

The Servile Conference

THE Labour Party Congress was in marked contrast to the Hull Trades Union Congress. Whereas the Hull T.U.C. attempted to face the issues confronting the workers, the Labour Party Conference did no serious political work at all. At Hull, the influence of the Left-wing was marked, whereas, in the Labour Party Conference, only the Communist fraction took up the attitude of opposition towards the leadership. Such Left-wingers as were there were overawed by the atmosphere of the Conference, and did not dare to criticise the official policy. To a certain extent this weakness of the Left exists because the masses have not yet lost faith in the Labour Government.

In regard to the trade union situation, even the dullest worker realises that the trade union movement, as it is at present, urgently needs re-organisation. There is strong mass support for those who take up a Left attitude in the trade union movement, and, consequently, the Left-wing is vocal. In the Labour Party, on the contrary, the Labour Government's period of office has been too short to expose to the masses the true nature of Labour Party leadership. While the Left-wing in the T.U.C. was, therefore, swimming with the current, the Left-wing at the Labour Party Conference was called upon to swim against the current, and had not the moral strength to do so.

AN ELECTION ATMOSPHERE.

The Conference met under the atmosphere of the General Election—and was dominated by that atmosphere. The Labour Government was going into battle on behalf of the Russian Treaty, and consequently many workers could not see that criticism of its Imperialist policy in other spheres was justified. The Conference was opened by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald who delivered one of his usual florid and ambiguous speeches. There is surely no politician in the world to-day who can talk for so long and say so little as Mr. MacDonald. While he did not in his speech lay down any fighting working class policy, nevertheless, by masterly use of rhetoric, he conveyed the impression that he was giving the lead for a powerful struggle against the capitalists. In doing so he won the sympathy of the Conference and was consequently able during the course of his speech to launch an attack against the

Communist Party with a view to influencing the Conference decisions on the question of the relations between the Labour Party and the Communists.

MacDonald's speech was followed by a vague general resolution praising the work of the Labour Government, and calling for strong support of that Government. The Party fraction has been criticised for not opposing this resolution. A mistake may have been made in not doing so, but it is up to those who hold this point of view to make themselves fully acquainted with the situation. The resolution was an emergency resolution. It was only distributed to the delegates a few minutes before it was moved. No amendments to that resolution were in order. The only way to oppose it would have been to move the previous question. This would have led the majority of the delegates to believe that the Communist Party was opposed to the return of a Labour Government, as they would not have had time in moving the previous question to give a clear political explanation of the Party's attitude. On the whole, I am inclined to think that the delegation did the only thing that was possible under the circumstances. They later handed a declaration to MacDonald explaining why they had not opposed this resolution, but the reading of that declaration was not permitted. Immediately after the emergency resolution, the Party fraction had an opportunity of making a sharp criticism of the Labour Government in connection with the discussion on the Executive Committee's Report. In spite of the fact that the atmosphere of the Conference was totally against such discussion, the Party fraction did its revolutionary duty.

FORCING POLITICAL DISCUSSION.

On the questions of Communist candidates, of Unemployment, of the Dawes Report, of India, of political prisoners in Russia, of the Labour Budget, of the Government's attitude towards militarism, and of the Youth Movement, the Communist Party fraction raised sharp criticism. It can safely be said that this was the only opposition which manifested itself in the Conference and that without it there would have been no political discussion at all. On the question of Communist affiliation and Communist candidates, the Labour Party Executive put up Mr. Frank Hodges, a prominent member of the Government, to state the case against the Communists. Mr. Hodges, in praising the enthusiasm of the Communist Party membership, suggested that they should go out into the highways and by-ways, *i.e.*, outside the Labour movement, in order to carry on their propaganda. Subsequent speakers on the official side made the same suggestion. It is

obvious that they were exceedingly anxious that the Party should break the connection it has recently been establishing in the localities with the local Labour Parties. Other speakers who took part on the official side emphasised the fact that for the Conference to recognise the Communists in any way would have an adverse effect on the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party. There is no doubt that, from the purely vote-catching point of view, and not from the point of view of working class principles, this is correct. In preparation for the Election, the Conservative Headquarters had prepared a huge number of leaflets and posters all based on an attempt to identify the majority of the Labour Party with the Communists, and if the Labour Party Conference had done anything to identify itself with the Communists a considerable section of its more timid supporters would have been scared away. The decisions of the Conference were, therefore, influenced to a very great extent by immediate electoral considerations.

THE STRUGGLE FOR AFFILIATION.

