

TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The Nottingham Trades Union Congress.

By Harry Pollitt (London).

The Nottingham T. U. C. (1930) was attended by 606 delegates, representing 3,744,320 trade unionists, and it is certain that the endorsement given to the policy of the General Council through the decisions taken will have equally serious results for the workers as the congresses of 1927, 8 and 9.

This Congress met during the sharpest period reached in the crisis of British imperialism, as seen in the unparalleled unemployment and intensification of labour in the factories, wholesale dismissals through this intensification, wage reductions through the Labour Government's arbitration courts, after fierce resistance by the workers, tremendous revolt in China, and a new, wide upsurge in India and in Egypt.

But these vital issues were not tackled, because the leadership which dominated the Congress is to-day part and parcel of the apparatus of capitalist exploitation; its whole function is to assist the capitalists out of the crisis by throwing the full burden upon the shoulders of the workers, meanwhile attempting to deceive them by using socialist phraseology and supporting high-sounding resolutions without any intention of fighting for them.

The president, **Mr. Beard**, gave the lead to the Congress when he declared — speaking of the unemployment crisis — “the figure of two million unemployed does not appal me”. Mr. Beard's speech was important in another respect. Whilst giving full support to the policy that has been pursued by the General Council for the last three years, he was at great pains to show that the initiative for what has taken place first came from the presidential speech of **Mr George Hicks** at the Edinburgh Trades Union Congress. In other words he blatantly exposed the manner in which the “Rights” use their “Left” colleagues in order to justify policies which result in untold misery and anxiety in millions of working class homes to-day.

The Congress in discussing rationalisation apparently completely forgot all the promises that had been held out during the last two or three years.

There is no need in this article to give facts and figures showing how all the promises of **increase in the standard of life** have been proved false by the workers' bitter experiences. It is only necessary to turn to the resolutions adopted at the Nottingham Congress itself. A few examples will suffice. In a resolution dealing with "Compensation to Workers Displaced by Rationalisation and Amalgamation" we find the following:

"This Congress views with grave concern the displacement of old and faithful employees of firms through the operation of rationalisation and amalgamation."

In the resolution dealing with "Unemployment" the following is to be found:

"This Congress recognises that the capitalist system of industry has at all times failed to find employment for all able-bodied workers. The introduction of machinery and speeding-up of labour has increased the output per man, with the result that less men are required to produce the amount of goods which can find an effective market, and as a consequence the percentage of unemployed workers continues to increase."

It is clear from these extracts and from the resolutions which were adopted that the pressure of the workers is reflected in the agenda of the Congress. These protests from the workers the leaders were not able to ignore, and in many cases the language of protest has been carried into the final resolutions adopted by the Congress, only as a means, however, of further carrying through the policies outlined in the Mond-Turner Memorandum, and in the report issued to the Nottingham Congress which indicates that further conversations are now to take place between the employers' organisations and the General Council of the T. U. C.

The only instance on record of the prevention of displacements and dismissals is the case of the Bishopsgate railwaymen who took the matter in their own hands, and by taking what can only be described as strike action in carrying out a work-to-rule policy, were able by means of independent action and leadership to prevent the railway company from enforcing the policy of dismissals in this particular depot. But the official delegates at the Nottingham Congress took great care that such an instance as this should not be used for the purpose of mobilising resistance to mass dismissals that are the natural result of the policy of the General Council itself.

Only one or two militant delegates, speaking under very great difficulties, were able to oppose the General Council's policy, and whilst they did not get mass support in the Congress itself, they can be sure that their stand was not lost to the thousands of active workers all over the country.

The second issue that came before the Congress—the issue of **Empire Economic Unity**—follows quite naturally from the advocacy of rationalisation and its operation with the co-operation of the General Council. It is now seen that rationalisation is not a solution of the crisis, and so the General Council comes forward with its report on Empire Economic Unity. The object of this report is to show their readiness to work in alliance with the capitalists in intensifying the exploitation and oppression in all the colonial countries, which in turn will worsen the conditions of the workers at home.. This, of course, is in line with their joint work with the capitalists in launching and operating rationalisation during the last three years.

The gist of this report, when first presented to the General Council, leaked out, and received the unstinted support of the Rothermere and Beaverbrook press. Subsequently disclaimers were issued, and the appendix of the Report issued at Nottingham certainly endeavours to tone down some of the decisions in the Report itself. Mr. Bevin in his speech at Nottingham also endeavoured to blur over some of the more blatantly imperialistic passages of the report on Empire Economic Unity.

After what was described in certain quarters as "a first class debate" the Congress — by a majority — endorsed the report submitted by **Mr. Bevin**. It should be noted and remembered that Mr. Bevin in his advocacy of a united bloc of the countries which go to make up the British Commonwealth

order to find markets for British manufactured goods and sources of cheaper raw materials, fields of exploitation and of profitable investment for British capitalism, was at great pains to deny that this phase of General Council policy had anything to do with the Beaverbrook-Rothermere advocacy of Empire Free Trade: but like Rothermere who, in his advocacy of Empire Free Trade can never make a speech or write an article without attacking the U.S.S.R., so Mr. Bevin in his advocacy of Empire Economic Unity. In his reply he made a filthy attack on the Soviet Union itself, by saying openly that it had paid and direct agents in the Congress to put forward its point of view. Mr. Bevin, however, took great care not to reply to Comrade Hermon's (E.T.U. delegate) criticisms of the General Council's Empire Economic Unity Report.

