

After Hull—What ?

THE Hull Trade Union Congress is, generally, admitted to be a great improvement on previous conferences. It took a number of decisions upon important questions, which, if applied, will improve the position of the Trade Union movement to some extent. Nevertheless, it shrank from taking decisions upon the many important questions a solution of which is of the utmost consequence to the Labour movement as a whole. Like the curate's egg, the Congress this year was only good in parts.

THE CONGRESS DECISIONS.

Comrade Losovsky has pointed out repeatedly in articles upon the British Trade Union movement, that this movement combines a very muddled political outlook with a high degree of combativeness on purely economic questions. The decisions of the Hull Congress go far to confirm this view. Thus, the Congress took a step forward by granting increased powers to the General Council, by suggesting the need for closer union in the various industries, and by the decision which it arrived at after some vacillation to take steps to secure greater international Trade Union unity. All of these questions deal with the preparation of the unions for the economic struggle, and the need for pushing ahead those preparations was felt by the great majority of the delegates.

But on general political questions, the Congress was confused and indecisive. On the Russian question, for instance, it was sound, but on the question of the Dawes' Report and the Labour Government, it was afraid to take a strong stand. Almost every delegate present felt that the Dawes' Plan was a scheme, which, if put into operation, would hurt the workers of this country as well as the workers of Germany. Almost every delegate felt that the Labour Party had not used its opportunities on behalf of the workers as it might have done, but they shrank from taking practical action on those questions.

THE OFFICIAL LEFT-WING.

In its way, the Congress was a good reflection of the left-wing tendency which is springing up amongst certain sections of the Trade Union leaders. Those leaders feel that the Trade Union movement in its present state is impotent. They are prepared to support, or partially support, advanced proposals designed to

remove specific weaknesses, but they have no comprehensive left outlook on working class problems. They support the need for greater unity, they support the treaty with Russia, but in the same breath they shield the Labour Government from vigorous, healthy criticism, and uphold the Dawes' Report while expressing grave doubts as to its economic effects.

In a way those left leaders have been assisted by the revival of the fighting spirit of the workers, which has been manifest since the end of 1923. It would be a complete mistake however, to imagine that they are merely right-wingers being pushed on from behind by the masses. There are genuine progressive elements amongst them, anxious to improve the union organisations, but afraid to move too far in advance of general working class opinion.

THE C.P., THE MINORITY MOVEMENT AND THE OFFICIAL LEFT.

In view of that situation, what attitude should the Communist Party and the wider Minority Movement with which it is associated take up? In the first place, I think they must strive to convince the workers and the progressive leaders of the need for making the utmost possible use of the gains which have been registered. The Congress has given the General Council more power, not as much as is necessary it is true for the effective accomplishment of all its tasks, but, nevertheless, an increase in its existing power. The left leaders on the General Council who have sponsored this reform must realise that they can use their opportunities to help or hinder the movement towards greater unity.

Already the suggestion has been thrown out in the capitalist Press that the General Council should use its extended powers to secure the peaceful settlement of industrial disputes. If this is accepted the advance towards greater unity in the Trade Union movement will be imperilled. The General Council must not use its power to hamper struggle, but to make struggle more effective.

The General Council can also raise the prestige of the British Trade Union movement enormously if it energetically carries out Mr. Purcell's pledge to secure effective unity in the international Trade Union movement. An ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory, and if the Minority movement and its supporters can induce the left-wing of the General Council to take those steps, and produce results, then the opposition to granting still greater power to the General Council will be broken down.

It would be a suicidal policy, however, for the Communist Party and the Minority Movement to place too much reliance on

what we have called the official left-wing. On problems of Trade Union organisation this element is fairly clear, on other problems it has not broken away from the "right" position. It is the duty of our Party and the Minority Movement to criticise its weaknesses relentlessly, to endeavour to change the muddled and incomplete left viewpoint of the more progressive leaders into a real revolutionary viewpoint. But the revolutionary workers must never forget that their main activity must be devoted to capturing the masses.

