

THE BRIGHTON T.U.C.

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I NEVER attend a Trades Union Congress without wishing it was being held in some great industrial centre, so that the lads from the factories could watch its proceedings, see what kind of leaders they have, how their money is spent and to what purpose. There were many visitors at Brighton who had come along to listen, who thought they would like to see the leadership of the workers tackle the things that they and their families are so worried about. The wages issue and the rise in the cost of living; the way we seem to have got completely under the thumb of the U.S.A.; the wars in Malaya and Korea; the atom bomb, rearmament, the lengthening of the conscription period; the cuts in schools, houses and hospitals.

Was any lead of a working-class character on all these problems given by the General Council? Were the rank and file delegates—among them many of the cream of the movement—encouraged to put their ideas forward on them? Did the General Council try to get a sense of urgency and responsibility as to what should be done to fight the employers and war-makers? Did it in any way even reflect the concern of the lads in the workshops at the situation Britain finds itself in, speak for them, make their voices and demands heard—which is after all what these leaders are so highly paid to do?

They did none of these things, and had not the slightest intention of doing so. The Brighton T.U.C. was organised and led by people who might have been envied by those who have to organise the annual conferences of the Economic or Primrose League. It was led by frightened and hysterical leaders, terrified at the results of their own past policies and desperately seeking alibis to prevent this from becoming more widely understood. It was led by trade union leaders for whom exploitation and capitalists no longer exist, for whom rent, interest and profit have no meaning, and who from the start to the close of the Congress uttered no single word against the employers or capitalism.

Not that these leaders have no words to utter, or nothing for them to vent their hatred and anger against. They have. When they spoke they trembled with uncontrolled hysteria, their voices shook the very Dome they were in; but all this was against Communism and

the Communist Party. As I watched Deakin going through his strip-tease act in defence of capitalism, I couldn't help thinking of Ben Tillett, when during a dockers' strike in London he publicly prayed to God 'to strike Lord Davenport dead'. That was the class spirit which enabled the trade unions to develop in the fight against capitalism. The spirit of Brighton is meant—if the General Council has its way—to make the trade unions lead the employers' fight against Socialism.

What was the trick worked at Brighton in the Presidential address of Mr. Bullock, the speeches of Attlee and Tewson? It was this line of talk: 'We have had five difficult years. We have made sacrifices. We had just turned the corner and great gains were going to be obtained, but now, because of the policy of the Soviet Union, we have had to increase our expenditure on defence, take part in a war in Malaya and Korea, and abandon our social plans for the future through having to adopt a great programme of rearmament'. Now, is that picture even remotely true? It is not. Britain is on the verge of a new world war, and if that does not take place, of an economic crisis. If such a war did take place the economic crisis would be even greater precisely because the Labour Government in its hatred of Communism decided to ally itself with the most brutal and aggressive power the world has even known—the U.S.A.—and refuse an alliance with the greatest, most constructive and peace-loving socialist power the world has ever known—the U.S.S.R. It is through that alliance that Britain has been forced into pacts like the Brussels Agreement, Atlantic Pact, into rearmament, into the war in Korea today and Formosa tomorrow. In the meantime, the U.S.A. refuses to lower its prohibitive tariffs; steals Britain's colonial markets; re-equips Western Germany and Japan; brings forward through its French stooges the Schuman Plan and Council of Europe.

Even at the Brighton T.U.C. there was some glimmering of what U.S. plans in Japan mean for Lancashire. On a resolution protesting against unfair Japanese competition, an important statement was made that received little publicity.

Mr. Wright (Amalgamated Weavers' Association) said that Lancashire was very concerned about this question. If nothing were done in three or four years there would again be unemployment in all the principal textile towns. The industry itself could do very little to remedy the position. The gap between wages here and in Japan was far too great to be overcome by technological advances. There was a danger that the industrial policy

being pursued by America in Japan would vitiate the advantages from Marshall Aid. (*The Times*, 7.9.50.)

