binding. The expulsion by the Executive Council of a number of Communists and militants in 1931 was quashed by the Final Appeal Court.

Opinion varies as to whether the basis of organisation should be place of residence or place of work. Since the conflict between employer and worker takes place at the point of production, and it is here that union policy has to be applied, the theoretical argument for factory branches is a strong one. Practical difficulties centre around a change-over from long-established branches built on the residential basis and the leadership developed with them, and the fluctuation of personnel in the factory. But it is difficult to see how trade unionism in the modern mass production factory can satisfactorily cope with the problems arising daily therein unless the union branch coincides with the place of employment, thus providing leadership and means for dealing promptly with grievances.

Almost every union recognises the need for factory organisation, and makes some provision for shop stewards and factory meetings. Where the factory and branch organisations are separate there is frequently a pronounced lack of co-ordination between the union organs and the struggle in the shops. Where the branch coincides with the place of work, as among London busmen, union vigour and effectiveness is at a high level. The removal of factory problems from branch life undoubtedly aids the tendency to collaboration and compromise as against that of militant action.

The difficulties in the way of far-reaching amalgamations, which would in fact bring about industrial unionism, are practical rather than theoretical. The T.U.C. has frequently endorsed the idea that unions organising the same kinds of workers should combine their resources. In a period of rationalised industry and strongly centralised employers' organisations it would be hard to find any considerable body of informed trade union opinion which would seriously contend that amalgamation would be a bad thing. But in practice

there is a considerable body of conservatism and reluctance to change, and many complications of differing rules and financial systems which produce a state of inertia. The 1937 decisions of the two largest distributive unions, the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers and the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen, and Clerks, to unite have again stimulated interest in amalgamation.

THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS AND ITS GENERAL COUNCIL

The 214 unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress include all the important unions except professional organisations such as teachers, and certain unions organising civil servants and Government officials debarred by law from affiliating. The affiliation fee is 2d. per member per annum. Congress meets annually in September. One delegate for every 5,000 members results in a gathering of some 600 delegates.

Congress procedure is organised around the General Council's report. This printed volume records everything that has been before the General Council during the year. The President conducts Congress through the report paragraph by paragraph. Delegates may make observations, raise questions, or move to refer back any paragraph. Thus provision is made for reviewing all problems facing the movement. Resolutions may be placed on the agenda by affiliated organisations and by the General Council, and are taken on the appropriate section of the report.

The General Council is elected annually by ballot vote of Congress. It consists of thirty-two members grouped according to industry. It has no power to instruct affiliated unions. Power remains in the hands of the executives. If a union defies Congress policy, the only

action that can be taken is to disaffiliate it. But in practice the authority of the General Council is considerable and growing. It can call conferences of all the executives, as on the occasion of the 1926 general strike, as a means of unifying the whole movement on some line of action.

The General Council has a staff of experts at Transport House. The departments are Finance, Organisation, International, Trade Boards, Education, Research and Economic, Social Insurance, Publicity. There are Standing Committees for the various industrial groups and sub-committees for Finance and General Purposes, International, Disputes, Education, Organisation, Workmen's Compensation and Factories, Economic. The General Council has representatives upon numerous committees, both those of the Labour Movement and those of the Government and various social organisations. With the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party, the General Council is represented on the National Council of Labour, the centralising organ in which the policy of the entire movement is discussed.

The General Council maintains regular relations with the local Trades Councils which it recognises. These bodies are co-ordinating committees of delegates from such branches in a locality, usually a borough, as are affiliated to them. They originated as strike aid committees in the 1860's. One of them, the Manchester and Salford Trades Council, convened the first T.U.C. From 1868 to 1894 they were affiliated direct to Congress. This arrangement was terminated on the grounds that it meant dual representation. The 1924 Congress resumed relations with the Trades Councils through a sub-committee of the General Council which seeks to make them local organs for work approved by the T.U.C. They are now federated in areas, and have their own Annual Conference, which is reported to the T.U.C.

The Trades Councils play an important rôle in the movement. They gather together the most active and spirited union branches for joint consideration of problems and for mutual support. While the Model Rules issued by the T.U.C. for their guidance give the impression that they are merely administrative bodies, they are in many cases vigorous centres of debate on policy. During periods of advance they tend to gather round themselves the entire organised working class.

Keen disappointment exists in the unions at the tendency of the General Council merely to operate routine procedure and to neglect to respond to the great opportunities and needs of the movement. While its work on the parliamentary field and in connection with inter-union disputes is widely appreciated, the hopes of bringing into being a vigorous general staff which would unify all forces for purposeful effort have been disappointed. One weakness which has emerged is that each member of the Council has to function first and foremost as a leader of his own union, and is only able to consider the problems of the whole movement in his spare time. He does not feel the same responsibility for the whole movement as he does for his own union. So the general secretary and his experts are left to run Transport House without anyone bothering very much what they do, and there is no department there which considers the spirit and activity of the movement as its responsibility.

The composition of Congress is determined by the individual unions who elect delegates according to their own rules and not on any general plan. There may be election by rank and file ballot or by executive appointment. Usually well over half the delegates are full-time officials.

Voting is by show of cards. Each union delegation holds cards representing the number of members on

whom affiliation fees have been paid. This is the block vote.

The block vote is under criticism as being the means whereby officialdom steam-rollers democratic opinion, and nullifies debating achievement. It is difficult to see what other voting system would be acceptable to all the unions, while the present method of financing Congress remains. The evil would appear to lie not so much in the card vote but in the lack of democratic procedure within the unions. This lack permits the card vote to be cast by officials without reference to the opinions of their members.

Most unions cast their vote as a single entity. The delegation may be almost evenly divided but the whole vote is cast as the majority decide. This suppresses the minority and provides a false picture of the balance of opinion in the Congress as a whole. Other unions allow the general secretary to hold all the votes and cast them as he considers correct. There is no procedure whereby the issues coming up at the Congress are placed before the affiliated membership and an expression of opinion taken.

The solution of the difficulties arising around the block vote is bound up with the extension of inner union democracy and the drawing of the whole membership into discussions of policy. There are no serious reasons why through the union journals and discussions in the branch rooms and shop meetings there should not be a thorough consideration of the main issues which are known to be coming up at Congress. The system whereby numerous delegates are appointed instead of being elected could with advantage give way to a democratic procedure whereby every delegate would come up for election and would state his policy. Such changes in procedure would ensure that the votes were cast at the Congress in a closer accordance with the opinions of the members.

THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE LABOUR PARTY

The Labour Party was formed in 1902 on the initiative of the Labour Representation Committee, a body financed by affiliated trade unions. Its annual conference is in October. Its main affiliated organisations are the trade unions, and, as the card vote operates, it is controlled by the unions. Its executive is divided into sections to allow for the representation of other affiliated organisations. Affiliation is open to constituency Labour Parties, Co-operative Societies, and certain Socialist organisations. The Labour Party thus constitutes an expression of the trade unions in the parliamentary field, and a beginning of a federation of all working-class forces operating in that field. While it maintains its 1924 decision to exclude Communists and its refusal to accept the affiliation of the Communist Party it is prevented from developing into a complete federation of working-class forces.

Certain unions finance a stated number of candidates for Parliament, often maintaining the party organisation in a particular constituency.

The same feeling has been aroused by the block vote at the Labour Party Congress as at the T.U.C. Proposals have been made to overcome this by distributing the trade union vote throughout the constituency parties, but it is difficult to see any trade union agreeing to this, since it would mean depriving the unions of the control for which they pay in their mass affiliation fees.

The management committees of divisional and borough Labour Parties are composed of delegates from affiliated organisations and wards of individual members, consequently the trade unions are usually in the majority here also.

The trade unions are compelled by law to maintain a separate political fund, and can only make payments for

political purposes out of this fund. Since the 1927 Act the members are not liable to contribute to this fund unless they specifically declare their wish to do so by signing a special form. This procedure is referred to as "contracting in."

The advance of the trade unions as a movement into the sphere of politics through the medium of the Labour Party constituted a tremendous step forward for the working class, since it implies a recognition of the inadequacy of one-sided industrial activity, and a declaration that the organised workers have set as their aim the achievement of a government of their own. Whatever criticisms may be made of the adequacy of the Labour Party, as at present constituted and led, do not affect the correctness of the principle of trade union support of the Labour Party.

CHAPTER III

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND NEGOTIATING MACHINERY

THE FIRST NEED of the trade union is a collective agreement. The essence of this is that terms are settled between the collective of workers organised in the union and the employer, and not by each individual and the employer. The dictatorship of the employer in the factory is modified, and the union plays a part in deciding what wages and conditions are to be.

An agreement can be arrived at only by negotiation, and negotiation implies recognition of the union. Many employers refuse recognition and collective bargaining until they are convinced that a continuation of such refusal will cost them more than will an agreement.

What is the nature of an agreement on wages? What determines the scales fixed by it? Does it put an end to the conflict between worker and employer?

Whatever the level of wages, the working class will always desire them higher and the employing class will desire them lower. Since the working class has no other means of access to the necessities and pleasures of life than through wages, its interest in raising them is continuous. Since the employing class sees in wages the main drain upon its revenue, and consequently upon its profits, its interest in lowering them never ceases. This conflict is inherent in the system of capitalist relations

between workers and employers, and the conclusion of any agreement which leaves this relation untouched cannot solve this conflict.

When the issue of *what* wage is to be paid arises, it is decided by the relative strength of the two contending parties. The decision is a compromise, not so high as the workers would like, not so low as the employers would like. Each side will get as much of its desires as its strength induces the other to grant. The relative strength of each will be influenced by a number of factors, including the economic and political circumstances. If there is a shortage of labour, the workers have a strong position. If unemployment is widespread, the employers are favourably placed. Degree of organisation, fighting spirit, and capability of leadership also count.

The compromise will endure as long as in the opinion of both parties it represents the best they can get, having regard to the relation of strength between them. In itself it satisfies neither party; each desires to alter it, but knows that the opportunity to alter it will come only with an improvement of his position and a weakening of that of his opponent. Therefore the agreement is not a truce, for the struggle goes on.

Battle is the test of strength in war. Ability to win battles is the decisive test. Manœuvres are directed towards securing the best position or the best concentration of forces. In the economic warfare between worker and capitalist it is the withdrawal of labour or of employment, the strike and the lock-out, which are the battles. They are the only way of deciding who is stronger. True, the method is so expensive that both sides prefer to arrive at an agreement without a stoppage. But the negotiations for such an agreement are not on a higher plane than the strike method; they result from the existence of the strike weapon and ultimate readiness to resort to it. If the negotiators do not speak

for men ready to act in proportion to the seriousness of the issue, their words will carry little weight.

