

The Political Meaning of
The
GREAT STRIKE

by
J. T. Murphy

1/6

ORDERS FROM MOSCOW?

This pamphlet answers three questions: ¶ Are the Communists slaves of Moscow? ¶ Are they out to smash the Labour Movement? ¶ Are their policies based on facts or on "wild theories"? And these questions are answered by documents of the utmost importance to the whole Labour Movement, including reports given by British Communists at Moscow (hitherto unpublished) even more revealing than those published by "Jix."

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THE POLITICAL MEANING OF THE GREAT STRIKE

By
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With an Introduction by J. R. Campbell

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P R E F A C E

THIS book is not a detailed history of every event, local or national, in the nine days' strike of May, 1926. Nor is it another essay in the art of "secret history"; there are already quite enough "disclosures" and "revelations" explaining the strike and its ending in terms of personalities and accidents, the weakness or the cleverness of individuals, the stubbornness of the miners, etc. This book gives no new "theory" of that sort to explain actions and omissions that in reality are inexplicable by any such trivial incidentals. It is an attempt—and a successful one—to explain the meaning of the General Strike: the causes behind it, the reasons for the shape that it took, and particularly the reasons for the event that will stick in men's minds for a long time, and mould the future to a greater extent than we yet realise: the surrender of May 12.

A detailed history, without the analysis that comrade Murphy gives, would only be a mass of unconnected incidents, confusing and at first sight inexplicable. At the same time the reader will notice that this is not an exercise in "pure theory": that the deductions are not based on preconceived ideas unrelated to the facts; that every fact and figure touching on what is actually happening or has happened, of any importance, is given its due weight and linked up in the argument.

The theory that the strike was due to some exceptional circumstances that can never happen again (e.g., Mr. Baldwin's "weakness" played upon by the "extremists" in the Cabinet) is dealt with very faithfully by comrade Murphy in the pages that follow. An equally ridiculous theory is popular in certain sections of the Labour movement: that the General Council's surrender was due to reasons not yet fully known—the personal failure of this individual or the cunning of that one. This book ought to dispose of this idea for ever. It is of no vital importance, for instance, to know how far the Negotiating Committee controlled by Mr. Thomas misled the majority of the General Council

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as to the nature of the Samuel Memorandum. The facts that **are** important are bigger things than these, and comrade Murphy gives them.

One "revelation" however, has to be dealt with. Mr. Bromley has given in the "Locomotive Journal," since this book was written, a summary of the report that the General Council intended to make to the Conference of Trade Union Executives on July 25th. The Conference has been postponed, but the General Council's "reply" published in this way is still being used extensively by the press against the miners. The General Council's explanation boils down to this: that they did not "let the miners down," because they had never really promised to back them up!

The claim put forward through Mr. Bromley is that the General Council's position changed after the publication of the Coal Commission's Report. On February 27, 1926, they had pledged themselves to back the miners' demands in full. But on April 8, in a letter to Mr. Cook (not published until after the strike), the Industrial Committee of the General Council "was of the opinion that matters have not yet reached a stage when any final declaration of the General Council's policy can be made." The rest of the "reply" is a violent attack on the policy of resisting wage reductions. The plea is that the General Council was never pledged to such a policy.

This plea can easily be answered from the General Council's own statements. The pledge of February 27 had never been withdrawn or even publicly modified. On March 25, the Industrial Committee of the General Council "reaffirmed its decision to support the miners in their effort to secure a favourable settlement" ("Daily Herald," 1-3-26). On April 8, this committee "reaffirmed its previous declarations of sympathy and support" ("Daily Herald," 10-4-26). On April 9, they repeated the reaffirmation ("Daily Herald," 11-4-26). On April 14, they said again "this Committee reiterated its previous declaration to render the miners the fullest support in resisting the degradation of the standard of life." Here are four declarations referring to a "previous declaration." What was this previous declaration? It can only be the pledge of February 27: "there was to be no reduction of wages, no increase in hours, and no interference with the principle of national agreement." ("Daily Herald," 1-3-26.)

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The fact that the General Council, while thus repeating the pledge that it later repudiated, was at the same time secretly trying to get the miners to accept a wage cut, is not a very convincing argument in defence of that Council! But it is a very useful additional fact to prove the main thesis of this book: just as the General Strike was not due to any individual's aims or actions, but to the decay of the whole social system under which we live, so the surrender of May 12 was not due to any of the events of those nine days, or even of the nine months before them, but to the inability of a whole system of Labour's leadership—men, ideas and organisations—to cope with the plain facts of a new era.

J. R. CAMPBELL.

THE POLITICAL MEANING OF THE GREAT STRIKE

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE first General Strike in the history of the British Labour Movement has come and gone. There has been nothing like it in this, the oldest of capitalist countries. It has astounded the most optimistic and flattened out the pessimists by the grandeur of the mass response to the call for action. There was not a murmur of opposition from the workers anywhere. With one accord the army of trade unionists responded to the word of command and left their work. There was no hesitation. At midnight, of May 3rd, 1926, the trains ceased to run, transport came to a standstill, the factories began to be empty and only those industries carried on which as yet were considered "the second line of defence." The only complaint that could be heard, and this complaint increased in volume as the days went by, came from those at work who wanted the call to cease work to apply to them.

The display of solidarity was magnificent, the spirited determination of the masses beyond praise, when suddenly, without the slightest warning to the workers, they were ordered back to work. The whole movement was bewildered. What did it mean? Had the Government caved in? Surely! In the provinces and districts trade unionists began to organise "Victory celebrations," when lo, the Government and mineowners' organs trumpeted the "Triumph of commonsense" and the "Unconditional surrender of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress!" The celebrations were turned into faltering explanations and the note of victory in the ranks of the workers was turned into

bitter chagrin. Truly the events of these nine days require an explanation, not simply a "close up" explanation giving the "inner history of the General Council," but an explanation which places the event in its correct historical perspective.

To separate the General Strike from the events leading up to it would be a great mistake. Although this is the first General Strike, it must not be forgotten that a General Strike has been threatened on more than one occasion in recent years. The years 1920, 1921, and 1925 have stamped upon their pages indelible marks which are inseparable from the events of May, 1926.

In May, 1920, a General Strike was threatened in the event of the Government declaring war on Russia in aid of Poland. This was the nearest approach to so great a struggle. For the first time Councils of Action were formed and British Labour, steeped in Parliamentary Liberalism, found itself face to face with a first class anti-parliamentary situation.

In 1921 the trade unions were in the front line of attack and the famous Triple Alliance of Miners, Transport Workers, and Railwaymen crumpled up before the issues of the General Strike on that infamous day, "Black Friday." On that occasion the miners were the storm-centre. The miners were locked out and the trade union leadership of their allies collapsed at the sight of the political implications of working class solidarity which would express itself in the sympathetic strike on a mass scale. On that occasion the masses were not called into action and a variety of explanations were offered for the great failure, not the least common being the explanation that the "masses were not ready." For four years "Black Friday" echoed and re-echoed through the trade unions, and one and all were saying, "There must be no more 'Black Fridays!'" Leaders ceased to attempt to justify the events of that day, and it appeared in the days of July, 1925, when once again the miners' problems became the paramount problems of the Labour Movement, that the blackness of '21 was to be wiped out in the manifest "will" of the Unions to stand by the miners.

Again the General Strike appeared on the horizon and

it was declared that "Black Friday" was wiped out by "Red Friday." True, there was no General Strike called on this occasion, but all the decisions pointed clearly and definitely to such a strike, as the logical sequel of what had already been established. The Government retreated before the threat and the Trade Union leadership of the day, especially the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, secured a prestige which had long been absent from the movement.

On three occasions, therefore, within five years prior to the fateful days of May, 1926, had the Labour Movement been on the threshold of the General Strike, but on no occasion had the Government of the day tested the strength of the threat. Once the leadership crashed, when it thought that it was going to be put to the test, but it recovered, and life swept it forward again until the gauntlet was taken up, the challenge accepted. The result we know. To some this is the finish of the story, the end of the General Strike policy, and so on. Mr. Cramp cries "Never again." Mr. MacDonald and his colleagues proceed to capitalise the strike into parliamentary votes. The capitalist leader-writers and Tory and Liberal leaders boast of the triumph of "common-sense" and the durability of the Parliamentary institutions. But each and everyone of them are ignoring certain very important features of the situation which no serious person can afford to ignore. Not the least of these is the fact that on each of the occasions cited, both with regard to the threat of the General Strike and the actual General Strike, the decisions were taken by congresses and conferences and by leaders politically opposed to the policy of the General Strike and its implications.

The leadership on each occasion has been practically the same. The "Left Wing" leaders in the national executives of the unions and on the General Council could be counted on the fingers of one hand. To suggest that these "Left Wingers" swung the conferences and congresses into their decisions is a palpable absurdity. Why then these remarkable decisions and movements, in flat contradiction to the theories held by those who make them?

Were the Circumstances "Exceptional"?

It may be argued that the conditions governing the

decisions on each occasion were exceptional. This was argued especially with regard to the challenge of 1920 and the formation of the Councils of Action. On this occasion the whole of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions lined up for direct mass action against the Parliamentary Government. Although the result was immense, no less than the prevention of war on Soviet Russia, the Labour Movement became apologetic when the implications of its own actions in relation to its enemies at home began to dawn upon it. It was said that the movement was feeling the impulse of the revolutionary wave that had swept Europe, and that when it had died down it would be thoroughly appreciated as an exceptional event without any relation whatever to "domestic politics."

That the British working class was profoundly influenced by the revolutionary wave from Europe only a fool would deny. That it was deeply stirred by the war and the "after the war problems" no one will question. It had been promised much and expected the fulfilment of the promises, a fulfilment that was not forthcoming. All this can be admitted at once. But once this is admitted, what is the value of the argument about "exceptional circumstances," when within nine months of this nation-shaking event, a similar situation looms directly ahead, this time arising irresistibly from the economic difficulties of British capitalism itself?

But still the critics and the leaders refused to examine the forces that were driving them into actions contrary to their desires. Four years only, crowded with the "triumph of gradualness" in the Labour movement and positive assurances that the way of all progress lay through parliamentarism, and again the Labour movement is forced by circumstances to take decisions in flat contradiction to its proclaimed political line of advance. June, 1925, is the answer.

Nor in the interval of nine months since then has there been any marked change of opinion in the ranks of the leaders of Labour. The Liverpool Conference of the Labour Party, which included almost every leader involved in these actions, emphatically repudiated the forces in the working class who warned them of coming events and told them to prepare and how to prepare. Then of what value is the

argument concerning "exceptional circumstances" when these circumstances, which force men into situations contrary to their wishes, occur four times within the short period of six years? Was there ever such an "exception" which appeared in history with such irritating frequency? To seek an explanation of these events in terms of "exceptional circumstances" or the "Red Hand" in the General Council is as futile and worthless as an explanation of rotten English weather in terms of a Bolshevick conspiracy. We must dig deeper than that if we would learn the meaning of these events and wise men will hesitate before making dogmatic assertions to the effect that such a situation will not arise again.

Of course, on each of the occasions mentioned some new factor appeared in the situation, but to suggest that this new factor was the exceptional circumstance responsible for the crisis or that the crisis itself is due to something outside the main track of history, a non-repeating factor, is to lose all sense of history and turn it into a topsy-turvydom beyond human understanding. Contrary to such fantastic notions, we regard the remarkable fact that the most conservative trade unions, led by the most conservative of trade union leaders, on this side of the Atlantic, have been led into General Strike situations four times within six years as very decisive evidence of a fundamental change in the main lines of British history. *It is this profound "exceptional circumstance" that lies underneath the great mass movements, the failures of the leadership and the rise of new forces within the ranks of the working-class movement.*

Labour Leadership and the Change.

Few people in Britain will yet acknowledge that there is this fundamental change. They prefer to pursue the ostrich policy and persuade themselves that to-morrow will be better than to-day, and "we will pull through somehow." An immense faith in "the good old way" dominates the mind of the average Englishman and with this immense conservatism he refuses to think out either the meaning of his yesterdays or the problems which lie ahead. British Labour leadership, whether in the trade unions or the Labour Party, is no exception to this rule. Its lack of theoretical training

is notorious. The first political programme adopted by the Labour Party was borrowed from the war-time leader of American capitalism, President Wilson. It was announced as British Labour's War Aims, and proclaimed as the path to Socialism. When the war ended Labour echoed the "Reconstruction" cry of the capitalist class, called for "industrial peace" and in all its political acts followed in the wake of the Governing class, priding itself upon having better notions of how to restore capitalism than the capitalists themselves. Its foreign policy was in acknowledged "continuity" with capitalist governments, and its domestic policy bore the hallmark of "gradualness." At no time has it had an independent policy based upon the interests of the class upon which it depends for support and which gave it birth. It has always been the victim of pressure from either the masses of the Labour movement or the class governing society.

It is this complete lack of decisiveness, based on a lack of understanding of the evolution of social forces, that lies at the bottom of its contradictory actions and its failures. So long as British capitalism was on the up grade and able to adapt itself to the claims of the workers, there was little possibility of the Labour leaders being found out. Comfortable in their social life, excellent as collective bargainers and as administrators of trade union rules, they felt neither the necessity nor the desire to "worry about theory." Nor did the war interfere to any great extent, if at all, in this smug, comfortable way of life. They tied their union offices to the Government apparatus and, with a few exceptions, left the workers to fight their battles on their own. It is a matter of little surprise, therefore, that they recognised neither the significance of the "After the war problems" nor the necessity for new lines of development. To them Socialism was still some "far-off divine event." They faced a severely wounded, quivering European capitalism and the millions of suffering restless workers, with the mentality of the comfortable nineteenth century Liberal and Tory trade union bureaucrats. They neither understood the class war nor wished to understand it. All they wanted was to be left alone, to return to the "normal."

When all the "inner histories" of the collapse of the General Council have been written and told, and the stories

of cowardice and panic have exhausted themselves, these deeper defects will be found to underlie not only the incidents of failure but the continuous refusal of the leaders to take the measure of history and face up to the new tasks life itself was calling upon them to fulfil.

But it is one thing for Labour leaders to dodge the problems for a time and to fail in the hour of crisis, and another thing for the masses and for the ruling class which feels the reins slipping from its grasp. The war struck the masses of workers direct. So also did the post-war economic calamities. Disillusionment followed rapidly in the path of suffering and want, while the Russian Revolution and the toppling of thrones in Europe blasted upon their ears the mutability of capitalism. So vast was the consequent movement among the workers that every capitalist government beat a retreat. Even the British Government beat a retreat and British Labour leaders were caught in the stream of revolution. They chanted the songs of revolution and repeated its slogans and talked of the "Decay of Civilisation." Even the Independent Labour Party knocked at the door of the Communist International and timidly enquired if there was not an easier road than the path of revolutionary struggle. Right well we know that this is as far as it got, but that it should get so far is an indication of the greatness of the movement behind it. It peeped within the frontiers of the workers' revolution and sensed at once the hardness of the fight, retreated hurriedly and proceeded to confine its agitation to Liberal interpretations of the formula of "self-determination." It was with this mentality and outlook that the Labour leaders harnessed the great revolt of 1920 and prevented war on Russia.

Rise of the Communist Party.

But this was not the sum total of all that was happening within the ranks of the working class movement of Britain. The war conditions gave rise to a great movement among the workers which found its organised expression in the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movements. It passed with the passing of the war conditions, but left its marks deep upon the trade unions without changing the leadership. Out of this new force and the small Socialist

parties arose the Communist Party of Great Britain, a section of the Communist International.

For the first time in the history of the working class of Britain men and women banded themselves together in a political party based upon the interests of the working class, with a political policy determined by those interests. It differed from all previous workers' and socialist parties in that it was but a section of an International Party, and committed to a daily political activity, a focussing of the actual daily requirements of the workers in their struggles as a class at war with capitalism. It made mistakes, but it went ahead with its job. It was abused. It was denounced and repudiated. In conference after conference of the Labour Party it was subjected to scoffing comments of "Orders from Moscow" and the like. Even the "Left Wing" Labour leaders, such as Lansbury, echoed these tirades with additional objections to "Orders from King Street." But the tirades and opposition only helped to strengthen the new force and helped it to take more careful measurement of the opposition to be overcome. It had much to learn, but was willing to learn and face the realities of life.

The rise of this new body to many seemed of no importance and to many still seems of no importance. But it is beyond dispute to-day that its political record through the period traversed by the crises we have mentioned is in direct contrast with the record of the accepted Labour leadership, which was driven into positions and responsibilities it neither wished for nor understood. It not only foreshadowed the crises, but with increasing sureness indicated the ways and means of meeting them, and to the utmost measure of its strength applied its policy. Instead of shrinking from the revolutions of Europe it studied them. Instead of abusing the leaders of the workers' revolution and seeking to pass them over "to work out their own destiny" it learned from them and accepted their help and guidance.

It was thus that this new leadership in the ranks of the working class of Britain learned to see through the "after the war problems" and to regard them not merely as "problems of re-construction," but as evidence of the fact that we had entered a new epoch to which only the working class hold the keys of social progress. It was thus that of all

the parties forced to come to grips with the crises it was the one party within the workers' movement which was not taken by surprise and compelled to take decisions contrary to the main lines of its policy. It was thus that it placed itself at the head of every social discontent of the workers, directed it in terms of their class, and brought it within the scope of the Labour Movement, so that the conservative leaders felt the pressure from below. It helped the unemployed workers to organise as never before, and developed their power until the whole Labour movement was compelled to reckon with their demands, and the day arrived when the unions had to admit the unemployed to an open alliance. It saw the workers leaving the trade unions and raised the cry, "Back to the Unions" until the trade union leadership was compelled to launch a "Back to the Unions" campaign. It saw the significance of the collapse of the Trade Union International and participated in the formation of the Red International of Labour Unions. It took up the cudgels on behalf of international working class solidarity, led it through its various phases until the whole trade union movement of Great Britain became the storm-centre for international trade union unity. It led the way in organising the discontent within the unions and helped in the creation and development of the Minority Movement. It saw the potentialities of the existing Trades Councils and directed the awakening forces within them until the Trades Union Congress was compelled to follow the course already taken in regard to the Unemployed Workers' organisation. It saw the weaknesses of the trade unions and their lack of central leadership and raised the demand for power to be invested in the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, until this became a vital issue and was agreed upon on the threshold of the crisis of 1926, after repeated repudiations.

It was thus that the young Communist Party became increasingly the centre to which the discontented workers gravitate and force their claims upon the leadership that does not want to struggle. It cannot be gainsaid that the victories and achievements of the Labour movement in all these crises have corresponded to the degree to which it has approximated to the measures indicated by the Communist Party, and its failures correspond to their refusal to make

the preparations that our Party has outlined as necessary preparations. This does not mean that there has arisen within the working class of Britain a new leadership with heaven-sent powers of political penetration and foresight, but that the evolution of the working class has been carried a stage further and out of its own ranks and through its own experiences, it is producing an organised leadership true to its interests and its tasks.

So important has this new leadership become that the capitalist class lay at its door the blame for every trade dispute and the responsibility for the breakdown of their own economic system. These accusations, of course, are as silly as the arguments about the "exceptional circumstance" which pokes its nose into history to destroy the dreams of peaceful gentlemen of the Labour movement. At the same time we will not be so foolish as to underestimate its influence and its power. The fear which gives rise to the accusations against the Communist Party arise more from a consciousness of its potentialities than its actual fighting strength to-day. It is the gravitation of increasing numbers of the workers towards the Communist Party (a process which indicates the growth of class consciousness in the working class finding its clearest and most definite expression in the Communist Party) which alarms the capitalist forces and compels them to strike at this new body ere it becomes too strong for them. But this new force did not create the breakdown of capitalist economics, nor did trade unionism, nor the Labour Party. The latter bodies were neither responsible for the war nor did they lay any obstacles in the way of British capitalism during its prosecution; indeed they were its open allies. It is not until all the promises of the capitalist class, its statesmen and its governments have proven false, and the capitalist class proves itself incapable of solving its own problems, that this process of developing the class consciousness of the workers sets in at an increasing pace. Without underestimating the positive work of the class conscious workers against capitalism as a factor in the increasing difficulties of capitalism in Britain, it is unquestionable that the constant driving of new inroads into the standard of life of the masses (combined with the continued failure of the capitalist class to give the slightest positive proof of the temporary character of these inroads) has done far more than all the propaganda and agitation of

the revolutionary workers to extend and deepen the class consciousness of the masses.

To lay at the doors of the Communist Party and the forces gathered around it the responsibility for the threats of the General Strike, or for the actual coming of the General Strike on May 3rd, when the Communist Party has not yet achieved a sufficient organic change in the leadership of the unions and the Labour Party to provide an alternative leadership when the General Council collapsed, is childish on the one hand and on the other is clear evidence that the process of Communist development follows in the wake of the failure of the capitalist class to meet the natural demands of the masses for a decent standard of life within the framework of the system which they own and claim to control. It is this failure which led to the growth of such mass resistance that the General Strike was possible so far as the workers were concerned.

Capitalist Strategy and the Strike.

But there are two sides to a fight as well as to a bargain, and whilst busying ourselves in explaining and finding the causes of the tremendous developments which marshalled the forces of the workers, we must not overlook the fact that three times the ruling class avoided a frontal attack upon the General Strike before it actually provoked it in order to smash it. A retrospective glance over the years in which these events occurred will reveal a similar process to that which we have shown going on in the ranks of the working class, except that it has gone faster, and is consciously led and developed by the dominant party of the ruling class. The challenge of 1920 was not faced boldly because the ruling class felt none too safe in the saddle. The army was being demobilised and discontented, and the whole population were becoming restive for the fulfilment of the beautiful promises made during the war. Everything was exceedingly unstable and it was a risky job for any Government to fling down challenges or take them up. The threat of 1921 was disposed of by the Labour leaders themselves and the measure of the determination of the Government of the day was never really taken. Then a wholesale offensive of the capitalist class was conducted against the wages of the workers, and was continued for two years without any indication of the emergence of British capitalism from its difficulties.

Torn by difficulties in its foreign politics, without any appreciable recovery of markets that would set its industry running again at full strength, enraged by the conquests of the Russian Revolution, annoyed by heavy taxation and foreign debts, fearful of the new competitors that had emerged from the war with greater strength, worried by the growing gap between imports and exports to its disadvantage, alarmed at the new aspirations of the subject peoples of the Empire, the ruling class of Britain felt that it was up against the greatest fight of its existence. It learned from the European struggles and revolutions and applied these lessons with a thoroughness that is commendable. It destroyed the Coalition Government and set about securing a unified political party that could exercise an authority and a power unhampered by divisions in its own ranks. It secured a powerful Conservative Government and the Labour Party formed the opposition. Still unable to emerge from the "trade depression" and finding that Labour made rapid strides and the political alignment of forces assumed more and more a class war sharpness, it set about the task of reducing opposition to a minimum. Confident that the Labour Party had not developed far enough to secure a parliamentary majority, it threw away its majority and paved the way for a Minority Government of Labour, committed to "continuity." In nine months it had got the Labour Party committed to its own fundamental lines. It destroyed the Labour Government, swept the Liberal Party out of the way, and returned with a record majority written upon the forgers' card which it had not hesitated to use. With Labour's opposition reduced to exceeding faintness it proceeded to consolidate its political forces and rule as an open dictatorship, fighting on all fronts. But still in spite of all its optimism and assurances of good times ahead, the national budget looked worse than ever and the trade returns became increasingly alarming. The basic industries, coal, metal and shipbuilding and engineering refused to "turn the corner."

Alarm mixed with anger against the workers became more and more apparent. The trade unions had become the only strong force challenging capitalist authority and preventing an attempt to recuperate at the expense of the workers' wages and hours of labour, but the growth of solidarity at home and abroad amongst the workers (coupled with the fact

that the Government was not anxious to face an industrial stoppage and was not quite sure that it could cope with a General Strike) led to the retreat of July, 1925. If ever there was a strategical retreat the 1925 Subsidy Settlement was such. From that moment the Government redoubled its energies to secure the utmost strengthening of its forces for an attack. It planned as no government in Britain had ever planned for a smashing class war effort.

Having reduced the Labour Party opposition in Parliament to a state of helpless bewilderment, it determined to knock the bottom out of the trade union opposition outside Parliament. It set about, through its party apparatus, the organisation of the O.M.S. (Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies in time of General Strike).

It strengthened the police forces everywhere and merged the Fascisti either in the police forces or the O.M.S. It struck at the Communist Party and the Minority Movement, which were the only bodies to take its preparations seriously and to warn the workers of their significance and of how to prepare on their side. It set the Labour Party leadership busy on the job of battling against the growing class consciousness within the ranks of Labour, and saving the Labour Party from Communism in the interests of "the Nation." It led the trade union leaders of the General Council "up the garden" and struck back at the General Strike with as great a decisiveness as it had struck at the Labour Government. It handled the General Strike, into which the General Council and the Trade Union Executives had plunged the workers with a minimum of preparation, as a full dress rehearsal for civil war. It marshalled the middle classes behind the Government and left the trade union leaders of the Labour Party murmuring that they were not fighting but only having a trade dispute. The end we know.

The ruling classes, led by the Tory Party, have come out triumphant, with the leadership of the Labour movement in Parliament and out of it thoroughly beaten. But no one can say who has passed through this remarkable series of events that the workers are beaten or that the fundamental problems before the ruling class are in any way solved. At the very moment that the Press hiccoughs its joy at the "Victory of common-sense" it publishes the trade returns

for the month before the Strike telling the dismal story of British capitalism's continued decline. They are the worst figures for the month of April for four years.

In these circumstances, and with this unfolding process before us, stretching over a series of years, how can we regard the General Strike of 1926 as due to some "exceptional circumstances" or to some malignant conspiracy? And how can we say with confidence that the "General Strike is dead" and will not be heard of again? It would be unspeakable folly and stupidity.

The writer therefore proposes to outline in the following pages what led to the General Strike, to tell the story of what happened during the strike and the days immediately following, and to glance at the perspectives and tasks which lie before us.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT LED TO THE GENERAL STRIKE?

IF we were concerned only with the strike as an incident wherein the miners were in trouble and other trade unions came to their assistance, it would be an easy matter to give the facts and figures relative to the mining industry, the breakdown of negotiations, etc., and our leading question would be answered. But sufficient evidence has already been given to reveal it as a most important landmark in British history, and much more than such simple data is necessary if we are to place this great event in its proper historical perspectives.

Of course it will be necessary to give the facts *re* the coal industry, and these we shall give, because the coal industry holds a key position in British economic life and has been for almost a decade the storm-centre of the economic difficulties of Britain. These facts however do not stand alone. Much more than generosity on the part of other trade unions is required to produce such united action on the part of the workers as was manifest in this strike.

Social forces do not arrive at such sharp alignments and marshal themselves in "battle formation" without some common factors being at work in all industries and in all classes. The strike situation can only be regarded as an indication of a general crisis. I therefore propose to place the facts of the coal crisis in relation to the outstanding features of the crisis in general.

For our purpose there is no need to go farther back than the year 1919. This was a critical year for British capitalism. It had to face the sequel to its victory in the imperialist war of 1914-18. It had to re-adjust its economic and social life under exceedingly difficult circumstances. Even during the war large bodies of workers were breaking away from the social patriotism which had tied the unions to the State machine and brought the Labour Party into coalition with the Liberals and Tories. The end of the war saw the termination of Labour's coalition policy and the whole Labour apparatus subject to a flood of working class demands.