While the Hull Congress made changes in Trade Union policy, it said little on the all-important question of co-ordinating the workers' offensive, against capitalism. As a consequence of this, we may expect that sectional rushes at the strongly-organised capitalist enemy will continue to be the rule for some time. The Minority Movement must see that the idea of a common working class demand on wages and hours, and a co-ordinated struggle to realise that demand, is popularised amongst the widest circles of the workers. It must be emphasised by the Party members and the adherents of the Minority Movement, that the operation of the Dawes Report is not only going to make it impossible for the workers to advance, but it is going to stimulate a fresh employing class offensive against the workers. It is, therefore, essential that the workers' forces should be co-ordinated to get the maximum possible gains, and to prepare the workers' organisations to meet the employers' counter-blow.

The Minority Movement must especially in view of the sharp rise in unemployment, press the claims of the unemployed, both with regard to putting into operation the Six Point Charter, and with regard to a closer relationship of the unemployed and official Labour organisations. The unemployed movement has done much to prevent the unemployed workers being used against the employed workers. This service must be reciprocated by the employed workers bringing pressure to bear upon the Government to carry out their promises to the unemployed.

The Trade Union movement must be encouraged to force the hands of the Labour Government, *i.e.*, to force that Government to act not as a neutral body between Capital and Labour as it believes itself to be in theory, or as a body serving the interests of the capitalists, as it actually is in practice, but as a body consciously assisting in the development of the workers' offensive against capitalism. It must be forced to abandon its support, for example, on the infamous Dawes Plan, and to repeal all anti-Labour legislation such as the E.P.A. and other similar measures.

It must succour the unemployed, bring in a minimum wage bill, and make an attempt to nationalise the main industries.

The attitude of the General Council with relation to international unity will also be strengthened if the Minority Movement is able to show the masses of the British workers that they are more dependent upon international conditions than any other working class in the world, that the existing split in the Trade Union movement in Europe hurts them most, and that they ought to use the key position which they hold in the Amsterdam International to bring about real Trade Union unity. In order to accomplish those tasks the Communist Party and the Minority Movement must start an intensive campaign now. There must not be a powerful union in the country without having either a Party member or an adherent of the Minority Movement, running for the Trade Union Congress as a convinced supporter of the Minority Programme. The active workers in those movements must also contest every union position possible, not as isolated individuals, but as adherents of the Minority Programme.

TO THE MASSES.

A definite attempt must be made not only to reach the active men in the union branches, but also to reach the great mass of the workers who do not take a continuous interest in union affairs. This necessary approach to the masses can only be undertaken through the workshop.

In this sphere the workers will encounter great difficulties. The employing class do not like militant workshop organisation, and will do their best to oppose it. Nevertheless, if we can get propaganda going which will lead up to the formation of workshop committees, we will be well on our way to overcoming many of the other problems with which we are confronted in other spheres of the Labour Movement. A strongly developed workshop movement uniting the workers in the shop will do much to speed up and simplify the problem of wiping out stupid sectionalism from the union movement in general. It will provide a ready and continuous approach to the masses, and will enable the adherents of the Party, and Minority Movement, not only to keep them informed as to the daily struggle in which they are engaged, but also to revolutionise their outlook.

The formation of workshop committees will also provide a necessary means of counteracting the bureaucracy which is such an unpleasant and dangerous feature of the Trade Union movement at the present moment. Not only so, but if the workers are going to continue to press forward, then we will be faced with the neces-

sity of taking mass action of a political character. The slow moving Trade Union apparatus is not well adapted for quick mass demonstrations and strikes, the factory committees are. Without factory committees a mass political struggle is almost impossible.

Special problems, however, are attached to the formation of factory committees in the various industries and it is useless to give very many general directions except to say, that, wherever possible, existing official shop stewards and shop delegates positions should be harmonised as far as possible with the development of all-embracing factory committees.

The campaign in the union branches and the workshops must not, of course, be merely a campaign for reaping organisational changes, but a campaign leading up to a united struggle. Closer activity in the union branches and in the workshops should enable us to organise the great mass of discontented Trade Unionists so that in all the large industries of the country the supporters of the Minority Movement, no matter what union they belong to will be able to meet together to hammer out the policy to pursue in their respective industries on the same lines as that which has been undertaken by the Miners' Minority Movement. This will also help to break down bureaucratic resistance to progress.