If the forces are about equal, if one side is balancing the advantages and disadvantages of a conflict, the argumentative skill of the negotiators may turn a point. But it is not the argument which decides; it is the force behind the argument. No doubt charm is an asset to a diplomat, but it is a poor prospect for a diplomat whose resources are limited to charm when his opponent can bring guns into action. The force which counts in the economic conflict is the ability of the workers to stop production, and with it profit, or of the employers to stop production, and with it the workers' livelihood.

Collective bargaining and recognition of the union reflects the ability of the workers to stop production. Recognition is an admission by the employer that he is not strong enough to continue dictatorial determination of wages and conditions. He does not make such an admission before the workers are strong enough to ensure it.

Lest it should be thought that refusal to recognise trade unions is a mere relic of obstinacy prevalent in a previous generation, events at the Smithfield Market, London, during 1936 should be examined.

Smithfield Market is controlled by the Corporation of the City of London and equipped with modern specialised machinery for handling great quantities of meat. Some 2,500 men are employed by firms working on the market. Wages varied and conditions were arduous. For some years only the pitchers were organised in the Transport and General Workers' Union. Pitchers are key men who bring the meat into the shops. They won a number of small strikes and secured an agreement setting the rate for pitching at 2s. 9d. per ton. Inspired by these successes, the remainder of the shopmen began to organise in the T.G.W.U. around a programme

including a minimum wage, special rates for overtime, limitation of working day and working week, annual holidays with pay. The employers refused to meet the men's representatives. The men prepared to reply by strike action. The employers set up a council of their own, met the union officials, and persuaded them to form a Joint Conciliation Board. The constitution of this board provides that any question arising shall be dealt with by representatives of the employers and the union officer. In the event of failure to agree it shall be referred to the Conciliation Board. If the board fails to agree, the differences may be dealt with by any procedure agreed by the board. If unable to agree to a procedure, the dispute shall be reported to the Ministry of Labour. This agreement gave the men nothing but interminable delay, while seeking to prevent them using their right to strike. Thinking the workers had been fooled, the employers did nothing to improve wages and conditions. On February 2nd, 1936, the men went on strike. The strike was declared unofficial, and solidarity action by the dockers was prevented. With the aid of the National Government alternative machinery for handling meat on a London scale was put into operation. Faced with this and with the hostility of the union headquarters, the Strike Committee organised a united return to work, set up a Market Committee and shop delegates, and gained hundreds of new members for the union. The employers learned their lesson, and on March 4th signed an agreement giving considerable concessions.

Here we have an example of the reluctance of employers to give recognition and of their complicated tactics to prevent the workers from using the strike weapon. The "recognition" given in setting up the Conciliation Board was a trick, and the real recognition and economic concessions were gained only because

the workers demonstrated their strength. Had the workers seen in the Conciliation Board an alternative to the use of their own power they would probably be still pursuing the mazes of its procedure, but they rightly saw in the stopping of production the effective way of expressing their trade unionism.

The conflict between the organised employers and trade unionism has brought into being extensive and complicated machinery for negotiations. The process has reached a point where the strike has become the abnormal method of arriving at an agreement. But the strength of trade unionism remains in its ability to withdraw labour, and will so remain while capitalism continues. The negotiating machinery will only be understood if it is seen, not as a substitute for the strike weapon, but a consequence of the ability to use the strike weapon. This remains true whatever the form of the negotiating machinery.

The functions of negotiating machinery are to arrive at agreement and to interpret that agreement.

Negotiating machinery may be divided into two groups. In two-party negotiations representatives of employers and of trade unions face each other. In three-party negotiations, in addition to employers and trade unions the Government takes a hand.

There are direct two-party negotiations in most industries where an agreement exists. The agreement provides for contact between the two parties when an issue arises within it, and for its renewal or modification upon expiry. Contact may be upon a factory scale, and more or less informal, or may involve a national meeting, with elaborate procedure.

Bilateral negotiations are typified in the agreements between the Engineering Employers' Federation and the engineering unions headed by the A.E.U. There is a national agreement on working conditions, with

supplementary agreements, covering the working week, overtime, night shift, and similar questions. Wages are the subject of a series of agreements on a district scale.

Embodied in the national agreement is procedure for avoiding disputes, called the York Memorandum. It provides for issues arising in the workshop to be discussed between the management and the shop stewards. Failing agreement, a local conference shall be held within seven days. Failing agreement, the matter can go to a central conference which meets every month. This conference may make a recommendation to both parties. Until this procedure has been gone through no stoppage of work shall take place. But in the event of the central conference failing to reach agreement, there is nothing to be done. The employers argue that a stoppage of work is a breach of the agreement, since these provisions are part of the agreement. Consequently when a stoppage does take place the A.E.U. Executive is in a dilemma. It must either refuse to recognise the stoppage, however justified it may be, or invite a national lock-out.

Direct negotiations may have been brought into being by Government initiative or legal enactment, even though the Government does not take part in them. Joint Industrial Councils exist in many industries on the recommendation of the Whitley Commission set up under the Asquith Government in 1916.

Three-party negotiating machinery exists in numerous varieties.

The Minister of Labour has power under the Industrial Courts Act of 1919 to refer any dispute to a special Court of Enquiry. This court can report, but its recommendations are not binding. The permanent Industrial Court of the Ministry of Labour deals with disputes only when both sides agree to submit the dispute to it. The Ministry of Labour Conciliation Department frequently offers

its services during disputes, but has no power to compel either side to accept them.

In 1921 Parliament laid down three-party negotiating procedure for the railways in the Railways Act. Conciliation machinery was set up comprising national, sectional, and local committees. Local Departmental Committees and Sectional Councils are composed of equal numbers of representatives of the men and of the company, the men's being elected by ballot. They discuss working conditions, but have no power to effect changes. If agreement is registered the company will voluntarily remove or modify the cause of complaint. At the top was the Central Wages Board, composed of equal representation from workers and companies. It dealt with national issues such as rates of pay and hours of duty. Failure to agree on this body resulted in the matter going before the National Wages Board. Here were to be found not only representatives of the companies and the workers, but also of the third party, railway users. Its sessions were public. The chairman was appointed by the Minister of Labour as an "independent member." In 1932 this board departed from its previous practice of deciding in favour of the companies and gave them only one-third of what they asked from it. The companies thereupon decided to withdraw from the board. In 1935 they did so, and a National Tribunal was set up of three persons "not connected" with the companies or the unions. One is nominated by each side, and the chairman, unless both parties agree upon him, is appointed by the Minister of Labour. The tribunal sittings are in private, and the unions have undertaken not to make publicity around issues before it. The change from open discussion in the National Wages Board to the closed tribunal is a modification of the democratic form of three-party negotiating machinery in the direction of a fascisised form.

In a different category are the Trade Boards. These were established by Act of Parliament in 1909 and extended in 1918. They function where the economic position of the workers is so weak that they are unable to establish their claims to a tolerable wage by their own action. The Trade Boards fix a minimum wage after discussion with representatives of the employers and of the workpeople. This minimum wage is then enforceable legally. There are frequent prosecutions of employers for infringing the decisions of the Trade Boards, but the penalties are usually light.

In the various forms of trilateral negotiations the representatives of the "third party" may be either Government officers, nominees of institutions or societies, or individuals appointed by the Government, according to circumstances. In what capacity are we to consider that the Government is acting? Is it an impartial, neutral body, able to weigh the merits of the case and to arrive at some inherently just decision? We have seen that the conflicting view of wages taken by the worker on the one hand and the employer on the other renders a just decision impossible as between them. What is just for one is unjust for the other. In a class society the Government has to act in the interest of one class or the other when their interests clash. It will naturally act in the interests of that class with which it is politically and economically connected, and of which the political party dominating the Government is the expression. The Government does not lose its class bias when it intervenes in an industrial dispute. This does not mean that it will take exactly the same view as the employer. It does mean that a capitalist Government will express the view dictated by the general interests of the capitalist class as a whole, having regard to all factors and not merely the interests of the section immediately involved in the dispute. There may even be rare occasions on which the

general class interests may entirely override the sectional interest, and the Government may side with the workers.

In this country there is no procedure for compulsory enforcement of decisions of negotiating bodies, except for those of the Trade Boards. Any such compulsion would mean taking away the right to strike and exposing the State as the agent of the employer. This was done during the war of 1914-18, when decisions of arbitration bodies under the Committee of Production were legally enforceable and strikes were prohibited. But even then compulsory arbitration broke down because the workers organised their factory shop stewards committees and went on strike.

It remains to consider co-partnership schemes which purport to improve industrial relations. They consist in giving or selling shares in the firm to workers, who thus acquire an interest in the dividends. It is a deception to pretend that this makes the workers owners. Possession of a few shares does not mean ownership, since policy is decided by majorities. It boils down to a simple arithmetical question. If the employer can save a certain sum by not having to pay trade union rates and conditions, then it is worth his while to give a portion of that sum in the shape of shares or bonus on condition that the workers don't ask for trade union rates.

CAUSES, NATURE, AND RESULTS OF STRIKES

A strike means that the workers withdraw their labour in order to compel the employer to grant their demands. It is serious, since hunger comes into action immediately on the side of the employer. Strikes, therefore, only take place when the workers feel deeply. The actual issue in dispute may appear trivial, but the strike shows a depth of discontent.

Two different conceptions of the strike exist. One

considers it as a simple withdrawal of labour, a purely economic struggle in which endurance and folded arms are the workers' strength, passivity the finest virtue. The only question is whether the employer can stand the strain on his profits longer than the workers can stand the strain on their stomachs.

The other viewpoint sees the strike as a conflict between sections of two classes. The strike is, in fact, a battle. Whether or not it will be restricted to economic weapons depends upon the magnitude of the dispute and the position of the general political conflict. It is to the interest of the workers to do everything possible to bring support to the strikers, to take the offensive, and to develop a campaign against the employer. Activity is the way to victory. Activity will include not only routine strike organisation, but propaganda and agitation on a large scale aiming at drawing masses into action. The strategy and tactics of strikes are now being studied by those who hold this viewpoint.

The results of strikes need to be estimated under a number of headings. The direct result, in terms of economic loss or gain of demands, is of course the most immediate, but there are others. A strike may result in such strengthening of the workers' organisation and solidarity that, even if all the demands are not won immediately, they will be gained later. A strike which is lost may nevertheless have cost the employers so much as to make them abandon the idea of further attacks; in such cases it is better to have struck and lost than to have accepted the employers' demands without a fight. The political effects of strike experience are also to be taken into account. The workers learn rapidly in the intensity of the struggle, and the lesson always is that greater unity and activity are required for victory. In itself a strike is neither a good nor a bad thing for the workers. All depends upon the results, and the way in which the strike

leadership enables the workers to draw conclusions from these results to strengthen their future position.