In rapid succession, early in 1919, the miners, engineers, railwaymen, dockers, etc., launched their programmes for

higher wages and shorter hours. The miners had put forward additional demands of a character that was to place them at the front of the struggle for some time to come. Besides the wages and hours questions, they were demanding nationalisation of the mines and democratic control of the industry. They threatened strike action. Strikes and threats of strikes characterised the whole situation. The Government called a national Industrial Conference to include all the trade unions and representative employers, to work for industrial peace, but miners, railwaymen, transport workers and engineers refused to attend—a refusal which was symptomatic of the feeling of strength possessed by the workers and their leaders. The magnitude of the awakening of interest in the workers' movement is seen at a glance in the figures of trade union membership during these two years, 1919 and 1920. In 1913 the trade unions mustered a total strength of 4,189,000. In 1919 it was 8,081,000 and in 1920 it rose to 8,493,000.

It would be possible to show a long list of capitalist concessions here: how even real wages advanced in front of the pre-war level and how the aggregate reduction of hours of labour for six and a half million workers amounted to 41,755,000 per week, and to add many other gains. But our purpose here is to show the process of class consolidation and development that has gone on as a necessary preliminary to such events as the General Strike of May, 1926.

Class Consolidation.

This found expression in the ranks of the ruling class in a growth of discontent against the Liberal elements of the Coalition, a demand for economy, and an increasing alarm at the prospect of the termination of the artificial period of prosperity. In the ranks of the workers it took shape in the fusion of the Socialist Parties, the B.S.P. (British Socialist Party), the Socialist Labour Party and several other socialist groups with the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committees into a Communist Party directly affiliated to the Communist International. This was a most important step forward, representing not only the beginnings of a class party within the ranks of the working class movement but the tightening of the bonds between the British working class and the revolutionary workers' movement in Europe.

During the same period, arising out of the struggles of the unions, especially the railway strike, began a centralising process in the unions culminating in the formation of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress in place of the Parliamentary Committee of the Congress, which had functioned only as a kind of clearance committee of the unions to pass on the resolutions to the Parliamentary Labour Party.

The T.U.C. went further and established a joint committee of the General Council and the Labour Party Executive, and even attempted to get the Co-operative Union to take part. It was not until September, 1921, that the first General Council was elected, but it was a direct product of the struggle of 1919 and 1920. This was strengthened by the great movement of 1920 which threatened a General Strike, where through the joint conference of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party a national Council of Action was formed with the counterpart in every district. The Councils of Action passed away with the passing of the crisis but the influence created thereby strengthened the line of centralisation indicated. By the end of 1920 therefore we are witness to a widespread awakening of the workers on a scale hitherto without parallel, a general move towards centralisation in the unions and a crystallisation of its growing class consciousness in the formation of the Communist Party.

With the end of 1920 came also the end of the period of concessions and of the widespread advance of the workers. The successes that had been achieved by unions acting almost as independent bodies prevented a rapid strengthening of the centralising tendencies I have mentioned. The General Council was not in being, and the working class movement was totally unprepared for the rough period that was immediately before it. The ruling class was on the contrary well centralised in the government of the day. Having safeguarded itself thoroughly from political encroachments, and dodged the issue of nationalisation raised by the miners, it proceeded with the policy of decontrol, *i.e.*, the relaxation of State control of private industry, and an ending of the process of currency inflation, which was reaching dangerous proportions.

Alarm was spreading through the ranks of the capitalist class. The demand increased for a cessation of the policy of concessions, for drastic retrenchment, and for something to be done to "get back to 1914." A terrific slump began in 1921 which has remained through succeeding years and is the

basis upon which the process of class consolidation has been increasingly accentuated. The severity of the situation is seen at once in the financial and economic figures of these years.

The total of State expenditure as revealed in the national Budget amounted in 1913 to £172,000,000. In 1920-21 it had risen to £1,145,000,000, and in spite of all the efforts at retrenchment remains in 1925-26 at £824,000,000. Besides this colossal increase, municipal expenditure had risen from £71,276,000 raised in rates before the war to £105,590,000 in 1920, £151,865,000 in 1921 and remains about the figure of £160,000,000 to-day. These figures mean a change of from 18 per cent. to 40 per cent. of national income passing into the hands of the State and Municipal authorities.

This great increase of taxation aggravated the difficulties of industry. How severe these difficulties were will be realised from the fact that with all the attempts at artificial restoration, all the counter attacks upon the workers, the export figures have not reached more than 75 per cent. to 85 per cent. of 1913. This position is made worse by the fact that there had been a large increase in technical machinery and heavy expenditure following on the "readjustments necessary for peace industry." The choice before the capitalist class was, therefore, either further inroads into their wealth or a counter offensive against the working class. They choose the latter and class warfare began in real earnest with the odds on the capitalists. The working class movement, and especially its leaders, was saturated with social pacifism, the apparatus at its disposal was divided against itself, and the Communist Party too young and small to have direct influence on the course of events. The nearest approach to a machine capable of putting up a general resistance was the Triple Alliance of Miners, Railwaymen and Transport Workers.

The miners were the first in the line before this counter offensive. The Triple Alliance collapsed at the thought of the implications of common action, or shall I say its leadership collapsed and prevented it functioning? After the collapse of the Triple Alliance it was an easy matter to deal with the rest. But not without resistance on the part of the workers. In 1921 86,000,000 working days were lost in dispute. In 1922 there were 20,000,000 days lost, and in 1923 there were 10,000,000 lost in the same way. It is estimated that in two years the workers lost £10,000,000 per week in wages.

The wage attack slowed down a little in 1923. Will anyone suggest that these terrific years of debacle had nothing to do with the preparation of the forces for the General Strike of 1926? We shall see.

Facts of the Economic Crisis.

Simultaneous with the attack came the breakdown in industry and the growth of a vast army of unemployed. In 1921, for example, the Government statistics show 1,509,029 unemployed and in 1922 there were 1,828,000. The irritation and anxiety in the ranks of the capitalists knew no bounds. Discontent among so class conscious a social force naturally drove their sympathies in the direction of their most violent defenders, and from this onward the process of class assimilation and consolidation goes on rapidly within their ranks. It appears to be the fate of classes that come to power to hold on to the last ditch long after the justification for their existence as a ruling class has passed away. The British ruling class appears to be no exception to this rule, for the whole record of these years is a study in the contrast between its inability to solve its economic and social problems and the intensification of the grip of political power. This we will show in order to substantiate our case in relation to the General Strike and its place in British history.

The registered number of unemployed (which by the way should be regarded as a minimum figure because of the various changes have been made in the manner of recording the unemployed in order to hide the real situation) are as follows:—

1921	...	...	...	...	1,509,029
1922	...	...	...	...	1,828,223
1923	...	...	...	...	1,343,725
1924	...	...	...	...	1,134,742
1925	...	...	...	...	1,237,700

Let us examine the figures of a number of leading industries. The decline of agriculture in Britain had become notorious before the war. During the war by extraordinary methods the decline was stopped and an improvement shown. But the story afterwards is the continuation of the pre-war story.

In 1913 there were 11,335,000 acres arable land and 16,071,000 acres under permanent grass. In 1919 there were 12,309,000 acres arable land and 14,439,000 grass. In 1924 there were 10,929,000 acres arable and 14,948,000 acres grass land. That is one million and a half acres less land under cultivation in 1924 than in 1913. During 1925 the decline has continued by a further fall of 300,000 acres.

The iron and steel industry offers little consolation. The monthly average for 1913 shows 338 blast furnaces working and producing 855,000 tons of pig iron and 638,000 tons steel ingots. In 1920 the corresponding figures are 284 furnaces working, producing 699,000 tons pig and 755,600 tons steel. In 1924 there were 181 furnaces working with an output of 601,900 tons pig iron and 685,000 tons steel. In 1925 the position is worse still, with only 164 furnaces working in the month of March out of 482 in existence.

The exports of machinery in 1913 amounted to 689,389 tons. In 1922 they fell to 400,000 tons and have not yet appreciably improved on that figure. The story of shipbuilding is blacker still. The quarterly rate of ships tonnage laid down according to Lloyd's register was in 1919, 601,000 tons; in 1920, 599,000 tons; in 1921, 142,000 tons; in 1923 it was 101,000 tons and 1924, 263,000 tons.

The cotton exports of the years 1922 onwards are only as yet 60 per cent. of the amount of 1913, while the coal industry shows a heavy decline in all directions with the exception of domestic consumption; decline in export in 1924 is to the extent of 12,000,000 tons as compared with 1913. A still more alarming feature is the growing gap between imports and exports—imports steadily increasing and exports steadily declining. For example, in 1924 imports had risen to 4.1 per cent. above 1913 imports and the exports had fallen 24.5 per cent. below 1913 (measured in 1913 prices).

Sufficient data has now been given to the serious factors weighing upon the British capitalist class, data which reveal the foundation of the class movement we are emphasising. In giving these data I am not concerned with proving whether the capitalist class will recover its position, or will not recover, but in showing that that they **have not** recovered and that this failure to recover in the period under survey lies at the bottom of the political development which leads to the General Strike of May 1926.

Capitalist Class Strategy.

Already we have recalled the breakaway of the Labour Party from the Coalition Government of the war period. The popular discontent and the anxiety of the ruling class, roused by the widespread movement of the workers and their own failure to solve their economic difficulties, shattered the coalition of the Liberals and Tories in 1922 and led to the ascendancy of the Conservative Party. This was the beginning of the end of the Liberal Party and the concentration of the ruling class in its most reactionary forms. Within a year it passed swiftly away from Liberalism, changed its leaders and plunged for a tariff war as a means of salvation for its broken down industry. How far this was the principal reason for its actions, or how far it was a conscious manoeuvre for the purpose of outwitting the Labour Party is uncertain, but the fact remains that the Conservative Party under Mr. Baldwin's leadership threw away a large majority. It launched into a general election knowing full well the growth of Labour support, and paved the way to a Labour Minority Government. During the interval of nine months it vigorously overhauled its Party, re-adjusted its leading team, secured the commitment of every leader of the Labour Party to the fundamental lines of its own policy, and then shattered the Labour Government.

It raised the banner of class warfare high, denounced the Liberals as incapable of facing the dangerous Labour movement, unhesitatingly used forgery as a means to colour the Labour movement red and to intensify the fright of the middle classes as to the danger of revolution, and swept the polls. It returned with a reconstructed Government based upon a reconstructed Party, a shattered Liberal Party, and a Labour opposition reduced in numbers and literally pulverised politically. It was truculent and confident in its political power over its opponents. It had used the "democratic" apparatus to the utmost and gripped it unscrupulously and effectively. It secured 48 per cent. of the votes and secured 68 per cent. of the seats in Parliament. The Liberals secured only 18.1 per cent. of the votes and 6.5 per cent. of the seats. Labour secured 33.8 per cent. of the votes and 25 per cent. of the seats.

It then set about the task of relieving the class which it represented. In its first budget it relieved them of

£42,000,000 of taxation, cut down relief to the unemployed, and introduced harder conditions for the securing of unemployed benefit under the Insurance Act. It then began on a vigorous imperialist campaign as the "solution of unemployment and the means of trade revival." It continued the efforts against currency inflation and reached the point of returning to the gold standard, which had the immediate effect of initiating a campaign for the reduction of wages and the lengthening of the working day and the week. Against this only the trade unions remained as a direct means of struggle.

Effect on Working Class Movement.

Now let us observe the effect on the working class movement through this same period and get the measure of its development to face the new phases of the industrial crisis which, even with all this intensified political development by the Conservative Party, still remained as acute as ever. (Indeed during the year 1925 imports increased by £45,000,000 and exports declined by £28,000,000.)

In three years from Black Friday, 1921, the trade unions lost three million members. But the vast awakening of the workers in the great industrial struggles found its reflex in increased attention to parliamentary activities. In 1918 only 2,244,945 votes were cast for Labour. In 1922 the number had risen to 4,236,733; in 1923 to 4,348,379; in 1924 to 5,551,000. Here is distinct evidence of a class finding its feet. Especially are the last figures eloquent of this when it is remembered that the increased vote was secured amidst the denunciations of the Labour movement as a Bolshevik movement. It may be argued that these figures illustrate the movement of the middle class forces towards Labour, but without underestimating the force of this argument, an examination of the distribution of the Labour vote will show that its growth and strength correspond to the concentration of population and industry and emphasises the awakening political consciousness of the working class.

Lest it be thought that I am overlooking or underestimating the movements of the middle classes we will examine the movement of social forces in relation to them also. It will be found that their movements and their economic position emphasise the process which is here being portrayed. Throughout the period under review there has been a continuous concentration of wealth which is arresting in its sig-

nificance. According to the Labour Year Book, 1926, the income tax returns show first that :

“ The aggregate income of the income-tax paying class has declined very little during the recent “ lean years ” The aggregate income of income tax payers is actually greater in 1923-4 than it was in the prosperous year of 1918-19, when it stood at £2,071,571,796 ; while this larger income is distributed among a smaller number of taxpayers than was the income of 1918-19. Thus in 1918-19 the aggregate number of individuals estimated to have incomes over £130 per annum was 5,747,000 of whom 3,547,000 were effective taxpayers ; but in 1923-4 though the aggregate income of income-tax payers is greater than it was in 1918-19, the number of individuals with incomes of over £130 per annum is estimated at only 5,000,000 and the number of actual payers at 2,400,000.

Let me add to this the fact that although in the 1925 Budget the super-tax was reduced considerably, the amount recovered from the super-tax payers was greater in 1925 ! A loss to the revenue was expected of some £6,700,000. Instead of the loss there was an increase of £5,000,000. These facts prove incontestably the concentration of wealth into fewer hands and the decline of the wealth of the middle classes.

The second feature of the income tax returns relates to the higher paid workers and points to the breakdown of the “ Labour aristocracy.” The same year book proceeds :

“ The decline in the past five years in the income of weekly wage earners liable to income tax has been much greater than the decline in the income of the income tax paying class as a whole. Thus in 1919-20 the aggregate income of weekly wage earners assessed to income tax reached the record figure of £825,786,395. By 1923-4 it had fallen to £300,000,000, a drop of nearly 64 per cent. The reduction in weekly wage-earners' incomes liable to income tax since the maximum year of the boom has been more than $4\frac{1}{2}$ times as great in proportion as the drop in the aggregate income of the whole income tax-paying class.”

Equally eloquent of the savage onslaught that has been made on the position of the skilled workers, especially when placed in relation to the position of the unskilled workers, is the Coal Commission's Report. This confirms the evidence of the income tax collector and adds that proportionately the skilled workers, especially in exporting industries, engineering, shipbuilding, cotton, iron, steel, iron mining and pottery,

have been reduced to an average of 40 per cent. above pre-war standards, whereas the unskilled workers retain an average of 70 to 80 per cent. above the pre-war standard. The cost of living index figure is about 75 per cent. above pre-war. (This evidence is brought out to justify the demands for the reduction of the wages of the miners, especially the higher-paid miners.) To this must be added the fact that it is precisely in these industries that the revolutionary movements within the trade unions have developed and the Communist Party has its greatest strength. It is precisely the General Workers' Organisations that remain the most conservative, and it appears from these figures that there is good reason for it. Thinking themselves very fortunate because they have not been so heavily hit as the skilled workers, they are susceptible to the blandishments of leaders who explain this to be the result of their virtuous policy of industrial peace. But the arresting question forces itself upon us, "If the attack upon the better paid workers has produced such a far reaching effect, has so profoundly changed the relation of social forces that a general strike has been the sequel, is there any likelihood of this process coming to a stop when skilled and unskilled alike receive the shattering blows of a ruling class determined to surrender nothing further of its resources?"

The extent of the transformation in the voting of the masses we have now shown along with the economic changes in their position which laid the foundation of the change. While the parties were undergoing their internal changes in 1923 and 1924 and especially during the period of the Labour Government there was a lull in the attack of the employing class. Indeed a number of concessions were allowed to come through the Labour Government which encouraged the recovery of the trade unions. With the passing of the Labour Government the trade unions had to face a new situation, arising from disillusionment as to what they were likely to get from a Labour Government and the fact that they were again face to face with a better organised and more militant opponent.

But in arriving at this position some remarkable inner transformations had taken place. The rise of the Communist Party had proven to be more than an accidental passing phenomenon. From 1920 it set the pace in every manifestation of working class activity, focussed the leading questions of the working class as a whole and played an immense role in

crystallising the class consciousness arising from the incessant struggles that had set in. On its initiative three definite movements had been organised and concentrated upon the problem of giving the working class a centralised class leadership corresponding to the class leadership and organisation of its exploiters. First the Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement; second the Minority Movement within the trade unions; third the development of the already existing Trades Councils. All these movements converged upon the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. Their influence can be measured by the fact that the most recent conference convened by the Minority Movement represented a million workers.

There is no need to repeat the numerous issues and campaigns that have been conducted on current politics. Sufficient to say that the issue of Communist policy versus class collaboration has become the predominant issue in the working class movement. But the Communist Party has not yet secured the organic leadership of the Labour Movement, with the result that the crisis of this period finds a working class, in the process of being revolutionised, facing class battles cumbered with a leadership that does not want to fight.

We have now established (1) the breakdown of British capitalist economy. Five years' efforts at the expense of the working class shows no basic improvement. On the contrary, the facts tend to show the crisis as acute as ever. (2) Accompanying this breakdown there has gone on an intensifying process of class consolidation, a dividing of the social forces into two class war camps. (3) The ruling class, being more class conscious and experienced in politics, re-assembles its leadership in the hands of its most conservative party and strengthens its political dictatorship. (4) The working class increasingly awakens to political consciousness and rapidly begins to crystallise a new leadership based upon its class interests. (5) The change from the former privileged position of the skilled workers in the dominant British industries accentuates the process of developing class action and the growth of a new leadership.

I have refrained from showing the great influence of the Russian Revolution, of the campaigns for international trade union unity, of the foreign politics of the various governments, of the effects of imperialism and many other forces in develop-

ing this process, in order to demonstrate more completely that this evolution of social forces is not an imposition either of the gods or of some external propaganda, but is inherent in Britain's internal conditions and her own social forces. With these things well established as the foundation for the wide support to the miners on the one hand and the irreconcilable ferocity and alarm of the ruling class on the other, we can direct special attention to the mining industry which dominates the fortunes of British economics to-day.

The Basis of the Miners' Struggle

It is difficult to believe that the Coalition Government of 1919 intended anything more than to use the Sankey Commission as safety valve. In view of the claims of the miners' opponents that they are impatient, it is well to take note of the principal findings of that Commission of seven years ago. It declared :

“ Even upon the evidence given, the present system of ownership and working in the coal industry stands condemned, and some other system must be substituted for it, either nationalisation or a method of unification by national purchase and/or by joint control.”

It recommended nationalisation of mining royalties immediately, the adoption of the principles of State ownership of the coal mines and along with it a scheme to come into operation within three years, paying a “fair and just compensation.” But nothing was done, although it was quite evident then and has been evident ever since, that the coal industry was in such condition that without drastic changes it could not keep pace with the demands that were being made upon it in the markets of the world. This is fully confirmed by the present Permanent Under Secretary for Mines in the Coal Commission Report of 1926. He says :

“ Ever since the end of 1920 the depression that then overtook the other heavy industries has been lying in wait for the coal mining industry, but has been warded off by a series of accidents. For the last half of 1921 the industry was busy filling up the gaps made by the three months stoppage in the summer of that year. In the first half of 1922 the depression actually laid its hands on the coal mining industry, but the great strike in the United States of America came to

our rescue. After that came the French occupation of the Ruhr, and it is only during the last fifteen months that the industry has not been helped by the temporary cessation of some normal sources of coal supply. Without this its present difficulties could hardly have failed to come upon it four years earlier."

Two things are here established irrespective of all arguments *re* world competition. First, the need for reorganisation acknowledged seven years ago. Second, the employers and successive governments have been conscious of the artificial position and nothing has been done towards improving it. Nevertheless coal owners have continued to extract considerable profits during the same period from coal getting alone (*i.e.*, leaving on one side profits derived from by-products which are estimated at £6,000,000 per annum).

In 1919 Profits amounted to	...	£30,400,000
In 1920 Profits amounted to	...	£35,000,000
In 1921 Loss amounted to	...	£21,300,000
In 1922 Profits amounted to	...	£10,403,527
In 1923 Profits amounted to	...	£26,148,715
In 1924 Profits amounted to	...	£13,419,057
<hr/>		
Total Profits in six years	£94,071,299
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This is not what one would call a bad return on the money invested in the industry, considering that the total amount invested including "watered capital" amounts, according to the evidence in the two coal commissions, to £198,000,000. If we add to these profits the profits of the four years preceding 1919 we find that the total profits received in ten years amount to no less than £200,471,299. *And they still own the mines.*

And how fared the miner during this period? The following figures published by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain tell the story of the wages received.

AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS OF MINeworkERS.

DISTRICT	1921 4th Qtr	1922 3rd Qtr	1923 4th Qtr	1924			1925	
				2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr
Northumberland—	51/0	42/11	58/9	48/4	45/3	47/8	45/4	42/6
Durham—	53/10	44/1	54/5	50/2	47/10	49/1	43/3	45/2
South Wales and Mon.—	55/11	48/9	53/1	52/8	55/6	55/0	55/8	52/8
East Federation—	68/9	46/11	54/5	57/5	57/3	54/10	56/9	49/2
Lancs., etc.—	51/9	38/11	46/10	47/7	47/4	49/6	49/3	44/4
North Wales—	46/6	42/0	46/0	48/1	46/8	47/0	49/6	42/9
South Staffs., etc.—	41/3	41/9	42/10	43/5	45/0	46/11	46/1	43/10
Cumberland—	45/0	46/2	48/5	48/5	50/2	53/11	50/7	48/3
Bristol—	48/2	40/3	44/5	44/10	42/3	39/3	51/5	47/6
Forest of Dean—	38/3	39/5	47/0	46/2	48/8	46/0	47/6	39/7
Somerset—	46/2	34/3	44/8	45/7	45/10	50/2	46/3	42/8
Kent—	51/9	60/3	57/6	63/4	38/6	53/11	66/7	65/6
Scotland—	60/5	49/5	62/2	60/0	53/8	58/2	53/3	52/1
Great Britain	58/10	45/8	53/11	53/6	52/8	53/1	52/11	48/6

The average wage of the mineworker in Britain in the first quarter of 1921, that is, before Black Friday was 89s. 8d. per week. A comparison with the above shows an average drop of 34 per cent. in the first nine months of 1921. A further comparison with wages of workers in other industries shows also the average wages of the miners to be lower than the wages of the workers even in the most depressed industries.

According to the evidence of Mr. Varley, the leader of the Nottinghamshire Miners (a Right Wing Labour leader now proposing that the miners should accept reductions), before the Coal Commission :

“ It will be seen ” he said “ that even in the depressed ‘ export trades ’ the workers received a higher wage than the miners during the second quarter of 1925. Wages in many of the Trade Board trades, even, soar far above this figure and

in very few of these one-time sweated trades does the rate of the lowest grade of unskilled male labour fall below this figure. We point this out in order to show that although the workers in these other industries are in no case getting an extravagant wage and in most cases are getting a very low wage, far too low to maintain a decent standard of living, the miners are worse off than them all, and are far below any decent minimum of subsistence. Many thousands of miners are getting less—considerably less—than even the low average of 48s. 6d. per week.”

(Note.—Trade Boards were established by the government some years ago, in those industries where the workers were badly organised or had no organisation at all, to do away with what was known as “sweated labour.”)

According to the “Labour Gazette” (a Government publication) of June 30th, 1925, the wage rates in various industries were as follows :

OCCUPATION.	WEEKLY WAGE RATES.
Engineering Fitter—Clydeside	56/0
Brassfounder—London	63/6
Ironmoulder—Birmingham	60/11
Shipyards Rivetter—Clydeside	53/0
Wheelwright (Vehicle Building)	70/6
Building (Painter)—London	76/10
” (Bricklayer) Crewe	69/4
Wool Textiles—Yorkshire	54/10
Bespoke Tailoring (Skilled Worker)—Liverpool	68/0
Boot and Shoe (Clicker)	60/0
Soap and Candles (Man)—Large Centres	56/0
Baking (Table Hand)—London	57/6
Flour Milling (Labourers)	57/0
Road Transport (One Horse Driver)—Manchester	53/0
Railways (Fireman)	57/0 rising
” (Shunter)	to 72/0 after 10th year.
Docker (Liverpool) for 5½-day week	65/0
” (Liverpool) for 5½-day week	66/0
CERTAIN TRADE BOARD MINIMUM TIME RATES (MALE WORKERS).	
Boot and Floor Polish	54/0
Boot and Shoe Repairing	60/0 to 70/0
Button Making	54/0 to 63/0
Laundry	54/0
Paper Bag	55/0 to 69/0
Tobacco	61/6

The Price of Coal.

If the miners’ case rested alone upon the comparisons of wages and profits then the figures here given present an overwhelming case against the mineowners, and warrant the workers rendering the miners every possible support. But

the miner invests his life in the coal-getting business, and takes risks that are far greater than the risks taken by other workers. Who ever heard of a mineowner risking his skin in the service of the industry? The evidence of Mr. Harts-horn, a South Wales Miners' leader, before the Sankey Com-mission remains true to-day as then. On this occasion he gave the following vivid description of the hazardous nature of the miners' calling :

"I do not think the public realise that one out of every six or seven—certainly one in every seven—of all the men and boys employed in the industry, surface and underground, every year get injured to an extent that renders them idle for at least seven days, and a very considerable number of them, of course, are rendered idle for a much longer period, and a large number of them are totally and permanently dis-abled. I think about four men are killed in the mining in-dustry every twenty-four hours, Sundays and week-days. This is an occupation in which men are blown to pieces . . . In the mining industry the casualties are more like those of a battlefield than anything else. The only difference between the soldier and the miner is that the miner can never ask for an armistice. He cannot even treat for terms of surrender. The casualties go on every day."

In three years, 1922-3-4, 3,603 miners were killed and 597,198 were injured. An injury which does not keep the worker from his work for at least seven days is not recorded in the statistics.

In view of the effective returns which the mineowners have received for their "monetary risk" and the appalling contrast in the character of the risk taken by the miner, and the poor monetary results he gets in return, one would expect some compensation in other directions. But such is not the case for the British miner. It is questionable whether there is another large class of workers who have to live in the abominable conditions of the miners. When he returns from the semi-darkness of the pit, his clothes covered with coal dust and often wet through with working in water or under a dripping roof, the miner has to wash and change in the room that in many cases has to serve as kitchen, wash-house, scullery and bedroom. Often he has to walk miles before he can get to even this accommodation. Pit head baths are a rarity in Britain.

As for the housing conditions in general, apart from say

the Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Notts coalfields, which are newer and more up-to-date, they are an abomination. This was acknowledged by the Government Commissioners so long ago as March, 1914, when a special investigation was made. It was acknowledged again by the Sankey Commission in 1919. But a Liberal investigator, a Mr. James, bears witness that in spite of all the acknowledgments and investigations, nothing has been done in many of the districts up to 1924. He says :

“I have personally investigated all the specially bad slums which were visited by the Commissioners as long ago as March, 1914. All of these, condemned long ago, are inhabited to-day—generally more densely inhabited—and there is not a word of condemnation applied then that could not be applied now.

“At Merry’s Row, in Blantyre, I found a slum containing single roomed backless bungalows in which whole families live.

