



THOMAS BELL

[Frontispiece

# PIONEERING DAYS

By  
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## FOREWORD

I CAN think of nothing finer in life than to see young men and women, with all their earnestness and keenness, coming for the first time to our movement. It is an inspiration to those of us who have laboured long. It is at the same time a reminder of our own youthful experiences, when we came into the movement eager to understand things and become politically educated, impatient to play an effectual part.

We did not accept things at their face value: we challenged all and sundry. We had to see things crystal clear, or we were not satisfied.

Older men to whom we looked for guidance and enlightenment were not always helpful. In many cases they were superior and aloof—sometimes because, as we soon found out, they were not *able* to answer our questions, but often also because they regarded us as a nuisance. There was too much of the attitude common to a certain type of successful trade union leader. Listen to him during a railway journey, as I have often done. He will recount with great self-satisfaction how in his early days he, too, was a socialist of the Left. He will dwell wearily upon some event, a strike or a delegation, in which he played a certain role, and out of which he came to be an official. He reads all the Left books and can quote socialist scripture like the devil. He “is prepared to go as far as anyone,” but the workers are not yet educated up to going as far as he is prepared to lead them. So meanwhile he pursues the comfortable routine of officialdom and takes a “sane” view of labour affairs.

There was also enough of the sort of fellow who was for ever reminiscing about the good old days when men and things were "different," and ever so much better than they are to-day. His eyes were shut to the march of time, and he was hopelessly out of touch with the course of living events—a perpetual discouragement to the idealism of youth, which had its eyes to the glorious future.

But with what warmth of feeling we regarded those who, out of their own comprehension and experience, were ready to guide and work with us. How we looked up to "the pioneers"! I personally shall always owe a deep debt of gratitude to the stalwart friend and teacher, George S. Yates, who saved me endless floundering by leading me direct to the sources of the knowledge I desired. He put into my hands the basic theoretical works of Marxism and the writings of the great masters of science and general literature. He insisted—and himself set the example—that whatever task one takes up must be done well and thoroughly; that it was nonsense to argue, as some self-styled "advanced" comrades did, that, since the supreme object of our life was to fight for the downfall of capitalism, it was unnecessary, and even wrong, to spend time on technical education, "which would only make us more efficient wage-slaves"! Experience confirmed what he drilled into me: that the chap who was a dunce at his craft was generally looked upon by his fellow-workers as probably a dunce at everything else too, and that proficiency in one's job was an evidence of seriousness that won a ready ear for one's political and philosophical ideas.

And now that some of us, in our turn, have forty or so years of activity in the movement behind us, I think we have the duty to transmit to the younger men and women, as far as we can, what we have seen and learned in the period travelled. Only in this way can there be a real

fusion of all the vital forces of the working-class movement—the fresh and vigorous thought, the ambition free from selfish personal motives, which fires every sincere young recruit, with the mature understanding and firmness which the experiences of the struggle have bred in those who have remained true to their principles.

There is no Chinese Wall between youth and age. Neither has a monopoly of the qualities necessary for the leadership of the workers. We have seen how the attempts of Trotsky deliberately to set the young communists of the C.P.S.U. against the party leadership—the young guard against the old guard, as he put it—in an unscrupulous bid for personal aggrandisement, inflicted for a time great harm not only upon his own party and the Soviet Union, but also on some brother parties by their tacit support of Trotsky. Neither the young by virtue of their youth, nor the old by virtue of their age, have an exclusive role to play. Leadership such as our movement demands calls for vision, the ability to choose accurately at each moment the course to be pursued; and these in turn depend upon a sure grasp of the fundamentals of the movement, upon practical experience in applying them, upon character, intelligence, and human sympathy. In other words, it calls for the best that the young and the best that the old can give.

It is as one man's contribution to the future of our movement that the following pages have been written. They do not aim at being an autobiography. Rather it has been my aim to give, from personal experience, an account of events which the younger men and women have not personally lived, in the hope that it will throw light on many problems which, in spite of changed conditions, have still much in common with those of the pioneering days.

## CHAPTER I

### CHILDHOOD DAYS

WHEN I was born (on September 20th, 1882) Parkhead, in the east end of Glasgow, was still a semi-rural village. One or two coal-mines were still operating in the vicinity, though the dumps and the open unused shafts bespoke the passing of coal-mining from the district. Hand-loom weaving was still an active industry. But the main centre for employment was already Beardmore's Forge. The smell of oil and smoke, the thud of the Sampson hammer and the glare of furnace fires were fast banishing the scents and sounds and colours of the country.

The Bell family were of fisherman stock and came from John o' Groats, the most northerly point of Caithness. From here Samuel Bell had migrated about the '30's of last century to Saltcoats, on the Ayrshire coast, where my father—William Bell—was born in 1854. He was the youngest of a family of two sons and two daughters.

Saltcoats was then an old-world fishing village with an excellent harbour. It had at one time an important fleet of fishing smacks which scoured the Firth of Clyde and the lochs of Argyllshire. There was a certain amount of hand-loom weaving carried on supplementary to the fishing industry.

Equipped with a very elementary education, my father became apprenticed to the building trade, as a stonemason. It often happens that when young craftsmen complete their apprenticeship, they are driven into the

big cities in search of work denied them by the small village employer, who is generally more concerned with cheap labour than skill—which labour he gets from a succession of apprentices, until with time and developments in big industry, the village decays. It was in this way my father migrated to Glasgow.

My mother—Barr Hargreaves—came from a line of coal-miners who had inhabited the vicinity of Parkhead for generations. In those days the stonemasons, like the miners, were aristocrats of labour. On the occasion of the marriage of my father and mother they were driven to church in a four-in-hand with a postillion rider in front. As a symbol of affluence my father wore a suit of white moleskins, while my mother wore a brand new Paisley shawl. The wedding supper was held in the Public Hall to which special invitations were issued to a large circle of friends. We may smile at the “lavishness” and “extravagance” of these proletarian marriages, but after all it is a red-letter day for the young couple. Soon the industrial machine claims them for its own, and the unremitting toil and slavery in after years gives little opportunity to add to their stores of romance.

Long spells of unemployment were a common experience in our family, and I recollect my mother having to go to the warehouse in the city for raw cotton and silk which she spun at home with the aid of a “spinning jenny.” When we were infants she attached a string to the cradle, and in this way rocked as she worked the latest member of the family, which finally consisted of three boys and three girls.

Often did I run to the pawnshop with my father’s Sunday clothes or some small article of value, to raise money to meet pressing debts. Deeply sensitive as I was to our own family poverty, I was surprised to meet people

at the pawnshop whom I was prone to look up to as my "betters." This experience broke down in me that exaggerated worship of respectability peculiar to the proud Scottish character.

My father, being of a radical turn of mind and never having much money, spent most of his spare time, especially week-ends, reading. There were hand-loom weavers in our village—indeed, in the courtyard where we lived. These old men were notorious for their advanced views, and often as a boy I frequented their shops to help them in little ways. To go on an errand was always an opportunity to get inside. Once in, I lingered as long as possible, on the pretext of doing small jobs for them—but in reality because their talk and their habits attracted me.

They wove cloth for shirts, shortgowns, petticoats, etc. This they had to take into town to the big warehouses which either had given them orders or made purchases from them, bringing back bobbins and yarn for more work. If there was not much doing they would foregather in each other's shops, or go out to the local public-house and discuss the questions of the day.

There was a local lending library in the village, established for many years by these old radicals, the books being kept in a small ante-room in the Public Hall. My father was a member of this library. For a shilling a year he had the privilege of taking out two books a fortnight, on paying twopence a week for each book. It was my job to go to the library and fetch the books. The keeper of the library, old Tom Bennett, a real old bookworm after Burton's own heart, for some reason took a special interest in me and used to chat with me when I came in. I helped him to look over the dingy shelves for particular books, or return those handed in to their respective places.

This was my earliest contact with books, and no doubt

laid the foundation for that love of literature which I regard as being as important for a man's soul as meat and drink are for his body.

We were not a religious family in the sense of being devout. From the day my father and mother were married in the Parish Church in Parkhead, I believe they never attended service. Certainly my father didn't. My mother may, from some strong sense of respectability, rather than devotion, have attended a Sunday evening service on rare occasions. This, however, did not prevent them from paying for their seat or pew. And in later years, though my father's mind hardened against the Church and religion generally, my mother never failed to maintain contact with the local parish missionary. It was the "correct" thing to do.

In my parents' childhood days there had been no Board schools. They were the more keen that we should attend regularly. When the Education Act for Scotland was passed in 1879, and the Board of Education for Glasgow took over all schools, the limited grant of the Government and the parsimony of the city ratepayers made it necessary for scholars not only to purchase their own books, pencils, slates and ink, but to pay sevenpence a week for instruction. What this meant to a worker with three or more children at school can well be imagined.

Often when the date came round to pay the school fees (which were due fortnightly), my mother, having to decide with her limited means which were the most pressing debts, would not be able to afford them. I recollect the trouble she had to persuade my elder brother, Samuel, to tell the teacher the fees would be paid next week. He was a proud, stubborn lad, and insisted on having the 1s. 2d. when it was due or he wouldn't go to school. My mother would plead with him that she hadn't got it. Then she



would take the family "tawse"—a black strap with five fingers—to him and beat him, but to no purpose. Finally, in despair, she had to borrow the money from her brother or my grandfather.

With my keener sense of the difficulties at home, I had, on the contrary, no hesitation in going to school and telling the teacher he couldn't get his fees till next week. This led to conversations with the teachers about our family circumstances, and I remember the sympathetic words of one teacher, in particular, who came of a miner's family himself.

I went to school in the spring of 1889 and left in the spring of 1894—at exactly eleven and a half years of age. But even this short period had taught me something in addition to the routine subjects. Resentment at the cruelty of certain of the teachers led to their being mobbed by the boys after school hours. More than once I took part in waylaying a teacher, booing and hissing and shouting names at him on his way home. The relief to our feelings was great, especially when we got rotten apples or other refuse to throw at him, though we knew well that this would lead to a "court martial" next day. Finally feeling ran so high that we organised a strike. We had a dare-devil of a boy, the son of a steel smelter—Jock Clyde—for our leader. We all stood outside the gate and when the bell rang we refused to go in. Away we marched in formation through the cornfields, singing the popular songs of the times, and in a mood of defiant destruction. Gathering sticks on the way, we prepared to defend ourselves against the farmer, his dogs, or any other "enemy" who might attempt to stop us. Nobody did. But this, my first crude experience of strike action, has vividly remained with me ever since. The immediate result was the removal of the teacher in question, and a

better disposition on the part of the remainder of the teachers.

In later years I came to travel in many lands and have observed the living conditions of the workers there. But I verily believe there is nothing, with the possible exception of the conditions under the old Russian Czarism, to compare with the slums of Glasgow. There has been some improvement in the last thirty years, but when I was a boy they were appalling. We did not live exactly in a slum, but in something next door to it. Imagine a block of buildings less than fifty yards square, with a courtyard ; twenty-five families, with an average of four to the family; one water-tap outside to each group of families; two open wet closets; a central open midden joining them, and one wash-house for the lot; the courtyard of earth full of mud puddles in the wet weather—and it seemed to rain about nine months in the year in Glasgow.

Each family had no more than two rooms. In our case there were eight of us in these two rooms. I knew families of ten who were our neighbours. The beds consisted of holes in the wall with wooden props to support the straw palliasses. To add to our discomfort, we lived above a hay and grain store, so that we were on familiar terms with rats, mice, bugs and fleas. Scarlet fever, measles, influenza, chickenpox and smallpox were continuously present—if not the one, then the other. It must have been a heartbreaking job for my parents, who were scrupulously clean, to keep us in decent health. Looking back I can understand now the reason for so much scrubbing, cleaning, airing of beds and whitewashing of walls that went on.

I believe that the rebellious character of the Clydeside workers is fostered to a considerable extent by the herded conditions of life. The tenement system, combined with

the factory life, draws the workers close to each other. There are quite extensive circles where every one knows each other. Their parents have grown up and been married together. They have been born in the same "close." They go to the same school, play together in droves as children, go to the same works, spend their leisure time, especially when unemployed, standing about the corner of the street together. From the circles of my early associates I could name half a score of workers who came to take an active part in the official Labour movement, and who got their first impulses from the arguments and political discussions that went on at the street corner rendezvous.

Mutual aid is very highly developed amongst neighbours in the poorer tenements. A great deal of borrowing and lending goes on of domestic utensils, clothes and money. One will lend a wringing machine or tub on washing days, while another will assist in the washing of the clothes. On special occasions, such as a wedding or a funeral, I have known my father lend a neighbour his black suit which, in accordance with family custom then, he always kept available for such events. On the other hand, many is the time I had to run to some neighbours for the loan of a shilling to keep the house going till Saturday came round with the weekly wages.

But it is in sickness, and above all childbirth, where the reciprocal help is most strongly felt. The rearing of a family was regarded as one of the necessary accompaniments of getting married. At the first hint of marriage the young girls began making baby clothes. But now and then some "improvident" woman would find herself in a difficulty, and then there would be a lot of coming and going amongst the neighbours, one bringing one article and another some other article, for it was an

unwritten law that the baby must never suffer for the omissions of the parents.

There were no clinics and few Samaritan Hospitals in those days. Midwifery was usually undertaken by some elderly woman who had had several children herself, and the neighbours would gather round to help. The man of the house and the other children, if any, were given meals and temporary lodgings elsewhere during the critical days.

In these and a hundred other ways the sense of solidarity became an integral part of the make-up of the working men and women of the Clyde.

## CHAPTER II

### MY FIRST JOB

THE half-time system was prevalent in the days of which I am speaking. Boys and girls of ten and eleven were encouraged to go to the cotton mills or rope-spinning works or to take jobs as errand-boys. Many of my school chums were half-timers. My parents were very much opposed to this system, though, like other workers, they badly needed the extra shillings. But while we were not allowed to neglect our schooling we were encouraged to carry milk in the mornings for a local farmer.

Boys and girls would get up at six o'clock and go to the farm or dairy. There each was given as many as twenty pint or quart cans at a time, with long handles for carrying; and with this weight they made the round, climbing three and four flights of stairs to deliver the milk to the customers—for which they got the handsome wage of one shilling and sixpence a week. My older sister and brother had done this job, and when I reached the age of eight or nine I fell heir to the post. I can remember how on a winter morning our hands were cracked and bleeding with the cold and frost, and I cried. My mother made me soak them in a basin of hot water, after which she rubbed in vaseline. The hot water caused excruciating pain, but it softened the skin and helped it to heal.

My first job on leaving school was with one of these dairymen, full time. My hours were from 6.30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and sometimes 7 p.m. For duty I had to assist in

getting the horse harnessed and loading the van; go round the streets (two rounds a day) ringing a bell for customers, and run up stairs with special deliveries. (The ringing of this bell was an art at which I soon became expert from practice, and the other boys used to claim me in some back street, for a chance to imitate.) I had likewise to scrub the milk barrels and cans, clean the horse's harness and the brasses of the cart, and wash out the yard. After numerous other odd jobs, I walked two miles home; and earned a wage of 3s. 6d. per week of seven days.

There was no set time for meals. Going out so early in the morning, often without any breakfast, I was ravenously hungry by eight o'clock. More than once, when I had had no chance to eat up to nine or ten o'clock, I picked up a crust of bread from the road to keep me going.

A more agreeable job was that of van boy to a mineral water manufacturer. Our round was to Coatbridge and Airdrie—a distance of some ten miles. In the summer months it was fine to get out along the country road to Coatbridge, which was then flanked on each side (save for the village of Bailleston) with cornfields, woodlands, high trees, and a deep wooded glen just as one enters Coatbridge. Once out of Glasgow I used to jump off the lorry and walk, to stretch my legs. It was glorious in the springtime, with the early morning nip in the air, to watch the buds sprouting, the leaves coming out on the trees and the wild flowers raising their heads; to listen to the lark, the mavis, the blackbird and the throng of other songsters in the woods. But in the eighteen months that I was on this lorry I not only came to appreciate the delights of nature—I came to see something of the lives of the miners and ironworkers.

As one passes the cross of Coatbridge, there is a long

stretch of iron and tube works along the road to Coatdyke. In the period I am speaking about, capitalist production in Great Britain was expanding. Tongues of flame leapt up from dozens of furnaces. Puddling of iron was still in vogue. Steam hammers made an infernal din. Volumes of steam kept hissing day and night, so that a fine spray from the condensed steam and the particles of coal and dirt that filled the air from the smoky chimneys kept the main road always greasy and filthy.

Here the workers were to be seen at the gates or lying over the walls, stripped to the waist save for a blue flannel singlet, their faces scorched with heat, and always in a sweat. Thousands of these workers had migrated from the peasant villages of Ireland and worked for very low wages. Drunkenness and religion seemed the only refuge from their hell of toil.

Amongst the miners the remnants of the "truck" system still prevailed. The stores were connected with the mines. The company owned the houses. Those were the days of hideous rows of miners' one-story houses without any sanitary conveniences, damp and unhealthy. In many cases the workings of the mines underneath caused cracks in the foundations and the structures, so that it was a regular thing to see houses with gashes in the walls and wooden props to hold them up.

We hawked our mineral waters through the thickly populated parts of the town, because it was there where our custom was to be found. The iron-workers in these infernos had a perpetual thirst. For twopence they could get a huge bottle of "Iron-Brew," or lemonade, or ginger beer—concoctions of water and boiled sugar, tinged with an appropriate chemical simulating fruit, and gas made from vitriol. Thousands of bottles of this queer stuff were consumed daily.

However, it wasn't possible to go for ever on 7s. a week. I went to work inside the factory.

Machinery in bottling minerals was then in its infancy. There was still a great deal of hand labour, and much heavy lifting and carrying. In the washing department boxes of empty bottles were piled up near big, long tubs filled with hot water. On one side, usually, young workers—boys and girls—were employed filling cages with bottles and sinking them. Their wages were 9s. a week. They were always working in water, with wooden clogs to protect their feet, and only a sugar bag made into an apron to keep their middle from getting wet. By the end of the day the water was through the bag and to their skin.

It was the duty of these young workers to watch out for corks pushed inside the bottles; paraffin oil, and all kinds of foreign ingredients, including flies, beetles and mice. Sometimes, being rushed to keep pace with the washers on the other side of the tub, they got careless. Then the water would be filthy with oil, dead flies, bits of paper, etc., and the result would be cursing and swearing and recriminations all round. On the opposite side of the tub were the washers. Their job was to lift out the bottles as they came up; insert them upside down on the flushing pipes, and turn on a tap to swill them out. They, too, in turn, were rushed by the bottlers who, at times, got out of step with the washers.

I passed from the washing-room to syruling and labelling. I had to put syrup into the bottles and run with them to the bottling machine, then stick a label on each bottle as they were filled, corked, and tied, and run with the full box, which weighed about half a hundredweight, to a store room thirty yards away. The average output was sixteen boxes an hour for nine hours a day. I therefore carried 72 hundredweight every day over a



distance of 30 yards—i.e.,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles actual load carrying and another  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles walking back—for 12s. a week!

The bottling machine was a primitive thing, where a mistake in filling or corking would cause the bottle to burst and fly all about the room, sometimes striking the workers in the eye or face, or on their bare arms. There were not a few bottlers in those days with only one eye.

Personally, I seemed to have a charmed life, for apart from cracked hands, cut fingers and an occasional graze on the arms from splinters of glass, I escaped unharmed, and was earning 16s. a week as a tier when I was taken away by my parents to go to the iron foundry.

## CHAPTER III

### I COME TO THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

IT was while working in the bottling store that I began to take a keen interest in atheism and labour politics. There were three Salvation Army lassies who worked at the wash tubs. They were keen propagandists and often engaged me in discussion. Their propaganda provoked me into marshalling all the atheistic arguments I could muster. To meet their challenge I read the Bible, Ingersoll's *Mistakes of Moses*, and quoted the *Brimstone Ballads* of G. W. Foote, the Freethinker. I did not seem to make any impression on them other than, I believe, to intensify their prayers for a lost soul. They told me they prayed for me every time we had an argument. When I moved into the bottling room I found more sympathy from an old bottler and a woman who was tying for him. Both of them were Irish and violently pro-Boer. They were anti-British in everything, and sympathised with my socialist opinions. This encouraged me very much to persist in my views.

I had always been of a studious disposition—the type of young worker who wanted to know things. I had taken a keen interest in the miners' strike of 1894, and the railwaymen's strike of 1897. I remember joining in the processions of workers who went from street to street in Parkhead burning the effigy of some scab or blackleg, and with what glee we watched the flames shoot up over the life-size image of the dummy—which had an

appropriate label hung round the neck—and poked the dying embers into flame!

I can appreciate, now, the fury of the bourgeois press in denouncing such conduct, and the by-laws in municipalities against the torchlight processions. I believe the burning of the effigy of a “scab” had a deep and lasting influence upon the working-class youth. For me, young as I was, the burning was justified. I did not know exactly why, but “blackleg” was synonymous to me with something anti-social. He was a social leper and ought to be exorcised. The “blackleg” impressed me as a kind of thief who had stolen something from his fellow-workers and deserved punishment. The railwaymen then were not so well organised in point of trade union membership as they are to-day; moreover, they were not overweighted with the huge bureaucratic apparatus they now have. The impression made on me *then* was that they were terribly militant.

The only branch of the socialist movement in Parkhead then was the Independent Labour Party. It had a front shop for its branch rooms in the “Wandered Land,” Great Eastern Road, facing Janefield Cemetery. It carried on a certain amount of public propaganda, but was most in evidence during the municipal elections. Amongst its leading lights were big Sandy Haddow; John Brown (who became Secretary of the Iron Moulders’ Society of Scotland); Geordie Mitchell (a printer), and a family called Harvey, who were steel smelters in Parkhead Forge.

But the most outstanding and active was Sandy Haddow. Sandy was a big, sturdy proletarian, and had become a leading smelter in the forge. A man of action, with a powerful frame and voice, he was tireless in his propaganda for socialism. In the simplicity of his defence of the poor and the demand for “equal opportunities for

all," which was a common slogan of the I.L.P. socialists at that time, his enemies had found the opportunity to work up a scandal around him with a view to destroying him. The method of payment by Beardmore then was to give a contract to a leading man, making him responsible for the payment of wages to those working under him. When Sandy was thundering at the street corner, denouncing the capitalists and their appropriation of wealth, the anti-socialists butted in with the demand for Sandy to practise what he preached, and to give an equal divide. Amongst the backward workers this stigma gained in its circulation until Sandy's character as an exploiter was as black in the eyes of some workers as Beardmore's.

But Sandy persisted in his propaganda, and as a parish councillor he was a valiant defender of the poor. He exposed in public the graft which was then unchallenged in the city and its parish councils. The aged workers, who were torn from their homes and separated from their life-mates, and forced into the barracks of Barnhill Poor-house to end their days with the stigma of pauperism and failure, always had a friend in Sandy.

Workers came to him with their grievances. He went from home to home, assisting where he could by material means, and giving advice. Nothing was too much trouble for him when helping the poor.

He not only made scenes in the Parish Council meetings, but he never failed to come out to the street corner to tell the workers what was going on. It was enough to improvise a poster saying, "Sandy Haddow will speak here to-night," and the workers would flock to hear him. He seldom missed holding a meeting on a Sunday morning, and often held one in the evening too. His propaganda was always simple, direct, and of local interest. With sheaves of notes and press cuttings he would lash the local

municipal fathers for their graft, and end with a glowing picture of the future socialist commonwealth.

Parkhead Forge in the early eighties was controlled by the Beardmore family. It manufactured steel plates for all kinds of work, from  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. plates for tubes to 5 in. and 6 in. plates (and guns) for warships; as well as locomotive tyres. Earlier still it made cannon balls. The old puddling process was carried on till a late date side by side with the Bessemer open hearth furnaces. The furnaces, foundry, rolling mill, steam hammers and press engaged a large staff of highly skilled labour—including bricklayers—and all under the patriarchal eye of old “Bill” and “Isaac” Beardmore.

The plates, ingots of steel, propellers and keels for ships were hauled down the Clydeside on a chariot-like conveyance which consisted of a car on two wheels at each end of a long pole—a “monkey” as it was called. This “monkey” was drawn by a team of ten, twelve and more horses, according to the load. To bring the load to the main road, which led to the shipyards of Govan or Clydebank, there was a steep incline from the gate up the New Road (now Duke Street) to Parkhead Cross. When, as often happened, the horses got stuck, I have seen Isaac Beardmore come up to the Parkhead Cross, and call upon the workers who were to be found at the street corner to come and give assistance to the horses and haul at a rope. Once on the straight road the men and Beardmore would adjourn to the corner public-house, and all engage in drinks at Isaac’s expense.

With the expansion of imperialism, its shipbuilding, armaments, etc., Beardmore’s grew like a mushroom. By the war of 1914 the old puddling process had died out. Electric furnaces, cranes, automatic conveyers and up-to-date methods had wiped out the old patriarchal

conditions. The family concern had become a giant armament ring with its tentacles stretching throughout the mine-fields and shipyards of the Clyde Valley, and to international concerns. During the Great War (1914-18) over 10,000 workers were employed on munitions and the by-products of the steel plant. It gathered workers from all parts of the country. The village of Parkhead had become a congested cosmopolitan area of many dialects. The economic crash following the close of the war dealt a severe blow to the Beardmore concern. The works for a time were practically shut down: the poverty and destitution of the workers was unspeakable.

But to my story. As was customary in those days, I was one of a group of young workers who hung around a favourite street corner (Burgher Street was our corner), bantering each other over football, boxing and dancing, and indulging in good-natured humour at each other's expense. We had our football team, for which we trained on the old Celtic Park. Our training night was Thursday every week. We ran round the track, had skipping ropes, and "friendly" boxing contests for exercise. (It happened more than once that I came away with a black eye, a swollen nose, or a thick ear.) It was fine, healthy sport. The vigorous flesh gloves and sponging kept us in fine trim.

Politics, too, got a good share of our attention. It is a big mistake to think the corner boys spend all their time conspiring to attack old gentlemen and steal purses. There are many intelligent young workers in these crowds, and I have heard very fine political discussions, albeit amateurish and crude.

When big "Sandy" called a meeting a group of us used to gather round to listen. When the meeting was over we invariably took sides for and against. The more

we discussed the more I became convinced I, too, was a socialist, and started to read the pamphlets and literature. There were three of us in particular who became seriously interested. Alex Waddell (now settled in Canada, I believe); James Walker (now a high official in the Iron and Steel Smelters' Federation and M.P.), and myself.

We three used to get together to compare notes. We went for walks to have uninterrupted discussions. We planned to go to all the Labour meetings. But, as often happens with young workers who begin thinking about political questions, we saw religion and the Church as the big enemy. Curiosity awakened, everything has to be brought to the bar of reason. In search for the truth, it is not long before the hand of the Church is found in every subject of enquiry, creating in the young mind doubt, suspicion, fear and hesitation. Some young workers give up the struggle—the bolder go forward and land in the camp of atheism.

We took the road of secularism. In our own simple way we probed into religion, science, and sociology. It was some time before we ventured into an atheistic meeting, but it happened. The Secular Society in Glasgow held meetings every Sunday morning and evening, in Brunswick Street, in a little hall that apparently was used as the Fruit Brokers' Exchange. It always smelt fruity! Here the late G. W. Foote, Chapman Cohen, Joseph McCabe, Percy Ward, F. G. Gould, J. T. Lloyd, J. M. Robertson, Denis Herd, Mrs. Bradlaugh-Bonner, and occasionally a socialist speaker—Herbert Burrows, etc.,—would hold forth.

My first attendance was to hear G. W. Foote, then getting an old man, but still full of vigour. For a lad who was still attending Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Meetings

in the Wesleyan Church, Gallowgate, and perplexed with religious doubts, it was a bit of a shock to hear for the first time an orchestra on a Sunday playing secular music. We might very well laugh at such fears in these days of radios and cinemas on a Sunday, but over thirty years ago secular music in a public place in Scotland was an innovation.

G. W. Foote was an orator of the old Bradlaugh radical school. He opened his speech with a dramatic recital from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and then at intervals quoted from several of the plays in an effort to claim Shakespeare for the cause of atheism. Apart from atheism, this was my real awakening to the fine qualities of the great dramatist, and I straight way read the whole of the plays, and subsequently saw most of them acted.

I was now 17 years of age and in search of scientific knowledge. The Rationalist Press Association had just begun to issue reprints of scientific classics at the modest price of sixpence. These included Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* and *Wonders of Life*; Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature*; Clodd's *Story of Creation*; Grant Allen's *Evolution of the Idea of God*; Laing's *Modern Science and Modern Thought*, etc., etc. I read and studied all these as they appeared.

But the first scientific text-book I bought was *The Descent of Man*, by Charles Darwin, and subsequently *The Origin of Species* and the other books of Darwin. Soon I enlarged my circle of kindred seekers after the truth, and fairly plunged into scientific and philosophical studies. I was not satisfied, however. The problems of the universe—astronomy, geology, embryology, origin of man, etc.—still left the economic and social relations of the classes untouched. And always I wanted to find a solution to the problem of poverty. I devoured a book about this time which had been prohibited for several



years in America, called *Dr. Foote's Plain Home Talk and Cyclopædia*. This book dealt with every subject under the sun, especially the origin of life, childbirth, care of the body, psychology, and sociology. This book made a great impression on me and I handed it round my work-mates until it was as black as coal, and the batters torn.

In my thirst for knowledge about socialism I suggested to my companions that if we joined the I.L.P. we would come into contact with those leading personalities we admired and heard so much about, and we would be sure to get enlightenment. We joined in 1900. The patriotic fever of the Boer War was still running high, and, though I knew nothing about Imperialism, I had read about the scandal of the Jameson Raid; about the proposal to annex the Transvaal and destroy the independent republic of the Boers. I took part in the pro-Boer meetings and sold pamphlets and literature at the meetings. We had then, as our big attraction, a miner from Ayrshire who had worked in the Transvaal. He told the audiences about the real motives of the war—the greed of the mine-owners who flogged and physicked the natives; their desire to reduce the £1 a day standard of the white workers, and to abolish the eight hours' day.

The I.L.P. somehow did not satisfy me. I found the leaders whom I had expected to assist me in my thirst for knowledge kept what they had up their sleeves and only brought it down to club me when I became too inquisitive. I remember the branch discussing the running of a big meeting to open the municipal election campaign. It was suggested we should invite the Rev. James Barr (now a leading Labour M.P.). I took a strong stand against Barr. I argued it was impossible for a parson to be a socialist; that the working class was chloroformed by

religion, and that we ought not to encourage religion from our platform.

Those leaders I had hoped would enlighten me came down on me like a ton of bricks. They reduced me to silence with their metaphysics, though I remained unconvinced. After the business was through, John Brown (the secretary of the Iron Moulders' Society) fastened on to me, and gave me my first, and one of the best, insights into opportunism and political bargaining I ever had. In substance his argument was, "If we say openly we are socialists the people won't vote for our candidate. We should go as far with our opponents as they will go with us. If we oppose certain candidates in one municipal ward, they will oppose us in other wards: *ergo*, let us bargain with them. The Rev. James Barr will give us a veneer of respectability and show the people we are not intolerant."

To me—socialist idealist and enthusiast—this was a blow. It savoured to me of graft and left me cold. The I.L.P. was a growing political force in the city. As designed by Keir Hardie and others it was the driving force in the Labour Representation Committee—the forerunner of the Labour Party. Every ward had its branch. There were over a score of wards and these were linked up into a Federation. I attended the Federation meetings as branch delegate, and I learned that what John Brown had said was not merely an expression of personal opinion, but a matter of settled policy.

Already the I.L.P. had a number of bailies and magistrates in the Municipal Council—Shaw Maxwell, P. G. Stewart, George Mitchell, to name the more prominent of them. These fellows worked as a caucus and were as perfect a bunch of bureaucrats as ever dominated the local Labour movement. I was rather

young then to fathom the subtleties of the debates, but I have impressions of heckling and criticism and uproar at those meetings. Looking back, I fancy the opposition came from the proletarian elements who didn't want to follow the policy of trickery pursued by the platform.

I had heard of the Social Democratic Federation and had become acquainted with one or two miners who were members. I had made up my mind that the I.L.P. was no place for me. I must get closer to the S.D.F. In the winter of 1902 I joined the Economic Classes run by the S.D.F. at 63 Adelphi Street, South Side. My companions Waddell and Walker joined with me. In the course of our studies we three debated amongst ourselves whether we ought to join the S.D.F. The scientific teachings of Marx on economics laid bare the class struggle, and showed us the workings of the whole industrial system of capitalism. "The Materialist Conception of History" was the key to a scientific interpretation of the historical processes that have led to the present structure of society and enabled us to grasp the meaning of the struggle between the old order and the new. The entire revolutionary outlook—in an abstract way it may be—appealed to us youngsters. We agreed together to join up at the end of the session. Naturally, we began debating and disputing in the I.L.P. branch on matters of theory and practice, and many fierce discussions ensued. My companions seemed to weaken under the discussions, and when the session drew to a close they made several excuses for delay, but my mind was made up, and I joined the S.D.F. in February 1903.

Walker found work with the steel-smelters in Parkhead Forge. Many of the leading furnacemen were members of the I.L.P., and it was not long before he was sent to Ruskin College as a student. He was there during the

“Plebs” revolt, about which more later. True to the type of Ruskin student he became an official of the Iron and Steelmelters’ Federation, gravitated as a functionary to the central office of the union, and later became a Labour M.P. A clever platform speaker, he has never failed to utilise his early studies in “Marxism” in defence of the trade union and Labour Party bureaucracy, and to attack the Communists, whom he has always detested.

These classes, I believe, were the first of their kind in Great Britain. The leader of the classes was an exceptionally clever worker—George Yates by name. By trade an engineer, while in Edinburgh Yates got employment with some professor at the University, attending to the scientific instruments. He utilised his opportunities to study and became an expert mathematician, draughtsman and designer. He worked in Glasgow as a draughtsman and designer for the Central Station and railway bridge that spans the Trongate, and it was then that he conducted these classes and addressed public meetings in his spare time. A fluent speaker, he was well informed on Marxism, economics, history, philosophy, logic and literature. He read and spoke French and German fluently.

Yates had come from the old Scottish Labour Party to the S.D.F. He was an ardent Internationalist and attended the congresses of the International. The Paris Congress in 1900 was the scene of a big debate on the question of socialist participation in bourgeois governments. This was provoked by the entrance of the French socialist, Millerand, in 1898, into the Cabinet to sit cheek by jowl with General Gallifet, the butcher of the Communards of 1871.

The resolution approving the participation was moved by Karl Kautsky, and became famous as the Kautsky

resolution, or, as the Russian journal *Iskra* dubbed it, the "Caoutchouc [india-rubber] Resolution." H. M. Hyndman and the official delegates of the S.D.F. supported Kautsky. Yates and a small group were against. He immediately took up the fight against Hyndman on returning from the conference and, in collaboration with J. Carstairs Mathieson, a schoolmaster in Falkirk, led a number of the Scottish branches in opposition. Though Hyndman, under pressure of the opposition, was forced to abandon his attitude, at the end of a year the struggle had become widened. The issue really became a question of Reformism or Revolutionary Socialism, and I had no difficulty in finding myself on the side of the Yates group. In France the fight against Millerand had been led by Jules Guesde, who was then a thorough-going Marxist. The Guesdists had been named the "Impossibilists" in contrast to the pure and simple reformists, dubbed "Possibilists."

Yates and his group opened a series of press attacks on the officials of the S.D.F. But Harry Quelch, who was editor of the party paper, *Justice*, and a colleague of Hyndman's, suppressed the correspondence. The main line of the opposition was against all reformism: exposure of the Labour Party and trade union officials as fakirs; for socialist trade unionism; against the monarchy; and exposure of the futility of Labour parliamentarianism. This line the official S.D.F. nicknamed "Impossibilism," and started to suppress and expel the opposition.

Unable to find ventilation for their views in *Justice*, articles were sent to the *Weekly People* of New York—the organ of the Socialist Labour Party of America—which, under the leadership of Daniel de Leon, had also opposed Kautsky at the Paris Congress. Quantities of the *Weekly People* were brought over for sale in Scotland and circulated

in London. This widened the breach. In the meantime, the question of a paper for Scotland was raised and finally *The Socialist* was launched in 1902.

The Scottish "Impossibilists" had an enthusiastic ally in James Connolly and the Irish Socialist Republican Party, whose headquarters were in Dublin. The I.S.R.P. had a little hand-printing press of its own and printed a monthly paper—*The Socialist Republican Worker*. Connolly immediately undertook to print *The Socialist*. Thus was forged, between Connolly and the S.L.P. in Glasgow, a link which was not broken until his assassination in the Easter Rising of 1916.

*The Socialist* appeared monthly, an eight-page sheet for one penny. It was edited and circulated entirely by voluntary labour. From the economic classes I took copies, hawked them in the foundry and at public meetings, and raised subscriptions to keep it going. From associations in the classes and under the influence of *The Socialist* I, too, became an "Impossibilist." We studied that winter *Wage Labour and Capital, Value, Price and Profit*, the first nine chapters of *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx; Thorold Rogers' *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*; H. de B. Gibbins' *Industry in England*, and J. Richard Green's *Short History of the English People*. Besides which we took readings in Shakespeare, short lessons on English grammar, and from a little primer on *Logic*, by Prof. Stanley Jevons. It was funny to see old "Daddy" Hyndman, Hunter Watts, and others, who came to Glasgow for propaganda purposes, sitting amongst the boys, and being treated like mere raw students of Marx. It was gall and wormwood to Hyndman, who was a vain, egotistical old peacock. But we enjoyed it!

We had two and a half hours' tuition; reading out aloud; questions and answers to last week's lessons;

short discussions and examination of home-work: after which tea was made and for another hour we talked and discussed freely on all manner of political and educational subjects. An hour's respite and we would repair to Buchanan Street, corner of Argyle Street, or to Glasgow Green, to hold forth on socialist propaganda to large audiences who collected there every Sunday night.

In those days the Clarion Scouts were a strong force for socialist propaganda in Glasgow. At a time when Labour politics were still a completely new idea to many workers, the Scouts did excellent pioneering work. During week-ends groups of young lads and lassies would cycle out to the mining villages in Lanarkshire, carrying papers, leaflets and pamphlets. Public meetings were held at the open places and lively discussions engendered. Thus, by sales of literature, hawked from door to door, and open-air meetings, the ground was prepared for the I.L.P. and the future Labour Party in Lanarkshire. This combination of propaganda with pleasure has much to commend it even to-day, however changed the forms may be.

The Scouts were then fairly catholic in their propaganda, and gave their platform to speakers of different socialist and Labour groups. They held regular winter lectures in the old Albion Halls, adjoining College Street. The S.D.F. had their quota, and it was a bean-feast for us young "Impossibilists" to turn up at all those meetings and heckle the speakers—especially Hyndman, Quelch, and Co. We were preparing for the platform.

Internally, the party strife went on with strong feelings on each side, and sometimes physical force for possession of the premises and the majority of the members. In retaliation for being called "Impossibilists" we styled the reformists "Kangaroos," because they kept jumping from one reform to the other, and would never be definite

on anything. This strife had gone on for three years and had to be ended. The spring of 1903 was to see the climax.

The week before the opening of the Party Congress in Shoreditch, London, *The Socialist* appeared with a scathing personal attack—an article entitled “The Official S.D.F.” The “Impossibilists” sent a strong delegation, prepared for the worst. We knew this meant expulsion, and so it did. Yates was expelled in the first session. Mathieson and other Scotch delegates were followed by E. E. Hunter, who then ranked himself among the militants.

In Glasgow we waited on the news and as soon as the telegram came through we took a pail of paint we had ready, blotted out the sign, and took the name of the Glasgow Socialist Society. There remained in the conference a small group of “Impossibilists”—principally of the English branches. This group, led by Fitzgerald and Anderson, for reasons best known to themselves didn’t like the idea of following the Scottish lead, and next year left the S.D.F. to start the Socialist Party of Great Britain. It never got beyond the dimensions of a small sect and for a long time was largely confined to London.

As the Glasgow Socialist Society we remained for three months, when a conference of the Scottish branches was called in Edinburgh, in August 1903, to found the Socialist Labour Party. At this conference, which I attended, James Connolly acted as the chairman. There were delegates from Kirkcaldy, Dundee, Dunfermline, Edinburgh, Leith, Falkirk and Glasgow. There was little discussion on policy as the line was clearly understood. Agreement with the attitude of *The Socialist*, and acceptance of its policy, were made the criteria of membership in the new party.

The question of the name of the new party required a



little thought. We were anxious not to create the impression, which the official S.D.F. was trying to encourage, that we were only the tools of the American S.L.P. We thought of "Republican Socialist Party," etc., etc. It was Connolly who, with his characteristic directness, proposed "The Socialist Labour Party." "It doesn't matter what you call yourself," he declared, "you'll be dubbed the S.L.P. anyway." And the S.L.P. we became.

## CHAPTER IV

### FORMATION OF THE SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY

THE social composition of the S.L.P. consisted principally of young industrial workers with a handful of professional and clerical workers. Full of enthusiasm and the vigour of youth, we set out to storm the entire edifice of capitalism and all its institutions, including the bureaucracy of the trade unions and the Labour Party. We attacked vigorously the corruption of the latter, and went out for a clean leadership.

In the S.D.F. we had had specimens of drunkenness, from the leaders down to the local branches, that made the name of Socialism stink. It was the practice of the officials in Chandos Hall, Maiden Lane, London, to inveigle promising young comrades from the provinces into public-houses to stupefy them and win them over to the side of "Possiblism." Our comrades—clean, healthy and full of idealism—refused to be drawn into such debauches, much to the disgust of H. W. Lee and Harry Quelch, who openly declared once that "Temperance seemed to be one of the cardinal principles of 'Impossiblism'." Our leading comrades—Connolly, Yates, and Mathieson—were teetotalers, and their example was followed by the young members, who already didn't hesitate to clear out of the S.D.F. branch habitual drinkers, especially if they were platform speakers.

There are, I believe, few greater curses to the workers' movement than the beer-swilling and drunkenness that

goes on amongst many of the leaders, especially in the trade union and Labour Party apparatus. The older leaders become comfortable and cynical, and deliberately set out to corrupt, by drinking bouts, the younger strata that are coming on, as a means of covering up their self-seeking opportunism. I have known several cases in my experience, in every section of our movement, where clean, honest, bright, intelligent men have been reduced to muddle-headed sots and fools by this practice. It is a disgusting bourgeois method of corruption and, while not posing as a fanatical teetotaler, I think it ought to be crushed wherever it shows itself.

It has become the practice of ill-informed critics to represent the S.L.P. as being anti-Parliamentarian. This was the favourite label attached to every organisation that denounced the jobbery of the Labour politicians of the Second International, and exposed the sham pretences of bourgeois democracy. It was the stigma attached to those who insisted upon waging an energetic class-struggle when the Labourists and Social Democrats were bent on becoming respectable "Ministerialists."

That the S.L.P. were opposed to the bourgeois parliamentary system and to the capitalist state power was true. But that we renounced all participation in parliamentary action by the working class is not true. On the contrary, it was precisely on this question that the S.L.P. waged a struggle for years against the syndicalists and anarchists, who denounced all parliamentary action. What our party fought against was the reformist programme of the I.L.P., the S.D.F. and the Labour Party, which led the workers to believe that only through the ballot-box and the return of a Labour Party majority to the House of Commons could the social emancipation of the working class be achieved.

The rise of the S.L.P. coincided with the period when the Labour Representation Committee was very active and making strenuous efforts to capture seats in Parliament. We could recite examples of labour leaders who actually held shares in the industry of which they were supposed to be organising the workers to fight. To send such "Labour lieutenants" of the captains of industry to Parliament, men who had sold the pass and broken strikes repeatedly, was to perpetuate illusions among workers. In this respect the propaganda of the S.L.P. did a certain amount of useful pioneering work, in combating liberal-bourgeois ideas that are current to this day, especially in the upper ranks of the working class.

It is a thousand pities, however, that we were not familiar with the rich correspondence between Marx and Engels and the writings of Lenin. We should then have been saved from numerous errors of sectarianism. Both Marx and Engels, and later Lenin, were at great pains to analyse and expose the liberal-bourgeois ideas and influences at work in corrupting the labour movement and keeping the working class divided. Marx and Engels repeatedly insisted on the importance of the socialists attaching themselves to the unconscious but powerful class instincts of the trade unions and assisting in the formation of an independent workers' party. "Far better," writes Engels, "let the workers' party begin to be formed on a programme not altogether pure. Later on the workers themselves will understand and will learn from their own mistakes; but I think it would be a great mistake to hinder the national organisation of the workers' party, no matter on what programme."\* These profound ideas of Engels we neither knew nor understood.