The same concern was being strongly felt by workers and employers alike about Western German competition. But the Right-Wing leaders of the General Council are not concerned with facing these realities; they can think of nothing but their manufactured bogies of Communism. They talk about 'moral values'. But they are experts at making black appear white. Immediately after the T.U.C. in September, 1949, the U.S.A. forced Britain to devalue the pound sterling, which Cripps had declared again and again with the full support of the Government and T.U.C. would take place only over his dead body.

Yet the President of the Brighton T.U.C. has the audacity to declare:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer had to take the serious step of devaluing sterling. This very necessary but hazardous action has so far accomplished a desirable purpose.

And that apostle of *morality*, Attlee, went further and stated to the T.U.C.:

The distasteful, but necessary, devaluation of the pound sterling was having the result which we anticipated in promoting our economic recovery.

And these people dare to talk about 'Communists turning somersaults'. What they didn't dare tell the Congress delegates was that the startling rise in the cost of living since devaluation took place as the result of a policy forced on Britain by Wall Street and not the Kremlin. The real scandal about devaluation, however, is that these experts in 'morality and spiritual values' knew last September (1949) they were going to devalue the pound, and they swindled the Trades Union Congress into supporting the wage-freeze policy on the ground that prices were going to come down, when all the time they knew that prices were going to go up and up. They dare to talk about 'Communists being the agents of a foreign power'. But history has no precedent for an alleged great Power like Britain so abjectly and slavishly carrying out the orders of a greater Power like the U.S.A. in the hope of halting the rising tide of the fight for national liberation, independence, peace and socialism.

But no matter how well the lickspittles of capitalism try to serve their masters, immediately they fail to pull it off, then the guys who pull the strings, to which the Right-Wing leaders so willingly dance, let go. Consider, for example, what the Press said after the voting on the wage freeze:

Had the psychological atmosphere in the Congress Hall been rather different, had the Council's case been better presented, the voting might have been different, might easily have gone the other way. (*News Chronicle*, 8.9.50.)

Has the General Council of the T.U.C. ever before received so sharp and open a rebuff as it was given during yesterday's eventful proceedings? . . . Frankly the General Council, in our view, took the whole matter of opposition to wage-restraint far too casually. Because dislike for a continuation of wage-restraint is being loudly exploited by the Communists, and because the Communists are known to be a noisy minority within the trade union movement, the General Council thought that its own advocacy of wage-restraint was enough to carry the day. (*Evening News*, 8.9.50.)

The more one thinks of this Conference the more imperative does it seem that there should be a thorough reorganisation at Transport House. (*The Observer*, 10.9.50.)

Behind the slick phrases of Attlee about rearmament lies the future intention of a gigantic speed-up in the factories; the attempt to force the workers to give up customs and practices which are a safeguard for their wages and jobs; the direction and transference of labour; longer hours—all of which will be accompanied by higher prices, higher profits, shortages of essential commodities; drastic curtailment of essential social services and building of new houses. This is one price to be paid for the politics of the Labour Government and the General Council, in tying Britain to the war chariot of American imperialism.

But there is another price also to be paid, if the policy of the Labour Government, supported by the General Council, lands Britain in a third world war. It is the danger of being completely obliterated through atomic warfare. No country in the world is so vulnerable as ours, no country and no peoples would suffer more than ours if ever atomic war breaks out. And yet the Tewsons and Williamsons go blue in the face begging Congress not to demand the abolition of the atom bomb. They gloat that it is in the possession of the Americans. They even have the heartlessness to advance arguments trying to prove that there is no difference between being killed by atom bombs and rockets. Are these Right-Wing leaders of our Trade Union movement quite prepared to see millions of the civil population, men, women and children, die the most frightful and agonising deaths; generations unborn have to bear on their bodies and in their characteristics the effects of atom bombing? Are they prepared to see cities totally destroyed and this island made un-

inhabitable for years and years, and all in their hatred of Communism and the Soviet Union? If so, these men are a cruel menace to the Trade Union movement, and the sooner they are sent packing the better for all concerned.

