

The British Labour Party Conference.

By J. T. Murphy (London)

Before the Labour Party Conference opened, indeed as soon as the agenda of the Conference was published, it was clear that the discontent in the ranks of the working class with the Labour Government was finding open expression in the Labour Party itself. There were not less than forty five resolutions and more than twenty amendments to these resolutions dealing with the question of unemployment. And these resolutions and amendments in one form or another criticised and expressed discontent with the Government. Unemployment was the overshadowing question because the Labour Party had promised so much and performed so little.

The Conference was well staged managed, in that the Executive of the Party placed no resolutions on the agenda clearly defining its political policy. It allowed, as is customary in the Labour Party and Trade Union Conferences, resolutions to pour in from the locals and the unions and then leave it to the standing orders committee to find a composite resolution which would express the general body of opinion in these resolutions. This composite resolution is then placed on the order of the day either to supplement a statement from one of the leaders or to be the means of critical opposition to the leader's speech. Nobody knows beforehand what the leaders are going to say. No resolution is examined in such a way as to indicate its full significance either with regard to past policy or future policy. It amounts to a generalisation leaving room for all kinds of interpretations in application etc.

This kind of procedure therefore leaves the platform in an admirable position for manipulating a conference, to keep it talking on things that matter very little, to crowd the most important things into a short time under the control and influence of the leaders of the Conference. Henderson is a past master in this business, the most skilful manipulator of conferences of this kind. Never once leaving the platform during the sessions of the Conference he kept complete control and by Thursday had got the Conference to the remarkable position of having to dispose of forty five resolutions in five and a half hours. And these resolutions included such subjects as disarmament, rationalisation, unemployment benefits, control of finance, question of confidence in the Labour Government, Parliamentary reform, pensions etc.

Boldly the chairman announced that the Labour Government had no apologies to make and then proceeded to make a speech of apology. The theme of this apology consisted of "we are a Minority Government facing a world economic crisis". "Had it not been for these facts we would have had a different report to make." Every thing had to be explained away on these two grounds. No explanation at all as to why the Labour Party had not seen the world economic crisis coming. No questioning of the stupidity of being a Minority Government if it was not possible to get across what they wanted. The facts are of course that they were blind to the oncoming economic crisis on the one hand and on the other hand they went into a Minority Government willing to co-operate with the Tory and Liberal Parties because there was no fundamental difference between them and these parties. All of them whatever their so-called ideals want to restore British capitalism, and this they have endeavoured to do.

But this fact of the common basis for co-operation it was the aim of the leadership of the Labour Party to hide under the glamour of socialist aspirations. Hence, in marched Mr MacDonald, with a weary, sorrowful look on his face, "dreading" the limelight as always, also declaring he had no apologies to make and then proceeding to explain away the reasons for not having fulfilled expectations. He also talked of the world economic crisis, then turned on the critics and told them that the party has its "hand to the plough" at one moment, is "laying brick on brick and sword in hand" at the next, pleading patience, assuring everybody how necessary it was to go slowly without the slightest attempt at analysis. Then a peroration which Mr. Maxton regarded as his own. It was very similar to the perorations of Lloyd George who could always see the sunrise of the new day over the Welsh mountains.

Then the "opposition" got its chance and here the Standing orders committee had already took the sting out of it by forming a composite resolution which washed out the I. L. P. resolution and thrust them back on to the "Labour and the Nation" programme. Of course the I. L. P. supports this programme but Maxton and his followers had already opposed it in the Birmingham Conference and then swallowed it. Nevertheless this is not of much importance. It was not the resolution that mattered on this occasion as the ventilation of the discontent of the rank and file against the Government.

Here Maxton showed the role he and his followers are playing. The opposition was proven to be not an opposition at all. Maxton simply embraced MacDonald whilst saying a few words complaining that the Labour Government was not going in the direction of socialism. All this amounted to a complaint that the Labour Government was not going fast enough in the direction it was taking. He "would not change the personnel of the cabinet" if he had the opportunity. He was a friend of the Labour Government, a friend of MacDonald. It was quite clear that the I. L. P. was a back number. Its strategy has fallen to pieces. Maxton, Stephens, and the others have been looking for an opportunity to become an independent party cherishing the idea that there is room for such between the Labour Party and the Communist Party.