The S.L.P. was bent on cleansing the working-class

\* See Lenin on Britain. Page 76.

movement of all social opportunism and liberal-bourgeois corruption. But how? It attacked the class-collaboration policy of the trade union leaders, but for some years prohibited its members from becoming officials in the trade unions for fear of corruption. It did not understand that a trade union leader can and ought to be a tribune of the people. It refused to allow dual membership in its ranks, which prevented the members not only from belonging to the other socialist parties, but from working in the Labour Party. This clearly led to isolation from the main stream of the organised working-class movement, to the cardinal sin of leaving the workers at the mercy of the liberal-labour opportunists, precisely where they were most influential, and at a time when the working class was seeking to build up a party independent of the bourgeois parties and groping towards socialism.

The S.L.P. made the mistake referred to by Engels of striving for a pure socialist programme. Had it known how to bring into the Labour Party its study of Marxism, combined with its critical attitude towards the liberal-bourgeois ideas and opportunism then manifested in the workers' movement, and particularly in the young growing Labour Party, it could have had a more beneficial influence. It could have more effectually assisted the workers to learn from their own experience.

Our first national secretary was Neil Maclean, now Labour M.P. for Govan. He was then a mechanic employed in Singer's Sewing Machine Company, Clydebank. Maclean had been secretary for the Glasgow Clarion Scouts, and had come over to the "Impossibleists" just prior to our expulsion from the S.D.F. He was one of a small group of capable platform speakers in Glasgow, consisting of George S. Yates, an engineer, Fred Cater, a shoemaker, a stonemason named Fraser,

and a clerk named James Craig. Neil Maclean did a considerable amount of propaganda and for the next three years visited the most important towns in Scotland addressing meetings. His long association with the Clarion Scouts, and his wide circle of friends in the I.L.P., caused him to chafe at the restrictions of the S.L.P. In 1906 he was working in Edinburgh. Here he came into conflict with the local party branch which was notorious for its academic narrowness. There was much unemployment in Edinburgh at that time and large meetings were being held in the town on the initiation of the I.L.P. Maclean took part in these meetings and formed one of a deputation to the Edinburgh Town Council to present demands for work or relief. Deputations to the Town Councils or Parliament were frowned upon as the preparatory steps of opportunists whose eyes were fixed upon Parliament as a career. To analyse the true causes of unemployment, viz. production for profit, competition for markets with the recurrent gluts and crises, that was the true and sole function of a socialist. But to go cap in hand and ask for sops, that was anathema, and for this Neil Maclean was expelled.

Neil Maclean was a forceful speaker, and had a talent in those days for organisation. If, to-day, his is a mediocre role in the Labour movement it is the fate of most of the pioneers who have flirted with Marxism and then passed over to the camp of the Labour Party. I have noticed this to be the case with several others; they are always out of step, and rarely succeed in finding a place in the top leadership of that party.

Our first national organiser was James Connolly, at a salary of 30s. a week. The son of an Irish emigrant who had found employment in Edinburgh with the City corporation, Connolly had joined the S.D.F. in that city

and had taken sides with Yates against the official policy. Connolly himself had worked with the Corporation Cleansing Department and, to the consternation of the smug Edinburgh bourgeoisie, ran as a Socialist candidate for the Town Council, for which he got sacked. A short, stocky man, with heavy auburn moustache, a roguish twinkle in his eye, and pleasant Irish brogue in his speech, Connolly made friends everywhere. His quiet, reticent disposition concealed the store of knowledge he had acquired from extensive reading and wide travel. But, provoked into discussion or debate, he would rout opponents with incisive and merciless logic.

Connolly travelled all over Scotland, lecturing and organising, for the first year of our existence. As lecturer, propagandist and organiser, he was unique. A proletarian of proletarians, he had none of that snobbery and pretentiousness that mar so many of our leaders. He was a true son of the working class; devoted and self-sacrificing for the cause of the workers' emancipation from capitalist slavery.

I learned much from Connolly. I carried the platform and took the chair for him at his meetings. He took great pains to coach us and to assist us in becoming public speakers. He would arrange to put one of us up for ten minutes before he took the meeting. Afterwards he would give us friendly criticism and words of encouragement to go on and do better. Connolly's speeches were a model of simplicity, conciseness, and burning class invective; always backed up by quotations and statistics of fact. Being Irish, he excelled in repartee; his ready wit silencing all opposition, though he went to no end of pains to clear up doubts in the minds of workers honestly seeking the truth. One example of his repartee. We were holding a meeting at the Wellington Monument, Falkirk, one Sunday

night. At question time, a man in the audience tried to be clever and in a facetious tone of voice asked: "Mr. Speaker—if you had been born with a silver spoon in your mouth, what would you have done?" Without any hesitation Connolly replied: "I would have cried like the devil till they took it out of my mouth and put me on the breast." Another Saturday night, at Rutherglen Cross, a few drunks gathered round, and for a time there was a lot of interruption, prompting one individual to ask: "Is this a public meeting?" "Yes," said Connolly, "what do you think it is—a public-house?" The laughter put the crowd in good humour, and the meeting went on.

A brilliant writer, he not *only* wrote his articles, but hand-set them, ran the printing machine, and did everything in connection with the production of a newspaper, including its sales at meetings. When the linotype machine was introduced he promptly set about learning to become an operator. He was fond of poetry and loved Freiligrath, from whom he would recite with fine feeling at our social gatherings. No mean poet himself, he wrote a goodly number of songs which we printed in *The Socialist*. The "Rebel Song" is a fine example of his work, and there are many others which ought to take their place in a section of our literature at present woefully deficient, except in rubbishy music hall parodies.

Connolly never demurred to speaking anywhere, or at any time. In this connection, I think he was shamelessly exploited by us. We had not yet trained many speakers—that was to come—and I have known him to do as many as twelve meetings in one week, apart from his literary work. Nor did he always get his 30s. on a Saturday. Many a time I had to whip up the comrades, to collect their coppers, threepenny pieces and sixpences to let him



have his salary by Tuesday. But never a murmur or complaint did we hear, though he had a wife and about six of a young family in Dublin depending on him. We were all filled with emotion when he sailed from the Broomielaw, one September night, in the Irish boat, to go to Dublin in preparation for emigration to New York.

I did not see him again till the great Irish Transport Workers' lock-out in 1913, when I spoke in the Glasgow City Hall with him and Larkin, in support of the Dublin workers. The last I saw of him was again at a meeting in the City Hall at which I spoke—in 1915. The *Irish Worker* had been suppressed, and during Connolly's visit to Glasgow we undertook to print it on our machine in Renfrew Street. Comrade Arthur MacManus was especially keen on doing this; worked day and night to get it out, and arranged for the shipment of the paper which he took over personally to Dublin, as glass. I managed the clandestine correspondence.

I shall never forget the night little "Mac" went to Dublin with the papers. The morning of that day he called at my house for my cycle to have a run into the country—for a "breather," as he called it. About six at night, as I was washing the foundry grime off, "Mac" turned up with his arm in a sling. He had fallen on a gravel path and broken his collar-bone. Dr. Scanlan had set the bone and told him to lie up for a few days, but "Mac" insisted on going to Dublin.

We expostulated with him about the folly of this, but it was no use. Off he went. It was a fearfully wet and boisterous night. What kind of passage he had can be left to the imagination of those who have crossed the Channel from Glasgow. This incident was typical of the determination and devotion of "Mac" for the workers' movement.

From these excursions of MacManus to Dublin I learned a great deal about the irregular drilling and arming going on in Ireland, that was to culminate in the Easter Rising in 1916. The Republican volunteer movement in the south had been stimulated by the Ulster movement in the north; by the postponement of the Home Rule Bill, and the determination not to have conscription in Ireland for the English army. I heard many graphic stories of workers going out at nights, and giving up their week-ends to drilling and rifle-practice; of the activity of the Countess Markevich among the youth, and of the activities around Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

Connolly understood the limitations of the bourgeois Republicans in Southern Ireland. He knew they would never go beyond the type of republic which enabled the Irish capitalists to exploit the Irish workers without the hindrance of the British Government. If there was to be a Republic in Ireland, then for Connolly it was to be a workers' Socialist Republic. And so he began a workers' volunteer army.

It was a revelation at first to me, who had known Connolly, the quiet, persuasive propagandist, the editor, the poet, the economist, historian, philosopher and organiser, to hear that now he was to be seen in an irregular military uniform seriously drilling the workers who frequented Liberty Hall. What for? It was not then clear to us. MacManus and I speculated together on the chances of an uprising or a successful rebellion in Ireland. Was the time ripe? MacManus once put this query to Connolly. "The time is never ripe," said Connolly, "until you try. If you fail—then it is not ripe. If you succeed—then it *is* ripe."

For Connolly, "England's difficulty was Ireland's

opportunity." I have heard him use this phrase frequently, and Easter 1916 was to show he meant it. If the Easter Rising did not realise Connolly's highest expectations, he at least fulfilled his international duty as a socialist revolutionary leader.

A revolutionary Socialist and Internationalist, Connolly had studied deeply the lessons of the Peasant Wars, on which he had written some fine essays. He never forgot the sufferings of the Irish peasantry. He had travelled over the west and south of Ireland and would cite, with telling effect in his propaganda, the half-savage conditions imposed by British landlordism and capitalism in the west, where the peasants had to go out into the sea gathering seaweed for a living, and where they had to sell their butter to pay rent, while they lived on potatoes.

He never failed, too, in his denunciation of the Church, to make clear he was a Catholic. This was rather disquieting to me, an avowed sceptic. I never could understand how it was possible to reconcile this with his profound knowledge of historical materialism. One night, following a meeting in Rutherglen, where the straight question was asked, "Was he a Catholic?" and the straight reply given "Yes," I tackled him on this. "How is it possible," I asked, "to reconcile the Catholicism of Rome with the materialist conception of history?" "Well," he replied, "it is like this. In Ireland all the Protestants are Orangemen and howling jingoes. If the children go to the Protestant schools they get taught to wave the Union Jack and worship the English king. If they go to the Catholic Church they become rebels. Which would you sooner have?" He related stories of the workers in the Irish Socialist Republican Party going to mass of a morning and delivering the *Irish Worker* at

the houses on the road. I cannot recall the remainder of our discussion, but I was not convinced.

Connolly's attitude towards religion was further seen in his dispute in America with Daniel De Leon on the question of the Church and marriage. De Leon never missed an opportunity to attack the "Ultramontanist" of the Catholic Church, i.e. the activity of the Catholic Church designed at all times to increase the power and influence of the Pope. Connolly was opposed to dragging this question into the press. He took the standpoint of the Second International then, that "religion was a private matter." The authority of the International and my admiration for the intellectual level of Connolly disconcerted me somewhat, yet I really felt De Leon was fundamentally correct.

But I entirely approved of Connolly's special work amongst the Irish emigrants of America. The Nationalists of the John Redmond type carried on extensive propaganda in America, exploiting the miseries of the exiles and filling the coffers of the Nationalist movement at home. I saw no reason, then, why the Socialists should not expose this graft and organise the workers into the Socialist movement, albeit under an Irish name.

And when one morning in 1916, while in Liverpool, I read, with burning indignation, that Connolly was fatally wounded and was to be shot, I forgot all about his religious persuasion. He had passed into the great Valhalla of revolutionary pioneers and martyrs.

\* \* \* \*

The new Party launched, we immediately prepared for the municipal elections. Candidates were run in all the towns where we had branches. I think it will be of interest here to give, as a sample, the Party election programme.

Following a preamble setting forth the class relations and the Socialist aims of the Party, the manifesto read:

“ Fellow Workers, we do not expect to be able, within the limits of a single municipality, to stamp out the cause of your poverty and toilsome life; all we can expect to do is to ease the pressure of wage-slavery, pending the entire overthrow of capitalism.

Our candidate, therefore, if elected, would press forward in the teeth of all opposition such measures as would tend to brighten the existence of the army of toilers. It is impossible to here give a full account of all the measures that could be adopted with benefit to Labour. However, the following will make clear the attitude of a Socialist on a Council:

#### “ HOUSING OF THE WORKERS

“ One of the worst evils the capitalist class impose upon the workers is mean, insanitary housing. Our candidate would press forward the erection of roomy, healthy houses for the workers, to be let at the cost of construction and maintenance.

#### “ CORPORATION EMPLOYEES

“ Our Candidate would press forward Direct Employment of Labour by the Corporation in all Corporation undertakings, with a minimum wage of 30s. per week, together with a working day of not more than eight hours; the workers so employed to have the right of appointing their immediate superiors, and to be represented by a delegate on all public departments directing their industry. Such delegate to have an advisory voice in the business of the department, but without the right of voting.

#### “ UNEMPLOYED

“ One of the appendages of the capitalist system is the existence of a large army of unemployed workmen, who keep wages down by competing with those in work. Our candidate would press forward relief for the unemployed by the provision by the council of useful work, under the conditions aforementioned.

**“ LIQUOR TRAFFIC**

“ We believe that the drink problem is inseparable from capitalism, that drunkenness is due to the brutal conditions of life imposed upon the workers by the capitalist class, and will only disappear when the workers have access to the means of physical and mental well-being possible only under Socialism. The most that can be done now is to curb the evil by placing the liquor trade under control of the municipality.

**“ STRIKES**

“ The capitalist system forces the workers to again and again strike against their hideous conditions of employment. The recent legal decisions of the capitalist House of Lords make the funds of your unions subject to appropriation in the event of strikes; but these battles on the industrial field are inherent in the nature of capitalism, and will continue so long as the wage system continues. In the event of any local strike or lock-out, our candidate would press for the granting of relief or assistance to the men in their struggle with the masters.

**“ FREE MAINTENANCE OF ALL CHILDREN AT SCHOOL**

“ As water can be supplied free of direct charge to the consumers, and paid for out of the rates, why cannot a similar provision be made for maintaining the helpless children of the poor, who are often incapable by reason of hunger of benefiting by the education supplied at school. This has already been put in operation with great success by the Municipality of Paris and other French towns.

**“ TAXATION**

“ Nothing has served more to mislead the workers than the middle-class cry of ‘ save the rates ’; but we declare the question of taxation to be of secondary importance to the working class. Taxation is one of the powers of state and municipality to raise ways and means. The Socialist Labour Party would tax the property of the propertied class to the fullest possible amount, and thus wield the weapon of taxation in the interests of the workers.

“ Our candidate, if elected, would press for evening meetings of the Council. . . .

“Vote for the class interests of the working class.

“VOTE for CLARK, the SOCIALIST CANDIDATE.”

Our candidate was a working engineer, Thomas Clark.\* After a strenuous six weeks' campaign of meetings, door-to-door canvassing, and distribution of leaflets and papers, we got 475 votes, against the combined Liberal, Labour and Tory opposition. This was in the Hutchesontown Ward, for which the Parliamentary candidate and subsequent member was the renegade, George N. Barnes, against whom we kept up a running opposition.

The municipal election over, we began our winter session of Economic classes, which we maintained with unflinching regularity until 1920, when, except for a small rump, we merged into the Communist Party. The first year the classes were conducted by Neil Maclean. The second year (1905) I was appointed conductor. And for the next fifteen years, with the exception of a break of one year, when I worked in London and Liverpool, I held classes every winter in Glasgow.

These S.L.P. classes, apart from the economic and social conditions, played an important part in gaining the Clydeside its reputation for being “Red.” Every year produced new worker-tutors. Classes sprang up in a number of the shipyards and engineering shops. In the great majority of these classes the tutors had come through the S.L.P. parent groups. Amongst the most outstanding in the West of Scotland were William Paul, T. Clark, J. W. Muir, J. McClure, Arthur MacManus, John Wilson and John McBain.†

\* Clark was a foundation member of the C.P.G.B., but drifted away. Later was an E.C. member of the A.E.U. and became anti-communist.

† It is not my province to speak here of Edinburgh, Leith, Falkirk, Kirkcaldy, Aberdeen, Manchester, Newcastle, Reading, and the East End of London, where study classes were held and tutors trained.

In 1906 John Maclean,\* a school teacher from Pollockshaws, began lecturing in Economics, later to be assisted by James McDougall, a young bank clerk from the same district as Maclean. These two took the more popular course of lecturing to large audiences of workers in Glasgow and, later, in several towns in Scotland under the auspices of the Educational Department of the Scottish Co-operative Society. From their efforts sprang the Scottish Labour College movement. Maclean's method had the merit of popularising economic study amongst large numbers of the workers, but had the defect of becoming a propaganda lecture. The S.L.P. method was more intensive and produced a crop of competent class tutors, who led classes inside the factories. No such tutors came from Maclean's classes in this period or during the period of the war, though there did emerge later from the Scottish Labour College tutors who had come under the influence of Maclean.

The S.L.P. took a great interest in the international movement. Yates had brought over "The International" hymn from Paris in 1900. We had this song translated and duplicated for all our members, and it was sung at all our meetings, when "England Arise" and the "Red Flag" were the principal songs of the Socialist movement. We studied the Paris Commune and never failed to hold an anniversary meeting to point out the lessons of the Commune. On May Day we refused to join in the "Fakirs'" demonstration, held on the first *Sunday* of May, and consisting of a quiet walk to Glasgow Green, speeches by prospective Labour M.P.s, a horse show and advertisement parade. We always held our May Day meeting on the First *Day* of May, on Glasgow Green, finishing up with a social in the Party rooms. During the

\* For more details of Maclean's life see page 114.



Sunday demonstration we held an oppositional meeting, criticising the Labour leaders and demanding strike action on the First of May, in accordance with the International resolution. We encouraged all members to refuse to work on May Day, and to get other workers to do the same. Personally, from the day I joined the S.D.F. I have never worked on a May Day. I always tried, with varying success, to get other workers to do the same. In later years, when I was on the Executive Committee of the Iron Moulders' Union, I was successful in getting the union to cease work and take part in a First of May demonstration that occurred on a working day.

Our method in the classes was to open with an inaugural survey of the whole field we proposed to traverse, and to make the workers familiar with the subject as a whole; the textbooks, etc., which included *Wage Labour and Capital*; *Value, Price and Profit*; *Capital*; and H. de B. Gibbins' *Industry in England* and Buckle's *History of Civilisation*.

Each student was given a series of definitions of terms used by Marx. These had to be studied, memorised and discussed thoroughly, for perhaps the first four weeks. The student would study *Wage Labour and Capital* at home. At the class we would read it over paragraph by paragraph, round the class. This practice aimed at helping the students to speak fluently and grammatically. At the following class meeting questions would be put and answered, and the points raised thoroughly understood by everyone, the results of each lesson being summarised by the leader. This method was applied in the same way to industrial history. Later on, simple lessons on historical materialism and formal logic were added. So that, after six months of this, every worker who went through the entire session came out a potential tutor for other classes.

In August 1904 the International Congress at Amsterdam adopted an important resolution on Unity, which read:

“ In order that the working class may develop its full strength in the struggle against capitalism, it is necessary there should be but one Socialist party in each country as against the parties of capitalists, just as there is but one proletariat in each country.

“ For these reasons all comrades and all socialist organisations have the imperative duty to seek to the utmost of their power to bring about this unity of the party, on the basis of the principles established by the International Conventions; that unity which is necessary in the interests of the proletariat, to which they are responsible for the disastrous consequences of the continuation of divisions within their ranks.

“ To assist in the attainment of this aim the International Socialist Bureau, as well as all parties within the countries where unity now exists, will cheerfully offer their services and co-operation.”

The columns of the *Daily People*, organ of the S.L.P. in America, opened a discussion on this absorbing theme. Simultaneously, there began a movement to bring about a unification of the militant forces in the industrial movement. Conferences took place in Chicago on January 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, 1905, between leading officials of the Western Federation of Miners, the American Labour Union and individual members of a number of other organisations, and a provisional executive was elected.

A manifesto was issued, calling a great national Convention for the purpose of launching a united industrial organisation. The signatories to this manifesto included such well-known personalities as William D. Haywood and Chas. H. Moyer, of the Western Federation of Miners; A. M. Simon, Eugene V. Debs and Ernest Unterman of

the Socialist Party, and Frank Bohn, national organiser of the S.L.P.

The Convention opened on June 27th, 1905, in Chicago, and lasted for eleven days. Out of this Convention was formed the historically famous Industrial Workers of the World (The I.W.W.), the constitution being adopted by 42,719 against 6,998.

Our National Executive promptly sent a telegram of greetings committing the British S.L.P. to the Convention without any consultation with the Party membership. The change for us in England was so sharp and radical, and so opposed to our traditional attitude towards the leaders of the trade unions and Socialist Party as to cause a certain confusion in our midst. Moreover, there was resentment at the fact of committing the Party to such a change of policy without discussion, and an apprehension at the violation of our "principles."

We had fierce discussions in Glasgow on the question of policy and finally with a majority group in our branch I resigned from the Party. We remained outside for nearly a year before we saw our mistake and returned to the ranks. But during that year I was not idle. We met as a group; we held study classes, carried on propaganda, and I took part in several public debates. Later, when the movement for industrial unionism grew in Glasgow, I was one of its most ardent advocates.

It is not within my province here to go into the history of the I.W.W., its stormy career and eventual disruption before finally disappearing from the scene. Suffice it to say the first convention was hailed as the opening of a new era in industrial organisation and policy, in particular, by the workers in the Anglo-Saxon speaking countries, where its influence is to be seen in the period of industrial unrest prior to the Great War. In the United States the

employers met the new organisation by a policy of kidnapping (Moyer, Haywood, Pettibone), arrest (Morrie Preston), provocation and "framing up" (Tom Mooney and Warren Billings), and eventually the Criminal Syndicalist Laws.

From the first Convention two currents run through the I.W.W. On the one hand the anarcho-syndicalists considered the I.W.W. was all-sufficient and were against introducing politics into the union. On the other hand were those led by De Leon and the S.L.P., who stood for the recognition of the need for a political party to head and lead the proletarian struggle for power. These waged a persistent fight against the anarchists and their methods; against the corrupt elements and the "stool pigeons" who came to infest the I.W.W. in order to destroy it. Eventually a split took place at the Third Convention, in 1908, one section with its headquarters in Detroit, and the other—the anarcho-syndicalists—in Chicago. In 1915 the Detroit section changed its name to the Workers' International Industrial Union. Both disappeared from the stage following the new situation created by the victorious revolution in Russia.

## CHAPTER V

### I JOIN THE ASSOCIATED IRONMOULDERS OF SCOTLAND

UP to this period I had been serving my apprenticeship as an iron-moulder. I had been taken away from the bottling store to be given a trade. My brother was about to finish his apprenticeship and, following much discussion in our family circles as to what to do with me, it was decided I must go into the foundry. So one Monday morning I started in Springfield Steel Works. I was not over-enthusiastic. I was earning 16s. a week in the bottling store and when Saturday came round and I got 5s., less two days' pay deducted as "lying time"—a practice which the boss alleges is to facilitate the book-keeping, but which, in reality, when hundreds of workers are employed, is a method of locking up a big sum in the bank on which the employer draws interest—my heart sank into my boots.

What irritated me more was the prospect of being bound for seven years at low wages. The practice of apprenticeship is a relic of the early craft guilds of the Middle Ages. It is a method of keeping the craft a closed corporation, and restricting the supply of workers with a view to maintaining a higher wage rate. In addition to being bound for the period of seven years, the young worker was at the mercy of the adult workers. These latter were supposed to impart the secrets and technique of the trade. But about my apprenticeship period the speed-up was beginning. There was always a margin of unemployed,

and so the apprentices were left to shift for themselves and looked upon as cheap competitive labour, as in fact they were. At the close of my apprenticeship I knew I could look forward to getting only 16s. or 18s. and the "sack." For only in exceptional cases are finished apprentices kept on, since they have then to be paid the rate for journeymen.

I was determined not to go on working for low wages, and, after nine months, I left one morning and went to another foundry where many boys were employed for relative cheapness. I told the employer I was a two years' apprentice, and started with 11s. a week. After working there for two years I left and went to a foundry that made gas engines. I remained in this shop, with short intervals, and finished my seven years with 23s. a week and a knowledge of malleable, iron, brass and steel moulding. I was developed for my age, and never could accept the idea of working for less wages than adults while doing the same work. I joined the Associated Iron-moulders of Scotland in August 1904, and have retained full membership to this day.

When I returned to Springfield Foundry I found a number of the men were socialists of the I.L.P. type. Soon we were at it hammer and tongs, arguing and discussing the difference in policy of the S.L.P. and the I.L.P. and the Labour Party. Of course, all these workers were union men. Indeed, I might say here there were not half a dozen non-union foundries in Scotland. Every foundry had a shop steward. Within three hours of starting in a job your union card was collected. A man couldn't carry a card if he had not paid up his contributions. He couldn't start in a union shop if he hadn't a card. If he attempted to start the other workers would stop immediately. All contributions were collected by the steward at the

paybox every two weeks. On the Monday following, a shop meeting was called, and every man's name read out, with his payments and arrears, if any. Everyone knew who were good payers and who were bad payers. This had a powerful moral influence for good on the shop.

The union was, in fact, a closed corporation and, of course, wealthy. We had about seven to eight thousand members and the funds represented from £10 to £12 per head.

The more active workers were on the district committee, which was elected at a quarterly meeting of members. The committee, to which the shop stewards brought grievances, met weekly. The district branch met monthly to hear a report of activities and to discuss shop grievances. In the interval, the district committee had executive powers. From the monthly meeting delegates were elected to the Labour Representation Committee in the locality.

In our shop we had one of these delegates, and I was soon at grips with him about the policy of the "Fakirs." We seized every occasion for discussion. During meal hours we would sit in a group and argue. After the cast, when we had run about with ladles of boiling metal till we were bathed in perspiration, it was a union rule to take a rest of fifteen minutes to cool down. Then we would collect together, and if we cooled our bodies we didn't cool our ardour, for we pitched into one another in fine style. By dint of perseverance in discussion, and by means of pamphlets and books, I won over a goodly number to my side. Workers would come to my house to get references for points raised in our discussions. Soon I was able to suggest we start a study circle. This we did, and a study circle was formed on Marxism and Industrial History.

I attended the branch meetings of the union and

criticised the whole craft union character of the organisation, its apprenticeship system and provident benefits, and advocated industrial unity of all workers in the country, denouncing the constitution of the union which spoke of "the identity of interests between capital and labour." The branch meetings were dull and full of senseless routine. I proposed setting aside special nights for the discussion of matters of policy, and so worried the officials as to get them to agree to hear a discussion on industrial unionism. Of course, the officials attended as a matter of duty, without interest in the proceedings, but we got many of the younger workers along and had a fine discussion.

A few sympathisers gathered around me and we visited other branches on their meeting night. In this way we built up a network of contacts and groups in each district with a forward policy. (This work culminated later in the development of an unofficial movement which led to the first strike for forty years, swept aside the old executive, and subsequently united the Scottish Union with the English Union into the National Union of Foundry Workers, embracing *all* foundry workers. Incidentally, my old antagonist—John Brown—who was general secretary, died, following the strike, from heart trouble!)

Foundry work is made up of hard physical labour. Up till the end of the Great War, the working week was one of fifty-four hours, of nine and a half hours a day, from 6 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.

The foundry was then the Cinderella of the engineering trade. The conditions under which the moulder worked were vile, filthy and insanitary. The approach to the foundry resembled that of a rag and bone shop, or marine store. The entrance was usually strewn with all kinds of scrap iron and rubbish. The inside was in keeping with



the outside. Smoke would make the eyes water. The nose and throat would clog with dust. Drinking water came from the same tap as was used by the hosepipe to water the sand. An iron tumbler or tin can served as drinking vessel until it was filthy or broken, before being replaced by a new one. The lavatory was usually placed near a drying stove, and consisted of open cans that were emptied once a week—a veritable hotbed of disease.

Every night pandemonium reigned while the moulds were being cast. The yelling and cursing of foremen; the rattle of overhead cranes; the smoke and dust illuminated by sparks and flames from the molten metal made the place a perfect inferno. Glad we were, when it was all over, to creep into some corner alive with vermin of all kinds, to close our eyes for a few minutes.

Rationalisation and changed conditions to-day have made for some improvements, principally in the bigger concerns. But go into some of these little “rag-stores” that still exist, and the above description will be found to be no exaggeration.

But all this did not deter me from study. I carried the first nine chapters of *Capital* to work, and read on the trams to and from work and during the meal hours. More than once I have gone to an adjoining field for a quiet read, only to fall asleep and find I was half an hour late, for which I was fined.

I would come home in the evenings, have a bite and a wash, and take to my books and lessons for the classes. I was always in demand for public meetings, for which I had also to prepare. The preparation for a meeting was always a source of anxiety for me. Not that I had nothing to talk about, but I always felt it obligatory to go well prepared with something definite to say. I could never trust myself to get up and improvise a speech. This I

could do later, when I became more experienced on the platform. But even to-day I get impatient with comrades who come to advertised meetings without preparation. It leads to rambling, disconnected, and often foolish and extravagant statements being made that discredit the Party. Even in agitational meetings around some special question we should take pains to think out what we are going to say, in order to draw the correct political conclusions, and avoid the danger of "practicism," so familiar in the speeches of reformist trade union leaders, i.e. merely confining remarks and discussion within the narrow limits of the subject-matter in dispute.

While engaged in this propaganda work I devoured history, economics, philosophy and literature. In addition to the books I have already mentioned, I read John Richard Green's *Short History of the English People*; *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, by Thorold Rogers; Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; Stanley Jevons' *Principles of Science*; George Henry Lewes' *Biographical History of Philosophy*; John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic*; Marx's *Capital*; *Poverty of Philosophy*, etc., as well as the pamphlets of the movement. I also found time to attend winter evening classes in the Andersonian College in the city. This college was endowed by an old shipyard owner to provide technical instruction for workers. Cheap classes and lectures were arranged on every subject for which students could be found. One could get a six months' course for 2s. I attended classes on geology and French, and later, courses of lectures on astronomy, organised by the West of Scotland Astronomical Society, of which, with Arthur MacManus, I became a member. I also attended, for three years, courses of English literature, under Professor Eyre-Todd, in the Academy of Literature. From the foundry to the class-room, and to the distraction of an acrimonious

branch meeting of the Party, or a public propaganda meeting at some street corner in one night, was a queer mixture, but we went through with it, full of idealism, enthusiasm and zest for a new system of society.

From my first perception of socialism I was resolved to be a public speaker. I had found the master key. I thought I only needed to shout often and loudly enough, and a distracted world was ready to listen and believe. With my companions, Walker and Waddell, we arranged a little speakers' class of our own. We met in each other's houses on alternate weeks. Each was to take a subject. We would arrange the kitchen table and chairs like a platform. One would act as chairman; one the speaker, and we had one for an audience. The chairman would open the proceedings with all the solemnity and formality of a meeting of the Primrose League, and after ten minutes would introduce the speaker. The latter would also observe all the formalities in opening and proceed to his address, which lasted ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, as he gained in practice. Then the meeting was thrown open for questions and discussion. The "audience," from copious notes, would rattle off questions. The speaker would be called upon to reply, and as often as not his replies led to a discussion, in which chairman, speaker and audience lost all sense of propriety, and the meeting would end—when we met at my house, at least—with my mother tactfully enquiring if we were ready for tea!

Came one night when it was insisted I must take the public platform. The S.L.P. then held regular meetings on Sunday evenings in Bath Street. I recall my confusion as the chairman—a big, burly stonemason named Fraser, with a voice like a fog-horn—kept telling the audience about this new young comrade who was here to address them, and some of his qualifications, of which I had only

learned for the first time that night. I stepped on to the platform with the stupor of a drunken man. My teeth chattered; my legs trembled; and the platform rattled on the cobble stones till I felt the earth was going to open up and swallow me.

I had rehearsed my little piece on the model of Connolly's speech. After the first five minutes my nerves settled; the rattling of the platform ceased and for the next fifteen minutes I could hear the echo of my voice as if I were in a great cathedral. Bathed in perspiration, I got down: my baptism was over. "Good boy," said Yates. "You did fine. Just you keep at it. Imagine all these folks are a bunch of cabbage heads, and that the Party depends on you: you'll pull through."

Having few speakers when we started the S.L.P. we set to making them. We held speakers' classes. There were four of us—Neil Maclean, Willie Paul, Tom Clark and myself—who would have a try-out on Glasgow Green. We usually carried on for fifteen minutes each. But one night Clark went first to act as chairman. Whatever got into his head I don't know, but he rambled on as if he never intended to stop. I suspected he had been putting in overtime practising. He wound up with a chunk of poetry from William Morris and stepped down after fifty minutes without even referring to the speaker, who had now abandoned all hope of speaking. I blandly took the platform and performed the usual functions of chairman, announcing the literature, appealed for the collection, and called for any questions.

We competed with each other as speakers, going out into the surrounding districts to hold meetings and sell our pamphlets and our Party organ, *The Socialist*. We attended every Labour meeting held in the city, and either put questions or took the platform in opposition. We

challenged all and sundry to debate. The I.L.P. and Labour Party speakers knew nothing of Marx. They usually concentrated on municipal trams, milk and pawnshops, or appeals to the heart against the cruelties of capitalism, adjuring the workers to be sure and vote Labour. We made fun of their sentimentalism; flayed them with the class struggle, and called for the social revolution as the only way out. With cold, hard scientific logic and quotations from Marx and Engels, we usually reduced all opposition to silence, but we never made members. The workers would agree with us, but they wouldn't join. They thought we were terribly intellectual, and that they had to have a knowledge of Karl Marx and science before they could join the Party. We usually lost as many members in a year as we gained. I once made a calculation over a period of three years and found we had gained 350 odd members and lost almost exactly the same number.

I have heard cheap sneers at the numerical weakness of the S.L.P. Undoubtedly our sectarianism had something to do with it, but there are some additional causes the wiseacres have not yet been able to put their finger on.

The question of building a revolutionary mass party in Great Britain is still a vital problem for the working class of this country. If it is not yet solved this is due in a large measure to special conditions which have a well-known historical explanation. The British capitalists derived enormous profits from the monopolist position they enjoyed in the world markets up to the latter years of the nineteenth century, and from their extensive colonial possessions. These profits permitted them to give a relatively high standard of living to a limited section of the working class, and thus to encourage among those workers the idea that there was no limit to the improvement which

might be effected in their lot, within the framework of capitalism, and that their interests were bound up with the prosperity of their masters. As a result of this, liberal bourgeois ideas prevailed in the workers' movement, especially among the highly skilled and better-paid workers, with the exception of a small core of militants. The beginning of the workers' movement took the form of craft unions, separate from the wider mass of the unskilled workers. Trade unionism, mainly reflecting the outlook of these better-paid workers, preceded the formation of the workers' political party, the Labour Party, and so influenced the character of the latter. The leadership of the trade unions and of the Labour Party still under the influence of bourgeois ideas, are social reformist and opportunist in outlook and policy, and are opposed to all class struggle.

There is no doubt that these were, and are, important influences retarding the growth of a large revolutionary party in this country. On this question it will take much patient persevering work to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way. If we are to avoid the mistakes of the earlier socialist groups we must pay more and more attention to the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

Since the October Revolution in Russia, and the formation in this country of a Communist Party twenty years ago, with its rich literature and experience, a definite advance has been made. We may look with certainty to the deepening of the world crisis in capitalism, now being accelerated by the new imperialist war, for a quickening in the political class-consciousness of the working class. A great responsibility lies upon the young Communist Party in knowing how to utilise its experience and to crystallise this quickening movement and organising it into a powerful revolutionary party.

## CHAPTER VI

### INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM, SYNDICALISM AND THE "PLEBS"

UNDER the influence of the I.W.W. convention, a conference in which I participated was convened in the Templars' Hall, Ingram Street, in 1905, and the Advocates of Industrial Unionism was started in Glasgow.\* The following preamble to the Constitution represents the objectives the Advocates set before the workers:

"The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people, and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

"Between these two classes a struggle must go on until all the toilers come together on the political as well as on the industrial field, and TAKE AND HOLD that which they produce by their labour through an economic organisation of the working class, without affiliation to any political party.

"The rapid gathering of wealth and the concentrating of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands make the trades unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power

\* In the *History of Trade Unionism*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, it is said on page 655: "The pioneer of the new faith in the United Kingdom seems to have been James Connolly. . . . Connolly, who was a disciple of the founder of the American Socialist Labour Party, Daniel De Leon, started a similar organisation on the Clyde in 1905." Connolly left Glasgow to go to Dublin, and eventually to the U.S.A. in the autumn of 1903. I personally saw him off on the boat. As he did not return to Ireland for several years after he could take no part in the formation of the Advocates of Industrial Unionism in 1905. The Socialist Labour Party of America was founded in 1879. Daniel De Leon did not join it till 1890.

of the employing class, because the trades unions foster a state of things which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping to defeat one another in wage wars. THE TRADES UNIONS AID THE EMPLOYING CLASS TO MISLEAD THE WORKERS INTO THE BELIEF THAT THE WORKING CLASS HAVE INTERESTS IN COMMON WITH THEIR EMPLOYERS.

“ These sad conditions can be changed and the interests of the working class upheld only by an organisation formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry or in all industries, if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lock-out is on in any department thereof, thus making injury to one an injury to all.”

The Advocates began holding outdoor meetings and indoor lectures. Within two years the idea of Industrial Unionism began to take root in Singer's Sewing Machine Company, in Clydebank; in the Argyle Motor Works, Alexandria; and in the Albion Motor Works, Scotstoun.

The Singer's factory employed about 10,000 workers. The firm refused to recognise any union, and those union men who were employed had to keep it quiet. It was typical of the new machine age. The sub-division of labour was carried to a fine art, and young boys and girls were brought into the factory to operate the simple processes on ridiculously low wages. I remember Arthur MacManus describing a job he was on, pointing needles. Every morning there were millions of these needles on the table. As fast as he reduced the mountain of needles, a fresh load was dumped. Day in, day out, it never grew less. One morning he came in and found the table empty. He couldn't understand it. He began telling everyone excitedly that there were no needles on the table. It suddenly flashed on him how absurdly stupid it was to be spending his life like this.



Without taking his jacket off, he turned on his heel and went out, to go for a ramble over the hills to Balloch.

The dull, deadening influence of this factory, the unbridled exploitation, etc., was favourable soil for the new ideas of industrial unionism. Factory gate meetings were held, literature was sold, and study classes begun. Soon contacts were extended inside and it was not long before every department had a small group. The Advocates had passed the stage of mere propaganda. It had to assume responsibilities for organising the workers. And this it did, changing its name to the I.W.G.B.—the Industrial Workers of Great Britain—and assuming the role of a new union.

The membership began to increase, and from a handful of enthusiasts it jumped to hundreds and soon touched four thousand members in Singer's alone. Shop-grievances were taken up. From small successes the influence of the organisation grew and spread to every department. The slogan of "An injury to one is an injury to all" caught on. Simple shop disputes became departmental issues. Each shop appointed its delegate to the Department Committees, and these were linked up through a Works Committee.

As the organisation grew we began to get more and more apprehensive of a factory strike. We were not yet ready to exercise firm control or discipline. Moreover, the factory was isolated save for small groups in the shops I have mentioned.

Another disturbing influence was the question of religion. There were many Catholics in the works. Could they subscribe to the Socialist principles of the Union? There were many active Catholic workers who didn't worry about that. But the question was taken before the local priests, who counselled the workers to

join, while advising them not to abandon the Church, on the grounds that they could not then be singled out as non-unionists. Had the matter been left there little harm would have been done. But the Jesuitical habit of not letting the question alone, but raising it on all sides, caused dissension and not a little acrimony amongst the workers.

Came one day when a woman was dismissed. The shop stopped work; a department meeting was held, and an appeal was made to the other departments on the slogan of "An injury to one is an injury to all." Strike meetings were held in the factory, and the firm, writhing under the development of the new militant union, decided on a lock-out. The factory was shut down and 10,000 workers were locked out.

The greatest of enthusiasm prevailed amongst the workers. Headed by the Clyde Workers' Band, demonstrations took place through the town. New members were enrolled at every meeting, and a firm line taken by the Works Committee.

The management and foremen made special appeals for the "loyal" workers to resume work without success. They then hit on the device of sending a post-card to everyone on the firm's books, whether recently working or not, inviting them to say if they wished to resume work. The strike committee appealed to the workers to return the post-cards to them and they would count the votes. Just over 4,000 cards were returned to the committee. But, naturally, the firm, through the press, reported the overwhelming majority for resuming work; promised revisions of pay, etc.; and opened the gates after being shut a full week. A breakaway took place and the strike committee could not stem the return to work.

Once the strike was broken, one after the other of the

leading comrades was dismissed. From the standpoint of the workers' movement as a whole, there were certain compensatory features in this. I remember addressing a large meeting in the Co-operative Hall after the strike, and referring to the dismissals declared: "If the firm imagined by dismissing the active workers in the I.W.G.B. they would stop the growth of our movement, they were deceiving themselves. Every man dismissed would become the nucleus of a group of industrial unionists that would spring up all over the Clyde." This forecast proved to be fulfilled to an even greater degree than I had anticipated, for soon afterwards the war was to reveal in the Clyde Workers' Committee movement shop stewards in factory after factory who had once been in Singer's.

In the meantime, by 1910 industrial unionism had begun to take root in several parts of the country. Wherever an S.L.P. member was to be found the question was raised. Large quantities of literature were circulated to the discomfort of the pure and simple trade union leaders and to the Labour parliamentarians. The young Fabian intellectuals fastened on to it as their latest new toy. Of that we will speak later. The bourgeois press carried special articles by Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden, denouncing the whole theory as anarchism—the stock shibboleth of the Second International for all criticism of socialist ministerialism.

The industrialist movement generally derived great stimulus from the Johannesburg strikes and the deportation of the South African workers—Crawford, etc.—to England, and from the heroic struggles of the miners of Western Australia at Broken Hill. Tom Mann was coming home from Australia. As industrial unionists we saw in the return of Tom Mann, with his fiery platform oratory and living record with striking workers, the potentialities

for a great push forward in Great Britain. To our chagrin Mann visited France and while there associated himself with the Anarcho-Syndicalists. On returning to England he identified himself with a small group of anarchist elements, and started the Syndicalist League.

The conference at which the Syndicalist Educational League was formed took place in Manchester on November 26th, 1910. The S.L.P. sent the late Jim Morton as delegate, with a watching brief. An attempt was made to keep Comrade Morton out, but failed. At this conference Tom Mann declared "we must use a word understood on the continent, as we are Internationalists, and—Syndicalism is the word."

The following resolution indicates the line of the Syndicalists:

"Whereas the Sectionalism that characterises the trade union movement of to-day is utterly incapable of effectively fighting the capitalist class and securing the economic freedom of the workers, this conference declares that the time is now ripe for the industrial organisation of all workers on the basis of class, and not trade or craft, and that we hereby agree to form a Syndicalist Educational League to propagate the principles of syndicalism throughout the British Isles, with a view to merging all existing unions into one compact organisation for each industry, including all labourers of every industry in the same organisation with skilled workers."

It might appear from this resolution that there was no difference between the Syndicalist Educational League and the Industrial Unionists. In point of fact the principle of syndicalism as advocated in France by the revolutionary syndicalists and now adopted by the Syndicalist Educational League was "The Mines for the Miners," "The Railways for the Railwaymen," etc., which for us had nothing in common with socialism. On the other hand

the methods of the syndicalists, "direct action," "sabotage," "physical force" and the "General Strike" in opposition to political and parliamentary action, were the methods of anarchism, which the S.L.P. had been denouncing since the foundation of the I.W.W. For these reasons the S.L.P. in its press and propaganda carried on a vigorous exposure and denunciation of the Syndicalist Educational League.

It is only fair to say that Tom Mann eventually abandoned this platform, became identified with the Trade Union Amalgamation Movement, and joined the Communist Party of Great Britain shortly after its formation.

Tom Mann began publishing a series of small monthly pamphlets under the title of *The Syndicalist*, which later was replaced by a monthly paper of the same name. The most famous was the issue of January 1912 which contained an "Open Letter to British Soldiers." This "Open Letter" was written by a Liverpool building worker and printed in *The Irish Worker*. A railway fireman, Fred Crowsley, a worker on the London and North Western Railway, reproduced this "Letter" as a leaflet at his own expense and, singlehanded, went down to Aldershot one Sunday morning and distributed it to the soldiers in camp. He was arrested and sent to prison for four months. *The Syndicalist* reprinted it without comment. For this the editor, Guy Bowman, was sent to prison for nine months, and the two brothers Buck, the printers, received six months each.

In February of the same year a general strike of miners took place. The authorities drafted troops into the mining areas and improvised barracks for the soldiers. Tom Mann, in addressing a public meeting in Salford on behalf of the Workers' Union, took the occasion to refer to the presence of the military forces in the vicinity of the

town, and cited the cases of Fred Crowsley, Guy Bowman and the brothers Buck. He read the leaflet in public as a challenge to the authorities. He was arrested in London, brought to trial in Salford, and sentenced to six months in the second division in Strangeways Gaol in Manchester.\*

It is a matter of sociological fact, to be observed in history and in political life, that in periods of class ferment there is a quickening of intellectual life. Little groups spring up everywhere, each announcing to the world its theory, remedy, and way out of the crisis, as the *only* way. Moreover, each starts a paper as the "organ" of the "movement." To the young revolutionary worker all this is very distracting. He has to spend valuable time reading and making himself acquainted with the case of his opponents, and disputing with all kind of freak arguments. It is only later he learns that with the changing objective conditions the basis for all "freak" movements is removed, carrying such "movements" and "organs" with them into the limbo of history. But in the ferment he cannot ignore them.