A lot was said by Deakin, Tewson and Attlee at Brighton about democracy, and it is high time that this issue was raised sharply in the factories and trade union branches. For those passionate exponents of 'British Democracy', who are always contrasting it with the 'undemocratic' Soviet Union, are those who deny any vestige of democracy in their own trade unions. They are also those who shout the loudest that the Communists want economic chaos and worsened conditions so as to have better opportunity to advance their policy. But it is a striking fact that in those unions where the influence of the Communists is strongest the workers have the highest wages, best workshop organisation and most democracy in the conduct of their Trade Union affairs. Since the advent of a Labour Government, more and more of the time of Trade Union conferences each year is being given over to representatives of the Government and to leaders whose speeches are in defence of the Government. This is also the case with the Trades Union Congress. The opportunities for delegates from the job expressing their point of view gets less year by year. But for the reactionary 'fraternal delegates' from America and Canada, for Government representatives, and for what are termed 'speakers who will lead in' for the General Council, more and more time is being given. Further, how can any sincere democrat justify a position where on the Sunday night before the Trades Union Congress opens on Monday, you know what the result of the voting on all the important issues will be, because it has been decided in separate delegations meetings of all the principal Trade Unions? And this before a single word has been said in support, or opposition to, the resolution on the agenda, or the policy statements of the General Council. This represents sectionalism in its worst possible form, the negation of a truly democratic and working class way of discussing and arriving at decisions, and it makes the Congress itself a huge waste of time and money that only benefits a seaside resort, and would be better spent in organising the unorganised workers.

There is another aspect of democratic procedure which is worth drawing attention to. When the delegates of the various Trade Unions are elected they are being elected as delegates to the Trades Union Congress, and not to represent individual Trade Unions. The

Standing Orders of Congress provide that every delegate has the right to take part in the Congress proceedings. The practice is now growing up that unless a delegate is speaking in support of the sectional decisions of his union delegation, he is not allowed to speak. This means that in practice minority opinions cannot be heard, and an entirely false position is given of the actual relation of forces and opinions. The minority who fought so hard at Congress, both in their delegation and on the floor of Congress, can be justly proud of the fight they put up in a very difficult situation. What they fought for will win out. It has taken three years of hard fighting to get the wage freeze policy finally defeated. Those who have led this fight have been subjected to every form of abuse from the Right-Wing leaders of the General Council. Let us hope that it is not going to take three years for the masses to realise that these delegates are also right in their struggle against the policy being adopted on Korea and the Atom Bomb.

Every worker knows how Deakin has sided with the Government and the employers in his support of wage freezing. The workers at the Trades Union Congress have found that his policy is a wrong one. They will soon find that out also in relation to his policy on Korea. Of course there is an apparent contradiction on the voting on the wage freeze resolution and the voting on the Korea resolution. It arises because there is still far too little political discussion inside the factories and trade union branches—still far too much concentration on what are called ‘the immediate practical things’, and not sufficient understanding that it is from the political situation and policies adopted to meet it, that all ‘the immediate practical things’ arise. It is this which leads to setbacks and defeats for the workers. True they are always learning in the school of bitter experience, but there will be far less suffering and anxiety when there is a greater readiness to discuss every question also from a political standpoint. If the political issues of the day had been as seriously discussed in the factories and trade union branches as the General Council’s policy on the wage freeze and equal pay for equal work had been, the General Council at Brighton would have been defeated in the same way as they were on these two decisive issues. As the Labour Government’s policy supported by the Right-Wing leaders of the General Council of the T.U.C. lands the working class into even more serious times than we experience now, it will yet be understood that it is from the political situation that every problem arises. The trade union leaders who are foremost in de-

nouncing politics in the unions, have themselves shown the example to the workers. They judge everything from a political standpoint, the reactionary standpoint of social democracy. They have succeeded in turning the Trades Union Congress into a mere political appendage of the Labour Party and Government.