“In the same neighbourhood, close to the birthplace of David Livingstone, is a dilapidated square known as “the village,” densely inhabited by miners. It was built more than 100 years ago.

“At Rosehall, on the outskirts of Coatbridge, I found nearly the worst of all.

“Rosehall is an odious, hypocritical place—hypocritical because the outside of the outer row along the main road has been touched up so that it wears a rather picturesque, old-world appearance.

“But pass through this outer husk by one of the narrow passages, and you find yourself in an enclosed area of rows of low cottages, with rows at right angles to them at the ends. Some of them have two rooms. Some of them are one-room, without back exits or windows. Others are one-room, back-to-back.

“In each of these single rooms lives a miners’ family. There is no pantry. The coal is kept under the bed. Water has to be obtained from a standpipe outside, used by a number of houses. Conspicuously huddled together in the yards are filthy huts for sanitary purposes,”—(“Coal and Power.” Lloyd George Report.)

Certainly this is a picture of a bad patch, but apart from the districts which I have mentioned as distinctly modern, all the other mining districts are bad patches. The typical mining village is an atrocity. The dwellings have been thrown up at a minimum cost in long rows—mean box-like affairs, which soon fall into disrepair, soon become black and grim

as the mines themselves, making the lives of the miners' wives into a wretched slavery. The normal accommodations of the towns are denied them, and the lack of decent accommodation for the miners at the pit-head piles on the agony of keeping pace with the dirt.

And this is the life of the mining population in the pit and out of it! The miners risk life and limb in the getting of coal for a pittance. Their wives face the agony of making the pittance go as far as is humanly possible and battle incessantly amidst domestic conditions that are awful to think about. And the children?

Here then is the economic and social foundation of the struggle in the mining industry, which developing with the struggles embracing the rest of the British nation, led to the General Strike. The mineowners demand a continuation of their profit making, come what may to the lives of the miners. The miners fight for the means of life. After three years following upon the Black Friday debacle, the miners secured in negotiations conducted during the period of the Labour Government a slight improvement in the agreement forced upon them in 1921, and an open struggle was avoided. But it was a short agreement, due to terminate in March, 1925. It was at this point that the miners' struggle converged with the general struggle. The Miners' Federation felt after the experience of 1921, when every trade union had been taken separately and beaten, that the working class movement would not want to repeat that experience. No leaders dare propose that the miners should accept either lower wages or longer hours. Indeed so strong had grown the resentment within the working class against the capitalist wage cutting offensive that the Trades Union Congress pledged itself to resist any further attacks on wages or hours of labour. It was thus that the forces converged upon the path that led to the General Strike.

CHAPTER III.

“ RED FRIDAY ” AND THE NINE MONTHS’ TRUCE.

THERE has hardly been a moment since 1921 when the question of the miners’ conditions has not been to the forefront in the Labour movement. Promptly after the defeat of that year, the Communist Party and the Red International of Labour Unions initiated a campaign to revive the unions, to work for the ending of the ending of the “Black Friday” agreement, for a new wages agreement and the nationalisation of the mines, etc. On the initiative of the R.I.L.U. bureau, A. J. Cook (now secretary of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain), S. O. Davies, Noah Ablett and a few other leaders of the South Wales Miners began the organisation of a Miners’ Minority Movement to campaign on the above lines. It met with increasing sympathy throughout the coalfields. By 1924, through the combined efforts of the Communist Party and the Minority Movement, A. J. Cook was elected secretary of the Miners in place of F. Hodges. This development was taking place amidst a general revival of Labour activity.

The advent of the Labour Government gave an impetus to it, and produced some startling changes in the trade union leadership. A number of the Labour leaders who became members of the Government were also trade union leaders. Thomas of the Railwaymen, Clynes of the General Workers, Hodges of the Miners, Shaw of the Textile Workers, Bondfield of the General Workers, all of them “Right Wing” leaders, had to leave their trade union offices for “higher orders.” The effect on the trade unions was most marked. The leadership of the Trades Union Congress passed into the control of the “Left Wing”: Swales of the Engineers, Purcell of the Furnishing Trades, Hicks of the Building Workers, Tillet of the Transport Workers. The political line of the Labour Government involved the “recognition” of Soviet Russia and naturally gave an impetus to fraternal relations between the British trade unions and the Russian trade unions, paving the way for the remarkable Hull Trades Union Congress which had considerable influence in revitalising the British trade unions. The National Minority Movement had just held its first national conference with 271 delegates representing 200,000 workers.

The Labour Government drove the trade unions back upon their own resources by its continuation of the policy adopted by previous governments in relation to trade disputes. It made the same declarations about the "defence of the constitution" against strikes, and prepared the same kind of preparations for "a state of emergency" whilst expecting and calling for patience and toleration because it was a minority government. Under its influence, and the economic effects of the invasion of the Ruhr by the French military, the miners secured a temporary agreement embodying a slight increase of wages through an increase of what are known as the "percentage rates." But the end of the Labour Government, after the signing of the Dawes Report and a modification of the Ruhr situation, saw the mineowners again on the war-path, preparing another offensive for the return to the eight hour day and the cutting of wages.

In order to disarm all opposition in the ranks of Labour as well as all other parties against any strike action the miners might be forced to take, they (the miners) urged and secured the action of the Labour Party in the House of Commons on behalf of a Miners' Minimum Wage Bill. It was defeated by 208 votes to 143. The only defence of the miners now depended upon the forces outside Parliament—a fact which strengthened the efforts of the Communist Party and the Minority Movement, both of whom were pushing ahead with a powerful campaign for an All-in Conference to prepare for general action against the oncoming wage reduction offensive of the employers. It was this campaign, taking the form of a series of local conferences, that paved the way for the Quadruple Alliance. Led by A. J. Cook and Herbert Smith (the president of the Miners' Federation) they now made strenuous efforts to build a "Quadruple Alliance" of Miners, Transport Workers, Railwaymen and Engineers. In this work, Bevin, the leader of the Transport Workers, played a leading part; indeed he is credited with having drafted the scheme of the Alliance. To this plan of action the Communist Party and the Minority Movement gave immense support, while warning the workers against any rivalry between the new body and the Trades Union Congress and its General Council and keeping up its campaign for All-in Conferences. A Conference of the union executives was called for July 14th to consider the scheme. This conference in itself was an im-

portant innovation destined to play an important rôle in the future of the unions. The notorious Right Wing element, Thomas, Clynes and Brownlie of the Engineers, determined to place every obstacle in the way of the development of this alliance. They succeeded in preventing the scheme coming to fruition before the crisis came to a head, but the actual preparations and propaganda for the alliance helped to pave the way to the support of the whole trade union movement for the miners.

On June the 30th the mineowners gave one months' notice to terminate the agreement and proposed the reduction of wages varying, from district to district, between 13.4 per cent. and 47.9 per cent. on the basic rates. They also proposed the abolition of the national minimum and the establishment of new district minimum rates dependent upon the conditions in the various districts, and the provision of a guaranteed profit without relation to a guaranteed wage. These terms were promptly turned down by the Miners' Executive, a body by no means revolutionary but bound by the emphatic decisions of repeated National Conferences. Another national conference was called, and this endorsed their attitude to the new proposals and the measures that had been taken to secure the support of the other trade unions. In quick succession came the conferences and the decisions. The Trades Union Congress gave support. The Executives of the unions gave support. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress issued a manifesto pledging full support. The Government appointed a "committee of inquiry" which gave very little support to the mineowners. Jix saw the revolution coming. And finally the following call to action was issued from the Trades Union Congress headquarters.

Notice.

Lock-out of Coal Miners, August 1st, 1925.
Official Stoppage of the Movement of Coal.

Official instructions to all Railway and Transport Workers, as agreed unanimously by a joint Conference of the N.U.R., A.S.L.E. and F., Railway Clerks Association and the Transport and General Workers' Union Executives, and approved by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress.

R.C.A.,
G. LATHAN.

T. GILL (Pres.).
A. G. WALKDEN (Sec.).

T. and G. W. U.,
H. GOSLING,
E. BEVIN.

T.U.C. General Council,
A. B. SWALES (Chairman).
W. M. CITRINE (Assistant Sec.).

June, 29th, 1925.

* * * * *

Here was "Red Friday" indeed!

For months and months the Communist Party and the Minority Movement had been hammering away at the job of getting all the forces of the movement behind the miners. They had organised All-in Conferences in the districts, agitated for the Quadruple Alliance, demanded more power to the General Council, urged the affiliation of the Trades Councils to the Trades Union Congress, called for the unions to table their demands simultaneously, for the formation of Workers' Defence Corps, for the preservation of the seven hour day for the miners, for nationalisation of the mines and minerals without compensation to the owners, for workers' control of the mines, for an alliance of the unions and the Co-operative Union—and here we were witness to the whole union movement travelling along the same route! At the same time every phase of the propaganda we had conducted was finding confirmation every hour. We had warned the workers that the attack on the miners was the beginning of a general attack and Mr. Baldwin on the day of the issue of the above orders conducted the following conversation with the miners.

Miners: "But what you propose means a reduction of wages."

Mr. Baldwin: "Yes. All the workers of this country have got to face a reduction of wages."

Miners: "What do you mean?"

Mr. Baldwin: "I mean all the workers of this country have got to face a reduction of wages to put industry on its feet."

That the trade union leaders knew the implications of their decision there is not the slightest doubt. Mr. Cramp, Chairman of the Labour Party and Industrial Secretary of the N.U.R. said, on July 2 :

"This will be the nearest approach to a general industrial upheaval and no man can say what will be the ultimate outcome. . . . If men refuse to handle coal on our instructions and are suspended or dismissed we shall naturally protect them. If the railway companies were to take that action it would mean only one thing—the whole of the railwaymen would be embroiled."

All the leaders were busy making similar statements with few exceptions. Of course Mr. Thomas was still looking for an "open door" and Mr. MacDonald was on the look out for a "silver lining." They did not like the way things were going, naturally.

But more shocking still was a further action taken by the trade union members of the Parliamentary Labour Party. For some time the Communist Party had been agitating for the Parliamentary Labour Party to obstruct the business of the House of Commons until action should be taken to relieve the position of the unemployed. When lo, this section of the Parliamentary Labour Party sent a delegation to Mr. MacDonald to say :

"That it was the unanimous opinion of the group that if a stoppage occurs, the Labour Party should take organised and effective action in the House of Commons, as from Monday, to hold up all Parliamentary business other than discussion of the industrial situation."

MacDonald promised to lay the matter before the Executive of the Parliamentary Party, but how his soul must have revolted at this violation of his sacred democratic formalism !

All this however was not to be put to the test as yet. The Government called a truce. Mr. Baldwin slipped the subsidy card on the table at the last moment : £20,000,000 for the mineowners, continuation of the existing wages and hours for the miners, a special enquiry by an impartial commission. The die-hards, led by Sir William Joynson-Hicks, were thoroughly annoyed. They wanted to call the bluff of the Congress at once. The mineowners were annoyed, or at least pretended to be. The Labour Movement was jubilant at the "bloodless victory." Thus began

The Nine Months' Truce.

The ferment which followed was tremendous. The

capitalist class in general was really vexed, and so were Mr. MacDonald and a number of other parliamentarians, in spite of the fact that the Parliamentary Labour Party passed a resolution unanimously congratulating the General Council and the miners. Of course there were good grounds for annoyance. Was it not generally recognised that the miners and the General Council and the Parliamentary group had been pursuing the Communist policy? Indeed Mr. MacDonald was very angry with the Government. He declared :

“The Conservative Government came into office because it was supposed to be a law and order government. It had yielded. It had come to a conclusion that was sound, but by a way that was abominably bad. It had increased the power, the reputation, and the prestige of everyone of those elements that did not believe in political action at all.

“It has simply handed over the appearance of victory to the very forces that sane, well considered, thoroughly well-examined Socialism feels to be probably its greatest enemy and the biggest chance that reaction had got in this country now. . . . The Tory Government in its foreign policy, its attitude to Russia, its attitude at home, the methods that it had adopted to bring this temporary settlement into being, has sided with the wildest Bolshevik, if not in words, certainly in fact and in substance.”

He was compelled to issue an “explanation” later to say that he did not mean the Bolsheviks on the General Council, but the Communist Party.

But the Communist Party had no illusions on the matter. It stated clearly at once that the intention behind the truce was to prepare for a real smashing attack and that the workers must at once take advantage of the agreement to prepare for May 1st, 1926. Every issue of the “Workers’ Weekly” from that date numbered off the weeks as they went by, and asked what was being done, while putting forward the measures that should be taken. The capitalist class made no mistake on the question. Mr. Baldwin promptly said that, in the event of united strike action on the part of the unions, he would use all the powers of the State to defeat them. Lord Londonderry declared “that whatever it may cost in blood and treasure” in the circumstances foreshadowed by Mr. Baldwin and threatened by the unions “they would smash the unions from top to bottom.”

Immediately it became generally agreed that it was a truce. But did that mean that the union leaders, the Labour

Party leaders, the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party were going to discuss thoroughly the lessons of the crisis and make effective preparations? Let us see. For just about a month the "Daily Herald" gave publicity to these statements and opened its columns to a number of trade union and Labour leaders who swelled the chorus "Prepare." Mr. Wheatley, a leader of the I.L.P. and a late member of the Labour Cabinet, went further than the rest of them and said :

"That we were rapidly moving towards a revolutionary crisis, when the fate of the working class would depend upon whether their working class brothers in the Army and Navy would shoot them or line up with them."

Mr. Bevin took him to task and wanted to know more definitely what he meant. He declared for folded arms and pacifism! Right in the midst of this the Communist Party addressed a letter to the Labour Party Executive and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress in which we said that we agreed with the warning note that was being raised concerning the rôle of the army and navy in the event of the unity that had been established being called into action, and suggested that it would be a wise policy on the part of the Labour movement to tell the soldiers and sailors the truth about the situation.

With one accord the Labour press with the exception of the "Herald" howled at the Communist Party. The "Herald" was struck dumb. Mr. Citrine, the acting secretary of the Trades Union Congress tumbled over himself to assure everybody that the Trades Union Congress would take no notice of us. In short the capitalist class was assured that so far as these gentlemen were concerned their army was as sound as a bell and secure from any "interference." The soundness of the "Unity" at once unfolded itself. The Communist Party thus called the bluff long before the Tory Government ended the truce. The simple request of the Communist Party to the Labour leaders to take the next logical step in the preparations for May 1st punctured the balloon of "Unity." The discussion about these preparations ceased, so far as they were concerned, with the exception of those openly identified with the Minority Movement, such as A. J. Cook, and a few leaders associated with "Lansbury's Labour Weekly."

That we were not shrinking from the issue the Communist Press will bear witness. In the "Communist Review" for September, 1925, I wrote :

"Immediately the Government had begun to move its Fascisti forces to blackleg, and the Army to protect the blacklegs, its Navy to man the pumps, and its special constables to assist the ordinary police force, there would undoubtedly, judging from recent utterances, have been such a hurrying and scurrying amongst the leaders as marked the days around Black Friday, 1921.

". . . let us be clear on what the General Strike means. It can only mean the throwing down of the gauntlet to the capitalist State, and all the powers at its disposal. Either that challenge is only a gesture, in which case the capitalist class need not worry about it, or it must develop its challenge into an actual fight for power, in which case we land into civil war. Any leaders who talk about a General Strike without facing those obvious facts are bluffing both themselves and the workers."

But time waits for no one. The Trades Union Congress came in October and from its decisions it was clear that changes were taking place within it that pointed clearly the way the wind was blowing. And it was not in the direction of preparations for struggle. A number of important resolutions were passed that had been pioneered by the Communist Party and the Minority Movement. These thoroughly annoyed the capitalist press and the supporters of MacDonald and Thomas. The Congress denounced Imperialism in unqualified terms, condemned the Dawes Plan and pledged itself anew to International T.U. Unity. But it postponed decision on the question of power to the General Council, through the combined manœuvres of the Right Wing elements and Mr. Bevin. Then it elected Thomas again, along with Miss Bondfield, on to the General Council. Later Mr. Pugh of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation became chairman and the Council was once more dominated by the reactionaries.

Immediately afterwards the Labour Party met in annual Conference at Liverpool. It adopted resolutions the opposite of the Scarborough resolutions, and whereas the Miners' Federation had voted against compensation to the royalty owners, the Labour Conference voted in favour of compensation. In addition the whole Right Wing of the Labour Party mustered its full forces to expel the Communists and denounce the class war. Forgetting all its experience, how that three times

already, in flat contradiction to its theories, it had been party to actions openly acknowledged as leading to the General Strike, a distinctly class war weapon, it rhapsodied about what it would do when it had secured a Labour Government with a majority. Its pledges to the miners were forgotten and not the slightest indication of what it would do in the coming crisis of May, 1926, emanated from the Conference. Apart from the Communists in the Conference, not a single speaker dealt with any of the realities of the class war.

After the Conference it proceeded to wait for the Report of the Coal Commission. But not so the Government. Taking the Labour Party decisions against the Communist Party as an open invitation to suppress the latter, the Government proceeded to arrest twelve leaders of the Party in the hope of so weakening its activity that the Party would die. Mr. Thomas had written in the "Weekly Dispatch" "Smash them or they will smash us." The Government at least tried to oblige. It also proceeded to patronise the organisation pioneered by leading members of the Conservative Party who were ready to do what Lord Londonderry (a mineowner) had declared they would do in the event of a general strike. This organisation was known as the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies and professed to aim at the defence of the "Community" against the effects of a general strike. Magistrates acted leniently towards the Fascisti and advised them to join the O.M.S. and police forces. The Home Secretary gave special attention to the police forces. Others gave attention especially to the army and navy and air force. In short the whole forces of the State were thoroughly overhauled, and the nearer we came to May 1st the closer came the auxiliary forces "O.M.S.," special constables, etc., to the Government. Finally leaders of the Fascisti left their organisation declaring that the O.M.S. sufficed for all that they intended.

"Masterly Inactivity."

Meanwhile the Labour Party waited for the Coal Commission's Report. The I.L.P. waited for the Coal Commission's Report. All in the hope that "peace" would be preserved. They busily denounced the efforts of the Communist Party and the Minority Movement. They said the formation of Workers' Defence Corps was "provoking the other side to

make preparations," as if the ruling class had not already a powerful police force, army and navy and air force, long, long before the miners' crisis, and had used them too long before the Communist Party had come into existence.

There is only need to add the statement of a leading member of the I.L.P., in the "New Leader" of May 21, 26. Mr. H. N. Brailsford writes after the event :

"When the General Council, after the July crisis, faced the probability that it would recur in May, it failed to realise the need for cool preparation and clear thinking. The creation of the O.M.S. was enough to remind it of that duty. A sub-committee was, indeed, set up: plans for **maintaining supplies and creating a Defence Corps were discussed**, but in the end it reported to the effect that **preparation was impossible, and that plans could be improvised when the emergency arrived.**"

So much for the General Council's preparations. On the General Council are a number of members of the I.L.P. They said nothing. The I.L.P. had had its conference and it said nothing. The same writer only a fortnight before the General Strike wrote in the same paper dated April 16th, 1925 :

"Is it merely a stiffly argued dialogue to which we are listening, or is it the prelude to a violent melodrama of action? . . . All of us have been waiting for the protagonists to speak. Silence within the Labour Movement has become a test of loyalty. This reserve was inevitable and within limits it was proper. It is not for outsiders to incite the miners to fight: still less is it their business to remind them of the risks they run."

Later he says that if the mineowners force a fight the whole Labour movement will render support to the miners, but this attitude of a political party being "an outsider," a spectator, characterised the whole I.L.P., and no preparations came from them. Indeed it did worse than nothing. When both the Labour Party and the I.L.P. were invited to make a united front with the Communist Party on the following issues both parties refused. The issues were :

1. Nationalisation of the Mines.
2. A living wage for the miners based on the cost of living.
3. 100 per cent. trade unionism.
4. Workers' Self-defence against the O.M.S.

The letters to both parties were sent early in March, 1926.

During the whole of this period the Communist Party and the Minority Movement were alone in striving for adequate preparations to be made. With few exceptions even the miners' leaders were content to drift with the rest of the trade unions. The lines advocated by Communists and the Minority Movement, while the rest were waiting for the Coal Commission's Report and another trump card to slip from Mr. Baldwin's sleeve, were definite and clear. An Executive Committee meeting of the Communist Party held on January 9th and 10th, 1926, issued the following programme of action and all its succeeding actions were devoted to carrying it through.

M A N I F E S T O

The present industrial situation and the crisis looming ahead fully justify the Communist Party's warning to the workers that the capitalist class is determined to return to the offensive, on an even more gigantic scale than last July.

The miners, after the breathing space bought for the owners by the means of a subsidy, and the sham impartiality of the Coal Commission, are now threatened with an open attack on the seven-hour day, on the Miners' Federation and on wages.

The owners have thrown disguise to the winds.

The attack on the miners is the most violent and unashamed: but workers in most of the industries are faced with similar attacks.

The railwaymen are threatened with wage cuts; the engineers with longer hours; the builders with abolition of craft control won by years of sacrifice.

Coupled with this, nearly two million workers remain unemployed. By artificial and brutal administrative restrictions, thousands have been struck off the register, and refused unemployment benefit. They have become completely dependent on the Poor Law authorities, and the crushing burden of maintaining this huge army of reserve workers against possible strikes or lock-outs falls entirely upon local taxation.

These facts, taken together with the steady, if unobtrusive organisation of the O.M.S., point to a definite determination on the part of the British capitalists to prevent a repetition of Red Friday, to challenge the organised Labour movement and smash it, and to drive the workers down to coolie conditions. By this means they hope to achieve the impossible task of stabilising their system, undermined by war,

ruin of foreign markets, chaos in production, and hideous exploitation of colonial workers.

The struggle now opening is of a magnitude hitherto unknown. But this enlarged meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party believes that the workers can meet the capitalist attack and smash it, as on Red Friday.

More: we believe that the British workers can turn their defensive into an offensive, and present a common demand for better conditions which will be the prelude to a complete victory over the capitalists.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party declares that the following steps are urgently necessary in order to ensure that the workers' forces are properly organised against the capitalist attack, and instructs all Party members to regard a campaign for those measures as their main and immediate tasks in their respective trade unions:

1. Summoning by the General Council of a **Conference of Trade Union E.C.'s** in accordance with Scarborough decisions, to give wider power to the G.C. to lead the whole workers' industrial army.
2. In addition to the campaign for granting full E.C. powers to the G.C., the completion of the **Workers' Industrial Alliance**, to reinforce the workers' defensive preparations against the coming crisis, and in particular the inclusion of the N.U.R., A.E.U., Boilermakers' and General Workers, etc.
3. A working agreement between **the G.C. and the C.W.S.**, to ensure provisioning the workers, and a policy of mutual support between the two National centres of the T.U. and Co-operative movements, the T.U.C. and the Co-operative Union.
4. Formation of **Factory Committees** elected by all workers irrespective of craft or sex, in accordance with the Scarborough resolution, to ensure unity of the workers from the bottom, and the calling by the Trades Councils and District Committees of conferences to ensure union support for these committees.
5. A national campaign for **100 per cent. trade unionism**, including a National Show Cards week. Special attention to be paid to bringing all young workers, including apprentices, into the unions.
6. Organisation of **Workers' Defence Corps**, composed of trade unionists, and controlled by Trades Councils, to protect trade union liberties against the Fascisti, and calling upon the General Council to take steps to place the workers' case before the workers in the Army, Navy and Air Forces.
7. Formulation of a **common Programme** for the whole movement (£4 a week for 44 hours), supplementary to the

special demands of each industry (Railway All-Grades Programme, Miners' Cost-of-living Scale, Engineers 20s. demand, etc.).

8. The strengthening of the relations between the G.C. and N.U.W.C.M. in order to secure the realisation of the **unemployed** demands, as a counter to the capitalist attempt to force the unemployed into blacklegging.

The Central Committee instructs the Political Bureau to pursue this policy, to strength its support of the N.U.W.C.M. and the Minority Movement, and to direct the efforts of the Party members throughout the Labour Movement, in such a manner as to ensure the most complete unity of all working class forces in resisting the latest attack of the employers, and in transforming each resistance into an irresistible advance which shall help completely to shatter the power of capitalism.

In particular this Enlarged Executive declares that the Industrial Crisis emphasises the correctness of the Party Policy, in insisting upon the transformation of the Party on to a factory group basis, by the formation of militant Party groups in every factory, pit and workshop, and upon greater attention being paid to the functioning and extension of our Party fractions in trade unions and Trades Councils. The Political Bureau should strengthen its work among women.

* * * * *

To the miners it set forth a minimum programme which it urged them to place not only before the Coal Commission but to make it the basis of their immediate struggle.

1. No lengthening of hours.
2. No District Agreements, which means the smashing of the M.F.G.B.
3. No reductions in wages.
4. Wages on cost of living basis.

Then it threw its energies into the efforts of the Minority Movement to organise the special National Conference of Action for March 21st, 1926. In spite of the rebuffs of the I.L.P. and the Labour Party the efforts of the Communist Party and the Minority Movement were an unbounded success. 883 delegates, representing 547 organisations, inclusive of fifty-two Trades Councils, were present. These represented, all told, approximately one million workers. Following the lead of the Communist Party it passed a comprehensive resolution which reads :

The preparations for the capitalist offensive assume ever larger dimensions. The present industrial position is full of menace and the attack threatens to be the most colossal in the history of the working class movement.

Just as last July, so to-day it is imperative that all the forces of the working class movement should be mobilised under one central leadership to repel the attack and to secure the demands of every section of the workers.

Once again the General Council must take the lead: once again the entire movement must be gathered together for the fight.

This Conference of Action, therefore, calls upon all supporters of the Minority Movement and the workers generally to:

(1) Urge each Trades Council to constitute itself a Council of Action by mobilising all the forces of the working class movement in its locality: (the trade union branches, the organised unemployed, the Co-operative Guilds, and the workers' political organisations); by organising 100 per cent. trade unionism; special attention to be paid to the organisation of young workers and a campaign be commenced to organise the unorganised women workers; building up workshop organisation; by calling special conferences of affiliated members; by holding continuous mass demonstrations in support of the sections attacked; by bringing pressure to bear on the local authorities to secure relief for those rendered destitute during the struggles; by establishing as far as means permit a commissariat department in conjunction with the local co-operatives; by using every means to bring all the workers, men and women, organised and unorganised into the struggle.

(2) Urge the General Council immediately to convene a National Congress of Action, at which plans shall be prepared for:

(a) The complete scientific utilisation of the whole trade union movement in the struggle.

(b) Securing the co-operation of the co-operative organisations.

(c) Securing the active participation of the Parliamentary and National Labour Parties in the organisation of the struggle by placing themselves at the disposal of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress.

(d) Urging the General Council of the Trades Union Congress to take steps to ensure the full support of the International Trade Union Movement for the struggle of the British working class.

That Impartial Commission.

Meanwhile the Coal Commission sat and it reported. Who are the Coal Commission, do you ask? I beg to introduce the gentlemen of the Coal Commission, selected for their acumen as bankers and economists. (That was to ensure their "impartiality.")

Chairman :

Right Honourable Sir Herbert Samuel, P.C., G.B.E. Educated Balliol College, Oxford. Postmaster-General, 1910-1914; late High Commissioner of Palestine. Brother of Sir Stuart Montagu Samuel, Baronet, of the banking firm of Samuel Montagu and Co.

