

International of Labour Unions

London Committee

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Statement on Organisation and Policy

At the last meeting of the London Committee, the question of the organisation of the London Area was discussed from various points of view.

The following statement is a summary of the discussion, and in your work for the R.I.L.U., the Committee hope you will follow out the suggestions:—

Organisation

(1) The London Committee must ultimately be composed only of delegates elected by their Trade Union Branches. Until an efficient working committee has been elected, the present committee shall continue to act.

(2) When affiliations are accepted, they shall be grouped according to the industry the Unions affiliating are engaged in. If sufficient affiliations are received from any one Union, then a separate group shall be established, in order that the fight can be more efficiently waged, by conducting the campaign directly in the Unions, the Branches where delegates will form such groups acting as a driving force to the less advanced Branches. This will enable the R.I.L.U. policy to be waged in the Unions, not by any outside organisation but by members of the Unions themselves. Where such groups are established, they shall elect one of their number to sit on the London Central Committee.

For example, if 20 Branches of the A.E.U. affiliate, then our policy is to form an A.E.U. group which will work through the channels already provided by the Union rules, but the policy that they adopt must be one sanctioned by the Central Committee. From this group, one member would be elected to represent the group on the Central Committee. Applying a similar method to every Union, we believe that definite and lasting results will be obtained.

In an area like London, there are so many Branches that it is essential that your Committee should not be too large to function efficiently, and the Ideal to be aimed at is to have a Committee that is representative of every Industry, composed of delegates elected from groups comprising each Industry. This would not be too large, for if your Committee is composed of 18 such Delegates, it means that any Policy or Tactics decided upon by the Central Committee is then reported to all the groups and your Policy and Tactics are acted upon simultaneously through the channels of organisation best adapted to serve the purpose of the various groups. All affiliation fees must be paid within one month of affiliation being accepted. The expense incurred in carrying out group work must be borne by the Central Committee, to whom all fees must be paid.

Policy

It is the duty of every active worker of the R.I.L.U. to participate in every action and question concerning the Trade Unions. It is not enough to call for the Revolution, we must relate our principles and experiences to the every day struggles of the Trade Unionist. The Unions are experiencing a testing time that gives better opportunities for Propaganda than we have ever had. These opportunities must be made use of, and we are suggesting the following ideas in order that our propagandists should follow out a uniform policy:—

(1) Point out how the Unions were formed to demand higher wages, shorter hours, better working conditions; for a time the Unions are able to successfully obtain their members

better conditions, because when Capitalism was developing, it was forced to give way here and there. This marks the period when the Craft Unions are at the height of their power. When war broke out, English Capitalism had reached its zenith, and the race for supremacy in the struggle for the control of the World Market resulted in the War with Germany. During the War, conditions obtained which cannot be repeated. There was a huge demand for skilled and unskilled labour in the Engineering and Shipbuilding Industry; this demand could not be met. The Unions then had economic powers, and obtained higher wages, etc. This artificial success attracted thousands of workers to the Unions who had not been organised before.

Funds began to accumulate, membership to grow, the Unions to get more and more powerful; the workers thought this state of affairs would continue. The present Trade depression has proved the testing time, unparalleled unemployment, the Unions unable to maintain the conditions won during the War. Wage reductions the order of the day, already the working hours are in danger of being extended for those who are in work. The Union funds depleted, members leaving in thousands, the morale of the Movement gone, faulty leadership and poor vision complete the picture of the state of the Trade Unions at the present time.

(2) Trace the effect of labour saving machinery in Industry and its particular effects upon Craft Unions. Quote examples of how this constant introduction of machinery simplifies the processes of production and is responsible for displacing skilled craftsmen by the hundreds, and this augmenting the unemployed market to be a menace to those still employed. The moral is: **One Union for one Industry, irrespective of craft and occupation, if exploitation is common to all workmen, then all workmen must organise into a common Union to abolish exploitation.**

Unemployment

The present crisis has proved that the Unions even in times like the War years, cannot accumulate funds that enables them to pay out Unemployed Benefit for any lengthy period, without being called upon to make special levies to eke out the funds. We must therefore explain that as **unemployment is necessary under Capitalism** and the workers are not allowed to run Industry for themselves, that we demand that **Unemployed Benefit must be a charge upon the Industry and not the Trade Unions.** The adoption of this policy would relieve the Unions of a tremendous burden and enable them to develop more and more into **fighting organisations rather than only function as relieving Unions.**

Urge all members of your Union who are out of work to join the Local Unemployed Committee, **where all the unemployed are organised irrespective of their different grades into a compact virile body.** The experiences thus gained of working and acting unitedly with all workers **when out of work,** will stimulate the tendency to similar action **when in work.** Make a point of showing how little it matters when the worker is hungry, whether he is a **craftsman or a labourer** they both have to take the same chance and both get the same treatment from the **Poor Law Guardians.**

Adopt as your slogan:—“**Work or Maintenance at highest Trade Union rates.**” Show that under Capitalism this is impossible, and then go on to urge the abolition of such an inhuman system! Advocate the adoption of shorter hours, so as to spread the available work over the number of workers to do it, whilst retaining the weekly district wage.

Wage Reductions

Here, immediate action is necessary. Get your Branch to demand the **General Council of Trade Unions** to issue a definite

ultimatum to the Employers **that no further reductions will be tolerated.** A special Trades Congress should be convened so that the whole Union Movement can agree on a plan of campaign and action, not only to resist reductions, but to **immediately challenge the employers' right to run Industry.** If the Unions would only take up the Offensive against the employers they would rally the Movement together again.