It will now be a fatal mistake if the militant workers say, 'we won out on ending the wage freeze and in demanding equal pay for equal work', and let it stop at that. Wage increases and equal pay will have to be fought for in the factories and trade union branches, and rest assured the Right-Wing leaders of the General Council will move heaven and earth to prevent this from taking place. Resolutions on paper are one thing, action to secure them is another, and as the workers take action, they will see how these leaders will more and more reveal themselves as the open agents of capitalism, in a way that will make the conduct of those who betrayed the general strike in 1926 look almost like a gentlemanly act.

We are fully aware of all that the Press and the B.B.C. have said about the attacks on the Soviet Union, on Communism, the Communist Party. We understand the speeches of Tewson, Attlee, Williamson and Deakin. We know what is cooking and will face it and defeat it. When the hysterical outbursts of these leaders have been forgotten, the shouting and the tumult dies down, there are hundreds of the Brighton Congress delegates who will ask themselves, 'And where do we go from here?' We Communists have not been defeated. We are neither intimidated nor afraid. We know that the last word has not been said at Brighton. There was a great question mark in the minds of the majority of the delegates who left Brighton. The principal General Council leaders returned from Brighton more worried and frightened than when they went there. The Labour Government cannot be too happy at the result of the handiwork of its stooges and agents. The U.S.A. warmongers cannot either be happy at the strong anti-American feeling that was expressed at the Congress, in the lobbies and hotels.

It was not a united Congress. It was not a Congress that can make the warmongers believe that it is all plain-sailing for them, nor one that can make the profit-makers feel the barometer has been set 'fair' for them. You cannot successfully wage imperialist wars with a Trade Union movement divided in its outlook. You cannot make a success of a rearmament policy that millions of the best, most skilled and politically-minded of the working class have their doubts about. The last word will be spoken, not by the General Council,

but in the factories and trade union branches. Brighton has only given added proof of the urgency of a great new campaign to rouse the old, fighting trade union spirit, militancy and outlook among the mass of Trade Unionists. Passivity, belief in a false loyalty to false Labour leaders has not brought us any nearer to Socialism, which means prosperity, construction and peace. It has brought us into a situation where splendid British lads who could be carrying forward the fight for Socialism in Britain, who could be building houses, weaving cloth, tilling the soil, forging steel, digging coal, manning the trains and docks, are being maimed and killed, fighting for the profits of British tin and rubber millionaires in Malaya, and for Yankee imperialists in Korea. Their blood is not on our hands. It is on the hands of Attlee, Deakin and Tewson. None of those enjoying a comfortable week at the seaside, who so loudly supported the General Council's policy on Korea, will volunteer to go there.

The Trade Union movement needs Tilletts and Manns, men with flaming tongues to rouse the masses to action before it is too late. It needs the spirit and sacrifice of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, the 1889 Dock Strike pioneers, the heroes of the 1926 General Strike and Miners' Lock-out, to inspire the masses to action in defence of wages, full employment on constructive work, our national independence and peace. It needs men and women who will fight for increased wages, equal pay for equal work now, who will defend trade union conditions in the factories, fight against Yankee methods of speed-up and exploitation, recruit the unorganised, unify the Unions, extend nationalisation, and range the Trade Union movement on the side of peace, and not war. It needs fighters against sectionalism and purely craft outlooks; men and women who stand for a greater unification of the trade unions than exists today; men and women whose minds are not set on pelf and place, who won't cringe before a Wall Street millionaire's frown, who will recall our triumphs of the past, and refuse to see them squandered by people who serve the interests of capitalism, because they believe they are better off than they would be under socialism. It needs men and women who hate the rich and love the poor, who believe in Socialism—yes, men and women who want power for the working class, and know that to win this, a united, militant, fighting Trade Union movement against the bosses, against capitalism and against Labour leaders who conspire, disorganise and betray the trade unionists, is a vital necessity. That is the lesson of Brighton—as it will be of Margate.