In this ambition they have missed the bus entirely. Had they had the courage to present British politics with this phenomenon their opportunity came at the time of the Liverpool conference when masses of workers were being disaffiliated from the Labour Party because they wanted a working class policy. But Maxton and his merry men were afraid that this meant coming too close to the Communist Party. They saw the fate which awaited a centre party. And to-day they know it too. There never was any place for such a party for any length of time. But to-day, when the chasm between the classes has become deep and wide, such a proposition is hopeless. The choice is clear and sharp—either with the Communist Party or with the fascist party. Maxton and company were fumbling and in this conference to find a basis which would widen by the time he thought things were ripe for a break. Never being sure that the time has come to break with anything or anybody, he and his supporters have been and are the safety valves for the Labour Party chiefs. Thus they are always groping for an alternative programme to the Labour Party but which retains the essentials of the Labour Party. This they never find and they are left without the means to become the leaders of the Labour Party though ever posing as if they were an alternative leadership. Splendid tools for the MacDonalds who slam them or coax them as occasion demands.

The Conference had no time for them. And their cup must be full to running over. Here are the men that have said "Ah if we were not hampered with the Communists in the Conference then we could be the reasonable, the 'practical alternative' and the workers would listen to us." Well there were no communists in the conference and where was the I. L. P.? Simply washed out. Without a plan of action. Without guts. Not a man of them dared to raise his voice in protest against the treatment of the Meerut prisoners. How could the I. L. P. break the formalities, challenge the standing orders, voice indignant protest? It could not be done. So Maxton, Brown, Horrabin, Stephens, Wise, silently let the conference sweep on and not one had the guts publicly to proclaim what they privately think.

Brockway made a speech on India, claiming the right of India to independence through the Round Table Conference, deplored violence, supporting Ghandi. And not one word about the Meerut prisoners. The platform manoeuvred. Kenworthy came on deck with the theme that "the Indians did not really want independence, they wanted to be part of the British Empire, separation was the last thing they thought about. Had he not been to India? Did he not know all there was to know on this subject? Has he not the ambition to become a Viceroy? Don't be carried away by Brockway". And the

the Government tout Graham Pole walked up and suggested it was wrong to discuss India. It would influence the Round Table Conference. Up jumped Cook, the government hand rag, and moved that the conference proceed to the next business. And he is a member of the I. L. P. And his motion was carried. And not one protested. And this is all that was said and done against imperialist oppression.

The Conference discussed **rationalisation**. Everybody said it was a nasty thing. Bevin said so. Tillett said so. Wise said so. Maxton said so. The platform said so. But of course inevitable. The brains of the I. L. P. got to work and proposed that it should only go forward on conditions guaranteeing certain things for the workers. So said they all. So there was nothing to separate the I. L. P. from the conference on this question. It was a strange denunciation which gave room for the ventilation of some nasty remarks about capitalism. This allowed the conference to relieve itself. A spate of resolutions came forward as to improvement of the conditions of the workers, pensions at 60 etc. The platform said it was not much use but let it go forward because it would at least give the appearance to the workers that the Labour Party was in favour, "as an ideal of course", of doing something for the workers.

Bevin and the chairman of the Trades Union Congress made violent speeches about the Trades dispute Act and the necessity for its repeal. But the resolution they got the conference to pass and to which they were speaking said not one word about repeal but about the "amending of the 1927 Act", a typically MacDonald modification. On this question the conference was completely tricked.

But the new slogan of the Labour Party for **unemployment** is the most interesting reversion to the slogans of the old capitalist parties "Back to the Land, gentlemen, back to the Land". There's a pretty picture for you. A country thoroughly industrialised. Thousands of workers driven from the land every month. The agricultural situation utterly hopeless from the standpoint of competitive development in the direction of cereal growing, and which has been, and is being, rapidly turned into a grazing ground. Does that stagger the Labour Government? Not in the least. It will push back the wheels of history and drive the industrial proletariat back to the land: "every worker his own cabbage patch." And mark you without changin' the system, without chasing the landlords, without even nationalising the land, the Labour Government is going to develop the large modern farm. And the Congress cheered.