Support this argument by an analogy: "The Trade Unions are like an army in battle, the army is retreating, they are being pressed farther and farther back." Suddenly a command rings out: "The retreat cannot be allowed to continue, the army must put their back to the wall and stand their ground; otherwise, hopeless and lasting defeat must follow." A call like that stiffens the backs of the soldiers, and many a position has been retrieved. **The Unions must put their backs to the wall, it is either united resistance or defeat and the decisive moment is now.** There is no fear of the unemployed wanting to blackleg, they are better organised than the ~~un~~employed.

No Extension of the Working Week

In your speeches, show how the Employers by the use of the Press and speeches are preparing the ground for the introduction of a campaign to lengthen the working hours per week. Already, the Railwaymen, Textile Workers and Building Trades are threatened. Lord Weir is conducting a campaign amongst the Engineering and Shipbuilding employers in support of a 53 hour working week. There must be united resistance at this. Here also, the employed are sure of the support of the unemployed.

If the Unions fail to act, then we must popularise the idea of getting our members to work the existing hours and then leave the factory. Remember, this tactic only wants a start and it would immediately catch on. **The Unions would either have to support it, or once again prove their inability to defend the conditions we have already got.**

Trades Councils

The London Committee urge that more attention should be given to the Trades Councils that now exist in every locality. In times of Crisis these Councils play a very important part, and with the fervent in the Labour World increasing, it is easy to see that the importance of capturing these Councils by the revolutionists cannot be overestimated. Our immediate task should be to extend the basis of the Trades Councils representation, we must urge that Delegates be elected from the various Factories in a District, so that eventually they are really **TRADES COUNCILS**, composed of Delegates from the Workshops; instead of Delegates from the various Trade Union Branches as they are composed of at present.

The Unemployed organisations in the various Boroughs must be represented immediately on the Local Trades Councils, because they are directly representative of masses of Workers denied the **Right to Work** but who constitute a great weapon in any struggle between Labour and Capital and direct contact with Trades Councils enables that weapon to be used by Labour, because in the event of a Social Conflict no Blacklegging would take place.

This question can be developed at great length, but enough has been written to show our objective. Every Branch that is represented on a Trades Council should see that its Delegate is a revolutionary, who realises the potentialities of the Council. Remember the part these Councils would have had to play when the National Council of Action was formed or if the Triple Alliance Strike had materialised, and it is easy to see that in the very near future the Trades Councils will play

an ever increasing part in the Class War. Therefore our slogan must be:—

“Capture the Trades Councils.”

Delegates who are now on Trades Councils should support

- (1) **Unemployed Organisations by being directly represented.**
- (2) **Where a Delegate from a Factory is elected, he should sit on the existing Trades Council in that locality.**

Control of Industry

The foregoing arguments, well used, will enable us to drive home the necessity of abolishing Capitalism and the adoption of Communism. This involves the control of Industry by the Workers engaged in Industry. The workers must be trained to the idea of their ultimately **controlling their Industries**, therefore, we must advocate the forming of Workshop Committees, such committees to be composed of one delegate from each occupation or grade in a department. Each Department to be linked up into a Central Works Committee.

Its purpose must be to regulate workshop conditions, demand decent canteen arrangements, adequate sanitary conveniences, the right of the workers to be consulted in any change of staff or productive process, the right to appoint foremen, to investigate Order Books, particularly when any dismissals are threatened. Rectify all shop grievances by approaching the Management as representing all the men and not a section, thus demonstrating to the older members the efficiency and effectiveness of your Works Committee as against the present way of waiting for some paid official to come down and remedy your grievance. Efforts must always be made to get the office staff represented on the Works Committee, **and one Delegate from the Works Committee should be elected to the Local Trades Council.**

The Wages Bill, the profits account, the total production of the factory, the amount of raw materials used, where they came from and how all these facts should be ascertained and tabulated, the numbers of actual workers, the number of Office Staff and Directors, Foremen, etc., should be noted. **The idea must be constantly encouraged amongst the workmen that the factory will one day be theirs to administer in the interests of the community, they must therefore be educated to work for the speedy realisation of that object, and also so that they will be able to efficiently run the factory.**

In conclusion we suggest that if your propaganda is carried on the lines laid down, you will widen your sphere of influence, your words will command attention, your Branch will endorse and support your views. Other workers will hear of your propaganda and will be eager to help, so the ideas will spread. The agitation will grow, more Unions will be compelled to drop their reformist methods and by constant pressure will be forced to adopt our revolutionary policy and tactics. The Unions will learn through struggle. With experience will come wisdom. Avoid personalities, the principles we have to propagate are too big for any time to be wasted on personal attacks. We can establish our influence on knowledge and facts, and the workers with their new outlook will then be able to discriminate between efficient and inefficient leadership.

Everywhere strive for the advanced men to hold official positions, so that the control of your Union gradually passes into the leadership of revolutionists.

Wherever an official position is vacant, let the Head Office be acquainted, so that we can get the best men nominated, and from these choose the most capable and fearless comrade to contest the position and by our united efforts get him elected.

May I appeal to you to throw yourself whole-heartedly into the fight. It's a long and bitter struggle, but the victory is worth the sacrifice.

Yours fraternally,

(Signed) HARRY POLLITT.