A strike without the sanction of the union leadership is said to be "unofficial." The most frequent cause of unofficial strikes is the failure of negotiating machinery to remedy the workers' grievances. The issue in such cases is more complicated than the simple issue of whether or not an agreement should be honoured. Just because the process of production is always being developed in the direction of increasing the productivity of labour, the workers always tend to be the sufferers from the changes in technique and conditions as new methods and rates are introduced. Conditions fairly satisfactory when the agreement was signed may become quite harsh and unsatisfactory without any change in the agreement, but because of changes in production methods. Here it is that the procedure for avoiding disputes often fails to deal with the problem because of its slowness and lack of decision. It is often hampered because of lack of power to make any change in the agreement. Consequently the workers are continually aggravated by actual worsening of their conditions, while the union is tied to a procedure which from the workers' point of view does not function. When the irritation produced by this state of affairs becomes unbearable, an "unofficial" strike is the result. There is nothing either illegal or morally reprehensible in an "unofficial" strike. The right to strike belongs to the workers; the trade union executives are their representatives. If the workers do not agree with the position taken by their representatives they can show it by striking. As long as the employer retains and exercises the right to close down his works in whole or in part, and to dismiss workers without their consent, it is difficult to see any grounds for moral indignation on his part if the workers resort to lightning or unofficial strike action.

Whether such unofficial action is in fact the best tactic is another question. There may be occasions when the general welfare of the union as a whole demands the forbearance of individual sections or groups, even if they have a temporarily favourable position. On the other hand, there may be cases where the general welfare of the union positively demands that a stand be made against encroachments. If the Right Wing trade union officials argue that workers make a mistake in taking unofficial action, because it jeopardises the position of the union by weakening its authority in the eyes of the employers, the workers could with equal right argue that the officials made a mistake in signing an agreement and adhering to a procedure which jeopardises the position of the union by weakening its usefulness in the eyes of the workers. The question will be settled, not by fine points about honour, but the relative strength of the strikers and the employers.

STRIKE STRATEGY AND TACTICS

It is matter upon which much comment has been made by trade unionists that, while the British trade unions have a rich experience of strike struggles under almost every variety of conditions except direct civil war, the General Council makes no effort to study this experience and to make it available to the membership. The lessons of this experience, and the guidance that would accrue from its systematic circulation and study, would greatly assist the shop stewards, branch and district officials in their work of securing wage increases and improved organisation in hundreds of factories.

The variety of conditions under which a strike may break out is such that there can be few generalisations as to its conduct. The economic conditions, the degree of organisation on both sides, the immediate issue and the

general issues behind it, the mood of the workers, the local situation, the general political position, all are, or may be, important. At any moment one of the factors may change and produce a situation in which all previous decisions must be scrapped and a new line of policy considered. The most important thing about a strike is the return to work—under what conditions, when, with what organisation and spirit. More mistakes are made through forgetting this truth than for any other single reason. Victory may be defined as securing a return to work on conditions favourable to the workers, with their organisation and fighting spirit in a condition to carry on the struggle inside the factory.

The essential conditions for victory by the workers include leadership, solidarity and a situation in which their economic power can be effectively withheld. Of these the one most often lacking is leadership.

The strike leadership requires to be in closest touch with the mass of workers, constantly leading and inspiring them to activity, with its ear to the ground and never losing touch with reality. Courage is vital, audacity an asset provided it is based on accurate information. Policy and the leadership of mass activity around policy is the function of the efficient Strike Committee. That policy must be continually explained to the workers, and their energies aroused in favour of it by discussion and explanation. A Strike Committee cannot command obedience; it is a democratic centre of the strike, depending for its influence on the closest connection with the strikers.

The method of work and the composition of strike leaderships are also in dispute. Traditional practice has it that the permanent officials of the union are regarded as the source of strike policy. Negotiations may even be secret, and the workers only consulted when a *fait accompli* is presented to them with a "take it or leave it"

attitude. If a "Strike Committee" is brought into being at all, it is some carefully selected committee confined to purely organisational routine, and is not allowed to influence policy or negotiations. This attitude concentrates on the purely economic aspects of the strike as a withdrawal of labour, sees picketing as a legally permissible action of official representatives only, regards mass demonstrations and mass publicity as harmful because they tend to alarm the authorities. The idea of limiting the strike to folded arms results in the exclusion of all other bodies from the strike and a refusal to call for general working-class support.

This conception is opposed by the Left with the method of concentrating responsibility in a democratically elected Strike Committee, working with the full support of the official machinery. The Strike Committee controls negotiations and submits issues to the workers for approval or otherwise. It is in daily session, frequently reports to the workers and leads the activity of the masses in demonstrations, raising money, mass picketing, and other forms of agitation. It welcomes the support of all sympathetic organisations and of the Press. It seeks to draw the maximum forces into action against the employer on behalf of the strikers. Such Strike Committees have attained numerous successes in factory strikes, but have as yet not been tried upon a larger scale.

CHAPTER IV

THE GENERAL STRIKE

SIGNIFICANCE, BACKGROUND, AND ISSUE OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

THE NINE DAYS' MASS STRIKE of 1926 showed British trade unionism in action on the greatest scale yet. It brought out into the open all the implications of the struggle for wages during the period of capitalist decline. It revealed the capitalist Government and State unmasked, working openly with all their resources, assuming dictatorial powers for the defeat of the workers. It demonstrated that in the workers' ranks class solidarity is a fact, sectionalism is not supreme. It proved the bankruptcy of Right Wing policy in industrial struggle.

The issue was miners' wages, but miners' wages in a new situation, fundamentally changed from all the conditions under which the trade union movement and its leaders had developed.

The fundamental change was that in the post-war period Britain had definitely lost the position of workshop of the world. Her capitalist rivals were equipped not only to compete, but in many cases to surpass. This loss of monopoly brought with it the capitalist drive to take away from the working class the share, or rather the scraps, of the fruits of that monopoly which had formed the basis of concessions to trade unionism. This involved, not a temporary slump, and loss of wages during the

slump, but a general crisis and a permanent and continuous reduction of the workers' standard of living. From 1921, industries were attacked in turn. The most powerful, miners and engineers, were beaten first. But this was only the first round. In 1925 Mr. Baldwin, explaining to the miners' leaders that they would have to make further sacrifices, said: "All the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages" (*Daily Herald*, July 31st, 1925). A shock went through the workers' ranks. Determination to stop the retreat by a united stand in aid of the miners extended from one end of the country to the other. The workers understood that in defending the miners they were defending themselves.

The T.U.C. came to the aid of the miners. On July 30th, 1925, it issued instructions placing an embargo on the transport of coal from the moment the lock-out of miners was due to begin.

Mr. Baldwin capitulated. He agreed to subsidise the coalowners to avoid a reduction for nine months while a Coal Commission enquired into the whole situation. The Government was afraid of a general strike for which it was not prepared. It was also concerned about the financial situation, Britain having just returned to the gold standard. But Mr. Baldwin was under no illusions as to the nature of the threat to which he had given way, and only wanted to gain time. He said in the House:

"We were confronted last week by a great alliance of trade unions. If we are again confronted by a challenge of that nature, let me say that no minority in a free country has ever yet coerced the whole community."

Thus the trade unions by threat of strike action had forced the Government to give a subsidy which otherwise

It would not have given. The trade unions had committed a political act of great significance. The organised workers had closed their ranks and dictated their will to the capitalist Government. No wonder the day was dubbed "Red Friday."

The capitalists used the nine months' breathing-space to prepare for the struggle. They set up the Coal Commission partly to distract the attention of the workers from the coming struggle by creating an atmosphere that settlement would be certain, and partly to prepare a report directed to dividing the other unions from the miners. They arrested the twelve leaders of the Communist Party in order to silence those voices which ceaselessly warned and roused the workers. They formed an organisation for blacklegging on a national scale—the Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies. It bore a strongly Fascist character, and received the blessing of the Home Secretary, Sir W. Joynson-Hicks.

The trade unions made no preparations. The Scarborough T.U.C. adopted Left resolutions but the General Council did nothing to carry them out. The readiness of the rank and file was shown by the attendance of 883 delegates, representing 957,000 trade unionists, at the conference called by the Minority Movement to prepare for a united struggle. But in the General Council they were not discussing preparation for a general strike, but preparation for a retreat from the alliance with the miners.

In March 1926 the Report of the Coal Commission proposed a family wage, municipal selling of coal, nationalisation of the mineral. It also went on record for a reduction of miners' wages. The miners were urged to accept the reduction as a means of getting the other proposals carried out. The miners refused. Throughout April the General Council tried to get away from its commitment to support the miners in their refusal to

accept any wage-cut, longer hours, or reversion to district agreements. The miners became alarmed and asked for a reassurance of support, which was not given in Mr. Citrine's letter of April 8th. The T.U.C. was beginning to yield. The Government's decision to accept the report, provided all other parties did likewise, was the excuse for deserting the miners. This weakening encouraged the coalowners, who demanded wage-cuts and district negotiations. They posted notices terminating contracts on April 30th. The miners refused, and there was again deadlock.

The speeches at the conference of union executives on April 29th indicated the changes which had taken place. Mr. Arthur Pugh, in his report, made it clear that the General Council regarded the Coal Commission's Report as making a new situation. The resolution was vague. The miners' secretary, Mr. A. J. Cook, declared his interpretation of the resolution to mean that it reaffirmed the previous decision to resist any wage-cut. This was not denied, but neither was it confirmed. No wonder Mr. W. J. Brown described the atmosphere as "distinctly chilly."

The Government and the coalowners remained adamant. On Friday, April 30th, deadlock continued, and the conference of executives voted for the general strike by 3,653,527 to 49,911.

It was a tremendous decision. By it the unions were staking their whole position, putting their agreements into the melting-pot and embarking on the greatest challenge to capitalism they had ever made. The enormous majority showed how, even in face of existing divisions and rivalries between unions, united action was possible around the great issues. By this vote the trade union movement showed how far the working class had advanced in the unification of its forces.

The conference dispersed after the vote had been

taken. Executive members went back to the unions and districts to begin the struggle, while the General Council went back to resume negotiations with the Government in a futile effort to avoid the conflict. The Government took advantage of the strike of the *Daily Mail* compositors to break off negotiations. It was prepared; it wanted a fight, confident that the weakness of the General Council would guarantee a capitalist victory.

The *Daily Mail* compositors showed the magnificent spirit of the rank and file. The compositors, well paid, sure of their jobs, had least of all to lose if the miners went down. But they not only lined up with the rest; they went on ahead and struck on an issue of classic importance—the use of the capitalist Press for anti-working-class propaganda. They refused to set up the leading article attacking the miners and the trade unions generally. The general strike had begun.

THE STATE UNMASKED

The strike began on May 3rd. The response was complete. All those called out responded. Many unorganised workers joined in the struggle. Two million men stopped on the first day.

