

The Third Conference of the British Minority Movement

By Earl Browder and Hans Sturm

UNDER the slogan of "All power to the workers of the world," printed on a red banner across the platform, the **Third Annual Conference of the National Minority Movement of Great Britain** gathered in Battersea Town Hall, Battersea, London, on August 28 and 29. There were 802 delegates, including 264 delegates from the provinces, representing a membership of 956,000, in 521 organizations.

The important items on the agenda of the conference were: Aid to the Miners; the General Strike and its Lessons; the Reorganization of the Trade Union Movement; International Unity; Anti-Labor Legislation; and Organization of the Minority Movement. On each question, comprehensive resolutions were presented, debated, and adopted unanimously.

Aid to the Miners.

The whole character of the conference was determined by the circumstance that it met in the midst of the miners' struggle, which is but the most acute point in an extremely acute class struggle in Great Britain. The fourth month of the heroic struggle of the coal miners, at this moment becoming most critical, dominated the proceedings of the conference. "Help the miners" was the first and last note of the conference.

There were 110 miners at the conference. About 30 to 40 of them, being without money for railroad fare, had walked to London from the coal fields. Only 49 of them are included in the official list of delegates, as the others represented minority groups, and only the officially credentialled delegates were counted in the representation. This group of miners' delegates represented 100,000 miners, who comprise the vanguard of the million members of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

"The coming Trades Union Congress must decide to call for a levy on all the unions to help the miners, and to apply an effective embargo on coal . . . It is war we are in, and there must be no scruples in calling out the safety men from the mines."

These statements made by Tom Mann, the chairman, in his opening speech, gave the lead on practical proposals for the immediate help of the miners. They were embodied later in official documents. A. J. Cook, secretary of the M. F. G. B., addressed a letter to the conference, greeting it and wishing it every success, and raising the issues of the levy and the embargo. He declared that "Even now, with an embargo on coal and a levy to help feed the women and children of the miners, victory can be secured."

Sharp, bitter, and drastic criticism of the general council, including its right and "Left" members, was voiced by all delegates in the discussion from the floor. The conference delegates were especially indignant against the decision of the general council to bar discussion of the general strike and miners' struggle from the coming congress. After a militant, fighting speech from Arthur Horner, leader of the Miners' Minority Movement, which was greeted by an enthusiastic demonstration of solidarity by the conference, an open letter was adopted, addressed to the delegates to the Trades Union Congress. This letter declared that the capitalists are employing two chief weapons against the miners:

"The first has been the unimpeded import of foreign coal and its transport over the British railways, together with that of stocks accumulated here before the lockout. In this way the capitalists have succeeded in keeping industry and transport going, and have, therefore, been in a position to defy the miners. The general council has done absolutely nothing to stop this, whether by making definite recommendations to the unions concerned, by launching a national campaign, or by appealing to the Amsterdam International and its affiliated International secretaries.

"The second weapon of the capitalists has been that of starvation. Single miners have been denied relief even when straving, boards of guardians have cut down relief to women and children below starvation level, the N. S. P. C. C. has been mobilized to report that "no starvation exists," scores of newborn babies have died of hunger, while at home the capitalists in dozens of places have refused permission to collect for relief purposes. Abroad there has been Baldwin's dastardly appeal to Americans to 'let them starve.' The total collected in Great Britain by the two national funds has been under 400,000.

"Action by the general council is imperative. Its inaction is having a disintegrating effect on the movement. It is vitally necessary that the movement should be kept intact, firmly knit and united, and concentrated under central leadership, and that all the resources of the movement should be utilized to the utmost in support of the miners.

"The general council is afraid to face the responsibility of this disgraceful policy. That is why they are trying to burke discussion of their conduct, referring the matter to conference of executives to be held after the miners have been finally starved into submission.

"Comrades, don't be led away by this outrageous

policy. It is you who constitute the supreme authority of the British Trade Union Movement, and every standing order can be suspended by you, if you choose to insist on the right to discuss, and decide on measures to help the miners, whose defeat means the defeat of every worker.

"They will tell you that discussion would militate against the miners' struggle. Comrades, it is a lie. At most it would only expose to the workers of Britain the fact that their elected leaders, even before the general strike, tried to force wage reductions on the miners. That will only help the miners because it will expose the real motives of the traitors or cowards who are now obstructing practical steps to assist them.