1910-11-12 was such a period. There developed "Forward" movements, and "Amalgamation Committees" and schemes which were to crystallise later into the large national unions with an industrial structure in place of the hitherto narrow craft unions. The foundations of many of our large national trade union organisations of to-day were laid in those days of severe criticism of the weakness of having a multiplicity of unions in a given industry.

Industrial unionism and syndicalism were taken up by the young Fabian intellectuals, led by Orage, Hobson, Reckitt, Bechhofer and, later, G. D. H. Cole, etc. The *New Age* carried regular articles on the subject. Municipal

\* See Tom Mann's *Memoirs* for details of the trial.

and local government gradualism was yielding no results. Labour parliamentarianism was proving itself a nest of corruption for job-hunting politicians. The wave of industrialism could not be ignored. The young Fabians set out to reconcile *consumers* with *producers*, which they had separated in their abstractions, like the good petty bourgeois they were, and evolved the theory of the "Guilds."

The Fabians, like the Syndicalists, were a source of confusion and distraction for the militant workers; the Syndicalists by exorcising all parliamentary action, the Fabians by dragging in their fetish of the State. With the Russian Revolution most of the problems disturbing both Syndicalists and Guildsmen were clarified and the best elements from both camps found themselves by 1920 in the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Another important movement in these times was the Catholic intellectual movement. Pamphlets and booklets on economics and Marxism appeared in Dublin from the hands of University professors. The clever distortion and depreciation of Marx, of the Theory of Value, and the Materialist Conception of History, showed the skilful hand of the Jesuits. In Glasgow, the late John Wheatley started the Catholic Socialist Society in October 1906, following some personal difference with the local priests. This society was confined to practising Catholics. He was successful in gathering around him a large following of young Catholic workers and keeping them out of the main stream of the militant workers' movement, under the pretence of reconciling socialism with the Church.

The wave of industrial unrest, of criticism of the State bureaucracy, and of the futility of State socialism within the framework of the Capitalist State were made subjects of study by the Catholics. They attacked the theory of

value and its logic of the class struggle in a superficially clever exposition of *Marxian Socialism*, written by Paschal Larkin and Professor Alfred Lahilly, providing the Catholic Truth Society with a textbook against Marx's *Capital*.

Belloc's *Servile State*, and the *Party System*, and his paper, *The New Witness*, swam with the tide of criticism against the bourgeois State bureaucracy and sought to turn the eyes of all good Catholics at least, to the good old times of simple handicraft under the Church of the Middle Ages, when petty production was the rule in industry and peasant holdings in agriculture.

Distracting as this Catholic movement was on the Clyde, it was a worthier foe for the steel of the S.L.P. and the industrial unionist than the banal sentimentalism and municipal "socialism" of the I.L.P. and Labourists. The Catholic devils could quote scripture from *Capital*. The I.L.P. knew nothing of Marxism except that it was "continental" socialism in contrast to "English" socialism.

Great play was made in those days on the distinction between "continental socialism" and "English socialism." The majority of the Labour leaders were drawn from the aristocracy of labour, which for generations had been inoculated with the ideas of capitalist property and imperialist domination. Socialism was an ideal, an intellectual diversion; in practice they were for co-operation of the classes, and opposed to all class struggle. Even Keir Hardie, who was among the more advanced of them, was to be found, in 1904, singing the praises of class co-operation at a banquet provided by the Federation of the Iron and Steel Employers. The Labour leaders found theoretical expression in the "gradualism," step by step, from one reform to another, and the "peaceful transition to a new social order," expounded by the Fabian Society



and the Independent Labour Party. These narrow petty-bourgeois conceptions of socialism—still current to-day among the Labour leaders—were sanctified by the policy of the Second International which left each national section to apply, or not to apply, international resolutions as it saw fit.

When I approached the socialist movement as a youngster, Blatchford's *Merrie England* was the chief propagandist booklet. Millions of this cheap, rubbishy pamphlet were circulated by the Clarion Scouts and the I.L.P. I never could agree, as was the stock argument of I.L.P.ers, when its economic fallacies and stupidities were pointed out, "that anyway *Merrie England* had made more socialists than any other publication ever printed." *Merrie England*, like its sequel—*Britain for the British*, while they brought recruits to Labour and the I.L.P., made for the intellectual confusion of thousands of workers, and largely paved the way for the social patriotism within the Labour movement during the Great War of 1914-18.

The fact is that the importance of popular writings in addition to the more advanced literature was not then fully understood. This left an open field for clever journalists such as Blatchford, R. B. Suthers, and others in the I.L.P.

The growth of economic study classes and the challenge of the revolutionary theories of Marx, were having a disturbing influence on the I.L.P., the socialist theoreticians of the Labour Party, and of the trade unions. To meet this challenge Ramsay MacDonald and Snowden began publishing, in 1905, a library of books to fill the gap left by *Merrie England* and *Britain for the British*. This was to be The Socialist Library, "scientific" and "up-to-date"! and was to include "authoritative" books from continental socialists who looked upon Marx as out of date.

It began with *Socialism and Positive Science*, by Enrico Ferri, who was then a Marxist; followed by *Socialism and Society*, by Ramsay MacDonald, in which MacDonald attacked Marxism, and sought to find in Darwin a justification for "evolution"—i.e. reformism—as opposed to revolution. Volumes by Jaurès, Vandervelde, and Bernstein, which followed, showed clearly the attempt to facilitate the coming of the wave of "Revisionism" into England, and provide the I.L.P. with an ideological weapon against Marxism.

Almost simultaneously, and growing side by side with industrial unionism, was the rise and growth of the Central Labour College movement, and the Plebs League. Ruskin College had been started in 1899—a training centre for potential Labour leaders. It was supported by several trade unions, who sent young, promising workers to study economics, trade unionism, and history.

A number of the students sent up to Ruskin College had come under the influence of the S.L.P. and industrial unionism. Here they found they had to grind at the economics of Jevons and Marshall, and the ordinary bourgeois historians and sociologists. They brought their smattering of Marxism—keen class criticism—into their studies, to the discomfort of the lecturers and management board. The students formed themselves into a group and called themselves The Plebs League. I believe the adoption of the name of Plebs was largely due to the popularity amongst the S.L.P.ers of De Leon's *Two Pages from Roman History*, in which the struggle of the plebeian order against the patricians is graphically portrayed. Eventually, a strike took place around the curriculum and the text-books. The students demanded Marx's *Capital* to be included as the text-book on economics; Lester Ward's *Sociology* in place of Giddings', etc. In 1909 a breakaway

took place and the Central Labour College movement was founded, with the Plebs League as the driving force.

The Plebs League set out to organise study classes all over the country, and to combat the Workers' Educational Association—an offshoot of the Ruskin College and founded in 1903—which had a wide influence amongst the trade unions. The W.E.A. followed the curriculum of the bourgeois university, vulgarising economics and history and the "humanities." The Plebs stood for independent working-class education—i.e. for a recognition of the antagonism of interests between the workers and the capitalists; for a training that would equip the students to advance the class interests of the proletariat, and for a college to be owned and controlled by the workers' organisations, trade unions, socialist and co-operative societies.

The Plebs movement never took actual root in Scotland for the obvious reason that with S.L.P. classes, and the Scottish Labour College movement under John McLean, the bill was filled. Nevertheless, we followed the movement with lively interest. Later, when I began to cross the border on lecturing engagements, I came closer to the Plebs movement. In 1919, when I lived in Manchester, I gave lectures under its auspices in Liverpool and Sheffield, and presided at one of its conferences. I also took an active part in opening the Manchester College in Dale Street.

The Plebs League and Labour College movement exercised a wide influence amongst the militants of the workers' movement. It succeeded in winning over such powerful unions as the South Wales Miners' Federation and the National Union of Railwaymen to its support, and until 1929 they were its financial backers.

The "independence," however, which the Plebs

jealously guarded became a double-edged weapon. Against the bourgeois control of education and the "humanities" of the W.E.A., the Plebs did useful, positive work. But to prove their "independence" they eschewed all political parties. Politics and political parties were analysed and dissected in the class-room in the same abstract way as economics and English grammar. The S.L.P. was culpable in this respect by giving the C.L.C. and the Plebs League its moral and intellectual backing and not taking up the challenge. For challenge it became. It was considered a virtue amongst many of the students to remain not only "independent" on matters of education, but aloof from party politics. We had the mortification of seeing splendid young militants becoming sterilised and inert before the question of a workers' party of struggle. To sit back and propound the problem became the acme of revolutionary intelligence—a positive hindrance to the growth of a revolutionary workers' party. It was not until after the formation of the Communist Party that this challenge was taken up, and fought out.

## CHAPTER VII

### 88 OLD SHETTLESTON ROAD

IN common with most young men and women who come to the socialist movement, my opinions were firm and decided. On matters of economics, politics, science, religion, etc., I recognised a boundary to my knowledge, but with idealism, enthusiasm, and the study of more and more books I was sure I would enlarge this boundary and get to know more. But what I had acquired to me was crystal clear and solid. I was an iconoclast, and ever ready to challenge the gods of traditional belief.

About this time my thoughts turned to marriage. On this subject I was influenced by the views of Dr. Foote's *Plain Home Talk*; Macfadden's *Physical Culture*, and, of course, my studies in working-class economics. On economic grounds I had convinced myself it was criminal for a worker to attempt to keep a wife, home, and possible children, on the beggarly wages then paid. I had only to look around me for proofs, in the poverty and squalor of my neighbours. Moreover, I had lively recollections of my own upbringing.

In the foundry I raised heated discussions on marriage in the little circles of workers who took their meals together during the break in the working day. I had just devoured Bebel's *Woman Under Socialism*, translated by Daniel De Leon, of the American S.L.P., and delved into all the literature I could lay my hands on dealing with marriage and the family. I spent hours in the Mitchell

Library, in Glasgow, sifting out from the excellent collection of books it contains all I could learn on this subject.

I had heard about Havelock Ellis' work on *Man and Woman*, and after some searching I secured a copy. (This book had been suppressed for quite a time.) I read Engels' *Origin of the Family*, E. B. Tylor's *Anthropology*, and Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society*.

A passage from Bebel always stuck in my mind and summarises the impression made on me by my readings and reflections. Here it is:

“If wedlock is to offer the spouses a contented connubial life, it demands, together with mutual love and respect, the assurance of material existence, the supply of that measure of the necessaries of life and comfort which the two consider requisite for themselves and their children. The weight of cares, the hard struggle for existence—these are the first nails in the coffin of conjugal content and happiness.”

To me, marriage and the family was a bourgeois trap. It was of a piece with the entire policy of the ruling class to keep the workers under its rule. From infancy the child of the worker is soaked with rules of behaviour ostensibly to make him a good citizen, an upright parent and a pillar of society. In the Sunday school “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods,” etc., is backed up by threats of the policeman if you do. As a young worker you are told “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” When the young worker has served his apprenticeship to this slogan of continuous work and sleep, and becomes of age, he is next set upon by a host of well-meaning “good citizens” and “pillars of society,” and family men and women, urged to “settle down” and make a home for his old age.

It appeared to me then that this was the acme of

deception. Once married, with children, the ups and downs of unemployment, low wages, sickness and debts, there was no escape. The worker was entirely at the mercy of the bourgeois class for the remainder of his life, doomed to provide children for exploitation and war.

These views I argued for and broadcasted wherever I went. I have to smile when I think of my youthful audacity in combating the experiences of family men in our foundry discussions. I must say, however, that our discussions were always maintained upon a high level of seriousness, and never degenerated into the vulgar facetiousness and sexual morbidity one often hears in such discussions, especially when psycho-analysis is dragged in, and the combatants are intellectual dilettanti.

I had set out to lead a bachelor life devoted to the workers' movement, and intellectual self-improvement. My ambition was to substitute the family life by gathering together a circle of kindred spirits who could discourse on all manner of subjects of scientific and intellectual interest. I was soon to discover this was no easy task among workers whose minds were stifled from infancy. Another thing I discovered was that one *could* find kindred spirits in matters of science and mind, as I did, but wholly lacking in that deeper something appertaining to real companionship.

With party work, with three or four companions, and my books, my life at this time was rounded. In our spare time we visited each other to talk and discourse on all manner of subjects and the books we were reading. We went to the play, to lectures, and especially the music hall, which has always been a great favourite of mine. But I began to chafe at the mechanical dullness of all this.

My mother was the last word in attentiveness when our

little circle met at our house, making us jolly and comfortable within her limited means. So were the landladies of the "digs" which my companions usually occupied. I began, however, to have ideas of my own about the entertainment of friends. I longed for a corner of my own where I could do exactly as I wished without consulting anyone. Moreover, I could retire to this "ideal" corner when I got bored with my companions, as I sometimes did.

Subconsciously I was groping towards marriage. I was no chevalier to women. The few women comrades in the Party I treated as comrades in the common struggle. I would discourse with them on politics, etc., in the same intellectual manner as with the men comrades. But invariably, and I think quite naturally, our discussions turned on to "the woman question." I had studied the views of Belfort Bax on "The Legal Subjection of Man," and, I fancy, must have been exasperating at times to those comrades who were full of socialist ideas of equality between the sexes. But I have no recollection of ever being cynical.

There was one woman comrade who attracted me—Lizzie Aitken. She was always neatly dressed; of fine physique; rather more reserved than the others, and with convictions which she expressed with a rare intelligence. One evening, it being our custom to clean the Party rooms in turn, we were scrubbing the floor and doing the usual cleaning up of dishes, etc., together. This was always made an occasion for flashes of wit and fun betwixt the comrades. We were in a very jolly humour and I had occasion to say I was going to hear Harry Lauder at the Empire; would she like to come? To my unbounded delight she said, Yes!, and the next day I booked seats for two—on February 4th, 1906, to be exact.



From this time I began to crave for that human companionship I felt missing in our bachelors' circle. When the spring holiday—the first Monday in April—came round I planned an outing for two to Callender and the Trossachs for the day. The day was wet and misty, but, undaunted, we set out to Callender with lunch basket and high hopes, such as only lovers have.

I had been there with the Party summer camp and knew every inch of the place. I had climbed to the top of Ben Ledi to see the sun rise; I had pulled a boat up the five miles of Loch Vennacher, and explored the Falls of Leny. No finer place could be chosen for the opening of a romance.

A thick mist lay on the hills and rain fell heavily when we arrived. Laughingly, we set out along the beautiful avenue that skirts the Teith of Vennacher, with umbrella and raincoats as a gage of battle to the elements. What matter if we got soaked to the skin: there was always a fire at the Temperance Hotel in the village! Besides, we were alone and that was everything. Thus began our courtship, which was to last for four years before we could get married.

The wages of a journeyman iron-moulder then were 36s. a week. Up to this time I gave everything to my mother and got back 12s. pocket money. With thoughts of marriage I had to begin to save. I came to an arrangement to give my mother so much, as an agreed sum, and to keep the rest.

My companion was in the same plight. She was a dress-maker earning 15s. a week, from which she had to provide board and keep herself in clothes, and meet other expenses, including a small donation to her family in the village of Ceres, Fifeshire. Like myself, she came from a good proletarian stock. Her father, too, was a stonemason,

and subject to all the disadvantages of seasonal work which was much worse in the country than in the towns. A little plot of land was the one compensation for the more regular work of the towns.

Alexander Aitken was the typical radical craftsman of the latter half of the nineteenth century. In his youth a thoroughgoing churchman, he could not brook the hypocrisy of the Church and was caught up with the radicalism of Charles Bradlaugh, the great freethinker. Soon he imbibed the atheistic ideas of Bradlaugh and became as fervent and vigorous a freethinker as he had been an elder of the kirk.

To be an atheist in such a little village and an ardent propagandist at that, in those days, called for courage. He was ostracised from the village life, and even his own workmates would not speak to him. He replied by an aggressiveness worthy of the man. He would hawk the pamphlets and papers, and challenge all and sundry by his independent stand for his views.

My companion was the youngest of a family of twelve. Her brothers were social democrats, and, as the baby of the family, she grew up in an environment of simple intellectual tastes for reading and independence of thought. One of her errands was to go to Cupar to get *The Freethinker*, the *National Reformer* and *The Clarion* from a newsagent who was scared for his customers and always kept them hidden away in a drawer until called for. So that when she came to Glasgow to finish her apprenticeship as a dressmaker she was ready to join in the political and anti-religious movement of the times. We were fortunate, therefore, in having nearly everything in common. Even in our ages: only four months separated us.

We set our faces against the terrible one-room system in

Glasgow and decided on having at least two rooms to begin with. We discoursed on the disadvantages of the one-room system and built up dreams of the social revolution when housing would be revolutionised and the domestic drudgery of the home abolished.

About this time an economic crisis broke out in America and soon made its influence felt in Scotland. I got laid off work and for eleven months was unemployed. In those days it was not quite so hopeless as now. One could entertain hopes of a job. I walked to Paisley; to Dumbarton; to Coatbridge, and the surrounding towns, often doing twenty miles a day in search of work. There was no Labour Exchange then. We got 10s. a week from the trade union, if we were fully paid-up members, for three months, and 5s. a week for another three months. I qualified for this benefit, and took part in an agitation for an extension, which was successful.

At the end of nine months my little savings were nearly gone, and through the influence of a brother-in-law I got a job greasing locomotive wheels in a railway shop, for which I got 18s. a week. This lasted for six weeks, when I got a job in the foundry again and left the railway shop.

With renewed hope we took stock of our joint savings and found we had about £15 all told. We had now been courting for about four years and we decided to stoop to conquer and to risk a one-room house. This we did on February 4th, 1910, at a registry office in Blytheswood, Glasgow, to the disgust of our relatives, who associated all such marriages with irregularities. We aggravated their unnecessary fears by abstaining from adopting the marriage-ring, which my wife was definitely opposed to wearing.

Beginning married life in a one-roomed house has certainly all the advantages of economy. The customary

presents which we received from our relatives by way of furniture and domestic equipment enabled us to pass through the ordeal with £8 in hand. This we were to need, as I got laid off the very day we were due to be married. In Scotland the traditional practice amongst workers is to get married on a Friday night. This enables the couple to have the week-end for their honeymoon and start work on Monday morning. We consoled ourselves for my being laid off with the thought that we could ape the bourgeoisie and have a long honeymoon. After two weeks' unemployment I again got work, and our honeymoon was ended.

Our first son, Oliver, was born on March 18th, 1911 (Paris Commune Day). We were ardent physical culturists and vegetarians, students of Bernarr Macfadden. Our son was to be the personification of all our ideas on a good physique and clean living. Besides, he was to be brought up in the socialist faith. This we saw to with no uncertainty.

I remember carrying him in my arms, when he was barely six months old, to a study class I was attending. He was carried to the Socialist Sunday School and later, when he was a bit older, attended meetings where I was lecturing. The visits of my socialist friends, the discussions in the house on socialism, and the socialist books available all had their influence. It was fitting that he should be an ardent shock-brigade worker in the Soviet Union and an active Komsomol (Young Communist).

Comfortable within its limits as our single-end was, in a three-story tenement, we dreamed of a house with a garden. This we secured, after a little over a year, in a row of cottages in Elba Lane—a stone's throw from 15 McEwan Street, where we lived. It wasn't long before I realised the incompatibility of spending ten hours in

foundry work, with preparing lessons from *Capital* and on industrial history for economic study classes, doing Party propaganda and tending a garden—especially when it got overrun with weeds.

In the spring of 1913 a miners' strike was declared and the foundries were shut down for lack of coal. I used part of the six weeks we were unemployed to dig my garden and plant it with vegetables and flowers. But my romantic ideas of a cottage and garden were shattered, and I returned to the conveniences of a two-roomed tenement house in Old Shettleston Road in May.

No. 88 Old Shettleston Road, Shettleston, became quite a centre for a little circle of kindred spirits in the movement, including a Russian glass-worker named Scidletsky, and J. S. Clarke. We took great delight in listening to Scidletsky telling us about the struggles of the glass-blowers in Poland. It was my first introduction to the Russian socialist character. His story of how he ran away from home because he wanted to work in the towns amongst the workers, and the living conditions of the Polish workers, made a great impression on our little circle. Unfortunately, like most glass-blowers, he had lung trouble and migrated to Australia for his health. I never saw him again.

John S. Clarke was then a militant socialist living in Edinburgh. He had a remarkable memory and capacity for absorbing the facts of history. I thought then he ought, and I encouraged him, to go in for lecturing on history. I also encouraged him to cultivate his capacity for satirical verse, many of which I was responsible for printing in 1919, when I was editor of *The Socialist* (weekly).

Clarke had many fine qualities. He could be very caustic and vitriolic with his pen. But I have known and

experienced the *other side of him—the human side*. That he had in great measure. When the deportation of the Clyde Workers' Committee leaders was decided upon, Edinburgh was chosen because the comrades were sure of Clarke's door being wide open for them. We remained firm friends during the war. Subsequently, when he left the Communist Party and joined the I.L.P., later to become a Member of Parliament, we drifted apart.

Arthur MacManus became a regular visitor, and till his untimely death remained an intimate friend and companion. Returning from our classes, our lectures, or propaganda and Party meetings, we would discuss everything under the sun—economics, politics, history, science and literature. Supper over, we would gather round the fire and discourse together till early morning. While I had the advantage of Arthur in economics and the sciences, being ten years older, he was ahead of me in modern literature, and especially in poetry. His Irish ancestry fired his blood with imagination and romance. He was in that blissful stage when youth refuses to accept traditional standards and conventional views. His Irish temperament ran riot at the slightest suggestion of fixity and permanence in social institutions. He challenged everything and everybody.

The MacManuses were emigrants from Ireland. Arthur's father and brothers belonged to the Fenian movement. His uncles, I believe, were directly concerned in the attempt, during the 70's or 80's of the last century, to blow up the Tradeston Gas Works in Glasgow, for which they had to flee to America.

Arthur's father was a Pontifical Zouave and was one of the few who went from Scotland in defence of the Holy See during the Garibaldi movement. Till his death he was a boilerman in Filshill's Confectionery Works in the



ARTHUR MACMANUS





Gallowgate, Glasgow. Old Mrs. MacManus, like many of the Irishwomen of her day, had known what it was to harbour men "on the run" from the police, in the midst of a grinding struggle to get ends to meet. She had had experience of the "informers" and what prison meant to the Fenians in Irish and English gaols. Kindly and sympathetic to everyone in our movement, she idolised Arthur, her youngest son, who was at the same time the despair of her heart on account of his waywardness.

Not that Arthur was neglectful of his mother. Of that I am sure. I had become very friendly with the family, and was practically adopted by the old lady as her son. Many a time when Arthur was in danger she would unbosom herself to me about her hopes and fears for him. She looked to me as his elder brother. I have known Arthur to send help to his mother though his resources were meagre.

Born of Roman Catholics, Arthur got his schooling in the Catholic Seminary in Abercrombie Street, where he grew up with the children of the slums of the East End. He was intended for the priesthood and got to be a Maritz Brother in a convent in Dumfries, but fled from this to go to the factory. Many a time we laughed heartily at the picture of him, so slight and dwarfish, in the guise of a priest. But the service and ceremony of the Church made an indelible impression on him.

I remember in after years when some socialist comrade died and we accorded him the usual funeral, with propaganda speeches and songs badly sung, how Arthur revolted with indignation at the matter-of-factness in such burials. A socialist funeral was always an occasion for his bitter satire on the lack of human feeling often shown towards our comrades.

In this I am sure he was right. Death, whether it be

of a relative or of a socialist comrade, is a very serious matter. There is no reason why we should not be able to arrange a quiet ceremony with splashes of red colour, good music, and fitting tributes to the work done by the comrade while alive. This can be done without the trappings and religious humbug of the Church. A socialist funeral should be an occasion for manly resolve to continue the work of the pioneers, and not a mere anti-religious demonstration. I rejoice to think Arthur's funeral was just such as conformed to the views he always held. Our movement in this country has since then profitably learned from our Russian comrades how to do honour to our proletarian fighters when dead.

In matters of politics, Arthur put everything to the test of action in the service of the workers' movement. He was fired with enthusiasm for the Women's Suffrage Movement when it flared up, though I believe I tempered his ardour by my conviction that the middle-class women were merely using the working women to get the franchise for themselves, after which they would let the working women down. This seemed to me to be another example of the kind of thing the bourgeoisie did during the Reform Movement of 1831. But when the Government suppressed the Suffragettes' paper, and the S.L.P. press was asked to print it, there I was at one with Arthur.

We attended together a lecture in the Andersonian College which made a great psychological impression on both of us. This was a lecture on Radium by Professor Soddy. The explanation of how the heat of radium disintegrates and then reintegrates completely upset our old Laplacian theories of gradual dissipation of the earth's heat, and ultimate death—the earth becoming a dead moon. We applied this idea (new for us) to politics, and particularly to the hide-bound ideas of the S.L.P., which

were now as ossified as the rocks in the Grampian Hills. Henceforth we were no longer to be the slaves of dogmas.

We had dabbled in the dialectical philosophy of Josef Dietzgen, in Bergson's philosophy, and Sorel's application of Bergson to Syndicalism, and the deification of intuition as opposed to reason. Nietzsche, Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, Hauptmann and Strindberg added their weight to our intellectual challenge to all existing social standards and conventionalities. We read feverishly, discussed fiercely, and walked the streets, often after midnight, in an effort to sort out for ourselves the problems of man and the universe. We experimented psychologically on everybody and everybody and eagerly watched for the results.

Naturally in those days much of the rich Marxist literature now available was not yet accessible in English. If only we had had access to, for example, Lenin's *Empirio-Criticism*, how much waste of time and effort we should have been spared! And how fortunate it is for the young people of to-day that they have a much more direct road to an accurate grasp of philosophical and sociological problems, in the form of an extensive library of the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, together with the many fine novels and dramas of Soviet literature.

In the Party fierce discussions took place about this time on the attitude of the S.L.P. to the many questions brought to the front by the ferment of the times.

There was one comrade, John McLure, who turned up at nearly every meeting with some new question for us to declare "what attitude an S.L.P.er should adopt towards this"—"the Temperance Reform Bill," "Taxation of Land Values," "Appearing on the platform with other Parties," and local municipal questions, etc. He assumed the character of "Brother Jonathan," depicted in the

*American Weekly People* for years by Daniel De Leon; the type of man who is always getting the knock-out, but quite impervious to defeat, comes up smiling next week with a new argument. McLure eventually argued himself into the I.L.P., where he subsequently found a leading position which he retained until he died.

Incidentally, I might mention David Kirkwood, M.P. for Dumbarton, who was then in the S.L.P., came under the influence of "Brother Jonathan's" arguments, and, with the help of the late John Wheatley, M.P. for Shettleston, landed in the camp of the I.L.P. Notwithstanding the publicity given to Kirkwood, Davy never was a revolutionary by conviction. He was the typical radical trade unionist of the nineteenth century. As a trade union engineer he had all the characteristics of an aristocrat of labour. Clean living, temperate, and a great family man, Davy was to be seen on a Saturday afternoon taking his boys for walks into the country. Nature study, general literature, and, later, socialist pamphlets, shaped his intellectual outlook. We were intimate friends, being natives of Parkhead, and used to engage in long discussions on Labour and Socialism, sometimes in Davy's house, and sometimes in John Wheatley's.

Wheatley exercised a strong influence over Kirkwood, a strange phenomenon of the Calvinist succumbing to the Jesuit. Had Kirkwood not come under Wheatley's influence he might have proved an acquisition to the militant workers' movement in Glasgow. But, pulled hither and thither by the manœuvres of Wheatley, Davy more often than otherwise played the role of a "big noise."

Wheatley carried on a policy of systematic poaching amongst the active men of the S.L.P. I, myself, visited him on several occasions, on invitation, and had keen

discussions with him on socialist policy. He would acknowledge the correctness of revolutionary policy but always insinuated, in the subtle vein of the Jesuit, one could do all one wanted for the revolution in the I.L.P. My anti-religious training made me suspicious of him; my Marxian training only confirmed me, the more he argued, in my opposition to his reformism and opportunism.

While "Brother Jonathan's" doubting and questionings were really a groping towards the I.L.P. and reformism, he was expressing ideologically the contradiction between the changing objective conditions and the sectarian line taken by the Party. MacManus and I, too, were in opposition to sectarianism, but were struggling for more flexibility in the Party's attitude to the class struggle; for greater mass action on the basis of our revolutionary policy. The intense industrial agitation, strikes and general mass ferment in the working-class movement, simultaneously with the growth of arbitration and conciliation in labour disputes which characterised the four years before the outbreak of the Great War, undoubtedly had made a deep impression on myself, MacManus, J. W. Muir and a group of serious-minded workers in the S.L.P. We had had our experience in the strikes at Singer's and the Argyle Motor Works in Clydebank, where we had been seeking to organise the new machine-minding labourers then excluded from membership in the craft unions. We supported the strike movements of the workers. At public meetings, in discussion circles, at lectures, and in articles in our paper *The Socialist*, we analysed the underlying causes of the unrest and the meaning of the strikes. We concentrated our fire on the craft union leaders who were opposed to mass action and for ever seeking the way of compromise, or as we put it, acting as lightning conductors and running the mass discontent into the ground, i.e.

playing the role of "labour lieutenants" to the captains of industry. Simultaneously, we attacked the labour parliamentarians, MacDonald, Snowden, Clynes, and the I.L.P.ers generally, who wrote articles in the yellow bourgeois press denouncing direct action.

We were disturbed by the fact that there were over 1,100 different trade unions catering for less than 4 million workers organised, i.e. about one-third of the industrial working-class population. We were convinced that the closed corporation character of the trade unions was an obstacle to the organisation of the millions outside any union, and by virtue of their narrow craft outlook opposed to the struggle for socialism. In the several big struggles for recognition of the union we saw in these only a struggle for the "right" of the "labour lieutenants" to get their feet under the mahogany table of the employers, and, therefore, to be more effective in their role as "decoy ducks" for the capitalists.

This last was of course too simple a conception. Even though many of the officials were self-seeking and corrupt, and notwithstanding all the limitations of the narrow craft forms of organisation, the trade unions had been created to voice the collective demands of the workers and protect their interests, and it was therefore right and necessary to compel the employers to recognise them.

We were sincerely desirous of playing a more living part in the direction of this great mass movement. It was necessary to apply in life the dialectical and theoretical weapons we had been forging in fourteen years of study, and to participate actively in the trade union mass movement. This we had begun to do and were feeling free from the dogmas that had been gripping us for years, when the Great War came.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FIGHT AGAINST THE WAR

I REMEMBER the excitement with which we read the news that war had been declared. For years we had preached anti-jingoism and sold thousands of copies of the speech of Gustave Hervé, for writing which he got four years' imprisonment. Now the war had come. What was going to happen? What would the International do? What *could* it do? We had already had an earnest of how the British Labour leaders would behave, during the Balkan War. The attitude of the German social democracy had been made familiar to us by the "Flashlights on the International Congresses," by Daniel De Leon. We now realised how isolated we were by our policy of keeping aloof from the International. The S.L.P. had refused to recognise the S.D.F., the Labour Party and the I.L.P. as the *real* representatives of socialism in Great Britain. Moreover, we had refused to agree to the method of treating Great Britain and all its parties as a single section, out of fear of smothering the views of minorities and strangling the revolutionary groups. We had sent delegates to the International Congresses to press our claims for independent representation, but met with a flat refusal.

Thus we had remained outside. But we now understood that if we had been an integral part of the International, even though denied the platform at the Congresses, we should have been in closer touch with other sincere

revolutionary elements in the world movement, and able at this moment of the collapse of the International to work with them for the maintenance of the principles of International socialism against the social chauvinists who were hastening to range themselves beside the bourgeoisie of their respective countries.

Arthur and I sat late into the night discussing the situation in all its pros and cons. We walked the streets, excited and restless. One thing was clear as crystal, academic discussions and sectarianism must end. The International is dead; we must make sure in the new International that arises Henderson and his bunch find no place. Meantime we must do everything in our power to make it impossible for "this crowd" (our bourgeoisie) to carry on the war.

A special Party meeting was called to discuss the war situation. A keen debate ensued, in which three lines were taken. The first line, led by MacManus and myself, was definite, open hostility to the war; the second, led by the late John W. Muir, was that in the event of invasion we should be prepared for National Defence; the third line was to look upon the war with an academic interest, as an event of world importance that would hasten the inevitable collapse of capitalism!

Our discussions continued without definite conclusions. The quick march of events, however, was to solve in practice what theorising couldn't settle. The Wheatley Catholic group called a meeting in a hall in Watson Street, where regular meetings were held, to make a pronouncement on the war. Tom Johnston, editor of *Forward*, was the principal speaker, with Wheatley in the chair. MacManus and I went with a prepared series of questions, the purpose of which was to make a united front movement against the war. We questioned Johnston on the



attitude to be adopted to the question of National Defence. He replied by asking us to imagine a man met by a tiger on a lonely road, and being forced to defend himself. But to our minds this did not at all represent the situation of the workers in relation to the war. The war was a struggle between rival sections of the capitalist class; and Johnston's attitude could only lead in certain eventualities to collaboration with the capitalists for the carrying on of this struggle. When I put the straight question: "Are you prepared to take part in a united movement organised to fight actively against the war?" the answer was: "No! The I.L.P. is quite sufficient." This reply was indicative of the Centrist role the I.L.P. was to play during the war.

The S.L.P. was in the habit of holding regular outdoor meetings in several parts of the town throughout the week, the principal meeting being in Buchanan Street on Sunday evenings. Meetings had been held here summer and winter for fourteen years. It was a recognised place of meeting, and with the fever of the war enormous crowds gathered, augmented by thousands more who came to read the bulletins of the *Glasgow Herald* office, which was situated half-way up the street.

The first Sunday passed off quietly. On the second Sunday J. W. Muir was the speaker. An angry mob of the student element collected. The platform was rushed and blows struck. Muir, who was rather a sensitive character and peaceably disposed, was forced to hit out in self-defence. This was his first lesson in jingoism and the logic of "national defence." Henceforth, Muir's hostility to the war was determined. Mac and I did not fail to drive home the lesson to the other Party comrades. Our meetings must go on, and they must be defended. We organised groups of non-party workers who belonged to

our "corner" (the streets where we lived). These workers knew nothing of politics, but they were always ready for a fight, especially when one of their own was involved. Arthur MacManus they knew as one of their crowd, and they readily turned up to steward our meetings. I mention this for the benefit of our active young workers. Keep close to the workers. They can be relied upon to stand by those whom they know for one of their own.

The industrial situation throughout the country when the war broke out was most tense. It was a period of militant "direct action" on the part of large masses of workers, affecting builders, miners, transport workers and the engineering and metal trades. Strikes were the order of the day. In the first half of 1914 there had been an average of 150 strikes a month.

Now, the rapid course of events, the Treasury Agreement between the Government and trade union leaders, and the entrance of Henderson and Barnes into the Cabinet, brought into action various vigilance, emergency, and unofficial committees and, subsequently, the Clyde Workers' Committee.

I began to take a more active part in trade union work, became a member of the District Committee, and very soon was elected to the Executive Council of the union—the Associated Ironmoulders of Scotland. On my arrival at the first Board meeting, which I should say was comprised, apart from the General Secretary, Assistant Secretary, and office workers, of moulders like myself working at the trade, I was received by the President and the other leading members—who were I.L.P.ers and pacifists—as a brother in the common struggle against the war. But, whereas my attitude was one of open hostility and resistance to the war on socialist grounds, they confined themselves to the opportunist course of creating difficulties for

the Government on the plea of the damaging effect of the war upon the trade union funds.

For example, the rule of the union was that when a member joined the fighting forces he ceased his membership. This was a measure of protection for the union funds against charges arising from death and disablement while on military service or unemployment afterwards. But it had the potential disadvantage of drastically reducing the membership in the conditions of a large-scale war. And the I.L.P. Executive members therefore pleaded that the Government should accept financial responsibility for all contingencies arising out of the war, thus enabling the union, without incurring financial burdens, to retain its members during the time that the latter were serving with the forces. Beyond that they did not go.

My first experience on the Executive was a meeting at which W. Appleton, the Secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions, attended to persuade the union to sign the Treasury Agreement. He didn't succeed at that meeting. Workers, who have just come hot haste from the inferno of a foundry, with the heat, the grime and the smoke still in their blood and nostrils, are not easily influenced by the bourgeois manners, polish and well-groomed appearance of the type of Appleton. I dare not put on paper the remarks exchanged by the workers round that table about this type of "Labour" leader, nor what the substance of their conversation was as we left the meeting. The censorship forbids!

The purpose of Appleton's visit led to a discussion for or against the war, in which Mr. Appleton got some severe knocks. We had known him as one of the jingo camp of Blatchford and Hyndman, and gave him no quarter. His arguments for nationalism and national defence, and against German competition and "dictatorship,"

were riddled by the crystal-clear class consciousness of the workers present. I revelled in the debate, especially with such a live "Labour fakir" for an opponent.

On the Clyde the engineers, in particular, were in a state of ferment. A three years' agreement between the A.E.U. and the employers was due to expire in November, and an agitation was being carried on for twopence an hour increase in wages. This agitation affected all the metal workers, indirectly, since success for the engineers would largely determine results for the other trades, who were also putting forward wage demands through the local Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Workers.

The war fever created a lot of confusion. The trade union officials, in alliance with the employers, called a halt to labour disputes, and appealed for industrial peace while the war lasted. Negotiations were opened up between the employers and the officials and were dragged on for months. By February 1915 there was talk of a compromise on  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. an hour, when a strike broke out in one of the biggest engineering works in the city—Weir's, of Cathcart.

This firm specialised on a patent pump of their own. They had a factory in New York State to meet the requirements of their American market. The American factory was organised on the up-to-date methods of scientific management; free labour supply; mechanical appliances and the conveyor system. The Glasgow works had grown up from small beginnings, and had inherited all the restrictions of the craft unions, to the chagrin of the younger members of the Weir family, who had been associated with the development of the enterprise in America.

For years a struggle had taken place in Cathcart between the workers and the management around the

introduction of the system of Taylorism, especially in the foundry. At first the workers resisted the innovations; later they accepted the position but with several restrictions. Now, with the war, was Weir's opportunity, and the firm was not slow to seize it.

Arrangements were made to bring over a number of American workers with attractive inducements. They were given a free return passage; a wage rate of 10s. a week more than the Glasgow rate, and a six months' contract with a bonus at the end of the term. This was adding fuel to the fire with a vengeance, and the Cathcart men struck work.

The strike of Weir's workers led to meetings of workers in the other engineering shops—in the Albion Motor Works; in Barr & Stroud's, scientific instrument makers, etc. Delegates from other shops were sent to the strikers' meeting in St. Mungo Hall, conveying fraternal greetings and resolutions of solidarity. At the end of two weeks the strike was called off, but not before a "Central Labour Withholding Committee" had been set up—the precursor of the famous "Clyde Workers' Committee."

It will be opportune here, I think, to speak of the shop stewards system which was to play such an important part in the struggles of the workers during the war. The shop steward was an integral part of the trade union machinery, especially the engineers, prior to the war. Most unions had their delegate on the job or in the shop, for the collection of contributions, checking up on defaulting members or on non-union workers; for reporting changes in the conditions of work, and as a link between the union branch and the works.

The functions of the stewards, of course, varied in the workshops, depending on the numbers employed, the nature of the work, and the degree of militancy amongst

the members. With the advance of the industrial system, of industry on a large scale, with its departmental divisions, the coming together of several stewards in the carrying out of their duties was inevitable. It was not long before they became an organised force in the shop to deal with general questions as well as the narrower business of the trade union.

For some years prior to the war the stewards had been assuming the functions of the workers' deputies to the management, a parallel force with the district organiser of the union or the trade union branch officials. At the same time, many of the more advanced capitalists, especially in highly-developed engineering towns, had seen the advantages of welfare committees, especially as a means to diminish the role of the trade unions in the works. The objects of these committees were, of course, restricted. They existed for indoor entertainment; outdoor games; sick donation benefits and general discipline of the factory in the interest of the capitalists. They got their impulse before the war through the desire of the capitalists to evade the trade union regulations and to isolate "their" workers from the rest of the trade. And though the shop stewards were admitted to them, the majority of these committees were anti-working class, and aimed at the demoralisation and destruction of the workers' organisations, having been corrupted by the bribery of higher wages, more favourable working conditions, and the various welfare schemes.

Barr & Stroud's in Glasgow had had an elaborate Welfare Committee in existence since 1900, and a shop stewards' group. The shop stewards in Weirs, Cathcart, had been welded together before the war, under pressure of the attacks by the firm on working conditions. The Albion Motor Works, Clydebank, Beardmore's, Parkhead, and several of the shipyards all had groups of

militant shop stewards. When, therefore, the Munitions Act was passed and put into operation, these stewards were brought to the front, as the representatives of the workers. Their role and importance got added strength from the fact that the trade union bureaucrats had signed away their rights to the Government, under the infamous Treasury Agreement. The workers perforce had to defend their own rights directly.

The strike ferment was not confined to Glasgow. All over the country discontent was rife. The Government appointed Commissioners to represent it on the spot, and to enter into contact with the individual firms with a view to making separate agreements with each shop as a means of preventing concerted action by the workers. Out of these consultations, with the trade union officials collaborating, came the Munitions Act.

The Munitions Act gave the employers and the Government almost unlimited power over the workers. Petty, exacting tyrannies were imposed for the most trivial offences. Always the threat of punishment, and in the last resort of sending the worker to the army, was held out, if there was any individual resistance. The employers used the Act to walk through all the established traditions of the trade unions; by introduction of machinery; dilution of skilled labour by women and unskilled workers; the piece-rate system; bonus; and non-unionism.

Feeling inside the workshops ran high on the question of non-unionism and the dilutees. The skilled workers resented the encroachments on labour conditions which had been won only after generations of sacrifice. The militants were bristling for an open fight. It was in such an atmosphere that an engineer named Marshall, working in Beardmore's, Parkhead, struck a non-unionist with his fist and laid him out. Marshall was accused of "slacking"

and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment. The Labour Withholding Committee took the initiative and called a conference of representatives from all the workshops to explain the meaning and implications of the Munitions Act. The committee issued a leaflet for wide circulation opposing the terms of the Act and called on the workers to resist.

Meantime the question of prices and rents began to create a ferment. The notices to increase rents were met by widespread resistance all over Glasgow. A Rents Resistance Committee was formed, and thousands enrolled. Placards were hung out the windows of the workers' houses to the effect that "We are not paying increased rent." Street pickets were appointed to watch for the "factor," or landlord's agent. The ringing of a bell was the signal for a whole street to turn out. The landlords tried to get round this organised opposition by an individual summons to the Sheriff's Court. But this only aggravated the situation. The women marched in a body to the shipyards and got the men to leave work and join them in a demonstration to the Court. These demonstrations led to the Rent Restrictions Act.

By the end of 1915 the Clyde Workers' Committee was formed, and almost immediately was faced with the Dilution of Labour Act. The Clyde workers were now completely beyond the control of the trade union officials, and as a last resort the Government had decided to send to Glasgow Lloyd George, Arthur Henderson and R. McKenna. If anything was calculated to exasperate the workers, this was. The union officials were held in disrepute and disgust; Lloyd George was regarded as a trickster of the first water and responsible for the Munitions Act.

The plan was to hold a large meeting in St. Andrew's



Hall on Thursday evening. All arrangements had been made by the officials of the Federation of Engineers and Shipyard Workers when Lloyd George suddenly changed his mind and decided to make a personal tour of the workshops and shipyards, culminating in a large rally in the St. Andrew's Hall on Saturday, Christmas morning, where he no doubt intended to play on the harp of Peace and Goodwill between employers and workmen till the war was won. The tour was to be in the nature of an appeal for heavy guns and 80,000 skilled men for munitions.

A meeting of the delegates to the E. and S.W. Federation took place on Thursday night. After hearing a report from the officials who had been to Newcastle the previous night to consult with Henderson and Lloyd George's entourage they decided by 60 votes to 5 to have nothing to do with the Saturday meeting and adjourned about 11.45 p.m., notwithstanding appeals from Henderson, having decided that an aggregate meeting of allied shop stewards be held to decide on policy before any future meeting with Lloyd George.

As soon as the Government officials heard of the results of the meeting, telegrams were sent out and special messengers dispatched to the committee, calling them to a meeting in the Central Hall in the morning at 10 o'clock to hear reasons why they should reconsider their decision. Payment was offered to all who would attend the Saturday meeting. Taxi-cabs were placed at the disposal of the local officials to see that the tickets of invitation were distributed to all the conveners, stewards and shop committees. I believe most of the payments were handed over to form a fund to start *The Worker* as an organ of the Clyde Workers' Committee.