But of course any old scheme that said it would employ two or three men for five minutes and give the appearance of the Labour Government being able to do something to make the unemployment figures look less would be cheered. The one thing that the Conference would not face was the **class struggle**. Everythin' they wanted must come from legislation and without struggle. This was the theme of the old men's conference. This fact was turned cleverly to account in the debate on the question of **family allowances** and social services. The I. L. P. put forward this demand. It had also been the subject of discussion between the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party Executive. The Trades Union Congress turned it down on the plea that family allowances and social services would enter into the consideration of the regulation of wages. This led to the argument being developed by Hayday and Bevin into an attack on social services adroitly covered by talk of future co-ordination and development of all schemes of social insurance. This discussion will be most appropriately used when the Three Party Committee comes in with its report on the Insurance act. Then we shall be told, as in this debate, that the workers must organise in trade unions to fight for what they want. Hayday declared there was a danger of those who were advocating the development of social services becoming anti-trade unionists. If the workers, he said, could get everything through social insurance then workers would be thinking trades unions unnecessary.

On no occasion was there a vote of censure on the Government. The most striking event of the Conference was the defeat of **J. H. Thomas** who stands discredited as the Minister of Unemployment. This of course is a demonstration to the Party in answer to the many resolutions expressing the

the government's record on unemployment. But I think it would be a mistake to interpret this as a leftward tendency of the Conference itself.

This was evident in the discussion on the **Mosley memorandum**. It is of significance to observe that Mosley did not participate in the debate on the I. L. P. motion of censure on the Government. This dissociated him from the I. L. P. But when he did speak on the question of his memorandum coming before the Executive of the Labour Party for consideration, he explained why he left the Government. He then turned on the Government, denounced it as Government without a policy in the face of the greatest crisis of British history. He played up to the Trades Union Congress Empire memorandum, talked of "insulating" this country "from foreign dumping", gave a friendly gesture to tariffs, another gesture to the raising of the social standards, raised the national banner "the nation calling for a lead as never before", parliament an encumbrance, outworn. "Change it", he cried. It was the most typically nationalist fascist speech I have heard. With all the demagogic at his command he roused the Conference as it had never been roused. He had touched the ground movement of dissatisfaction in the conference and given it an outlet under the banner of "National Socialism".

The I. L. P. before this was literally washed out. But here is the new significant movement within the ranks of Labour and the Trades Unions. Mosley is finding a mass basis for his leadership; new developments are taking place. The open fascist declarations in the ranks of the bourgeoisie, the Melchets, the Morris' etc. have now their counter-part appearing in the ranks of the Labour Movement. Fascism is in its stride and we must be ready for striking developments.

The Conference was imperialist, nationalist, in favour of rationalisation for saving capitalism. It reflected the pressure from the masses. Loud in its protestations against apologies it was a conference of apologies. Pathetic in its appeal for a majority in Parliament which it sees fading further away. The I. L. P. has no further positive role even for the Labour Party. And the new fascist danger has arisen sharply and openly in its midst.

ECONOMICS

The Coal Crisis in Britain and the Coal Mines Act

By J. A. Mahon (London).

The British coal industry which during the autumn of 1929 and the spring of 1930 experienced a slight revival, is now confronted with an ever deepening chronic depression which is intensifying the problems of the Labour Government and forcing the coal owners to harsher measures against the workers.

Coal production for the first six months of 1930 showed a decrease of approximately 2 million tons as compared with 1929 (129 millions — 131 millions). This despite the fact that the revival in trade continued into the second week of April and that the returns up to that time were greater than the corresponding period of last year. The coalowners were quick to realise that the collapse of the temporary revival ushered in a new and more fundamental crisis in the industry. The "Colliery Guardian" for July 25th stated: "During the past half-year the British Coal Trade has undergone a retrogression and at the present time optimism is at a discount." Similar opinions to the one quoted were expressed by other leading industrial journals and by representatives of the Labour Government. That these opinions and gloomy predictions were perfectly justified is indicated by the latest available returns of production. Output for the 12 weeks 1st July to 20th September was 51,604,000 tons as compared with 57,625,900 tons in the corresponding period for last year. The year's production to date is approximately 180 million tons as compared 188 million tons last year. Thus the decrease for the 38 weeks ending September 30th is roughly 8 millions, 6 millions of which has accrued during the last 12 weeks.

The new crisis in the industry is further reflected in the rapid growth of unemployment in the minefields. The following figures of persons employed in and about the mines are culled from official sources: