

The Nine Months' Truce

The Tasks before the Coming Labour Conferences.

By J. T. MURPHY.

THE three important congresses of the Minority Movement, the trade unions, and the Labour Party, which are to meet in swift succession during the next few weeks, could not meet at a more urgent moment. It is only a few weeks since the whole trade union movement, rallying behind the miners, arrived at a "nine months' truce." This was announced as a "great victory," and, indeed, it was no little moral triumph to secure the demonstration of the will to get together on the part of the unions.

Prepare Now!

But the hosannas were short-lived. They have been rapidly followed by the warning note—Prepare for nine months hence.

Mr. Baldwin led off by declaring that, in the event of united strike action on the part of the unions, he would use all the powers of the State to defeat us. The "Daily Herald" gave wide publicity to this. Lord Londonderry follows up by announcing that "whatever it may cost in blood and treasure," in the circumstances foreshadowed by Mr. Baldwin, and threatened by the unions, "they would smash the unions from top to bottom."

The threats and warnings were clear enough. So much so, that one Labour leader after another swelled the chorus of "prepare." Indeed, Mr. Wheatley, a late member of the Labour Cabinet, went one better than his friends, declaring that we were rapidly moving towards a revolutionary crisis, when the fate of the working class would depend upon whether their working class brothers in the army and navy would shoot them, or line up with them.

Our "Military" Appeal, and Why.

The Communist Party in the midst of this chorus suggested to the Labour Party Executive and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, that we agreed the warnings were justified, and it would, therefore, be wise to tell the soldiers and sailors the truth about the situation.

At once all the pæns about "unity" and the "victory" which appeared in the "New Leader," and the "Daily

Herald," ended. The "New Leader" bleated like the "Morning Post." The "Daily Herald" was struck dumb. The aspiring Mr. Citrine so famed "for detail" and his niceness to everybody, sought patronage of the capitalist press by assuring everybody that nobody, especially the Trades Union Congress, would take notice of us.

Mr. Citrine should not be so hasty in his assurances. If he will look at this year's agenda, and reflect on the leading decisions of the Trades Union Congress, its "back to the union campaign," its "demand for more power to the General Council," and even its recent "victory" in the mining crisis, he will find, if he is not blinded by his own conceit, that the Trades Union Congress is increasingly listening to the voice of our Party. What is more, the unseemly haste of many of its leaders to assure the capitalist class that "the army of the capitalist class is safe, so far as they are concerned," will not escape the attention of the workers.

The one great thing which the letters from our Party to the Executive of the Labour Party, and the General Council of the T.U. Congress has accomplished is the swift unfolding, within less than a month, of the real value of the "unity" among the leaders, so widely proclaimed, and in which every one of them was so anxious to share. It has stripped them of all their fine clothes. They are angry. No wonder, for the workers can see that had the government taken up their challenge Red Friday might easily have been another Black Friday.

Immediately the Government had begun to move its fascist forces to blackleg, and the army to protect the blacklegs, its navy to man the pumps, and its special constables to assist the ordinary police force, there would undoubtedly judging from recent utterances, have been such a hurrying and scurrying amongst the leaders as marked the days of Black Friday, 1921.

What General Strike Means.

But let us be clear on what a general strike means. It can only mean the throwing down of the gauntlet to the capitalist state, and all the powers at its disposal. Either that challenge is only a gesture, in which case the capitalist class need not worry about it, or it must develop its challenge into an actual fight for power, in which case we land into civil war. Any leaders who talk about a general strike without facing this obvious fact are bluffing both themselves and the workers. Let those laugh who care, we are egotistic enough to maintain that our Party has rendered a great service to the working class movement by revealing its next step, and in the process, exposing those who shrink from it.

We did not ask the Labour Party or the General Council to "arm the working class." That is not the next step. We simply asked them to "enlighten" the fighting forces, to win them to the cause of Labour, as a means of preventing their use against the workers. To refuse to do this is to shrink from the logic of their own pacifism.