The Government threw off the mask of impartial representative of the community and flung the whole force of the State into the struggle against the working people. It proclaimed a State of Emergency, establishing a dictatorship, with all power to the police. All army leave was stopped. The Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies and the Fascist bands were taken over by the Government. Broadcasting was commandeered. Hundreds of special constables were enrolled. Warships, troops, and armoured cars were mobilised.

The General Council's "plan" for the strike was drawn up hurriedly a few hours before the stoppage

began. Mr. Ernest Bevin is credited with being its author. It proposed the withdrawal of labour in "waves" following each other by decision of the General Council. Control was to be through a series of sub-committees at headquarters. In the localities Trades Councils were to be co-ordinating bodies. The plan reflected the hesitation of the General Council. Why "waves"? Why give the Government and employers breathing-space? Why hold back the municipal workers, the power and light workers? Why suppress the workers' own papers just when they needed them most? Why no lead for mass self-defence of the workers against arrests and brutality? Why only a grudging recognition of Trades Councils? Above all, why no demand for the resignation of the Government and for taking over by a Labour Government?

These hesitations can only be explained by the fact that the General Council never wanted the stoppage and hoped to the last to avoid it. When it did come, they preferred to treat the strike as a sort of peaceful demonstration rather than as a fight for victory. This line was fully developed in the *British Worker*, a paper issued by the General Council on the third day of the strike. Its content was negative and passive. It made no mention of the hundreds of arrests, the scores of police charges and attacks. Its main effort was to prove that the strike had nothing to do with politics or the constitution, and was purely an industrial dispute. It exhorted the workers to remain calm.

It is difficult to reconcile this view of the General Council with the facts. The strike was a challenge to the capitalist class and the Government. The working class, in siding with the miners, was defying the Government. The Government suspended normal democratic procedure, established an open dictatorship, and launched an army of police, military, O.M.S. people, special

constables, and Fascists to enforce its will on the workers. The working class in turn began to obey only its own leading organs. It allowed transport only "By permission of the T.U.C." It organised mass pickets which stopped other transport. It found blacklegging being organised and protected by the Government. It listened on the wireless to the Government order guaranteeing immunity to any policeman or soldier who broke the law in pursuance of activity against the workers. Class was in action against class. How was it possible to maintain the argument that there was no political issue?

But the General Council tried to so do. It refused the offer of the Soviet trade unions to contribute £1,000,000 to the strike fund. The slogans so clearly needed to inspire the movement to a further effort—"Stand by the Miners!"; "Nationalise the Mines!"; "Resignation of Baldwin, make way for a Labour Government!"—were issued, not by the General Council, but by the Communist Party.

The workers who were carrying on the strike did not follow the advice of the General Council to remain calm. They organised mass picketing on a big scale, in many places taking command of the streets, which they controlled by means of barricades. They manfully resisted the police brutality and in cases besieged the police in their stations. Some town halls were occupied, and the beginnings of workers' own food services appeared. All sorts of local bulletins, many produced under conditions of illegality, appeared in increasing numbers. Trades Councils and Strike Committees began to act as the source of authority for the working class. The good humour of the first few days was replaced by an increasing dourness and determination. Mass defence measures were organised. The Trades Councils and Strike Committees began to prepare a national conference to co-ordinate their efforts. Discontent with the

British Worker and the lead of the General Council grew hourly.

THE STRIKE CALLED OFF

The General Council began to seek a way out. A prominent judge declared in the High Court of Justice that the strike was illegal. Members of the General Council began negotiations with the chairman of the Coal Commission, Sir Herbert Samuel, who was in touch with the Government. On the eighth day he presented a memorandum to the General Council. This memorandum was a private document, and proposed that effective guarantees of reorganisation of the mining industry be given prior to wage-cuts taking place. On the basis of this memorandum, without the agreement of the miners who rejected it, without any confirmation or guarantees from the Government, without any provisions against victimisation—in fact, without any provisions at all—the General Council called off the strike. Its representatives went to see Mr. Baldwin and surrendered unconditionally at the moment when the strike had reached its highest level and was still gathering strength. The Government immediately broadcast that the strike was over.

This action of the General Council is inexplicable unless seen as a culmination of its entire previous policy. It was in no sense a sudden breakdown, the result of intimidation or trickery. The call-off represented the logical end of the whole Right policy of failure to recognise any fundamental change in the position of capitalism, denial of the need for class struggle, and, through a long series of acts of class collaboration, failure to prepare the workers. The fear that the strike was getting so strong as to be moving out of the control of the General Council may have accounted for the haste with

which the surrender was carried through and the failure to get any guarantees for the protection of the individuals or organisations who took part, or even to mention the thousands who were sentenced to fines and imprisonment. In view of the solemn undertaking of mutual support given at the conference of executives, the word "betrayal" applied to this surrender by hundreds of thousands of enraged workers does not seem too strong.

The employers at once sought to impose worsened conditions all round. But the workers were not broken. There were actually more on strike in the last two days than previously. They stood firm, the agreements were saved, but there was much victimisation and humiliation. If proof is required that the strike had not weakened one iota, it is found in the rally which saved the agreements. Alone the miners fought on for nine long and bitter months and were beaten. The trade union movement suffered a blow which set it back for years. The Right took advantage of the despondency and passed on to the Turner-Mond conversations which gave peace on paper and rationalisation and wage-cuts in the factories.

The greatest display of solidarity the movement had ever seen had failed, not because of the strength of its enemies, but because of internal weakness in the leadership. But the knowledge gained by this bitter experience opens the way to future victory. The class rôle of the Government and the State was made clear. The character of capitalist democracy was laid bare. Dictatorship was revealed as an organised weapon of the capitalists. The conclusion of Right Wing policy was proved to be surrender. The weakness of a Left which could only make propaganda, and which was not so firmly organised in the factories and localities that it could take the lead in action, was exposed. If these lessons are learned by the trade union movement the nine days will not have been in vain.

CHAPTER V

WAR

MODERN WAR requires enormous quantities of machines, munitions, and supplies. In capitalist industry production is carried on with the machine tool as the basis of technique; in capitalist war destruction is carried on with the machine weapon as the basis of military technique.

The production, transport, and use of the machines and supplies needed to carry on the war is an industrial undertaking of the greatest magnitude, requiring the mobilisation of all economic resources. To conduct the war successfully the Government requires not only an army to do the fighting, but a conscription of the entire human and material resources of the country to produce the maximum number of war machines and supplies and to bring them to bear upon the enemy. Factories, production and transport centres, become part of the front. The distinction between "civil" and "military" disappears. Both are essential parts of the war machine.

Under capitalism, war is the only form of enterprise which guarantees the immediate consumption of all the products of industry. War is, therefore, the most profitable activity of capitalism. It provides an outlet for all that production is capable of, and an unlimited market beyond.

The war Government requires not only unlimited production, but continuity of production. There must

be no break. A break would immediately endanger the maintenance of the battle-front for lack of material supplies. It would also have serious moral effects, since it would direct the attention of the civil and military population to the existence of a conflict within the State. It would throw into relief the continued existence of the contradictions between labour and capital just at the time when the Government desires most to smother this contradiction and to concentrate all energies upon the war.

The political and military need for a continuous, unlimited, and unbroken mass production of machines, munitions, and materials is essentially a labour problem. Here is the basis of the attitude of the Government towards trade unionism in wartime, and the time of preparation for war. Here is the starting-point for the Government desire for an alliance, for collaboration of the trade unions and the Government machine.

The war of 1914-18 provided experience of the problems. It was Mr. Lloyd George, the Cabinet Minister most familiar with labour questions, who first appreciated the real nature of the conflict, and, because of this, rose to the highest post of leadership. As early as 1915 he declared to the Trades Union Congress that the war had resolved itself into a "conflict of mechanics" between the rival groups of powers. As Minister of Munitions, and later as Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George developed the policy of alliance with the trade unions as one of the Government's basic requirements for victory.

Alliance implies a bargain. The bargain was formulated at the Treasury conference in 1915. Compulsory arbitration was set up; the trade unions gave up the strike weapon. The right to leave work without permission from the employer was abolished. All trade union rules, conditions, and practices which hampered output were surrendered. All provisions and safeguards of the

Factory Acts were relinquished. The unions approved the introduction of unskilled labour to processes hitherto confined to skilled labour—the so-called dilution of labour. In effect, the trade unions agreed to conscription of industrial labour long before military conscription was proposed.

Such was the contribution of the unions. What did they get in return? Promises.

A promise that after the war the surrendered conditions should be restored. A promise that the dilution of labour should not be allowed to increase the employers' profits. A promise that the Fair Wages Clause should operate in Government contracts. A promise that the compulsory arbitration proceedings would protect the workers' standard of living. In addition, the unions were to be given representation upon numerous committees set up by the Government in every sphere of industrial activity, and trade union leaders entered the Government. Exemption from military service was granted to trade union officials.

In practice the workers got hardly any of these things. Dilution of labour began immediately and was kept up, but the Munitions Levy, imposed to keep down employers' profits, was removed in one year. Hundreds of establishments failed to operate the Fair Wages Clause, and the Government did nothing to compel them to do so. The cost of living rose by leaps and bounds, while wages toiled slowly up the rungs of the arbitration ladder. The argument that "we must win the war," backed by the threat of transference to the army and to the trenches, was used to intimidate the workers in the factories. But, after the war was won, the Government took no steps to compel the employers to restore the old conditions.

The presence of the union representatives in the various committees and in the Government became a

means, not for securing to the workers the promises made in the Treasury agreement, but for committing the unions further and further to every phase of the Government's war policy.

Why did the trade unions come so disastrously out of this bargain? Why was the Government, at the very hour when its need of labour was so dire, able to get concessions from unions instead of having to give them?

By the terms of the bargain the trade unions surrendered their independence when they gave up the use of the strike weapon. They thereby gave up the only weapon through which they could have compelled the employers to observe the terms of the bargain. The unions placed themselves at the mercy of the Government. But the Government had cajoled only when it feared, and the moment it felt strong enough to coerce it did so. What was established by the Treasury agreement and the subsequent Munitions of War Acts was in fact a state of employing class dictatorship over labour. The rights, liberties, and customs of the workers were suppressed with the agreement of the official representatives of the trade unions, and the Government exercised its power to break its promises, written or implied. The collaboration proved to be that of the lion and the lamb, the workers providing the nourishment.

This experience showed that when the trade union leaders took the standpoint that the prosecution of the war was in the national interest, and came before the class interest of the workers, and when they consequently agreed to a political truce, they committed themselves to a course which not only surrendered the struggle for advancing the political power of the workers, but also surrendered the immediate material and sectional interests of the workers, including much that had been won by decades of trade union effort. Class collaboration became indistinguishable from surrender

of the trade unions to the Government. The terms of agreement became terms of surrender.