"Insist on the miners' fight being discussed. Suspend standing orders to discuss ways and means of helping them. Send out a call to the workers of Britain, and the world for an embargo on coal and a levy on wages.

"STAND BY THE MINERS!"

Detailed policy regarding the immediate situation of the miners, was laid out in a special resolution adopted by the meeting of the 110 miners' delegates. This important resolution said in part:

"This conference of miners' delegates, meeting under the auspices of the Minority Movement, warns the officials and the executive of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, that the defeatist utterances for which they have been recently responsible, are being interpreted by the government and coal owners as retreats, permitting them to increase their demands and to intensify their ruthless attempts to smash the Federation and its policy.

"This conference declares itself still prepared to fight for the retention of Hours, Wages and National Agreements as obtaining on April 30, and under no circumstances must any settlement be agreed upon without first being submitted to the whole membership for ratification.

"It declares that District Autonomy has been mainly responsible for permitting desertions by District Federation officials, and calls upon the Miners' Federation of Great Britain to forthwith secure complete control of the struggle in order that it may direct all the resources of the whole movement wherever assistance in men and money is most necessary.

"The Miners' Federation of Great Britain is urged to prevent outcropping; blacklegging in pits; by means of intensive propaganda, the withdrawal of safety men, and such other steps as may be considered necessary.

"It urges the Miners' Federation to now make an application to the Transport and Railway Unions, asking them to impose an embargo on coal, and to the T. U. C. at Bournemouth for a five per cent levy on all wages earned by members of affiliated bodies."

On the question of international action in support of the miners, the conference adopted a resolution which stated: that it takes note of the steps taken by the con-

tinental workers, especially shown by the results thru many organizations and trades councils in Germany, protesting against the sabotage of the bureaucracy, and appealing to them to call upon the transport workers to assist in this blockade; it notes the sympathetic 24-hour strike of the French miners; it greets the magnificent assistance of the Russian Unions which has stirred the workers of the whole world; it notes with approval the wage movements undertaken by the German miners; and calls upon the T. U. C. to initiate international action to combine all these movements into one great international movement.

The Lessons of the General Strike.

In the discussion on the lessons of the general strike, the unanimous note struck by all speakers was, in the words of the report:

"The fundamental failure of the general strike was a failure of the trade union leadership, both in the Right wing whose policy was dominant thruout the whole period since Red Friday, and the "Left wing," who failed to combat the development of this policy in its earlier stages and who capitulated to this policy even before the general strike."

In the discussion from the floor, many points were made, which demonstrated that the delegates had well-learned the most important lessons of the strike. The most important of these were summarized in the following resolution of the conference:

"This conference of the Minority Movement declares that the failure of the late general strike was primarily a failure of leadership. The leadership failed:

"1. To make preparations during the period of truce between Red Friday and the general strike.

"2. In accepting the Coal Commission Report which means the reduction of the miners' wages.

"3. In its refusal after the issue of the Coal Report to reaffirm the previous T. U. C. policy, which was also the policy of the miners and the working class, of no reductions in wages.

"4. In trying to get the miners to accept reductions in wages up to the eve of the general strike.

"5. In general, not to carry the general strike to the logical conclusion of challenging the wage-cutting government.

"This Minority Conference further declares that the general strike was forced upon the leaders by the rank and file and that the leaders had no intention of leading it to a victorious conclusion, because from the beginning they played with the idea of accepting a reduction in wages and never believed in the efficiency of the general strike. In these circumstances the government called the bluff of the general council. Faced with the demand for an extension of the strike, and afraid to accept the responsibility, the terms of the Samuel Memorandum provided an excuse for calling the strike off. This was an act of wage-cutting treachery which stimulated the capitalists to attack the workers all around. Only the steadiness of the miners and the rank and file workers saved the workers from a more crushing defeat.

"Since the ending of the general strike, the general council has done nothing of value to assist the miners, who are now being forced to negotiate. Thus the defeatist policy of the general council has strengthened the Baldwin slogan of 'All wages must come down,' and has produced the anomaly of a united front of class-cooperation between labor's general staff and the capitalists.

