

INDUSTRIAL PEACE

By HARRY POLLITT

THE shameful betrayal of the General Strike has been followed by a steady succession of defeats for the working class, but the final and complete betrayal of the Trade Union Movement to capitalism has been brought about by the decision of the General Council to open up negotiations on future industrial relationships of the T.U.C. and the employers.

This is the last resort of leaders who are afraid to face the implications of the present period. It is not because some of them do not understand what the present situation means to the working-class movement, but because they realise that the struggle for the elementary conditions of trade unionism to-day has become a revolutionary issue in which they are brought up against the whole political resources of the capitalist state. This they are not prepared to face.

The present situation is revolutionising the outlook of the masses and is resulting in a movement to the "Left." The leadership which is now openly renouncing the idea of class struggle is endeavouring to propagate the idea of class peace as a necessary preliminary to a Liberal-Labour Coalition. In other words, the leadership is deliberately deceiving the workers by presupposing a peaceful transition to Socialism via economic democracy within the confines of the capitalist system, and is endeavouring to persuade the workers that a new period of prosperity is opening out in which the trade unions will be able to exchange the class-struggle basis for co-operation with the capitalists in the reconstruction of capitalism.

It is necessary once more to cite the events which have taken place since the General Strike in order to obtain a clear picture of the evolution of the present situation. Immediately after the General Strike and the defeat of the miners in 1926, the capitalists began a new offensive against the workers at home and abroad. The policy of armed intervention against the Chinese Revolution, the Arcos Raid, the severance of relations with the U.S.S.R., the Local Authorities Audit Bill, the New Unemployment Insurance

Act, and finally the Trade Unions Act, were all definite stages in this offensive.

In each stage the masses were betrayed by their leaders. Yet, in spite of the victories hereby engendered for the capitalists, trade shows no signs of a revival, the decline in the basic industries continues, and although the economic and political rights of the trade unions are destroyed by the Trade Unions Act (at least, from the legal point of view), the capitalists still find it necessary to prepare a new offensive against the wages and hours of other sections of workers.

It was no accident that at the end of July, immediately the Trade Unions Act was on the Statute Book, the Prime Minister, Mr. Baldwin, and Sir Alfred Mond (who, it will be remembered, left the Liberal Party in order to join the Conservative Party because it was fighting Socialism more determinedly than the Liberal Party), commenced to make speeches in favour of industrial peace. In September open overtures were made by the Prime Minister with the idea of getting the Trades Union Congress to make a gesture that would open up a new period of industrial co-operation.

In due course the necessary gesture was made by Geo. Hicks, the so called Left-Winger, who was deliberately chosen by the Right-Wing of the General Council to make the open capitulation to capitalism because of his one-time revolutionary activities. His speech was accepted by the entire Press of the country as an indication that the General Council was prepared to enter into negotiations with the capitalists.

The Blackpool Conference of the Labour Party, held subsequent to the Edinburgh Trades Union Congress, adopted a series of resolutions which clearly indicated that the Labour leaders were preparing for a coalition with the Liberal Party either at or after the next General Election. This coalition, of course, is the direct corollary of the policy of industrial peace : both represent the theory that the revolutionary issues confronting the working class may be avoided and better conditions brought about by labour and capital pooling their ideas.

Since these two conferences there has been more propaganda on behalf of class collaboration than at any time during the history

of the British working class. The most remarkable feature about it is that, whilst innumerable articles are being written and speeches made in favour of industrial peace, it is calmly taken for granted that nothing is wrong with the existing trade union structure, and that this has reached the height of efficiency. This is well-expressed by Mr. Citrine, the Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, in his article in the *Manchester Guardian* special supplement on "Industrial Relations" (30.11.27), in which he says :—

Trade unionism has reached the end of a definite stage in its evolution. It has established a virtually unchallenged control of the organised power of the workers.

One would assume from the above paragraph that there is unity of policy and action in the Trade Union Movement, that there are no rival opinions or official jealousies standing in the way of such action, that there is a common policy on all the fundamental questions facing trade unionists. Strangely enough at the Edinburgh Trades Union Congress itself, trade union re-organisation ranked as one of the most important debates. The General Council had set up a special committee to consider this vital question ; a long report was printed and there was general agreement in Congress that something would have to be done to adapt trade union structure to the needs of the existing situation.