Lloyd George's first visit was to Beardmore's,

Parkhead. The shop stewards were assembled and Lloyd George was introduced to them by Kirkwood with a tirade to the effect that one engineer was worth a dozen lawyers to the country. When Lloyd George had finished his usual demagogic harangue it had been intended to have a nice photograph showing how really fraternal the Clyde workers were with the Government and to use it for purposes of publicity. This, however, was too much for the delegates, and amidst protests and recriminations against the Government the meeting broke up in confusion. At Weir's, when the manager sent for the convener of the shop stewards to inform the workers Lloyd George was coming, they refused to meet him. The projected visit to the Fairfield shipyard was abandoned. But the climax was to come at the "Grand Rally."

The St. Andrew's Hall was taken and invitations issued to the shop stewards. The most elaborate precautions were taken to protect the speakers; a special barricade being erected across the platform to prevent anyone getting to it from the body of the hall. This, in itself, was a provocation to ridicule. The workers spent the time while waiting for the speakers in singing socialist songs—"The Red Flag," "The International," and a favourite piece of doggerel set to the Hallelujah hymn, "Tell me the old, old story."

As soon as Henderson got up to speak, pandemonium broke loose. He was stormed with all manner of abusive epithets. The air was blue with violent language, which mingled with the strains of the "Red Flag," until he was forced to give in. Then Lloyd George tried to speak. This was a thousand times worse. He played on "free speech," on "patriotism," his friendship with Ramsay MacDonald and Thomas and Labour, amidst a running fire of interruptions. Before sitting down he began to reply to

written questions, but said that as he had another engagement he would reply to them all through the medium of the press. In the midst of the uproar, Johnny Muir got up to address the meeting, denouncing the Munitions Act, the Dilution of Labour Act and the platform, and pledging the meeting to accept no dilution without consultation with the Clyde Workers' Committee. The speakers left the platform and thus completed the fiasco of the whole tour.

In January 1916 the Clyde Workers' Committee decided to publish a weekly paper—*The Worker*—to give publicity to its views and to co-ordinate the local struggle. It was printed by our Socialist Labour Press. By the appearance of the fourth issue the authorities had decided to suppress the paper. This issue contained an article headed "Should the Workers Arm?" and was used as the excuse. The editor, J. W. Muir, and W. Gallacher, as chairman of the C.W.C., together with the manager of the S.L. Press, W. Bell, were arrested. The workers in the Albion Motor Works, Barr & Stroud's, and Weir's struck work, and bail was allowed. They were, however, convicted and sentenced to one year each, the printer getting three months.

This was the beginning of a policy of repression, persecution and deportation aimed at breaking up the workers' movement in the West of Scotland. J. W. Muir did not write the article for which he was to serve a year in gaol. It was written by an I.L.P.er, Catholic and Pacifist. But Muir had too fine a sense of loyalty to betray a trust. Sensitive and emotional, his health was seriously undermined by the prison life, and he never really recovered from this experience. Later, John Maclean and James Macdougall, made nervous and excitable by their activity and the whole course of events, were also to be broken in health; Maclean to go to an early grave, and Macdougall

to become embittered and sour and finally land into the camp of the Liberal Party! Few of those who went to prison in those days had the toughness and fibre needed to stand up to it like Gallacher.

Opposition to the Conscription Acts was next in order. Persistent agitation was carried on inside the workshops against Conscription and tremendous meetings were held on Glasgow Green. John Maclean was very active in this movement and for his part in the agitation he was arrested and sent to prison for three years. In view of the important role of John Maclean in the movement in Glasgow and throughout Scotland I take the liberty of reproducing the material extracts from an account of the life of Maclean, written by his friend and colleague James Macdougall, and published in leaflet form during the General Election campaign in 1918, when Gallacher acted as deputy candidate for John, who was then in prison.

“ John Maclean was born in 1879 at Pollokshaws. He was of working-class origin, his father being a working potter who had originally come from Bo’ness. The family of four children had a hard upbringing, as their father died when John’s elder brother was only fifteen. If John Maclean was able in later life to portray the life endured by the masses, it was because he had as a child endured and suffered like them. Indeed, had it not been for his heroic mother, John would probably have been condemned to lifelong toil at some manual occupation yielding quick returns. Mrs. Maclean, however, was a woman of spirit; she went back to the cotton mill and worked as a weaver, the occupation she had followed before her marriage, and not only brought up her family respectably, but made her two sons teachers. John Maclean himself has informed me that it was the knowledge of the sacrifice made and self-denial endured by his mother and sisters to enable him to be educated that made him resolve to use this education in the service of the workers.

“John was educated at Pollok Academy, Queen’s Park Higher Grade School, and ultimately graduated at Glasgow University. As was the custom in those days, he worked as a pupil teacher while attending the University classes, and in his holidays he got a job in the Calico Printing Works at Thornliebank, an experience of great value to him in the career he afterwards pursued. For his degree, he took among other subjects that of Economics. He is essentially of a practical nature, and likes nothing better than a concrete problem to tackle. So he joined the Social Democratic Federation in 1905. In the unemployed agitation of that year he took a prominent part, and soon became one of the best-known speakers of the Party. From that time forward practically every year he spent his two months’ summer holiday in Socialist propaganda. His enthusiasm and energy never seemed to become exhausted. John traversed Scotland from end to end, from Lerwick in the Shetlands to Dumfries in the South. No single speaker has done so much to make socialism familiar to the working class of Scotland as John Maclean. Particularly is the spread of the movement in Fife and in South Lanark to be ascribed to him.

“On the 10th of November, 1915, John Maclean was tried under the Defence of the Realm Act for sedition and sentenced to a fine of £5 or five days’ imprisonment. He elected to go to prison. A week later his employers, the Govan School Board, dismissed him from his post as second master, in spite of strong protests by thousands of engineers and others who filled the streets round about the Board-room. On the 17th of the same month the famous one-day strike on the rent question, participated in by 10,000 workers, took place, with the result that the Government had to pass the Rent Act restricting rents to pre-war rates. John Maclean took a prominent part in this agitation. Then followed a winter of splendid propaganda, which culminated in the great strike against conscription in March 1916, the close of which was followed by the arrest of John Maclean and other socialists and by the deportation of leading shop stewards in the

engineering trade. Maclean was brought to trial in April, and sentenced to three years' penal servitude. Of this sentence he served fifteen months, and then in July 1917, owing to the influence of the Russian Revolution and the widespread agitation at home, he was released on ticket-of-leave. The temporary eclipse of the Revolution has been followed by the recent re-arrest of John Maclean, who had been appointed one of the honorary vice-presidents of the Soviet Congress along with Karl Liebknecht, and the passing of a brutal sentence of practically six years' penal servitude upon him.

“Restrictions of space prevent us from doing any more than merely referring to Maclean's important services to independent working-class education and to the co-operative movement.

“As is well known throughout the Labour movement, we are on the eve of starting a Labour College in Scotland. This is largely the outcome of the self-sacrificing labours of John Maclean. Twelve years ago he commenced to teach Marxian economics and industrial history in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. Last winter in the classes affiliated to the Labour College Committee alone, 1,500 students were enrolled. Through the medium of these classes several thousand pounds' worth of Marxian books have been sold.

“In 1905 at the Paisley Co-operative Congress he fought strongly in favour of the Co-operative movement taking political action. His pamphlet, “Co-operation and Rising Prices,” published in 1911, did much to awaken the movement to a sense of the dangers it had to face from capitalist concentration and multiple shop competition. Maclean is one of the few Marxian Socialists in Britain who have consistently upheld the Co-operative movement not merely as a present support for the working class, but also as an organisation which will play a vital part in the transition to socialism.

“John Maclean, sincere and honest, able and courageous, is one of the greatest pioneers that the British Labour movement has ever produced.”

The Clyde Workers' Committee was very active and aggressive. Committee meetings took place almost nightly. It was an inspiring sight to see workers, in their workaday clothes, and dungarees; hands and faces dirty with toil, coming straight to the committee meetings to report progress or to get guidance on some important question affecting their shop. Every Saturday afternoon the Shop Assistants' Hall, in Argyle Street, was packed to overflowing, hearing reports from the Committee, from the shop delegates, and engaging in discussions on matters of policy.

The Government became thoroughly alarmed at the situation and on Saturday, March 25th, took the desperate course of arresting ten of the shop stewards one night and deporting them. Armed detectives visited the comrades' houses just on the stroke of twelve o'clock, midnight. Some of the stewards were actually in bed. They were forced to get dressed and taken to a special car waiting for them outside, and were rushed off to the Central Police Station. Brought before the military chief for the district, they were given a list of certain towns where they could choose to go, and twelve hours in which to make up their minds.\*

I have already referred to the friendly relations between MacManus and myself with John S. Clarke, in Edinburgh. We had often visited Edinburgh and had pleasant recollections of the town and its amenities. Arthur chose Edinburgh, largely, I believe, for these reasons, and the majority of the others followed suit. Most of the comrades were inclined to find employment, but Arthur MacManus

\* It was for statements calling for strike action made at a monster meeting on Glasgow Green, the day following the deportations, that Maxton and Macdougall were sentenced to twelve months each—despite their expressions of regret for what they had said made to the Judge on their behalf by their defending Counsel.

absolutely refused work of any kind. He was in favour of an organised return to Glasgow, and proposed to challenge the authorities, but the Defence Committee, of which Wheatley was the leading figure, were scared at the proposal. Individual excursions were made to Glasgow, but in secret.

Much has been said about the part played by David Kirkwood under deportation. His was not a hero's part. In the first instance, substantial funds were forthcoming to meet the dependants' needs. It was easy, therefore, to sit tight and do nothing. I have already shown how he came under the influence of Wheatley. The latter was quick to utilise the deportation for his own political purposes. Kirkwood, never fertile in ideas, was only too glad to have a manager.

It was Wheatley who staged Kirkwood's melodramatic appearance at the Labour Party Conference in Manchester (1917), and his windy threats about returning to Glasgow in defiance of all the gods and the Government. He went to Glasgow, but after a hurried visit went back to Edinburgh. His manager arranged for him to visit a hydropathic in Crieff. But this was cut short by the appearance of the police, and back he went to Edinburgh, to sign an undertaking before Col. Levita, of the Scottish Military Command, not to return to Glasgow again. Nor did he, till the deportation order was lifted in February 1918.



## CHAPTER IX

### PROPAGANDA IN LONDON AND LANCASHIRE

As for myself, at the beginning of the war, I had taken employment in London and, later, in Liverpool, in Brown's Foundry, Bootle, chiefly on the persuasion of Jim Morton—who was later to achieve fame in accepting the challenge of Lady Astor to send an unemployed man to the Soviet Union. I had been in close correspondence with Jim Morton for many years. He was very enthusiastic about the militancy of the Liverpool workers. They were the first to win the forty-seven hours' week, and in the foundry and engineering trades this had been gained without any reduction in wages. Actually, they were paid a halfpenny an hour above the rate. I was to use this experience of shorter hours in Glasgow later on.

He kept urging me to come to Liverpool. Harland & Wolff had just opened a big new foundry for repair work. This shop was equipped with all the modern conveniences for the workers. It was clean and airy, with lockers for clothes, and all up-to-date sanitary conveniences and wash-hand basins. In contrast with the filthy, ramshackle foundry in which I was then employed—typical of all foundries in Scotland—it was a veritable eldorado, and the invitation was attractive. Moreover, the average worker's house had about four rooms—a contrast to the tenement room and kitchen in Glasgow.

I gave in my notice to leave my job, and within four days I was in Liverpool. When I arrived I found the

labourers were on strike at Harland's for extra money. I couldn't start work in such circumstances. Looking over the newspapers we saw an advertisement for moulders in London, and decided to apply, just for the fun of the thing. To our astonishment we got a post-card by return to come right away and start work in Aston's, Eagle Wharf Road. Without hesitation, and in a spirit of adventure, we both scraped our fares together and went.

We set out from Liverpool by the midnight train, with no luggage except a box of tools and a change of clothes that went into a week-end bag. Included in Morton's luggage was a cheap metal alarm clock which he carried in his pocket. He wouldn't part with that clock, for how would he waken in the morning? An alarm clock, he declared, was the working man's best friend. For myself I considered it our greatest enemy. This damned clock kept thump, thump, thumping, to the accompaniment of curses from the other passengers who were trying to snatch a forty winks' sleep.

We arrived at Euston station before 5 o'clock in the morning, in pitch darkness, on account of the war regulations. We hung about the station, waiting on the first train to Old Street. From Old Street to the foundry was a torturous walk in the dark through strange streets. At the foundry by 6 o'clock, we learned there was no start till 7 a.m. Off we went to a coffee shop in Packington Street to get something to eat; besides, we wanted to get into our working clothes. Following a word with the owner of the shop, we were led downstairs into a queer-looking cellar, where we changed our underclothes, and got into our dungarees.

I had read about London's coffee shops. I associated them with Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt, and other celebrities in literature. But I got a rude

awakening. Workers began to come in for their hasty morning bite. Thick mugs of stuff were handed out that passed for tea and coffee. Thick slabs of bread and marmalade seemed to be the favourite morning dish. This, I learned, could be had for about 2½d. The air reeked with sausages, doubtful eggs and thick fat bacon, the balance of the stock-in-trade being made up with indigestible slabs of yellow cake. This shop was run by an old man and six daughters, who seemed to be kept fully employed, and I have no doubt it was a goldmine for profit.

The novelty of London foundry life, which struck me as more patriarchal than in the north, with its amusing cockney dialect, was varied by air-raids. I experienced the horrors of air-warfare on the occasion of the first Zeppelin raid. To see this big airship gliding through the clouds with shells bursting all round it; to hear the explosion of bombs and see the sky red with the flames of Little Britain, Bartholomew's Square, etc., was my introduction to the realities of the war.

I worked through the spring and summer of 1915 in London, and Morton and I attended socialist meetings at Highbury Corner and in Hyde Park, and the B.S.P. lectures in Chandos Hall, Maiden Lane. I liked the amenities of London—its parks; its crowds; its lights, and its historical places and museums. But we both felt isolated and homesick. Morton went into hospital with sciatica, and eventually he returned to Liverpool. One day I gave my two days' notice, which expired on a Friday, and I was working in Liverpool on the following Monday.

To many people, Jim Morton was a queer cuss. But I liked him. He was a good, honest-hearted proletarian fighter. He had joined one of the Highland regiments, in

Edinburgh, when a lad of 18, and been through the Boer War. After the war he settled in South Africa for a time, and subsequently worked in London as a foreman moulder. From there he migrated home to Edinburgh. Restless by nature, he went to the midlands of England, and I believe worked in every town in mid and north England.

He joined the S.L.P. quite early, and we started correspondence through some articles of mine in the *Scottish Iron-Moulders' Journal*. He was a travelling propagandist. Always to be found in the market places and at local Socialist and Labour meetings, he never failed to have a bundle of papers and pamphlets on him. Two hundred copies of *The Socialist* a month, and ten or twelve shillings' worth of pamphlets sold, was a regular showing for him in those days. A prolific correspondent, his letters were bubbling over with a rich, quaint humour of his own. He had a habit of breaking into doggerel and often corresponded entirely in verse. I have many letters of this kind in my possession. The workers used to enjoy his verse, which he pasted up in the lavatories, satirising the working conditions; the foremen and managers; the trade union officials, and general political questions of the moment. It was all biting propaganda. A craftsman to the fingertips, he rebelled against the new industrialism that was creeping into foundry practice. This very often led to unemployment, as he refused to be hustled in any shape or form. It was in keeping with his whole character to accept Lady Astor's challenge to pay the fare of any worker who would care to go to the Soviet Union. His death, in the Soviet Union, was due to the cumulative effects upon his nervous system of sciatica, of which he had been a victim for many years, to my personal knowledge.

Back in Liverpool, in the hum of industry and the

environment of a militant workers' movement, I felt more at home. I began lecturing and holding economic classes in Litherland.

At this time there was one of the Bibby family of oil-cake manufacturers, of Liverpool, who had been making a name for himself as a theosophist and socialist. He published an artistic annual every year, with reproductions of famous paintings. The text of this annual always contained articles on socialism and pacifism of that deadly type that appeals to the emotions and idealism of the young workers who are just awakening into class consciousness and revolt against the brutalities of capitalism. I took up his pamphlets and challenged this type of pacifist, theosophical, utopian socialism. The result was a debate in which old Joe Bibby got a sound drubbing from the audience and his opponent. But it was like water running off a duck's back. Old Joe was impervious to argument. This was his hobby, and he was going on with it—spreading his pernicious ideas for what they were worth.

I visited Manchester, Bolton, and Wigan, on propaganda work for the S.L.P. Among the few S.L.P. stalwarts I came into contact with in Lancashire for the first time was Dick Hutchinson, a Manchester business man in a modest way. Dick along with Tom Nelson from Bury, a hard, plodding tutor in study classes who did some fine pioneering work in socialist education, had been working away for some years selling literature, holding public meetings and assisting in every way possible to spread Marxist ideas. When Willie Paul crossed the border into England for the first time and visited Lancashire as S.L.P. national organiser, he found in Dick Hutchinson a staunch friend and collaborator.

The B.S.P. had a<sub>x</sub> propagandist in Lancashire named Albert Ward. Ward was a racy fluent speaker, and a

rabid opponent of the S.L.P. and industrial unionism. Dick Hutchinson could not rest until a debate was arranged betwixt Ward and me. This debate finally took place in the Trades Council Hall in Blackpool to Dick's delight, since in debate and discussion Ward came in for some severe knocks. This was the beginning of my friendship with the Hutchinson family. Unhappily, Dick, who was never robust in health, died on Christmas Day in 1917, leaving three children, one of whom, Lester Hutchinson, was to figure in the famous Meerut Trial case in India, following his courageous assistance to the Bombay workers in their press and trade union organisation. During the whole course of the Meerut arrests and trial his mother travelled all over the country, addressing meetings wherever opportunity presented itself, and never rested until the men were free.

While in Liverpool I took a hand in starting a Merseyside Workers' Committee. Meetings were held in Wallasey, Birkenhead, and in St. Martin's Hall, Liverpool. We corresponded with the Clyde workers. But it was uphill work, as the several local union committees were fairly militant, and seemed to the workers to be all-sufficient.

While the prices of foodstuffs were rising rapidly and living, generally, was getting dearer, wages were not keeping pace. There was always a big gap between the pay envelope and the cost of living. And, naturally, the foundry workers were grumbling. The moulders were in a different position from the engineers and other munition workers. We had opposed payment by results and the bonus system. It was about this time that the employers and the Government instituted the practice of systematic overtime. Thus, extra money was earned, but at the expense of the workers' hides and sleep.

While in Liverpool I kept in close touch with Arthur

MacManus. I was delighted one day to learn that he had decided to come to Liverpool to work. Pressure was being put on all the deportees, under the Conscription Acts, to find work, and finally jobs were arranged by the Ministry of Munitions for "Mac" and some of the other deportees in the Cunard Company.

When "Mac" presented himself one morning to start work, the other workers downed tools and refused to work with him, on patriotic grounds. "Mac" encouraged them; told them he didn't want to work either; that he was sent there against his will, and proposed they should have a meeting together. Soon the workers came to look on him as one of their own, and he became very popular with all the workers in the shop.

Rebelling against the compulsion of working, "Mac" often stayed off work for days. On these occasions he visited Manchester, Barrow, Coventry, Birmingham, and Derby—meeting the shop stewards for conversations and organisation. Soon a network of committees were drawn together, and in the spring of 1917 engineers were on strike.

With a number of the National Committee of Shop Stewards, "Mac" was again arrested. F. E. Smith (Lord Birkenhead) was the Counsel for the Prosecution. It is doubtful if a more spiteful, hateful enemy of the workers ever existed. He blustered and threatened to send them to the front, to be shot, etc., but a more subtle hand was at work, and a document was prepared giving pledges to return to work. The majority of the prisoners signed. "Mac" refused, and didn't sign. He was set free with the rest.

Throughout the war the Government resorted to the old practice of sending spies amongst the militant workers as informers and provocateurs. The munition shops were

riddled with them. The Workers' Committees were pestered with them. Perhaps the most outrageous case of provocation was the "Alec Gordon" case.

All over the country there was a network of sympathetic pacifists who formed branches of the No-Conscription Fellowship. These comrades played an important role in concealing and feeding "absentees" and keeping in touch with those conscientious objectors who were in prison.

Many of those comrades kept an open door for men on the run. In Derby, the house of Mrs. Wheeldon was a haven for anyone who was opposed to the war. This "Gordon" turned up and pretended he was a C.O. He was given all the privileges of the house. Here he ingratiated himself and engaged in the discussions that took place on assisting C.O.s to escape from the camps and to cross over to Ireland.

One of these camps, near Liverpool, came up for discussion. The question of gaining the sympathy of the warders was easy. But the guards had dogs to assist them. The conversation turned on the dogs, and "Gordon" was enthusiastic about poisoning them as a way out. While this proposal was being examined "Gordon" actually informed his paymasters that a conspiracy was afoot in Derby to poison the Prime Minister and Mr. Arthur Henderson. As a result Mrs. Wheeldon, her two daughters and her son-in-law, who was a chemist, were arrested.

The trial was a most disgraceful frame-up. The prosecution point-blank refused to put "Gordon," their chief witness, into the witness box for cross-examination. The mother got ten years' and the other members of the family five years' imprisonment each. After serving a couple of years they were released, following hunger-strike. Mrs.



Wheeldon died a few months afterwards. The daughter and son-in-law contracted pneumonia and were at death's door for several weeks. "Gordon" was shipped to South Africa for a time to save his skin.

Arthur MacManus had been frequenting Derby in connection with the shop steward's movement. He became a welcome visitor at the Wheeldons' house, and subsequently married the second eldest daughter, Hetty. Through associations with Arthur I, too, frequently visited the Wheeldons, and came to know the mother and family, on their release.

I give the following "epitaph," which appeared in *The Socialist*, of which I was the editor, as a curiosity of the times.

EPITAPH ON ALEX GORDON

*Agent provocateur* of the British Government during the Great War to safeguard Democracy

Stop! stranger, thou art near the spot  
 Marked by this cross metallic,  
 Where buried deep doth lie and rot,  
 The corpse of filthy Alick.

And maggot-worms in swarms below,  
 Compete with one another,  
 In shedding tears of bitter woe,  
 To mourn—not cat—a brother.

Meanwhile, my domestic circumstances in Liverpool had become difficult. We were obliged to take rooms with a dock worker in Bootle. There were his family of four; my family of four, and Jim Morton, all in a six-roomed house. Our furniture was packed into our living-room. I was glad when one day I got the offer of a house of our own in Benedict Street. Here Morton and his family shared with us.

Our younger boy, Laurence—nearly three years of age—caught a chill and died, after three months' illness, with peritonitis. The week after he was buried the elder boy, Oliver, took German measles, which developed into pneumonia, and, subsequently, an empyema. He was wasting away, and in sheer desperation I rushed him and his mother back to Glasgow. Within twenty-four hours of reaching Glasgow he was operated on in the Children's Hospital. But he had four operations yet to go through, which confined him to the hospital for fifteen months before he could be released. With nursing and anxiety, my wife had a complete breakdown in health, and I had to pack up and return to Glasgow.

## CHAPTER X

### THE MOULDERS' STRIKE

ON my return to Glasgow, in the autumn of 1916, I got work in the Acme Steel Works, Shettleston, but housing room was at a premium. We stayed in Killermont Street for a time with a sister-in-law, and subsequently moved to Keppochhill Road, Springburn, to another relative's, where we had to dig in, six people in two rooms, for six months, before we got rooms of our own.

I had to be up at 4.45 every morning to walk a mile for a train to Shettleston in time for a 6 o'clock start. The workmen's trains were a scandal to civilisation. All the old carriages were used; there were no heating arrangements in winter, and very often no light. At different stations miners would get in with their lamps hooked into their caps, and lit. The air became polluted with the smell of oil and wick, to which was added the volumes of thick tobacco smoke. Coughing and spitting and general nervous irritation weren't calculated to give one a good temper for beginning the day's work. But then, we were only workers and nobody cared.

We stopped work at 5.30 p.m., and if it was necessary to work overtime, it was about 9 p.m. before I got home. I resisted overtime as far as it was possible, because it left me little time for propaganda and study work. This was not always possible on account of the nature of my job. Sometimes my job would be late in getting cast. I had to wait and attend to the difficult and dirty, but technically

necessary, task of slackening the inside of the red-hot castings.

I managed, however, to put in a fair amount of propaganda. There was something going on every day and every night, and party meetings, trade union meetings, public propaganda, study classes, etc., were added to my already long working day. Apart from these party activities, I delivered a course of lectures to a Marxist Study Circle which had grown up during the war, comprising party and non-party workers. As many as two hundred workers attended these lectures on Marxist Dialectics; Economics; Materialist Conception of History; the Class Struggle, etc.

I followed closely the methods by which the bourgeoisie used the war situation as a means of introducing new methods of labour, machinery, dilution, and methods of payment. There was one manager of the big Government shell factory—Cecil Walton by name—who was very skilful in this direction. He favoured works committees; mixed with the workers; encouraged welfare canteens and works magazines. He wrote a great deal himself for the works magazine and the local press, and gave lectures. He was a very dangerous man for the workers' movement.

He published a book called *The Great Adventure*. This book was given a wide circulation. Its object was to boost Taylorism in industry, and in a subtle way to undermine trade unionism by advocating joint works committees between workers and management; higher wages, by bonus system, and new piecework methods. I replied to this book by a series of lectures entitled "The Adventures of a Modern Quixote in Industry." Walton's editor and henchman turned up at these meetings, which were held in 50 Renfrew Street, and were packed out.

It was not difficult to smash their arguments with the aid of Marxism.

Incidentally, I was on a breakdown job which led me to work one Saturday night, all Sunday and Sunday night. I found an excuse for leaving work for three hours, on the Sunday night; attended the meeting, and returned to my job without the management being any the wiser.

I always have attached great importance to the utterances of the "captains of industry" and their henchmen. Their ideas reach a wide section of the workers through the bourgeois press, which readily gives them space. At this period, the Ministry of Munitions' Commissioners on the Clyde were encouraging the policy of Cecil Walton, to sow confusion in the ranks of the Clyde workers, and break their unity. The employers were being coached in these new methods, as I learned one day when our boss sent for a deputation of all grades of workers in the foundry, to meet and discuss with him new methods of bonus and payment by results.

I was appointed leader of this deputation. Before many minutes had elapsed it was clear to me someone had been trying to educate the old man, who hadn't two original ideas on works management. From a series of questions put to him, I recognised the source of the ideas he was trying to put across us. He was trying to get a greater output for a fraction of a bonus, but it was so clumsily put that I was able to show the workers this scheme was of no advantage to them, and it fell through.

The food crisis was getting serious. Prices were soaring while necessaries were getting scarce. Foundry wages were actually behind the rising cost of living. The few extra shillings got by overtime was at the expense of the health and strength of the moulders. I carried on an agitation amongst the workers individually and at shop

meetings, and attended trade union meetings in other districts beside my own.

I was working on night shift at this time. One Tuesday morning on leaving work at 5 a.m. I hurried along to Beardmore's Forge, Parkhead, to meet Jock McBain as he was going to work. We discussed together the need for some kind of action, and what was to be done. Already, the germs of unofficial action existed in Emergency Committees, which had been set up in the southern and western districts of Glasgow. We decided we would call a meeting of these groups, and as many representatives of other districts as we could reach, to be held in the Central Halls in Bath Street, on the following Thursday. And this was done.

I explained to my mates in the Acme Steel Works that a meeting was being held, and that it was necessary that we be represented. They agreed and they undertook to help me to make up for lost time on my job while I attended the meeting. I jumped the wall to avoid the attentions of the gate-keeper, took a tramcar into the city and caused no end of merriment among the moulders as I entered the meeting with my grimy face and the working garb of the foundry.

I proposed that we take the City Hall and call a mass meeting of moulders for the following Sunday. A meeting of moulders on a Sunday! The man's crazy. Never was such a thing known in the history of the Iron-moulders: it would be a flop; nobody would come to it. And, anyway, we had no money. These and other sceptical views were overcome. We raised the necessary money for the deposit to take the hall there and then, agreed to put advertisements in the local newspapers, and on Sunday the hall was besieged long before the doors were opened. They had come not only from Glasgow, but from several

towns adjacent. Incidentally the meeting was a huge success and left us with several pounds surplus after paying all expenses.

The chair was taken by a young moulder, James Gardner, a member of the I.L.P. in the south side of the city. Gardner came from an old socialist family. He had been active in the youth movement and full of idealism. This, however, was to be a new and big venture for him. He acquitted himself well on this day, and soon gained the necessary confidence with experience. Later he was to play an important part in drawing up the new Constitution and Rules for the National Union of Foundry Workers, following the decision to unite the Scottish and English unions. He acted as election agent in 1918 for John Maclean who had a special admiration for Gardner. When the C.P.G.B. was formed in 1920 Gardner acted as the first chairman of the Glasgow branch. Devoted and disinterested "Jim" Gardner has never wavered in his loyalty to the cause of the working class.

It would be difficult to single out for special mention any one of the fine group of workers in the Emergency Committee. Alec Liddell was an indefatigable secretary. Tommy Pect a wizard in raising funds. Tom Semple a young moulder, then of upright religious training, who came to study Marxism in our study circle for moulders, and to substitute Marx's *Capital* for his bible, was later to be an Executive member of the National Union of Foundry Workers, and is now secretary of the Co-operative Education Committee in Manchester. Other members of this committee have continued their work in different spheres of activity, but no record of these times would be complete without reference to big Jock McBain.

A burly north countryman from Elgin, of splendid physique—no mean wrestler in his day until he tore a

ligament in his leg and was forced to retire from the ring—McBain was afraid of nothing and feared no man. We had known each other for years before the war when Jock attended study classes I ran in an old hand-loom weaver's outhouse in Dalmarnock Street, Parkhead. Jock was in the I.L.P. and I was in the S.L.P. Jock was active in the trade union branch, while I was denouncing craft unionism at the street corners and occasionally at the monthly and quarterly meetings of the union branch. But we were on common ground when we were both unemployed and tramping from place to place in search of work. Between visiting foundries on our peregrinations we argued and thrashed out together problems in economics and history, with all the enthusiasm of zealots.

Here is an example of the character of big Jock. When the call for strike action went out it was learned that the men in Newtown Steel Works had decided not to come out. Without hesitation big Jock trekked all the way from Parkhead to Newtown to get the moulders to strike work. Finding the gates shut he made his way into the foundry through the railway siding. Divesting himself of his jacket and rolling up his sleeves, he astonished some of the moulders by appearing on the floor of the foundry and demanding to see the shop delegate. Getting into touch with the shop delegate he demanded a meeting of the men to discuss the situation, with a view to getting them to reverse their decision. The meeting took place and Jock won. Newtown men stopped work.

This incident is characteristic of McBain. It is such initiative and boldness that has won for him the respect and authority he enjoys to-day as District Organiser, number one, of the National Union of Foundry Workers. Watchful and vigilant in foundry affairs, there are few



foundry employers who would dare to cross Jock McBain and hope to get away with it.

As the principal speaker, I dealt with the cost of living, wages, foundry conditions, hours, and the need for reorganisation of the union upon industrial lines. The favourable reception given to my speech convinced me that the time was ripe for action. I dealt especially with the hours question; cited my own experience, and made an indictment of the barbarous practice of getting up in the middle of the night and working till bedtime the next evening. I put forward the demand for a forty-seven-hours' week to bring us into line with Liverpool. We got the meeting to agree to form a Central Emergency Committee, and for the shops to send their representatives. Resolutions were passed demanding from the trade union officials that they take immediate steps to put forward a demand for increased wages and for a forty-seven-hours' week without reduction in pay.

Our committee met the Executive Council of the Union, and put before them the demands of the workers. But they started equivocating. We called another mass meeting and in the meantime we visited other districts in the country and got local committees set up. At the mass meeting we reported the results of our deputation and got the meeting to agree the time was ripe for direct action. On September 13th, simultaneous action was taken, with the exception of two or three districts, which came in later, and the strike was general amongst the foundry workers all over Scotland.

We called a mass meeting of moulders for 10 a.m. the next day, on Glasgow Green, to review the situation and to give directions to the strikers. I spoke from a platform at the Victoria Fountain to about 3,000 workers. Enthusiasm ran high, and at the close of the meeting we called

for representatives from the various shops to attend a meeting in the Lithuanian Hall, Stockwell Street, to give instructions and details of organisation.

The union officials dared not take any action in Glasgow, but they arranged a meeting, in collaboration with the Central Iron-Moulders' Society, in Falkirk Town Hall, in the heart of the light castings industry, which we were seeking to draw into the strike. We got information as to the Executive's intentions and J. McBain and I went through to take up the challenge. The hall was packed. We got into the centre of the hall and when the secretary, John Brown, was making his statement, I took copious notes. Some workers, thinking I was a Government agent (it was the practice then for the agents of the Government to attend all workers' meetings), started shouting. The meeting got into an uproar. I then stood up and announced to the platform who I was and what I was doing.

When the platform speakers realised we were in the hall they started a vitriolic attack on our committee. We let them finish without interruption, and at the close of the secretary's statement demanded the platform to state our case. We were refused, so we announced that we would call a meeting in the Oddfellows' Hall, Falkirk, the next evening, and state the case for strike action.

We held a bumper meeting, but we could not get any general action in Falkirk. This town has a peculiar tradition in foundry practice. There was only one heavy cast-iron shop in the town. The others were all light castings—stoves, gutter-pipes, and domestic utensils. The workers in those shops behaved like serfs. Their shoulders were twisted through adaptation to the tools, and their gait, even when they were dressed on a Sunday, betrayed what they were. They worked on one job continuously. The

job was a family concern, handed down for generations, from father to son. In many cases, through borrowing money from the firm, there was a debt on the job so that the worker was tied to the firm. He was difficult to organise into a union, and ignored trade union conditions. I have known cases of a worker on a Saturday morning jumping over the wall at 2 a.m. to start work so that he might have a full day's work for the Saturday, which was only a half day.

As the foundries came under the Munitions Act, the employers pleaded they had no jurisdiction over wages, which were fixed by the Committee on Production, under the Ministry of Munitions. We thereupon decided to send a deputation to state our case. The deputation consisted of J. McBain, Alec Liddell and myself.

We went to the Ministry of Munitions, who referred us to the Ministry of Labour, then headed by the renegade trade union leader, D. J. Shackleton. This was a curious experience for us. With Shackleton there were Isaac Mitchell, a former trade union official of the engineers, and some other officials from lesser-known trade unions. But it was like talking to Churchill or Lloyd George. These fellows were completely corrupted by their positions and spoke even stronger language than the out-and-out capitalist.

Getting no satisfaction here we again went to the Ministry of Munitions, which then occupied the Hotel Cecil in the Strand. Churchill refused to meet the deputation personally, but sent his assistant, McCallum Scott. We put the case of the moulders for increased wages, quoting the cost of living and the fact that, though a highly skilled class of workers, by the nature of our job we were not able to earn as much as unskilled workers and women doing certain branches of munition work. But it was like water

running off a duck's back. We cited statistics; cases of sheer exploitation, and even quoted Government statements anent the urgency of supplying munitions—very popular then in Ministerial speeches—but the Ministry wouldn't move. Scott gave us to understand Churchill was prepared to sacrifice men at the front rather than yield to us.

The strike had lasted three weeks without any defection in the ranks. A curious feature of the strike was the fact that those workers in the light castings section of the trade, who had been accustomed to piece-work for generations, were the first to plead poverty. We had to start relief funds to provide assistance for them after the first week, and collected over £2,000 in a few days. I did not fail to ram this home as proof that piece-rate wages were no solution to the wages problem; that, in fact, where piece-work was carried on, the workers had to take more out of their bodies; get used up sooner, and usually resort to drunkenness for excitement by way of reaction to their slavery.

It was clear to me, however, that in the absence of any general funds to assist the strikers, and it being illegal to pay out trade union funds, we could not hold out indefinitely. I proposed that, though it was illegal to pay strike pay, it was not illegal for the union to make a grant to its members from the funds. This idea was adopted, and we forced the union officials to make a grant to each member equivalent to three weeks' strike pay.

We had to make up our minds to retreat. And this we determined to do. It called for the clearest explanation of the reason for this advice to get the workers to agree to go back to work on a given day, unanimously. With a few exceptions, the huge meeting of over 3,000 workers, in St. Andrew's Hall, agreed upon a resumption of work,

but to keep the unofficial committee in existence for future struggle. Two days after resumption of work the Ministry of Munitions gave a bonus of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. to all engineering workers, including moulders. I believe our strike had an influence on this decision.

I am firmly convinced, from my experience of this strike and similar experiences, that the workers will always lend a ready ear to those whom they trust, whether for action or retreat. But one must have their confidence first. Our Emergency Committee was representative of the workers in the foundry. Reports were made to the workers and proposals discussed by them for action by the Committee. We could, therefore, speak with authority and rely upon their backing.

The closest consultation and discussion between the leaders and the workers is essential for unity of action. One of the big weaknesses I found in the National Shop Stewards' movement, to which we affiliated, was the gap between the committee and the workers. Comrades would solemnly discuss proposals for action, and when it was put to them, "Well, what is your shop, or what are the workers in your town, likely to do?" too often the reply was non-committal, because they knew they were not speaking *for* anybody but themselves, or a few militants.

The experience of the National Shop Stewards' movement during the last war provides us with many useful lessons on unofficial movements of the working class. When the workers in a shop or industry are agitated by some particular grievance, or a series of grievances, they will readily listen to anyone who brings forward suggestions for action to effect a remedy. They will even form committees over the heads of the trade union officials, and take strike action for redress. But once action is taken—a strike, a deputation, a conference—resulting in

some decision, be it a compromise, defeat or success, the tendency is to dissolve again into a state of inertia.

It appears to be impossible to keep the general mass of the workers constantly at a high pitch of class tension, except under the exciting conditions of special grievances, or deep crisis. It is only amongst the politically class-conscious militants that such is possible. Failure on the part of the militants to recognise this leads to the ridiculous position of unofficial movements becoming nothing but a name, with a few generals but no army. We have had many examples of this in the Shop Stewards' movement, from which it appears to me to be better, at an appropriate moment, deliberately to dissolve such committees which have been set up for special purposes rather than to weaken the morale of everyone concerned by allowing a natural disintegration to set in.

Our Emergency Committee concentrated attention upon working conditions in the foundry, writing articles for the press or publishing leaflets for distribution in given shops. Here is a sample of the kind of thing we did. In Weir's, Cathcart, the management began issuing a special Works Bulletin. We replied to this with the following criticism in leaflet form which I wrote on the basis of facts collected from moulders working in the shop.

## THE PLIGHT OF LORD WEIR

### *A Reply from the Foundry Floor*

“A new prodigy has arisen in our midst in the person of my Lord Weir of Cathcart—a veritable knight-errant of Industry. It is said by some in the noble company of sand-artists—a body largely responsible for his great wealth—that the title is too much for his head! Whether such is the case or not, there is no gainsaying his prominence to-day. But, like other great ‘captains of industry,’ that prominence is due, not so much

to personal attainments of social value to the community as to the wealth, and therefore power, acquired at the expense of the wage slaves employed at the Holmpark works and elsewhere. [Query: is he a captain of industry because he is a leader of men, or is he a leader of men because he is a capitalist?] He is probably no worse than the meanest 'hand' in the foundry. He is certainly no better. When he girds on his armour, however, to sally forth and tilt a lance at trade unionism, especially the Moulders' Union, he is irresistible. We are reminded of an ancestor of his who is said to have lived some centuries ago—the inimitable Don Quixote. For though there is no delusion on the foundry floor as to the impulses at the back of my lord's conduct, quixotic indeed is his onslaught on labour organisation. Thus, while the great 'kept' press seeks to cajole that part of the community who know not, on their acquisition in the person of 'The Weir of Cathcart,' the opinions formed by the thousands who have passed through his works remain untouched. WEIR'S, CATHCART, IS A BYWORD WITH HONEST WORKMEN, ESPECIALLY IRON MOULDERS ALL OVER SCOTLAND.

“WHO IS WEIR ANYWAY?”

“Lord Weir is the type of the new industrial prince born of the great war—a type that owes its titles and fame to the capacity for exploiting a great national emergency. Like his compatriots he is arrogant, domineering, and merciless in his economic relations with the working class.

“Surrounded by a retinue of 'scientific managers'—those modern prototypes of the early court favourites of the crown—workmen are regarded by him as so much raw material for manufacturing *pumps*! The refractory human element that separates the moulder from the pig-iron, or the mechanic from the machine, he would fain suppress. His problem is to render the one as docile as the other, and for such a purpose have bowling clubs, harriers, hockey and whist clubs been instituted, where periodically his benign personal mien may supplement the efforts of his lackeys. Thus, with apparently

cheap overalls, and Weir's special dope in the shape of a monthly bulletin, added to the 'Clubs' and such-like 'Welfare' work, honest men are expected to be robbed of their character and reduced to the category of worms! Should the sophistries of the disciples of 'Taylorism' fail, force is the alternative, AND THERE IS NO REDRESS EXCEPT FROM THE PRESSURE OF THE LABOUR UNIONS.

#### " HIS LATEST EFFUSIONS!

" In a speech delivered by his lordship recently before the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, as in the letters which appeared in the London *Times* of August and September, one listens to the same old plaintive tale of the iniquities and tyranny of trade unionism—especially the Moulders' Union, his pet aversion. Such diatribes no doubt leave the 'hands' cold, since what they owe to their organisation only *they alone* can appreciate. But let no one be lulled into a sense of security because of past achievements. These modern industrial upstarts, like Weir, are after flesh. THEY MEAN TO HAVE IT. Their time is spent in scheming, designing, and laying plans or traps to scotch Labour's unions. They call it progress (?) and expense is no object. It were well to be ready to meet the onslaught presently being arranged, not by Weir alone, but by the entire employing class.

#### " THE NEW-OLD ERA!

" Amongst the many blessings (?) of the great war for freedom has resulted a new balance of power in industry, and British capitalists to-day are being compelled to re-examine their economic position. A rapid extension of production is the prime essential for the conquest of markets. Without that the working of the industrial system is impossible. As often as competition brings about commercial stagnation new battles have to be fought again, and so we have substituted for the moment the Yankees and the Japs for the Germans.

" That sighed for and often promised period of prosperity will not come. As often as it seems about to be realised it



vanishes into air, and to-day we are back to 1908. To-day, as in 1908, the burning question is: 'What to do with the unemployed?' No wonder his lordship cannot sleep o' nights! His dreams are disturbed by this ever-recurrent problem of labour unrest, which is now taking more definite shape, and threatens the foundations of modern industrialism. Should the edifice go, what will become of his title, privileges, or power? And so he hies to the Chamber of Commerce to preach the dogmas of a superannuated political economy; to deliver tirades against all labour organisation, in the vain hope of arresting the coming crash.

#### " AS HE SEES THE PROBLEM

" Inverting the order of the phenomena to be analysed, as stated by his highness, but withal placing them in their proper order, we get the following main points of his lordship's speech:

- (a) Impaired volume and efficiency of production.
- (b) Shrinkage of sales in products.
- (c) Foreign competition.
- (d) Increased cost of living.

" As to (a) when Lord Weir talks of the obstructive policy of the Ironmoulders' Union as a factor in impairing production, HE DELIBERATELY LIES! He has been challenged time and again on this point when faced with the union officials, and has never been able to substantiate the claim. For the benefit of those engineers, ex-service men, and others, for whose welfare his lordship is pretentiously sympathetic, the following illustration will suffice:

" When the firm now controlled by Lord Weir started in Cathcart a number of years ago, producing pumps was then, as now, their speciality. At that time the following was the average time for production:

" Three men took five days of  $9\frac{1}{2}$  hours per day to mould one pump, and one day to close it; therefore the total number of hours required for the production of one pump was  $154\frac{1}{2}$

hours. To-day a change has taken place, and the pump which at that time took  $154\frac{1}{2}$  hours to produce is now being produced as follows: Four men now make two pumps and close them in one day of  $8\frac{1}{2}$  hours. This means that the total number of hours required to produce two pumps is now 34, or the total number of hours to produce one pump to-day is 17; which proves that the moulder has reduced the hours necessary to produce a pump by  $137\frac{1}{2}$ .

Old time necessary to produce one pump,						154½ hrs.
New time	”	”	”	”	”	17 ”

Difference,  $137\frac{1}{2}$  hrs.

“ Although Lord Weir accuses the Moulders’ Union of retarding production, the above statement should be sufficient to clear away any doubts in the minds of our fellow workers regarding same, and should also prove to them the fact that, while we have lessened the hours for the production of pumps, our wages have fallen considerably in relation to production.

“ In view of these facts one feels that our Noble Lord has proved himself worthy of one more title—‘ ANANIAS!’