The adoption of the Report simply takes this country a step further on the road to war against the U.S.A., as at the same time it intensifies the hostility against the U.S.S.R. It brings the General Council into complete line with the Labour Government's application of its empire policy as seen in recent events in India, China and Egypt. In this connection it is noteworthy that the Government which has recently refused Mr. Saklatvala a visa to visit India, granted a visa for an Indian Government agent to visit the Nottingham T.U.C. for the purpose of making an attack upon the U.S.S.R. This individual was openly recognised as one of those leaders who split the Indian T.U.C. last December, and led a breakaway in order that attempts should be made through the Whitley Commission to get the tame Indian Trade Union Movement under the domination of British capitalist agents.

The third issue which was supposed to be an outstanding issue of the conference, that of **family allowances**, gave rise to a debate which endorsed the policy of the General Council in supporting the minority report on the question of family allowances.

The report of the Lord MacMillan, in which he had dealt with the question of social services now received by the working class in this country, lent colour to the view that if family allowances were pressed for — as advocated by the majority — it would simply be placing a weapon in the hands of the employers to force down wages.

Only Comrade Hermon of the E.T.U. brought the Congress sharply up against the actual situation confronting the workers, and also indicated the ways and means whereby attempts could be made to realise the hard cash for operating such schemes at the entire expense of the capitalist class. Needless to say Comrade Hermon received very little support in such a Congress. But the workers will find that although the Congress supported the minority report on family allowances, this does not mean that the General Council will lead any fight to achieve the more limited proposals it contains.

Three months ago the hypocrisy of the I.L.P. "a Living Wage" propaganda suffered complete exposure when prominent members of the I.L.P. like Ben Turner, M.P., and J. H. Hudson led the attack on the wages of the Yorkshire woollen workers. Now events at Nottingham have given the "dull thud" to this propaganda, and it has taken since 1926 when the I.L.P. first brought forward its proposals at the Margate conference, to get thus far! This is the preliminary to the Labour Party and Labour Government's attitude at Llandudno, for so critical is the position as the economic crisis sharpens, that MacDonald in his efforts to save capitalism has to lead fierce attacks upon the workers, and the Government, Labour Party and Trades Union Congress dare not saddle themselves with "Living Wage" or "Family Allowances" programmes.

The whole Congress can be summed up as one which continues the line laid down at the past three trade union congresses. Yet underneath it all uneasiness could be sensed amongst many sections of the delegates who have not yet the courage to break through the official bureaucracy which ties them to the machine.

"The New Leader" representative at the Congress in his special article endeavoured to suggest that whilst there was a tremendous volume of criticism against the General Council it was silent because of the tactics of the Communists who, he says, "are responsible for creating an atmosphere of resentment to any criticism of official policy and a frame of mind that has done much to silence some of the best critics in the movement."

However, the nature of the resolutions on the agenda of the Nottingham Congress, and on the agenda of the Labour Party conference at Llandudno indicates the workers' new awakening. More and more is it becoming recognised that new fights confront the working class which in the coming months will involve, for example, the railwaymen. The textile workers face a big struggle on the question of the 8-loom principle and the fight against many of the recommendations of the Graham Committee. The miners, as has been shown since the Nottingham Conference in the demand of the South Wales owners for a wages reduction, apart entirely from the question of a reduction of hours, will find themselves faced with attempts to intensify their hours of labour on the basis of the spread-over system, which involves a reduction in actual earnings.

Over and above all this looms the immense and terrible problem of **unemployment**. Mr. Bromley made a speech at the Nottingham Congress in which he expressed the view that by February next the unemployed figures would be nearer four million than two million. The discussion going on between the three capitalist parties on the solvency of the Insurance Fund and what can be done to ensure this, makes it as clear as daylight that new attacks are being prepared on the existing rates of benefit paid under the present Unemployment Insurance Act, and to effect an increase in the contributions of employed workers.

The Minority Movement is already facing up to this situation in the campaign it has inaugurated on the basis of the **Workers' Character**, and is taking the first essential steps towards mobilising the workers' counter-offensive against the capitalist attack. The Charter is based on a series of immediate demands that come actually out of the present struggle and which the workers themselves feel are those upon which it is possible to wage a fight.

In this way, and this way alone, can the revolutionary workers proceed from the experiences of Nottingham, and go forward under the leadership of the National Minority Movement, building organisation for the Workers' Character out of which will come the new, independent leadership capable of leading the workers in the economic struggles of the future and giving an entirely new outlook to the workers, organised and unorganised, in their struggles. Such action means building up a united, powerful, revolutionary opposition that will break through the present isolation of the revolutionary workers, and exert a powerful influence on every phase of activity associated with the struggles immediately ahead.

IN THE CAMP OF OUR ENEMIES

The Forthcoming British Labour Party Conference.

By William Rust (London).

The 30th Annual Conference of the **Labour Party**, which opens at **Llandudno** on October 6th, meets at a time when the economic crisis in Great Britain is becoming increasingly acute, and the political situation very complicated and difficult for the bourgeois parties. "We are not passing through, but passing into a crisis", declared Mr. Lloyd George recently. But the Conference will not meet in "high spirits", as the Chairman declared last year, for since the advent of the Labour Government the number of registered unemployed has increased by over one million, and many politicians and economists prophecy that unemployment in Great Britain will soon reach the three million mark.

It meets at a time when the question of protection and what Government is going to carry out this new economic policy of the bourgeoisie comes up in its sharpest form. "Every safeguarding duty imposed by us is now under sentence of death", said Mr. Neville Chamberlain, a leader of the Conservative Party, "and there is only one thing that can save them, and that is the ejection of this Government, bag and baggage, and replacing them by a Government of the only Party which is determined absolutely to protect the home market against the inroads of the foreigner".