It is, of course, common knowledge that the important resolution on Factory Committees passed at the Scarborough Trades Union Congress in 1925 has, since its adoption, been sabotaged by the existing leadership, and subsequent to the Edinburgh Trades Union Congress there has not been a single pronouncement by any member of the General Council in regard to re-organisation of the Trade Union Movement. Not a single attempt has been made to initiate a campaign for 100 per cent. trade unionism, factory committees, unification and amalgamation of rival unions, etc. Everybody has taken it for granted that the existing machine is perfect, and that all that is necessary now is for the trade union leaders to meet the capitalists and explain how they could run industry better than it is being run by the capitalists without causing any inconvenience to the working class.

As was intended, this propaganda enabled the capitalists to understand the mentality of the General Council leaders, with

the result that they issued an invitation to the General Council over the names of twenty-four of the most prominent capitalists in this country who represent an aggregate capital of £100,000,000, 159 public companies, eighty-one chairmen, two past presidents, six vice-presidents, and four other members of the Executive Committee of the Federation of British Industries, as well as the chairman of the Council of the National Confederation of Employers' Organisations, covering the following industries—chemical, coal, banking, iron and steel, shipbuilding, transport, dyeing, motors, tobacco, tinplate, rubber, silk, railways, electrical engineering, cotton, flourmilling, insurance, gas lighting, textiles and engineering.

In December, 1927, the General Council decided to accept the invitation to explore the possibilities of establishing better relations between employers and employed. In order that there should be no doubt as to who was responsible for initiating the policy of class collaboration, the *Observer*, January 1, 1928, published certain statements made by Sir Alfred Mond in an interview on the outlook, including the following :—

At the last meeting in September of the Trades Union Congress the desirability was discussed of a fuller use of the machinery for joint consultation and negotiation between employers and employed. Mr. George Hicks, who was then president of the Congress, stated that nothing at that time had been done to establish effective machinery at joint conferences between representative organisations entitled to speak for industry as a whole.

Public statements made by representatives trade union leaders subsequently encouraged me to approach a representative group of employers, who issued an invitation to the General Council of the Trades Union Congress to a conference.

The Labour correspondent of the same journal reviewing the situation makes a frank statement on the position in the following passage :—

For the trade union leaders who have taken the decision to discuss with influential employers the possibility of increasing the efficiency of industry within the capitalist system the outcome of the discussions will be of critical importance.

They have placed before the membership the clear-cut issue whether the unions, believing that the collapse of decaying capital is assured, will adopt a policy designed to accelerate the collapse, or whether they will collaborate with the employers to get the best out of industry, on the assumption that the existing system may be modified

gradually, and that in any event it is stable enough to continue for a very long time.

The Industrial Peace Conference took place on January 12, 1928. The Press of the country was full of it, and loud in its regrets that there was one dissentient voice, that of A. J. Cook. A full report of the speeches at the conference has not been made, but sufficient is already known for it to be clear that the trade union leaders attained the heights of servility and kow-towing. The following passages are indicative of the sort of speeches that were made :—

The great thing was to make each other's acquaintance.

I am glad to have lived to see this day.

Once I stood for destroying capitalism ; now I know that if capitalism was destroyed the workers would suffer most.

I stand for co-operation between the workers and the employers.

I am glad that at Edinburgh I initiated the idea that led to this conference.

There is another school of thought abroad that fights against co-operation. We (leaders and employers) must fight together against this school.

The most significant speeches, however, were those made by Sir Josiah Stamp and Sir Douglas Milne-Watson. The one by Stamp, we are informed (the speeches have not been printed), indicated that in view of the parlous condition of British capitalism the only way out for the capitalists was by co-operation with the trade unions. Watson suggested that those present at the Conference should sign a short statement indicating their support of co-operation between labour and capital, the settlement of industrial disputes by conciliation machinery and not by strikes and lock-outs, and, most important of all, that any change necessary in the economic situation be brought about by constitutional methods.

The only leader at this conference who voiced the working-class position was Cook, but immediately the Conference was over he was bitterly attacked in a way that the leadership would never dare to attack the capitalists. In this connection the statement made by Citrine is particularly interesting, as it is an open threat that disciplinary action will be taken against Cook because he has been disloyal to the General Council and loyal to the working class. Citrine's statement will rank as a classic example of intimidation. It is as follows :—

I feel bound to point out that the suggestion attributed to "the

"employers' representatives" is a malicious exaggeration. The statement thus distorted was made by an individual employer, speaking, just as did Mr. Cook at the Conference, on his own responsibility. Mr. Cook's suggestion that the General Council intends to keep the movement in the dark as to these proceedings is known by him to be entirely false. Mr. Cook's action is now a matter for the General Council itself to consider.