“ On the other hand the suggestion that ‘ the employment market must be sufficiently elastic to allow the stoker or trimmer (displaced by the adoption of oil as fuel) to be absorbed in something else,’ immediately recalls the history of the great machine industry. The factory lords of a century ago whistled the same tune. Professor Jevons taught it in the universities. If you are thrown out of your job by a new machine or invention, go and learn another trade! But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. His lordship wants the advantages of a workers’ republic with the emoluments of capitalism, which latter only accrue to the favoured few. He can’t have it both ways. Were society organised on the basis of production for the benefit of the community, no such barriers as he suggests could impede the transference of labour power rendered superfluous by new inventions. *But so long as private aggrandisement and exploitation prevails, labour organisation*

*must remain as the one bulwark against the capitalist greed and rapacity that has neither soul nor honour where profits are concerned.*

“ A change in the *composition* of capital is the normal method of increasing the volume and efficiency of production; to attain the maximum output per operative with the minimum cost. To seek increased output by extending the working day is reactionary and senseless. The experimentalists of industrial research proclaim it. When his lordship proposes to extend the working day he shows what honour or civic spirit he possesses. All this, however, is commonplace to him. IN REALITY HIS PRETENTIOUS INTEREST IN UNSKILLED LABOUR IS DICTATED BY THE DEMAND FOR CHEAP LABOUR. The National Union of Foundry Workers are not too soon in seeking to organise the unskilled workers. The latter would do well to hearken and fall in line.

“ As to (b) and (c), these go together. Where foreign competition is a menace, shrinkage of sales follows. On the other hand the present political instability of the nations of the world—the aftermath of the Imperialists' banquet—renders inter-exchange of products difficult, or impossible. The ‘ rate of exchange ’ is merely the barometer, not the cause of no trade. There are plenty of products available, but big business will not sell except on favourable terms. The wealth producers (i.e. the working class) have no concern in foreign any more than home competition. All competition for them is a curse. The inter-exchange of products can only freely take place when vested interests are removed.

#### “ A LITTLE LESSON FOR ‘ HIS HONOUR ’ ”

“ As to (d) cost of living, we vouchsafe here a little lesson for his lordship on the elementary principles of political economy, to teach him his P's and Q's. The cost of living, your highness, is not determined by wages—rather the reverse. Wages, as the price of labour power, is determined by the average minimum necessary to maintain and propagate the race of the labourers. Competition for jobs, as every worker knows, regulates in the last analysis this minimum.

The apparent manipulations of your cost clerk are really an anticipation of what the market will stomach, and may deceive himself and you by the appearance of things. Prices don't determine values. It is values that regulate prices. Thus wages don't *determine* the cost of living. It is the cost of living that regulates wages. Your 'greatness' would fain pay the moulders half their present wages, but you know you dare not impair their efficiency; and so access to the industrial reserve army is what the noble lord is really after. But how does he propose to get it while maintaining the social peace?

"His plan is to stabilise wages for a period of, say, one year. Having done so, he would scrap all the trade unions and impose payment by results (i.e. introduce the tooth-and-claw struggle among the workers). When the anticipated increased production has materialised and prices reduced, then he would stabilise wages on the new lower basis, and so on, *ad infinitum*. In other words, he would cheapen production to cheapen the workers until we were reduced to living on the proverbial smell of the rat's tail!

"But there can be no stability under capitalism for either employers or wage-workers. The very laws of economic development preclude such a possibility. Only when the dead hand of private control, with its class privilege and power, has been buried for good will there be social peace. Until that day the working class must look to itself, organise in their labour unions, and, taking the tip from his lordship, **PREPARE TO FIGHT.**

"DUGRAMMER."\*

Our Emergency Committee carried the movement into the trade union, where it was fused into a rank-and-file agitation to change the leadership and reorganise the union upon a new industrial basis. With a number of new workers elected to the Executive Council of our union, the movement for amalgamation between the Scottish

\* A dugrammer is a heavy instrument for pounding sand when moulding.

union and the English society was speedily taken up. A reorganisation committee was formed representative of the districts, with powers to prepare a new constitution for submission to the members. When this committee had done its job it met the English committee, and within a comparatively brief period of months, amalgamation was completed, and a new union—the National Union of Foundry Workers—open to *all* workers in the foundry, was a fact.

During the winter months of 1917 and 1918 I ran special economic study circles for the foundry workers, moulders, iron-dressers, and labourers. We went through Marx's *Wage Labour and Capital*; *Value, Price and Profit*; the first nine chapters of *Capital*, and Gibbins' *Industry in England*, and some lessons in logic. These classes played an important role amongst the foundry workers. Quite unknown to me, a social gathering was arranged, and there I was presented with a fountain pen, and a copy each of Giddings' *Sociology*, of Gide's *Political Economy*, and of Bonger's *Criminology*, as an acknowledgment by the workers of their appreciation of the benefits derived from the classes.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

THE Russian Revolution, in February 1917, came to us as the culmination of a tremendous movement of mass discontent with the war. To me it was the opening of the direct revolutionary struggle with the forces of imperialism. How far was it likely to spread? That it would have serious repercussions on the troops of all the belligerents was certain. Amongst the working masses in the enterprises it was sure to give a stimulus to the widespread discontent and war weariness beginning to set in. Unfortunately, the press was under a rigid censorship, and news only trickled through.

Following the 1905 revolutionary uprisings I had read all the books I could get my hands on bearing on Russia, one most important book being a record of his travels and experiences, by Barrett, the then editor of *The Financier and Bullionist*. This is a mine of information on Russian industry and agriculture, and, of course, on the whole financial system up to 1908. It was written for the information of the City as a guide to investments. I was familiar, too, with the literature of the various liberal groups which were exposing the horrors of the Czarist régime. The stories of the revolutionary heroes and heroines of Russia published by Jaakoff Prelooker I had told over and over again in the course of my propaganda work. I had, therefore, no hesitation in deciding this was the end of Czardom at last.

Our Party immediately took up the defence of the Russian Revolution, and began to popularise the idea of Soviets. When the call was sent out for the Leeds Conference in 1917 to set up the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, MacManus and I attended on behalf of the S.L.P. Gallacher, "Mac," and I sat in the middle of the hall. We had no illusions regarding the platform, and the intentions of MacDonald, Snowden, etc. We kept up a running fire of interjections and comments to help to disillusion those workers who had come there for serious business.

I represented the S.L.P. on the Council for Scotland, but it never really functioned. Like the Leeds Conference, it was still-born.

When the appeal was made to the Labour and Socialist Parties to send delegates to an International Socialist Conference to be held in Stockholm, I was appointed as delegate for the S.L.P. All attempts to get a passport, however, were in vain, as the Governments of the Allies, as well as the Governments of the Central Powers, for their own particular reasons, were against this conference.

One Thursday in February 1918 I got a letter from Arthur MacManus, urging me to join him in London for an important meeting with Litvinoff, then acting as Soviet Representative, to be arranged for the week-end. It was difficult to leave work, for, according to the Munitions Act, etc., it was an offence to stay away unless good reasons were given. Any man who was believed to be "shirking" work could be handed over to the military tribunal and sent to the army.

I was not to be deterred by any circumstance from attending this meeting. I informed the foreman I was going off on Friday night and would not be back till

Tuesday morning. I thought that by taking him into my confidence I would be able to get my week's wages to secure my fare to London. Unfortunately for me, the job I was on was in a desperate hurry, and I was told I couldn't get leave. I expressed regret, but paid no attention to him; borrowed my fare and set off by the midnight train to meet MacManus on Saturday morning.

Our conversation with Litvinoff turned on the general situation and the Bolsheviks' achievements; the position of our movement in Great Britain, and the attitude of our Party to the Russian Revolution. Coming from the provincial north, where we had few opportunities of meeting continental revolutionary workers, this conversation made a great impression on me. I felt for the first time what a big movement ours was; its political depth and international character.

On Sunday afternoon we went to the International Club, which was then situated in Charlotte Street, at the back of Tottenham Court Road. This Club was a link, I believe, with the foreign workers' clubs which flourished during the greater part of the nineteenth century, their members being political refugees from abroad. To me, fresh from the country, it seemed a perfect babel of tongues.

We went into a little private room upstairs, to meet one of our Russian comrades. This was a tall dark comrade, young and rather handsome, dressed in a three-quarter length black coat. During our discussions, again on the English movement and its relation to the Russian revolution, this comrade was at great pains to show us, in the simplest, most direct language he could muster, the political implications of all our industrial activities, and to lift us above the mentality of the pure and simple shop steward. I came away from London resolved that



our Party had to become linked up with this great revolutionary movement going on in Russia.

When I turned up to work on Tuesday my job was filled. The foreman told me "Since you could take two days for yourself, you can take another two days for me." "That won't trouble me," I replied, "I can take a week for you" —and I did, though I knew this meant no wages for that week: a serious matter for me then, as I was without a penny in the world, and dependent on my wages weekly. I tried to get the other workers to see the implications of this reaction of the foreman, but as it was a matter of individual choice, they would not take any action. I lay off for the remainder of the week, and on resuming work the following Monday I handed in my written notice, according to the Act, and left this job. In the heat of the foreman's recriminations I learned that some sneak had informed him I was in the habit of jumping the wall at night to attend socialist meetings.

By 1918 the cumulative effects of the betrayal by the trade union leaders through the Treasury Agreement, the several Munitions Acts, and Military Service Acts, were harnessing the entire working class to the service of the capitalists with a vengeance. The conditions of labour were akin to a veritable state of industrial serfdom. All rules and customary practices of the workers were bartered away by the union leaders; the statutory working day and week were abolished by systematic overtime, nightwork and Sunday work. The much-vaunted freedom of labour and the sacred bourgeois laws of supply and demand were completely abrogated. Workers could not leave their jobs without permission of employers; employers agreed amongst themselves not to poach for workers by means of advertisements.

The manner in which the ruling class carried through

its policy of securing labour for the prosecution of the war forms one of the most interesting studies in the political methods of the British capitalists.

It would be too simple to suggest that these methods were Machiavellian or implied conscious planning. On the other hand, to say that the capitalists were merely "muddling through" would also be too simple. A class with centuries of experience behind it in trading, bartering, cheating and swindling (especially the primitive colonial peoples), in building up an Empire, is bound to have absorbed into its consciousness the habits and tricks inseparable from these practices. The British "genius for compromise" is a bourgeois method of over-reaching an opponent by taking the line of least resistance. Never taking the direct road, he is at liberty to vary his route. And so, in political tactics, he moves by precedent. He puts out feelers. If he is successful he goes farther—enlarges his policy—meantime sanctifying what is done by legislative enactment.

And so, having got the trade union and Labour leaders to tie up the unions, their membership and funds, by specious promises of the "restoration of all conditions after the war," and admitting some of the leaders into the holy sanctuaries of the Government as "guarantees," the rest was easy. Step by step, with measure by measure on the statute book to give legal sanction, the rope was gradually tightened—"Single men first"; "Dilution of labour"; the "Man Power Bill," etc.

In connection with the Man Power Bill, the Clyde workers made a strong stand. Demonstrations and meetings against Conscription were held all over the Clyde Valley. In this agitation the irrepressible John Maclean worked like a Trojan until early in 1918 he was again arrested and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

The Government sent Sir Eric Geddes to Glasgow to face the situation and get the Man Power Bill accepted. The City Hall was packed to overflowing. The essence of Geddes' statement (which I reproduce from notes I took at the meeting) was to the effect that all certificates on occupations were to be withdrawn except red cards, i.e. cards for specially skilled workers. All men who were of scheduled age on January 1st, 1917, who had not been with the same employer since August 1915, were to be taken for the army; the Government proposed taking into the army dilutees who were fit and of age, and returning to the shipyards 20,000 skilled men who were at that time in the army. (The meaning of this was quite clear. The shipyard workers would come back to the yards as soldiers, working in khaki uniforms under military discipline. This was the open militarisation of industry.) On the question of policy Geddes naively suggested that if the German people threw over the military party the war would be over. There were twelve different governments in Russia and the British Government was in diplomatic relations with as many as possible. He was in favour of the International Labour Conference, if the representatives of Germany were bona-fide.

This statement led to scenes reminiscent of Lloyd George's visit to the city early in the war. Revolutionary songs were sung and a running fire of interjections was directed at the platform. The climax was reached when the secretary of the Discharged Soldiers' and Sailors' Committee, McPhie McEwan, brought on to the platform a young lad, half-witted and the only son of a widowed woman, brandishing his calling-up papers.

A demand was made for Gallacher to take the platform and address the meeting, which he did. MacManus and I were seated in the middle of the hall with a resolution

prepared to put to the meeting. This resolution denounced the Man Power Bill and declared the refusal of the Clyde workers to give another man or penny for the war: it also called for an immediate armistice on the basis of no annexations or indemnities. The resolution was put to the meeting and carried with acclamation and the singing of the "Red Flag." Geddes left the platform in disgust and the crowd, on leaving the hall, formed into a procession four deep, and marched through the principal streets shouting slogans and singing revolutionary songs.

As part of the general campaign against the war, John Maclean, M.A., was put forward as Parliamentary candidate for Gorbals in opposition to G. N. Barnes, an official of the Engineers' Union, who had joined the Coalition Government in the first days of the war as a "guarantee" for the restoration of trade union conditions.

(A Labour Party Conference had decided to withdraw from the Coalition Government and to contest the General Election independently. Barnes refused to conform to this decision. He was therefore no longer the official Labour candidate, being sponsored by a so-called Labour Coalition group.)

The Labour Coalition group, getting alarmed, arranged for a meeting to be held in the St. Mungo Halls, in the south side of Glasgow, and to be addressed by Barnes, Henderson, Brownlie and some local supporters. With the appearance of the platform cheers were given for Maclean and demands made for his release. The meeting was a perfect Donnybrook.

In the midst of the uproar I made my way from the back of the hall to the platform. I took up a statement made by Barnes, that Maclean did not represent the views of the Clyde workers, and after attacking Barnes and Henderson for refusing to lift a finger to release Maclean, I appealed

to the audience to give the lie to the platform by raising a bumper collection to assist the Maclean Defence Fund. I took my cap and started with Henderson, but this was too much for them. The platform party picked up their papers, refusing to give any assistance. A good collection was taken from the meeting, which ended with the customary singing of the "Red Flag" and cheers for Maclean.

The campaign in the Gorbals on behalf of John Maclean was one of the most inspiring contests in Glasgow during the khaki election, December 1918. Maclean was the adopted candidate of the local Labour Party, and had the enthusiastic support of the I.L.P. and the B.S.P. Following the persistent demand of the local comrades, and visits to the Labour Party headquarters in London, that Maclean be the official candidate, the National Executive of the Labour Party gave a last-minute grudging consent.

The details of the inspiring scenes when Maclean was released from prison, and arrived at Buchanan Street Station, are graphically portrayed by Gallacher in his *Revolt on the Clyde*. I would only say here that in contrast to these scenes it is the tragedy of Maclean's life that imprisonment had affected his health so seriously, and the bourgeois authorities had done their work so thoroughly, that, in the final demonstrations of the election campaign, when he made his first platform appearance, he was quite unable to maintain an even balance between the issues of the election and his revolutionary fervour.

The final meetings in the Co-operative Halls in South St. Mungo Street, which opened amidst scenes of the wildest enthusiasm, closed in an atmosphere of subdued silence, and the deepest sympathy for one who had obviously suffered much. Maclean received 7,436 votes; Barnes, the renegade, received over twice as much.

There is no doubt in my mind that, had it not been for those closing scenes, the results would have been more favourable for Maclean.

During this khaki election the S.L.P. decided to put up three candidates—MacManus for Halifax; Paul for Ince, and Murphy for Gorton. I acted as election agent for MacManus, in Halifax. We singled out Halifax because the sitting member was Whitley, notorious during the war for the Whitley Report on Workshop Committees, whereas MacManus was chairman of the National Shop Stewards' movement. We made the issue in these elections (1) against the war-makers; (2) Soviets versus the parliamentary "democracy," and (3) the Bolshevik Revolution. I believe it will interest the reader if I give here OUR FOURTEEN POINTS (the press at this time was giving great prominence to the fourteen points of President Wilson) as an illustration of our platform:

#### OUR 14 POINTS ARE:

1. In home affairs we affirm that all land, railways, mines, factories, means of transportation, and all other instruments of social service shall become the communal property of the people.
2. Social classes thus being abolished, no person shall have the power to employ another person for private profit.
3. The defence of the National Socialist Republics may be necessary to prevent any Imperialist capitalist State attempting to crush the freedom won by the workers in any land, consequently **THE ARMY AND NAVY SHALL BE DEMOCRATICALLY CONTROLLED.**
4. To achieve this the government of the country must be changed by the transfer of all governing power from the Parliamentary legislative institution to the Federal Congress of People's Administrative Councils, composed of delegates from the toiling masses.
5. The People's Administrative Councils shall be organised

- in accordance with the industrial and social functions in local areas, and linked together in a federal congress.
6. The working day shall be so adjusted as to engage the labour of all who are physically fit and available for social service.
  7. None shall be allowed to participate in the government of the country who, being able, refuse to do work of social service.
  8. The community shall be responsible for the provision of a sound general and technical education for all.
  9. The community shall be responsible for the care of all widows and orphans. Their standard of comfort and opportunity shall be maintained at the same level as the rest of the community.
  10. All provision for disabled, or partially disabled citizens, shall be accorded to them as a social right.
  11. The discharged disabled soldiers' and sailors' department in the local and national administrative councils shall in conjunction with their own medical advisers control all matters relating to degrees of disablement, fitness for social service, and treatment required.
  12. The maintenance of all civil liberties, such as the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and all other liberties necessary for the full social development of humanity shall be ensured.
  13. All State endowment of religious institutions shall be abolished. Thus will be established freedom and equality of all phases of human thought.
  14. And, finally, the Workers' Industrial Republic stands for the complete self-determination of nations and the Federation of Socialist Republics of the world.

During this election we visited every factory and workshop in the town. It was inspiring to see little "Mac" and our speakers standing on the top of machines addressing the workers on the class issues of the moment. We had duplicated from the *Socialist* an excellently coloured map

of Europe, showing the imperialist division of territories and the sources of wealth in the respective areas. The Soviet territory, splashed in red, with its mineral and other resources marked off, gave a graphic picture of the causes of the imperialist hatred of Bolshevism. Forty thousand of these were distributed in Halifax and to the soldiers from Halifax still abroad.

Besides acting as agent for the candidate, which included the arranging and organising of meetings, at which I had to speak myself, I edited a daily Bulletin, which we got out during the last week of the election, and which we sold at a penny a copy.

And here is an extract from a letter I received from Willie Gallacher, which I think is interesting as a testimony to the esteem in which MacManus was held by the workers:

“ 43 Well Street,  
“ Paisley.  
“ 24-11-18.

“ . . . Tommy boy, you are becoming a regular political genius. Your invitation to Halifax is of that ambiguous order that seems to say ‘ we would like to have you with us, but we think you shouldn’t come.’ . . . Tell Mac I was out at Mile End to-day and roped in for him two quid for the Armistice holiday. There’s a couple of days’ pay lying there for him.

“ I do hope the fight is going well. I would like very much to give a hand. Wherever Mac happens to find a job the workers seem to turn to him instinctively to represent them. They know that he is trustworthy and that he thoroughly understands their industrial needs. Unfortunately some workers have often the foolish knack of turning to their industrial enemies when seeking political representation.

“ I sincerely hope the Halifax workers will display greater wisdom and support their comrade who is out to fight capitalism as against the man who has been commended by the



Coalition for his efforts to 'harmonise' their interests with those of the men who have been so ruthlessly exploiting them.

"I may mention that the workers in Mile End are subscribing to give Mac a testimonial for his very valuable services as Convener of Shop Stewards. . . .

"All good wishes.

"Yours fraternally,

"WM. GALLACHER."

Four thousand votes for Bolshevism in the midst of a war-fevered election, and saving our deposit of £150, was, we felt, no mean achievement.

When it was decided that I was to act as agent I had left my job without permission, and was absent for six weeks. On my return I got the sack, and had to look for another job. But the campaign was worth it.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE FORTY-HOUR STRIKE

IMMEDIATELY the armistice was declared the agitation for the shorter working week flared up. It derived its impetus from the gradual laying off of munition workers and the shutting down of the war industries. Moreover, the soldiers were coming back from the trenches, many of whom expected the Government and their employers to fulfil their promises to keep their jobs open for them. By the end of 1918 there were already 30,000 unemployed in Glasgow alone, with the numbers increasing daily. What more reasonable than to bring forward the proposal for a forty-hours' week as a means of sharing out the available work for the returning soldiers ?

The workers had good precedent for their demand. As far back as 1892 the Trades Union Congress, in a period of economic depression, passed a resolution in favour of a forty-hours' week with a view to providing work for the unemployed. So far as the iron-moulders were concerned, I had been instrumental in getting our trade union to take a ballot vote and agree on the question of supporting the boilermakers' resolution to the Trades Union Congress for a forty-four hours' week. But, of course, the dominant needs of the moment provided the basis for the agitation in 1918, and by the end of the year there was much talk of strike action.

The Clyde Workers' Committee and the various unofficial groups that had sprung up in several unions were

forcing the pace by vigorous agitation. (As a matter of fact, the Clyde Workers' Committee had decided on strike action to be taken immediately after the New Year holiday.) The influence of the unofficial movement penetrated most of the important trade unions. The District Committees were, in the majority of cases, led by militants who were not in harmony with the official policy of the unions, whose headquarters were, generally, out of Scotland—some in Manchester, but principally in London.

The Glasgow Trades Council had a strong nucleus of militant workers as delegates from the trade union branches. The hours question was brought repeatedly before the Council, in spite of the efforts of the officials to smother it. Finally, unable to ignore the growing agitation the Trades Council leaders, in conjunction with the Scottish Trades Union Congress leaders, decided on a policy of joint action rather than allow the movement to develop outside their control.

Emmanuel Shinwell was chairman of the Trades Council. I remember Shinwell as an anarchist. Round about 1906 and 1907 he was in the habit of addressing open-air meetings in Wellington Street, off Sauchiehall Street, for the Glasgow Anarchist Group. He was a young tailor, then working in the clothing industry. He was a glib-tongued speaker, and at home on the platform.

As an anarchist he was strongly against industrial unionism and the S.L.P. His opposition was no doubt sharpened by the heckling and criticism that he and the anarchists in general received from our boys. His anarchism was of the Kropotkin type, much in vogue in those days—a harmless, petty-bourgeois intellectualism. Many of the anarchists I knew were quiet, respectable trade unionists or co-operators. And so there was nothing

strange in Emmanuel Shinwell, anarchist, becoming a trade union official and a member of the Glasgow Trades Council. He got his chance in an internal dispute between the Glasgow seamen and Havelock Wilson's union, and soon blossomed into a specialist in transport union affairs. Few workers in these days will detect in the opportunist parliamentarian, Emmanuel Shinwell, M.P., the voluble anarchist of 1907. But to return to my story.

William Shaw, a woodworker, was secretary of the Trades Council. Both these officials had the backing of the strong delegation of I.L.P.ers on the Council, on its trade union side and on its political side. Negotiations were entered into with the Clyde Workers' Committee, and a Joint Committee was established to prepare for strike action, comprising the Trades Council, the Scottish T.U.C. and the Clyde Workers' Committee. The responsible officials of this Joint Committee were E. Shinwell, chairman; W. Shaw, secretary of the Trades Council, and David Morton, for the unofficial committees, joint secretaries. (Morton was an engineer, and brother of James Morton of the S.L.P. David subsequently became a Labour councillor in Stockport, Cheshire.) I was President of the Scottish Iron-Moulders' Union at this time and we sent two delegates to the Joint Committee.

In the course of Executive discussions in our union, we had no disagreement on strike action. The problem was whether we should call the workers out without the regulation ballot vote, or take the ballot vote in the usual way. It was known that action was going to be taken in a few days by masses of workers in other industries, and that large bodies of our own members were ready and keen to strike. I therefore proposed the unusual course for a trade union official of taking a shop ballot by show of hands.

The General Secretary was instructed to send out telegrams to all our district secretaries, who, in turn, instructed the shop stewards, and we had returns from all the shops within four days. There was a majority in favour of strike action, but only a majority of sixty: not sufficient to warrant the calling of a strike, according to pure and simple union standards. But our little group on the Executive Council, which was in close touch with the Clyde Workers' Committee, knew the feeling of the moulders in important foundries, and understood they would strike. We therefore decided to go forward and the strike orders were issued.

The fact that our union had officially thrown in its lot with the strike movement played an important role in the strike. It counteracted the usual press tirade against unofficial action, which was their stock-in-trade during the war. But we had much trouble to hold two or three districts which were dominated by reactionaries—viz. Kilmarnock, Coatbridge and, to a certain extent, Paisley. We took the bold course, however, and threatened—and in one or two cases imposed—fines of £5 for not complying with Executive instructions. After the strike we reviewed these cases and reduced the fines to 10s. But it had the salutary effect of bringing those “Constitutionalists” to heel with a dose of their own medicine. We paid strike pay of 15s. to each member on strike. These official actions by our union were a source of strength and encouragement to the workers in other trades.

Here is the official appeal for strike action:

TO THE WORKERS  
A CALL TO ARMS

The Joint Committee representing the official and unofficial sections of the industrial movements having taken into consideration the reports of the Shop Stewards in the various

industries, hereby resolve to demand a 40-hour maximum working week for all workers, as an experiment with the object of absorbing the unemployed.

If a 40-hour week fails to give the desired results a more drastic reduction of hours will be demanded.

A general strike has been declared to take place on Monday, January 27th, and all workers are expected to respond.

By order of the Joint Committee representing all workers.

WM. SHAW  
DAVID MORTON } *Joint Secretaries*

By January 28th, 100,000 workers were out. Dockers, engineers, electricians, steel workers, shipyard workers, builders, miners—the backbone of industrial Scotland—were on strike.

On Wednesday, January 29th, an enormous meeting was held in the St. Andrew's Hall, which could not cope with the crowd that turned up. Four overflow meetings had to be held. After speeches by Shinwell, Kirkwood and three London delegates, amidst great enthusiasm, the following resolution was passed:

“That this meeting pledges its support to the Joint Committee, and urges it to prosecute the strike with the utmost vigour till the Government is forced to open up negotiations with the Committee, and that when this is done the Joint Committee should submit the Government's proposals to the rank and file, with a view to a satisfactory settlement on the basis of the 40-hours' week for all time, piece and lieu workers, without any reduction of wages.”

A huge procession was formed and a march began to Pinkston power station and to George Square, the centre of the city, the trams being held up *en route*. In George Square speeches were made by Shinwell, Neil Maclean and Kirkwood, and a deputation was appointed to interview the Lord Provost regarding the position of the

tramways during processions. The Corporation officials at first refused all admission to the Lord Provost. Only after the personal approach of Neil Maclean and Shinwell did he agree to receive the deputation.

The Lord Provost took the opportunity to offer to make representations to the Prime Minister and Sir Robert Horne, the Minister of Labour, on the forty-hours' demand. The deputation accepted the offer, and agreed to call at the City Chambers on Friday at 12.30 p.m. to hear the answer. All the workers were invited to the Square to learn the results of the interview. We did not see, then, the subtle character of this manœuvre to gain time and to prepare for a violent attack on the striking workers, with a view to smashing the strike. As we shall see later, the deputation didn't get the chance of having any reply from the Government. The police saw to that.

Meanwhile the strike extended. District Strike Committees were formed representing all workers in each area, regardless of their occupation or whether unemployed; whether trade unionist or not, and including housewives. These committees appointed sub-committees for organisation; propaganda and publicity; sports and entertainment; couriers, etc., and for the granting of permits to move foodstuffs. A cycle corps ran between the districts and the Central Committee, carrying reports, messages, and the strike bulletin, which was issued daily.

When the strike began, one of the first acts of the committee was to print a daily bulletin for its own purposes of publicity. Here again the Socialist Labour Press filled the breach. A group of S.L.P. comrades worked night and day, voluntarily, getting out this strike bulletin (the organ of the forty-hours' movement). Beginning with 10,000 copies we reached 20,000 daily, running two Sunday editions as well. These bulletins, a four-page

sheet, were sold at a penny each and distributed by the strikers themselves. Twenty thousand was the maximum capacity of our machine or we could have sold as many more.

I recall the meeting of the joint committee, which met in the office of the Trades Council secretary, to discuss the preparations for Friday's demonstration. We had scarcely begun when the doors were burst open and a group of detectives marched into the room. They were evidently only intent on taking stock of who was who, as they contented themselves with a close scrutiny of faces, and after ordering everyone present to write his name on a piece of paper, went away.

When the police departed we got down to discussing policy. The question put was, "what were we going to do with the mass demonstration on Friday—first in the event of any further proposals or promises, and, second, should we get a flat refusal?" One proposal\* was to lead the workers along the well-to-do streets and let them loose. Another proposal was to go to the houses of the bourgeois city councillors and smash in their windows. But when somebody mischievously proposed to begin with some of the Labour councillors, the idea was dropped. In the midst of the discussion two strikers came in to say that strike-breakers were being held inside the Pinkston power station, food being supplied to them and beds provided; and that they (the workers) had made plans to blow the station up with dynamite. The reactions of the orthodox professional type of trade union officials present may be better imagined than described!

I argued strenuously for, and eventually we agreed on,

\* The law of libel forbids giving the names of the movers of these two proposals. Suffice to say both of them are highly respectable Labour members of Parliament.



concentrated demonstrations to be made to the various electric power stations, and such workers as were still operating, with a view to extending the strike in the city. But, alas! "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley." Circumstances were to arise on Friday which were certainly not anticipated. We had made a big blunder.

According to our programme the demonstrations began to arrive from the districts, with banners, and some with bands. The Square, where the workers gathered, is a compact enclosure housing, at one end, the City Chambers; on the left the post and telegraph offices; on the right, hotels for the railway terminus for trains from the north, and at the opposite end to the City Chambers, business offices and warehouses. By twelve o'clock the Square was chock full.

From the left side of the City Chambers came the East End contingent, led by the committee and a brass band. Heading the committee was a big, burly iron-moulder. As this contingent came up the crowd made way for the band. Just as they got to the entrance to the Square and were commencing to march past the main entrance to the City Chambers, the mounted police, who formed a cordon round the entrance, blocked the way. The band and the crowd wavered for a moment. Our iron-moulder called for the band to come on. Just then one of the mounted police, by a skilful feint, tumbled his horse. This was the signal for drawing truncheons and the police began to attack right and left. A mineral water lorry, standing in a side street, was seized by the strikers and the bottles were hurled at the police. Our iron-moulder got a blow from a truncheon which laid him out for a few moments.

Meanwhile, the deputation had gone into the City Chambers to interview the Lord Provost. They were

informed he was engaged at the moment. After waiting in a side room for twenty minutes they again made enquiries; still he was engaged. As a matter of fact he was consulting Sheriff Mackenzie, who was in attendance, as to the advisability of dispersing the crowd who were waiting impatiently outside. Presently an uproar was heard going on outside. The deputation now realised that they had been deceived by the Lord Provost. Shinwell and Kirkwood rushed out to restore quiet. Kirkwood was waving his arms to the crowd when he got knocked senseless with a baton, and afterwards was carried into the Council Chambers for the attention of the ambulance nurses, who were already in the building—a proof that the attack by the police was premeditated.

Gallacher, who was near by, seeing the savagery of the police, made a rush at the chief constable and gave him a terrific blow in the face. Needless to say, the chief's attendants belaboured poor Gallacher and rendered him almost unconscious. In the meantime Sheriff Mackenzie, accompanied by the Lord Provost and police officials, appeared in front of the City Chambers, and read the Riot Act. This was the signal for the police to extend their savage batoning to the crowd.

As president of our union I had to preside over Executive meetings every day, to deal with questions of policy and the holding of our members solid for the strike. We had been busy that day dealing with a district whose leading committee was not in favour of the strike, and also the question of compelling foremen and managers, who were union members, to stop work—a very important measure, since it had been the practice in the past to leave foremen and managers at work to carry on production with the aid of apprentices and labourers. When I reached the Square Gallacher and Kirkwood were standing,

heads swathed in bandages, on the window balcony of the Council Chambers, exhorting the workers to go away to the Glasgow Green, and they would follow.

I learned that some of our comrades had got badly smashed, and had gone up to the S.L.P. rooms in Renfrew Street. I hurried up to see what was the extent of their injuries. Here I found Shinwell behind locked doors. We kept him there till it grew dark; got him food and arranged a disguise for him. Then I took him to a clandestine office we had for our press work. Arrangements were made to collect a responsible group of the committee to meet. At this meeting we decided on sending delegates to Belfast, and to England, to inform the workers there of the situation in Glasgow.

After the Glasgow Green demonstration was over, bands of demonstrators, on their way through the city, began to smash windows in the fashionable streets, and well into the night the police were kept busy in a form of guerrilla warfare. In the meantime military assistance was called for, and during the night troops with tanks poured into the city from the military barracks, Maryhill, and from Stirling Castle. Saturday morning found the military patrolling the streets; soldiers posted at all banks, post offices, bridges, power stations, and railway depots; while a battery of tanks and machine guns was stationed in the cattle market, Gallowgate, ready for anything.

This intimidation by military force, coupled with the fact that only a few unions officially recognised the strike and therefore most of them withheld financial assistance, decided the issue. The strike persisted for another ten days, by which time it was obviously impossible to hold out much longer, and on February 12th the strike was called off.

Here is the notice which appeared in the "Strike Bulletin":

"The Joint Committee, having fully considered the whole position of the Strike, and due consideration being given to the attitude of those officials of certain trade unions in supporting the government and the employers against the workers in their demand for 40 hours, recommend a full resumption of work by all strikers on Wednesday, February 12th, until such time as we can perfect the organisation of our forces with a view to making our claims for 40 hours on a national basis and to enforce it by a national strike of all workers in the near future."

During the night of the battle in George Square the police made twelve arrests. The prisoners were detained until the strike was over, when bail was granted. In the month of April the trial took place in the High Court, Edinburgh, and lasted ten and a half days. The jury, by a majority of 14 to 1, found Shinwell, Gallacher, Murray and McCartney guilty of sedition. Shinwell was sentenced to five months, Gallacher, Murray and McCartney 3 months, Kirkwood, Hopkins, Ebury, Brennan, Oliver, Alexander, London and Mackenzie were found Not Guilty.

I have gone into some detail in connection with this forty-hours' movement, because of the lessons and the extent of the movement, which are very important for us in a study of the workers' movement in Great Britain. Starting primarily as a Scottish movement, it spread rapidly to all parts of the country, and at one time assumed all the possibilities of a general political strike. There was tremendous mass activity all over the country, but the trade union and Labour bureaucracy did everything possible to prevent the strike spreading. In this they were ably supported by the bourgeois press, which, inspired by

the Government, spread lying stories about what was happening in other towns, and created confusion.

I have said that the Scottish movement had all the possibilities of becoming a general political strike. For example, the Government had promised the railwaymen the eight-hours' day by February 1st. On Monday, February 3rd, the London tube motormen, in five systems, went on strike, demanding a thirty-minutes' break under the eight hours as they were accustomed to have under the nine hours. The next day the Metropolitan railway workers struck work in sympathy.

The engineering employers were wrangling with the trade union officials over the proposed change in hours. Some sections of employers favoured the forty-seven hours' week: others were against. The Royal Dockyards went on the eight-hours' day for the first time on February 1st. The boilermakers on the east coast and on the Thames were on strike. In Birkenhead 400 riveters and caulkers struck over wage rates. In Barrow-in-Furness 300 carpenters and joiners went on strike against the premium bonus system. The electricians in South Wales went on strike on February 3rd for the forty-seven hours, and a basis wage rate of 2s. an hour. The London electricians threatened to cut off all power and plunge London into darkness on February 6th, unless the Government got into touch with Glasgow and Belfast, with a view to a settlement of the Scottish demands. Arthur MacManus and I attended, as delegates from the Clyde, the mass meeting which took this decision. We both felt, as we left the meeting, that through procrastination this decision would not come to anything. The fact that the meeting rejected a motion for action being taken immediately showed a lack of unity and decisiveness amongst the workers.

Belfast was completely under the control of the workers on strike for a forty-four hours' week. The strike committee decided which cranemen were to work at the unloading of coal boats. Permission, under stipulations, to take ships out of dry dock could only be obtained from the strike committee. To pass along Queen's Road to the shipyards a permit was necessary. Permits had to be obtained from the strike committee for electric current. Hospitals and the post office were granted special lighting, on application. The city was, in fact, entirely in the hands of the workers.

Lord Pirrie was the big boss of the shipping barons in Belfast. Posing as a friend of the shorter hours' movement, he issued a special statement to the press with a view to stampeding the workers. But he met with little success. Manœuvres then began with the trade union officials, which finally led to a conference with the joint strike committee. The result of this conference was a resolution to the effect that:

“ On condition of the men resuming work on the old terms, a national conference of the engineering and shipbuilding trades to be called to consider the hours' question within thirty days of the resumption of work. To recommend a shorter working week than 47 hours, and failing a settlement, the Belfast employers will arrive at a settlement with their own men within 21 days of the national conference.”

The strike committee took a ballot, without giving any recommendations, the result being 11,963 against and 8,774 in favour. On February 15th troops were drafted into the city and occupied the electric power station. The confusion and differences created by the manœuvres of the employers, backed up by the trade union bureaucrats (the A.S.E. suspended the district committee, as on the Clyde), led to the collapse of the strike.

In Scotland the effect of the movement was to speed up the reduction of hours for a number of workers. The Glasgow municipal employees for months prior to the strike had been negotiating over this question. The corporation committee immediately came to a decision and operated the forty-eight hours' week. Other municipalities in Scotland followed suit. The carters got the forty-eight hours, and the builders forty-four hours. The engineering trades were soon on the forty-seven hours.

The strike had lasted sixteen days. What might have been the results had there been a strong Communist Party to give unity of direction to such a movement is a matter for reflection!

## CHAPTER XIII

### TOWARDS REVOLUTIONARY UNITY

I WAS president of the Executive Council of the Iron-Moulders at this time, but when it was decided to convert *The Socialist*—our monthly Party organ—into a weekly, I resigned to become editor. *The Socialist* had a stormy career during the war. Willie Paul, who was the editor, was “on the run,” being wanted for military service. The manager of our printing press, Alf Cook, was also “on the run”; so was the Party secretary, L. Cotton.

To those moulders who may read these pages I would like to say by way of parenthesis that it was not without a big internal struggle that I relinquished my post as president of the Executive Committee of the Associated Iron-moulders of Scotland. I was torn by two loyalties, one to the moulders and another to the socialist movement which had then assumed new forms after the revolution in Russia. My major consideration had always been for a revolutionary socialist party. The most important thing for the moment seemed to me to work for the consolidation of all the best elements among the different socialist groups into a party after the manner of the Bolshevik Party. In this way, I felt, I should be serving the highest interests of the moulders, as well as those of all other sections of workers.

The S.L.P. was always strong on a Party-owned press, independent of private printers. Almost the first act of the Party when it was formed was to purchase a printing



machine on the instalment plan. The comrades in Edinburgh, a number of whom were in the printing trades, did all the setting up and composing of type and printing our paper and pamphlets by voluntary labour. It was one constant struggle to raise the deposit money every month. But by dint of enthusiasm and systematic collections the machine remained in action for over twelve years. Only then was it found necessary to pay a comrade as manager and compositor. Paid labour was for years considered dishonourable on the workers' press.

Our press was the subject of constant attention from the police. We had printed *The Suffragette*—the organ of the militant suffragists—when it was suppressed in London. We had printed *The Irish Worker* for James Connolly, when it was suppressed in Dublin. We had also printed *The Worker* for the Clyde Workers' Committee in 1916, when it was suppressed. Police officers of the special branch kept harassing the press, to find the responsible manager. They were always referred by the compositor and printer to "the press committee." But who they were and where they were they never could find out. One day they got exasperated and came with a warrant to dismantle the machine. They took away some vital parts and put the machine out of action. But we were not to be deterred by that. Some of our comrades, working on night-shift, made the parts overnight, and in the morning the machine was running again. Finally, the police came and took away the ink rollers, in addition to other vital parts, which knocked us out.

To overcome their objections that they couldn't put their hands on anyone responsible, it was agreed that MacManus should be editor; a woman comrade—Miss Deans—was to be manager, and I was to be general secretary. The three of us went to the stipendiary to

claim the return of our machine, and to say we were henceforth the responsible officials. But the authorities wouldn't have it, and refused to do anything.

We made an agitation all over the country on this question of "Freedom of the Press," addressing meetings, circularising workers' organisations, exposing the high-handed manner in which the ruling class were acting in defence of their class interests. Paul did yeoman service for *The Socialist* by succeeding in bringing out the paper every month. This meant negotiating with printers all over the country, most of whom were intimidated by the war legislation from printing anything against the Government.

When we started the weekly *Socialist* it was printed by the Blackfriars Press in Manchester—a plant owned by a group of I.L.P.ers. We had a very weak Party in Manchester, and except for the splendid help I got from Tommy Jackson and J. S. Clarke, I had to write up most of the issue myself. This I did during the summer months from a tent in a field near Heald Green, on the outskirts of Manchester, occupied by myself and another comrade—Sam Raines. Between times I was speaking in different towns all over the Midlands, and running economic study classes. *The Socialist* had a circulation of 8,000 copies, and played an important part in preparing the way for the future Communist Party. Moreover, our Socialist Labour Press had published a number of important booklets, including Karl Liebknecht's *Anti-militarism*; Lenin's *Collapse of the Second International*; speeches by Clara Zetkin; Lenin's *State and Revolution*, and a reproduction of Bolshevik leaflets issued to the troops of the foreign armies of intervention, etc., etc.

But I was far from contented in Manchester. I felt terribly lonely and isolated, away from the healthier

atmosphere of militancy in Glasgow. I kept slogging away at my editorial work in a spirit of soldierly duty, but I longed to be back in the more congenial surroundings of the foundry.

One night I felt I must get back to Glasgow. I walked all the way from Manchester to Cheadle Heath, where I was lodging with a Scotch engineering worker, cogitating and debating with myself as to what I should do. When I got home I wrote out my resignation and posted it that night. Within a week I was back in Glasgow, and started work in the Anchor Line Foundry, Finneston, feeling a new man. I worked there till the late spring of 1920, when I left to take part in the preparations for the unity conference that was to launch the C.P.G.B.

In January 1919 a radio message was sent out from Petrograd on the initiative of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party calling on sections of the socialist movement to attend a conference to take place in Petrograd in March 1919 with a view to the establishment of a new (The Third) International. Unfortunately, we in the S.L.P. did not get this message until we saw it printed in the *New York Weekly People*. It was then too late to get to Petrograd. MacManus and I had no hesitation in approving of this step. We, too, had been for a new International from the day war was declared and the Second International had collapsed. And now, in the spirit of this appeal from Lenin, we resolved to work for the establishment of such an International with a section in Great Britain.

We set out to establish direct contact with our Russian comrades, which we succeeded in doing. From them came the suggestion of uniting all the socialists and militant workers in Great Britain favourable to the Russian revolution into a single party. Conversations began with representatives of the British Socialist Party, with the

Workers' Socialist Federation (a group round Sylvia Pankhurst) and several leading shop steward workers known to have taken an active part against the war and to support the Russian revolution. But these workers were "direct actionists" and anti-parliamentary and were against association with the existing political parties.

All these groups were in accord in believing that the supreme need of the moment was for a united Communist Party. But this was not to be achieved merely by desiring it. The respective groups were separated from one another by differences of opinion on several important questions. For example, while the B.S.P. and the S.L.P. understood the possibility and the need for revolutionary parliamentary action, the others were opposed to any kind of parliamentary action whatever. Further, the S.L.P., supported by the W.S.F. and the South Wales Socialist Society, were divided from the B.S.P. on the question of whether or not the united party, when formed, should affiliate to the Labour Party.

Our S.L.P. traditions were hostile to the Labour Party. We had been fostering industrial unionism and the militant shop-stewards movement, to which the Labour leaders were strenuously opposed. We rightly regarded the Labour *leaders* as thorough-going opportunists, but we wrongly deduced from this that the Labour *Party* was at this stage necessarily an obstacle to the growth of the revolutionary movement. We were, therefore, against affiliation. On the other hand, the B.S.P. had always been affiliated to the Labour Party, and naturally felt that the new Communist Party should also be affiliated, assuming as a matter of course that it would enjoy within the Labour Party the same rights as were enjoyed by other parties to carry on its own independent activity and to put forward its own policy.

MacManus, Paul and I had sanction to act as the S.L.P. representatives on a unity committee, comprising ourselves, the B.S.P., the Workers' Socialist Federation (an anti-parliamentary group led by Sylvia Pankhurst), and the South Wales Socialist Society (a group of the militant Miners' Reform Society—also anti-parliamentary—from the Rhondda). Meetings took place in Eustace Miles' restaurant, near St. Martin's church, where we failed to agree on the question of affiliation to the Labour Party—the W.S.F. and the Rhondda socialists supporting the S.L.P. on this question. The W.S.F., failing to secure an agreement on the question of anti-parliamentarism, remained aloof from any further proceedings on unity and assumed the title, "The Communist Party (British Section of the Third International)".

Further unity meetings turned on the question of affiliation to the Labour Party. We could not get an agreement on this. I proposed to leave this question open for a year and not to make it a condition of unity. Eventually it was proposed to leave the question of affiliation to the Labour Party to be settled by a referendum of the new party, three months after the formation of the party.