Members :

General Hon. Sir H. Lawrence. Retired from Army, 1922. Managing partner of Glyn, Mills and Co., bankers. Director of Vickers, Ltd., London, Midland and Scottish Railway, Electric Holdings, Limited, seven other companies, including three foreign banks.

Sir William Beveridge, K.C.B. Educated Balliol College, Oxford. Formerly leader writer for the "Morning Post." Later in Board of Trade. Invented Labour Exchanges, now Director of London School of Economics.

Kenneth Lee, Esq., textile capitalist. Chairman of Tootal, Broadhurst, Lee and Co., Ltd., and of the District Bank.

This august body held 33 public sittings for the taking of evidence and examined 76 witnesses. They also "caused to be inspected on our behalf 42 mines, in various parts of the country, selected by the Miners' Federation as offering special grounds for complaint, on account of hindrances to output due to inefficient management or other causes." They also visited 25 mines in Lancashire, Scotland, Yorkshire and South Wales and inspected parts of the underground workings of several of these. Out of this mass of evidence and experience they presented their report.

Whatever else may be said about the Commission it could be guaranteed in advance against any socialistic recommendations. Besides the current problems of the industry it was faced with the necessity of undoing the work of the Sankey Commission. The latter had already asserted that the condition of the mining industry warranted the Government

of the day taking action to nationalise the mines. If there was one recommendation more than another which the Samuel Commission could be guaranteed in advance not to endorse it was that of nationalisation. But it could be guaranteed to examine thoroughly the economics of the industry and bring forward such recommendations as would be in accord with the interests of the banks and big industry.

What was the problem they had to tackle? In a previous chapter I have already shown the basis of the conflict between the mineowners and the miners in terms of wages and profits and hours of labour. But the incidence of the struggle remains to be explained. Two things were noticeable in the figures given. First that the total profits of the industry were lucrative, and the mineowners had done exceedingly well over a number of years. Whatever the difficulties of the industry they had succeeded in transferring them on to the backs of the miners. How they had transferred them is revealed in the variable district rates of wages.

The fact that there are district rates of wages at once brings us to the peculiarities of the industry which distinguish it from other industries. The coalfields themselves vary in many ways—in the kind of coal, serviceable for import or export, in the geological difficulties attending its exploitation, in the age of the mining operations, etc., and the multitude of owners with varying capital at their disposal. The total number of separate collieries is about 3,150 owned by about 1,500 separate concerns, who endeavour to run the pits as separate entities governed by their own peculiar conditions. The only thing about which there appears to be any unanimity on a national scale is their common determination to maintain their “own business” and keep the miners in subjection.

The businesses vary in size and equipment, age and methods of work. According to evidence of the M.F.G.B. to the Commission, 154 of the more important collieries, having an output of 300,000 tons or over, have 852 directors' seats which were actually held by 587 separate individuals. Of the 587 individuals, 361 were not only concerned in colliery companies, but were also directors of 869 other companies. The actual dead weight of cramping conservatism weighing upon the industry can therefore be well appreciated. Each concern struggles against absorption by the others, yet

when they combined together against the miners they naturally sought to make terms which would keep the worst of them going at a profit, a process to which the better equipped did not object because it helped to guarantee bigger profits to them. Of all the industries of Britain it is questionable whether there is one where the contradictions are more numerous and the conservatism of the owners is stronger. And behind the present struggle is a century of struggle wherein the miners have steadily fought their way up against this conservatism to the point of national organisation, convinced that their only hope lies in the nationalisation of the mines.

The problems attendant on these struggles the Commission had to face and at the same time avoid justifying the miners' demand for nationalisation of the mines. It proceeded to examine the home and export trade on the principle of "seeing what the market demanded." They came to the conclusion that the trouble did not lie in the home market, apart from the amount of coal used in the manufacture of pig iron which had fallen 7 per cent. as compared with 1913, and the amount used for ships' bunkers which had fallen from 19.6 million tons annually in the pre-war years to 16.2 millions in 1925. The latter they attributed to the general fall in foreign coal trade and the increased use of oil for shipping.

They say :

"We may estimate the extent of the change by comparing the gross tonnage of vessels registered by Lloyds as being fitted for burning oil, which rose from 1½ millions before the war to 20½ millions in 1925. Meanwhile the corresponding figures for coal burning vessels fell from 44 to 42 millions."

Nevertheless they were of the opinion that both the amount for bunkers and the amount for the iron and steel industry were affected by the "general depression."

Then they had to face the question of the export trade. Here they came to the following conclusions :

1. "The depression in the British coal export trade (which had fallen from 88.7 million tons in 1913 to 68.9 million tons in 1925), is, in the main part of a general depression, affecting almost all European coal-producing countries: an excess of supply over demand caused partly by the impoverishment of customers, partly by the development of new coalfields and partly by the increased use of substitutes.

2. "To a lesser extent it is due to the competition of foreign countries with us in the coal export trade, especially that of Germany."

The latter conclusion it fails to establish with any degree of satisfaction. For according to the Westminster Bank Review for September, 1925, the British proportion of total world coal exports was 50 per cent. in 1913, 60 per cent. in 1922 and 55 per cent. in 1924. There is no indication in these figures that there is a grave necessity to cut prices, unless it is the intention of the British coal exporters to set the pace in cut-throat competition. The Commission hides this fact in an array of figures showing that the British share of the world's total coal consumption has fallen from 9.8 per cent. to 7 per cent. in ten years. The scare about German competition, if it means anything at all, is at bottom an outcry against the effects of reparations coal, which has heavily hit British coal exports to Italy and France. A further fact which is passed over without comment is that South Africa and Australia, two important sections of the Empire, have along with Japan swept British coal out of the Australasian and Far Eastern markets. Had the Commission had courage enough to tell the truth they would have said "The British Coal Industry is not only hampered by Conservative stupid coal owners, but it is now paying the price of victory in the war for the growth of important colonies into coal exporting countries and the intensification of the contradictions within capitalism which accompany its growth throughout the world."

But the crisis they call "a depression," the competition is accepted as a thing of divine creation which must not be tampered with, and uncomfortable facts concerning the Empire and the results of their own policy they gloss over as of little account. Then they proceed to unload themselves upon British industry to see what they can do to intensify the process that has brought them to the present state of affairs. To the coalowners they address themselves as "gentlemen of the family in trouble" and urge them to adopt more up-to-date methods of exploitation and competition. Supporting big business as true bankers usually do they urge the swallowing of the little concerns, the trustification of the industry and the transformation of royalty owners into bond holders. They prove with a mass of figures that large industry is

superior to small industry, take the employers to task (gently of course) for not having taken a deeper interest in research work, and tell them all about what is being done in other countries.

Turning their attention to the miners they discuss learnedly the differences in wage rates, go through the schedules in detail and elaborate the peculiarities of the industry which I have already mentioned, and whilst talking of a national settlement weight the scales in the direction of district settlements. They discuss the question of the hours of labour and whilst saying they do not recommend a lengthening of hours proceed to elaborate the need for a reshuffling of hours, changes in the shift system, etc., that would in effect lead inevitably to the longer working day. Finally after juggling with the wage scales, toying with the question of family allowances, talking about pit-head baths and co-operative selling and other nice things that have gone the rounds of Labour and Socialist circles for years, they come regretfully but firmly to the conclusion that the subsidy must come to an end and wages must be reduced.

Equally emphatic was its rejection of the Labour Party's proposals, placed before the Commission in the name of the Miners' Federation, the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party. These were founded on the basis of nationalisation and ran as follows :—

“We suggest that the coal industry should become an organisation for mining coal, manufacturing electrical power on a very large scale, making both coke and smokeless fuel, oils, ammonium compounds, chemical base materials from tars and other by-products.

“We propose that this transformed industry should be nationally owned.”—“The Labour Magazine,” Feb. 1926.

On the basis of this plan they erected a kind of Guild Socialist plan, ranging from commissions answerable to the Board of Trade, national councils, and provincial councils, to pit and works committees and so on. In fact quite a delightful utopia. But I must not forget to mention the scheme included transforming royalty owners into bond holders and the State finally having the royalties.

The Commission directed itself mainly to the question of nationalisation. It used evidence submitted by the

M.F.G.B. and gave a reply which should be pondered over by the workers and all those who think of the mechanical development of capitalism through nationalisation to Socialism. The evidence of the miners said :

“It appears that the typical coal mining concern is becoming more and more a complex unit. In some cases it is becoming a unit which so far transcends ordinary industrial divisions that it can only be described as a heavy industry unit.”

The Commission said : “We concur in this analysis. We believe that in the future coal mining will be found to have become an integral part of the great industrial complex, which will comprise also electricity, smokeless fuel, gas, oil, chemical products, blast furnaces, and possibly other activities.” Then it went on :

“But the scheme suggested does not propose to nationalise at this stage or for an indefinite time in the future, any part of the vast combination which is being gradually evolved, except the mines themselves and those coking plants which are situated at the collieries. . . . By removing these mines into State ownership, the very sections of industry which already approach the standards that are likely to prevail in the future would be the most injured. Existing combinations would be disintegrated, and a serious obstacle would be raised against further integrations.”

This says plainly that the problem of nationalisation of any large industry raises at once the whole question of class power, which the Labour Party and the Trade Union leaders as yet refuse to face.

The Commission turned down nationalisation. Naturally. That is one of the things it came into existence to do. But it presented a report which toyed so much with the trimmings of the Labour Party schemes that had not the mineowners been stupid bunglers or parties to the Government plan to get a General Strike they could have had the Labour movement divided against itself to such an extent that the miners would never have got the unanimous support which they did get, and the General Strike would have been impossible.

Labour Attitude to the Report.

When the Report was issued Mr. Baldwin adopted a hush hush policy, begging that before anybody ventured to say anything further they would read this lengthy document, and study it in detail. The General Council and the Miners'

leaders together begged that there should be silence pending the study of the document and the publishing of an official statement. Mr. MacDonald said :

“The report is a conspicuous landmark in the history of political thought, and is indeed one of the strongest indictments of private enterprise that has ever been issued as an official paper. . . . The stars in their courses are fighting for us. . . . The miners’ leaders have very wisely advised that tongues should be silent for the time being. . . .”—“Forward,” March 19th, 1926.

Six weeks from May 1st!

Mr. Henderson, Secretary of the Labour Party said :

“That provided that any further degradation of the standard of life of those who produced coal under great risk and exceptional trying conditions was avoided, he believed that within the limits of the report something could be done to restore the prosperity of the industry.”

Mr. Cramp, Chairman of the Labour Party and Industrial Secretary of the N.U.R. addressed himself to the railways side of the Report and said :

“National problems had to be faced more in the spirit of national efficiency. . . .”—(Edinburgh, March 12th, 1926.)

The I.L.P. organ “The New Leader” said on March 12th 1926 :

“The reading of the Coal Commission’s Report has affected us as no printed words have affected us since Sir Edward Grey addressed the House of Commons on that fatal Monday in August, 1914. Its tone, like his, is judicial. It holds the balance between the contending sides. . . . Each side must make its reckoning. The miners know the risks of resistance when the market is fatally against them and their war chest is empty. But they also know that the railwaymen were with difficulty turned back from a strike the other day, and that the engineers are also challenged. The strike if it comes, cannot fail to be bitter, and general and revolutionary in its character. The opposing forces reckon on a victory won by starvation of the workers and violence of their semi-Fascist organisations. . . .

“Our own view is, that while it prepares with all its courage and steadfastness for a decisive struggle, the Labour Movement should address itself first of all to the good sense and the corporate conscience of the nation. For the sake of a sister people, in peril, this nation shouldered in 1914, a colossal burden. It loaded itself with debt. It taxed itself with stern severity. A subsidy means that it should recognise for a time the claims of men who are its kith and kin,

a part of itself, the very source of its life and power. To aid them through the period of re-organisation means at the worst a trifling addition to income-tax or super-tax. Will it accept the duty of solidarity or will it call for industrial war?"

Some preparation for a revolutionary struggle!

* * * * *

The answer of the Communist Party was :

"The report of the Coal Commission is a political document of first-class importance. The contentions of the Communist Party have been, once again, vindicated. Their contention that the Commission was only a subterfuge to cloak the preparations for an attack on the wages and conditions of the miners is amply borne out by this report.

Red Friday.

"Ever since the tremendous and magnificent display of solidarity by the workers on Red Friday, 1925, the employing class have used every device to split the working class into isolated sections. They were particularly successful in creating friction between the engineers and the building trades over the question of steel houses. They attempted the separation of the railwaymen by the Award of the National Wages Board. Their ultimatum to the engineering trades over the question of Hoe's is yet another incident revealing the strategy of the capitalist class.

"In each of these partial conflicts the workers have lost ground. In the case of steel houses the wage standards of the building trades are threatened. In the case of the railwaymen two grades of workers will be doing equal work for unequal pay. In the case of the engineers, after two years' negotiations, for an improved standard, they are threatened with the lock-out and extended hours of labour.

"And now the miners are faced definitely with reductions of wage scales which are already much below subsistence level.

Wage Cuts.

"Reduction of wages—that is the cardinal point of the Report, which lays bare the full class character of the struggle and demonstrates that there is no alternative which does not involve either an attack on wages and hours or an attack on existing capitalist ownership.

"The Commission's Report is a declaration of war against the miners and the whole working class movement by the capitalist class, with the full power of the State machine mobilised at their back.

"The Commission's proposal to withdraw the subsidy will mean an almost total cessation of the export trade with the closing of pits and unemployment resulting.

Purpose of Subsidy.

"The subsidy has served its purpose well; it not only staved off the clash of forces last July. It was even more useful to the capitalist class in regaining European markets, giving them and their European colleagues a level by which to drive down still further the conditions of the European workers—who in turn they hope to use as a lever to worsen the conditions of the British workers. Finally, it gave them a breathing space in which to mobilise all their forces for an open struggle against the workers.

"To maintain their export trade without the subsidy will entail a far greater reduction of working costs than the proposed reduction from 33 per cent. to 20 per cent. over the basic rates. The proposed reduction of the higher rated men to assist in maintaining the wages of the lower paid workers would result in reducing wages to the pre-war level, or even lower.

Fake "Nationalisation."

"The sop of the proposed nationalisation of mining royalties (estimated as it is to cost £100,000,000) will only mean the alteration of rent receivers into interest receivers. It will operate for some time to come only in those areas which are at present undeveloped. It falls into the same category as the proposed municipal retailing of coal, the suggested family endowment, and the pithead baths, etc. All are attempts at bribing various sections who have been advocating these reforms and so detaching them from any united action of the working class against the capitalist offensive.

Dangers Ahead.

"The miners are faced with two dangers to-day.

"In the first place there is the direct offensive of the capitalist class, who mean to abolish the last remnants of the national minimum and national agreements, to set district against district, collier against surface worker, so that a decadent system of private enterprise may continue to draw life from the living bodies of miners, their wives and children.

"The second danger comes from the existence of Labour leaders who are obsessed with the idea of uniting all classes and speaking of the interests of 'the community as a whole' that they fail to defend the workers they represent. Around them will be gathered all the doctrinaire intellectuals, with their utopian theories, who have been attracted to the Labour movement. With them, too, will be all the vacillating elements on the fringe of the working class movement. All these will make their appeals and address their little questions and votes of censure to the capitalist class and bid the workers be reasonable.

"From these elements the working class can expect every hindrance and little or no help.

Power.

“The question which has to be faced by the working class can only be answered by the working class. It is the question of power.

“That there is power in the hands of the working class if they care to take it was demonstrated last July. To-day the need for a united front of the whole working class under the direction of the General Council of the T.U.C. is apparent. For six years the Labour Movement talked about united support for the miners. Only on one day, Red Friday, July 31st, has that unity been translated into unity of action, and then in a few hours it compelled the Government to retreat.

Action, Now.

“To-day we need no phrases about unity, but united action. The Communist Party calls on all organised workers, miners, engineers, railwaymen and others to use the weapon of their fighting strength, the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, and through the united front of all workers press forward the minimum claims of all workers as a direct counter challenge to this latest move in the capitalist offensive.”

* * * * *

With this declaration it went ahead with a campaign of exposure and preparation for the struggle with the aid of the Minority Movement along the lines indicated in the Minority conference decisions already mentioned. Meanwhile during the same week the General Council of the Trades Union Congress sent out a communication dealing with the resolution submitted to it by the Scarborough Congress which proposed that the General Council be granted powers to :

“(1) Levy all affiliated members.

(2) Call for a stoppage of work by any affiliated organisation to assist a union defending vital trade union principles.

(3) Arrange with the Co-operative Wholesale Society for the distribution of food, etc., in time of strike.”

It thought “that events at some future time might render it necessary . . . to apply for additional powers . . . but the Council is of the opinion that the powers already invested in them with regard to intervention in disputes are as effective as can be reasonably exercised at the present time.”

Six weeks from a General Strike!

Hastening Events.

The miners waited for something to turn up. The Trades Union Congress waited for something to turn up. The Labour Party waited; the I.L.P. which leads the Labour Party waited. The Government left them all waiting with the cryptic comment that if both sides could agree to accept the Coal Commission Report then the Government would adopt it. The Government thus kept its hands free and its departments busy preparing for the General Strike. By his non-committal attitude Mr. Baldwin, whilst playing the rôle of errand boy to the mineowners, gave the impression that he had some card up his sleeve ready to play when the others failed. He had, but not the one the Labour Leaders were looking for or prepared for.

The miners kept up the campaign of no reductions of wages, no lengthening of working hours and no district settlements but hitched their claims on to the Coal Commission's statement, which said :

“Before any sacrifices were asked from those engaged in the industry it should be definitely agreed between them that all practicable means for improving the organisation of the industry and increasing its efficiency should be adopted as speedily as the circumstances allow.”

The continual reference to this paragraph was a mistake for it permitted MacDonald, Thomas and others of the General Council to infer that at some point the miners were prepared to consider a reduction in wages. This should have never been permitted and the consequences we shall see later.

But whether we approach the question of wages, of hours or of the forms of agreement we find everyone approaching the question and the developing crisis as simple out-of-date unionists who did not appreciate the magnitude of the weapons they had forged and were forging or the implications of their use, or the necessary preparations which logically followed. This is the most generous of interpretations of their failures. It is impossible to apply it to all and especially the political leaders who were participating. MacDonald knew what was developing. So did Thomas, Bevin, Hicks, Purcell, Bromley, Pugh, Tillett, Henderson, Smith and Cook. Indeed it is difficult to make a single exception of the leaders who were in the midst of negotiations and actually invested

with the responsibilities of the situation. Yet from amongst them all we can only point to Cook who incessantly agitated for preparations to be made for the revolutionary implications of the struggle. Although the General Council met on March 25th and endorsed the attitude of the miners to the Coal Commission's Report and the questions already mentioned, and *again endorsed* the miners after the Federation had met on April 18th, 1926, and although lock-out notices were posted against the miners on April 15th, 1926, the following extracts of speeches will indicate the line pursued by those holding leading positions.

Remember when reading these speeches that with the posting of the lock-out notices the mineowners had also posted up the following terms of re-employment.

The following figures are taken from the statement of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Similar reductions were demanded in other districts.

Wages per Shift.

				Old Terms		New Terms		Reduction	
				s	d	s	d	s	d
Scotland :									
Coal hewers	...	...	...	9	4	7	6	1	10
Brushers	...	...	...	9	4	7	6	1	10
Labourers	...	...	...	6	8½	6	0		8½
Northumberland :									
Hewers	...	...	...	10	0	7	7	2	9
Storemen	...	...	...	8	0	6	0	2	0
Wastemen	...	...	...	7	7½	4	9	2	10½
Labourers	...	...	...	7	7½	4	9	3	1½
Durham :									
Hewers	...	...	...	9	8	6	10	2	10
Wastemen	...	...	...	7	6½	4	5¾	3	0¾
Labourers	...	...	...	7	6½	4	11¾	2	6¾
South Wales :									
Hewers	...	...	...	9	9¼	7	2½	2	6¾
Labourers	...	...	...	8	0¾	(6	8*	1	4¾
						(5	9†	2	3¾
Labourers (late shifts)	...	...	...	48	4	(33	4*	15	0†
			(for 5 shifts)			(28	9†	19	7†
Yorkshire :									
Hewers	...	...	...	10	7½	9	6¾	1	0¾
Labourers	...	...	...	9	6½	8	9		9½

* Married men.

† Single men.

‡ per week.

It will be seen at once that the mineowners meant business and why they were so keen on district settlements. Here was a deliberate effort to divide off export areas from the others and to play one district against another. But let the leaders say their say. Mr. Thomas speaking in Monmouthshire on April 18th, said :

“To talk at this stage as if in a few days all the workers of the country are to be called out is not only letting loose passions that it will be difficult to control, but it is not rendering the best service to the miners or anyone else. Therefore, instead of organising, mobilising, and encouraging the feeling that war is inevitable, let us concentrate on finding a solution honourable and satisfactory to all sides. There can be no doubt of the gravity of the situation, there can be no doubt of the consequences that would follow a stoppage, and because of the seriousness of it, it is in the interests of all to work for peace.”

Mr. MacDonald speaking at Maesteg, South Wales, on April 23rd, 1926, said :

“The owners as well as the men know that a reduction in wages, a crude, unscientific reduction in wages, will not solve the mining problem. . . (Presumably a ‘Scientific reduction’ would—J.T.M.). He went on to say both sides should come together and then the presiding individual should say ‘Now we have the facts, will you two sides come to an agreement with me as to how that situation could be handled, and I am going to see that the national interests alone are considered and not sectional interests.’”

Seven days before the Strike!

* * * * *

And these are characteristic of the manner in which the leaders led up to the General Strike situation. But the miners have also an international organisation and the international secretary is Mr. Frank Hodges, who has had many “adventures as a Labour leader,” including that of being the Secretary of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain. It was now on the boards that the British miners would look to the Miners’ International for help at the coming meeting called for April 16th. So listen to Mr. Hodges, speaking at a luncheon of the Nottingham City Business Club on April 9th :

“The recommendations of the Commission were good in the main. They looked upon the industry in the right perspective. . . . Leadership of trade unionism was not neces-

sarily confined to finding strategical means of getting improved wages or better conditions. The main object of a leader should be to see that his industry was so ordered that it would yield automatically better wages and conditions. . . . If it were put to him as to whether he would accept a reduction in wages or a temporary readjustment of the working day he would accept the latter. . . . Everyone of the Commission's recommendations breathes the possibility of prosperity and it must be our clear duty not to wreck the industry now at this critical period so long as there is the possibility of prosperity before us in the future. . . ."

So the days flitted by with no preparations for the stoppage other than the conduct of ordinary trade union routine. Employers and Government toyed first with district settlements, then with the hours question, then with the wages again, but never getting anywhere near a "settlement," and the leaders danced incessant attendance upon the Government and the Owners always feeling they were on the verge of a discovery of a formula under Mr. Baldwin's hat. Even Cook went to the extent of contrasting Baldwin with "Jix," as if both were not members of a single cabinet pursuing a definite policy.

The Miners' International met at Brussels and agreed to support the British Miners in the event of a stoppage. The Transport Workers' International met on the 14th April and agreed to render assistance by enforcing an embargo on the export of coal to Britain in the event of a stoppage. The Red International of Labour Unions sent the following letter to the Amsterdam International with a view to mustering the maximum of forces behind the British miners.

April 24, 1926.

"Dear Comrades,—As you are aware, the R.I.L.U. has proposed to the International Federation of Trade Unions that joint assistance and support be organised for the mine workers of Britain, on the grounds that the forthcoming struggle would definitely be of an International character and importance.

"In reply to this proposal, the R.I.L.U. received the following answer: 'The I.F.T.U. is already collaborating with the Trades Union Congress one of its affiliated centres, on the mining crisis.' This reply rejects the proposal made in all good faith to unify all forces to assist the British miners in their fight against the mineowners.

"Their reply was not based upon the interests of the

British miners, and may do much harm, not only to the British workers, but to the proletariat of the world.

"The R.I.L.U. has called on all its affiliated sections to render wholehearted support to the British miners. The All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions has already informed you that it will carry out its duty of international solidarity. The Russian miners, the miners of Czecho-Slovakia, and France, who are all supporters of the R.I.L.U., and the transport workers of various countries, have already signified their readiness to do everything possible to further the victory of the British miners.

"As a body representing the British Trade Union Movement, the General Council undoubtedly recognises the sincere desire of workers of all schools of thought to render assistance to the British miners, and to see that assistance practically and systematically organised.

"The Executive Bureau of the R.I.L.U., therefore, makes the following proposal to the General Council:

"The General Council, as the body interested in the British miners beating back the coalowners' attacks on the wages and working day, shall take the initiative in whatever manner it considers advisable, in convening an International Conference of all trade union organisations desirous of rendering assistance to the miners. This conference will be for the purpose of co-ordinating and most expeditiously arranging international support for the British miners.

"The British miners once again are facing a serious battle. Let us remember how during the miners' lock-out in 1921 the proposal of the R.I.L.U. to the Amsterdam International regarding a joint effort to assist the miners was turned down. The miners were defeated. This sad experience should have served as a lesson, yet the I.F.T.U. is repeating its action of 1921, subordinating the interests of the proletariat to what are plainly side issues.

"We are confident the British trade unions and the General Council, having taken the initiative in trying to establish world trade union unity, will view with disapproval the rejection of united action in a case of such importance to the working class.

"In view of the extreme importance and urgency of this question, and the tremendous responsibility which the approaching miners' struggle places on every working-class organisation, the Executive Bureau of the R.I.L.U. awaits a favourable answer to the above proposal.

"With fraternal greetings,

"Executive Bureau, Red International of Labour Unions,

" (Signed) LOZOVSKY."

This help was declined in the same way that the request for the united campaign made by the Communist Party in Britain had been declined. The Russian Co-operatives sent a resolution urging the International Co-operative Alliance to make efforts to render a united front of the trade unions and the Co-operatives' organisations behind the miners. This was declined because the Co-ops. were "neutral" in struggles of this kind. But there was no escape. The crisis deepened and Mr. Baldwin continued to run and to talk but never making a variation on the question of reducing wages.

Prayers for Peace.

April 29th arrived and with it the Special Conference of Executives of 200 unions, a proceeding similar to that of the preceding July, 1925, crisis. The miners' delegates were in national conference, too. They re-affirmed their attitude on wages, etc., but never faced up to the question of what to do in the event of other unions coming into the struggle. To them it would only be an extended trade union dispute. The special conference of the Trade Unions unanimously passed a resolution moved by Thomas :

"This conference of Executives of Trade Unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress endorses the efforts of the General Council to secure an honourable settlement of the differences in the coal mining industry.

"It further instructs the industrial Committee of the General Council to continue its efforts and declares its readiness for the negotiations to continue provided that the impending lock-out notices of the mineworkers are not enforced.

"That this conference hereby adjourns until to-morrow (Friday) and agrees to remain in London to enable the General Council to consult, report and take instructions."

The conference itself was quiet enough. It did not want to talk about a General Strike. It got angry when anybody mentioned it. It prayed for "peace," but it could not get away from its declarations *re* the wages of the miners. It sang songs. It listened to funny stories between reports. It sang "Lead, Kindly Light." The Communist Party had tried to give it light in a special appeal to the Conference, besides its constant efforts to get the trade unions to clear the decks for action. But it wasn't this kind of light they wanted. The Conference wanted some kind of intervention that would save them from any actions beyond another demon-

stration like that of July last year. So they just relied on their declarations of support to the miners and hoped for "something to turn up." If ever there was a body of people who were the victims of circumstance it was this drifting conference, that was suddenly to be galvanised to take a decision as far beyond its capacity to see through to its logical conclusion as anything could be.