"This policy of class collaboration before, during, and after the general strike, was and is the policy of the Right wing. The 'left' leaders, however, share the responsibility, as they completely capitulated to the Right wing.

"The conference declares that no 'Left' leadership can be trusted in the future, unless it breaks with the Right wing policy and allies itself with the left wing trade unionists organized in the Minority Movement.

"This conference, therefore, declares that the sole guarantee against future failures, and betrayals, lies in the development of a new trade union leadership with a fighting working class policy. To this end the conference pledges itself to strengthen the campaign for the policy of the Minority Movement in the trade unions, not only by securing trade union affiliations, but also by developing a mass individual membership."

Trade Union Reorganization.

The conference reiterated its previous policy on trade union reorganization, that the entire trade union movement must be rebuilt on the basis of industrial unionism. The special resolution on the reorganization question in the present conference points out that "the future success of trade unionism will be determined by the extent to which the movement lifts itself out of the rut of craft interests and petty sectionalism, and transforms and strengthens its organization so as to enable the workers to wage the class struggle as one united class." The general strike, it declares, signaled the end of the day of sectional fights as an effective weapon. Mass strikes, of even a deeper, more intense and more formidable character than the one just experienced, are the order of the day. The resolution therefore laid down seven principal points for emphasis in the current work of the Minority Movement; these are:

1. The development of all-embracing factory committees, which is of primary importance in the development of working class unity. The general council, or failing that, the local Trades Councils, should initiate a campaign for this object. The Factory Committees to be affiliated to the local Trades Councils.
2. The affiliation of the trade councils to the T. U. C.
3. The development of a centralized leadership for the trade union movement, for the granting of more power to the general council, and a systematic effort to change the present personnel of the general council.
4. The election of the general council by the rank and file on the basis of the rank and file of the unions in place of the present industrial groups of the general council electing their industrial group rep-

resentatives on to the general council.

5. The general council must promote amalgamation conferences between the unions in the various industries, disputed questions being referred to the general council for arbitration.

6. The revision of the rules of the various unions to ensure that 75 per cent of the delegates to the T. U. C. are rank and file workers working at the trade.

7. The development of the Co-operative—Trade Union Alliance in order to provide Commissariat facilities for workers during a strike.

International Unity.

Even more than on any other question, the conference demonstrated interest and enthusiasm on the question of International Unity. Dozens of delegates demanded the floor, and all of them who spoke emphasized the necessity of international unity in order to beat back the capitalist offensive. All of them mentioned, in terms of admiration and appreciation, the unprecedented aid of the Russian unions to the miners, and condemned the cowardly refusal of this aid by the general council. Always this subject aroused the conference to applause. The heart of each delegate seemed to be attuned most high to the question of international unity.

The conference heard greetings from other lands and from the Red International of Labor Unions. Amid profound enthusiasm the messages were read and the delegates from abroad addressed the conference.

A telegram from the executive bureau of the Red International of Labor Unions was read, which said:

"The R. I. L. U. sends warmest greetings to the representatives of the revolutionary workers of Great Britain who have come together with the object of consolidating the trade union movement and for a determined and victorious struggle against the capitalist offensive. The great events of the last few months have been striking proof of the correctness of those principles for whose defense your movement was formed. Necessity for new tactics, for a decided and organized struggle, and for new leaders capable of conducting for workers' cause has never been so evident as now. We are profoundly convinced your conference will do everything possible to liberate the British trade union movement from the traitors, renegades, and capitulators who are strangling its development, leading it from defeat to defeat. The problem of the hour for the Minority Movement is a problem of transforming its present mass influence into organizational power. The miners' strike remains the most important task of the labor movement, and above all of the labor movement of Great Britain. We do not doubt for one moment that your conference will employ all its efforts to secure victory for the miners.

"Long live victory for the miners!

"Long live the united fighting international trade unions!"

Comrade Hans Sturm, representing the Minority of the German Trade Unions, gave a message to the conference, in addition to a telegram of greetings from its secretary, Fritz Heckert. Comrade Herclot, representing

the C. G. T. U. of France, brought greetings from his organization, and told of the struggle for the embargo conducted against black coal, and of the 24-hour strike of the French miners. A representative of the Indian Workers' League, Dr. Bhat, greeted the conference in the name of the exploited colonial workers. A message was read from W. Z. Foster, secretary of the Trade Union Educational League of America.

