

Workers' Dreadnought



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THE AUTOCRACY OF THE BOILERMAKERS.

By HARRY POLLITT.

The article in the *Dreadnought* of March 13th, entitled "Towards the Communist Party," touches on the very important question of the various rules of the Trade Unions, and I believe that this question should receive the immediate attention of those trade unionists who are out for making their Unions means for obtaining the support of their members for a revolutionary policy.

MILITARISM.



You no longer see its head, but its weight is there.
Drawn by Masereel.

The whole Trade Union machinery is infinitely more cumbersome and reactionary than the Parliamentary procedure at Westminster, and it is high time that the Left Wing comrades considered whether it would not be better to attack the existing system from the inside than to leave the reactionary Trade Union leaders a free hand.

Trades Congress Decision a Vote of Executives.

At the Trade Union Congress, 270 Trade Unions were represented by 800 delegates, and it is certain that not 70 of the Unions had ever consulted their members as to how the delegates should vote, so that the vote against Direct Action was not the vote of the trade unionists of the country, but of the Trade Union leaders. The same leaders, of course, say they are against Bolshevism, because it is not "democratic."

The N.U.R. voted against Direct Action on the decision of the Executive Committee.

The Labourers' Union, represented by Clynes and Thorne, voted against Direct Action, after both these men had recommended their members on the ballot vote not to vote for Direct Action because it would lead to all sorts of trouble, and Parliamentary action would nationalise the mines without any trouble at all.

The Boilermakers' Executive never asked the opinion of its members at all, believing, I suppose, that they are only children in such matters.

The vote of the Textile Unions' representatives was also against Direct Action, and my experience in Lancashire justifies me in declaring that their members would

not be consulted, because I have very rarely known them to hold branch meetings at all, unless some special emergency arose in their own trade.

These examples are typical of the way that the power rests in the hands of the Executive Committees of the Unions, which always take the line of least resistance, and this applies, not only to Trade Congresses, but to the working of the Unions on all matters.

Boilermakers' Union a Close Corporation

The Boilermakers' Union, for example, is one of the oldest in the country, it has a membership of 90,000; it caters only for skilled men; it has a general secretary, assistant secretary, five permanent members of the Executive Committee and nineteen organising delegates, all of whom are elected for three years. None of these positions can be filled by any member with less than ten years membership. The society is split into districts which control the various areas, but no district Committee can spend any money without the sanction of the Executive Committee, nor can it even call an aggregate meeting of its members without applying for permission to the Executive.

Executive Controls Finance and District Meetings.

The Executive has absolute control over all finance, and its members will never countenance an unofficial strike unless their election period is at hand, when they have been known to develop extreme views, which vanish when their seats are re-assured for another three years. At the present time, two members of the Executive have sat on it (in more senses than one) for twenty-three years; they are hopelessly out of touch with modern workshop practice and a drag on the programme of the society.

Executive Refuses to Call a National Conference.

The Boilermakers have never had a rank and file conference. The Executive refuses to call a National Conference, where the questions of policy and our attitude towards important questions can be discussed; it is true that once every five years a General Council meets to revise the rules, but anyone in the Trade Union world knows that all revolutionary suggestions are received with horror by that body and promptly turned down.

The Boilermakers' Journal.

A monthly journal is issued in which are the general secretary's remarks (in John Hill's case, always good and straight), reports of funerals, debt cases, presentations, and other soul-stirring matters of that description; but there is also space reserved for the rank and file to give their views, and if your views coincide with the Executive, you get a good show. If they don't, well, you get edited to such an extent that you can't recognise your own offspring. The writer, for instance, is not allowed to write any more about Russia in the report, because the Executive objects. An article I wrote criticising the Executive and urging the rank and file to call a conference,

was wiped out. Thus one finds it practically impossible to "get a move on," and I would show, in many more ways, how the Executive works in a reactionary manner. What is typical of the Boilermakers, is typical of nearly every big Union in the Engineering and Shipbuilding Federation.

For Unofficial Vigilance Committees.

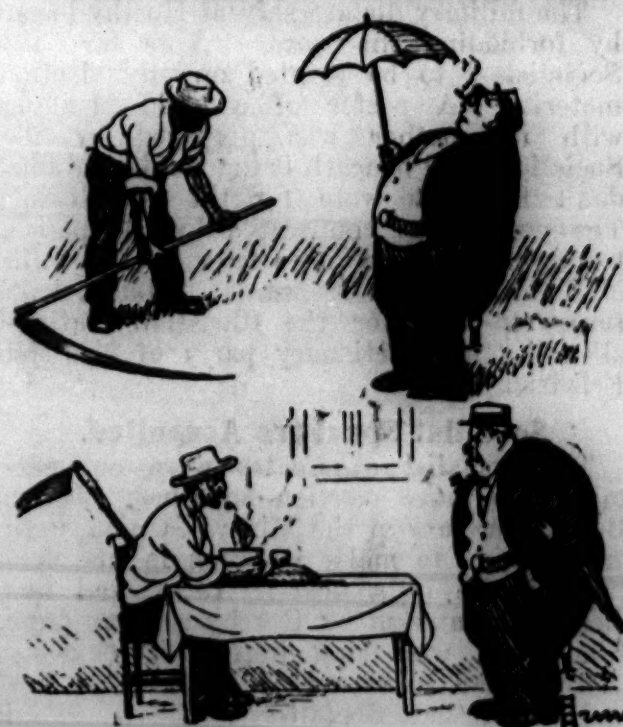
The question then arises, how can this be altered? I want to suggest that the time has arrived when Vigilance Committees should be formed in each district by the rebel members of Trade Unions. They could formulate a common policy, expound this policy at their branches, and would thus secure a far greater effect than could be got by different members proposing different policies in branches of the same Union.

Delegates from Unofficial Committees on Workers' Committee.

We all know what good work is being done by the Miners' Unofficial Committees. There is no reason why the same thing should not be done in every other Union. On our Central Workers' Committee you could have one delegate from every unofficial committee in each district, working a common programme, and we should not only be stimulating our comrades in the workshops, but we should be pouring a systematic propaganda into the branches.

I am getting tired of attending conventions and passing sweeping and compre-

THE "HORRORS" OF BOLSHEVISM.



Either work or starve.

hensive resolutions, which every delegate knows full well will have no earthly chance of being put into operation because of the limited influence we possess at the present time, which is largely due, not to lack of enthusiasm, but to lack of co-ordination amongst the Left Wing. By all means let us meet and put the views of the rank and file on record in reference to the important questions of the day, but—
Don't let it stop at that until we meet again!