The Party fraction stated the Party case in a satisfactory fashion, but it is obvious that it is possible for a fool to tell more lies in a minute than a philosopher can answer in a month. The astute politicians who argued against association with the Communists were not fools. Neither was the Communist delegation composed of philosophers. The result was that, in the time at our disposal, we could not answer or explain all the statements that were made against the Party. The actual voting on the first two resolutions is not a true indication of the Party's strength. In most of the Trade Union delegations there were minorities in favour of Communist affiliation, and in favour of the endorsement of Party candidates. In the miners' delegation, the decision to vote against the Party was carried by 74 votes to 52. The 52 delegates who were in the minority had the pleasure of seeing the votes of the people whom they represented cast against Communist affiliation. A similar thing happened in most of the other delegations, and the vote, therefore, does not give a conclusive index of the Party's strength within the Labour masses.

The third resolution to expel the Communists was not discussed at all. A vote on it was taken by a trick at the end of the debate on the first two resolutions. It was not made clear to the Conference what this proposal meant with reference to the rights of trade unionists and with reference to the position in local Labour organisations where the Communists are strong. Immediately after the vote to exclude the Communists was carried

by a narrow majority, a number of Trade Union General Secretaries, Bromley, Gossip and Cook expressed their fears as to the consequences of this decision, and there is little likelihood of it being applied to Communists who are members of trade unions. The remaining resolutions of the Conference were rushed through without any discussion, and a number of important questions on which Party members were to speak, such as the Dawes Report, Imperialism, Soviet Russia, and control of the Labour Government by the Labour movement, were not taken at all. The resolutions which were passed were carried without any discussion. The demands which are contained in this resolution are demands which cast very grave reflections upon the present Imperialist policy of the Labour Government, and are not likely to be taken seriously by that Government if it is returned to office.

On the question of Unemployment, the Executive brought forward a resolution that was a masterpiece of vagueness. When the Glasgow Trades Council delegate, supported by most of the Party fraction, endeavoured to get the Six-Point Charter embodied in this resolution, the attempt was defeated. *The spectacle of Trade Union delegates who had agreed to the Six-Point Charter at the T.U.C. turning down the same Charter at the Labour Party Conference does not inspire one with profound respect for the political consistency of many of the prominent workers in the British Labour movement.*

VICTORY FOR RIGHT-WING.

The net result of the Labour Party Conference is that no attempt was made by the Conference as a whole to review the work of the Labour Government during its first months of office. No attempt was made to discuss the new international situation arising out of the Dawes Report, and the taking of measures to carry on a struggle against that Report. No attempt was made to ensure that the Labour Government, if returned again to office, would act more strictly under the control of the Labour movement. As a consequence, we have got to acknowledge the fact that the Conference registered a victory for the Right-wing, that is to say, for those who are struggling to transform the Labour Party into a timid Liberal Party. For whatever results may be obtained in the Election in wiping out the Liberal Party of Asquith and Co. (and we are not inclined to think that they will be as great as expected) we have nevertheless to acknowledge the fact that political Liberalism will never be dead as an active political force while the present leadership of the Labour Party is in control.

The victory of the Right-wing is not a decisive victory. In

the movement itself, opposition to Right-wing policy is growing. The great effort being made by the labouring masses at the Election is due to the fact that those masses are fighting on two class issues, the Campbell case, and the Russian Treaty. Whichever way the Election goes, the desire of the masses to fight on class issues will be stimulated. A Labour government returned to office—though this is unlikely—would be forced by mass pressure to put up a more vigorous fight. MacDonald and the Right-wing leadership will fight against this and in so doing the Left elements in the Labour movement will be strengthened, particularly their sincere and consistent leader, the Communist Party.

If a Conservative Government is returned, the masses will expect a more vigorous fight against this government to be undertaken. The record of the MacDonald Government while in office will make it more difficult for that Government to fight Conservative reaction, and again Left-wing dissatisfaction will grow.

In those circumstances it would be folly for the members of the Communist Party to follow the advice of Mr. Hodges and Co. and go out into the highways and byways. The Communist Party must rally the sympathy of the masses in the local Labour organisations and fight those decisions. In fighting, it must consistently oppose the policy of the Right-wing leadership. In doing so it will be able to gain such strength as will not only prevent those decisions from being operated, but will also enable it at a subsequent Labour Party Conference to deal still heavier blows at those Right-wing leaders who are corrupting the Labour movement with Liberalism and Imperialism.

J. R. CAMPBELL.