But the working class movement cannot escape from this situation, although many of its leaders shrink back. Indeed, the progress of the whole working class movement in this direction is the most striking feature of the history of the last few years, and, especially this year.

The point of view which the Communists put forward has now a definitely organised expression on a scale which is continually increasing. The Minority Movement, for example, is no longer simply an influence diffused through the unions. It is an organised force pursuing a definite course. Within one year it has doubled its representation at its national conference. This is a positive proof that the mass of workers in the unions are ceasing to be scared by capitalist propaganda against Communism, for this movement is closest in its association and warmest in its regard for our Party. Its congress this year will have at least 600 delegates. Its keynote can only be—"Prepare." The resolutions on the agenda will show how to prepare.

Co-ordination Wanted.

Notwithstanding all that has been written and said against the Minority Movement, evidence of its continuous influence is seen in the agenda of the T.U. Congress itself. So much is this the case, that we have this year a marked contrast between the T.U. Congress and the Labour Party Conference. Ever since the Labour Party got into its stride, and incorporated the most important trade unions, these two congresses have been regarded as complementary to each other.

But so great are the changes during the last twelve months that, this year, they are almost regarded as rival congresses. While the trade unions have been rapidly moving into the path, which leads to revolutionary struggle, the Labour Party has become the storm centre for the resistance of this process. The struggle between the two forces is now on a massive scale. The fight is no longer a conflict between the leaders of the Labour Party, supported by an apathetic mass against a small Communist Party, as was the case a year or two ago, but a mass awakening and a wholesale movement of the industrial workers towards the Communist Party.

Not for a moment do I suggest that tens of thousands of workers are rushing into our Party. That would be an exaggeration. But an amazing fact of the present situation is the widespread sympathy for our Party, and a growing consciousness that we are "delivering the goods." Indeed, we are rapidly approaching the position when it will be exceedingly difficult for many thousands to explain why they are not in our Party.

So apparent is this fact that the success of the "left wing" leaders in the trade unions corresponds to the degree to which they have approximated to the policy put forward by the Communists. Both this fact, and the conflict between the congress of the unions and that of the Labour Party is seen in the pronouncements on "International T.U. Unity," and "National Trade Union Unity," "More Power to General Council," and "Labour Imperialism."

When the General Council pledged the unions to work with the Russian Trade Unions for International T.U. Unity, MacDonald and Cramp of the Labour Party immediately proceeded to sabotage and denounce it. When the General Council worked for a united front of the unions—the Quadruple Alliance—MacDonald and Thomas declared it would be a calamity. When the General Council worked for "more power," Thomas, Cramp, Clynes, worked for union autonomy.

Contrast in Leadership.

On Labour Imperialism, contrast the following.

Mr. MacDonald as chairman of the Empire Labour Conference said :

"There was an idea that the Union Jack was a sort of trade mark to be used in every great national, imperial or international matter, to enable certain sections to trade who, perhaps, would not trade but for the propaganda associated with the Union Jack.

"This is not good enough for Labour which does not want merely to use the Empire to benefit certain sections of capital. Our conception of Empire is very much wider, deeper and higher than that. The foundation of successful co-operation between different peoples living under different conditions is the power to be sympathetic so that we can understand each other's point of view.

"The idea that we are going to be the policemen of the world and put our noses into other people's affairs is a profound mistake, and the sooner we get back to limited responsibility and trust to the self-development of peoples, the better it will be for the Dominions and this country."

A day or two later, A. B. Swales, Chairman of the General Council, speaking to the same gathering said :

"We are passing through an intense phase in the development of economic Imperialism which is creating serious and complicated problems for organised Labour in every country. To many of us, Imperialism in the form that we have it to-day marks the last stage in the development of Capitalism.

"It represents the final effort of the groups which control financial and industrial capital in the most highly organised countries to secure for themselves markets for their goods and new opportunities for the profitable investment of their money.