DANGERS TO BE FACED.

Certain dangers confront the Minority Movement, however, and it is as well that they should be faced at the outset. The chief danger is that it will develop into a purely industrialist movement concerned only with the Union problems unrelated to the general struggle of the workers. That is, as we have pointed out, a marked trait of the old left official leadership. It is no less marked amongst the active rank and file in many of the unions. So far has this artificial separation of the workers' struggle gone on in Great Britain that it is quite common to find workers who agree down to the minutest detail on industrial policy, disagreeing fundamentally on political questions.

When the General Council of the T.U.C. refused to express an opinion on the Labour Government in its report it was giving complete expression to this amazing dualism in outlook.

The theory underlying this may be stated as follows: "It is the duty of the unions to become as strong as possible on the economic field in order to fight the employers. It is the duty of the Labour Party (for which the unions subscribe most of the funds) to control the government. When the Labour Party gets strong enough in Parliament, it will gradually buy out the capitalists and give the workers a certain share of control in industry.

The unions must not, however, interfere in political questions meantime, for that is the affair of the Labour Party." Now we venture to claim that it is absolutely nonsensical. The unions must fight for the workers everywhere. If a capitalist government attacks the interests of the workers and they can rally the workers to resist, they must resist. If a Labour Government is not using its position to fight capitalism, then the Unions must free it to do so. The role of the unions in setting up a real workers' government is an active role, not one of benevolent passivity.

If this were generally realised, then it would be quite impossible for a body like the Trade Union Congress to take up the attitude which it did to the Dawes Report. The Dawes Report is as definite an attack upon the workers' standard as any wage offensive ever launched by the capitalists. It is true that the Labour Government supported it instead of opposing it. It is true that the Trade Unions are the basis of the Labour Party and must support the Labour Government—when it fights for the workers. That does not mean, however, that when a servile Labour Government supports a measure which is likely to hurt the workers that the Trade Unions should support it out of loyalty to the Labour Party. The first loyalty of the Trade Unions should be to the working class. If they are really concerned with the Labour Party, which is largely their creation, then, instead of covering up its weaknesses, they must fight against these weaknesses by all means in their power.

The unions must be prepared to play an active part in the struggle which will lead up to a real workers' government as well as taking part in the control of industry after such a government has been set up. The Minority Movement recognised this at its first conference. It must continue in all its work to popularise the revolutionary position as to the role of the unions in the social struggle, so that the dangerous dualism, which has hitherto been a feature not only of the official unions, but of the unofficial movements within them, will be eliminated.

THE PARTY'S TASK.

In this struggle of the Minority Movement to build its influence in the workshop and in the union branches the Communist Party has a unique opportunity. It is the only party which has a clear industrial programme, it is the only party which has concerned itself with the organisation of the left elements in the Trade Union movement. If our members work wisely and energetically they can reap a great harvest.

The strong position of the Communist Party may be illus-

trated by contrast. During the Hull Congress, Mr. E. E. Hunter wrote an article in the *New Leader*, the official I.L.P. organ, in which he accused the Congress of being rather a futile assembly. The Congress was highly annoyed, and passed a vote of censure on Mr. Hunter. The correct reply to Mr. Hunter, however, was to point out that many of the delegates present were members of the I.L.P., probably a majority, and if the Congress was rather a futile body, it was because the I.L.P. delegates had not reached a common policy amongst themselves, were incapable of acting as a team and were pulling in different ways all the time. In marked contrast to this futility of the big group of I.L.P.ers who were present was that of the smaller Communist group. Possessed of a common viewpoint and working as a team, they were able to bring an influence to bear upon the Congress which was out of all proportion to its numerical strength.

The Communist Party having a united policy is in an exceptionally good position for playing a part not only in the Minority Movement, but in the larger Trade Union movement. Our weakness in this sphere is rather technical than ideological. Many locals and districts have not kept their industrial committees up to the scratch with the result that the necessary contact and co-ordination is lacking. If we can but remedy this, we can gain an influence over the union movement such as no political party has ever had in the past. We can take a big step forward towards getting that Mass Party.

J. R. CAMPBELL.