As the pressure upon the workers in the factories increased, so grew their tendency to repudiate in practice the terms their officials had accepted. With every rise in the cost of living, every new example of opulent profits of the employers, every new imposition of long hours and hardships, the resistance of the workers stiffened. As the shortage of labour increased, it became a serious matter to the employers to risk losing their workers, especially the skilled men, in spite of their legal powers. Thus arose the possibilities of workshop organisation. While the officials were harnessing the union machinery to the wishes of the Government, the workers were building a new and more effective fighting machine in the workshops. Groups of trade unionists would come together and elect their representative, the shop steward. Throughout the factory the shop stewards would link up and a works committee, representing all departments, would be formed. Neither the spying nor the intimidation of the employers and the Government could stop the movement. It reached its highest point on the Clyde, where the factories combined to set up the Clyde Workers' Committee. The trade unions could not handle the situation, and Mr. Lloyd George himself had to attempt, unsuccessfully, to deal with it. In South Wales the miners also took up the struggle. The ban on strikes was broken. In the working-class strongholds anti-war sentiment grew, fed by the fearful losses at the front, and strengthened the resistance in the factories. The shop stewards movement took on a national outline.

The conflict at the point of production had produced a new and more formidable form of expression of trade unionism in place of the official machinery which had been surrendered to the Government. This movement in the factories showed that in spite of the wartime

dictatorial powers the workers could frequently defy the employers and the Government. The war ended before the problems raised by this new situation had fully emerged.

The present National Government is moving towards a new subordination of the trade unions to its rearmament programme, which is the preparatory phase of the new war. The White Paper of 1936 relating to defence, and the subsequent statements of the Minister of Defence, Inskip, show that the Government is retreading the path of 1914, but that zero hour this time is set, not on the date of declaration of war, but on the date of declaration to rearm. As far as the unions are concerned, the Government wants history to repeat itself.

The Government invitation to the trade unions for a new surrender is clearly formulated in the White Paper, which, after describing the armament requirements and the financial provision needed, goes on to say:

"What we have to do is to carry through, in a limited period of time, measures which will make exceptionally heavy demands upon certain branches of industry and upon certain branches of skilled labour, without impeding the course of normal trade. This will require the most careful organisation, and the willing co-operation both of the leaders of industry and of trade unions if our task is to be successfully accomplished. But the Government have every confidence that these conditions will be fulfilled."

Not long after the issue of the White Paper Sir Walter Citrine, secretary of the T.U.C., took an opportunity of saying that the trade unions would not refuse to do their part. A whole number of trade union leaders began to speak about the danger of Fascism in terms which implied that the danger of a military attack by the Fascist powers

was a reason for supporting National Government rearmament. The signals were being set for movement into position for the new coalition.

But not only the leaders had read the White Paper. The London District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union had also read it, and convened in the summer of 1936 a conference of branch delegates and shop stewards to consider it. This conference showed that a lively resistance to the Government's policy was already finding expression in the factories, and that, while the trade unionists were certainly in need of steady work after long periods of unemployment, and were ready to fight for increased wages on the basis of the rearmament orders, they were decidedly not ready to be hitched helplessly on to the Government's war machine.

The conference declared that the Government

"is anxious to establish an industrial truce, a situation in which, in return for some small concession or promise, trade unionists would be expected to assist in the rapid production of armaments and forsake our main rights as a trade union. We would be expected to give up our right to fight the employers and the National Government for better wages and working conditions in return for what would be in essence a miserable and measly concession."

On the basis of further statements and practice by the Government's representatives, the engineers characterised the Government's intentions in the workshops as being

"intensive rationalisation, the dropping of demarcation customs and practices established by the bitter struggles of our forbears."

With unanimity the conference went on to define its policy towards Government rearmament. It emphatically rejected the idea of an industrial truce whether on a limited scale or totally. The engineers' delegates declared that in place of truce the men in the factories should organise the advance against the employers for better conditions, not as part of a bargain to facilitate rearmament, but because the situation presented an opportunity to advance long-overdue claims, and proceeded to formulate in definite language what the demands of the men should be.

The rapid increase in the union membership and the revival of the shop stewards movement in the factories showed that this conference was attuned to the feeling in the factories. In London alone the number of engineering shop stewards rose from 160 to over 400 in the last six months of 1936. Most of the London engineering firms are working on rearmament orders. The aircraft section of the industry was practically unorganised in 1934, but by the beginning of 1937 every important factory was past the 90 per cent mark of organisation. Most of this work has been done by the Aircraft Shop Stewards movement, which has established a leadership for the industry on a national scale, publishing its own paper with a sale of 14,000 monthly in the factories. The shop stewards conduct a continuous campaign for trade union organisation and for improvements in working conditions, and are demanding a national agreement for the aircraft industry. In twelve months they conducted fourteen important strikes, most of which were successful. Hundreds of pounds were raised for each strike, and the trade union organisations greatly strengthened, although officially the strikes were not recognised and the A.E.U. Executive has begun to attack the shop stewards movement.

It would seem, from the attitude of the engineers'

delegates and the revival of the shop stewards movement, that a strong Left current has already begun against the suggestion that the 1914 surrender shall be repeated.

The General Council of the T.U.C. has not yet made its attitude clear. The official trade union policy on war, in fact, stands midway between a repudiation of the decision for the general strike against war and a new coalition. The International Federation of Trade Unions at its Brussels Congress in 1933 decided for a general strike by the working-class movement of any country whose Government made itself an aggressor by refusing to submit to the arbitration of the League of Nations, and resorting to military action. This decision, taken at such a moment, may be said to have reflected the policy of the dominant countries in the League. The 1934 T.U.C. accepted this decision. But the destruction of the trade union movement in Germany, and the obvious impossibility of a general strike to order in the Fascist countries, led to the abandonment of this policy by the 1936 London Congress of the I.F.T.U. No other policy was adopted in its place, although one delegate called for a declaration that the Labour Movement would fight for the defence of those countries where it had democratic rights if those countries were attacked by Fascism. The report of this London Congress was accepted by the 1936 T.U.C. without any further definition of policy.

The question around which division is now taking place may be formulated as follows. Does the determination to defend democracy against Fascism mean that the trade unions should support the National Government's plans for rearmament and recruiting? Or should the trade unions take their own independent class measures for the defence of democracy, including an increased movement against the National Government?

In general the Right favours the first of these alternatives, the Left the second. The General Council may be expected to pursue a line close to the first, without necessarily formulating its policy in advance.

CHAPTER VI

UNITY

THE NUMERICAL GROWTH of the trade unions provides the most obvious evidence of their rôle as organisers of the working class.

MEMBERSHIP AFFILIATED TO T.U.C.

1868	118,367	1918	4,532,085
1895	1,000,000	1920	6,505,482
1902	1,400,000	1924	4,328,235
1908	1,777,000	1934	3,294,581
1915	2,682,000	1936	3,614,551

The increases correspond to periods of struggle, the acute conditions during wartime reflecting themselves in unprecedented growth. The failure to carry the struggle forward after the war, and the retreat before the capitalist offensive, is followed by a decline. A further decline follows the defeat in 1926. Since that year allowance must be made for the Trades Disputes Act of 1927, preventing the affiliation of civil service and post office unions. The new advance in 1936 brings with it a new rise.

The figures show that a firm core, some 3½ million strong, unflinching in face of disappointment or defeat, is organised in the trade unions, and knits together the different trades in a common bond of solidarity to trade union principle. This organised core embodies the

traditions of the working class, carries on the daily struggle, and expresses the hope of a new future.

But the trade unions are still the minority of the working class. More than 8,000,000 remain unorganised. Since the essence of trade unionism demands that it should enrol all wage-earners, the movement cannot be satisfied with its present position. New conditions in industry, especially the mass influx of women and youth into the factories, make it increasingly impossible to maintain the standards won by the trade unionism of past generations unless these new strata are organised. In 1936 only 417,000 women were in the trade unions.

Trade unionism is not a mere matter of paying dues and mentally acknowledging a principle. The growth of the trade union membership represents something vital and profound in the minds of the workers precisely because trade union ideas revolve around one principle—the elimination of competition between workers themselves in order to present a united front to the employers. To eliminate competition between the workers demands a constant effort to unite groups who are divided by material considerations, different rates of pay, various conditions, and has to be done in the face of the deliberate efforts of employers to divide the workers' ranks.

An example of the employers' methods of setting workers against one another is the payment of piece-work prices, or other forms of bonus payment, directed towards increasing the amount produced by the individual through the stimulus of increased earnings. The employer, by getting increased production from a number of individuals, is able to get the whole job done by a smaller number of workers than he would otherwise have to employ. Of the value of the increased production, only a portion goes back to the worker as extra payment, the remainder being profit for the

employer. But for poorly paid workers, for those with special family difficulties, for those who desire to improve their position in life, the allure of extra earnings is very strong. Here is a serious danger to trade unionism. The trade union policy in these circumstances is to prevent piecework altogether when strong enough to do so. Where it cannot be prevented, the union seeks to regulate it. It is regulated by means of an agreed basis for the piecework price and a voluntary limitation of earnings to the rate agreed upon. For example, if the price is fixed on the basis of time-and-a-third, this will be effective only if the men limit their output so that they do not earn more than the weekly wage plus one-third. Only by enforcing this through an inspection of pay checks by the shop stewards can the workers be safeguarded against being used in competition with each other.

Occasions arise when there is a vacancy for a job which is more desirable than the average, carrying better pay and opportunities. Who is to be given this job? Here the trade unionists apply the principle of seniority, those qualified to do the work being promoted according to the length of time they have been on the firm's wage list. If this is not rigidly enforced, the way is open to favouritism and the better job becomes the reward of subservience and place-seeking.

Demarcation between jobs is another problem. Here are reflected two aspects of the struggle—the competition of workers for available work, and the joint determination of the competing workers not to allow the employers to lower their standards. The right claimed by certain trades to a monopoly of particular work, sometimes leading to strike action if men from another union are put on to that work, is at bottom the demand that the employer shall pay skilled rates for certain classes of work, and shall not use one craftsman to do the work of

two. The firmness with which the skilled unions defend their rights on demarcation questions has been one of the biggest obstacles to capitalist rationalisation and consequent degradation of wages.

A further means whereby the employer seeks to use one worker against another is overtime. Overtime always means excessive exploitation, since no extra payment compensates the worker for the premature exhaustion of his vital energies consequent upon being deprived of recreation and sleep. Overtime is for the employer a means of avoiding the taking on of additional workers. It therefore directly adds to unemployment. It is also a means of reducing wages, since the extra payment for overtime becomes a necessity if the worker is to make his weekly budget balance, so that he gets a living wage only by doing sixty hours work instead of forty-seven or forty-eight. The trade union principle is to control overtime with a view to its limitation, and finally its prohibition.