(*Glasgow Herald*, January 16, 1928.)

This was followed by a speech made by Tillett in which he makes the following remarkable statement :—

The bunglers and mischief-makers in our own movement, as well as in the capitalist movement, have done their worst not only to destroy the trade of the country, but to jeopardise the livelihoods of our people, and there are to-day millions of women and children suffering through the wantonness and criminal idiocy of this type of man.

Anybody who spoke against the conference of employers and trade unions doing the work of an industrial Commission, was a mendacious charlatan.

(*Glasgow Herald*, January 16, 1928.)

Thus we have arrived at a position where any leader who dares to fight openly against the treacherous policy of the present leadership is made the victim of a joint attack by the capitalists and the trade union leadership. It is reported that at the Conference Citrine himself actually referred to the fact that there was another school of thought in existence which was against industrial peace, and there must be collaboration between the employers and trade union leaders to defeat this school of thought. Obviously, he meant the Minority Movement.

What does the whole of this propaganda mean ? It means that once again the trade union agents of the capitalist class are being used, as they have been used in the past, as the medium through which new attacks are to be launched on the working class.

At the very moment that the Conference was sitting the Lancashire textile workers were and are facing attempts to reduce their aggregate earnings by 12½ per cent., and increase their hours from 48 to 52½. The Yorkshire textile workers are faced with reduced wages and increased hours. The Durham miners are faced with a reduction of their minimum wage to 6s. 1d., as against the present 6s. 8d. per shift, and their piece rates, so that hewers at the coal-face instead of earning 9s. 2d. per shift will only earn 6s. 8d. per shift. All the recent speeches made by railway company

directors and Mr. J. H. Thomas deal exclusively with the menace of road transport competition, obviously in an effort to prepare the way for new attacks upon the existing standards of the railway workers. What is more significant, however, is the fact that this idea of class collaboration on such an open and elaborate scale was not voiced until the Trade Unions Act became an accomplished fact. Immediately the Act was actually on the Statute Book and its decisive clauses in operation, the new wages and hours offensive was launched.

It is these facts and experiences which justify the revolutionary opposition to the existing leadership. The whole industrial peace campaign is just another of the many methods used by the capitalists in order to increase their profits at the expense of fresh sacrifices from the workers.

Not a single one of those members of the General Council, who are talking so glibly about re-construction and rationalisation, will publicly declare the only conditions upon which he is even prepared to meet the employers in any sort of conference, namely, withdrawal of the Trade Unions Act ; universal wages for the workers ; full rights of trade union activity in the workshops ; ending of victimisation and the "Black List" ; withdrawal of present demands against textile workers and miners. On the contrary, they have tumbled over each other in their eagerness to get into the Conference. Why ? In order that they may prepare even more effectively for the coming General Election and the Liberal-Labour coalition, and in order (as one of the General Council spokesmen has said) "to put themselves right with public opinion."

Rationalisation has taken place in Germany on an unprecedented scale, and the result is seen to-day in the servile condition of the German working class. It may be possible to introduce new methods into various industries (which, let it be remembered, have been ruined by the capitalists themselves) so that temporary increases of wages may be given to certain favoured sections of the working-class movement. But do what they will, as long as the capitalists control industry, then industrial peace simply means increased unemployment, lower wages, and intensified competition for the working class as a whole.

What then is to be done in this situation? The first essential is a ruthless exposure of the pro-capitalist activities of the existing leadership and their replacement by honest and determined working-class fighters, who are out, not to lend the strength of the organised working-class movement to making capitalism safe for the capitalists, but to build up the organised power of the workers for the purpose of obtaining the best possible conditions at the present moment whilst gathering strength for the abolition of the capitalist system altogether. This entails increased activity in the workshops and trade union branches, a steady campaign for 100 per cent. trade unionism, a strong fight for every trade union position with candidates pledged to support Minority Movement policy, and continuous propaganda and agitation for the formation of workshop committees and the amalgamation of rival unions. Only thus can the unification of the British Trade Union Movement be realised and its forces rallied under a fighting leadership to combat the intensified attack of declining capitalism. Capitalist industrial peace means economic servitude. Industrial strength as expressed by the Minority Movement policy means economic freedom and victory for the workers.

VOLUME IX
(January-December, 1927)
NOW READY
See particulars on
page 66