Our report to the S.L.P. Executive Committee led to the Executive deciding by a bare majority not to take further part in the unity proceedings. This we declined to accept, feeling certain that this vote did not truly reflect the wishes of the members, and immediately issued an invitation for all branches and groups in favour of unity to a conference to be held in Nottingham during Easter 1920. At this conference practically all branches were represented together with branches of the Socialist Prohibition Fellowship. The conference unanimously endorsed our proposals for unity and sent to the unity conference the same delegation which had served upon

the unity committee with the addition of several new delegates. Henceforth we took the name of the Communist Unity Group and prepared for the Convention to be held in London on July 31st, 1920.

Prior to the conference a unity meeting took place in the I.L.P. offices, Johnson's Court, between the B.S.P., S.L.P. and the I.L.P. This conference turned into a dialectical skirmish between MacManus and Philip Snowden on industrial unionism versus trade unionism; Soviets versus parliamentary democracy, and the role of violence in the social revolution.

I never saw a man look so dejected as Snowden when "Mac" was finished with him. As a last word Snowden said: "Well, you are asking us to give up all we have stood for these thirty years. The past thirty years' work of the I.L.P. is good enough for me." And we broke up. But there was a "left" element in the I.L.P. in favour of unity. This we shall refer to further on.

Out of the unity committee a joint provisional Executive was appointed to prepare the platform, constitution and rules for the new party. MacManus and I worked continuously on this committee for about two months prior to the convention, in collaboration with the representative of the new Third (Communist) International. The stage was set at last for the historic convention that was to merge all the scattered revolutionary militants into the Communist Party of Great Britain.

In the meantime, in view of the stubbornness on each side, it was resolved to submit the question of affiliation to the Labour Party to the Executive Committee of the Communist International for guidance. The reply came in the form of a letter from Comrade Lenin:

"Having received the letter of the Joint Provisional Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, dated June

20th, I hasten to reply, in accordance with their request, that I am in complete sympathy with their plans for the immediate organisation of a Communist Party in England. I consider the policy of Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst and of the Workers' Socialist Federation in refusing to collaborate in the amalgamation of the British Socialist Party, Socialist Labour Party, and others, into one Communist Party, to be wrong. I, personally, am in favour of participation in parliament, and of adhesion to the Labour Party on condition of free and independent communist activity. This policy I am going to defend at the Second Congress of the Third International on July 15th, at Moscow. I consider it most desirable that a Communist Party be speedily organised on the basis of the decisions and principles of the Third International, and that the party be brought into close touch with the Industrial Workers of the World and shop steward committees, in order to bring about complete union.

“ LENIN,

“ Moscow, July 8th.”

It was characteristic of Lenin that he put this whole vexed question of affiliation to the Labour Party into a nutshell; favouring “adhesion to the Labour Party on condition of free and independent communist activity,” thus charging the Party on the one hand to insist upon the necessary guarantees and so avoid being harnessed to the reformist policy of the Labour leaders, and on the other hand reminding it of the need to carry on such activity within the Labour Party. It was unfortunate that this letter arrived only on the eve of the Convention, too late to allow the full consideration it demanded by the organisations and delegates, so that its full significance was not grasped in the Convention, but only realised later.

A new chapter was being opened in the history of the socialist movement in Great Britain. Hitherto the socialists had been small fragmentary groups, propagandist,

theoretical and educative, but without the serious challenging force of a great political party. The energies of the socialist followers of Keir Hardie and of the social democrats had been put into the development of the Labour Party. But even these were trade unionists first, and socialists secondary, as an intellectual attitude of mind.

Being a federal organisation, and largely dependent on the trade unions for its funds, the Labour Party became the vehicle for all the political grievances of the unions. As the unions were comprised principally of the aristocracy of labour the policy of the party was soaked in opportunism. The socialism of those leaders who belonged to the I.L.P. was, accordingly, thoroughly "British." Their textbooks were Blatchford's *Merrie England* and *Britain for the British*, reinforced by the spurious doctrines of Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden, who were thorough-going anti-Marxists.

Traditionally, the aims of the I.L.P. leaders who dominated the Labour Party never went beyond the prospects of replacing the Liberal Party as the great radical party of the people. If they used socialist phrases at all this was merely an indication of their "ideals," to be realised in the dim and distant future by a whole series of legislative acts through the House of Commons. As to the class struggle, this was anathema, the "crude barbarities" of which could be left to the "continental socialism" of Karl Marx.

There was nothing strange, therefore, in the decision by the Labour Party Conference in 1918 to open the doors, as the leaders expressed it, to "workers by brain," as well as "workers by hand." This, of course, was a deliberately false representation of the change that was being made. Brain workers had always been eligible to join the party



in the same way as handworkers, i.e. through their trade union or a socialist society. What the Labour Party Executive now wished was to draw in middle-class individuals (who need not be members of a trade union or socialist society) and incidentally to counter-balance the growing militancy of the working-class members of the party—a practice already begun by Arthur Henderson at Barnard Castle as far back as 1912. The war had torn up by the roots large sections of the professional and petty bourgeoisie. This class was now faced with an intolerable burden of war debt, of militarism, and capitalist monopoly. To whom could they turn? The Liberal Party was tied to the oligarchy of finance and imperialism. Only the Labour Party remained for them as the “People’s Party,” and so the doors were opened to them by the new rule of individual membership. On the other hand, the trade union leaders in the party rarely rose above the level of political mediocrities. And so the next few years was to see an influx of petty bourgeois Liberals and Tories, dominating and leading the Labour Party into the safe channels of capitalist parliamentary “democracy” and ministerialism, for “Labour and the Nation”—especially the “Nation”! Moreover, as we shall see later, the clause of individual membership had a twofold use. While letting into the party individual “brain” workers, it made it possible to exclude those militant “hand” workers, who fought against the capitalist policy of the party leadership.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE FOUNDATION OF THE C.P.G.B.

By the summer of 1920 the whole situation was ripe for a Communist Party of Great Britain. Capitalism in Great Britain and throughout the British Empire was caught up in the general crisis of world capitalism following the war. The shutting down of munition shops and the war industries, and the disbanding of the soldiers and sailors, who came home to find there was no work for them, aggravated the lack of markets. Unemployment was taking root as a permanency and not a periodical phenomenon. Tens of thousands of war-weary workers were now being disillusioned as to there being any "fruits of victory" for them.

The October revolution in Russia had widened the breach between the militant workers and the social-patriots. The differentiation in the various socialist groups and parties had been hardened. The I.L.P.ers, guild socialists, local socialist societies, Herald League groups, etc., caught up in the flush of enthusiasm and success of the Russian workers, were dissatisfied with the old organisations, and were looking for a single united party based upon the clear-cut programme of Bolshevism. All over the country the demand was for a new party—a party of action, freed alike from social-chauvinism and mere abstract propaganda.

On July 7th, 1920, the following invitation from the joint provisional committee was issued:

“ July 7th, 1920.

“ To the Secretary.

“ DEAR COMRADE,

“ The negotiations for uniting the various revolutionary left wing organisations in Britain in one Communist Party have now taken definite shape. A great national convention to establish the Communist Party and settle all questions of immediate tactics will be held in the Cannon Street Hotel, London, E.C., on Saturday, July 31st, at 2 p.m.

“ An invitation to representation at this national convention is cordially extended to all organisations, branches of organisations, local communist groups and independent socialist societies that accept the fundamental basis of communist unity: (a) The Dictatorship of the Working Class; (b) The Soviet System; (c) The Third International.

“ All bodies participating in summoning the national convention are pledged to abide by its decisions on points of tactics, and to merge their organisations in the new Communist Party. Representation at the convention will be held to imply that the branches, groups and societies represented will also accept its decisions and become branches of the Communist Party.

Your branch, group or society is cordially invited to send delegates to the convention to inaugurate the Communist Party and determine its tactics and policy. Representation will be at the rate of one delegate for every twenty-five members or part thereof, and voting at the convention will be on the same basis. The representation fee will be 2s. 6d. for every twenty-five members or part of twenty-five members represented.

“ Delegate's application form and agenda for the convention are attached hereto. Copies of a manifesto, 'A Call for a Communist Party,' are also enclosed.

“ Delegates' application forms should be sent in at once. Further copies of the manifesto can be obtained on application. The names and addresses of secretaries of unattached groups and societies to whom invitations to representation should be

sent will be warmly appreciated; and where speakers are required to explain more fully the object of the convention, they will gladly be sent if mutually satisfactory dates can be arranged.

“The Communist International calls us to action. We are confident that all sincere communists will respond to that call and help us to make the national convention and the Communist Party an overwhelming success.

“On behalf of the Joint Provisional Committee for the Communist Party.

“ARTHUR MACMANUS, *Chairman.*

“ALBERT INKPIN, *Secretary.*”

One hundred and fifty-two delegates attended, representing fifty-six branches of the B.S.P., twenty-two branches of the Communist Unity Group, and twenty-four miscellaneous groups. These 152 delegates held 211 mandates—the voting strength of each branch being in proportion to the number of its members.

The composition of this delegation was 90 per cent. proletarian, our group being entirely made up of actual workers. But it did not embrace all the communist elements in the country. There were still groups around the Workers' Committee movement outside. The Second Congress of the C.I. was in session at this time. In Moscow there were spokesmen at the Congress for the London Workers' Committee, and for a group around the Scottish Workers' Committee.

These groups were definitely anti-parliamentary and were the British counterpart of that section that formed Communist Labour Parties in most of the countries associated with the C.I., in an anxiety to be more “left” than the C.I. itself. They were anti-parliamentary, and also anti-Labour Party, and would have nothing to do with the unity proceedings, as they believed the new

Communist Party was only going to be a glorified British Socialist Party. However, their discussions in Moscow with Comrade Lenin led the best elements of them to see the importance of a single Communist Party and the value of revolutionary parliamentary action, and they joined up in January 1921; following another unity convention held in Leeds, thus completing the work of the national convention in 1920.

It has always been my regret that the S.L.P. (Communist Unity Group) was not represented at the Second Congress of the C.I. It would have been better had the joint provisional committee sent one delegate from the S.L.P. and one from the B.S.P. This would have ensured a fair reflection of the main tendencies represented on the joint provisional committee.

At the convention I had the task of moving and explaining the resolution on parliamentary action, which read:

“The Communist Party repudiates the reformist view that a social revolution can be achieved by the ordinary methods of parliamentary democracy, but regards parliamentary and electoral action generally as providing a valuable means of propaganda and agitation towards the revolution. The tactics to be employed by representatives of the Party elected to Parliament or local bodies must be laid down by the Party itself according to national or local circumstances. In all cases such representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the Party and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit.”

An addendum was added:

“In the event of any representative violating the decisions of the Party as embodied in the mandate which he or she has accepted or been instructed upon, he or she shall be called

upon to resign his or her membership of Parliament or municipality, and also the Party."

The arguments which I used in support of the resolution are given in the official report of the Convention proceedings. I take the liberty of quoting them: "So far as the Joint Committee were concerned, the Communist Unity Group and the B.S.P. were in complete agreement upon the need for and the advisability of taking parliamentary action, but the present resolution had arisen in the course of the negotiations with the W.S.F. and had been very important at the time. After the defection of the W.S.F. the resolution might have been cleared off, since there was no point of difference between the remaining groups that made up the Unity Committee; but, as there was still a considerable amount of hesitancy in many groups on the question of parliamentary action, for and against, it had been thought better to allow the question to be ventilated at the conference; that being the safest and simplest way to make the position clear, so far as parliamentary action was concerned. It would be seen that the resolution from the very first repudiated the reformist idea that a social revolution could be achieved by the ordinary methods of parliamentary democracy. In this respect its point of view was common to communist parties internationally at the present time. He and those who agreed with him did not think it was possible to effect a peaceful transformation in the parliamentary bourgeois democracy as understood to-day, and thereby to work out the emancipation of the working class; they believed that the parliamentary institution as it existed to-day, the constituency in itself, was entirely foreign to the purpose of the communist state of society they had in mind. Consequently, in preference to the parliamentary constituency, they rather looked to the more direct method of representation as expressed

through the workers' committees whether in industrial or social life. With regard to parliamentary and electoral action as providing a valuable means of propaganda and agitation towards the revolution, while they did not place any faith in the parliamentary institution in itself, and did not think it was capable of fitting into the scheme of things that they as Communists had in mind, nevertheless, they thought it of considerable value to revolutionary propaganda not to shut the door upon any avenue whatsoever that was going to liberate the minds of the masses from their superstitious faith in parliamentary democracy. He thought that the best policy to adopt towards that particular objective was to demonstrate inside the House of Commons that, so far as the working class were concerned, there was nothing to be hoped for in that chamber. By breaking the parliamentary precedents and conventionalities which played so large a part in shaping the minds of the workers, we could do a great deal to break down that reverence for parliamentary institutions that many of the fellow-workers had. . . . In reference to action inside the House of Commons, our policy all the time was a critical, destructive one, exposing the fraudulent character of our modern parliamentary democracy—which was not a free institution at all, but was an institution controlled by high finance. That being so, he suggested it was the business of the Communist Party inside the House of Commons, in order to liberate the minds of the masses with regard to capitalist fetishes, critically to examine every situation that arose, and to criticise the points of view put forward by our opponents, whether bourgeois, semi-radical, or anything else, and, generally speaking, help to focus the attention of the working class upon the vital interests so far as the communist agitation was concerned. As to the clause,

‘ In all cases such representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the party, and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit,’ those of us who had been identified with the political Labour movement for any length of time knew the hackneyed phrase used by the politicians of all shades of opinion, that once they went inside the House of Commons they ceased to have any connection with their particular organisation, and represented the interests of all sections in the community. This was a pretence; it was impossible—and this was the inherent weakness of the parliamentary constituency—for any representative to express the desires and wills of all the conflicting class elements that made up a constituency. By this resolution we sought to make it emphatic that the candidate sent up by the Communist Party would contest the seat under the surveillance of the Communist Party Executive, and would go to the House of Commons with a mandate from the Party—that he would not draw his mandate from the constituency. That was the point of view sought to be brought out in the resolution—that we must have discipline to the Communist Executive from all members, whether inside or outside the House of Commons.”\*

There were a number of local councillors and prospective Members of Parliament, mostly of the B.S.P. delegation, who were much disturbed by this proposal. Principal amongst these was Robert Williams, the man who later played such a miserable role in the Triple Alliance fiasco (Black Friday) of 1921, for which he was expelled from the party.

We did not notice, at the time, the importance of the speech by Williams where he said: “ The duties and

\* From official Report of Convention proceedings. July 31st and August 1st, 1920.



obligations would be to accept in a general way, according to racial, national and economic considerations and requirements, the general policy of the International. . . . Lenin should not be looked upon as a Pope. We did not want Popes in the revolutionary movement." This was quite in the spirit and letter of the Second International.

Williams came into the ante-room after his speech, and worried the commission on the resolution about this clause. "It was a violation of all our traditions in this country, and would prevent us from getting members elected." But I insisted this was a matter of principle and we couldn't yield on it. As we learned afterwards, in the Executive Committee, when we came to deal with the policy of local councillors and their allegiance to the party, Williams had only been saying openly what others believed.

In fact, it was not long after the party was formed that Williams and Purcell came before the sub-committee of the Executive on the question of running as a Labour candidate, and the text of Purcell's proposed election address. Purcell's refusal openly to run as a communist, and to proclaim his party membership, led to his desertion from the party. It is now quite obvious, twenty years after, that Williams, Purcell, Colonel Malone, Ellen Wilkinson, and Walton Newbold, to name but a few of the renegades from the first convention, had been only caught up in the surge of the new movement. In reality, they never belonged to it.

The real bone of contention was the question: "Should the C.P. affiliate to the Labour Party?" The case "for," on behalf of the B.S.P., was put by Fred Hodgson. Hodgson was a good proletarian—a quiet, effective speaker; logical and persuasive. He was head and shoulders above the rest of the B.S.P. leaders; knew his

Marx and the British workers' movement. He had all the qualities of loyalty to party.

We had decided to put up one from each side, and since MacManus was in the onerous and responsible position of chairman, it fell to Paul to be our advocate. Paul, too, was a keen Marxist and student of theory. As a speaker he was the opposite of Hodgson. He had a wide experience as a propagandist. Racy and voluble he often missed fire by a too great eagerness to score a point in debate. This led him frequently to strain after facetious remarks at the expense of an opponent, which cheapened his argument. But in this discussion oratory was of secondary importance. The long negotiations and polemics that had previously taken place between the different groups had brought to the conference delegates and groups with more or less fixed opinions on this question. The number of waverers was negligible.

The vote to apply for affiliation, 100 for and 85 against, showed how evenly divided was the convention.

Following this decision, declarations were made by MacManus and myself in the name of our group that, in spite of the adverse decision on this question, we would loyally abide by the decision, convinced above all tactical considerations of the paramount need for a united Communist Party. The great historic step for which we had so long hoped had been taken. The foundations of a working-class party of a new type for Great Britain had been laid.

One comrade to whom I should like to pay tribute for his share in bringing about unity is Albert Inkpin. During the unity negotiations, and subsequently in our Executive work, I got to know Albert as a serious, efficient and competent comrade in the cause of socialism. Not so robust in physical health as some of us who had

come from the north, Albert, nevertheless, was an indefatigable worker, bringing understanding and a sympathetic approach to people, rare gifts in one whose early training and associations had been in office work. These qualities were much in evidence during our protracted discussions leading up to the Convention. Twice imprisoned, Albert has shown that he is of the stuff not to be intimidated by prison bars.

The tactic of seeking affiliation to the Labour Party was not an easy one, and often misunderstood. Many comrades never grasped the real meaning, as interpreted by Lenin. While accepting the principle of independence and criticism, many comrades, through long associations with the local Labour Party movement and a zealous desire to be inside at all costs, opposed, in practice, revolutionary criticism and often spoke and behaved as if they were I.L.P.ers.

Whatever illusions some of our comrades had as to the likelihood of the C.P.'s application for affiliation being accepted by the Labour Party Executive, Henderson and company had their minds made up against it. After lengthy correspondence, a meeting was arranged with the Labour Party Executive and our Executive, in the headquarters of the Labour Party in Ecclestone Square. Arthur MacManus, as chairman of our Executive, opened with a brief statement about the new Communist Party, and our desire to be affiliated to the Labour Party on the same terms as the other socialist bodies.

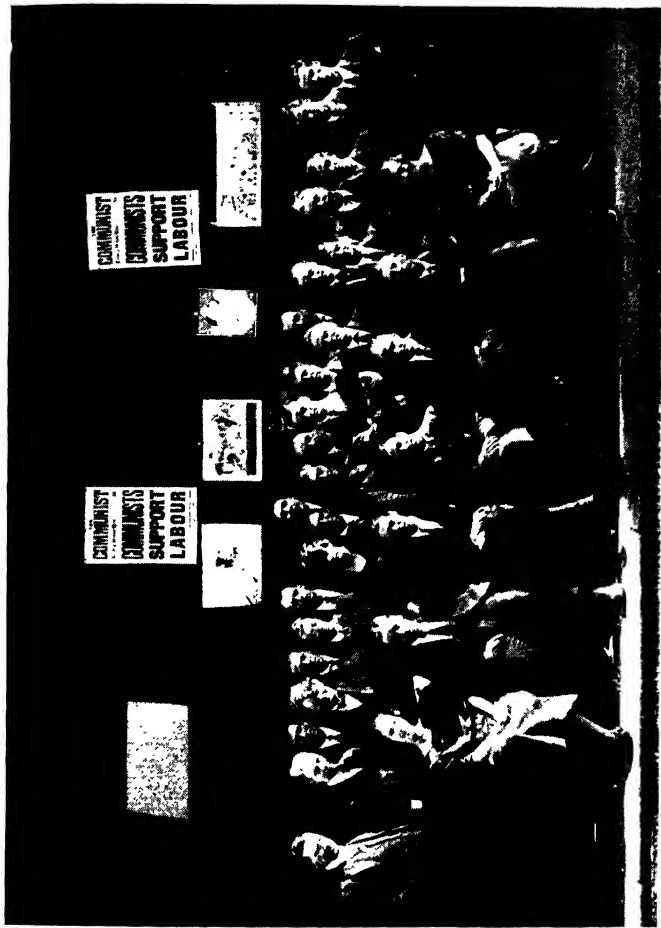
After several questions were asked by Executive members of the Labour Party, Arthur Henderson made a statement. With the Theses of the Third Congress of the Communist International in hand, he quoted paragraphs to show how it was incompatible with their constitution for the Communists to be inside the Labour Party. He

took three questions—the communist attitude to parliamentary institutions (alleging a disbelief in parliamentary action); the role of violence and insurrection in the workers' movement; and illegal organisation.

Unfortunately for the logic of Henderson's case, we were able to confront the Labour Party Executive with quotations from some of their own speeches during the threatened war on Russia in 1920, and the fact that they had taken extra-constitutional action in setting up the "Council of Action." Point after point we took up, refuting their arguments with simple working-class logic. But it was useless. The final reply, sent in writing, was a categorical refusal. Notwithstanding this rejection, we continued our agitation for affiliation and utilised every means of exposing the pro-capitalist policy of the Labour Party leaders.

I was appointed party organiser. We had planned the organisation on the geographical basis of districts with local branches. Our first job was to get the branches together as units of the new party and link them up into districts with district committees, each with its own organiser, and each unit organised on the principle of democratic centralism. But it was not an easy job getting the comrades to understand the meaning of centralised direction. Time after time, on the Executive Committee, we had to combat the "federalist" and "constituency" notions of the comrades who came from the provinces, and try to get them to think "executively." At the opposite extreme we had amusing cases of local secretaries and organisers who interpreted centralised direction to mean that they were, like sergeant-majors, to give orders and every member had to spring to attention and obey.

We took stock of our resources and membership. Our first census, after the second unity conference in 1921,



CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND STAFF, C.P.G.B., 1921



revealed no more than 2,000 to 2,500 members. I found that many names given to us as branches only existed on paper. Even when the Scottish Communist Labour Party came in, though they talked of 4,000 members, I doubt if they brought 200 into the party. It was the same when the "left wing" of the I.L.P. came over. They talked in terms of thousands; in point of fact they, too, only added one or two hundreds. But it was difficult to reach final conclusions. Each section protested, insisting on its membership as given. That is why the figure of 10,000 got into the records of the C.I. as the membership of the C.P.G.B. in 1921.

Within two weeks of the formation of the party a crisis arose over the Polish-Russian war. The British and Allied governments were openly supporting Poland, as part of the general counter-revolutionary campaign and war against the workers' socialist republics.

A strong anti-war and pro-Soviet feeling ran through the entire Labour movement. Local trade union branches, trades councils, and Labour Parties were holding meetings and demanding action to be taken by the national organisations to prevent war. A section of the dockers in the East End of London actually held up a munition ship, *The Jolly George*, which was intended to carry arms to Danzig.\*

A special congress took place in the Central Hall, Westminster, of delegates from the T.U.C. and the Labour Party, on Monday, August 9th. We were refused official credentials as a party, but we secured guest tickets, and with other comrades I had a seat on the platform. Speeches were made by Thomas, Clynes and other Labour leaders, threatening a general strike if the Government persisted in its ultimatum to Russia, and a

\* For an account of this, see *Serving My Time*, by Harry Pollitt, ch. VII.

Council of Action was formed to operate the decisions. The next day the newspapers announced that the Government was not going to declare war. But the workers did not slacken their vigilance. The C.P. had issued a statement earlier in the previous week, demanding a Council of Action, and formulated five points as a programme of action; it also demanded representation on the Council. The points put forward by our party were substantially adopted at the special congress, though we were refused all representation. We thereupon took steps to secure representation on the local councils.

A great wave of enthusiasm ran through the workers' movement locally. Meetings were held, and leaflets issued explaining the meaning of this war against the Soviets. The workers made a search of all railway goods and consignments; sent in reports of activities in the metal and munition shops, and dockers kept an eye on all ports. This spontaneous action of the workers undoubtedly influenced the British Government to stay its hand.

The Labour leaders who had disgraced themselves during the war took the advantage of this popular movement for a "come back," and exploited it for opportunist political reasons. When the Government's ultimatum was withdrawn, the Council of Action was allowed to die. Locally, the councils lingered on for a while, and then faded away. The importance for us lay in the fact that our party was identified *officially* with the *local* movement, and played an active part in organisation and propaganda.



## CHAPTER XV

### MY FIRST VISIT TO MOSCOW

IMMEDIATELY following the second unity conference in January 1921, it was decided that I should go to Moscow to make a full report on the new party, and the situation in Great Britain, and to act as party representative on the C.I.—to be, in fact, the first official representative of the C.P.G.B. on the Executive Committee of the C.I.

Conditions on the continent were still confused and difficult from the effects of the war. To get a passport was not easy, and business references and recommendations were demanded; but after several weeks' delay I got one. But another problem arose in the getting of visas. The foreign consulates in London demanded letters of invitation from business houses in their countries, and raised all manner of petty questions, making for delay. Their last resource was to ask permission from *their* Foreign Office. When that was proposed I knew the answer.

I went to a port on the east coast, and through the influence of local comrades working in the docks, I made contact with a German sailor, and arranged with him to go aboard as a stowaway. I arranged to meet him at his ship—at 12 o'clock midnight, and went off to fill in the remaining hours as best I could. It rained all day, and I sat in a picture house for a double round of the programme, till the theatre closed. I then walked slowly back to the dock gates. To my dismay I found the main gate closed, with only the side gate open near

the watchman's box, in which a uniformed policeman sat.

I had no luggage of any kind—not even a change of shirt. Pulling my cap to the side and buttoning up the collar of my coat, I walked briskly through the gate as if I were a workman and knew where I was going. Fortunately no notice seemed to be taken of me, and I went along the road I had mentally noted during my visit early in the day. When I reached a rail-track that crosses the road I found the barrier closed. For a moment I thought I had gone wrong. Jumping the barrier and passing the signalman's box, I came on some dockers working at a ship, and a policeman chatting with one of the men who looked like a checking clerk. I exchanged a "Good-night" with them and passed on into the darkness towards the dock where "my" ship lay.

Here was the ship. Twelve o'clock exactly. I waited for my companion, as agreed. Fully five minutes passed and no sign of him coming. Had he failed me? Hearing footsteps, and seeing a shadow turning a corner a few yards away, I decided to walk on to the ship and chance my luck. As I made for the forecastle my companion came out. With a brief greeting he led me down into the ship's bunker amongst the coal. He laid down a board and a couple of sheets of thick wicker matting, and left me for the night.

Stretched on my back I must have soon gone off to sleep. Often when in the foundry, working at nights, I had lain amongst lumps of coal during our spell after supper. This experience was nothing new to me. I was awakened by the throbbing of an engine, and the sound of voices speaking in German, which struck my ears as a strange, guttural drawl. I found I was lying next to a motor engine, with only a thin metal plate to separate us. I could sit

up, for my companion had taken care to pile the coal high up so that I was completely hidden from view should anyone in authority come along to the boiler fires.

My throat was parched, and I felt as if I would be stifled. I was afraid to move, as I did not know whether anyone was about or if the firemen on duty were friendly or not. Just then a head came over the top, saying, in a subdued broken English, "Goot-morn. Have goot sleep?" This was my companion. He passed over a bottle and some thick slices of brown German bread and ham; told me, in a low tone of voice, to be quiet, and that the ship would not be leaving till 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

To my disgust the bottle contained cognac. But my throat was parched, and I had no alternative. I swallowed it with an effort, and lay down again to listen to the motor-engine; the rattling of chains; the shovelling of coal, and officers' commands. The cognac had the salutary effect of sending me off into spells of deep slumber in which the noises were lost. We were at sea when I next awakened.

On the third day I was informed we were sailing into Bremerhaven, and a few hours would bring us to our destination. There began again the rattle of chains, the stopping and re-starting of the motor engines, and soon the sound of the German tongue, to me, then, quite strange: then a long silence. My companion made a welcome appearance to tell me to follow him. Crawling out into the dark space of the bunker my legs went from under me. I was as if in a trance, staggering about, reaching for something to grip to keep myself from falling.

In the darkness my eyes had got accustomed to the absence of light. When I got on deck it was already five in the morning, and the dawn was breaking. It was some minutes before I could see. I was taken to the galley for

a wash-up. What a mess! Eyes, ears, hair, and four days' growth on my chin, were all thick with coal dust. I stripped to the skin and fairly revelled in the hot water and soap. It took about three big pails of water before I got the grime off to my satisfaction. Having no change of clothes, however, I no sooner got dressed than I became as dirty as if I had just come up from the boiler-fires.

My companion had arranged to get off the watch at 6 o'clock, and we made off to look for a barber's to get a shave. We then made for a little landing-stage from which a small motor launch apparently ran people up the river to Bremen. I enjoyed the exhilarating sensation of racing up the river in the fresh morning air. It was delightful after being cooped up in a coal bunker. Along the dockside where before and during the war there must have been a hive of industry, now all was desolate. The great cranes were standing idle. Only a few small craft were to be seen lying up. The effects of the war and the revolution were visibly reflected in the great silence.

In Bremen we went to a comrade's house for breakfast and another wash. The wife of the house made me strip off my clothes and get into a change of her husband's, while she washed my underclothes, and sponged and cleaned my suit as best she could. We chatted about the situation in England and Germany, and the prospects of the revolutionary movement. Very fine comrades.

We took the train to Berlin, travelling in a fourth-class carriage. The experience of being crowded in what appeared to me to be a railway truck, with only two wooden seats—one at each end—and standing all the way, was new to me. Here were housewives with baskets; workmen, and what looked like one-time respectable petty bourgeois. I was sorry I was not able to speak with them, but from the bits of information my companion

gave me, the conversation was largely on prices, scarcity of necessaries, and economic problems in general.

I can never forget the impression Berlin made upon me. I had expected, since there had been a revolution, to see more evidence of the civil war than was apparent. I was astonished to see in the public squares great, hideous war monuments, the symbols of the old German militarism, standing unscathed. Apart from the marked signs of economic distress, in the shortage of food and starvation of the workers, in the ragged and shabby clothes, and the down-at-heel look of the petty bourgeoisie, it was difficult for me to imagine there had been a revolutionary crisis.

At the end of the week I went to Stettin, but just missed a boat, and had to wait here for another ten days, during which I had a recurrence of my sickness. Having to stay indoors was not a great hardship, however, as I had no passport, and in such a small town it was dangerous for a foreigner to be seen about the docks. This was not so much a personal question as the possibility of involving the local comrades and dislocating their organisation.

About 11 o'clock on a Sunday night, six of us—four men and two women—were taken on to the ship and led down below, where the ship's stores were kept. We lay on a rack amongst tarpaulin and ship's blankets for about twelve hours, waiting for the ship to move off. The next day, about four in the afternoon, we were let up, one by one, to join the rest of the passengers, who proved to be a ship-load of repatriated soldiers and citizens. My first contact with the Russian people.

We were sailing up the Swinemünde Canal to the Baltic Sea, with two or three hundred souls aboard. The ship was not very big and every inch of space was occupied with improvised racks for sleeping accommodation. We were all divided into groups, with a leader responsible

to a committee appointed from the ship's passengers, for organisation and discipline. The life was just such as the soldiers had been accustomed to for some years. Fatigue parties were organised for cleaning, cooking, and arranging the mess for the groups.

I had made friends with a little Italian and Hungarian who were on the same errand as myself. With my smattering of French the Italian and I got on well together. We entered into the life of the ship—working, discussing politics, singing, and playing games. One group had an accordion, and I made a hit by playing English tunes while some men and women danced. The weather was excellent, and we had glorious sunshine for the first three days. On the night of the third day a wind gathered into a rain-storm. The ship tossed about like a cork in the ocean, and finally the engines were stopped. Most of the passengers went below, sick. I had already had my sickness on land, and was able to enjoy the freshness of the wind and rain well into the night, from a sheltered corner up on deck.

In the morning we sighted what proved to be Baltisk Port—a bleak, deserted port at the mouth of the Gulf of Finland, forming a railway terminus for Reval. Here we got off the ship, passing in single file through a military guard of Esthonians, to join a train-load of waggons waiting to convey us to the Soviet frontier. After some delay, counting and checking up of heads, we were told off in groups of twelve, each group to a waggon. Three or four coarse wooden planks to sit on, and a brazier with some blocks of wood for heat, made up our accommodation. We stood or squatted down just as we felt inclined. From the brazier we stuck a long pipe through an opening in the side of the waggon that passed for a window. With every change in the wind, clouds of smoke came back

on us, so that our eyes watered; we coughed, spat and argued about the advantages and disadvantages of having any fire.

In the course of conversation my Italian comrade, who spoke German fluently, made the acquaintance of a soldier who came from Petrograd. This soldier had been on the Western Front; got wounded and was afterwards shipped to England. Hearing I was English, in broken French he enquired if I knew Manchester and Handforth. He had been convalescent in Handforth and was familiar with the countryside, especially Heald Green, where, during the summer of 1919, I had lived in a tent while editing *The Socialist*. We became fast friends, and within the limits of our broken French, discoursed on England; the war; the revolution; and socialism.

The journey from Baltisk Port to Reval and to the Soviet frontier was a unique experience for me. With my companions I had been given a bag of ship's biscuits—little hard knobs about an inch long and half an inch thick. These were to last us till we got into Russia. Personally, I did not worry over food. I was making a virtue of necessity, since my digestive apparatus was out of order. But my companions longed for a variety of any kind.

The engine was fired with clumps of wood. As a result it went with fits and starts. When the steam was up and we were on the level it was all right, but when we came to an incline and extra pressure was used, we got stuck fast. At such times we got on to the track and walked alongside the train, when it did start, to stretch our legs, jumping into our truck when the engine got up steam.

Thus we rode to Reval, and after a wait of two hours in this station we set off to cross the Narva, for Petrograd. The frontier was a kind of no man's land, with two long

wooden huts, one of which had a Y.M.C.A. sign, and was used as an ambulance room and military offices. Here we had to get out. We were lined up as if on parade. Formidable-looking Esthonian officials, in military uniform and well armed, inspected the lines in collaboration with the Soviet Government representatives. We were called to attention and dismissed four times. Apparently there was a discrepancy between the figures counted by each side, and since the expense involved in transportation was matter of revenue to the Esthonians, accuracy was important to their poverty-stricken country. But my friends and I had the impression at first that they were looking for us.

We hung about this deserted outpost for a few hours, waiting on the Soviet train coming. At last we heard an engine's whistle and from round a bend in the line emerged the big iron horse with a red flag sticking on the front of its head, and behind it a long train of trucks similar to those we had just left. A wave of suppressed excitement ran through all present, and had it not been, I believe, that it was considered unwise to make any demonstration of national feeling, the whole convoy would have gone wild with joy.

A trim little official in Soviet uniform, with the familiar portfolio, jumped from the footplate of the engine, and after some customary exchanges of papers with other officials, we scrambled once more into our trucks—each claiming a corner or a seat on a plank—and we were off.

Now that we were in a Soviet train the crowd became more demonstrative. Most of them had not been in Russia since the Revolution. Amongst the refugees were many returning to their native land after years of exile. In some cases were women and children coming to this new-promised land for the first time. Groups here and there



argued and disputed with each other; others sang the "Dubinushka," the "Volga Boatman," and "Stenka Razin," while some were quietly contemplating, no doubt, what this new world had to offer them.

Came the Esthonian frontier. Here we passed that criminal barrier of capitalist civilisation—barbed wire, six feet deep, running for miles along the arbitrarily fixed dividing lines, to separate the peoples. Once on the other side, the long, rumbling train approached a great wooden archway, painted red, bearing the Soviet emblem—the hammer and sickle; red flags, and the welcome inscription "Workers of the World Unite," stretched across the railway lines. As we passed through the archway a band struck up "The International"; heads were bared, and immediately everyone joined in singing, fervently, the hymn of the revolutionary workers of all lands. Then a great waving of caps; wild "hurrahs," and gesticulations from truck to truck, and shouting of slogans. We were in the land of proletarian freedom—Soviet Russia.

When we reached the Narva the great iron bridge that spans the river was broken in two and lying in the water. This was my first view of the material destructiveness of the war. A thin wooden, temporary, structure stretched across the river, and over this we slowly crawled, not without a feeling of satisfaction when we arrived on the other side safely.

Rumbling along over vast stretches of plain, in and out of deep forests of thick pines, we came at times to the remains of huts and outhouses in little patches of cultivable soil, now deserted save for the carcass of a dead horse here and there. These I observed during the intervals of failing steam.

The first village we came to within the Soviet border was Yamburg (now known as Kingisep—named after

Comrade Kingisep, a revolutionary worker in Esthonia, who was judicially murdered by the Esthonian bourgeoisie in 1922). I have spoken of the impression which Berlin made on me. Here was a contrast! On passing beneath the archway that marked the beginning of Soviet territory, one felt "red." The hammer and sickle; the red flags; the "International"—what proletarian could fail to feel inches taller, to have a sensation of proud triumph to remember that this was the workers' socialist fatherland? And now, to see the red flag flying over the railway buildings, the post office and government buildings, and the hated double-headed eagle torn down to make way for an embossed plaque of the world, with the hammer and sickle spread across it—the symbol of the unity of the workers and peasants of all countries—was to realise how thorough had been the socialist revolution of 1917 compared with the revolution in Germany.

We arrived about seven or eight at night. I was taken away, along with my companions, by some party comrades, to have our credentials verified. For some reason I lost sight of my Italian friend, whom I did not see again until some months after, in Moscow. That done, I was given my "Pyock"—a ration of black bread, cheese, butter, tea and sugar—and fixed up for the night in a courier carriage that lay in a siding of the station, with two German comrades, and a young peasant soldier as our escort.

About ten o'clock at night a great meeting was held around a platform erected up against a huge tree at one end of the station. The significance of holding the meeting under this tree was that it had been used by Koltchak's White troops to hang revolutionary workers and soldiers on. Here greetings were extended to the newcomers to Soviet Russia, and stories related of what the workers and

peasants had achieved despite the counter-revolutionary murders of Koltchak and his imperialist masters. Amongst the several speakers I was amazed to hear a young lad of 15 years of age deliver a fluent oration on the part played by the youth in the revolution. As each speaker finished, a brass band crashed out the "International," and wild "hurrahs" rent the air along with shouts of "Long Live Soviet Russia" and "Long Live the World Social Revolution." About twelve o'clock midnight the long train of trucks filled up again, and moved off with its human cargo to Petrograd, and I saw it no more.

The next forenoon a courier train arrived from Reval. Our waggon was hitched to it and we set off for Petrograd. We arrived at the Baltic station late on a Saturday night. The train was met by one or two of the customary porters, in expectation of bags and parcels to carry. My German comrades had some heavy baskets which they handed over. Knowing that conditions of life were hard for the workers I proposed giving them part of our "Pyock," and forthwith put all my bread into the pool. A rash act, as I was soon to learn.

The station was deserted, save for some homeless people, who lay about sleeping on the benches in the waiting-halls. Our soldier friend went off to find someone in authority, and finally returned to inform us that, it being Saturday night, everyone had gone home and we could see no one till Monday morning. He led us upstairs in the station building to some unoccupied office rooms, and bade us make ourselves comfortable for the night. Out of nowhere, seemingly, appeared a man with a huge pail of warm "casha" (a kind of porridge). We welcomed this frugal supper and lay down on the tables for the night.

In the morning my soldier companion set out to find the

“International Hotel,” to which we had been directed. After some hours he returned to inform us that he could not locate it. I feared he was like myself—a stranger in a strange city. My German comrades and I determined to set out to find the hotel for ourselves, taking our soldier friend with us. The snow had just lifted and the rain now falling left pools of slush and water in the many holes in the streets. Heaps of collected snow and rubbish were piled up all along the sidewalks, awaiting the communal service to remove them. Through the slush and rain we trudged, until finally we arrived at a red-brick building inside a wooden barrier, which we were informed was “The International Hotel.”

Inside we were led to the room of the Commandant, a young man in military uniform. He sent for an interpreter, who proved to be a Russian-American—only six weeks in the country himself. I explained to him my desire to get a train for Moscow and enquired, in my innocence, if I could get one that night! At that time trains ran at long and uncertain intervals, and only when convenient for the government, but how was I to know?

My American interpreter was one of those thousands of skilled workmen, enthusiastic for the revolution, who had come back to help the new socialist republic. To all my enquiries he shrugged his shoulders. “You don’t need to worry,” he said, “this is a workers’ country. We only work six hours a day. You stay right here, and wait until the morning.”

He led me to a long, narrow room, with four bare walls. He dragged in a spring bed-frame, and later on a bag full of straw, telling me all the time what a wonderful country this was! He next took me to a store-room and handed me over my “pyock”—black bread, cheese, tea and sugar. Where to put it I was at a loss to know. I had no

bag or luggage of any kind. Fortunately, I had retained the bag which contained my ship's biscuits. This I now used to store my rations, which I carried about with me for safety.

This building proved to be not "The International Hotel," but an international emigrants' clearing house. Here were lodged, in long dormitories, whole families who had left America and Europe to come back to the homeland. I counted as many as sixteen families in one long room: eight on each side, each occupying a platform for sleeping purposes—men, women and children. In the communal kitchen, below, I was the centre of interest, as the latest arrival from the old world. They plied me with questions, and we discussed world politics till early morning.

Monday morning I was up early! For washing we had a circular fountain in the middle of the landing. This fountain was provided with ridiculous little spouts. By pressing up a little plug in the tap the water rose in the air, and fell into your hands. As soon as you let go of the plug the water ceased. A ridiculous and insanitary contrivance of the old régime, with which, I was told, was associated some religious fetish.

I fear I worried the officials in my eagerness to get off. My American interpreter was so terribly busy he put me in charge of an immigrant who was to take me to the Smolny Institute. From this comrade I learned all about the international immigrants' clearing centre. It appears that many of those workers who had come back from America were skilled mechanics and machine-men. Industry was at a very low ebb, and with the lack of materials and the scarcity of food, these workers had become a problem, many of them becoming frankly disappointed. Naturally, those of them who could

wanted to get to their home villages, where their parents lived, and where food was more plentiful. This was no easy job in the broken-down condition of transport. Thus many of these workers were obliged to hang around for weeks on end waiting to get away—a source of trouble and inconvenience to the Government.

We walked across the city towards the Smolny Institute, along main streets, down side streets and through narrow turnings. The New Economic Policy had not yet been introduced. Shops were empty and windowless, in many cases. Hoardings and name-boards hanging precariously were swinging in the high wind that was blowing. As we passed along one street a huge board announcing someone's qualifications as a bootmaker came rattling down, just missing me by inches. Thereafter I took to the middle of the road.

At last the Smolny! The cobble-stones in the big square facing the avenue up to the building were, for me, sacred ground. Here decisive battles had taken place. I reconstructed, in imagination, the coming and going of soldiers and sailors; the bursting of cannons and rattling of machine-guns. Inside—Lenin and other great Bolshevik leaders deliberating, preparing and planning the revolution.

A great wooden archway, decorated with red flags and slogans, spanned the entrance to the avenue. Through this, up to the crude statue of Karl Marx, which then stood just inside the iron gates leading into the Institute; past the guard, and we were in the great citadel of the Bolshevik Party. A few enquiries and signing of "propusks" (passes), and I found myself in the secretarial offices of the Communist International.

I was handed over to a comrade who was to see me safely established in the "International Hotel." Outside the

Smolny we clambered into a tram-car. There were no conductors and no fares to be paid. The tram came along, and everyone scrambled in or hung on as best they could, taking care to get off at the nearest stopping place to their destination. People hung on to the steps; on the cow-catcher at the back; beside the driver in front, and anywhere else possible. It was a situation unavoidable in the prevailing circumstances of war communism.

Arriving at the International Hotel, I got a bath—my first real wash for over a week—and a real bed in which to lie down. I felt I wanted to sleep for days on end, but I was keyed up at the realisation that I was in red Petrograd. I was amused on going into the dining-room for dinner. The first impression was a bit disappointing. Here were fine linen on the tables; cutlery and glassware just as in the old régime, with waiters also taken over from the old régime, dressed as usual and making all the usual obeisances. This was not to my liking: it was too bourgeois. The dinner, however, was a compensation, for with all the decorations and appearances of lavishness I had a plate of thick cabbage soup; two thick pieces of black bread and a pat of butter, and a glass of tea without sugar!

From enquiries I learned that a train was going to Moscow on Thursday, but that it was already fully booked, and I would have to wait for another week. I protested, and finally it was suggested that if I could arrange it with an Indian comrade, I might get his platzkart (ticket entitling the passenger to a seat). This did not materialise, but it was agreed that I could come in the same coupé if I cared to lie up in the baggage rack. I protested that I would stand if necessary all the way, but I wanted to travel on the first train. I lay on the rack while the two regular places were occupied by this Indian

and a German woman comrade. I was nearly smothered, and stifled with heat and bad air, but I was going to Moscow! In the morning we arrived at the Baltic, or Windau, station, as it was then named.

The great square in front of the station was crowded with pedlars and speculating merchants of all kinds. My Indian comrade evidently knew his way about. He bargained with a group of droshky drivers who fought with each other for the fare, and finally we drove off to the Hotel Lux. As we were going out of the square I saw the pedlars scattering in all directions. Buying and selling, I learned, was illegal, and a raid was being made by the soldiers to round up the speculators.