Speaking for the executive bureau of the R. I. L. U., Earl Browder briefly addressed the conference.

Browder declared that:

"The Red International of Labor Unions, representing the revolutionary workers of the world, from the beginning, now, and in the future, has been and will be behind the miners with all its forces . . ."

Further he declared:

"Your problem is no longer only that of winning the majority; it is now above all that of organizing the power of that majority so that you can take control of the unions. The time has arrived when these principles for which you are fighting must be translated into deeds, must be translated into active policies, must be translated into organization; from being the policies of the unofficial movement, they must be put into effect as the official policy of the Trade Unions of Britain."

The Problem of Anti-Labor Legislation.

An important problem before the British movement is that of anti-labor legislation which is in force and proposed for further enactment by the Baldwin government. The conference reviewed this problem in detail, and formulated its standpoint toward the most important aspects. "The government," declared Tom Mann, the chairman, "is not against all trade unionism; it is only against that trade unionism which is strong enough and directed by those who are capable enough to achieve something of value to the workers." Particular attention was paid to the Emergency Powers Act (E. P. A.), the Sedition Laws, the Astbury decision, and the proposed restrictions on trade union procedure by the Baldwin government. The governmental proposals regarding the Civil Service were given special examination. "The attack on the Civil Service trade unions," said Tom Mann, "is very significant. In the general strike, railway clerical workers were out with the manual workers; this is essential for complete success. Solidarity with those who wield the pen and others who work is the object we aim at." It was pointed out that the proposed regulations were an attempt to prevent unity between clerical and manual workers, and an attempt to entrench thoroughly reactionary elements in the governmental service. The resolution concluded with the following paragraphs:

"The conference notes the statements of Mr. Churchill on behalf of the government re the trade union organizations of civil servants, particularly his references to (1) compulsory arbitration in the civil service; (2) the disaffiliation of civil service trade unions from the Labor Party and the Trade Union Congress.

"This conference declares that these measures are being taken with a view to strengthening the

capitalist state for attacks on the workers.

"The conference, therefore, calls: (1) For the release of all class war prisoners; (2) For the repeal of all anti-labor legislation; and (3) For the abandonment of the projected cabinet legislation on trade unions.

"The conference declares that the workers' first loyalty is to their class, without regard to the laws of the capitalist government, and pledges itself to the strengthening of the labor movement, in order that it may successfully resist the application of anti-working class laws while organizing to abolish capitalist governments and laws altogether.

"The conference, therefore, calls on the T. U. C. and the Labor Party to conduct a campaign preparing the labor movement to resist all anti-labor legislation, and pledges itself to do all in its power to ensure the success of this campaign.

Organization of the Minority Movement.

Due to the crowded agenda of the conference, the short time at its disposal, and lack of adequate preparation on the question, the problem of the organization of the Minority Movement did not receive the amount of attention deserved by its importance. But a beginning was made, and a sound foundation laid, by the adoption of a detailed resolution on the subject, from which the following extracts are taken:

"It must be understood that the Minority Movement is entering upon a new phase of its work. The initial period, when the dominant characteristic of its work was mass propaganda and the widest possible dissemination of ideological influence, has now given way to the second period, that of organizational crystallization of the wide influence won among the masses, and the exerting of this influence in determining the official leadership and policies of the trade unions.

"The historical event which marks the beginning of the second phase is the bankruptcy of the general council, the official leadership of the existing unions, and especially of the so-called left wing leaders. Before the working masses of Great Britain is now placed by the development of history the slogan of 'Change your leaders.' It is the function of the Minority Movement to transform this slogan from an aspiration into reality."

The resolution then proceeds to develop some of the practical sides of this problem. The leadership in the struggle for control of the unions, "must be representative of every section, of every group, that is actually ready to struggle against the policy of capitulation, of acceptance of wage-cuts and worsening of the living standard, represented by the present-day leadership of the British trade union movement. The slogans must be "A complete united front of all those ready to fight against the offensive of capital," and "An alternative leader against every union official who has failed the workers in the struggle." The resolution then points out that:

"The problem of driving out the present leadership involves: (a) The extension and broadening of the struggle which the Minority Movement is car-

rying on in order to change the constitutions, rules and regulations of the existing unions which ensure the permanency of the reactionary officialdom in the unions; (b) The careful study and continual popularization by the Minority Movement of those revolutionary militants who are the future potential leaders of the transformed unions."