The "Daily Herald" cried "No threats!" At first sight of the paper I thought Joynson-Hicks had been letting off steam once more and the "Daily Herald" was telling him that Labour would have none of it. But, oh dear no! Nothing of the sort. It was feeling very satisfied because Mr. Thomas had urged "no excitement" and had spoken like a real statesman, and Mr. Bevin had done likewise. It was pleased with the soft pedal and the assurances to the Government that whoever may be wicked enough to want to hit it, those associated with the "Herald" did not belong to this crowd. Mr. Pugh still regarded the position as "Hopeful."

Here began a series of incidents developing out of this atmosphere and unwillingness to struggle that rapidly paved the way to the betrayal of the workers even before the strike had begun. When the workers did strike they believed they were striking against the imposition of any reductions in wages. The slogan "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day," was the issue in the minds of the workers. But not so the leaders of the General Council and the Labour Party. Mr. MacDonald did not want a "crude reduction in wages." Mr. Thomas wanted the miners to "face the economic facts of the industry," and sought to get the Government and the miners to agree to reorganisation of the industry "which might involve reductions of wages" but not to make the reductions preliminary to reorganisation. But as soon as the reorganisation was "initiated" then the wage reductions were to be considered. His stand therefore was not against wage reductions but the particular moment at which it was advisable to introduce them. In short it was the old game of manœuvring the workers into a position where the leaders could face them with plea for "temporary sacrifices in the interests of the nation." Seizing upon the statement of Herbert Smith "that we will agree to discuss the Report page by page from end to end, even involving a reduction in wages, but we refuse, and still refuse, to say in ad-

vance that we will accept a reduction," he interpreted this to mean that there was a point at which the miners would accept a reduction and it was his business and that of his colleagues to get that point made clear, or at least the miners set on the track where they would be thoroughly compromised into accepting reductions.

This was the line the negotiators of the General Council and Labour Party were pursuing when the negotiations broke down—a line which opened the way for an early collapse of any strike movement that might be developed. Having pursued the line of looking for a compromise solution, they made the calling off of the strike contingent upon the re-opening of the negotiations and not upon the defence of the workers' wages. A Black Friday therefore was in actual operation before the General Strike was declared, and the latter would not have been declared at all but for the determination of the Government to provoke it. These developments and conclusions are revealed in the events of this day, Friday, April 30th, 1926.

The Final "Offer."

On this day, the mineowners tabled their final demands. They were "a uniform national minimum of 20 per cent. over 1914 standard (*i.e.*, 13 per cent. reduction) on a uniform eight-hour day (*i.e.*, increase of one hour per day) "Mr. Baldwin added that these terms were temporary and that the 1919 (Seven Hours Act) would remain on the Statute Book and there would be no legislation prepared for the working of the additional hours if the miners accepted the "offer." The Government also "would set up a commission not later than December 31st, 1929, to advise whether, as a result of reorganisation or better trade, or both, the condition of the coal industry had improved to the extent that makes reversion to the standard hours justifiable." These "offers" were bound up with the putting into operation of the reorganisation proposals of the Coal Commission.

The miners replied to the Prime Minister :

30th April, 1926.

"Dear Mr. Prime Minister.—The proposals of the coal owners delivered by messenger this afternoon (April 30th) have been considered by our Executive Committee, and also by the conference which, as you are aware, has been in

London since Wednesday, to which we are empowered to send the following reply :

“The miners note with regret that although the report of the Coal Commission was issued on the 6th March, 1926, the mineowners have only submitted a proposal for a National Wage Agreement and a national uniform minimum percentage so late as April 30th, at 6.15 p.m., when at least two-thirds of the mineworkers in the coalfield are already locked-out by the coalowners.

“The proposals, stated briefly, provide for a reversion to the minimum percentage of 1921, i.e., 20 per cent. on 1914 standard wages, which means a uniform reduction of 13½ per cent. of the standard wages of the miners, and, further is conditional upon the extension of the working day for over three years, such an adjustment to be reviewed after December, 1929.

“The reply of the miners, after considering the proposals in the light of the present situations, is, therefore, as follows :

“They are unanimously of the opinion that the proposals cannot be accepted, but, on the other hand, feel that the statement of proposals submitted (as enclosed) of the Trades Union Congress affords a reasonable basis for negotiations and settlement.

“Our views on the question of extended hours are well known to you, and it is only necessary to say that the present hours,

(a) Are long enough to supply all the coal for which a market can be found ;

(b) Are as long as men should be expected to pursue such a dangerous and arduous calling ; and

(c) That to extend hours in present circumstances is simply to swell the ranks of the unemployed ;

(d) That to increase hours is to invite similar measures on the part of our foreign competitors ;

(e) That such a proposal is contrary to the findings of the Royal Commission.

“As to counter proposals, we can only say that we will co-operate to the fullest extent with the Government and the owners in instituting such re-organisation as is recommended by the Commission. Until such re-organisation brings greater prosperity to the industry, the miners should not be called upon to surrender any of their present inadequate wages and conditions.

“On behalf of the Miners' Federation, yours faithfully,

(Signed) HERBERT SMITH, President.

(Signed) T. RICHARDS, Vice-President,

(Signed) W. P. RICHARDSON, Treasurer.

(Signed) A. J. COOK, Secretary.

This letter was presented to the Prime Minister by the miners and the Negotiating Committee of the Trades Union Congress.

* * * * *

The apparent steadfastness of the miners against reductions and even against any proposals of reductions before "re-organisation brings greater prosperity" (when there would be no need for reductions), called forth questions from the Government as to whether the miners were prepared to accept the Coal Commission's recommendation in the interim of reorganisation. The Negotiation Committee secured the following reply from the miners :

"The miners are not prepared to accept a reduction of wages as a preliminary to re-organisation of the industry, but they reiterate that they will be prepared to give full consideration to all the difficulties connected with the industry when the schemes for such re-organisation will have been initiated by the Government."

I have underlined the word *initiated* for if the word means anything at all, it means that the miners had been tricked into a compromising position by the Negotiating Committee, and had the Government not been intent on a much bigger thing than defeating the miners they would have accepted this formula at once. *A Black Friday was placed in the Government's hands and they refused it because they were intent on reducing the trade union movement to impotence as completely as they had reduced the Labour Opposition in the House of Commons.*

No wonder the Trades Union Congress negotiators were angry with the Government. Had that statement been accepted at its face value they would have returned to the Trades Union Conference and declared that the day was won, the Government had climbed down, there would be no immediate reductions pending the initiation of the reorganisation of the mining industry, the concern of the miners for the "welfare of the industry and the nation" would have been stressed and their statements *re* "considering even a reduction in wages" after reorganisation, would have been used to illustrate their willingness to make a sacrifice in the national interests. Then immediately the Government had set up its first committees for reorganisation, and had called the attention of the miners and the Trades Union Congress to the final reply of the unions to the Government, stress would have been

laid on the word *initiate*, and what could the unions have said in view of this commitment? If the word *initiate* means anything at all it means *to begin* and once the Government could show the slightest evidence that they *had begun*, the unions perforce would again be compelled to consider the question of wages with the balance weighted against them by their own pledge to consider the difficulties of the industry. What chance under these circumstances would the miners have had either of a straight fight on the question, or of mustering the support of other unions manned by men who also did not want to fight?

It was the Government, intent on bigger game, which saved the miners' leaders from this course by immediately provoking the discussion on the meaning of the word "initiate" and the obvious shifting from the declared position of the Miners' Conference embodied in their letter to the Prime Minister. What did the miners mean? asked the Government, were they only seeking more definite assurances on re-organisation following temporary reductions, or did they mean they would accept no reductions until reorganisation had shown results? Herbert Smith, on behalf of the miners, of course, could not accept immediate reductions, and apparently had not thought that the statement implied that. The Black Friday deal was shattered. The Negotiating Committee appealed for a fortnight's suspension of the lock-out notices, pending further discussion. But there was nothing doing. Negotiations broke down. The delegations went back to the Conference at 11.30 p.m. Mr. Pugh told the Conference that negotiations had broken down on a "quibble over a mere phrase." Mr. Thomas said:

"Do you ask me at this stage what is the real meaning of the breakdown? I would say we have broken down on a phrase, nothing more nor less, a mere attempt to boggle with words after supreme efforts have been made. . . ."

Yes, on a phrase, but a phrase which meant *the defeat of the miners*.

The Strike Threat.

The Conference adjourned. It re-assembled on Saturday morning, May 1st. The first business was initiated by Mr. Pugh. He called the roll of the unions, asking the secretaries whether their Executives were agreed on *placing full powers in the hands of the General Council and carrying out*

the Council's instructions both regarding the conduct of the dispute and financial assistance. The answer was an almost unanimous decision of the Conference in favour, and six weeks ago the General Council had repudiated the necessity for this decision with May 1st staring them in the face!

Then followed Mr. Bevin. Mr. Bromley, Mr. Smith and Mr. MacDonald also addressed the Conference. Mr. Bevin outlined the organisational plans of the General Council, the limit of the "first line of defence." He declared that the war had been forced upon them and stressed how little inconvenience they really intended to the "community." Mr. MacDonald came down from star-gazing to criminology. "It is a crime against society" he cried, "this decision of the Government to fight against the standard of life of our people." He appealed for a renewal of negotiations and promised to "raise the matter on the floor of the House of Commons;" the miners should be supported "until right and justice have been done."

Then Mr. Pugh put to the meeting "Was the action of the General Council approved?" The Conference shouted "Aye" "To the contrary?" There was no answer. And that finished the Conference proceedings. There had been no discussion of the plan of action. There was no discussion as to what should be the conditions of the termination of the strike. The union leaders simply fell back on the ordinary union routine to carry out mechanically the instructions which came along and left the whole conduct of the negotiations, terms of negotiations, terms of strike settlement, the duration and development of the strike entirely to the Black Friday gang who were bluffing the Conference as to their real line.

There was, however, one decision taken though which is worth placing on record in view of subsequent developments. It read :

"That in the event of . . . trade union agreements being placed in jeopardy it be definitely agreed that there will be no general resumption of work until those agreements are fully recognised."

Was there ever conference in the history of the workers anywhere, faced with such momentous questions so utterly unprepared, so damned muddle-headed, so easily tickled with sentimental gush, so completely blind to the realities of the

situation? Never! Nor did they dream of the magnitude of the effect of their decisions upon the great mass of workers which were to answer to the call they put out. Even when they had taken the decision they hardly believed they would be called upon to operate it in spite of the fact that the Government had already anticipated them and declared "a State of Emergency" by King's Proclamation two hours before.

The General Council issued a manifesto disclaiming responsibility for the threatened stoppage and urging renewal of negotiations. It issued its detailed instructions, explaining the definite limits of the first call to action. The railways, sea and road transport, and all dock, wharf, harbour and canal services, work on air transport and in railway repair shops, iron and steel production, part of the engineering works, part of the building trades, all the printing trades, had to cease on Monday night. Besides work in hospital clinics or work connected therewith, convalescent homes, sanatoria, etc., etc., the textile industries were to continue at work, electrical workers, many engineering workers, etc., were left as the second or third "line of defence."

But there were yet two days to elapse. "Hearts beat high" in the evening when the Negotiating Committee got into touch with the Government once more. It was evident that there was to be last minute "boggling" on the word "initiate" or its equivalent, an attempt to get out of the difficulty. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress had sent the following letter to the Prime Minister, although Herbert Smith had said to the Miners' Conference on Friday "We have got a clear understanding with the General Council that although we are handing this matter over to them, we must function with them from time to time. Any negotiations must be joint negotiations and any advice from either side must be considered jointly."

The letter to the Prime Minister reads :

1st May, 1926.

The Rt. Hon. Stanley Baldwin, M.P.,
10, Downing Street, Whitehall, S.W.1.

MINING LOCK-OUT.

"Dear Sir,

"I have to advise you that the Executive Committees of the Trade Unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress including the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, have decided to hand over to the General Council of the Trades

Union Congress, the conduct of the dispute, and the negotiations in connection therewith will be undertaken by the General Council.

"I am instructed to say that the General Council will hold themselves available at any moment should the Government desire to discuss the matter further.

"Yours faithfully,

WALTER M. CITRINE."

* * * * *

Hence the meetings once again. In the midst of them the Government, who never showed the slightest intention of coming to an agreement or they would have snatched at the "initiative" conversations with both hands, seized upon an incident to knock the bottom out of the conversations. The printers of the "Daily Mail," to their everlasting credit, took exception to a violent leading article directed against the workers and went on strike. The General Council negotiators knew nothing of it at the time, but the Government framed up a case on the basis of the incident to cut off all negotiations, and until there was an unconditional calling off of the General Strike order they would have nothing to do with the trade union leaders. Although they had already opened negotiations since the general strike decision, the Government made this farcical declaration, and accused the trade unions of challenging the constitution, of subversive acts, etc. There was no escape for the Labour leaders. The Government had determined to call their bluff and they had called it. The strike was on.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GENERAL STRIKE LAUNCHED.

The First Day. May 3rd.

MONDAY, May 3rd, was a memorable day. Excitement grew hourly. A thrill had gone through the whole of the working class movement when Saturday's decision was flashed throughout the country. The May Day demonstrations were inspired with the enthusiasm generated by the feeling that the solidarity of the workers was a reality that would now make itself felt as never before. There was no questioning of the wisdom of the decision of the Trades Union Conference. Was it not a conference of the most conservative of trade union bodies, the trade union executives? Were not the movers of the resolutions for action Mr. Bevin, Mr. Thomas, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Smith and Mr. Bromley? Was it not Mr. Pugh, most prominent of industrial pacifists, who had taken the vote?

Here was no conference of "hot-heads." Here were no "revolutionaries intent on setting the Thames on fire." The only spokesman who might be accused of being tainted with revolutionary sympathies was Bromley, and he had evidently been put on to show that the rivalry between Thomas and Bromley was dropped for the strike. No one could say this time that the trade unions had been jockeyed by the "Reds." As a matter of fact the Communist Party itself was caught by surprise. It had not expected so great a decision from such a conference; although it had agitated for the fullest possible support and common action on the part of the unions, it had expected at the most, at this stage, a repetition of the July 1925 decision. In a manifesto sent to the press on the Friday and published in the "Sunday Worker," May 2nd, it said:

"The General Council's request for power to call out every industry will not move the Government unless accompanied by action. Such action can only be an immediate embargo on transport of coal or blacklegs and a stoppage of the lying capitalist press."

I was in the Sheffield Labour Party's office when the news was received of the General Strike decision. There were present most of the leaders of the local Trades and Labour

Council, chairman, secretary, executive members, organisers, and one and all said "Splendid!" And then first one and then another remarked "I was afraid that they would drag on these conversations too long." Workers walking along the streets were saying, "Wonderful! They mean to wipe out Black Friday this time."

They did not know of the arguments about the word "*initiate*." They did not know that at the very moment they were springing into action and renewing a confidence in some of the leaders, conversations were on once again and the Negotiating Committee were acting without the miners in efforts to find a formula which would get the miners committed to a reduction of wages. They did not know that Thomas and MacDonald were "grovelling" to get out of the responsibilities of their call to action. They did not understand that "Black Friday" had already been put across prior to the General Strike decision, that the Government was well aware that they had got the General Council Negotiating Committee well in hand and could use it more and more to defeat the strike the moment it desired. They looked upon the decision as an expression of the will to fight the boss, to fight against reductions in wages, "crude" or otherwise, and not as a piece of bluff that the Government had determined to explode. Thinking thus, they with an unanimity unparalleled in British Labour history began on May 3rd packing their tools and moving into the streets.

Monday was a day of preparations everywhere. Just as the General Council had failed to prepare so also the whole of the trade union movement. It was a case of improvisation all along the line, and the beginning of a general discovery of the inadequacy of the decisions and instructions of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and Union Executives. The first blunder that made itself apparent lay in the multiplicity of orders that were pouring into the districts. In spite of the decision that all power lay in the hands of the General Council, the latter body sent out its instructions through the separate union executives with the result that each union in the districts was at first acting on its own, and the Trades Councils had to face an immense problem of co-ordination with many trade union officials simply refusing to recognise any instructions which did not come direct from their union executives.

Had it not been for the prompt line of action taken by the Left Wing forces and the Communist Party the utmost confusion would have been maintained for days. But the continuous propaganda of these bodies for the transformation of the Trades Councils into Councils of Action co-ordinating all the forces in the struggle, for the formation of Workers' Defence Corps, for the establishment of the closest working arrangements between the Councils and the Co-operative movement, now came into its own. The Communist Party and the Minority Movement issued particular instructions to their members as to how to apply themselves to the immediate situation. The "Sunday Worker" played its part on May 2nd in the same direction. On May 3rd the Communist Party issued the "Workers' Daily" containing these instructions in a considered statement which read, after outlining the forces with which the workers would have to contend :

"The Trades and Labour Council in each town should summon a special meeting to erect the Council of Action. No Labour organisation can be barred from representation. It should be representative of all working class political, industrial, co-operative and unemployed organisations.

"Committees and sub-committees should be elected to take over the various duties. The Council itself should be the central directing body controlling the strike locally.

"One thing the Council of Action should not do: it should not take over the duties which ordinarily belong to the trade unions. Councils are organs of control and direction. They co-ordinate all activities and, therefore, receive reports from, and always work in the closest collaboration with the local union executives.

"Local press and propaganda committees should be elected to counteract the poisonous and pernicious propaganda of the Government and the employers' organisations.

"The Council should control through a sub-committee the assignment of workers to take care of the essential services. Not one worker must be allowed to aid the Government or the O.M.S.

"Through its Co-operative and Commissariat sub-committee the Council of Action should take a register of all possible food supplies and decide upon the localities in which food centres can be set up.

"Defence Corps should be organised under the control of the Council of Action, and it is vital that the sub-committee in charge of this should consist of responsible trade union officials who know the best trade union members of good character to be selected for defence work.

"A sub-committee should be appointed to deal with relations between the strikers and the Forces and the best possible relations should be maintained with the workers of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

"There should be a sub-committee to organise and outline picket duties in order that no important place will be open to blacklegs."

* * * * *

The value of these instructions, which became the recommendations of the Left Wing forces in all the Councils and in all the committees, was immense. They fitted so well into the requirements of the situation that they helped enormously to overcome the weaknesses created by the lack of preparation on the part of the General Council.

Especially was this the case in the large centres where the "Left Wing" and the Communist Party were in force. The experiences of our Party in Sheffield can be confirmed in many other centres. On the 3rd of May the Trades and Labour Council held its first meeting with representatives of the District Committees of the unions; it had not a scrap of organisation for the conduct of a strike. To this meeting the Communist Party offered its services and two representatives, offering also half of the strike bulletin which the District Committee of the Party had already prepared. The offers were turned down. The meeting ended and there was still no collective organisation. The N.U.R. had its own picket committee, the Transport Workers their own picket committee, and many unions had no pickets whatever. So unprepared were they that the following morning the Secretary of the Trades Council asked for the assistance of the Communist Party, for messengers, speakers, teams of workers to chalk the streets announcing meetings, and even for salesmen for the Council's strike bulletin! In spite of the way in which we had been turned down the previous evening, the Party responded and played no small part in the building of the strike apparatus and the conduct of the struggle.

"Groveling."

But if Monday was the day of organisation for the localities, it was the same for the General Council headquarters. With eyes frequently looking for "the open door" and the "ray of hope," while Thomas and MacDonald "grovelled" in Parliament, they began to organise means of communica-

tion. Wonderful leaders are these who never gave a thought as to how they were going to communicate with the districts when the workers were on strike! But worse still, it had got no newspaper. In its desire to be impartial and not to give the idea of class war any support, its strike order had closed down the "Daily Herald" and the whole Labour press as well as the press of the other side. Of course nothing of this is really surprising, for had they not already repudiated the printers who had struck against the vileness of the "Daily Mail"? This was to be a "gentlemanly" fight, and naturally having closed down the capitalist press how could they do anything other than close down their own? Only after the Government had announced its intention to issue the "British Gazette" did the General Council decide to issue, not the "Daily Herald" but a new paper "The British Worker." And what a paper too! A "splendid little paper" as Mr. Hamilton Fyfe, the editor of the "Daily Herald," would say. It worked with *four censors* to make sure that nobody would accuse the General Council or the Labour Party leaders of anything but the best intentions towards everything that capitalism holds dear.

Every issue is wet with tears of expostulation :

" THE GENERAL COUNCIL DOES NOT CHALLENGE THE CONSTITUTION.

IT IS NOT SEEKING TO SUBSTITUTE UNCONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT.

NOR IS IT DESIROUS OF UNDERMINING OUR PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS.

THE SOLE AIM OF THE COUNCIL IS TO SECURE FOR THE MINERS A DECENT STANDARD OF LIFE.

THE COUNCIL IS ENGAGED IN AN INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE.

THERE IS NO CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS."

—as if the workers cared a damn whether there was a constitutional crisis or not so long as they were fighting against reductions in wages!

But this echoed what had been taking place in the House of Commons on May 3rd. The General Council had not only decided to close down its own press but had to close down the

Labour Party too, with the exception of the spokesmen MacDonald and Henderson, who were pledged along the above line of policy. In fact it was their line as much as that of the General Council. They were not even decent parliamentarians. They were so overwhelmingly affected by every criticism and every challenge of the Tories (and then anxious too for the defeat of the General Strike) that they refused to see the political implications of their own actions and to use their position in Parliament in the interests of the strike. Instead of answering the challenges of the Government boldly right from the beginning of the dispute they cringed before the Government, uttered denials, gave every assurance that their motives were of the best capitalist brand. Having incited the conference of Trades Union Executives to go ahead with the strike they left the strike to drift whilst they continued their efforts to secure the betrayal of the miners and the General Strike. Had they, instead of denying the challenge to the constitution and spending their time explaining their good intentions, turned to the attack upon the Government in the House of Commons and on the public platform, accused it and proved it to be a provocateurs' government as well as a forgers' government; had they demanded a general election on the grounds that it had forfeited public confidence, they would have done more to prove their constitutionalism than all their weeping denials.

There was and is an overwhelming case against the Government as the provokers of the General Strike, as we have already shown, and had the Labour leaders been bold politicians and real leaders of the Labour movement they would have developed the General Strike as a political weapon and used their parliamentary position to destroy the illusions in the minds of the middle classes, especially illusions which were fostered by the Government challenge to civil war. The neglect of this line of action left the Government with a free hand to mobilise the middle class forces behind it and to keep its forces intact. The middle classes saw the effect of the strike and were roused by the intense civil war propaganda of the Government. They were afraid that it might be true. The one remarkable feature of the strike is that practically all the blacklegging was done by middle class men and women. But had the Labour Party boldly declared that

it was prepared to submit its case and the conduct of the Government to the constitutional procedure of a general election it would have been done more to undermine the confidence of the middle classes in the Government than any other course they could have pursued. They were afraid that they might not get a majority if the Government accepted the challenge, just as they were afraid to develop the strike because they had faith neither in the strike nor in the workers.

But whatever hesitation there might be in the ranks of the leaders there was none in the ranks of the Government. Promptly on the declaration of a "state of emergency" all the long prepared machinery began to move. The country had been divided into about nine divisions for the purpose of maintaining services according to government instructions, with a central controller of supplies in charge of all the divisions. This apparatus was semi-military in character. In each division was a military liaison officer who attended to the supply of whatever military forces were necessary. These began to move at once. The soldiers were confined to barracks to await orders. And orders began to operate. The principal parks in London were commandeered. Hyde Park became a great military centre and food depot. It presented the appearance of an armed camp. Tanks, armoured cars, masses of soldiers in full military equipment marched in thousands. The police were mobilised and all the special constables called up. A week before the strike began the police of the whole country had received orders to be ready for eventualities, and in the event of quietness reigning in particular districts then they had to be prepared to go to another on call. The enrolment of more special constables began. Recruiting stations were opened and every attempt was made to re-enact the scenes of 1914 on the outbreak of the imperialist war.

The Home Secretary made an appeal for "volunteers" better known as blacklegs and scabs. He set Scotland Yard in motion and on Wednesday evening the Special Branch raided the press which had printed the "Workers' Daily," the Communist paper. They took away the vital parts of the machinery, and this combined with the strike of printers completely closed down the newspaper possibilities of the Party.

* * * * *

May 4th.

But if Monday was a day of preparations and the beginning of much organisational confusion, the first full day of the General Strike was the day of days. The flood tide had set in. Three and a half to four million men left their work as one man. It was magnificent. They flowed to the centre of the towns and cities and the great murmur began. It was not a murmur against the strike but against the limited character of the strike and the contradictory positions into which large numbers of the workers were thrust. Especially was this the case in the engineering and shipbuilding industry and the metal trades. For example, moulders were at work in the same firms where engineers were called out. Pattern makers remained at work. Charge hands who were members of the Engineers' Union were permitted to work. So were the apprentices where adult workers in the same union were out on strike. In some cases so absurd were the instructions that non-unionists had joined in the sympathetic strike while loyal union men were at work. In the distributive trades the situation was almost as bad. Orders were given to the members to leave work although they were employed by the co-operative societies—an order which if applied would have handed the Co-ops. over into the hands of the Government. Indeed the union leaders had not even urged the strikers to come to any arrangements with the Co-ops., but on the contrary had offered to co-operate with the Government in maintaining food supplies.

Mr. Bevin had declared on Saturday morning to the Trades Union Conference: "We have deliberately determined to arrange for a voluntary service, notwithstanding that we are stopping vital services, such as transport and staple industries, to ensure the feeding of the people. Neither the General Council nor the miners have any quarrel with the people."

The workers were annoyed with all this confusion, and union officials and strike committees were everywhere bombarded with questions, with deputations, with requests that something be done and done promptly. The local officials and committees were annoyed too. Messages poured into the General Council from all over the country, reporting the wonderful response to the strike call. But before the day

was over delegations from the strike committees were trekking to London too to get the instructions cleared up and some definite decision concerning an all-out policy.

The most remarkable thing of the day however was the completeness of the stoppage of the press. It was amazing that the most conservative of unions should be right in the front line of the General Strike. It was amazing, but it was splendid too.

The Government and the employers were busy *also*. The Government monopolised the British wireless apparatus and began broadcasting its propaganda and appealing for volunteers.

The Liberals with one accord, led by Lord Oxford, came to the support of the Government. "He did not see how it was possible for any Government not to take up the challenge of the General Strike, which was a blow at the civilised course of the domestic and social life of the whole community, of which the Government were the trustees. He supported the Government in their contention that the General Strike must be unconditionally called off before there can be any further negotiations."

* * * * *

May 5th.

On this day the full measure of the stoppage could be taken. More workers were out than on the day previous, and the improvisations of both sides had begun to work. The unions had got to work organising their pickets. The transport workers and the railway workers were quickly on the job, and throughout the country carried the brunt of this work except in the distinctly mining areas where the miners flung themselves into the work with their usual thoroughness. The other side were busy too, and made their first experiments in blackleg traffic, beginning on the trams and buses. Immediately there was trouble. In London an attempt was made both with buses and trams. At Camberwell the London County Council tried to get six trams manned by "volunteers." Police officers stood side by side with the drivers and conductors. But the crowd went for them and smashed the tram windows with stones. The crowd went for the drivers too, and the police used their truncheons. Seven persons were injured and received attention at the hospital. The trams returned to their depot.