During the revolution a number of important buildings had been seized and put to the service of the Government, the local Soviet, the trade unions, and various revolutionary institutions. The Hotel Lux was given over to the Communist International for the accommodation of its workers and foreign delegates. Under the old régime this was one of the fashionable hotels in the famous Tverskaya Street, a stone's throw from the old Governor-General's residence.

My credentials verified, I was fixed up in room 154, and soon settled down. The C.I. apparatus hardly existed then. There was a secretarial office in the Denishney, in the building formerly occupied by the German ambassador, Count Mirbach, until his dispatch by the social revolutionaries, the same group of terrorists who made an attempt upon Lenin's life. Here I presented my credentials, and made my report.



## CHAPTER XVI

### LENIN

THE intervals between important meetings of the Executive Committee afforded me opportunities for studying events which I utilised to the full. I applied myself to learn as much about the revolution as possible. It was difficult to get books and literature generally in English. I used to worry comrades who knew the English language to read from *Pravda* and *Isvestia*; when there were some official, important statements made, we could always depend upon getting the text translated. In addition to talks with responsible comrades belonging to the C.I. or the Russian C.P., who lived in the Hotel Lux, I made the acquaintance of several Russian workers not in the apparatus of either the C.I. or the C.P. From these I gathered a store of information regarding the pre-revolution days; the revolution; the civil war, and the mood of the workers at the moment.

I made a tour of Moscow in a special propaganda tram-car, addressing large meetings in several important centres of the town. I visited workers' clubs and several factories and foundries. The big "Amo" (automobile) works were in a pitiful condition then. Lack of materials and skilled men played an important part in the low output. The comrade in charge, at that time, had apparently worked on the Clydeside, though I had not known him. We soon made fast friends and began a discussion on the cylinders from the foundry, which were giving trouble by

always leaking, when tested. The castings were perfect, and I could only conclude that foreign elements in the water used in the tests had something to do with the defect. But the enthusiasm of those few earnest workers, struggling against great difficulties, was marvellous. Those workers have every reason to feel gratified when they look back and contrast the "Amo" of 1921 with the wonderful "Amo" plant of to-day, renamed "Stalin."

Life in the cities, such as Moscow and Petrograd, was hard in those days. The conditions of civil war were still present. Food and clothing were very scarce. Some weeks the population were on the verge of famine, and eager crowds scanned the bulletins posted up on the walls at intervals, announcing the arrival of train-loads of grain from the provinces.

All municipal work was at a low ebb. Roads, pavements and buildings were crying aloud for repairs. I remember in the course of a walk through the town, in company with an old and responsible party comrade, discoursing on the need for getting on with this important municipal activity, and the need for providing centres of relaxation for the people, apart from the party clubs, and improvised entertainments. His report was apt and pointed. "Why worry," he said, "about holes in the pavement and plaster on the walls, until the food problem is solved? The roads and pavements can wait; hungry people can't wait."

As a foreign delegate I was in a privileged position. I had a room, light, and got a regular "pyock." But this did not blind me to the hardships of the workers, and I always felt glad when I was able to give a comrade visitor a share of my rations. Our hotel was in a deplorable condition, and was infested with rats. Not once, but several times, when I had to be away at evening meetings during meal times, and my "pyock" had been put on

my table, by arrangement, I returned to find the remnants on the floor; the rats had eaten my supper, and I had to go without until next day. Their audacity was amazing. Like tame rabbits, they gambolled about all night, and engaged in boisterous revelry. I always slept with my boots handy at my bedside to scare these nocturnal visitors, lest they became too familiar.

But if living conditions were hard, there was a great joy in labour. I joined with parties of enthusiastic young workers on Saturday afternoons, going on "Subbotniky." We would gather in parties and, mounting a motor waggon, set off to a railway centre to load or unload wood for fuel; or we would engage in clearing away rubbish in the courtyards of the hotel, or other institutions. These "Communist Saturdays" were not only economically useful, but gave a great moral impetus to the non-party members. I think one of the finest pictures to be seen in Russia is the photo of Comrade Lenin, Chairman of the People's Commissars and leader of the Bolshevik Party, engaged in carrying wood along with the other workers in the Kremlin on one of these "Saturday afternoons."

I have already mentioned the conditions of the tramway system, as means of conveyance. Motor cars were few, and these had been confiscated during the revolution from the bourgeoisie. There was no production of motor cars yet. The few that did exist were, naturally, placed at the disposal of the Government department officials. Springs broken, upholstery the worse for wear, faulty tyres—these cars were far from being the luxurious limousines depicted by the bourgeois press abroad. What with these shortcomings, holes in the streets, and no speed limit for reckless drivers, a ride in a car in those days was far from being a luxury.

I remember the excitement running through Moscow

one day on the arrival of the British commercial attaché. He rode up to the Narcomindel (Foreign Office) in an elegant car, dressed in a frock coat and tall hat. That coat and hat, and the car, were subjects of conversation for days afterwards. Tall hats and frock coats were only to be seen in the museums! I have seen more luxury and comfort in the district office of our trade unions in Glasgow. To see the Foreign Minister coming to his office attired like an engineer, bringing his lunch with him, was a wonderful sight to us foreign workers, accustomed to regard Ministers as a caste apart from the people.

Lest it be thought this was due to sheer slovenliness, or even to the conditions of the times, I may say that when in 1930 I had occasions to meet Comrade Tchicherin in conversation at his office, I found the same *proletarian atmosphere* of free access and absence of caste, as in 1921. Marx once said that in bourgeois society a man in uniform counts for more than when in mufti. In proletarian society a suit of dungarees or a leather jacket takes rank with the uniform of a general.

One day we were astonished to see a Leyland omnibus drive up to the Lux. Hitherto we had made our journeys to meetings in open trucks. This, I believe, was the first bus in Moscow, and was in the service of the Comintern. On this particular day we were going to the Smolensk district to a co-operative farm. Big Bill Haywood had just arrived, along with some other Americans. Being an S.L.P. man I had known Bill through the party press, as the secretary of the Western Federation of Miners, and first chairman of the I.W.W. Convention in 1905. We soon became fast friends, and always afterwards when I visited Moscow we spent hours together discussing old times and new problems, whilst munching sunflower seeds, and drinking tea.

On this tour we visited a big factory. This was a curious sight for us. Inside a huge wall, like a miniature Kremlin, was the factory and, running in circular style, were the workers' houses. I reflected on what must have been the slave conditions under Czardom, in this "fortress," with the workers bottled up here, isolated from the rest of the world. They were completely at the mercy of the factory owner, the priest, and the police. Now all was changed. The factory was the workers'. They combined the textile industry with work in the fields. The house of the former manager—an Englishman—was now a children's crèche.

I got talking to three elderly women who were employed in the crèche. They told me they had been working in this house as domestics for fourteen, eighteen, and one for over twenty years. They were enthusiastic in describing how they used to work fourteen and sixteen hours a day, and thought nothing of it. "But look at the young folks nowadays. They work their eight or even six hours and then they play about, go to the pictures, or dance. That is all they think about"—and they genuinely felt a little sad for their younger sisters.

When we had come out of the little meeting place after addressing the assembled workers, as usually happens when foreign workers make a visit, crowds collected round about to chat and look at the visitors. Bill Haywood was a great big fellow and was then developing a paunched stomach—the beginnings of that deadly sugar diabetes that finally caused his death. In his fatherly way, Bill stroked a little chap's head and remarked "there were little boys in America, too, who had no bread." When it was translated the little chap said to his mother: "No wonder. He must have eaten it all up." We often teased big Bill about that joke.

I had a great liking for Bill. He was a big-hearted,

generous soul, with a quiet humour of his own. In a sense his sojourn in Soviet Russia was a tragedy. He had a reputation for being a good proletarian fighter and leader, as he undoubtedly was, especially amongst the Western Federation of Miners. When he came to Moscow the conditions in industry were very bad: lack of materials, equipment, and technical man-power were severe obstacles to the reconstruction of industry. The management by workers' committees, untrained in organisation and direction, was not giving the results necessary. Any foreign worker with technical qualifications had the big opportunity of his life. But, of course, one can't make bricks without clay, and the difficulties were great.

The Don Bas region had coal mines and iron works, but they had suffered from the ravage of the white hordes of Denikin, and from the destruction wrought in driving these White armies into the Black Sea. In the task of directing the reconstruction of the industries of this area big Bill took a hand along with some other American immigrants.

If enthusiasm were enough the Don Bas would have been repaired in no time, for Bill was brimming over with this great project. When I visited him in the evenings for a little chat, the conversation inevitably turned on to the Don Bas scheme. Out would come blue-print charts and diagrams. Spread out on the floor we got down on our knees while Bill traced the interconnection between the coal, iron-ore, furnaces, mills and railroads. He would discourse eloquently on its *potential* capacity for output.

I never learned exactly what happened, but in subsequent visits to Moscow the Don Bas scheme faded out of Bill's conversation. For my part, I suspected that Bill was not cut out for a manager or director of industry. I have often reflected on this matter. A man may be a good

agitator and propagandist, but the management and direction of industry require other qualities. There is no reason why the two should not be combined. They can be, but only if attention is given to the technical and practical side of industry. I fear Bill just missed the technical qualifications in the pursuit of his strenuous agitational work. To me, this appeared to be the tragedy of Bill Haywood.

Whenever a delegate from a foreign party arrived from beyond the frontiers of the republic, it was the practice to arrange for a conversation with Comrade Lenin. Lenin, despite his many responsible duties as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and party leader, was still as keenly interested in the workers' movement abroad as when, in exile, he had made a practice of holding conversations with all kinds of workers who came to visit him. These talks enabled him to keep his finger on the pulse of the international movement, and he maintained this practice until it was physically impossible, on account of his illness.

I was accompanied on my visit by a Norwegian comrade named Friis, and Boris Reinstein, an old S.L.P. comrade from America. All the stories in the English press of Lenin being surrounded by a Chinese guard and, with other Bolshevik Commissars, wallowing in luxury, I found to be sheer spiteful propaganda. Apart from the very necessary precautions against counter-revolutionary agents of the Fanny Kaplan type,\* access to Lenin was as free as to the Foreign Office, to which I have already referred. As a matter of fact, bureaucracy and procrastination of

\* Fanny Kaplan, a young woman belonging to the Socialist Revolutionary Party that took up terrorist activity against the Bolsheviks after October 1917. She shot Lenin just as he was leaving a workers' meeting. A poisoned bullet lodged in his shoulder and hastened his death in January 1924.

the old Russian type were hateful to Lenin. He waged ceaseless war against all such things. Appointments for him were engagements to be honoured. And so to the minute we set out for the Kremlin.

He would be a cynic indeed who was able to enter the Nikolski Gate without some tremor of emotion, for here took place the heaviest fire of the bombardment during the revolution, and much of the fighting for possession of the Kremlin. Passing through the main gateway we came to a second iron-studded doorway. To our left rose an unpretentious-looking building standing opposite the old arsenal with its rows of French cannons captured during the Napoleonic wars of 1812. This building, built in the middle of the eighteenth century, had been since 1860 the High Courts of Moscow. It was now the seat of the Soviet Government. At the far corner were the offices of the Council of People's Commissariats of which Lenin was chairman. Here he worked and lived.

Passing through a little door we mounted a narrow stair, only stopping once to have our passes examined, and came to the secretarial room, where typewriters were noisily at work. Without hesitation one of the secretaries led us to a door at the far end of the room to what was Lenin's personal office, a moderate-sized room and modestly furnished with a dark brown leather suite, a table, office desk, and book-cases.

I had already seen Lenin at meetings and was prepared to meet an unassuming little fellow with auburn hair, rather thin on the top; with a small pointed beard and stubble moustache. Rising from his desk he came forward to greet us with a hearty hand-shake. Drawing forward chairs to his desk he bade us be seated. "When did I arrive?" "Was I well?" "Was I comfortable?" "Did I travel illegally?"



Formalities over, he begged to be excused for not having been able to give much attention to the English situation since his illness. And we settled down to talk. Drawing closer his chair he rested his right elbow on his desk with his right hand shading his right eye, fixing his left eye on me intently, as if not to lose a word of anything this new comrade had to say. And, I have no doubt, to form a personal impression of me. What that was I never learned.

We discoursed on the situation in England and, particularly, the Labour leaders—who they were; their characteristics and the support they had amongst the workers; of the White Russians abroad and their counter-revolutionary role. Notwithstanding his statement that he had not been able to follow events closely in England, Lenin astonished me by reaching down from his bookshelf some of the latest publications on Bolshevism, in English, which he had been reading.

We talked about the trade unions and the Labour Party, and their relative strength and influence in the working-class movement; about the Communist Party—who was who in the party, and its influence amongst the workers. Lenin was extremely interested in the miners' movement, particularly of South Wales, and I promised to give him more information from time to time. A few days afterwards, I sent him the following letter, to which he gave a prompt and characteristic reply. I think these letters are of interest, as illustrating Lenin's approach to problems still of vital importance for the English workers.

“Lux 154,

“7-8-21.

“DEAR COMRADE LENIN,

“In a conversation which I had to-day with two of our comrades who are delegates from the Fife Miners' Association,

of Scotland, to the Red Trade Union Congress, I gathered a few notes which are very interesting and I am sure will be instructive to you as to the progress of our movement in Great Britain. You have probably noticed that the South Wales Miners' Federation at its annual conference at Cardiff on July 24th, by a majority of 120 to 63, has decided to affiliate to the Third International. The following notes which I have gathered go far to supplement that decision and to indicate a very healthy movement in England.

“ 1. The comrades were very enthusiastic (when speaking about the strike movements in Fife) on the work that had been done in what they describe as communal kitchens. To begin with, the funds of the Association were very low. There was only £6,000 for 25,000 members. This fund was divided among the local associations on the basis of 11s. per member per week. The following illustration is taken from the district of Methil and Buckhaven. Having discovered that under the Board of Health Act, there were certain powers given to local bodies, they used these powers to the fullest. After registration:

(a) Two and a half pints of milk were secured for infants up to two years of age. From two years to five years sixpence a day was granted in foodstuffs. From five to fourteen years children could be fed at school.

(b) All sick and pregnant women could obtain beef and special wine.

(c) Women who were sick and unmarried were secured similar rations.

(d) In addition to soup which contained 4 lb. of beef to 25 gallons of soup, dry rations were served out to ALL WORKERS who were registered as follows: half-pound of bread, two ounces of tea, one pound of sugar, half-pound of margarine and some syrup.

“ The funds for this latter work were raised by the efforts of the Sports, Entertainments and Lectures Committee. An interesting sidelight was thrown on the attitude of the chief

Labour fakir, William Adamson, who was leader of the Labour Party group in the House of Commons last year. After the liquid resources of the Union were finished, the question of pawning the Union property was raised. Adamson lives in a house that belongs to the Union, and when it was proposed to mortgage it, he tried to get a number of individuals to sign the deed. (Keir Hardie, it appears, had an experience like that, and got his bed and chattels taken by the bailiff.) *The rationing scheme was applied to all workers whether miners or not.* To this Adamson objected and wanted to confine relief to the miners. But he was defeated.

“ The effect of the demand for loans was to cause the petty bourgeois elements to withdraw their money from the local co-operative stores.

“ Another interesting side to the strike was the attitude of the *Defence Force*. At first the marines were drafted into the district. It became so common for the women to walk past the pickets and to carry away coal that it became a scandal and the marines had to be removed. The policemen also were sympathetic, and, indeed, in many cases helped the women to fill their buckets, fraternised with the men, and wished them luck.

“ When the marines were replaced by the soldiers things were no better for the bosses. Demonstrations were held as near the mines as possible and within the hearing of the soldiers. By means of gummed labels with ‘ Don’t Shoot ’ appeals stuck all over the place, cartoons taken from the *Communist* pasted up on the walls, and a free distribution of leaflets among the soldiers, good work was done to undermine the morale of men who were not too keen on their job. The soldiers got dissatisfied with being confined to their posts and demanded relief. When they got off duty the miners fraternised with them; got up boxing competitions; entertainments and all kinds of sports and created an *esprit de corps* which so alarmed the officers that they took away vital parts of the rifles from some of the soldiers and kept others without ammunition.

“ There is one particular case of direct insubordination

occurring at a place called Fallin, in Stirlingshire. A number of scabs were working here and a mass demonstration was held to clear them out. When the strikers moved forward to shift the blacklegs the officer gave the command to fire. A soldier shouted to the crowd that they had no ammunition. Another soldier held up a white flag. The officer's command was obviously a bluff, and the crowd broke through to the scabs.

"The soldiers were found to be singing and whistling the "Red Flag" in the streets, and allowing the strikers all kinds of license. Many of the militant miners had managed to join up in the Defence Corps and in conjunction with the Sinn Fein elements played a good part in this demoralisation.

"With regard to the pumping arrangements, the system of pumping is centralised in the deepest mines so that the water can be dealt with in one place.

"I pass these remarks on to you as given to me by two comrades who occupied official positions and were actively engaged in the strike throughout its duration. I hope you will find them of some interest to you in your estimation of the British movement.

"With Communist greetings,  
"THOMAS BELL."

"To the Comrade Thomas Bell,

"(Lux 154).

"DEAR COMRADE,

"I thank you very much for your letter of 7-8. I have read nothing concerning the English movement last months because of my illness and overwork.

"It is extremely interesting what you communicate. Perhaps it is the beginning of the real proletarian mass movement in Great Britain in the communist sense. I am afraid we have till now in England few very feeble propagandist societies for communism (including the British Communist Party) but no really mass communist movement.

"If the South Wales Miners' Federation has decided on 27-VII to affiliate to the III International by a majority of

120 to 63, perhaps it is the beginning of a new era. (How much miners there are in England? More than 500,000? How much in South Wales? 25,000? How much miners were *really* represented in Cardiff 27-VII-1921?)

“If these miners are not too small minority, if they fraternise with soldiers and begin a *real* ‘class war,’ we ought to do all our possible to develop this movement and strengthen it.

“Economic measures (like communal kitchens) are good but they are not much important *now, before* the victory of the proletarian revolution in England. *Now* the *practical* struggle is the most important.

“English capitalists are shrewd, clever, astute. They *will* support (directly or indirectly) communal kitchens *in order* to divert the attention from *political aims*. What is important is (if I am not mistaken), (1) to create a very good, really proletarian, really mass *Communist Party* in this part of England—that is such party which will *really* be the LEADING force in *all* labour movement in this part of the country. (Apply the resolution on organisation and work of the party adopted by the 3 Congress to this part of your country.) (2) To start a daily paper of the working class, for the working class in this part of the country.

To start it not as a business (as usually newspapers are started in capitalist countries), not with big sums of money, not in ordinary and usual manner—but as an *economic and political* tool of the MASSES in their struggle.

“Either the miners of this district are capable to pay *halfpenny* daily (for the beginning *weekly*, if you like) for their *own* daily (or weekly) newspaper (be it very, very small, it is not important)—OR THERE IS NO BEGINNING of the *really communist mass movement in this part of your country*.

“If the communist party of this district cannot collect few £ in order to publish *small leaflets* DAILY as a beginning of the *really proletarian* communist newspaper—if it is so, if *every* miner will not pay a penny for it, then there is *not serious*, not genuine affiliation to the III Int.

“English Government will apply the shrewdest means in

order to suppress every beginning of this kind. Therefore we must be (in the beginning) very prudent. The paper must be *not too revolutionary* in the beginning. If you will have three editors, at least one might be non-communist (at least two genuine workers). If 9-10 of the workers do not buy this paper, if 2-3 workers  $\left(\frac{120}{120 + 63}\right)$  do not pay special contributions (of one penny *weekly*) for *their* paper—it will be no workers' newspaper.

“ I should be very glad to have few lines from you concerning this theme and I beg to apologise for my bad English.\*

“ With Communist Greetings,

“ LENIN.”

\* In view of the unjustified insinuation made on one occasion that this correspondence was withheld by me and only revealed when Lenin died in 1924, let me say here that the letter was sent home with my correspondence in the normal way, was known to the responsible comrades in London, and in substance was dealt with in my report of the proceedings of the Third Congress of the C.I. to our Executive on my return.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE C.I.

Two great congresses were approaching, the Third Congress of the Communist International, and the First Congress of what was to be The Red International of Labour Unions. The latter congress opened during the progress of the C.I. Congress, so that both were running simultaneously.

By the end of April the delegates began to arrive. Along with our delegates from Great Britain, I witnessed, for the first time, the First of May demonstration in the famous Red Square—the scene of many battles with the Cossacks of the old Czarist régime. At ten minutes to nine, the Chief Commissar for War, with a couple of the staff, mounted on horseback, galloped along the lines for inspection and with a greeting for each battalion. At 9 a.m. sharp, he delivered a May Day message to the troops, and read out the Revolutionary Oath, which was repeated by the soldiers, line by line, concluding with a rolling wave of hurrahs from one end of the line to the other and back again.

In May 1921 the soldiers were badly clothed and had poor equipment. Rough and ready clothing was more in evidence than fine uniforms; in many cases rifles were not even varnished and bore all the evidence of hasty improvisation. But the enthusiasm was wonderfully rich. The greatest thrill I ever got was to see the daring cavalry rough-riders, on their little Siberian ponies,

gallop at full speed past the forum, with their wild "Hurrah!" These scenes will remain vividly in my mind for ever. They imparted to me a proud feeling of real proletarian power and strength—a feeling that the social revolution had indeed opened and come to stay.

I have never shouted so much before or since as I did on that May Day in 1921. From 10 a.m. till 4.30 p.m. the workers were marching past the forum—500,000 in all, that day. Then back again to gather in their clubs for social jollification. What an inspiring spectacle!

I have seen several May Day celebrations since, successively marking the advancing prosperity of the workers' republics. In place of the rough cobble-stones in the streets, with many holes, and with sewer gratings sticking up six or seven inches above the level of the roads (a source of sprained ankles for the foreign workers, unused to cobbled streets), smooth macadam or square granite setts now pave the main arteries of the city, along which fleets of taxi-cabs and automobiles ply in place of the antiquated, ragged, filthy droshkies of the old régime.

The interior of the Red Square is completely transformed. Along the front of the Kremlin wall, the "Brothers' Graves," as the space is called, forms the resting place of over five hundred heroes of the revolution. What was still in 1921 a rough mound of loose earth is now laid out in the form of a well-tended garden. At one end a stone marked the grave of the Russian miner, Artium, and the other six miners, delegates to the Third Congress of the C.I. and the First Congress of the R.I.L.U., killed in 1921 while visiting the mines at Tula, through an accident on the railway, which I believe was an act of sabotage. Amongst these six is a Welsh miner—William Hewlett, of Abertillery—one of our delegates; an old S.L.P. man, and one of the first members of the Executive



Committee of our party. At the other end was a rough granite stone erected to John Reed, who died in 1920 of typhoid fever.

Graves are no longer dug in the Red Square. When leading personalities die their bodies are cremated, and their ashes, in a casket, are set into the wall and marked by a brass plate. Comrade Arthur MacManus, the first chairman of our party, has this distinctive honour.

Just outside the Square, at the entrance through the Iberian Gate, stood a little shrine with some holy relics. In the first days of the revolution a stone inscription was inserted in the wall of a nearby building so that everyone going in or coming out might read—"Religion is the opium of the people." Around the doors of this church beggars used to gather, begging for alms from the few devout worshippers who frequented it daily. Displaying ugly, filthy sores, these professional beggars (common in all Eastern countries) were an eyesore, and like the church itself, a nuisance to the traffic. This little shrine has since been removed as part of the renovation programme of the Moscow Soviet.

In place of the improvised platforms for demonstrations, the beautiful mausoleum in which Lenin lies is designed to provide a tribune from which the revolutionary leaders can review the march past. The Square is as smooth now as a billiard table, and much more convenient for both men and horses in present-day demonstrations.

The May Day celebration in Moscow now is an experience never to be forgotten, and a source of inspiration to workers from abroad. For days before, groups of workers are busy decorating the public buildings with banners and emblems, young fir trees and lights; and suspending across the streets streamers of scarlet cloth, emblazoned with slogans. Great fertility of ideas and artistic resource

are displayed, and I honestly believe no people in the world can equal the Russians in such decorative work.

It goes without saying that all labour is suspended for this, the historic revolutionary day of the world's proletariat. From early morning, between five and six o'clock, contingents of workers—men and women, youths and girls—begin to stream towards the Red Square. Headed by the local party banners, most of which are works of art on silk or velvet, with bands (for each section and nearly every factory has its own band), accordions and balalaikas, round which groups gather to dance as the demonstration slowly moves on, or when a halt is called, and the singing of revolutionary folk songs and socialist songs of all nations, the spectacle is inspiring.

In those early days, one contingent would carry a fantastic effigy of a foreign imperialist politician, another a great portrait of Lenin; some would present tableaux exposing the role of the kulak and the priest, and others would show the progress of the heavy industries and the increasing output of locomotives, turbines and tractors, the growth of electrification, the spread of education. Perhaps the most telling of all at that time was the ridicule heaped on the drunkard, illiterate, slovenly and coarse, showing the effects of vodka on social and personal life, and in industry. No intoxicants were sold on holidays, nor for two days before and after. In this way the diminution of drunkenness was effectively helped, by encouraging the more backward workers to discover that there were nobler and more profitable ways of spending the day.

On they come, streaming in the direction of the six approaches to the Red Square. Each of these approaches is cut off near the entrance by a military cordon, through which special passes are necessary to gain entrance to the Square. This prevents congestion. Within the precincts

of the Square soldiers, sailors, and representative groups of armed factory workers are drawn up. I have mentioned the poor condition of the army with regard to clothes and equipment in 1921. See them to-day! Well clothed, in handsome uniforms, well shod and provided with excellent equipment, a march past of the Soviet infantry is a match for the finest troops of the older capitalist armies. Tanks, machine-guns, cannons and technical appliances that were a dream to the men of 1921, make an impressive display, while overhead a fleet of aircraft manœuvres and dives and twists, all speaking of the powerful defensive forces of the proletarian government. A comparison of the army of 1921 with that of to-day is a special story of Bolshevik achievement and socialist triumph, not within the compass of this book.

Soon after May Day Moscow seemed filled with a conglomeration of peoples from all over the world. For me, a worker from insular little England, the effect was tremendous. I had not realised before *how* insular we were. The babel of tongues; the characteristic types of peoples; the variety in manners and dress were overwhelming, as, indeed, they must be for the average British worker, who rarely goes abroad and knows no language but his own. Undoubtedly the C.I., in frequently bringing together such a cosmopolitan collection of delegates from the ranks of the workers, is doing a great work in realising true international understanding and the unity of the workers of the world.

The revolution inevitably attracts romanticists, diletanti and all manner of adventurers, who stick at nothing to get there "to have a look round." Our Russian comrades, I am sure, were sorely tried then by such types. The conditions were such that it was difficult to get into the country unless one represented some organisation or

institution. On the other hand, our Russian comrades, ever true internationalists, were anxious to establish contact with the workers of all countries, and since many of the sections and groups had come into existence only since the October days, the personnel of the sections was often unknown. Many of the people who turned up were either unrepresentative—though that did not prevent them from making extravagant claims—or were there as tourists, sometimes on behalf of their capitalist governments! Here and there, one of these would find himself in the hands of the vigilant militia and be promptly sent out of the country.

These remarks do not apply so much to the C.I. as to the other organisations, since the Communist Parties were already becoming definite organisations with functioning committees and officials. It is fair to say that many individuals who did reach Moscow under doubtful circumstances, so far as representation goes, were genuinely won over to the party or the red Labour unions. Others, however, took fright at what they saw and at what they were expected to do if they were to live up to their professions of faith, and went right over into the Social Democratic and Labour Parties and the reformist trade unions.

We in Great Britain suffered much from the wave of romanticism of those days. Quite a group of dilettanti and careerists hung on to our party for a time. A characteristic thing is that most of these were of the ultra-Left variety. The party wasn't revolutionary enough for them! I remember a meeting in the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, to celebrate the November anniversary. I was the principal speaker, and J. W. Jagger, president of the N.U.D.A.W., took the chair. He opened the proceedings by saying, in a loud, stentorian voice: "I am a revolutionary!" (Loud applause.) He repeated it. (Less

applause.) He repeated it again, but this time it fell flat, and a worker remarked from the gallery: "All right. Get on with the meeting."

A few weeks afterwards I was sent to discuss her election address with Ellen Wilkinson, one of the N.U.D.A.W. organisers and a member of the party, who was being put forward as a Parliamentary candidate, and with Jagger. I failed to get either to agree to mention the word Communist in the election address. They were terrified to mention that they were connected with the C.P. in case it should lose them votes.

This same Ellen Wilkinson had attended the first congress of the R.I.L.U. She could not understand the New Economic Policy. She thought it was going back to capitalism. So much concerned was she for the revolution that she wrote an article and sent it over to our party organ, *The Communist*, urging that the time was coming when the Communist International would have to go into opposition to the Soviet Government to preserve socialism!

But while we had many of this romantic and careerist type visiting Moscow, the great majority were devoted workers—honest proletarians, who came with genuine enthusiasm, if not much theoretical understanding, to the first socialist country in the world: their fatherland.

One day I was in "Bill" Haywood's room, having a chat, when in bounced a stocky little Japanese worker. His clothes were rough and the worse for wear, and his boots were down at the heel. But his eyes were sparkling; his dark, swarthy, unshaven face radiating delight. It was quite some minutes before "big Bill" broke away from a real comradely embrace, and the plying of questions, to introduce me.

This worker came from a lumber camp in the Western States of America. He had been over a year on the way.

He was a member of the I.W.W. A true "Wobbly," he had worked his passage over to Vladivostok and from there had walked most of the way. He had actually set out to attend the Second Congress of the C.I., and now he had arrived—in time for the Third. Even more perilous journeys had been undertaken by workers coming from countries in Europe and beyond, where associations with the C.I. or a visit to Moscow meant gaol and, in some cases, death. Such proletarian devotion and risk for the revolution was a great inspiration, and offset the nausea from the romanticists and careerists.

Prior to the opening of the congress, a series of enlarged executive meetings was held in a building opposite the House of Nobles. Here I met, together for the first time, most of the leaders of the communist movement in all countries. Some of these are still with us to-day; others have taken different roads, but that is not part of my immediate story. Coming fresh from industry I formed unfavourable opinions about some of these leading comrades—in some cases with unwarranted class prejudice, and these I abandoned: others I held, quite justifiably—notably of the Frossard and Souvarine type (France). Instinctively, I had always distrusted leaders of professional and petty-bourgeois extraction. I never could bring myself to believe such people could genuinely understand the feelings and moods of the workers. Since then I have met many notable exceptions, but I still believe, if I had to make a choice in carrying out serious, responsible work, I would plump for a proletarian every time, unless the others had been exceptionally well tried and proven sound.

These meetings were very lively, and at times heated. The position in Italy, France, Czechoslovakia, and Germany called for the most serious examination. In

each of these countries social-democratic influences were still very strong. In reality the struggle was a question of winning over to the C.I. the many workers in the socialist parties still attached to the old leaders, who, themselves, were unable to break away from the old moorings—Serrati, in Italy, who commanded a large centrist following; Frossard and Loriot in France, and Smeral in Czechoslovakia. (The last-named did come over openly.) It was a testing time, when one had to face the prospect of deep political splits.

Of course, the social democrats of the “independent” and “centrist” type were a problem. They wanted to dissociate themselves from the betrayals of the Second International, and to flirt with the Russian revolution. They objected to centralised direction; to putting the Soviet system in sharp opposition to the bourgeois democratic system and, therefore, to the strict conditions of affiliation to the Third International. Such types of leader were Maxton and Wallhead, in England; Serrati, in Italy; Longuet, in France; Crispian and Levy, in Germany; Adler, in Austria, etc. This type of leader—neither fish, flesh, nor good red-herring—eventually formed a Two-and-a-half International\*—a fitting climax to their see-saw attitude.

Another problem was the “ultra-lefts” in Germany—the Communist Labour Party group, which had strong syndicalist and anarchist tendencies. I concurred in the

\* The nickname given to a short-lived International which comprised a number of sections of the Social Democratic Parties who pursued a “centrist” policy, and having its headquarters in Vienna. The Two-and-a-half International while refusing the path of revolutionary struggle followed by the Third International, pretended to a more “advanced” position than the Second International. After an existence of a little over two years (1919-22) it merged again into the newly-formed Labour and Socialist International which took the place of the old Second International.

final decision to give this group three months in which to unite with the other communists in Germany into a single party. Throughout all this discussion I watched with intense interest the tact, common sense, and flexibility combined with firmness of Comrade Lenin, who could reach out the hand of comradeship to wavering elements, and at the same time firmly reprove the impetuosity of a Bela Kun, and others who were over-zealous in their condemnation of the centrist policy of the Italians.

On June 21st the formal opening of the Third Congress took place in the great hall of the former Imperial Court Theatre (the Bolshoi Theatre). It was a joy to see this former home of Czarist pomp and luxury occupied by the representatives of the disinherited and poor of the world. The dazzling brilliance of the huge chandeliers of a thousand lights shone on the great stage, literally crowded behind the front row of speakers: a great dramatic representation of revolution triumphant over at least one-sixth of the earth's surface.

The heavy, dark red curtains draping the gold-tasselled boxes and terraces, conjured up in the mind the opulence and luxury of the once-powerful régime of slavery. In the centre, the private box of the Czar, which formerly carried above it the golden double-headed eagle with outspread wings—the symbol of tyranny and bloodshed—was occupied by a mixed group of the proletariat of all countries; in place of the double-headed eagle appeared a plaque of the world with the hammer and sickle, the symbol of proletarian unity and socialism.

The proceedings were opened by a thunderous singing of "The International," accompanied by an augmented orchestra of over a hundred and fifty instruments in the well occupied by the orchestra. Then, in memory of the heroes who died for the revolution, the Russian Funeral



March was played. I saw big, strong workers, who had experienced anguish and suffering a thousand times, and even faced death, with tears streaming down their rough, weather-beaten cheeks, unable to hide their emotion. I never hear that Funeral March but I remember that night.

The fraternal speeches over, a group of talented artists, including the great singer Chaliapine, kept the huge audience enthralled till two o'clock in the morning. It is a commentary on the behaviour of people like Chaliapine, who were given great privileges—their private homes were preserved for them and they were honoured as the people's bards—that they should prefer to display their art before the tawdry, debauched bourgeoisie of a decadent world, rather than participate in the new, creative world where art, music and the drama have become a living part of the soul of the people. Fortunately, new and equally great singers are rising to voice the deeper emotions of a free people.

The next evening the congress proper began in the Andreyev Hall in the Kremlin. The dais in this hall of magnificence, where the Czars had held their receptions for the nobility, and great affairs of state—a hall of golden pillars and a multitude of crystal candles—was still intact, with the canopy of the throne complete. The adjoining rooms were still almost as if their occupants had just left them. The Czar's and Czarina's bed-chamber and bed; the dressing-rooms; banqueting halls and staterooms, filled with magnificent furniture, now covered over with white canvas to protect the lacquer and gold facings, we used as ante-rooms for committees of the congress. I felt a great thrill that I, an iron-moulder, brought up in the poverty-stricken east end of Glasgow, should now be walking with other representatives of the working class

where the Czars and the nobles of the hated Russian Empire had lived and held sway over millions for so many generations—and that at last the dawn of socialism had really appeared.

The glass doors along one side lead to a long stretch of terrace, which affords a magnificent panoramic view of the Moscow river that winds past the Kremlin. The Kremlin is situated on the highest of a series of hills upon which the city is built. Away beyond the river lies the north part of the city, with its hundreds of churches—their blue, grey, green and golden domes glittering in the clear summer sky; flashing back the scintillating rays of a glorious sun. Many of these churches, their congregations having dwindled away before the advance of literacy and scientific culture, have been removed to make room for the reconstruction of the city, or been transformed into workers' clubs and recreation rooms. In contrast, I have stood on this terrace in the silence of a winter night, gazing on the city muffled in snow—a fairy-like spectacle of dancing lights in a vast grotto.

It is no part of my intention here to dwell upon the complex political and technical questions of the Third Congress. I have done that elsewhere. Suffice it to say that I followed events closely, and took part in all the proceedings, and made my modest contributions to the discussions. I own to a certain impatience, which I showed and openly expressed, at the lack of attention to the workers' movement in Great Britain, which, I held, and still hold, played a big part in the fateful events on the Continent. But, looking back, I believe congress was correct in dealing decisively first with the movement in Germany, Italy, and on the Continent in general.

Especially important was our attitude to the syndicalists and anti-parliamentarians. The Russian comrades were

involved in a struggle with the so-called Workers' Opposition, then beginning to show itself. This faction was active during the congress, and played upon the sentiments of those anarcho-syndicalist elements attending the R.I.L.U. Congress. A "round-robin" was prepared and a deputation organised to visit Lenin to discuss the question of the imprisonment of the anarchists, and to plead for their release. In the deputation was Tom Mann, who was still anti-parliamentarian. The deputation got little satisfaction. Lenin was able to show them, from facts and information known to the Government, that these anarchists had been actively engaged in counter-revolutionary work, and they could not, and would not, be released.

I was eager to hear from Tom the results of his interview. To my amusement he was quite excited, not at the rebuff over the anarchists, but because he had been asked to make a report on the Eastern question! It was nine o'clock in the morning, and his report was due at ten or eleven o'clock. Tom had been awake all night collecting his thoughts and collating material. I collaborated, to help him to be ready in time.

Tom got going in fine style, but with his customary eloquence he spoke longer than the time allotted to him. The result was a decision by the president to limit the other speakers in discussion to five minutes each. The Indian leader and other delegates from colonial countries protested vigorously and refused to speak unless they were given ample time. What threatened to be an incident was smoothed out by a tactful compromise in favour of the colonial delegates.

Besides leading our delegation, and acting in a secretarial capacity, I was appointed to make a report and prepare a resolution on unemployment for the

International Trade Union Congress. This entailed much research work, discussion in committee, and preparation, so that I was working almost night and day for the three weeks' duration of these congresses. But my task was a bagatelle to that of the Russian comrades, who have an astonishing capacity for conference work and the discussions involved. I have often marvelled at their amazing vitality and energy.

The congresses finished, some executive meetings took place to clear up the unfinished work of the commissions, and to set in motion the decisions of congress, and then I made for home to give my report, bringing with me all the principal resolutions. In those days getting away from Moscow was as arduous a job as getting in. There was no regular train service. Trains were few and only ran on special occasions. Nobody knew exactly when a train would go out, and so I had to wait for nearly ten days after I had decided to leave.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PARTY'S BAPTISM

LEAVING MOSCOW was one of the most amusing experiences I can remember. It was finally fixed for me to depart one Tuesday afternoon in September. Along with two other English delegates, Page Arnot and Olive Budden, I got my rations ("pyock") for two days, said good-bye to all our friends, and set off in a truck to the station. The train was all ready for going, and we got into the end carriage and settled down for our journey. As the two bells went a sudden commotion began in our carriage, and we saw two friends grip their bags and dash out and along the platform into another carriage, just as the third bell went, and the train started off.

To our confusion, as we looked out of the window to wave good-bye, we saw the train move off without our carriage. We were left behind. We thought: "Perhaps we will be hitched on to other carriages. Maybe there is another train." We waited in a state of blissful ignorance to see what would happen. Finally, an engine came along; our carriage was coupled on to it and we were off—but, only to be shunted into a siding and left there! Nobody approached us to tell us what had happened or to take the slightest notice of us. About eight or nine o'clock in the evening we managed, after frantic efforts, to get into touch with some responsible comrades in the C.I., who sent a truck to collect us and our baggage and take us back to the hotel, where we had a good laugh. Apparently

there was no "propusk" to take the carriage we were in.

We were subsequently informed the next train would be on Thursday. Thursday came and our departure was postponed till the following Tuesday. On the Tuesday we packed up again, and duly got our "pyock." As we stood at the bottom of the stairs of the hotel awaiting our conveyance, we were told we couldn't leave for another few days. So back we went again to our rooms to settle down for another week, when finally we were successful in getting off. What a change to-day! For reliability, speed and comfort the Soviet railway service is one of the finest in the world.

Leaving the Soviet Union is a real wrench. I remember to this day the strange welling up of emotion I experienced as we neared the last frontier post, just such emotions as I imagined the one-time forced emigrants experienced as they left their native land to go into the world of the unknown. The contrast, however, is now accentuated by the fact that to-day there are really two worlds—the Soviet Union of socialism, freedom and liberty, and the capitalist world of slavery and exploitation. Those who have crossed those frontiers in the days before the war in 1939 will have seen symbolised in the white epaulettes and steel swords and servile saluting of the capitalist frontier station guards the difference in the two systems. Once over the frontier all the bourgeois features of class distinction and behaviour appear; private property, buying and selling for profit and aggrandisement hit one in the eye. Only the philistine bourgeois gives a sigh of relief: the proletarian carries a determination to smash the capitalist system at all costs.

The five months I had been away from England were crowded with events of tremendous importance for the party. Our paper, *The Communist*, jumped to a circulation

of 60,000 a week. It carried a biting satire and exposure of the trade union and Labour Party leaders, in columns and cartoons, at once deadly in its criticism and instructive to the workers in its well-informed exposures.

The party propaganda and agitation became so effectual that the Government decided on striking a blow that would seriously cripple it, or put it out of action for a time. A corps of special branch officers, led by Chief Inspector Parker, swooped down on the headquarters, ransacked the premises, stripped the very walls of posters and photographs, and arrested Comrades Albert Inkpin and Bob Stewart—the excuse being the publication of the Thesis and Resolutions of the Second Congress of the C.I. Both comrades were imprisoned. I believe over the year nearly seventy arrests and convictions were made.

These events coincided with the historic fiasco of the Triple Alliance, which *The Communist* exposed ruthlessly, prior to and during the fateful “Black Friday,” when the Alliance collapsed by reason of the leaders shrinking from the challenge of the bourgeoisie.

Perhaps it is putting it too generously to say that the leaders of the Triple Alliance “shrank.” We have here, in fact, one more example of that cankerous corruption of the British Labour leaders which has been so deadly for our movement. Here we had a great, powerful organisation of the mine-workers faced with a definite worsening of their standard of living conditions. It had long been the practice of the employing class to take one industry at a time when attacking. The experience of the workers in this connection popularised the idea of a unity of forces. The idea materialised in the formation of an alliance between the miners’, railwaymen’s, and transport workers’ unions; a formidable bloc of workers in three key industries.

At a great conference of the National Union of Railwaymen, 90 per cent. of the branches supported a resolution to the effect that "the miners must be supported in their struggle by joint action, and all the power of the N.U.R. must be used." The Transport Workers' Federation passed a resolution to the same effect. Within a few moments of these historic resolutions being passed, the miners' officials agreed to parley with the owners, in the presence of a Government representative, and to negotiate on the basis of a 25 per cent. reduction.

On Friday, April 10th (1921), the Triple Alliance sent out provisional notices for strike action for Tuesday, giving the Government four clear days' notice to prepare. J. H. Thomas, for the N.U.R., and the officials of the Transport Federation, were actually in favour of a full week's notice. The four days' decision was a compromise. On Monday the miners' E.C. met the coalowners and Lloyd George, and by twelve votes to eight agreed to consider a reduction of wages "comparable to the fall in the cost of living."

On Tuesday the miners E.C., headed by Frank Hodges, visited Lloyd George with a proposal for a "pooling arrangement, to secure peace in the coalfields for five or six years." Lloyd George said that the Cabinet was against a "pool"; that the Government was prepared for six weeks to break the fall in the worst-affected districts, on condition that at the end of that time the owners' rates should apply. This meant a lock-out.

The miners' leaders protested and went to the Triple Alliance with a request for a strike on the Wednesday. Thomas and Williams explained that there was not time to call a strike, but, apparently, only time to call off any action, which they did, and then began discussions on the merits of a lock-out. As a matter of fact, Thomas and



Williams had gone, in secret, to see the Prime Minister, and effected a compromise on the question of the safety men being allowed to resume work. This was described in *The Communist* as one of the greatest acts of treachery to the working class of Great Britain. Bob Williams was then a member of our party, and for his part in the business he was expelled.

The effectiveness of the Editorial exposure and the brilliant satirical cartoons of "Espoir" (Will Hope) led to an action for libel being taken out by J. H. Thomas against *The Communist*, which had been severely lampooning him for his treachery to the workers. A decision, of course, was given in favour of Thomas. He was awarded £2,000 damages.

It was the party's baptism as a revolutionary organisation. From its experiences it became necessary to make drastic changes in its methods of working and organisation.

My report to the Central Committee on the International Congresses and their resolutions, especially the resolution on organisation, pointed to the necessity of breaking away from the old geographical socialist branch type of organisation, and for the institution of group and collective direction; furthermore, the necessity of transforming our party organ from the old socialist type of propagandist journal to a new type of paper that would become a party organiser, agitator and newspaper. I wrote a series of articles for *The Communist* popularising these views, which I had discussed at length with Comrade Kùsinen during his preparation of the Thesis on Organisation, adopted at the Third Congress. But it was not until the next year, at the St. Pancras Conference, March 19th, 1922, that the decision was taken to make a decisive change. At this conference a special commission, comprising

R. P. Dutt, H. W. Inkpin, and Harry Pollitt, was appointed to examine the whole party organisation and make proposals for bringing it into line with the Thesis of the Third Congress of the C.I. on Organisation.