There is then proposed the concrete methods of erecting the organizational structure of the Minority Movement in every unit from top to bottom of the trade unions. It concludes with the statement:

"Resolutions and good intentions are of no use whatever unless organized power is put behind them to actually carry them thru into life. Therefore the problem of the hour for the Minority Movement is the problem of the transformation of its present mass influence into organizational power."

The Growth of the Minority Movement.

The figures given at the beginning of this article, which show 802 delegates at the Third Annual Conference, representing 521 organizations, with 956,000 members, were carefully checked to prevent any duplications. The total membership included none of the membership of the separate Minority groups, but only of those trade unions which officially sent delegates. It must be borne in mind that only a part (205,000) of these are permanently affiliated to the Minority Movement and pay regular yearly fees on all their members; the larger number send delegates to the conference, paying only a nominal conference-fee, altho they support the main points of the Minority Movement program. All organizations paid the expenses of the delegates sent by them; it was for this reason, because at this time the unions have been drained of their money by the general strike and miners' lockout, that it was expected that the Third Annual Conference, just concluded, would show a falling off in the number of delegates present. This, however, did not materialize. In spite of all handicaps, the conference showed directly an unexpectedly large increase. In addition, 43 unions wrote letters to the conference, declaring that they were unable to send delegates on account of lack of finances, but supporting its program and wishing it success. These are not included in the figures given above. It is estimated that unions with fully 30 per cent more membership would have sent delegates if they had enough money in their treasuries.

Comparison of the figures of the Second Conference in August, 1925; the Special Conference in March, 1926, and the Third Conference just ended, give the following results:

| | Aug. 1925 | Mar. 1926 | Aug. 1926 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Total number of delegates.... | 683 | 883 | 802 |
| Number of organizations..... | 406 | 540 | 521 |
| Membership represented | 700,000 | 957,000 | 956,000 |

The healthy condition of the Minority Movement is shown not only by the steady growth noted above, but also by the character of the delegations, which come from all sections of the labor movement, and include the older as well as the younger generation, and women as well as men. In addition to the veteran chairman, Tom Mann, who has spent 45 of his 70 years as an active worker and leader in the British unions, fully half of the delegates were men and women who had been militant unionists before the war, including such well-known figures as Alex Gossip and others. That this was not a Communist conference was shown not only by these facts, but especially by the circumstance that only about 150 of the 802 delegates were members of the Communist Party.

Characteristic of the conference was the high degree of discipline displayed; for such a huge conference to complete an agenda of dozens of important items in two days' time was surely a remarkable performance, and reflects the specific trade union tradition of the British working class. This was also shown in the extremely practical and realistic character of the discussion of all questions before the conference.

Meeting just one week before the Trade Union Congress at Bournemouth, the decisions of the Minority Movement Conference, expressing the demands of the militant membership upon the leaders of the trade unions, have assumed great importance. Even the entire capitalist press has given it an unusual amount of attention and reported it at length. It is noteworthy that not a single one of these newspapers, however, mentioned a word about the delegates from abroad who attended its sessions; it was as though this were an instruction or an agreed policy. The *Daily Herald*, official organ of the T. U. C. and Labor Party, gave notice to the conference in a bitter editorial which repeated the charges of "disruption" and "Moscow dictation" long familiar from the practice of the leaders of the Continental trade unions and Social-Democracy.

The first great testing-time of the young revolutionary wing of the British trade unions has been passed, and has left it more firmly united, more clear in its program, and more grimly determined to battle onward to victory than had been expected by friends or enemy. It was a living demonstration of the truth of the motto upon the banner hanging in the conference hall, which accompanying a portrait of Lenin, carried the words:

**LENIN IS NO MORE. BUT THAT WHICH WAS
CREATED BY HIM IS INDESTRUCTIBLE AND
CONTINUES ON THE RIGHT LINES AND IN THE
RIGHT HANDS.**

American Don Quixotes and their Windmills

By Ellis Peterson.