"Imperialists never tell the naked truth about their doings in this way. They camouflage the brutal fact that Imperialism means exploitation, by talking about the glory of the Empire, the pride of race, the advance of civilisation and so forth.

"Economic Imperialism uses the language of Patriotism and even a religion to disguise its motives. But the reality is the exploitation and oppression of the weaker peoples and the intensification of commercial rivalries and antagonisms that lead to war.

"The main business of this Conference," he contended, "should be to put an end to this and bring together the workers and the oppressed against the common oppressors."

He was followed the next day by A. A. Purcell, who declared:

"The time has come when we have got frankly to admit the failure of capitalism. Capitalism is stifled in its own fat, and is failing to function. We must take steps to break the capitalist system and re-construct world economy on an entirely new basis.

"Millions of people, black, brown and yellow—even little children—are drawn into the industrial vortex. And so it comes about that the Indian miner gets 6d. per day, and the cotton and jute worker 6s. per week.

"Right well and truly has it been said that the British Empire is one huge slave plantation of the British ruling class."

"The capitalist class of old England—or of any other country—is not concerned how it gets its profits, or where, so long as it gets them. No pride of race compels the British capitalist to employ British men and women only. No patriotic ideals are permitted to interfere with the acquisition of £ s. d.

"Yet the British workers have borne the burdens of Empire. The Empire's frontiers are marked red with the blood and white with the bones of sons of British working class mothers.

"The consequences of the establishment of modern industrialism in the undeveloped parts of the world was not given the least consideration. The immediate gain was the thought. It is necessary to develop a power capable of smashing the capitalist system. And the only conceivable power was the power of the organised working class movement."

There can be no question of the contrast of MacDonald's speech with the speeches of Swales and Purcell. This contrast is more than a contrast of speeches, however, as a comparison of the preliminary agendas of the two Congresses will confirm.

We are thus brought face to face with the fact that the trade unions are moving along a path away from the leadership of MacDonald and Co. There is a reason for this, as significant as the fact that there is an organised revolutionary minority movement in the trade unions, and not in the Labour Party. It means, and can only mean, that the trade unions cannot avoid the struggle against capitalism, while the

Labour Party chiefs, who base their politics upon the exigencies of parliamentarism, strive to prevent the struggle, and in doing so, become the staunch supporters of capitalism.

Prepare—But to Fight.

The foundation of the trade unions is in the struggle. They must fight for improved conditions of labour, higher wages, shorter hours, etc., or they perish. Capitalism will not grant these improved conditions, but must increasingly fight against them. It is this conflict of interest, and sharpening of the fight, that has drawn the unions along the line of class conflict and given an impetus to the development of the minority movements. The Labour Party, however, with its incubus of middle class elements who repudiate the class war, seek to turn the trade unionists against their own struggle based on working class interests. They thus not only turn the Labour Party into a battleground of conflicting forces, but a battleground where the political conceptions of the movement find their level.

This process is bound to be assisted by the coming congresses in September, for the issues are becoming politically clearer. Each congress will agree that it is a congress that has got to say "Prepare!" The logic of the experiences of the trade unions during the last twelve months, much of which the Trades Union Congress will confirm, is crystallised in resolutions formulated by our Party, and placed in opposition to the lead of the Labour Party, the E.C. of which is fighting to subordinate the trade unions to the parliamentary party and to transform them into exchequers for providing parliamentary careers for aspiring politicians .

The choice will be presented in the Labour Party Conference, and the "left forces" will have to make their choice as well as the "right."

The Labour Party Conference will present us, therefore, with a measure of the real preparedness, which exists in the Labour ranks for the crash that is coming. We know, however, that until the working class struggle has developed our Party into a party uniting the workers' organisations on revolutionary issues and for revolutionary purposes, there will be, and can be, no victory in the challenge which is now destined to continually repeat itself.