Thus the trade unions organise a unity of outlook, a comradely solidarity which places the common interest before individual short-sightedness, through the daily struggle against exploitation. Through the unions the solidarity of labour is realised, and a force is built up capable of conducting strikes or more serious struggles, and forming a foundation for political unity. The value and power of solidarity in the workshop, and the depth to which trade union principles penetrate, are often underestimated by those who judge by the spoken or written word alone. Trade union opinion is slow-moving but enduring, reflecting a solidarity built with difficulty and not to be lightly jeopardised.

The extension of trade unionism to the unorganised, therefore, needs something more than propaganda. New wage-earners come into the working class from the youth, the countryside, from middle-class elements in the towns. All have to learn from experience before

propaganda for trade unionism will reap results. The process of hastening their maturing into the frame of mind when trade unionism can operate is not helped by the attitude, noticeable in many trade unions with a Right leadership, of sitting and waiting for new members to knock on the door. A rise in propaganda work and recruiting activity is nearly always noticeable when the Left is in the ascendancy in the unions. The less experienced and politically undeveloped workers tend to be most exacting in their judgment; they ask bluntly, "What will I gain if I join a union?" and weigh the reply in terms of hard cash. Consequently the Right tendency often to accept a wage-cut rather than face a fight gives the backward workers the idea that it is no use joining a union.

The obstacles to complete organisation of all the workers are many. Deliberate victimisation by employers is still rife. There is sometimes company unionism—that is, the organisation of a body calling itself a union but under the control of the employer, with perhaps compulsory deduction of subscriptions from the wage-pocket. Some employers refuse to employ a trade unionist or to have any dealings with trade unions. Such employers frequently set up a special labour department to handle workers' complaints and suggestions, and to combat trade union ideas. Then there is a mass of labour in such conditions of economic weakness that it cannot, unaided, lift itself to a trade union level.

The unions are prevented from bringing their full energies to bear against these difficulties by their habit of tolerating the continued existence of by-products of their past which have now become definitely harmful. Such is the A.E.U. exclusion of women. Another is the multiplicity of unions catering for workers in the same industry. This competition is a prolific source of wasted opportunity, wasted money, and bad feeling. An example

is afforded by a south London factory manufacturing electrical equipment which had been untouched by the official trade union machine for years. The workers themselves organised it and a dispute broke out, with the workers successful. Then appeared organisers from no less than six unions, each concerned only with his own particular claims for members. The competition between unions prevents a co-ordinated drive to bring in the unorganised.

The advance of the trade unions towards organising the industrial unity of the workers has inevitably its political aspect. In a society founded upon division into classes, economic issues merge into political issues.

In modern times the word "class" signifies something more than the aggregation of people with economic interests in common. To constitute a class such people must be able to express their common interests as a social force, to have a common aim and an organisation to express it. Their organisation must have a policy which inspires activity. To-day the working class is much more than a mass of people divorced from the land and dependent upon wages for their existence. This mass has developed a consciousness of its class position, an understanding of its problems, a determination to change that position. This process of realising themselves as a class is the result of the struggle of the workers against the capitalists. Only in this struggle are gained experiences which enable the workers to advance further in their outlook. This process continues. The standpoint of to-day, itself an advance on yesterday, is but a stepping-stone to to-morrow. The process will find its conclusion when a united and conscious working class is able to take power into its hands and then to ensure full freedom to realise all its potentialities in constructing a classless society. The present position of the trade unions must be estimated in regard to this process of the

development of the workers as a class. We must examine the trade unions not only in relation to the achievements of the past, but also in relation to the requirements of the future. Unity in the factory is the root of trade unionism, unity of the whole working class its fruit. The measure of the unity of the working class is the degree of its challenge to the capitalist class.

Unity in the factory arises through recognition of common interest, of understanding that only by a common advance can individual interests be advanced. Individual competition is replaced by united action against the employer. Unity of the class is arising through recognition of the common interest of all trades, of understanding that only by a class advance can the various industrial sections maintain their interests. Sectional struggles, aggrandisement of individual groups of the working class, must be replaced by united action of all against the common enemy.

But, while trade unionism grew in the factory in a favourable soil, it did not come automatically of itself. It came through the minds and hearts of individual men and women who saw more clearly, felt more deeply, and acted with greater courage and persistency than the others. They were leaders because of their foresight, courage, and energy. Around them the trade unions were organised. Class unity also, however favourable the soil, will not come as the automatic result of the trade union process. It will come through the activity of those who see the new stage most clearly and give the lead because of their comprehension. But because class unity is a question of millions of people in most varied places and circumstances, leadership can no longer be given by individuals acting alone or with those they can reach by personal contact. Leadership now requires the association of the leading individuals in an organisation, all acting in unison and team work, grouped together in the

different industries and factories, operating through a mass Press, appealing to the minds of the workers through all forms of propaganda. To reach the millions, to inspire them to move forward, and to do this under the fire of a highly organised enemy, modern class leadership must be able to speak with a million voices in a million places at the same time. Such a leadership is required by the trade unions if they are to complete their tasks and to realise their aims.

The widening of the field of struggle from the factory to all the factories, to the country as a whole, has transformed it into a political struggle. The challenge of the workers has brought the Government and the State into action on the side of the employers. The capitalist class uses all resources, economic and political, to obstruct the advance of the workers. To lead the working class and the trade unions in such a political struggle, a political organisation is required. The class struggle has reached a point where trade unionism is not enough to maintain and complete trade unionism. New forms of activity and new currents of energy are required, and these can be generated only by the force of political understanding and conviction. History now presents the trade unions with the problem of building a mass political party of the type which will enable them to break through the resistance which capitalism opposes to their further development, and to defeat the capitalist moves to destroy them.

The trade unions acknowledged the political problem when they formed the Labour Party in 1902. The capitalists were then seeking to limit trade union advance by a series of political acts which could be challenged only in Parliament. The trade unions decided that they required a parliamentary party of their own, and proceeded to build one on a trade union model. The question now in dispute is whether this party, the Labour Party, is of a

type able to fulfil the requirements of the trade unions in the present stage of the class struggle.

Since 1921 the Communist Party has challenged the idea that a merely parliamentary party is sufficient, and has put forward the conception of a mass party organised in the factories and streets for daily activity and discussion of all problems facing the workers. The Communist Party also contends that a scientific programme and ideology is required to fit the working-class party for its work, and that in Marxism-Leninism it has such a programme and ideology. An increasing number of active trade unionists, including officials, are examining with attention and sympathy the Communist viewpoint on this question.

Many trade union leaders who support class collaboration rather than class struggle, and have also been associated with the leadership of the Labour Party, not unnaturally show considerable hostility to the growth of Communist ideas, whether in the party itself or in the trade unions. The British trade unions have been fortunate in their development as united industrial organisations, giving liberty to all expressions of policy within their ranks subject to the observance of union rules. Many continental countries have witnessed the growth of two or more trade union centres, divided according to political colour, a state of affairs that the British movement has always prided itself on having avoided.

The movement is now witnessing an attempt by the Right leadership to break up this traditional industrial unity by taking organisational measures against Communists, and those it chooses to label as Communists. The question of working-class unity is thus being made an issue between Right and Left. The Communist Party, in seeking affiliation to the Labour Party, raises an issue which will be decided by the trade union votes at the Labour Party Conference. The Communist claim,

if accorded, would complement industrial unity by political unity, which the Labour Party was set up to achieve on a federal basis. The Right replies by refusing the Communist claim, and, on the grounds that unity already exists in the movement, logically but none the less absurdly commits itself to an effort to break the existing industrial unity.

The past has seen various forms of Left expression within the trade unions. The official machine has frequently been challenged by unofficial movements. The term "unofficial" is usually associated with the Left viewpoint. Strictly speaking, this is not accurate, because many officials, and some unions as a whole, take the Left viewpoint, while many lay members support the Right. But an "unofficial" movement is the traditional way in which the advanced membership, and sometimes the majority, protest against the refusal of the officials to meet their wishes. Unofficial movements are a long-standing feature of British trade union life, traditionally arising around practical issues rather than on theoretical differences, and growing in particular unions rather than throughout the movement. In recent years, under the stress of sharpening political conflict, the Right leaders have begun to describe them as disruptive, and to take organisational measures against them. This attack began in 1927 against the Minority Movement.

The successor of the wartime shop stewards movement, the National Minority Movement from 1924 to 1929 gave leadership through conferences, publications, committees, and industrial sections on a national scale. In its ranks were Communists and a variety of Left Wing opinion, including many officials. It aimed at winning the unions for a declared policy of class struggle.

In 1927 the Minority Movement led the resistance to Mondism, and gained such support that the Right began to fear it would become a Majority Movement.

To prevent this they began to violate the democratic rights of the membership. They particularly wished to remove from the floor of the T.U.C. the most effective spokesman of the Minority Movement, Harry Pollitt, delegate of the Boilermakers. The Right, by a series of bans, prevented the election of Minority Movement supporters to official positions in a number of unions, including the Boilermakers, the Shop Assistants, and the General and Municipal Workers. The General Council forbade Trades Councils to associate with the Minority Movement. These bans were enforced by individual expulsions, closing down of union branches, and disaffiliation of Trades Councils. The Right justified the disruption by claiming that the Communists did not believe in democracy. These measures assisted to isolate the Minority Movement.

In 1932 a further revival of the Left began, headed by the London busmen, who formed a new type of militant movement by grouping their trade union branches together around a policy of vigorous resistance to the employers. There were similar movements in other unions, accompanied by the election of Communists to many official positions, and the growth of Communist groups in important factories.

The Right replied by the Black Circulars of 1934, which sought to introduce definite rules in all unions, against Communists and to close the Trades Councils entirely to Communist delegates. But the tide of trade union activity was now rising, and the results of Mondism were no credit to Right policy. Consequently, while the T.U.C. accepted the Black Circulars, the great majority of unions rejected them, and some, such as the Shop Assistants and Paper Workers, revoked the existing bans. The Trades Councils had no option but to accept the decree of the General Council, but the majority honour it in the breach rather than in the observance.

While the Right maintains the policy of collaboration, it will continue to resort to disruption in order to relieve the pressure from the rank and file who are demanding struggle.

Two alternatives, therefore, confront the trade unions: to go forward to class unity, political and industrial, by establishing full democracy within the unions and within the Labour Party, and launching a great crusade to win the unorganised millions into the movement—class struggle, vigorous and determined, is the content of such unity—or to go backward, maintaining the division in the political sphere and adding to it division in the industrial sphere. To maintain class collaboration is the object of such division, and it bears with it suppression of democracy within the workers' movement.

CHAPTER VII

TRADE UNIONS AND THE STATE

THE BRITISH TRADE UNIONS hold a key position in the social and political conflict. The success of any capitalist Government in carrying through a policy against the interests of the great majority of the population will largely depend upon its ability to induce the trade unions to remain quiescent. If the trade union movement uses its influence to set the working people against the Government, that Government is in serious difficulties. If the trade unions do not come into action against the Government, popular indignation or disagreement, however widespread, finds itself almost helpless in the face of a determined Government.