At Hammersmith and Chiswick, the opposite side of London, the crowd gave the blacklegs on the buses a rough time, damaged the engines and cut the petrol pipes. Similar stormy scenes marked the day in Glasgow. The police charged the crowds time and again. Windows of cars and buses were shattered, police and civilians were injured. Excitement reigned supreme in various districts of Glasgow. Buses were overturned. Blacklegs were attacked by the crowds and severely mauled. The district of Hamilton was completely isolated by road and rail; even the people who got on commercial vehicles for a lift were compelled by the striking workers to alight. Similar scenes were witnessed in the streets of Edinburgh. Crowds let themselves go at blacklegs in the centre of Leeds, and attempts to run motor buses between Mansfield and Sheffield met with a hot reception from the miners. The attempts of the authorities to get transport service in Barnsley met with similar results. In almost all these places arrests were made and workers were sent to prison.

On this day Saklatvala was sent to prison for two months on account of his May Day speech in Hyde Park. From this moment the Scotland Yard authorities were let loose on the Communists. The Communist Party office in King Street, London, was raided almost daily in search of the "Workers' Bulletin" which had been issued in spite of the suppression of the "Workers' Daily." An amazing thing happened. While the Government issued its "British Gazette" and the General Council replied with its "British Worker," all the locals and district committees of the Communist Party set to work replacing the suppressed paper by local strike bulletins. These were typewritten sheets manifolded. The efforts that had been made by the locals to create factory papers around the workshop and factory groups was now turned to good account. In many places the Communists placed their machines at the disposal of the Councils of Action and Strike Committees, and helped them to produce the strike bulletins emanating from these bodies.. Thousands of copies were issued every day in all the important districts, and they proved a valuable means of conveying news of the strike and inspiring the workers. The police made a definite line for these bulletins and the machines that produced them, wherever they got the slightest chance. They raided houses and offices, social clubs and dance rooms and arrested Com-

munists on the slightest pretence. In spite of all their efforts and the number of machines they confiscated, the Communists continued to outwit them and appear with a fresh bulletin the following day.

The Government was going full steam ahead. It ignored the offers of the General Council *re* the transport of food supplies and went forward with its own plans, using every possible means of securing recruits for the "voluntary services" and mobilising its army and navy to man the docks. The "British Gazette" appeared screaming about civil war, the challenge to the constitution and the great parliamentary system. It called for recruits, developing full-blooded patriotism in the name of King and Country. Whose King and whose country it is, they made transparently clear.

In the House of Commons the Emergency Powers came under discussion, and the Home Secretary declared that the Government would use and continue to use their utmost endeavours to protect those who wanted to work. It sounded so much like the voice of MacDonald that it is no surprise to read that he quoted the declaration of the Labour Prime Minister during the period of the Labour Government, "*Any Government, all Governments must give protection to those engaged in their legal occupation.*"

In the evening appeared the "British Worker" telling of the wonderful response all over the country. It gave many items of news telling of the exhortations from the workers of every land. It told of how the University students were being mobilised for the "Volunteer service" by means of social pressure and promises. But when all this is granted, the main purpose of every leading statement and much of its news was deliberately calculated to smother the initiative of the workers and to lead them like lambs under the gentle guardianship of the authorities. For example it quoted with approval the co-operation of the unions with the Mayor and police of Nottingham in the maintenance of order and the distribution of food. What prize lambs the leaders are! Is it not as clear as daylight that this was simply handing over the food supplies to the Government and the O.M.S., and that they who control the food control the whole situation in a strike of this kind? Excuse has been made by some people for the actions of the General Council and Labour Party, on the ground that they were not revolutionary leaders. There

is no need to judge them on this basis; just ordinary commonsense and manliness should have prevented them clinging to the skirts of the Government with pathetic assurances that they never have been naughty and never will be.

The Government had no regard for them in the least. Indeed they seemed to have nothing but contempt for their whole outfit. The very same evening the first issue was held up for seven hours, due to a raid on the "Daily Herald" office. Mounted police had cleared the street and then a score or more of police led by Scotland Yard men rushed into the building, stopped the press and took away copies of the "British Worker" for submission to the City Commissioner. With his approval the paper came out and then it worked with FOUR censors! Is it surprising that there was no further interference? It was well calculated to chloroform the workers. In effect it said "You have done splendidly, but keep quiet, keep quiet, keep quiet; fold your arms, stand still, or go to bed. Take a holiday. Do only that which is emphatically legal. Don't develop the struggle. Have patience. Trust us, we will get you out of this as quickly as possible—with honour of course." And the Government accused the General Council of "revolutionary intentions." What cheek!

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May 6th.

On Thursday May 6th the Government forces began to manifest an increased activity. A public promise was made to all strikers who returned to work. The Government would take efficient measures to protect them, and prevent victimisation by the trade unions of the men who remained or might return to work. Then the lawyers were turned on to the job of intimidation. Sir John Simon expounded the illegal nature of the General Strike, and propounded "that every man was personally liable to be sued for damages; every trade union leader who had advised or prompted that, course of action was liable in damages to the uttermost farthing of his personal possessions." This was a preliminary hint which was followed a few days later by Judge Astbury in a case provided by a trade union official. He laid it down that a general strike was illegal and contrary to law and those inciting persons to it were not protected by the Trades Dispute Act. Members of unions could not lose benefits by refusing to obey

illegal orders ; and trade union funds could not be legally used for, or depleted by, paying strike pay to those strikers who obeyed illegal orders. Whatever the effect of these declarations and rulings upon the leaders they had not the slightest effect upon the workers.

But the Government was making headway with its strike-breaking organisation. It was succeeding in its efforts, in London at any rate, in getting buses on to the streets and a blackleg service of tube trains running. The buses were staffed by police and blacklegs three at the front, three at the back, while in many instances windows were either boarded up or covered with wire netting and the bonnets covering the engines were strapped with barbed wire. But they made little headway in the provinces in the development of independent blackleg services. In spite of all the propaganda by wireless and by press (which also began to overcome a little of the strike effects), about the thousands of trains running and so on, I saw little evidence of their successes in the provinces apart from that which was carried through by the consent of the General Council itself. Even so late as the ninth day of the strike, when I journeyed with a comrade in the side car of his motor cycle from Sheffield to London, and passed Derby, Leicester and the important towns en route, we saw only six motor buses on the road, no trams except labelled for the conveying of food, and only two trains with hardly any passengers—and this in a journey of 166 miles.

The worst areas I visited during the strike were the textile areas. Here there was no General Strike. The tramway-men, busmen, and railwaymen were bearing the brunt of a wretched situation. It was remarkable that they held so well with the attempts to run the textile factories as usual. It intensified the discontent in every section. Coupled with the growling of the engineering workers, who were divided against themselves by the confused and limited orders, was the actual incitement of the authorities to make special efforts to break the transport workers' efforts in order to cope with their normal business. I addressed meetings in Dewsbury, Bradford, Keighley, Shipley, and Normanton, and everywhere the trouble in the ranks of the workers was the same. Unions acting separately, and the local officials (where there was not a strong Left Wing movement) carrying out orders to the

letter in the most formal manner, damping down the initiative of the workers, echoing the "go to bed theory" of the national leaders.

Where there was a strong Leftward movement, especially where there was a good representation of the Communists and supporters of the Minority Movement, even the Right Wing officials were thoroughly dissatisfied with the state of affairs and desired an all-out policy. As the strike proceeded the workers pushed ahead in many places and forced a solution upon the committees. In Glasgow, for example, the Scottish Trades Union Congress wished to prohibit publications entirely and stop all meetings. The leaders sent for J. R. Campbell and A. Ferguson, and told them that the Communists must stop their meetings and their bulletins. Naturally they got a polite reply. They wanted also to stop all efforts of mass picketing. The whole organisation of the pickets was at sixes and sevens, until the pressure of the Left Wing forced upon them a change of policy. Indeed it was the lack of proper organisation and systematic efforts to lead the workers that made possible many of the melees with the police in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Crowds naturally gathered in the streets, but they were unorganised crowds who resented the sight of blacklegging efforts and let themselves go. Had there been properly, well organised picketing with the pickets well guarded with Workers' Defence Corps there would have been much better results for the workers. Instead it can be safely said that to the extent that real organisation of the pickets was undertaken there was a progressive decline of blackleg traffic in the streets of Glasgow. It was on the initiative of the Communist Party and the Minority Movement who formed a joint committee that the strike committees and the Councils of Action got down to their work.

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At the centre the Communist Party and the Minority Movement headquarters had got quickly to work, and were issuing leading bulletins in thousands of copies every day in spite of all the efforts of the police to discover the machines and the comrades who were doing the work. The Communist Party issued the following manifesto and distributed 100,000 copies, besides having it reprinted in the local bulletins.

FIGHT TO WIN!

The Political Meaning of the General Strike.**Workers of Britain!**

You have begun a General Strike of vast extent in defence of the miners' standard of living, knowing full well that further degradation for the miners means immediate attacks on the wages and hours of other workers. The General Strike is not only a magnificent act of brotherly support to the miners, it is an act of self-defence on the part of the working class, who, with their families, constitute the vast majority of the people.

The first watchwords of the General Strike, therefore, have been and remain: "All Together Behind the Miners: Not a Penny off the Pay. Not a Second on the Day."

But now that the struggle has begun, the workers have it in their power to put an end once and for all to this continual menace to their living standards and working conditions. Simply to beat off the employers' present offensive means that they will return to the attack later on, just as they did after Red Friday last year. The only guarantee against the ravenous and soulless greed of the coalowners is to break their economic power.

THEREFORE LET THE WORKERS ANSWER THE BOSSES' CHALLENGE WITH A CHALLENGE OF THEIR OWN: "NATIONALISATION OF THE MINES, WITHOUT COMPENSATION FOR THE COALOWNERS, UNDER WORKERS' CONTROL, THROUGH PIT COMMITTEES."

The Government in this struggle has dropped the pretence of being above all classes. It made no objection to the coalowners' decision to hold the community to ransom by their attack on wages: but it delivered an insolent and provocative ultimatum when the Trades Union Congress decided, in the exercise of its undoubted rights, to defend the miners against starvation wages and slave conditions. Ever since the strike began, the Government has welcomed the aid of the capitalist strike-breaking organisations, the O.M.S. and Fascisti but it issued an insulting rejection of the trade union offer to maintain essential services without blacklegs. Troops, aeroplanes and battleships are being used to overawe the workers, if possible, and to crush the General Strike. If the strike ends, though it be with the defeat of the coalowners, but with the Government's power unshaken, the capitalists will still have hopes of renewing their attack.

Therefore, the third essential slogan of the General Strike must be: **"RESIGNATION OF THE FORGERY GOVERNMENT! FORMATION OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT!"**

The Communist Party continues to instruct its members

and to urge the workers to take every practical step necessary to consolidate our positions against the capitalist attack. Such essential steps are: to form a Council of Action immediately: to organise able-bodied trade unionists in a Workers' Defence Corps against the O.M.S. and Fascisti: to set up feeding arrangements with the Co-operative Societies, to hold mass meetings and issue strike bulletins, and to make their case known to the soldiers.

But the Communist Party warns the workers against the attempts being made to limit the struggle to its previous character of self-defence against the capitalist offensive. Once the battle has been joined, the only way to victory is to push ahead and hit hard. And the way to hit the capitalist hardest is for the Councils of Action to throw out the clear watchwords:

NOT A PENNY OFF THE PAY: NOT A SECOND ON THE DAY!

NATIONALISE THE MINES WITHOUT COMPENSATION, UNDER WORKERS' CONTROL!

FORMATION OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT!

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

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May 7th.

This day is notable for the fact that the General Council had begun to feel the draught, following up the childish offer to co-operate with the Government to run the strike on Pleasant Sunday Afternoon lines. It decided to review all permits that had been granted for the transport of food. The Government had ignored their fraternal offer, and so they announced they were compelled to take action.

Then came the call of the Churches. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York proposed

(1) The cancellation on the part of the T.U.C. of the General Strike.

(2) Renewal by the Government of its offer of assistance to the coal industry for a short period.

(3) The withdrawal on the part of the mineowners of the new wage scales recently issued.

The Society of Friends also joined in an appeal to let nothing stop in the way of renewal of negotiations.

The Government boycotted these news items and went on with its propaganda about "the country being nearer to civil war than it has been for centuries." And then the "British Worker" bleated "Is it fair?" The General Council, without endorsing the terms of this Concordat, called the attention of the public to the grave significance of the Government's attitude to such peace efforts. And yet the reports from every part of the country showed a magnificent determination for the simple demand that there shall be no reductions in wages!

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May 8th.

To-day the real reason of the alarm of the General Council with regard to food supplies becomes apparent. Warships and submarines had been taken to the docks. The army had been on the march in large battalions. Now the first of the great convoys of motor cars of 140 flour and other food lorries was taken from the London Docks to Hyde Park under an escort of sixteen armoured cars, many cavalry and mounted police. It was, and was intended to be, a demonstration of armed force—to inspire confidence in the supporters of the Government and fear in the minds of the workers. The Prime Minister followed the demonstration with a broadcast address as to his peaceful intentions, the intensity of his longing for "peace," and his determination not to surrender the safety and security of the British Constitution. The General Strike must be unconditionally called off.

Then another organisation was started called the Civil Constabulary Reserve, to be a supplementary force to the police and special constabulary. It was to be paid and recruited from the Territorial Army and ex-military men. It was to be equipped with armlets, truncheons and steel helmets. Here was something for the workers and General Council to reflect upon, especially the latter who were responsible leaders. Evidence was accumulating that the Government was establishing an alternative organisation of transport, that it had got a complete grip of the food supplies, and had at its command an overwhelming supply of police, soldiers and sailors and an increasing number of middle class black-legs.

The state of mind of the Council can be best indicated in the note appearing in the "British Worker" on this date, with reference to the offer of financial assistance from the Russian Trade Unions.

"The Council has informed the Russian Trade Unions, in a courteous communication, that they are unable to accept the offer and the cheque has been returned."

You bourgeois gentlemen! You, in charge of a general strike! Ugh!

On this day, too, Sir Herbert Samuel, the Chairman of the Coal Commission, returned to England. Who sent for him I don't know, but I am informed that Thomas was the first of the negotiating committee to see him and that afterwards Thomas went to see the King. This was the beginning of conversations in which Thomas was playing his usual role of counsel in favour of wage reductions. Cook says, and others confirm his statement, that "fear spread over the General Council with few exceptions." But whatever the internal incidents may have been in detail, it is evident that Thomas and the rest of the Right-wing leaders had been leaving no stone unturned for the purpose of carrying out their consistent policy of betraying the General Strike. They had betrayed the General Strike in all its preparatory stages. They had presented a "Black Friday" betrayal to the Government before the General Strike was called. They helped to call it into action with a movement lacking elementary preparations for so great a decision, and then proceeded to stab it in the back, when the workers were on the street, by private conversations with people who had no authority to decide anything and were obviously the tools of the Government.

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May 9th.

"The day of rest!" But as Mr. Fyfe says: "Herbert Samuel saw some more of the General Council to-day, and they had what seems to have been a useful talk. . . Samuel knows a lot about coal, and is "quick on the uptake!" Good progress made . . . The General Council are sworn to secrecy . . ."

Meanwhile, in every city, town and village where the workers are on strike or locked-out, this day is the day of mass meetings; the spirit of the workers was undimmed.

Rather was there an increase in the demand for the extension of the strike. The confusion created by the attempted co-operation with the authorities on the questions of food and electric light and power supplies, along with the partial actions of a number of unions, was aggravating the workers everywhere. "Why the devil doesn't the General Council act and act promptly? Let us know who are really black-legs and who are not," they said. Resolutions upon resolutions were passed demanding an all out policy. The women in every district had thrown themselves into organising work, too, and were as keen upon the issues of the struggle as ever the men could be. They were on the Councils of Action and working committees, collecting funds, distributing literature and bulletins everywhere. Such I found in all the districts I visited during the strike. *And the workers did not know of the "conversations."*

But the General Council seemed to make things worse instead of better. After failing to tackle the question of food supplies at the beginning of the dispute, they now proceeded with an endeavour to tighten up permits without making any allowances for Co-operative Societies. These were not only to be dealt with in the same way as private traders, *i.e.*, permitted only to dispose of bread and milk, but nearly all the co-operative employees were called out. The effect on the Northern counties was exceedingly bad. While the Co-op Union national committee is a conservative and reactionary body, the same cannot be said of all the local co-operative societies, many of which were anxious to co-operate with the strike committees and the Councils of Action. For example, the local co-operative societies in Northumberland and Durham include so many workers and have such an extensive hold in the districts that they could have easily come to terms to take complete control of feeding arrangements for the workers of the districts. Joint strike committees received deputations from forty-five co-operative societies. When the permits were stopped for everything but milk and bread on May 9th, they looked helplessly at each other.

In other districts, however, the instruction was simply over-ruled on the initiative of the workers. In Doncaster, for example, the Council of Action combined with the Co-operative Societies and determined on an effort to control all the food supplies and transport in the hands of the Council

and Co-ops. Mass pickets were organised to hold up all transport that had not a workers' permit. It was the effort of the workers to carry out the plan that led to the conflict with the police in this district, when the latter batoned many of the workers, and over 70 were arrested and sent to prison. Mass pickets without well-organised Workers' Defence Corps are bound to get hurt. But the General Council had left organisation to be "improvised."

In other districts modifications of this policy were adopted in order to avoid handing over the resources of the Co-ops to the O.M.S. Had the employees all done as they were instructed and left their jobs, the Co-ops would have inevitably passed into the hands of the O.M.S. The General Council had its eyes only on London when it made the order concerning food and milk distribution, and equalled the co-operative union leaders themselves in stupidity when faced with a struggle of this character.

Meanwhile the Archbishop of Canterbury preached a "very good sermon" and made a "moving appeal" about carrying on to the bitter end. "It was wicked." Cardinal Bourne of the Catholic Church put God behind the Government and in the Government; in fact God was the Government. The Government went on developing its weapons. It announced that any action which "the armed forces of the Crown may find it necessary to take in an honest endeavour to aid the civil power, both now and afterwards will receive the full support of the Government."

It kept up its propaganda about civil war and "challenges to the constitution" and everywhere there was an increasing interference with pickets and arrests of Communists on the slightest pretext. And behind the scenes, according to "Lansbury's Weekly" and the "New Leader" all kinds of plans were being prepared for "arresting the leaders, seizing the funds of the unions, rushing a bill through the House of Commons altering trade union law," and so on. Thomas saw "rivers of blood" and the nerves of the General Council went to pieces. Samuel was having an easy time. Having been got "on the run," these Labour leaders turned on the miners to bully them into stating what reduction they would take.

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May 10th.

The "British Worker" came out on this day with a message from the General Council to trade union members:

"We are entering upon the second week of the general stoppage in support of the mineworkers against the attack upon their standard of life by the coalowners.

"Nothing could be more wonderful than the magnificent response of the millions of workers to the call of their leaders.

"From every town and city in the country reports are pouring into the General Council headquarters stating that all ranks are solid, that the working men and women are resolute in their determination to resist the unjust attacks upon the mining community.

"The General Council desire to express their keen appreciation of the loyalty of the trade union members to whom the call was issued and by whom such a splendid response has been made.

"They are especially desirous of commending the workers on their strict obedience to the instruction to avoid all conflict and to conduct themselves in an orderly manner. Their behaviour during the first week of the stoppage is a great example to the whole world.

"The General Council's message at the opening of the second week is 'Stand firm. Be loyal to instructions and trust your leaders.'"

The "British Worker" of this date also says that the "talk of revolution trick" had failed and marks a new note in the editorials of the papers and the speeches of the capitalist leaders. Is it any wonder that the Government was changing its tone when it had already got the trade union negotiators so well in hand? The editor of the "British Worker" who was obviously helping the "bluffers" says in "Behind the Scenes of the Great Strike":

"During the last twenty-four hours the seven negotiators appointed by the General Council to discuss with Sir Herbert Samuel terms of peace have satisfied themselves that they can accept the general assurances which have been given to them."

Is there any wonder that the Government changes its tone? The Labour leaders had done this without taking the miners into consultation, and from this time onward the inner story of the General Council is the story of endeavours to bully the miners into an agreement with what they had done. Fyfe says there is no truth in the rumours about the threatened arrests, and that the General Council was not rattled by them. It may be so. It matters little, and in any case why on earth should the Government arrest these

people, who had got no grit in them to begin with and were doing nothing more than trying to hold back the forces they had called into action? What is unquestionably true stands out clearly. Behind the backs of the workers, at the very moment they were calling upon the workers to "trust their leaders," the "conversations" had begun with one man and finished with the whole General Council accepting a memorandum which they tried to force the miners to accept, although they had not been consulted. They were doing this while the masses were pressing upon them to extend the strike. Due to this pressure of the workers, who could see clearly that unless the front was extended the ruling class would continue to increase its grip of the situation, notice was sent out that from May 11th there would be an extension of the strike in the engineering and shipbuilding trades, but not in any Government dockyards.

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May 11th.

came and the order to the engineers was to operate from the end of the day shift. The "British Worker" says: "The men have waited for the instructions impatiently, and all over the country they received their marching orders with enthusiasm and a sense of relief." Oh, that is true enough; but what damned hypocrisy to carry on "secret diplomacy" with such splendid men and women risking everything they possessed!

And so things moved rapidly towards the fatal day.

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May 12th.

The Government had slackened nothing of its organisational forces. It was steadily increasing its grip with every weakening of the General Council. The press was now growing. The Government rag, the "British Gazette" had everything in its favour ever since the Government monopolised paper supplies; it was appearing daily in increasing numbers. They had little to worry about from the leaders. The one thing which amazed them and continues to amaze them is the spirit of the workers. The unemployed workers had played an heroic part. Through their organisation, "The Unemployed Workers' Committees" they had thrown their lot in with the strikers and kept the number of workers among the blacklegs remarkably small.

The Surrender.

And the General Council was in uproar. Herbert Smith had done some plain talking. The General Council had come to an unanimous decision without the miners, and were going to call off the General Strike. A deputation waited on the Miners' Executive. It was led by Bevin and Purcell, who begged and pleaded to their everlasting shame that the miners would accept the Samuel Memorandum. There was nothing doing. By 12 o'clock noon, the General Strike was called off and the miners left in the lurch. It was called off unconditionally, without the slightest reference to the pledge of the Trades Union Conference concerning "all returning together on the terms upon which they came out." If there ever was an action which can be described as "panicky" it was this.

On the strength of conversations with Samuel, which he himself described as entirely unofficial, and the public utterances of Baldwin that he would renew negotiations immediately the General Strike was called off, the General Council and Messrs. MacDonald and Henderson slunk along to 10, Downing Street, and unconditionally called off the strike.

Telegrams were sent out all over the country ordering the strikers to return to work, and the Council proceeded to publish the text of the correspondence between Samuel and the Council along with the Samuel Memorandum. Here is the full text:

May 12, 1926.

Dear Mr. Pugh.—As the outcome of the conversations which I have had with your Committee, I attach a memorandum embodying the conclusions that have been reached.

I have made it clear to your Committee from the outset that I have been acting entirely on my own initiative, have received no authority from the Government, and can give no assurances on their behalf.

I am of opinion that the proposals embodied in the Memorandum are suitable for adoption and are likely to promote a settlement of the differences in the Coal Industry.

I shall strongly recommend their acceptance by the Government when the negotiations are renewed.—Yours, etc.,

HERBERT SAMUEL.

A. Pugh, Esq.,
President, General Council
Trades Union Congress.

The reply of the Trades Union Congress General Council was in the following terms :

Sir Herbert Samuel,
London.

May 12, 1926.

Dear Sir,—The General Council having carefully considered your letter of to-day and the memorandum attached to it, concurred in your opinion that it offers a basis on which the negotiations upon the conditions in the Coal Industry can be renewed.

They are taking the necessary measures to terminate the General Strike, relying upon the public assurances of the Prime Minister as to the steps that would follow. They assume that during the resumed negotiations the subsidy will be renewed and that the lock-out notices to the miners will be immediately withdrawn.—Yours faithfully,

ARTHUR PUGH,

Chairman,

WALTER M. CITRINE,

Acting Secretary.

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THE MEMORANDUM.

Scope of National Wages Board.

The text of Sir Herbert Samuel's memorandum is as follows :

1. The negotiations upon the conditions of the coal industry should be resumed, the subsidy being renewed for such reasonable period as may be required for that purpose.

2. Any negotiations are unlikely to be successful unless they provide for means of settling disputes in the industry other than conferences between the mineowners and the miners alone. A National Wages Board should, therefore, be established which would include representatives of those two parties with a neutral element and an independent chairman. The proposals in this direction tentatively made in the Report of the Royal Commission should be pressed and the powers of the proposed Board enlarged.

3. The parties to the Board should be entitled to raise before it any points they consider relevant to the issue under discussion, and the Board should be required to take such points into consideration.

4. There should be no revision of the previous wage rates unless there are sufficient assurances that the measures of re-organisation proposed by the Commission will be effectively adopted. A Committee should be established, as proposed by the Prime Minister, on which representatives of the men should be included, whose duty it should be to co-operate with the Government in the preparation of the legislative and administrative measures that are required. The same Committee, or alternatively, the National Wages Board, should assure itself that the necessary steps, so far as they relate to matters within the industry, are not being neglected or unduly postponed.

5. After these points have been agreed and the Mines National Wages Board has considered every practicable means of meeting such immediate financial difficulties as exist, it may, if that course is found to be absolutely necessary, proceed to the preparation of a wage agreement.

6. Any such agreement should—

(i) If practicable, be on simpler lines than those hitherto followed.

(ii) Not adversely affect in any way the wages of the lowest paid men.

(iii) Fix reasonable figures below which the wage of no class of labour, for a normal customary week's work, should be reduced in any circumstances.

(iv) In the event of any new adjustments being made should provide for the revision of such adjustments by the Wages Board from time to time if the facts warrant that course.

7. Measures should be adopted to prevent the recruitment of new workers, over the age of 18 years, into the industry if unemployed miners are available.

8. Workers who are displaced as a consequence of the closing of uneconomic collieries should be provided for by—

(a) The transfer of such men as may be mobile, with the Government assistance that may be required, as recommended in the Report of the Royal Commission.

(b) The maintenance, for such period as may be fixed, of those who cannot be so transferred and for whom alternative employment cannot be found; this maintenance to comprise an addition to the existing rate of unemployment pay under the Unemployed Insurance Act, of such amount as may be agreed. A contribution should be made by the Treasury to cover the additional sums so disbursed.

(c) The rapid construction of new houses to accommodate transferred workers. The Trades Union Congress will facilitate this by consultation and co-operation with all those who are concerned.

There is not the slightest indication anywhere in this that the General Council or anybody else had discussed this correspondence and memorandum with the Prime Minister. But there **is** the statement in the first letter that Samuel was acting entirely on his own and without the authority of any other person than himself. This in itself is monstrous. But had there been the fullest possible discussion, there still remains the fact that the General Council, after having pledged itself time and time again against any attempt to reduce the miners' wages, had now become the ally of the mine-owners endeavouring to foist upon the miners *reduction of wages and compulsory arbitration*.

When the strike was called off the workers knew nothing of all this. In fact, they thought there must have been a climb-down on the part of the Government. They thought it incredible that on the very morning the Council had called large bodies of men on strike, the same body should call the strike off, unless there had been a victory. Victory meetings were organised in the provincial towns, but by the time of the meetings they were changed into meetings of "explanation" and bitter chagrin.