THE SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY AND THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL. Socio-political science versus revolutionary romanticism. New York City: S. L. P., 1926, 64 p. \$25.

The Socialist Labor Party has issued a pamphlet with the above title. It begins with the following pretentious phrase:

"The S. L. P. is the oldest and the only Marxian organization in the United States."

Let us say once and for all that the S. L. P. is not the oldest Marxian organization in this country, neither is it "the only"—because it no longer is Marxian at all. But it was once and just this fact, the degradation of an organization with a rich and glorious past, is the reason why we use the occasion to take up some of the vital questions touched upon in this pamphlet. Among others the following questions are treated: reformism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Russian revolution and the Communist International. And in all these questions the S. L. P. of America, "being placed on the heights of social and industrial development and equipped with the instruments of Marxian economics," is going to give all the world "the new inspiration needed." "The vanguard of the social revolution must come from America," and "we know that the direction of the future development of the revolutionary forces, revolutionary organization and revolutionary tactics is contained in the contributions to revolutionary Socialism given by Daniel De Leon of the S. L. P."

Let us see, how things are in reality.

The pamphlet is from its first to last syllable a vicious attack on the Communist International and especially on its American section—and nothing else. All the arguments employed by the European social-democrats and some of the most lurid arguments of the capitalists are to be found in this "arsenal" of the S. L. P.

Fighting Reformism.

"For years the S. L. P. has combatted the petty bourgeois reformers masquerading as socialists under the designation 'Socialist Party.' With equal emphasis the S. L. P. has combatted the anarcho-syndicalists known since 1908 as the I. W. W. And it is now combatting that absurd coterie styling itself the 'Workers Party,' otherwise known as the 'burlesque bolshevik' . . . The Workers Party is even more opportunistic than was the old S. P."

It is true that Daniel De Leon fought reformism in the American Labor movement, not only the S. P. brand and the anti-political syndicalism of many I. W. W. members, but even—and very strongly—the trade union bureaucracy of the A. F. of L. But admitting these historical merits, we must understand why it was that this

long fight could show no results. The question is: How did De Leon and the S. L. P. fight against reformism? In a very dogmatic and sectarian way, in such a way that the S. L. P. isolated itself from the labor movement, from the masses, and thus became a sect. The S. L. P. proves what Engels meant when he spoke about the uselessness of a

"theoretically correct platform, if it is unable to get into contact with the actual needs of the people."

And here enters the question of "immediate demands," the "missing link" of the S. L. P. development.

There are two methods of fighting for "immediate demands." The reformists saw in the realization of those demands the best method of rendering necessary the social revolution and the revolutionary struggle. They nursed the illusion that capitalist society can be "reformed" into a socialist one. That is an entirely anti-Marxian view as well as unrealistic. Marx and the Marxians knew that there always are revolutionizing changes taking place in capitalist society. And one of the forces making for these changes is the struggle of the workers against exploitation. While capitalist society is developing upwards these reforms make for progress. (The higher pay and shorter hours compel the capitalist to develop techniques and methods of production.) Does this mean that exploitation grows less? On the contrary, and here is the fundamental difference between the reformist and the Marxian views. We know—and experience proves it—that the development of the capitalist system (centralization, concentration, trusts) means a broader and sharper class-struggle. **Therefore** the Marxians have always been for "immediate demands." However, there has entered a new factor in the period of imperialism. It has always been necessary to compel the capitalists to yield reforms. But the intense international competition during the decay-period of capitalism makes it more and more difficult for the capitalists to yield the demands for the slightest reforms. They put up their centralized economic might and the forces of the state against the demands of the workers, even in cases, where the workers are fighting against worsening of their conditions (see the British situation!). Then the fight for immediate demands becomes a revolutionary struggle.

This simple fact is Greek to those self-complacent "Marxians" of the recent S. L. P. type. They are repeating De Leon's inaccurate theories from times past and find themselves lined up with people against whom De Leon fought his life long fight!

De Leon fought against reformism internationally. The S. L. P. today is helping the reformists, first thru a united front internationally with the reformists in at-