In order to understand the forces deciding the position of the unions in relation to current problems we need to examine the sources and development of the ideas which influence the trade unionists.

To the trade unionist, modern Britain presents itself as a country in which the great majority of people live in towns and depend for their livelihood upon getting work in a factory, mill, or mine. The factories are owned by capitalists and are operated for profit. In the factory the technical process of production is continually modified by the ceaseless improvement of the tools and machines. The machine tool dominates production, and its requirements govern the number, duties, times,

and conditions of the workers.) In multiplicity of form, drawing upon the giant strength of steam and electricity for its power, the machine tool makes possible the modification of material to new shapes and conditions with a speed and in quantity incomparably greater than that of any previously known production system.

But multiform and almost unlimited in power as the machine is, it cannot supply intelligence and cannot control itself. Human labour is essential to production.!

The trade unionist notes that this essential labour which operates the machines works for wages paid by the hour or the week, and that these wages never get very far beyond subsistence level. The managerial staff who direct the work are much better paid. Best off of all are the owners, who do not necessarily do any work in the factory at all, but who have a claim on everything produced because they own the enterprise.

The trade unionist knows that both workers and management are essential to production. But he sees no useful function performed by those who are only interested in the factory for what they can get out of it in the shape of dividends upon capital.

Entirely dependent for life, health, and happiness upon what can be bought with his wages, the trade unionist sees in the constant endeavour of the management to cheapen production, by maintaining wages as low as possible in relation to output, the expression of the callousness of capitalist policy, indifferent to human welfare and seeking only profit. He regards the foreman, the charge-hand, the rate fixer, and the manager as agents directed by the owners to secure the maximum production at the minimum wages cost.

Exposed to the constant drive of such a production policy, and finding by experience that individual effort to better his lot is ineffective, the trade unionist sees in his organisation the only means of safeguarding his

standard of living, and of protecting his wife and children. The idea of combining with his fellows, of joint action with them for the simultaneous advancement of all, becomes firmly rooted in his mind. The right to organise, and if necessary to withhold, his labour in the effort to secure better wages and conditions becomes for him the embodiment of freedom and the hope of social advance.

Reinforcing his own experience with the traditions of past struggles handed on by the union, and with the common experience of all workers whom he meets, the trade unionist arrives at the firm conviction that the employing class never voluntarily concedes higher wages or improved conditions, but that only the power of the workers for united action can be relied upon to secure these advantages.

Finding that the struggle around wages goes on in all industries, the mind of the trade unionist readily embraces the conception that the workers as a class stand opposed to the capitalists as a class, and that the interests of the workers cannot safely be confided to individuals and organisations controlled by members of the class which lives upon profit.

To the employer the whole matter cannot but appear quite differently. Concerned primarily with production at a profit, he views the wages bill as the most objectionable item in his costs of production, and sees in its reduction the best guarantee of his prosperity. The appearance of trade unionism in his factory at once threatens his undisputed right to decide what wages shall be paid, who shall be dismissed, and when. He is faced with the possible organised interruption of production and consequent loss of profits. He has now to reckon with a body of men determined to get an advantage for themselves when opportunity occurs. All this appears to the capitalist not only as an obstruction in the path

of money-making, but as a definite challenge to his right to control the factory and the industry. As the numbers and determination of the trade unionists increase, and their organisation spreads, the capitalist class sees a growing menace to its profits, to the whole system of capitalist ownership, and consequently to its political domination.

In defence of his own interests the employer must at heart desire the destruction of this menace, the complete prohibition of trade unionism. Experience shows that all weapons which come to hand will be used to prevent and root out trade unionism if possible, to render it impotent if it cannot be suppressed. And what weapons are more powerful than political ones, the control of the machine of government with its extensive powers and resources? When, long before the trade unions had reached the stage of a conscious political challenge, the employing class got Parliament to pass the Combination Acts making trade union membership illegal, they showed that in their eyes the claim of the trade unions to exist and be recognised was in itself a political challenge to the rulers.

Higher wages, shorter hours, the right to discuss working conditions, the right to strike—all these things which appear to the trade unionist as the essence of his freedom, and the hope of improvement, cannot but appear to the capitalist as the most dangerous inroads upon the very foundation of the existing system of society, the right of the employer to be dictator in his own factory. In defence of the existing order, which is to him the only possible order of society, the capitalist needs to curb and to destroy this trade unionism. The tactics adopted may vary according to the strength and mood of the workers; the end remains the same.

At first open coercion was tried by Act of Parliament. When the movement became powerful enough to break

through this ban and to compel the repeal of the laws against trade unions, a new situation arose. It became necessary to make contact with the trade unions, to weaken their class character, and to cultivate elements in their leadership which would be more friendly to the capitalist system. Such contact was established on a wide scale by the system of conciliation, aiming at the peaceful settlement of disputes and the systematic regulation of industrial relations without strikes. The growing difficulties of the capitalist system, owing to its entering the period when expansion becomes limited, with the consequent need for an all-round reduction in the working-class standard of living if profits are to be maintained, render simple conciliation insufficient. Not merely the avoidance of disputes, but the active participation of the trade union machine in the process of keeping the workers' wages as low as possible, becomes necessary. This has been effected by collaboration; the trade union leaders have been drawn into joint activity on the policy of the Government and the employers. Such an entanglement of the trade unions, and their consequent discrediting in the eyes of the workers, opens the way to a new situation in which the possibility of destroying them arises. The weapon for carrying through this destruction is modern Fascism, but it has succeeded only where, as in Germany, trade unionism had become so weakened by collaboration with the employers that it had become a form lacking entirely a fighting working-class policy and content.

The varying tactics—coercion, conciliation, collaboration, Fascism—serve the same aim in different circumstances, the aim of maintaining the dictatorship of the employer in the factory and the preservation of the profits and the power of the employing class.

The development of the employers' tactics against trade unionism involves more and more the harnessing

of the State forces and of supplementary forces, such as Fascism, to their purpose. The experience of the trade unions, so far from giving any evidence that a reconciliation of the hostile viewpoints of worker and capitalist is possible, shows the increasing centralisation of the anti-trade union forces and the employment of sharper measures by the employing class. The increasing activity of the State is the most significant of these measures.

By the term "State" is meant the totality of the legislature and the executive, the Parliament and the Government of the day plus the machinery and the armed force at its disposal. It must be remembered that the normal method of enforcing the authority of Government is by force, and the State organises the application of this force. The amount employed varies according to need and circumstance. The village policeman of Tolpuddle and the armoured cars used in the general strike of 1926 both express the use of force by the Government to impose its will upon the workers.

The intervention of the State in industrial relations has three main aims; the State directly represses certain aspects of trade union activity; it compels backward sections of capitalists to come into line with the interests of big monopolies; it seeks to utilise the trade unions as an apparatus for labour regulation.

Repressive measures include legal prohibitions and the direct use of force against workers. We have noted the Combination Acts, the Taff Vale and Osborne Judgments. In 1911 troops fired on strikers in South Wales. The 1915 Munitions Acts prohibited strikes. The 1920 Emergency Powers Act provided for the suspension of democratic rights during certain strikes. The 1927 Trades Disputes Act forbade mass picketing, separated the civil service unions from the T.U.C., and enforced contracting-in for the political funds of the unions. The Sedition Act of 1934 and the Public Order Act of 1937

further increased the powers of the executive. The trade unionist sees in these repressive measures the use of the State by the controlling forces of private capital in order to prevent independent working-class action, and to limit the activities of the workers' organisations to channels approved or tolerated by the capitalists.

Measures directed towards bringing certain employers into line with standards of behaviour regarded at the particular time as the minimum necessary to maintain good relations with labour include the Ten Hours Act of 1847, limiting the working day; the Trade Boards Act of 1909, establishing a legally enforceable minimum wage in the sweated industries; the Coal Mines Act of the same year, establishing a minimum wage for miners; and various Factory Acts providing for the regulation of factory conditions and the enforcement of safety. Such measures are only enacted when the pressure of organised labour has become so strong that the Government has to move to avoid conflict.

Measures and practices involving the trade unions in the operation of State regulations and control of the workers have steadily increased in number and scope since the Trade Boards Act of 1909 provided for the joint activity of trade union officials and those of the Board of Trade. The 1911 Insurance Act made the unions part of the administrative machinery of insurance. The 1915 Treasury conference put union officials on numerous mixed committees for the conduct of war affairs. The 1921 Railways Act provided new forms of arbitration. After the war the Ministry of Labour extended its conciliation machinery. It is now customary for the Government to consult the T.U.C. on questions involving labour, and for representatives of the T.U.C. to be appointed to committees and commissions dealing with such questions.

We have seen that on many problems of the trade

union movement there are Right and Left viewpoints. The Right inclines to a policy of collaboration with the capitalists, and the Left to struggle against the capitalists. The differences come to a head in the estimation of the joint working of the trade unions and the State, and their roots are to be found in the attitude towards workshop problems.

We have seen that the pressure of the management in the factory impels the workers to see the only hope of their advancement through combination with their fellows, through trade union action. But to a minority of individuals comes the idea and the possibility of advancing their personal interests by joint action with the employers against their fellow workers. They may be pace-setters, working at an excessive speed which can be then set as the normal for the shop. They may be the eyes and ears of the management as to what is going on in the shop. They may become strike-breakers. They are out for a financial reward or a permanent job, and are prepared to act in a manner detrimental to the interests of their fellow workers in order to get it.

Selfishness, narrowness of outlook, fear of conflict, influence such individuals. The same motives find expression in the trade union organisation when opportunity arrives, or is provided, for their expression. An individual leader, a group of officials, a leading committee, or the whole union, may agree to act together with the employer in return for financial gain, or in order to avoid a conflict.

An example is the type of agreement which provides for wages being regulated by the selling price of the product. Here we have a section of workers forming an alliance with their employers against the buyers of the product, who must of course include the rest of the working class, either as direct or indirect consumers. Such an agreement suspends the struggle within the

industry, so far as the unions are concerned, to enable the employers to increase their profits, on the understanding that a small proportion of those increased profits is distributed to the workers in increased wages. The trade unions signing such agreements become interested in increasing their employers' profits, and thereby in the exploitation of other workers.

The development of connections between the trade unions as a whole and the Government brings with it the possibility of a similar bargain with the Government. On occasions, particularly in wartime, it becomes highly desirable for employers to secure the influence of the trade union machine being used to avoid stoppages throughout the whole country. Here the Government is able to act through its connections with the unions in the interests of the employing class.