Black Friday, 1921 was bad enough. Then, however, the leaders had not called three to four million men on to the streets. This time they had called them. The men had answered nobly—and been left to stew in the juice created by treachery, incompetence and cowardice.

CHAPTER V.

THE ISOLATION OF THE MINERS.

ON the evening of May 12th the "British Worker" announced "How Peace Came." It said that "The Trades Union Congress General Council is satisfied that the miners will now get a fair deal." The capitalist press announced it was an "Object Surrender," and the General Council was annoyed because its reports were not couched in better language—an "honourable settlement" for example. The miners recalled their national executive which promptly turned down the Samuel Memorandum and announced that it had been no party to the calling off of the strike or the accepting of the memorandum. They declared :

"That the Miners' Executive have given grave and patient consideration to the draft proposals prepared by the T.U.C. Negotiating Committee and endorsed by the General Council representing what they call the best terms which can be obtained to settle the present crisis in the coal industry. The Miners' Executive regret the fact that no opportunity for consideration was afforded the accredited representatives of the Miners' Federation on the Negotiating Committee in the preparation of the draft or in the discussions of May 11 leading thereto.

"At the best the proposals imply a reduction of the wage rates for a large number of mineworkers, which is contrary to the repeated declarations of the Miners' Federation and which they believe their fellow trade unionists are assisting to resist. They regret, therefore, whilst having regard to the grave issues involved that they must reject the proposals. Moreover, if such proposals are submitted as a means of calling off the General Strike, such step must be taken on the sole responsibility of the General Council of the T.U.C."

To this was added the further resolution :

"That after hearing the report of the representatives of the T.U.C. we re-affirm our resolution of May 11 and express our profound admiration of the wonderful demonstration of loyalty as displayed by all workers, who promptly withdrew their labour in support of the miners' standard, and undertake to report to the conference to be convened as early as practicable."

This contradiction in the attitudes of the two bodies to the same document intensified the bitterness in the ranks of the workers. But the General Council was not to be outdone in explanations. In its organ the "British Worker" of May

14, the explanation is given that the General Council acted on the basis of the reply to the Negotiation Committee before the Strike which I have shown to be the moment of capitulation (when the questions of Mr. Baldwin showed the miners they had been tricked into something which was giving their real position away and immediately recovered by the uncompromising reaffirmation of their position against reductions in wages.) After nine days of the General Strike the General Council reappear before the Government with the same capitulation in detail, in the form of the Samuel Memorandum, but in a decidedly weaker position. They had thrown away the power of the strike, and appeared before the Prime Minister like whipped children not only renouncing the General Strike, but throwing the unions back upon their own resources without the slightest effort to ensure them against the victimisation of their members.

When they approached the Prime Minister they said nothing about the Samuel Memorandum, which at the best is only an amplification of the Coal Commission Report, and was a document that bound nobody. Before this actually occurred it would seem inconceivable that a body of responsible leaders, representing $5\frac{1}{2}$ million men and women, the major portion of whom were on the streets, could entertain conversations with an outsider, who frankly confessed that he was an outsider, frame up a document with him, and on the strength of his goodwill go straight to the head of the opposing forces who had demanded the unconditional calling off of the strike as a preliminary to any further conversations and say to him, "We agree. We call off the General Strike. And we appeal to your good feelings not to victimise the men who have done what we asked them to do and what you wanted them to do. We will now help you to turn the workers against the miners, and by our desertion and your pressure no doubt the miners will sooner or later accept the reductions of wages which we all agree will be necessary." Yet such in effect actually happened.

Mr. Baldwin accepted the capitulation. What else could he do? It was complete enough. No generals of any army surrendering its forces had ever put before their conquerors less obstacles in the way of "settlement."

Naturally the employers were ready to seize the situation as a very good one for pressing home advantages won and

railwaymen, transport workers, tramwaymen, busmen, printers, were promptly met with astounding terms of reinstatement. The railway companies insisted upon the workers signing a document which said:

"You are hereby re-engaged. Your re-engagement is on the understanding that the company reserves any rights it possesses in consequence of your having broken your contract of service."

The busmen and tramwaymen were met with demands for reductions varying from one shilling to two shillings and threepence per day. Dockers were being called upon to tear up their union cards. Printers were faced with notices about the "open shop" and a number of newspaper establishments declared that they would only employ non-union labour.

But they counted without the workers. Immediately the workers were faced with this situation they refused to go back. The "British Worker" of May 14th, says that "upon instructions from their unions they refused to go back." But this is putting the cart before the horse. The workers refused to go back and then the Union Executives sent out to their members messages such as this:

"You must not sign any document or accept any conditions for resumption of work except the conditions obtaining before the dispute. The men must all go back together. The E.C. of the three railway unions are meeting to discuss the question of reinstatement.

"Throughout the country the men are solid in their attitude not to resume work under the companies' conditions. Men urged to stand solid and await the decisions of the joint executives which will be sent at the end of the conference."

The General Council gaspingly issued a manifesto calling upon the workers to stand together and handed them over in batches to be dealt with separately by the separate union executives. It said:

"Fellow Trade Unionists,

"The General Strike has ended. It has not failed. It has made possible the resumption of negotiations in the coal industry, and the continuance, during negotiations, of the financial assistance by the Government.

"You came out together, in accordance with the instructions of the executives of your unions. Return together on their instructions, as and when they are given.

"Some employers will approach you as individuals, with

the demand that you should accept conditions different from those obtaining before the stoppage began.

"Sign no individual agreement. Consult your union officials and stand by their instructions. Your union will protect you, and will insist that all agreements previously in force shall be maintained intact.

"The trade union movement has demonstrated its unity. That unity remains unimpaired. Stick to your unions.

"General Council, Trades Union Congress."

A wonderful "victory" which ends with an appeal to "stick to your unions"!

The "Peace Terms."

The union executives did meet the bosses and did come to an agreement. In each case except that of the printers and the furnishing trades, it was made with the same panicky haste that had marked the capitulation of the General Council. They made not the slightest attempt to re-constitute a central leadership in place of that which had thrown them overboard and ignored the pledge of May 1st. Each sought to get the men back to work as quickly as possible.

The printers held on for several days and secured the least onerous terms of re-instatement (except for the furnishing trades, which got good terms by the threat of a strike a few weeks later). The Labour leaders made an appeal to the "goodwill of Mr. Baldwin," and the latter, alarmed more by the fact that the workers were still out and any delay might lead to the possibility of a new leadership taking the place of the "peacemakers," denounced the idea of the employers taking advantage of the situation to reduce wages. Meanwhile the union leaders were eating dirt. They as little wanted the responsibility of reconstructing the united front as the General Council itself. So they signed "agreements" such as the following while the press joyfully proclaimed a "victory for the Nation."

. . .

PRINTERS' TERMS OF AGREEMENT.

1. The agreements between the parties which were in existence previous to May 1st, 1926, shall remain in force.
2. The Employers' organisations will recommend their members to give preference in engagement to former em-

ployees who left their work during the General Strike as and when required.

3. There shall be no lightning or sudden stoppage of work of any kind in the works of any member of the Employers' organisation.

4. The trade unions agree that there shall be no interference with the contents of any newspaper, periodical or other matter printed or published by members of the Employers' organisation.

5. No chapel meetings shall be held during working hours.

6. There shall be no interference with recognised apprentices in any trade dispute.

7. That works and departmental managers not engaged on production work shall not be called out during any dispute.

8. To prevent any stoppage of work or interference with work in consequence of a dispute or any question arising in or out of the trade, without first exhausting all the possibilities of the J.I.C. Conciliation machinery before the customary notice is given by either side.

9. That there shall be no interference by trade unions or their members with the conduct of business or with the discharge of members of the unions signing the agreement, the right of management to engage, employ, promotement.

10. That the temporary arrangement as to day to day engagement be continued to a date to be hereafter agreed. In order that as many of the former employes as practicable may be re-engaged short time may be worked in any department, if desired, subject to the details of arrangement being mutually agreed. This arrangement shall not preclude the working of overtime when necessary.

11. Workers who left their employment without giving proper notices are not legally entitled to holiday pay, but in this instance the Employers' organisation recommend their members to make holiday payments under Hours and Holiday Agreement and rulings of the Hours and Holidays Committee to all employees who thus left their work provided that this agreement is ratified.

12. Strict observance of agreements in the Printing and Kindred Trades shall be regarded as a matter of honour affecting each individual employer or employee.

13. This agreement is made without prejudice to legal rights of either side, their associations or individual members.

* * *

DOCKERS' AGREEMENT.

1. The port employers in London will re-engage labour on the terms of the National Agreement which the unions admit they have broken.

2. The men to present themselves for work at their usual

places of engagement at 7.45 a.m. on Monday, May 17th, 1926.

3. Employers will take on as many men as work is available for.

4. Permanent men, whether supervisory or labourers, shall be re-instated in their former positions on resumption of work.

5. The union undertakes—

(a) Not in future to instruct their members to strike either nationally, sectionally or locally for any reason without exhausting the conciliation machinery of the National Agreement.

(b) Not to support or encourage any of their members who take individual action contrary to the preceding clause.

(c) To instruct their members in any future dispute to refrain from any attempt to influence the men in certain supervisory grades (to be specialised hereafter) to take strike action.

6. After general resumption of work any arrears of pay due to men at the time of the stoppage to be paid.

* * *

RAILWAY TERMS.

1. The principle of Clause (1) of the settlement of May 14 that "men who have gone on strike shall be taken back to work as soon as traffic offers and work can be found for them" will be maintained, subject to a temporary suspension of the guaranteed week clause in the National Agreement of April, 1919, on the following conditions:

2. The suspension of the guaranteed week will be administered in such a way as not to cause expense to the companies, and will not be applicable to men who did not take part in the strike.

3. The railway companies will aim at finding employment at each station or depot for as many men as possible in the respective grades, on the basis of so distributing the work amongst the men in each grade as to yield, on broad lines, an actual weekly earning equivalent to three days' pay at ordinary rate.

4. If at any station or depot the available work for any grade is less than the minimum mentioned in Clause (3) endeavour will be made:

(a) To find employment at a neighbouring station or depot, where work is available, to which the men can travel without cost to the company to take duty at the times required.

(b) To transfer men at their own expense to other stations or depots where work is available.

The company to be relieved from any obligation under

these arrangements in respect of men who decline to travel or to be transferred.

5. If at any station or depot the distribution of the work under the foregoing clauses would not yield to the whole of the men earnings equivalent, on the average, to three days' pay at ordinary rate, the work will be distributed on the basis of three days minimum to a portion of the men each week under a weekly rotation.

6. Subject to the foregoing clauses, the work available in each particular grade at each station or depot will be distributed in such a manner as to equalise, as far as practicable the earnings of the men in each grade.

7. In distributing the available work in any grade, during the continuance of this agreement, regard will not be paid to age or seniority in the service.

8. The companies will arrange, as far as possible, that re-employed men entitled to holidays with pay will be relieved so that they may take their leave during the period of suspension of the guaranteed week.

9. The companies agree that men whom it is not possible to re-employ under these arrangements shall be recorded on waiting lists, and, during the continuance of these arrangements, will be accorded privilege ticket facilities, provided they are not in other employment yielding three days' wages or more.

10. These arrangements will continue in force until it is mutually agreed to restore the guaranteed week.

11. Persons entitled to Unemployment Insurance Benefits will be excluded from any participation in these arrangements, if by sharing in the available work they would prejudice the non-insured employees.

12. The existing National Agreements will continue in operation except as varied by the foregoing arrangements.

13. These arrangements to come into operation as from the first day in the next pay week after Whitsuntide.

* * * * *

In a memorandum issued at the headquarters of the National Union of Railwaymen, it is stated that the companies intimated that, while they were unable to agree to a similar arrangement with regard to the supervisory and clerical grades not yet re-employed, owing to the peculiar nature of the work, they will endeavour to treat them on similar lines, subject to work being available for which they are individually suitable, and subject also to the companies not being involved in any additional cost. The companies stated that they would arrange early meetings with the trade unions concerned to give effect to the above arrangements.

Mr. Thomas thought the railway agreement an excellent

agreement and hoped the workers would emulate the generous spirit of the employers. Mr. Cramp thought it the greatest achievement of his career.

Within twenty-four hours these "agreements" had been secured, and what little possibility there had ever been to reconstruct the front had vanished. The Communist Party and the Minority Movement Central Committees, seeing in the situation on the Wednesday a slight chance to make the effort in this direction, had sent out a call to all their members to do their utmost to hold the unions together locally on the basis of the May the 1st pledge for a simultaneous return on pre-strike conditions, and to maintain the support for the miners. They urged immediate local conferences of the strike committees with a view to organising a national conference of delegates from the Councils of Action, together with the union executives who had declared for a fight against the terms of re-engagement.

But the shock of the betrayal of the General Council was too great to make any quick throw up of a new leadership possible. The conditions which had governed the strike and the collapse at the centre made such development impossible unless a number of union executives were willing to give the lead. The fact that the instructions during the strike had been coming through the union executives weakened the central grip of the General Council, and obstructed the centralising efforts of the local councils. So it was only to be expected that when the General Council collapsed the workers looked at once to their own particular unions. When these in turn accentuated this, by individual action and separate agreements after the withdrawal of the wage reductions at first put forward, there was no possibility whatever of reconstructing the united action and leadership of the unions.

It may be asked why the Minority Movement and the Communist Party did not set up a new leadership. The answer is a simple one. Both are in a minority, and whilst the influence of both organisations is a growing influence neither have a sufficient organic control, that is have not yet sufficient leading positions in the unions to be able actually to control the unions even in the crisis without an accession of strength arising from sharp and big divisions in the existing leadership of the unions.

Had the General Council been divided and the Left Wing leaders proved themselves to be fundamentally different from the Right Wing leaders, had they been bold enough to stand in a minority and fought their way on the straight issues of no wage reductions, the story of the strike and its conclusion would have to be written in another way. But they were not different. One by one they fell before the drive of the Right Wing which never slackened its push to call off the General Strike which they had called on. The strike ended with the masses feeling intensely bitter, but with a confidence in their own strength and solidarity which bodes ill for the men who had let them down.

And the miners were isolated.

The Aftermath.

Conscious of the tremendous volume of resentment they had created the General Council appealed that there should be neither discussion nor recriminations. They decided to call a national conference of the trade union executives and explain at a date when they hoped the miners' question would be settled. Considering that they claimed they had won a victory, it is remarkable that it should require an explanation. A victory that is worth anything is surely discernable to those who have won. This victory however is of a very special kind. It needs an explanation. And the General Council was so conscious of it that it proceeded to undress in public. First came Messrs. E. Bevin, R. B. Walker and A. A. H. Findlay. They sent the following to "Comrades, National and International."

"Recognising our responsibilities as members of the General Council, as well as the tremendous feeling roused by the calling off of the strike and very natural desire for information concerning Mr. Baldwin's repudiation of the Samuel memorandum, we desire to say that Mr. Baldwin's statement as to the extent to which the Government was committed is not in accordance with our information.

"Let the truth be known and broadcast. The terms of the memorandum were put forward to the General Council and finally accepted in good faith by them on the definite assurance that they would be accepted by the Government as a basis for negotiation. On that understanding the General Strike would be declared off and the lock-out notices withdrawn."

To which Sir Herbert Samuel replied :

“The question is whether there were any consultations between Mr. Baldwin and myself on the terms of the memorandum which was sent by me on May 12 to the chairman of the Trades Union Congress Council. The answer is that there were none.

“I held several conferences with representatives of the Council, at none of which, to the best of my recollection, were present any of the three members who have put the question. At these conferences, I made it plain, not once, but repeatedly, that I was not acting in any way on behalf of the Government, and that, the Government having declared that they would not enter into any negotiations while the General Strike continued, I was unable to ascertain their views, either directly or indirectly, on any of the points to be included in the memorandum. . . .

“There was undoubtedly an honourable understanding between the members of the Trades Union Congress Council and myself that I would use my best endeavours to secure the adoption by the Government of the proposals of the memorandum. I felt justified in entering into such an understanding because I had been chairman of the Royal Commission, the recommendations of which had been accepted as a whole by the Government, and I believed that any further suggestions that I might make, none of which were inconsistent with the report of the Commission, would not be without weight, although made only in an individual capacity. . . . Finally, I knew that the Government had been disposed to consider favourably the definite adoption of the principle of a National Wages Board for the mining industry, containing a neutral element, which had been recommended in a tentative form in the report of the Royal Commission. This proposal was the central provision of my memorandum.

“As a matter of fact, all the points which are suggested in that memorandum for inclusion in a settlement of the coal dispute, and which might arise at the present stage, are covered by the Government’s recent proposal, with two exceptions. One of these is the suggestion that some allowances, beyond the ordinary unemployment pay, should be given, for a time, to miners who may be displaced by the closing of uneconomic pits, and for whom employment elsewhere cannot be found. Since, however, the Government proposed to set up a Special Committee to consider the assistance to be given to displaced miners, it may be held proper to reserve this suggestion for examination by the Committee. The other point is the proposal that the Wages Board should be required to fix rates—in addition to the minima for the lowest paid grades—below which the wages of no class of labour could be reduced. In view of the alarm caused by the employers’ proposals for wage reduction—which go far beyond the reductions contemplated by the Royal Commission and

indicated in general terms in the report—this provision seems desirable.

“With regard to the first paragraph in the memorandum of May 12, which contemplated a resumption of negotiations on the coal dispute after the ending of the General Strike and the renewal of the subsidy meanwhile so as to enable mine-owners’ notices of reduced wages to be withdrawn, it is obvious that the document must be taken as a whole; this paragraph must be read in conjunction with the later paragraphs, which clearly contemplated that some wage reduction may be found to be necessary, and expressed certain conditions that should attach to it. The Miners’ Federation, having rejected the memorandum for the very reason that it contained these provisions, and having again declared that they would agree to no reductions of wages of any class of labour in any circumstances, it is plain that negotiations cannot be resumed with any probability of success. The question of the renewal of the subsidy and the withdrawal of the notices pending the negotiations, cannot therefore arise.

“At the outbreak of the General Strike, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated in the House of Commons that they had then been prepared, if necessary, to renew the subsidy for a period of two or three weeks during the negotiations, and that funds were available for that purpose, but that they needed the assurance that the negotiations would not again be futile. I am confident that if the Miners’ Federation had accepted the memorandum of May 12, and had declared their willingness to resume discussions with a recognition that some wage reduction might be found to be inevitable, and with a determination to reach a settlement, no deadlock would have taken place on the question of renewal of the subsidy for a short period while these discussions were proceeding.

“Finally, let me say that, so far as I know, the members of the Government were wholly unaware of the contents of the memorandum of May 12, or even that such a memorandum was under discussion until I presented a copy of it, with the correspondence that accompanied it, to the Prime Minister on the morning of that day, when the members of the T.U.C. were already on their way to Downing Street to announce the termination of the General Strike.”

What would have happened, I wonder, if the Allied Generals in the 1914-18 war had come to an agreement with a German lieutenant and stopped fighting on the ground that they had come to an “honourable agreement with a person of influential position who will use his influence to get the German general staff to agree”?

Before this A. B. Swales, George Hicks and Ben Tillet had published a statement :

"The General Strike has ended, having served the purpose of urgent and necessary defence

"The Government and the employers, even after our courageous gesture of peace, have with wiliness and chicanery endeavoured to misrepresent the logical meaning of our act as being one of surrender. How meanly false this cowardly travesty of the truth is, will be obvious in a few weeks if not in a few days.

"The distinct lessons arising out of the dispute are, firstly, a demonstration of power and comradeship

"Secondly, it showed the economic grip of the workers upon all industries

"Thirdly, we closed a virulent and vehement capitalist press

"Finally, it brought together every class of wage worker It brought forth from the Russian Trade Union Movement a spontaneous gesture of good will."

Very nice indeed! But they do not explain why they signed the "gentlemen's agreement" and were parties to the calling off of the Strike without any guarantees that the miners' wages would not be reduced. On the contrary they had agreed to the reduction of wages plan outlined in the Coal Commission's Report. Hicks fought strenuously against the acceptance of the Russian trade unions' "spontaneous offer of good will" and Tillet made the soft soapy oration that retained the "services" of Mr. J. H. Thomas. Each of them have been propagandists of class war, declared their belief that the capitalists will surrender nothing except as the result of the exercise of the workers' power. Why then this rubbish "The capitalists must realise, etc."?

Mr. MacDonald proceeded to dissociate himself from any responsibility for the strike and for any of the decisions, and to denounce the General Strike as a weapon of the workers.

First he said at a Hammersmith meeting on May 18th, "I was present at many meetings—not to take part in, because I never did—I was present at the meeting in order that I might know what was in the minds of these men in order that I might be able, when the time came for the House of Commons to deal with the issues, to deal with them on first hand knowledge. Never for a moment, never for an hour did I hear any man—I don't care whether he is regarded as Right Wing or Left Wing of the Party—I never heard a single member of the General Council whisper an idea, give a piece of advice, suggest a move that was aimed at a political issue."

A question at once arises. Did Mr. MacDonald speak at the Memorial Hall meeting on May 1st in support of the policy of the General Council or did he not? Second, speaking as he did speak, without warning the Conference as to the dangerous position they were in regarding the lack of preparations for so great an action, the workers must perforce hold him responsible as much as any other leader for the declaration of the strike, for the lack of preparation as well as for a continuous assistance to the Government and the mineowners towards getting the miners compromised towards wage reductions. To make virtue out of the political bankruptcy of the General Council, to sit tight while the Council makes blunder after blunder because they did not raise or see the political issues they were inevitably raising by the General Strike, is to prove himself a party to the breaking of the strike.

Mr. Thomas also says, "I told you so. I have always been opposed to the General Strike. It was bound to fail." But Mr. Thomas was a party to the unanimous decision of the General Council to call the strike. He signed the orders. Why did he not warn the Trades Union Conference before it was too late, before the decision to strike that it was useless and fatal? Possibly he was as anxious as Mr. Baldwin to get the strike in order to defeat it.

And so the undressing goes on and we are able to see these men more and more without clothes around their bourgeois souls. Mr. Clynes follows naturally and denounces the General Strike after the event instead of at the Trades Union Conference of Executives. So does Mr. Cramp, who bursts forth again into a "never, never" policy. Why, it is necessary to ask again and again, did not these people, members of the Executives of the unions, tell the Trades Union Conference of May 1st that they were making the blunder of a lifetime?

* * * * *

Meanwhile the workers are paying the bitter price in victimisation, in unemployment with hunger and misery in its trail, while those who have re-started work are wondering how long it will be ere the threats of wage reductions made at the moment of re-starting are put into operation. That depends upon the outcome of the miners' struggle and the miners have been let down.

CHAPTER VI. THE CASUALTIES.

A MOST striking feature of the General Strike is the number of trivial prosecutions in the face of the manifest quietness of the workers. The police authorities were evidently instructed to jump at the Communists wherever the slightest opportunity offered, with a view to crippling the work of the Communist Party, and to so report the cases that the Home Secretary would be able to accuse the Communists of "incitement" and doing nothing in the strike—doing all the shouting and taking none of the risks. The workers will know how to value such innuendoes.

I will cite a few cases to show how both the magistrates and the police were, shall I say, "Class Conscious." The police conducted a raid on the homes of Communist Party members in the Rhondda Valley, South Wales. They found a lot of literature, some "Workers' Weeklies" (pre-strike date), old "Communist Reviews," and in the case of the Secretary of the Party Local, Frank Bright, some strike bulletins. Three others besides Bright were arrested; one named Llewellyn and the others Lewis. Bright was sentenced to two months on account of the bulletin. But in the case of the three others, all that could be found was a document issued by the Young Communist League in 1925. This suggested that its followers should urge the children not to sing the National anthem on Empire Day, and to refuse to salute the Union Jack. The magistrate thought in any case this was very wicked and asked them to undertake "not to engage in any propaganda work, or circulate literature of this type for the next twelve months, or they must go to prison for two months, and one month respectively." One of the Lewis's was bound over. All of them refused to comply with the conditions.

At Shipley the police raided a Communist dance, found a lot of old literature, and took everybody in the room who was known to be a member of the Communist Party or the Young Communist League. Eight persons were arrested. Again the strike bulletins were used as the pretext to break the Party organisation. They were held responsible for attempting to incite the troops although there were no troops

within a number of miles. So they received sentences ranging from two months hard labour to two weeks. Two more in London were sentenced to two months and six weeks respectively for having in their possession a leaflet containing the phrases, "Youth in Action: Troops Act." In another sheet it was stated that the "West Ham Council of Action is going strong and has the local movement well in hand. Mounted soldiers have been seen riding in the streets." ("Times" Report.)

The secretary of the International Class War Prisoners' Aid writes in the "Sunday Worker" of May 30th, 1925, "In South Wales numerous raids were carried out on workers' houses. In the case of Owen, Goldberg, and Wilde of Aberamam, the only evidence submitted by the police was that copies of the "Workers' Weekly" and the "Communist Review" and other pre-strike publications had been found in their possession. The police agreed that no attempt was made to distribute them. Two months' hard labour!"

Class Conscious Magistrates.

But not only Communists came in for this kind of treatment. The class consciousness of the magistrates was tuned up beyond the point of hating only the Communists. At the Marylebone Police Court on May 27th occurred the following dialogue between the magistrate and Arthur Hindle, a railwayman summoned for the non-payment of £8 to his wife under a maintenance order. He pleaded that he was out of work.

"Did you strike?" asked the Magistrate (Mr. Halket).

"Yes, sir."

Magistrate: "Well, it serves you right. I suppose you went off without notice and broke your contract. Have the railway company proceeded against you for a week's wages?"

"No, sir."

"Well, they could have done. If you treat your employers like that you cannot expect to be treated very gently yourself. You voluntarily threw up your work, repudiated your contract with the railway company and now you tell this injured woman [his wife] you cannot pay her."

The defendant replied that he was called out by his recognised trade union, the N.U.R.

"You need not have obeyed an order that was obviously illegal."

"We were called out. What could we do?"

"If they asked you to commit a crime you would not do it. Why should you commit this wrong?"

The defendant did not answer the question, but pointed out that he would return to work on Monday at a wage of 31s., which was a reduction of 12s. per week. The order was for thirty shillings per week.

Mr. Halket made an order for the payment of £8 within 21 days, or 26 days imprisonment in default, adding that the defendant might raise the money from the union officials who ordered him to go on strike. The magistrate also requested the Court missionary to assist the defendant's wife from the Poor Box, as she was destitute."—"Times" report June 4th, 1926.

How these Christians "love their enemies!"

In fact they distribute the "love" cheerfully. For example :

About the same date "On the application of the police, three summonses against J. A. Young, G. M. Gotto and C. H. Jones, were withdrawn at the same court. They were charged with exceeding the motor speed limit. 'The Commissioner desires,' said Police-sergeant Jones, 'that the Magistrate will look upon these cases with favour, as the defendants had been working—one as a volunteer omnibus driver during the strike, and the other two as special constables during the emergency.'

Magistrate (Mr. Cancellor): "Do you want to withdraw them? Very well: withdrawn."

Of course we have the consolation that the law is "un-biassed."

But what a joy ride the police had with the pickets. It is estimated that about a thousand cases have passed through the courts in England and Scotland. Glasgow alone saw over two hundred arrests, and sentences on the average of about three months for "impeding traffic." At Gateshead, near Newcastle, fifty men, mostly miners were each sent to prison for one month on account of "acts of intimidation." At Doncaster after a well organised attempt to hold up transport other than that permitted by the Council of Action and a tough struggle with the police, 84 miners were arrested and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. At Gloucester thirteen dockers were sent to prison for 14 days for stopping a barge and a tug in the canal. And so the game went on all over the country. In every district there was a powerfully organised police force ready for anything, and everywhere the workers found themselves totally unprepared for meeting this force.