What takes place in such united action between workers or trade unions and capitalists? It is self-evident that the capitalists will have use for such collaboration only if they gain by it. They can gain only at the expense of the working class. To serve their ends, the collaboration must be directed against the mass of the working people, and the trade union must become an agency for the transmission of capitalist policy, surrendering its independence and ceasing to be a class organisation of the workers.

If some individuals or groups gain temporary benefit from such collaboration, it is at the expense of their fellow workers. No doubt the pace-setter, the workshop spy or strike-breaker take home more money. But they get it, not because they are more efficient productive workers, but because they have become bosses' men, traitors to their fellows—such is the conviction of the trade unionist.

In the long run such collaboration is against the interests even of those who make a temporary gain. The

division which it creates in the ranks weakens the position of the main body and retards the growth of working-class strength and power, the only force which can release all workers from servitude to an employer. Those who pursue the collaboration policy prolong their own exploitation.

The Right Wing has made itself the spokesman and advocate of the collaboration policy in its higher forms, between unions and employers and between the trade union movement and the Government. Thereby they transmit employing class policy to the trade unions. Consequently Right Wing leaders have been "promoted" into the Government service, or have received honours from the hands of capitalist Governments.

The conviction of the Right that such collaboration avoids serious conflicts, and permits the continuity of trade unionism, finds satisfaction in the increasing joint working of the trade unions and the State, seeing in it the penetration of the State machinery by the democratic principle and the trade union idea. This estimation is aided by the fact that the Right takes the liberal view that the State is an executive organ concerned only with operating the law as decided by Parliament, and itself standing neutral above the classes.

The Left differs completely from this conclusion, just as it differs in its conception of policy in the workshop.

The Left considers that the essence of the combination of workers in trade unions is directed *against* the employers. It sees the worker as a member of the wage-earning class before he is the employee of a particular employer. It sees in the growing consciousness of the worker as a result of his trade union experience an advance towards class consciousness, complete when the worker realises that the solution to the demand for better wages will be found only when the employer is no longer in control of industry and the State. The Left, therefore,

sees in the trade union an organisation for a dual purpose, or, rather for a single purpose which has a dual aspect. While every possible improvement in wages and conditions must be won from the employer, the trade unions must be so strengthened that the taking over of control and power by the working class becomes practical politics.

The Left sees its viewpoint confirmed by experience. As trade union strength grows, so the employers extend their organisation. Beginning in a single factory, the struggle extends to an industrial scale. Since the employers will use a factory with lower wages to undercut a trade union factory, a national agreement and a national rate of wages becomes the requisite for defending each and every factory. Since the gains of increased wages can be removed by higher food prices and increased rents, the trade unionist finds no security in his economic victories, and reaches the conclusion that not until the workers have taken control and power out of the hands of the employing class will economic security be won.

The Left, therefore, views with the greatest alarm the increasing subordination of the trade unions to Government policy, considering this process as reflecting the penetration of the unions by capitalist policy, effectively forwarded by the resources of the State. The Left considers the State as the executive organ of the capitalist class, functioning in the interests of that class, and, so far from being neutral in the class struggle, existing to enforce the will of the rulers upon the people.

What the Right considers to be the supreme triumph of its policy, the Left considers to be the presage of disaster for the trade union movement. The Right is prepared to expel those who desire to end collaboration and to use the trade unions to further the class struggle. The Left points to the German experience as proof that collaboration is preliminary to the destruction of the

trade unions, and that, once readiness to fight has been worn down by constant surrenders, the Government and the employers will let loose upon it the Fascist forces of destruction.

It is necessary to note facts which point to the increasing similarity of outlook between the Right and the leading circles of the employing class.

The ruling class opens its political life to selected trade union leaders, and the interchange of official functions becomes more and more frequent. The first industrial officer to the Board of Trade was David Shackleton, a cotton trade union official. During the war of 1914-18 Arthur Henderson, an Ironfounders official, entered the Cabinet, J. R. Clynes, of the General Workers, was made Food Controller; G. N. Barnes, of the Engineers, and John Hodge, of the Steel Smelters, were given other Government posts. Later the evolution of J. H. Thomas from engine-cleaner to privy councillor was commended to the schoolchildren as an example of what democracy could produce. Frank Hodges, once secretary of the Miners' Federation, became a director of the Central Electricity Board. John Cliff stepped from the headquarters of the Transport and General Workers' Union on to the Board of London Transport.

The position on the side of theory may be judged by comparing the expressions of Mr. Milne Bailey and Sir Oswald Mosley. Mr. Milne Bailey was the late chief of the research and economic department of the General Council and a close collaborator of Sir Walter Citrine. In his work *The Trade Unions and the State* he developed a theoretical defence of the policy of collaboration as expressed in the Mond-Turner conferences and subsequent steps. Sir Oswald Mosley, as chief of Blackshirt Fascism, is as yet the most open advocate of the Hitler method of government in this country, and his book, *The Greater Britain*, explains his aims.

Both begin by accusing the existing state of inefficiency.

"The entire machinery of government is out of date."

MILNE BAILEY.

"Under the existing system Government cannot be efficiently conducted."

OSWALD MOSLEY.

Neither defines what he means by efficient government; both imply that the function of the State is to govern in the interests of society as a whole. From this it follows that an increase of the power and efficiency of the State is a step towards improvement of the conditions of society. Both go on to explain that the grouping of enterprises in the so-called "public corporations," i.e. boards or similar bodies created by Act of Parliament, are regarded by them as the next development of State power.

"Most Socialists and many upholders of private enterprise believe that such changes must eventually lead to a State regulated and controlled economy as the logical outcome."

MILNE BAILEY.

"Nothing but the rationalised State can hope to overcome the problem created by rationalised industry."

OSWALD MOSLEY.

Neither faces the fact that under the new forms of State control which they support the exploitation of the worker continues. There are still dividends on capital; the worker is no nearer to owning industry. The suppression of this fact enables the establishment of an illusion of identity of interest, in which the efficient running of

the administration of production is a question equally concerning capital and labour, and which, therefore, can be solved by bringing both parties together to make co-operation possible. Both Milne Bailey and Oswald Mosley visualise similar means whereby this can be done.

"Either at the request of the Government or on its own initiative, a National Economic Council, representing in the main the chief industrial and commercial interests, including the trade union movement, could advise on problems as they arose."

MILNE BAILEY.

"The Corporations . . . would find their national synthesis not merely in a national planning council to deal with the productive system, but in a national corporation acting under a Minister of Corporations which would in practice amount to a parliament of industry."

OSWALD MOSLEY.

This attempt of both to abstract the conflict of interest between worker and capitalist from the mind of the reader results in the problem of relations between the trade unions and the State being posed as follows:

"The grave conflicts that occur between trade unions and Governments are due to the failure to accord to these vocational institutions a status comparable with their actual position in the economic system and an effective voice in the formulation of policy affecting their interests. Yet our major industries will be unified under the control of corporations having responsibilities solely to the public.

"If the organisation of public corporations is interpenetrated with some such mechanisms for trade

union penetration or consultation at both the highest and the lowest stages, the possibilities of serious industrial conflict will be perhaps eliminated, and certainly minimised.

"The trade unions, being adequately represented on this body [i.e. the National Economic Council.—J.M.], would feel that they were participating in the work of government in a valuable and creative way, at the point where their special experience was of most use.

"The trade unions will remain autonomous institutions, but with functions that link them to the State in a consultative and constructive way."

MILNE BAILEY.

"In our labour organisation there will be no place for the trade union leader who for sectional or political motives impedes the development of a vital service. But there will be an honoured place for the financial organisation which joins in the work of British reconstruction and for trade unions which co-operate with such reconstruction in the interests of members who are also members of the national community.

"Wage questions will not be left to the dog-fight of the class war, but will be settled by the impartial arbitration of the State machinery.

"Existing organisations such as trade unions and employers' federations will be woven into the fabric of the Corporate State.

"Instead of being the general staffs of opposing armies, they will be joint directors of national enterprise under the general guidance of corporative government."

OSWALD MOSLEY.

The pictures painted by the leader of the T.U.C. research department and by the Fascist chief are not

quite identical, but there are similarities so striking as to confirm in the minds of many trade unionists the correctness of the Left viewpoint, which sees the General Council heading for disaster by a policy which, whatever its intentions, facilitates the advance of Fascism.

The attitude of the Right towards the State, and its conception of the relationship between the trade unions and the State, governs its attitude to the day-to-day struggle in the workshops, and produces the now familiar official denunciations of rank and file action and unofficial strikes. In such denunciations, and the accompanying penalisation of militants and expulsion of Left leaders, is to be seen the beginning of the process of shackling the trade unions until the will and strength for independent action are lost and the way cleared for Fascism.

The Left points to the German events. Under the Weimar Republic the trade unions had more than 5,000,000 members, and a majority on most of the Factory Councils. Led by the Social Democrats, the trade unions abandoned the strike weapon and expelled many thousands of militants. As the tendency of the State to govern by decree grew, the complacency of the trade union leaders grew also. When Hitler was given power in 1933 this complacency continued; the Social Democrats refused to call the general strike. But the moment German Fascism felt itself established it violently seized upon and destroyed the trade unions, sending the officials to concentration camps, confiscating the funds, and abrogating the agreements. In the place of the trade unions, Fascism set up a vast system of servile company unionism in which the only right accorded to the workers was that of paying dues. During the first three years of Fascist rule the average wage received by the German worker per week, according to official Nazi

statistics quoted by Sir Walter Citrine, fell from the equivalent of £2 10s. to 26s. The German workers are back at the beginning again; they have to once more fight for the most elementary organisation and the most elementary rights. .

The Left contrasts this appalling outcome of the collaboration policy with the triumphant position of trade unionism in the U.S.S.R. Here, with the working class in power and Soviet democracy increasing in strength day by day, the trade unions are a recognised part of the machinery whereby the working class carries on the government and the administration of industry. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, in their *Soviet Communism*, describe how the trade unions, together with the responsible Government organs and the factory administration, organise the workers for production, for education, and for cultural functions.

The Left summons the trade union membership to an energetic struggle for the repudiation of collaboration, warning the trade unions not to place their wrists in position for the fetters of Fascism to be snapped upon them. It seeks support by an energetic policy of taking up the factory issues as the basis for 100 per cent trade unionism. It is aided by the increasing network of factory groups of the Communists, who include the building of militant trade unionism within the existing trade union organisations as one of their most important aims. Together with its campaign for higher wages, shorter hours, holidays with pay, and 100 per cent trade unionism, the Left is urging the bringing into action of the giant resources of the trade unions in the effort to bring about working-class unity nationally and internationally, to extend the propaganda for a Socialist order of society, and to strengthen the political party of the working class so that it may become the Government of the country in the near future.

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Upon the outcome of the struggle between Right and Left in the trade unions largely depends the future orientation of working-class politics in this country, and with it the future of western democracy.

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