If the workers attempted to move an inch beyond what the police were prepared to permit, they found themselves in difficulties which only well organised preparations could possibly meet. The Government steered the operation of picketing along the grooves of simple trade unionism, and any attempt at collective action was met with the presence of well trained and well armed police forces. Indeed with the continual pumping of pacifism into the workers from the General Council and the constant appeals to simply fold arms, the situation appeared like a dress parade in the setting of a mock civil war, with only one side armed on the plea of safety for property.

Nevertheless the workers are undoubtedly learning from the experience and one of the first things that is a direct product of the petty persecutions is a wide extension of the organisation of the International Class War Prisoners' Aid.

CHAPTER VII.

REFLECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES.

WHATEVER the likes and dislikes of leaders or of anybody else as to the way history ought to have been made, the big fact now remains that it has been made by the General Strike. Called by leaders opposed to it, conducted by leaders who did not want it, it has been surrendered by the same leaders, who were anxious to see it defeated. Were it not so tragic for the millions who responded to the noblest of human impulses, and risked everything they possessed, the situation would be farcical. Because it is tragic and not farcical, it is now time to take stock.

In the chapters preceding my narrative of the strike, I outlined the events leading up to it, and placed them in line with the evolution of class forces in Britain. I there showed that this evolutionary process took the form of sharpening the class alignments, widening and deepening class consciousness in parliament, but the power of one class to impose its will and intensifying the class war. I produced evidence pointing to the fact that the more difficult the economic and social problems became, the more intense and powerful became the grip of the capitalist class upon political power through its most conservative party. This process in the capitalist class had as its corollary in the working class a great awakening to political consciousness on the part of millions of workers and the crystallising of the class consciousness in the formation of a party, the Communist Party, based upon the interests of the working class. Our task now, therefore, is to examine the effect of the General Strike on this process.

The Conservative Party and the whole capitalist class are exceedingly jubilant about their "victory." Up to the present their "victory" is entirely a political victory and not economic. That they will use their increased political power to secure economic advantage is more than likely, but at the moment they are holding back from a general attack pending the settlement of the issue with the miners. That they have increased their political power can hardly be disputed. By political power I do not mean simply the counting of noses

upon other classes. Of course to those who confuse the garments of power with power itself, this definition is rank heterodoxy. Worshipping the ballot box instead of taking it at its real worth, they are blind, wilfully or otherwise, to the realities of life.

Let us see what the capitalist forces have gained in this experience. Before provoking the General Strike the Government put in at least nine months' preparation. It has been able to test its army, its navy, its police, its auxiliary organisations such as the special constabulary, the O.M.S., its whole apparatus of food control and transport. For nine days it was enabled to give its machinery a thorough trial run against a minimum of opposition with the stage of civil war set, with one side unarmed and quiet. It gave the police excellent exercise in all the preliminaries and manœuvres of street fighting, raiding and confiscation. So pleased were the bourgeoisie with the result, that over £200,000 has been raised for a police fund in a fortnight. No one can dispute that for the whole of the nine days the Government was enabled to go ahead, unhampered, with experiments directed towards the complete subjugation of the working class. The capitalist leaders of Britain are now not only theoretically equipped as a result of their studies of European revolutions, but have a mass of material and experiments from their own experience which will prove invaluable to them in subsequent struggles. So thoroughly have they gripped the State apparatus and knit the auxiliary forces to it, that they have reduced to absurdity the project of the Fascists, who dreamed of superseding the State apparatus by an Italian brand.

In its relations with other parties the governing party can record singular triumphs. The remnants of the Liberal Party in the Parliament became good Tories, justifying and supporting the actions of the Government in its measures to suppress and defeat the General Strike. The Liberal opposition ceased to exist, with the exception of Mr. Lloyd George who opposed the policy of delivering an ultimatum to the strikers although supporting the Tories in their defence of constitutional issues, as did MacDonald and Thomas. The resulting split in the Liberal Party has weakened its forces still further. They are so busy debating as to who rendered the best service to the Tory Government that the latter can

rule them out even as a potential opposition for some time to come.

The only other source of opposition is the Labour Movement. In all its most important lines of policy the Government had already secured the collaboration of the Labour Party official leadership. This was secured of course by the formation of the Labour Government. The difference between the MacDonald-Thomas combination and the Baldwin-"Jix" combination lies in the forces which they are respectively leading, and not in any fundamentally different policy. Mr. Baldwin heads the capitalist forces, in the name of the "nation" of course. Messrs. MacDonald and Thomas head the working class, also in the name of the "nation." Naturally there is friction due to the conflict of interests between the classes, but it is only "friction" and not real conflict. The Government in any of the little incidents of parliamentary talking has only to remind the front bench of the Labour Party of their own statements during their term of office, or taunt them with disloyalty to the Constitution, and the opposition collapses.

It is only necessary to remind my readers of the Labour Government's ultimatum to Zaglul Pasha, and the faintness of the Labour opposition to the present Government's high hand with the "constitutionally elected leader" of the Egyptians, as the most recent example in foreign politics. In domestic politics two incidents relating to the General Strike reveal the completeness of the bankruptcy of the Labour opposition. The first occurred on Friday, April 30th, the day before both the leaders named led the workers into a General Strike. Mr. Thomas declared :

"I have never disguised that in a challenge to the Constitution, God help us unless the **Government won.**"

On the same occasion Mr. Baldwin reminded Mr. MacDonald that the Labour Government had threatened to use the Emergency Powers Act against strikers in 1924. Mr. MacDonald replied :

"The Prime Minister said that he sat down with an aching heart. I got up with an aching heart" (there's loving commiseration for you!). "With the discussion of General Strikes and Bolshevism, and all that kind of thing, I have nothing to do at all. I respect the Constitution as much as Sir Robert Horne."

* * * * *

After the calling off of the General Strike came the debate on the question of continuing the operation of the Emergency Powers Act for a further month. On this occasion only just over sixty Labour members voted against the Government. The front bench gentlemen and a number of those closely attached to them *did not vote*, an attempt at neutrality which leaves the Government with a bigger majority than ever and with the implied consent of the Labour leadership. With such abject weakness in the ranks of Labour's leadership it is impossible to affirm that the Government has any serious opposition in Parliament.

It has now emerged from the General Strike with the opposition outside Parliament seriously weakened. Before the strike, we had been witness to a process of centralisation of the powers of the unions in the hands of the General Council. That it accepted this power reluctantly I have already shown. It dropped this power through its nervous fingers on May 12th, and the unions were left on their own to make the best of a bad job. The Trade Union Executives were as nervous of the new situation as were the members of the General Council, and promptly pledged their unions not to repeat their wickedness of acting together—in short pledged themselves against a repetition of Labour solidarity. The Government has reduced the trade union opposition outside Parliament to the level of the Parliamentary opposition inside Parliament.

Mr. Baldwin can now say: "I provoked a general election in November, 1923, as a means of demoralising the Labour movement and securing the commitment of the Labour Party to our imperialist policy in deed and word. I provoked a General Strike in 1926 as a means of demoralising the trade union leaders and breaking up the unity of the unions which had become so manifest in 1925. There is now no important organised political opposition either inside or outside Parliament. Whatever strength may be gained by the revolutionary forces, which as yet are very small, it will take some considerable time before they can seriously hamper any policy we wish to pursue."

The nature of the policy the Government will have to pursue, even with its greater political grip, depends largely upon the effect of the General Strike upon the economic life of the country. The Liberal leader, Mr. Runciman, promptly real-

ising the need for inspiring confidence in capitalism's powers of recuperation, delivered himself of an oration to show that the General Strike had really done no harm at all. The Conservative Party was very grateful for the assurances. "Society" settled down to its most serious problem—how to make up for lost time with its court and social functions. The Prince of Wales sported £10 to the hungry wives and children of the Somerset miners, and arranged to attend two court functions in two days.

There is no need to debate with Mr. Runciman as to the exact amount of damage caused by the strike. The fact remains that there is no record of a strike of three to four million men for a period of nine days putting profits into the pockets of the owners! And the ending of the strike has not meant the ending of the crisis which produced the strike. Charges on the national finance are increasing daily. Charges on the Municipal authorities are increasing daily, and industry is steadily slowing down. In short the effect of the strike and of the crisis of which it is a part upon the economic situation is directly opposite to the effect upon the political position of the Government and the Conservative Party.

We have no hesitation therefore in coming to the conclusion that the General Strike has accentuated the process already indicated. It has weakened the economic foundations of the power of the bourgeoisie whilst intensifying and consolidating their political power. Of course it will be said at once that this proves that the workers ought not to have used the General Strike, which means that the miners and the General Council should now surrender without a fight. But it must be remembered that the General Strike came as a direct sequel to the failure of the bourgeoisie to improve the economic situation even to the extent of preventing further degradation of the masses, that it was determined upon by the Government politically and that the workers did not conceive of it as a solution of their economic problems. It was an act of passive resistance on the part of the working class and not a measure of economic construction, an act of war called forth by an act of war.

That the General Strike will make profound changes in the opinions of masses of people, who can doubt? For although our story of the strike reveals the rally of the middle class to the Government and the pulverising of the trade union

leadership, the same cannot be said of the workers. Passive they may have been in spite of the terrific incitement of the forces of Government, but they were not beaten by any means so far as their morale was concerned. Their ranks were solid, remarkably solid considering the confusing orders that were issued. And twenty-five hundred prosecutions before class conscious magistrates inside nine days will not drive the workers into the arms of the Conservative Party. The Hammer-smith bye-election held immediately after the calling off of the General Strike, wherein Labour turned the tables on the Tories and Liberals, is an eloquent indication of that. The General Strike, therefore, has rather accentuated the process of developing the political consciousness of the workers than driven them into the fold of conservatism.

The Changes Ahead.

That these indications reveal the limits of the changes that will take place it would be folly to assert. But it does not follow, because all the forces of the capitalist class have rallied behind the Government, to the extent of practically absorbing all Fascist tendencies within the constitution, that the final stages of the evolution of bourgeois political forces have been reached. It requires no great powers of discernment to foreshadow changes in the ranks of the bourgeoisie themselves. At the present moment we are living under the domination of the bankers and rentiers. A reflection on the figures already quoted with reference to income tax, super-tax, the relief to the rich of £40,000,000 per year in taxation, the return to the gold standard which promptly increased the value of investment 10 per cent. to 12 per cent. and added hundreds of millions to the value of the war-loan investments of the banks, the plan for exporting capital to industrial countries so well exemplified in the Dawes Plan to the disadvantage of all the heavy industries, the appointment of three bankers out of the four persons on the Coal Commission, all strengthen our characterisation of the Government as a financiers' Government and warns us of coming cleavages in the ranks of the capitalist forces the longer the economic crisis continues.

Symptoms of coming changes abound. The repeated protests of the Federation of British Industries, against tax-

ation, against the return to the gold standard, etc., and the demand for still greater economy, are clear indications that whilst there is a common bond which links together Baldwin, the banks, Lloyd George, the F.B.I., MacDonald and Thomas, there are struggles within the fraternity which will sooner or later manifest themselves in new forms and combinations. But at the moment the fact remains that "finance capital" dominates the situation through the Conservative Party and holds unchallenged sway. Having succeeded in securing this domination and reduced its opponents to a state of disorganisation it would be signally lacking in political acumen if it did not pursue the advantages gained by the Strike. In this respect the lines of action are more clearly discernable than in the case of its demoralised opponents.

Already committees have been appointed to examine the measures necessary to safeguard them against the passing of any Socialist legislation by the strengthening of the powers of the House of Lords. The electoral system is also being brought under review with the intention of blocking the Labour advance in Parliamentary representation. Already Conservatives have a distinct advantage in the country districts but are losing ground in the industrial centres. The revision therefore is taking the form of finding a corrective to the encroachments of Labour in the industrial areas and reducing its chances in the rural areas to a minimum. The outcome is most likely to take the form of a combination of proportional representation and alternative voting, plus a tightening of the franchise regulation prohibiting workers who have received Poor Law relief from voting. An examination of the figures I have given from the last election results show that the Liberals get a less number of seats for votes cast in their favour than the other parties, and proportional representation which by the way they favour, would give the Liberals a bigger representation at the expense of Labour, whilst the alternative vote in the countryside would put the Labour Party clean out of the picture in these areas for many a long day. Whichever line is taken the direction of the Conservative efforts is to stop the encroachments of the Labour movement and to block the path against Socialist legislation.

A further enquiry is being conducted into trade union law as a direct sequel to the General Strike. Indeed so great was the impatience of the Tories that the Government had to warn

its party against hasty measures, at the same time assuring it that the fullest attention was being given to the situation. The Committee appointed to examine the law have had the line made clear by the speeches of the Liberal, Sir John Simon, and the Judge Astbury decision making illegal the General Strike. The individual settlements of the unions made at the termination of the strike, along with the advice of Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Clynes complete the main material necessary for guidance. The latter are stumping the country denouncing the General Strike and advocating the narrowing down of union disputes to the limit of the particular union concerned and the confining of the other unions to financial aid. Mr. MacDonald especially would prefer a complete return to the craft unionism of the nineteenth century. The Government will certainly move along these lines and introduce legislation against revolutionary propaganda, even propaganda in favour of the General Strike.

If only the Conservative Party could stop the rising tide of class consciousness within the working class as easily as it has disposed of its lieutenants in the ranks of Liberalism and Labour, how justified it would be in its jubilation! He laughs best who laughs last, and the last laugh is not yet.

To Sum Up.

There is no need here to repeat the data showing the complete absence of organised preparations for the General Strike on the part of the Labour movement, other than to emphasise the principal features of the situation prior to May. The reiterated affirmations of the General Council in support of the miners against wage reductions and longer hours, following as they did upon the July manifestation of solidarity, acted as propaganda for its repetition. But the domination of the Council by Mr. Thomas and his Right Wing colleagues since the Scarborough Congress prevented any organisational preparations for a struggle. This lack of preparation was accompanied by speeches by Messrs. MacDonald, Thomas and Hodges, who acted more and more openly as capitalist agents within the ranks of the Labour movement—speeches all directed against the idea of a strike. They favoured wage reductions or “adjustments.” On April 30th the “settlement” was offered and rejected. On May 1st the opponents of the General Strike supported and called the General Strike.

It is now necessary to observe the sequel as shown in the records of the strike. *First* the strike was limited, not only in the number of unions called into action, but in that only sections of some unions were called out, creating endless confusion. This was due to an anxiety to co-operate with the Government in serving "the people" with food supplies. In effect this was handing over the food supplies to the Government, and we were witness to the Co-operative milk supplies being centralised in Hyde Park under Government control. *Second*. This meant that the Co-operatives became the allies of the Government instead of the allies of the unions on strike. This was contrary to the wishes of many Co-operatives. *Third*. Orders were issued through the separate union executives instead of from the General Council direct. The Trades Councils were consequently severely handicapped in the efforts to prevent the strike being run as a series of union strikes instead of as a single fight. It was preventing a class fight, which alone could cope with the rally of the middle class forces to the Government. *Fourth*. The closing down of the Labour Party in Parliament and outside Parliament is in direct contrast with the action of the Parliamentary trade union members in July, 1925. On that occasion it was proposed to obstruct in the House of Commons.

These decisions have a common foundation in the political outlook of the General Council and the Labour Party leaders as revealed in the repeated statements concerning the industrial character of the dispute, absence of challenge to the Constitution, etc. All the members of the General Council are members of the Labour Party or the Independent Labour Party. The latter of course is an affiliated body of the Labour Party. It is of significance to note that neither party issued any statement contradicting this estimate of the strike action. They remained silent and left their members on the General Council to pursue their individual course. In short the Labour Party and I.L.P. as political entities went out of existence for the duration of one of the most serious political situations in the history of this country. Each of these parties placed their apparatus at the disposal of the General Council and handed over the political leadership of the situation to a body which refused to face political responsibilities.

The only party in the working class movement which whilst giving the utmost of its support and of its membership

to the strike committees, Councils of Action and the like, maintained its continuous political work in the teeth of police interference and persecution, and continued to show the workers the politics of the struggle and how to meet the full demands of the situation, *was the Communist Party*. Its line of policy and conduct are indicated in the manifesto and instructions quoted in previous pages. Whatever its merits and demerits, according as the readers' views may be, the fact remains that it did face the situation while the Labour Party and the I.L.P. surrendered their politics to the General Council, who though composed of members of these parties denied all political responsibilities. Indeed the leader of the Labour Party in Parliament and a leading member of the I.L.P., Mr. MacDonald, glories in the fact that the politics of the situation were never discussed.

This astounding accord between leaders of the Labour Party in Parliament and out of it, in the I.L.P. and in the General Council, in attempting to conduct a General Strike, lies at the bottom of the betrayal and disaster, the confusion of orders, the limited nature of the call to action, the surrender of the food supplies to the Government, the failure to make an alliance with the Co-operatives, the denunciation of the General Strike as a political weapon, the attempt to divert the masses into formal parliamentarism, pacifism and craft unionism. For the Labour Party leaders Messrs. MacDonald, Thomas, Clynes, and the I.L.P. to now play the rôle of Pontius Pilate, washing their hands of responsibility for what has happened in the strike is downright hypocrisy following upon complete political bankruptcy.

There is not a leader in either party or on the General Council, not a journal belonging to any of them but has time and again declared that it is impossible to separate the industrial from the political. Why then this sudden conversion in the hour of action to the repudiation of the politics of the General Strike? The answer is simple and clear—the action into which they were plunged, from which they shrank in 1921 and cheered in 1925 and were forced into in 1926, was an historic event which completely repudiated the politics of the parties represented therein. Having represented to the workers that they can choose as weapons of conflict parliament for politics, trade unions for industry, Co-ops. for economics, they dare not tell the workers the truth without

repudiating their past and re-shaping entirely the whole of their political outfit. The Government called their bluff as leaders of class action, but the wonderful nine days, wonderful only in the magnificent solidarity of the masses, have revealed on a colossal scale the completeness of the political bankruptcy of the Labour Party, the I.L.P. and the trade union bureaucracy.

What is a political act? A political act is an action, whether in the form of words written or spoken, the making of a law, the raising or reducing of wages, the conduct of a strike, the casting of a vote or any other act *which changes or tends to change the relation of the classes in society*. If this definition of political action is correct, there is very little in the life of present day society which has not a political significance, irrespective of intentions. Everybody knows the destiny of good intentions, and for the Labour movement to have intentions the opposite of its actions is adding childishness to its other defects.

Does strike action on the part of three to four million workers, the shutting down of several principal industries, tend to change the relations between the classes? To put the question is to answer it. A schoolboy in politics would answer promptly, "Of course it does." It shakes the foundations of industry, raises ever more sharply the question as to which class shall hold the reins of power. Why then deny it, and refuse to face the logic of the action, unless you are seeking to destroy the power of the workers?

But, say Messrs. MacDonald, Clynes and a host of others, the political issue should be faced at the ballot box. What relevance has this reply to the situation when the challenge has been made and the opposing forces are in action? The Government had not resigned. We were not in the midst of a general election. Do these men say the Trades Union Conference should have surrendered before the Government's ultimatum? No. They voted for it or delivered speeches supporting the action.

Not one of them got up and told the conference that they should not take action, and that the miners must accept reductions. The action raised the political issue more sharply than the lock-out of the miners. To refuse to see the politics of the situation and yet to take action was to ask for defeat by the Government which saw the issue clearly and based

its actions upon it. To think that politics can be reserved for general elections or confined to the House of Commons is the height of absurdity and exhibits the lowest depths of political ignorance, however grandiloquent the language in which such ignorance may be clothed.

The Key Question.

Yet this is the key to all the confusion in the ranks of the working class movement, including the trade unions, the Co-operatives, the Labour Party; the foundation of and the illusions within its ranks as to the easy, rosy path to Socialism without struggle. They say, "Join the Co-op., join your trade union, join the Labour Party," without perceiving that every growth of the workers' forces, and every action, marshals forces affecting class relations and raises ever more sharply the question of class power. These organisations are based upon the working class, have grown as a result of the conflict of interests in capitalism, and must inevitably and insistently raise the question in the ranks of the capitalist class itself as to what the capitalist class is to do to defeat them. That means and can only mean the insistent raising of the question of power. To fail to see this is to surrender as the General Council surrendered.

The obvious conclusions to be drawn from this situation and this experience are clear for everyone to see. (1) All actions of the working class movement are political actions, and the instruments of the working class struggle, the unions, the Co-ops., the Labour Party itself, can never be led into anything other than disaster by men and women who either fail to see, or seeing, refuse to accept the political responsibilities of their actions. (2) The General Strike raised the question of class power and the leaders ran away from it, instead of answering with measures commensurate with the developing situation. (3) To raise the question of the ballot box as an alternative to the General Strike is to dodge the issues and the politics of the issues raised in the course of the struggle, which embraces periods between elections as well as during elections; it fosters illusions as to what can be secured through the ballot box without warning the workers as to the counter plans of the capitalist class to block the way of Socialist legislation; it encourages the belief in the notion

that the vote is an alternative to the strike instead of only one of the weapons in the armoury of the workers; in short it ignores completely the realities of the class war as revealed in the General Strike. (4) The failures of the General Council are based upon anti-working class politics which govern the minds of the members of the General Council. The collapse does not signify that there is no need for a General Council; on the contrary the whole experience of the strike shows the need for a real General Council uniting within itself the whole of the trade unions but composed of members governed and disciplined by working class politics. (5) There can be no disciplined action in working class politics without organisation on the basis of working class politics, that is membership of a working class party—the Communist Party. (6) The Communist Party is the only Party which after the General Strike can look the working class in the face confident in the strength of its line of action, before the strike, in the strike and after the strike. The I.L.P. and the Labour Party failed as completely as the General Council.

The contrast in the position of the classes we have revealed does not mean that here is the end of the struggle. The struggle goes on. Whilst the immediate situation shows the ruling class triumphant and truculent, better prepared and better equipped, it is impossible to forget that it operates in a situation where the social foundations upon which it rests are rapidly weakening. Emerging from the strike stronger in its powers of political dictatorship, it emerges weaker at the roots. The economic and social conditions at the end of the strike are worse than before it, and can only accelerate the demands of the capitalist class for further wage reductions and longer hours of labour. The strike is therefore not the end of class war but an accelerator of the class war.. The ruling class knows this, and the preparations that it is making to block the lines of Labour advance, to fetter the trade unions, to illegalise revolutionary action and propaganda, show clearly the utter folly of the "Never again" slogans emanating from the leaders who refuse to learn or who are consciously helping the capitalists.

The working class has emerged from the General Strike with its morale undamaged, though bitterly resenting the collapse of its leaders. It was incapable of producing promptly an alternative leadership, owing to the organic weakness

of the revolutionary forces within its ranks and the mass pacifism which prevailed and yet prevails. In spite of this it is still grasping the fact that the main question before the movement is not the question of structure, important as it may be, but the question of leadership. To change the leadership is a slow process bound up with the task of building a Communist Party.

Much more than direct individual recruiting of workers into the Communist Party is essential for the purpose although this is obviously the first line of progress. The increasingly large numbers of workers whose class consciousness is being roused as never before must be assisted by efforts which enable them to learn, on the basis of their own experience, the important rôle of the Party of revolution in the political class war. In other words the great mass of workers in the trade unions, the Co-operatives and Labour Party, who are in transition from Labourism to Communism, who are letting slip the fetters of capitalist politics and striving to become efficient working class fighters, must be prevented from floundering between Mr. MacDonald as the custodian of Tory Socialism and the Communist Party as the custodian of working class politics, by organising them within the Labour organisations on the basis of fighting for working class demands *which they perceive* as immediate urgent needs of the working class.

Already this process has gone far by the development of the Minority Movement in the trade unions, working as a fraction within them. It is now necessary to extend this Movement, not only by passing its resolutions as indications of agreement with its policy, but by electing to office *only those pledged to carry it into action*. To pass radical resolutions and leave conservatives to take control of them is the height of folly, a guarantee of further failures.

Organised Effort.

The need for an extension of this process on a wide scale to the Co-operative Movement stands out so glaringly that it is only necessary to mention it to at once recall the manner in which the Co-ops. staggered along through the Strike. When their leaders were not openly sabotaging the Strike they were torn between those who wanted to help and knew

not how, and the confused people who wanted to be loyal to everybody, the King, the Constitution, the Miners, Lady Asstor and Mr. Cook.

But still further there is the need for those in the Labour Party who are opposed to the MacDonalld leadership and policy to organise their opposition, and act as an organised body on the same lines as the Minority Movement in the trade unions and the Co-operatives. It is surely not without significance that the collapse of the Left Wing on the General Council during the General Strike follows on the collapse of the "Left Wing" at the Labour Party's Liverpool Conference. The fact of the matter is, in neither case could the people designated be looked upon as a "wing." A "wing" does imply a degree of organisation, but these in both cases were feathers in the wind, bound by nothing, and blown away by the organised power of the "Right Wing."

Without organised effort nothing can be achieved against determined foes. To organise a "Left Wing" does not mean formation of another Party any more than the creation of the Minority Movement means the organisation of a new trade union. There is no room in the working class for another working-class party other than the Communist Party. To form a party means not only the putting forward of a series of demands but the formulation of aims, a policy, a political theory. Any attempt on the part of the "Left Wingers" to do that will land them into one or other of the existing parties, and still leave the problem of this awakening class conscious movement symbolised by the term "Left Wing" untouched. This can only be tackled along the lines pursued by the Minority Movement in the unions, viz. : the uniting in common effort in the form of a fraction with its own leaders, all those who will agree to struggle for specific working class objects more or less immediate along the line of loyalty to working class interests. With such an organised line of action the Labour movement can be cleared of its anti-working class leadership and enabled to face the obligations of the class war.

This does not mean that here is an alternative to the building of a Communist Party. On the contrary we Communists are so convinced that the efforts of sincere workers to find a way out for the working class without a party will convince them of the need for the Communist Party, that we will readily join with them in any and every honest effort

to fight the workers' battles. We will thus prove that we not only understand how social forces evolve and what lessons to draw from history, but how to march with history and assist the process of its unfolding. The victory of the working class over the capitalist class, without a powerful Communist Party leading it, is unthinkable.

This is no new conclusion driven upon us by the General Strike. Before the Liverpool Conference of November last I wrote in the September issue of the "Communist Review" :

"The Labour Party Conference will present us, therefore, with a measure of the real preparedness which exists in the Labour ranks for the crash that is coming. We know, however, that until the working class struggle has developed our party into a party uniting the workers' organisations on revolutionary issues and for revolutionary purposes there will be, and can be, no victory in the challenge which is now destined to repeat itself."

The challenge came, the crash came, and the history of the conduct of the present leadership of the Labour Movement provides convincing evidence that we were right.

We have no hesitation, therefore, in now affirming that the General Strike of May 1926, is the greatest political landmark in the history of the working class of Britain. It proclaimed as nothing else has ever done that the challenge of class power, raised four times in six years, is inescapably bound up with the growth of the working class and the decay of capitalism. It was no exceptional circumstance, but a great event in the evolution of social forces fighting for mastery, in the war from which there was no escape. According to the measure in which the workers of Britain fulfil the tasks we have outlined, the war will be long or short. But the victory never was in doubt. It belongs to the workers.

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