I must record here an event of political importance for our party—viz. the by-election at Caerphilly, South Wales, in August 1921. In Caerphilly, where the miners are the largest and the most compact section of the population, they had been grossly betrayed by a cowardly leadership. As a result of the recent defeat a spirit of gloom and despair was abroad. The I.L.P. had taken advantage of the division in the official ranks of the miners to bring forward a Baptist lay-preacher and school teacher and get him adopted as the Labour candidate.

By going straight into the contest we were able to expose the whole system of parliamentary corruption during the period of the Coalition Government, and at the same time reveal to the disgusted miners who had betrayed them during their struggles with the mineowners, and why. Later the party adopted the policy of working for the return of Labour candidates, while at the same time criticising and exposing Labour Party policy, in order that workers who still followed the Labour leaders might have practical proof that our criticisms were well founded. But the fact that we got 2,592 votes in opposition to a Labour candidate in the course of a three weeks' campaign in Caerphilly was a useful indication of the possible support for our party in the constituency.

## CHAPTER XIX

### DIFFICULT DAYS FOR THE SOVIET WORKERS

EARLY in 1922 it was decided to send MacManus and me to attend the enlarged meeting of the E.C. of the C.I., and that I should remain in Moscow as party representative. After some delay I duly received the visas on my passport, but the German Consul flatly refused to grant MacManus a visa. We thereupon decided to go to Paris and try our luck there; and were successful. Without difficulty Mac got his visa, and within a couple of days we went to book our tickets for Berlin, only to learn that a general strike of railwaymen had broken out in Germany, and booking was impossible for a few days. We decided to wait until the Friday.

We occupied separate single rooms, next door to each other, in a little hotel near the Place de la Concorde. One morning a knock came at my door: "Two gentlemen to see you, sir," said the maid. "Show them up," I replied, and in came two French C.I.D. men. Apparently it was the practice of the police to visit hotels regularly, looking for undesirable foreigners—a warning to politicals to keep clear of hotels! They asked for my passport, which I duly produced. They then plied me with questions, the chief of which were: "Are you a trade unionist?" "Do you know Jack Hayes, the organiser of the policemen's union?" (Hayes, apparently, had turned up at Marseilles and given them the slip, according to the police story.) Finally they asked: "Did I know who was next door?"

“ Yes,” I replied, “ a Mr. MacManus.” They went to “ Mac ” and put a whole series of questions to him. They refused to believe that this little fellow was MacManus, and came back to me, insisting that I was MacManus, the chairman of the Communist Party. They left, not quite convinced. We thereupon decided to quit the hotel at once, and took railway tickets to Cologne, which was as far as the railway officials would book us.

After a delay of two days in Cologne we got through to Berlin. In Berlin we were held up on account of “ Mac’s ” Polish visa, and as my German visa expired the next day I decided to go on alone, in case I was held up. When the train drew into the Friedrichstrasse station, the carriage opposite me was in darkness. Presuming that it would be duly lighted up, I got in with an attaché case to claim a seat, leaving “ Mac ” to put in my bag. I went along the corridor to look for a seat in a lighted compartment, when suddenly the train moved off. Dashing back to make sure my bag was all right, I found, to my consternation, that it wasn’t there. Nor could I look out of the windows, which were sealed—as is the custom in winter. Apparently the conductor, seeing my bag in the carriage and nobody in the vicinity, decided to throw it out on to the platform. After an altercation with officials, it occurred to someone standing by that if “ Mac ” took a taxi-cab he might catch my train up at Alexander station. This he did. Leaping out of the taxi, past the barrier, with officials running after him, I saw, to my delight and merriment, “ Mac ” with my bag. Just in time, for we were signalled to be off again.

But my troubles were not over by any means. Arriving at Eydtkuhnan, I learned that the train went no farther. I must get out and cross the frontier into Lithuania in a short train consisting of dilapidated coaches. This I did.

Inside the customs room there were only a half-dozen passengers. It was midnight and I must wait till the afternoon of next day for my train. I approached a fellow-traveller to find out if he could speak English. Fortunately he knew enough to understand me. He was in a similar predicament to myself. We set out to look for a place to sleep. Near the station was a building with all the appearance of an hotel. In we went. It was like walking into a shanty in the wild west. Seated at little tables were groups of three and four unkempt men, drinking and talking animatedly. We pushed our way between the tables, and my friend, who spoke German, enquired from the man behind the counter for a bed. We were invited behind the counter and through a back kitchen to a hen's ladder, which led to a loft overhead—a kind of lumber-room, where our host and his wife, tumbling over each other in politeness, assured us of all the comforts of a first-class hotel! But the sight and smell of the place were enough for us, and we beat a hurried retreat, to the mutterings of the landlord, which I did not understand, but which I divined from his expression were not complimentary.

We went in the direction of the village—a collection of wooden houses which seemed to me to be all bent and twisted with the prevailing winds. It was a glorious winter night; clear, crisp and dry. The thick snow glistened from the roofs under a faint moon and, beneath our feet, crunched and echoed down the street. A two-horse sleigh, with a young couple in it, slid past us, with tinkling bells. Away across a field was the silhouette of another sleigh, with bells tinkling and a light swinging from the wooden collar that binds the shafts of the carriage. I felt indifferent to going indoors.

Looking up a side street we spied a sign of what proved to be a café. Here we were more fortunate. The place had

all the appearance of a restaurant and hotel. Again we were led through a back kitchen and up a wooden staircase to a big loft that was partitioned off with rough boards to make accommodation for visitors. From our room a door led into another room which was occupied by a soldier and a lady, who had to pass through ours to get to theirs.

In a corner of the room was one of those stoves peculiar to Germany. This consists of a long square chimney with a little closed-in fireplace, nine or ten inches square, situated near the middle. The heat from short wooden logs is held by the bricks and is diffused through the room. Some of these chimney stoves, in the better-class houses and hotels, are charmingly ornamented with coloured tiles and are quite pleasant. But this was a rough brick arrangement, not at all attractive; broken in places and daubed up with mud. To aggravate things the smoke was trapped and came back on us, making the room like a blacksmith's shop.

We got close up to the stove and began chatting, as far as our language limitations would permit. We exchanged English words for Russian, my companion—a Russian from Petrograd—being keen on picking up what words he could. Finally we began undressing. To my amazement my companion started to undo all kinds of ladies' silk underclothing and stockings, which he had fastened round him to evade customs duties. From the guarded conversation which we carried on, I gathered he was a speculator. Certainly he was not a Communist Party man. This I found out from various questions I put to him.

The next day, after a stroll round the village, I made for the station and took a seat in the buffet awaiting the train. It being a frontier station a lot of shunting of waggons and carriages went on, and actually my train

was at the platform a few minutes before I realised it. What was my astonishment when suddenly the door of the buffet was opened and in walked "Mac." He was full of excitement, and began rattling off a story of how he had walked into what proved to be a customs officer's room, where he was challenged for trespassing. Unable to make himself understood, he was taken to the station commandant's room, where he was interrogated by two or three officials, who tried him with several languages. One chap, who knew a few words of English, saw through the mistake and he was released. It was then he had made his way to the buffet. At all of which we had a good laugh.

When I arrived at Riga it was already too late to get my passport put in order, while the Moscow train was due to leave late that night, with perhaps three days to wait before the next one was due to leave. Trains were still very irregular. I therefore decided to take my chances of getting through. How I did this I prefer for obvious reasons to leave undivulged, but it was amusing and exciting while it lasted.

Across the Latvian frontier our train was held up for a considerable time by the O.G.P.U. officials. It transpired that the "provodnik"\* (each carriage has a "provodnik," or conductor) on our carriage was in the habit of doing a little contraband business. He had been detected, and when the bottom of the seat in his special coupé was opened up it was found that he had all kinds of foodstuffs and merchandise concealed, for speculation. Sections of his coupé were unscrewed and several parts of electrical instruments were discovered. An official of the O.G.P.U.

\* The "Provodnik" controls the carriage; keeps it clean, and attends to the wants of the passengers, providing beds, tea, etc., and is generally at the service of the travellers.

travelled with him to Moscow where, no doubt, he was appropriately punished.

Arrived in Moscow, we were soon installed in our hotel. We were given a large room with a little off-shoot containing two beds. The comfort of those beds was usually an uncertain quantity. They consisted of an iron frame, three feet broad, with a spring mattress six or seven inches deep. Sometimes one got one with broken springs, in which event it was like lying on a bag of coals. If they were newly sprung they were rounded on the top. The bed "Mac" had was of the latter description. Being rather tired after our long journey, we went to bed early and were soon fast asleep. Suddenly the noise of a dull thud on the floor awakened me. This was "Mac." He had rolled off his bed on to the floor. He sat up for a moment, dazed; then, pulling the quilt about him, he lay down to sleep again, until I shouted for him to get up.

Putting out the light we went to sleep again, when—crash! A big slab of the ceiling plaster came thundering down on to "Mac," accompanied by a rush of water. Needless to say, he jumped out of bed this time. So did I. I dashed upstairs to stop the water, but could get no answer to my knocking on the door of the room immediately above ours. After that we shifted our beds into the the next room, and went to sleep. In the morning we learned that the occupants of the room upstairs—two Chinese comrades—had gone to bed leaving their water tap dripping. The basin—a tiny, enamelled pottery thing—had overflowed and the water had seeped through the floor.

The Executive meeting was held in one of the large ante-rooms of the Sverdloff University Hall, in the Kremlin—in all, thirty-eight delegates from the different



countries. The principal questions discussed were the new economic policy in the R.S.F.S.R.; the tactic of the united front adopted in December 1921; the Russian famine in the Volga region, and the report of conference on unity between the Second, the Two-and-a-half, and the Third (Communist) Internationals. A dramatic moment in the proceedings was the arrival of nine members of the Hungarian party who had been sentenced to death by the White Guards, and had escaped.

Shortly after this meeting a great state trial was opened in Moscow. This was the trial of the twenty-two social revolutionaries.

In Petrograd, after the October revolution, the agents of the British and French Military Missions openly organised opposition to the new Soviet Government, mobilising, arming and inciting the cadets and bourgeois youth generally. The Social Revolutionaries took to deeds. They sent special detachments into Soviet institutions to sabotage them and prevent their functioning; others went into the army, to collect information; still others into the countryside, inciting the peasants to burn granaries; blow up railways and bridges, and murder Soviet officials. Comrades Volodarsky and Uritsky were assassinated. Comrade Lenin was nearly murdered. They assisted the British at Archangel, the Japanese in the Far East, and everywhere carried on this counter-revolutionary work, freely accepting money and material help from the imperialist governments and former owners. Now twenty-two of their leaders found themselves before the revolutionary proletarian court—haughty, defiant, and without remorse for their behaviour, with Vandervelde and Theodor Liebknecht (brother of the great Karl Liebknecht) as their legal defenders. It was characteristic of the leniency of the proletarian government that the great

majority of them got off with varying sentences of imprisonment.

I was cited as a witness against the British intervention in Murmansk, and the part played by the British Government in the counter-revolution. For this purpose I collected a whole series of documents proving the complicity of the British Coalition Government and its Labour and trade union allies in the plotting and conspiring to overthrow the Soviet Government. But this is a special story, that has received separate treatment in a book by W. P. and Zelda Coates.\*

This trial was my first experience of what a proletarian court trial is like. Imagine the great Hall of the Nobles. On the platform sits the court—five judges, four men and one woman, dressed in ordinary working attire, behind a simple table covered with red cloth, on which are papers, water jugs, glasses and ash trays. To the right, looking from the body of the hall, sit the prosecuting counsel and his assistants; to the left, the prisoners, sitting, chatting and smoking as in a committee meeting. In the front, facing the judges, a tribune for each speaker as he makes his or her defence. At the back of the platform, and beside the prisoners, stand soldiers of the Red Army with fixed bayonets. The body of the hall, and gallery, are closely packed by workers—some thousands—who listen intently each day, as the story of conspiracy and murder is unfolded, bit by bit, from the confessions of the prisoners themselves. Interjections, points of order, and corrections are freely bandied about until one wonders if this is really a great court trial or a great political conference. What a contrast from the closed, intimidating, stuffy atmosphere of the bourgeois court, where ceremony, uniform, officialdom, is designed to overawe the prisoners.

\* *Armed Intervention in Russia (1918-22)*.



SEN KATAYAMA

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During this summer (1922), I visited the town of Tver, in company with the veteran revolutionary Japanese leader, Sen Katayama, and others. We were given a wonderful reception by the workers of Tver. A huge crowd marched to the outskirts of the town to meet our autobus. Across the road a high archway was improvised, decorated with green branches and red banners bearing words of welcome in our respective languages. After formal greetings and handshaking, the workers formed into a procession and, headed by a military band, we marched to the centre of the town. From the balcony of the town hall we made short speeches. We had to cut them short for a veritable deluge of rain fell and we could not ask the workers to wait, though they were only too willing.

We then adjourned to the headquarters of the Red Army, where we were guests for the two days we were there. As the guests of honour we sat beside the commander of the regiment. Dinner over, we had speeches and a sing-song. To have heard the mixed voices of those lusty young fellows singing the revolutionary folk songs, their harmony and deep proletarian feeling, will be a joy forever. After each speech a half-dozen boisterous youngsters would catch hold of the speaker and, forming a chair with their arms, would throw him up in the air until he pleaded for them to stop—everyone laughing and enjoying the joke.

A visit to the living quarters of a Soviet regiment is a study in contrast between the life of a Red soldier and the life of an English Tommy. To begin with, there is none of the domineering caste atmosphere between officers and rankers. One gets the sense of a great communal family of brothers, where discipline is nevertheless seriously observed.

In addition to their technical training, facilities are

afforded and the widest encouragement given to every kind of humanistic study. Here was one comrade studying mathematics; another the German language; another painting (he showed us some scenes he had painted of the Paris Commune). We came across one comrade deeply engrossed in Sidney Webb's *History of Trade Unionism*. It was amazing to hear him plying question after question on English trade unionism. Political educational studies are a great favourite with all the Red Army. Of course, political knowledge is encouraged in the armies of imperialism, too, for war is only the continuation of politics by other means. But this knowledge is restricted entirely to the officer caste. For the mass of the soldiers, political education is of the narrow, nationalist type, carefully prepared to make the soldiers good patriots, for "my country right or wrong."

In the Red Army, class-consciousness and understanding are cultivated freely amongst the great masses on the basis of proletarian internationalism. Its textbooks are the history of the proletarian class struggle in all lands; its theoreticians are Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Such an army is unique in human history; a working-class army with the world as its country, and socialism its objective.

I must say here that I was in Moscow in 1922 when the first news of the seriousness of the drought came through, and I can testify to the prompt measures taken by the Government, within its means, to meet the situation. The position was indeed desperate. Ten provinces, involving a population of 10,000,000, were stricken. The internal resources of the country were at an extremely low ebb. Industry was almost at a standstill; transport was negligible and, therefore, unable to effect a rapid distribution of the food available in more fortunate regions. Sabotage

and deliberate destruction by kulak elements, encouraged by the counter-revolutionary agencies in the countryside, was the order of the day. Added to all this was the policy of blockade by the imperialist countries following the collapse of their military intervention. Even medical supplies were held up—a form of human succour recognised as an elementary ethical principle in ordinary warfare on the battle-field. That the Soviet system survived this catastrophic situation is a striking testimony to the energy and courage of the Russian masses and to their faith and confidence in the Soviet Government led by the Communist Party.

Such droughts have occurred before in Russian history (a particularly bad one in 1891), and appear to be indigenous to the geographical situation. But never again shall we have such an experience as in 1922. Now, with the collective system of agriculture, the enormous expansion of productivity and the developed transport system and storage equipment, famine is impossible.

In the Executive Committee of the C.I. we had a report of the serious nature of the drought, following which we decided upon launching an international campaign for famine relief. We knew it was only necessary to appeal to the workers outside Russia to secure help. We also knew that the enemies of the Soviet system would not be slow to utilise the distress to attack communism and the Bolshevik Party. One has only to read the press of those days to get an idea of the depths to which bourgeois class-hatred can descend: the lies, slanders and distortions it resorts to, in order to blackguard its historic enemy, socialism.

The response to the international appeal for material aid was enormous. Relief committees sprang up in all parts of the world. Funds were collected. Clothing, medicines, machines and seeds were rushed to the famine-

stricken areas—a great demonstration of the world sympathy and support for the young socialist Soviet republics. In this work in England Helen Crawford with untiring zeal and energy rendered incalculable services in organising meetings and the raising of funds in this country.

Among the many women who have been identified with our communist movement Helen Crawford has been one of the most outstanding. Courageous and plucky, disinterested, devoted and zealous for the cause of the working class, Helen has endeared herself to large sections of the people by her high intelligence, sterling character and qualities as a militant and fighter. A fluent speaker and sympathetic personality, she is just as at home addressing a meeting of thousands as she is in conversation with the ordinary working-class housewife. One moment she can be burning with indignation at some social injustice, moving her audience to tears, and the next moment provoking them to laughter by some homely Scotch simile or story to clinch her argument.

Widely read in socialist classics and general literature, in particular the Bible, which she can quote with telling effect against the capitalists, Helen Crawford combines a rare intelligence with a rich sense of humour. Of these things I can speak from over twenty years' close friendship. Had she been self-seeking and opportunist I feel certain she could have been amongst the first women members of parliament. But Helen chose the more difficult road, the justification of socialist principle, of working among the people, helping them in their daily life to gain understanding and conviction as to the need for a new socialist order of society. No one can portray the life of the socialist movement over the last twenty years in Scotland, and omit the name of Helen Crawford.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE EVE OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

TRADITION plays an important part in the cultural life of every country. In England tradition is very deep-rooted, especially in politics. In this country the idea of individual freedom of the subject, in opinion, speech and writing, and all matters of personal conscience, has been sedulously cultivated by the liberal bourgeoisie. This love of "democracy" has left its impress on political institutions and forms of party activity.

Our workers' movement, in particular, which has always been difficult for continentals to understand, has not escaped this influence. Some of the most glorious pages in the history of the working-class movements of the world have been written in England. In my time I have seen and taken part in long-drawn-out industrial battles, often for the pettiest economic demands. But these never culminated in a revolutionary political onslaught upon the political power of the ruling class and its basis, private property. Why this is so is to be explained by the historic conditions under which the British workers' movement has developed, and in particular by the corruption of the Labour aristocracy practised by the British capitalists during the expansion and development of their colonial monopoly.

As we have seen, this insularity has left its stamp on our socialist movement. Until the formation of the communist movement in 1917-18, it was the proud boast of our

socialist leaders, with the exception of one or two small groups, that our socialism was "English" and not continental. The parties were based on the geographical constituency with its branches, or group of branches. Their activities combined the propaganda of socialist ideas with the local municipal or parliamentary electoral campaign. The membership, generally, comprised the artisans and labour aristocracy, ever prone to catch at any measures of social reform and compromise, which probably explains, in the conditions of legality and "democracy" that existed, why we have never had a really revolutionary movement after the example of some of the continental countries.

A perusal of our theoretical and popular literature up till the beginning of the war reveals a negligible quantity of theoretical works from the continent. Until 1908 we had only available from Karl Marx the first volume of *Capital*; the pamphlets, *Wage Labour and Capital*; *Value, Price and Profit*; *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*; *The Poverty of Philosophy*; *The Eastern Question*; *The Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century*, and *Life of Lord Palmerston*. Side by side with these works of Marx were Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, and *Origin of the Family*. Karl Kautsky we only knew in brief extracts and pamphlets; Bebel's *Woman Under Socialism*; Lafargue's *Evolution of Private Property*; of Bernstein, Jaurès, Vandervelde, Guesde, Plekhanov we had essays and speeches; but of Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, nothing at all. Of course, individuals of the intelligentsia may have had access to the more important Marxist literature (I believe copies of continental classics in their original languages are to be found in the British Museum), but they did not find their way into popular editions. This I consider one of the prime offences of the

intellectuals of thirty or forty years ago, that they should have starved our movement in the way they did.

Thanks to the Russian revolution and the Communist International movement, this intellectual insularity was rapidly being broken down. The workers of this last decade have been given a new diet in political literature by the C.I. The effects are undoubtedly manifesting themselves in the new forms of our movement and its manner of struggle.

In 1922 our party was still following, largely, the old methods of the "English" socialist movement in its organisation and propaganda, despite the decisions of the Third Congress in 1921. In October, the party congress held in the Battersea Town Hall made a decisive change. The lengthy, detailed report of the Commission appointed at the St. Pancras congress the previous year was now available. This report was a digest of the resolutions of the Third Congress of the C.I. with recommendations as to their practical application. Henceforth the unit of organisation was to be the group, in place of the branch. Collective direction was entrusted to a central committee, with a political bureau and an organising bureau. The position of chairman was abolished as being incompatible with the new forms of organisation. The magazine form of our party organ, *The Communist*, was changed, and in its place a different type of paper started—*The Workers' Weekly*. At this congress I was elected, unanimously, as political secretary—a post which I held for a year, until further organisational changes were made.

Simultaneously with these changes another innovation, for Great Britain, was made by the starting of party training groups. Hitherto, the educational side of our movement was treated as a special branch, independent of the party. Marxist teaching was carried on through the

Central Labour College movement, but in practice this C.L.C. movement fell into the mistake of making Marxism an academic study without showing the need for a revolutionary political party. Starting of party training groups led to disputes with the Labour College and, especially, its leading group—the Plebs League, led by party members.

We did everything possible to convince such prominent Plebs leaders as Frank and Winnie Horrabin and to retain them for the Party, but without success. In this controversy they showed themselves unable to grasp the necessity for close connection between working-class education and revolutionary struggle, and ultimately they were to drift into the opportunist ranks. Amongst the prominent Plebs who did grasp the importance of this innovation of Party training groups, the name of Maurice Dobb is outstanding.

Undoubtedly the Labour College movement had done yeoman pioneering work, but now, with a centralised Leninist party, we had the responsibility for seeing that Marxism was rescued from the barren academic manner in which it had been presented. As leader of our department for propaganda and agitation, I was responsible for producing the first printed party training syllabus—a work which entailed much collective collaboration on the part of the active comrades associated with me in the department. We issued, also, a valuable chart of dates of important events in the history of the industrial and political movement, covering over 100 years, as a reference index to students—an exceptionally fine production mainly collated by an engineering worker.

In November 1922 a General Election took place. Our party had six members running as candidates—Comrades Gallacher (Dundee), Newbold (Motherwell), Saklatvala

(Battersea), Geddes (Greenock), and Windsor and Vaughan for Bethnal Green, North and South. Gallacher and Newbold were definitely communist candidates; the others were under the local Labour Party auspices, except Geddes, who was put forward by the unemployed workers. Newbold and Saklatvala were elected.

To be a communist Member of Parliament is no sinecure. Unlike the other "democratic" members he is *openly* held responsible for his behaviour in the House, to the party executive. He cannot get away with any excuse of "holding his seat in trust for all classes of his constituents." The party executive have an even greater responsibility than the member, for they have to determine his policy. Many hours have I spent in and about the House—in the smoking-room and in the lobbies—carefully discussing with our representatives the political course we wanted pursued in the debates.

Newbold, in particular, was an eccentric individual with a Quaker upbringing—entirely unsuited for communist work. He went about unkempt and unshaven, wearing a dirty collar and clothes, trying to look "proletarian"! He was an example of a certain type of intellectual that sometimes comes into our movement, and whom everyone has noticed—the type that believes one has to use the most vulgar swear words when speaking; to be regardless of dress and a stranger to soap; and wear hobnailed boots and corduroys, to be a good Bolshevik. Such individuals bring discredit on our movement, for the average workman does not *glorify* the dirt and uniform of his occupation.

Newbold was more suited for Somerset House—probing into the records of industrial and financial concerns, of which he was a walking encyclopædia. But of communist politics he had no idea. He astonished us one day, during

the trial of some counter-revolutionaries in Soviet Russia, by sending a telegram praying the Executive of the Communist International to intervene and prevent the carrying out of the sentences passed on some priests involved—the reason for this being the large Roman Catholic vote in his constituency. Defeated in the 1924 General Election, he left our party to return to the Labour Party, and eat all the hard words he had delighted to sling at MacDonald and Snowden during the period of the “left wing” movement in the I.L.P. that existed prior to his joining the Communist Party.

Saklatvala was an entirely different character. He was a type in himself. “Sak,” as he was familiarly called, had the most amazing capacity for overcoming difficulties. He personified the Bolshevik slogan, “There are no difficulties a Bolshevik cannot overcome.” The story goes that when he was fighting for official recognition by the Executive of the Labour Party for his candidature in Battersea, he so wore down the stolid Arthur Henderson that the latter gave up in sheer despair. His resources in energy were inexhaustible. He was to be found speaking here, there, and all over the country. He carried on a prolific correspondence and was interminably writing to individual friends, to newspapers, to his friends in India and in all parts of the world.

I first met “Sak” during one of our many unity conferences held in the Eustace Miles Restaurant in Chandos Street. He had come on behalf of the I.L.P., of which he was a member, as an observer. He took no part in the proceedings, but sat with that sphinx-like expression on his face which was characteristic of the man when he was weighing up a situation. Later, when the party was formed, I had occasion to meet “Sak” in different spheres and circumstances. I have visited him in his

office, met him at lunch in the City, and had many times to meet and discuss with him in the lobby of the House of Commons questions of party policy to be raised in debate in the House.

As a Member of Parliament Saklatvala did not confine himself to voicing the claims of the Indian and other oppressed peoples within the Empire, he was an industrious champion of the interests of all the workers in this country. His oratory at times was a model of the highest order, and commanded the attention of enemies and friends alike. As a public propagandist his services were in continuous demand and he gave them unsparingly.

He was an ardent defender of the cause of the workers and peasants in Ireland. He voiced inside and outside the House the claims of the unemployed. Workers on strike always found in "Sak" a warm friend and he gave them every assistance. For his activity in connection with the General Strike in 1926 he was arrested and sent to prison for two months. When the Anti-Imperialist League was formed in 1927 he became one of its most active leaders and spokesmen.

An Indian Parsee of the wealthy Tata family of iron masters, Saklatvala could have had a distinguished career in business. But his revolutionary devotion to the cause of freedom for the enslaved masses in India, which he combined with a burning passion against the exploitation of the working class in Great Britain, led him to the workers' movement and to the Communist Party which he served with unstinted zeal and enthusiasm.

He was hated by the ruling class. Only once did the India Office allow him to visit his native India. On that occasion Sak was fêted and garlanded wherever he went, by workers and municipal authorities alike. Later all efforts to visit India again were flatly refused, in contrast

to the ready facilities given to several leaders of the Labour Party. There is no doubt Saklatvala wore himself out before his time in an unselfish devotion to the cause of the colonial peoples and of communism.

Here, I think, it will be opportune to speak of Willie Gallacher, our one Communist member in the House of Commons to-day.

Prior to 1914 Gallacher and I were in different socialist parties, and rarely met each other. The Great War, however, and the activities of the unofficial workers' committee movement arising out of the war, brought together many of us who had been at political loggerheads for years. There was a Herald League Bookshop in George Street, Glasgow, run by an iron-moulder, Will McGill. I had known McGill for many years as a free-thinker and anarchist of the Kropotkin school, having first met him at the Pollockshaws Progressive Union, of which John Maclean was an associate member in his young student days. McGill, having retired from foundry work, was devoting his remaining years to the sale of all kinds of revolutionary and progressive literature. As such he was a figure in the Labour and Socialist movement.

There was a back room to McGill's bookshop, which he let for committee meetings. Here, in our dungarees, and with unwashed faces, we foregathered on common ground to discuss the urgent questions of the day and to plan our activities, and it was here I came to know and to form an interesting and lasting friendship with Willie Gallacher.

Gallacher is a true son of the working class. Possessed of a sure instinct, and always seemingly with his ear to the ground, he has the faculty of sensing a problem, and the first steps to be taken to deal with it, when others are more disposed to hesitate and discuss. Energetic and restless, and what the French would call a *raconteur*, he is



most at home on the platform or in discussion, where his deep class feeling and popular speeches have made him a great favourite with the workers wherever he goes.

As the one Communist member in the House of Commons, he has a difficult task, but he is doing it well. He is zealous for the interests and welfare of the people of West Fife, with none of the self-seeking opportunism which marks so many Labour members. He looks upon his practical work in the House as his communist job. Vigilant in all matters concerning the working class, he is the relentless foe of all exploitation, national chauvinism, and imperialist domination. Not a fraction of what Gallacher says and does in the House gets to the public eye, for, apart from the *Daily Worker*, which itself is limited in space, the powerful capitalist press rarely gives him the publicity he deserves. But what is known of his activity in the House reveals to the masses how a communist M.P. should behave.

The Fife miners and the electors of West Fife may well feel proud of their member. Outside of his constituency tens and tens of thousands of workers find in Willie Gallacher one who voices fearlessly their own class feelings from the highest forum in the country.

Following the measures of reorganisation we had taken—replacement of the old style branch by organised group work, in particular, inside the trade unions and the Labour Party, systematic educational training of party members, and a new type of party organ, *The Workers' Weekly*—the party began to advance. But it speedily became clear that the whole character of the new period opening out after the ebb of the revolutionary wave required a new consideration of the problems before us. The whole situation was thoroughly thrashed out, and the party course shaped in the light of the analysis of events.

The working class was showing signs of recovering from the blows of the capitalist offensive that became intensified following the collapse of the Triple Alliance in 1921, and began to press forward its economic demands. Simultaneously, demands were being put forward within the Labour Party for a more militant policy. From the conditions a new Left movement emerged which was to crystallise into the Minority Movement within the trade unions, and a Left Wing Movement within the Labour Party, with its own popular weekly, *The Sunday Worker*. Our party played a decisive role in developing these popular movements.

In the summer of 1923 I attended, as fraternal delegate, an important congress of our French party. The French Communist Party, like all of our parties, was undergoing a cleansing process. An offshoot of the once-powerful French Socialist Party, it still carried within its ranks many of the old parliamentarians and, consequently, the defects of social democracy.

This congress was held in the Grange-aux-Belles Hall, the centre of the French "syndicats." Rarely have I attended such exciting proceedings. All the traditional excitability and demonstrativeness of the French character were brought out in the struggle for the exclusion from the party of those reformist parliamentarians who were holding the party back. It was at this congress Frossard, who was then general secretary, and others were expelled.

We sat all day and through the night of the third day of the proceedings. I had delivered my fraternal speech about 4 a.m. and, tired and weary, came out of the hall about 8 a.m. to have some tea and a wash. I went into a café at the top of the street and had some refreshment. The place was surrounded with police, detectives and police cars. They were, of course, looking for someone

more important than I, but that did not prevent them from tapping me on the shoulder when I came out and asking me to come with them.

I was bundled into a car and taken to the local police station. Brought before the chief, I was plied with all manner of questions as to my nationality, place of birth, family associations and political associations. They evidently disbelieved me, thinking I was Russian. Finally, I was told I was being taken to catch the train for Calais in the afternoon. If I had been a ferocious terrorist they could not have taken more precautions. Two of their men saw me on to the English boat before their attentions ceased. Similar treatment was meted out to a number of delegates from other parties.

By the end of 1923 the workers were showing signs of recovering from the events of 1921. The November (1923) General Election returned 191 Labour members. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress began a "Back to the Union" campaign, to repair the big losses in membership since Black Friday. The unemployed began a series of local movements, culminating in a national march to London, arranged for January 7th. On the road several raids took place upon the workhouses—a new phenomenon in the workers' movement.

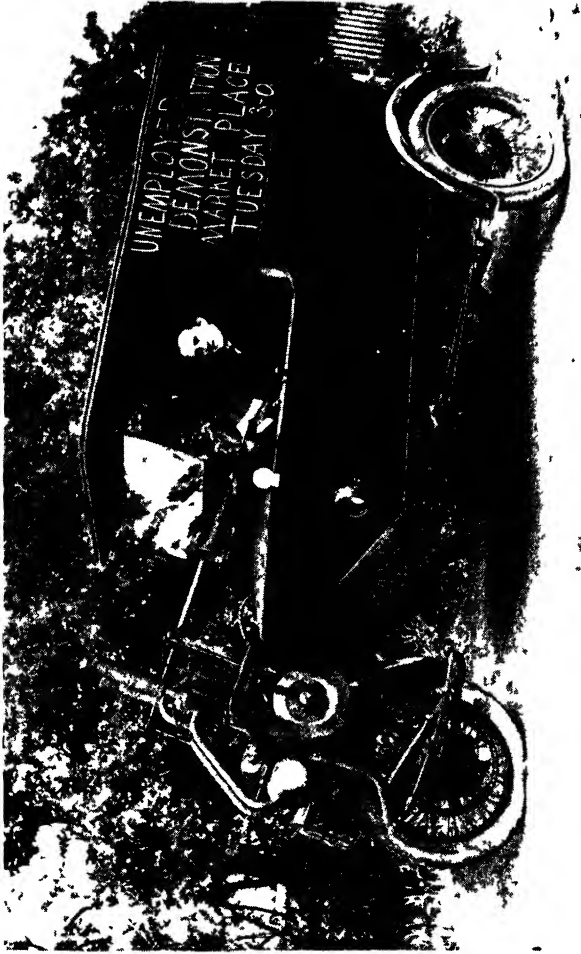
It should be remembered that prior to the Great War, the workhouses were tabooed by all but the helpless and desperately poor workers. Though in law each parish was held responsible for the support of destitute workers, the bourgeois class had succeeded in attaching such a stigma to everyone entering a workhouse that spirited workers preferred starvation to the point of death, rather than going to such a place. To be an inmate was to be a "social failure."

To gain admission to the workhouse a person had to be

thoroughly destitute and without means of support. The majority of the inmates were old and invalided workers—men and women—who were without friends or relatives, with a mixture of professional tramps. The buildings were veritable prisons, with prison regulations of confinement and a rigorous discipline. Virtually, the master of the workhouse was a prison governor. Old working men and women, who had slaved together for thirty and forty years, had the mortification of being separated from each other and shut up in different wings of the building. Against this there was no appeal. However, with the persistence of an army of two million unemployed following the war, changes were destined to take place. Desperation was breaking down the false pride of thousands of able-bodied workers.

When our party was formed, in August 1920, already numerous local groups of unemployed workers had been set up, but they had no clear objective. Their activities consisted of marching through the streets with collecting boxes, and sharing out the money at the end of the week amongst those who took part in the demonstrations. Rivalry and friction naturally took place in the competition for those streets likely to yield the biggest collections, and led to much bad feeling and enmity.

We immediately took up this question with a view to diverting these activities from a charity movement into a political class organisation. We got a group of our comrades together, who had been active in the workshop movement during the war, including "Wally" Hannington, who has proved to be one of the ablest mass leaders in England. A conference was held in the Bookbinders' Hall, in Clerkenwell, at which representatives from twelve boroughs of London attended. A Central Council was elected and a chairman, secretary and organiser



COMMUNIST PARTY PROPAGANDA VAN, 1921



appointed—Hannington being the organiser. A constitution was drawn up and the chief demand, "Work or full maintenance at trade union rates of wages," became the slogan of the movement. By March 1921, charity collections were eliminated, and demonstrations now took place to the local and central Government authorities, demanding that they accept their responsibilities and maintain the unemployed.

The organisation turned its attention to securing halls to meet in. In Islington (a London borough) the request was turned down because the leaders of the local movement were communists. The unemployed then seized a building and occupied it as their headquarters, barricading the doors and windows against the possibility of being ejected by the police. At the end of a month the vigilance of the defence slackened, and the police made a raid, ejecting the men on guard who were taken unawares.

A week later an attempt was made to raid the Town Hall. A violent struggle took place with foot and mounted police who were rushed to the scene of the demonstration. Heads were smashed on both sides; twenty arrests were made, and over a dozen sent to prison for several months. The value of these activities consisted in impressing the authorities that the unemployed were not going to starve in silence, and to bring the question of unemployment sharply to the attention of those fortunate to be in work.

The first national conference of the unemployed took place on February 21st and 22nd in London, and shortly afterwards a paper was issued, called *The Out-of-Work*, which soon reached a circulation of 60,000 copies monthly.

In June 1921, the first march was made to the Labour Party Conference, which was being held at Brighton, fifty-four miles from London. Out of a crowd of 15,000 assembled in Hyde Park, 150 were chosen to go as a

deputation to the conference. The march lasted nine days—three going, three at the conference, and three walking back. The representatives of the unemployed were allowed to address the conference, but most important was the propaganda in the villages along the route.

At Battersea, Sheffield, Bristol, Liverpool, and a number of other towns, this policy of forcing the hands of the local authorities and the seizing of public buildings was kept up with varying success, though in each case, not without severe tussles with the police, resulting in smashed heads and imprisonment.

On November 11th, 1921—Armistice Day—40,000 unemployed assembled on the Thames Embankment and marched through the streets to the Cenotaph, with contingents carrying floral wreaths to be placed on the monument to the war dead. One huge wreath bore the design of the Soviet emblem of the hammer and sickle, with the inscription:

“To the victims of capitalism who gave their lives on behalf of Rent, Interest and Profit. From the survivors of the Peace who are suffering worse than Death from the Unholy Trinity.”

All the contingents carried wreaths bearing similar inscriptions, and the bands played the “Red Flag” to funeral march time. Some of the demonstrators carried pawn tickets pinned on their breasts in place of war medals. Others carried slogans: “Did they die that we should starve?” while others distributed leaflets, to the exasperation of the police and bourgeois onlookers. In several towns outbursts of the unemployed took place during the two minutes’ silence, as a protest against the cant and humbug of such a ceremony.

Another agitational movement was next started against those factories known to be working overtime. This



consisted in a raid upon the works. All exits and entrances were occupied and the offices and telephones held up, while a deputation forced its way to the manager to discuss threatened wage cuts, and the stopping of overtime. Simultaneously the machinery was stopped in the shops, and the workers addressed by speakers from the demonstrators. Naturally, police appeared on the scene, notwithstanding precautions, but it was found possible to continue the meetings with the workers, since there was a danger of smashing the machinery if the police attempted to interfere. About sixty such raids took place about this period.

Movements of solidarity with striking workers; of resisting evictions from houses for arrears of rent; of raids upon meetings of the local authorities, demanding increased relief, work schemes, and protests against threatened cuts, were fairly common.

These activities, carried out in conjunction with the party direction, in which I took a prominent part, revealed the difference in character of the new communist party from the old socialist parties. It was the beginning of a new organisation of the workers unemployed destined in later years to play an enormous role in defending and advancing the interests of that large army of unemployed which emerged from the consequences of the imperialist war (1914-18), and in which Wally Hannington was to play such a conspicuous role as general secretary and organiser. The details of the subsequent activities of the National Unemployed Workers' movement have been well portrayed in Hannington's *Unemployed Struggles*.

Since the attempted assassination of Lenin by the Social Revolutionary Fanny Kaplan, the health of the great international communist and Soviet leader had given rise to considerable apprehension in the Soviet Union, the

C.I. and among all his friends throughout the world. With heroic persistence Lenin had carried on his work as People's Commissar, party leader and leader of the Communist International. By 1923 his situation became critical and fears were entertained for the worst. Once more he rallied and on receiving the good news our Executive sent him the following letter:

29th March, 1923.

To Comrade Lenin,  
Leader of the Revolutionary  
Proletariat in all lands.

DEAR COMRADE LENIN,

It is with profound joy and relief that we receive the news that your health is so far improved that we may look forward to your complete and speedy recovery.

For us, dear comrade, you stand out as a personal type and symbol of the courage, virility, and endurance of our brothers the triumphant Communist Party of Russia. Not only so, but as the accepted leader of the heroic toiling masses of Russia and their Workers' State, you stand (in their behalf) as a sign that, led by your example, all the workers of the world may win deliverance. Because you are the leader of the revolutionary workers of the world, you are singled out for the calumnies and execration of the bourgeoisie of the whole world. In the name of "Lenin" the conscience-stricken bourgeoisie everywhere hear the voice of Fate decreeing their universal overthrow. And because that is so in every mass assembly of workers—even in this backward land of Britain, where the bourgeoisie have their strongest hold—the name of "Lenin" never fails to provoke the heart-felt and enthusiastic applause with which the workers salute a brave champion of their cause.

The British workers do not yet understand enough to adopt our Communist programme and tactics, but they know enough to salute in you and your comrades the Russian workers and peasants, those who have done mighty deeds in the vanguard of the workers' battle for liberation.

More especially do we of the British Communist Party feel concern at your loss of health and the suffering you have undergone. The bullet that wounded you and the brain that directed it could never have reached the point of doing you harm had we been strong enough to have overthrown the brutal British Imperialism which sought to drown the Proletarian Revolution in the blood of its champions. Because we were weak you and your comrades in Russia bled and hungered. It is therefore, to us, a point of honour to at the earliest moment place ourselves in a position to give the only possible reparation—that of freeing the world from the possibility of a repetition of this crime.

Not only for the world's proletariat and its champion the Communist International, but for ourselves—who failed to overthrow the British bourgeoisie—we rejoice to learn that they failed to achieve all they had set their evil hearts upon.

We rejoice at your recovery and look forward to the day when Lenin, the Leader of the most revolutionary Workers' State, will be able, on the soil of Britain, to welcome the inauguration of the Soviet Republic, not only of Britain, but of the world.

With Communist Greetings,  
on behalf of the Central Committee  
COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN.

Yours fraternally,

THOMAS BELL,  
*Political Secretary.*

Unhappily, this improvement proved to be only temporary, and on January 21st, 1924, Lenin died.

Nineteen hundred and twenty-four, generally, was marked by a revival in the fighting spirit of the organised workers. The first national conference of the Minority movement, which took place in London on August 23rd and 24th, was a great success in point of numbers and organisations represented. An enthusiastic national conference of trades and Labour councils was held in

Birmingham. The movement for international trade union unity got a big impulse at the Trades Union Congress at Hull, where the Russian delegation received a great ovation and response.

The Miners' Federation was pushing forward new demands. There was considerable opposition to the secretary—Frank Hodges—consequent upon his part in the “Black Friday” treachery; and when he accepted a position in the Labour Government, the occasion was taken to replace him by Arthur Cook. Cook's election was indicative of the militant mood of the miners to which our party, by its sustained propoganda in the coalfields, had contributed a great deal—a mood which was to persist up to the general strike in May 1926.

At the beginning of 1925, our party brought forward proposals for a quadruple alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers, engineers, and shipbuilding workers. This proposal was adopted by the Miners' Federation and put before the other unions concerned. After the scandal of “Black Friday” (1921), and in face of a whole series of new wage attacks, the officials took up the idea of such an alliance, though half-heartedly.

In support of the mineowners' counter-demands to the mine workers the Government appointed a Committee of Enquiry into the mining industry. The miners refused to assist this committee and appealed to the Trades Union Congress for support. The T.U.C. appointed a special sub-committee, which was drawn from the transport and railway unions, to examine the question of an embargo on the movement of coal in the event of a strike or a lockout.

A special conference of trade union executives was summoned for July 30th. This conference ratified the proposals of the sub-committee, which were submitted, and approved the action of the General Council. The

Government almost immediately granted a subsidy to the mining industry to enable wages to be paid for a period of nine months, pending the appointment of a Royal Commission to enquire into the situation of the industry.

This "Red Friday" victory, however, was undoubtedly a manœuvre to play for time. The Government had not its machinery ready to cope with the situation. Moreover, its credit abroad would have been seriously jeopardised by a general strike, especially since it had just adopted the gold standard. It now hoped to split the workers' movement by its commission's report (an old trick of the British capitalists)—in the meantime making all preparations to break the strike, if it did take place, by means of an emergency organisation, named the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (O.M.S.).

## CHAPTER XXI

### WANDSWORTH PRISON

FOR our party this was an intensely interesting and busy time. We concentrated our activities on the coalfields, and on the railway industry. A continuous verbal and press campaign was kept up in the districts amongst the workers and in the trade unions, while at the centre we had a special committee working continuously, in close contact with the Left elements of the T.U.C.

We had arranged, as usual, this year for our counter-demonstration to the patriotic meetings around the anniversary of August 4th. I had gone to Glasgow to speak at a big demonstration there on the Sunday night. Finishing our meeting about 10.30 p.m., I had gone home to Killermont Street, to some relatives, for the night. About ten minutes to twelve I was undressing to go to bed when a knock came at the door. It was two C.I.D. men with a warrant for my arrest. Apparently the Government had decided that the moment had come to strike at us.

I was taken in a police car, which was in waiting in an adjoining street with other detectives and policemen in attendance, to the Central police station. After a close search of my pockets, and having handed over all possessions to the officer in charge at the station, I was led to a cell for the night to await the magistrate in the morning.

The cell was undoubtedly spacious enough, being ten

or twelve feet square, but for that reason it was cold and the dismalness of the place was aggravated by an iron-barred gate for a door. On the stone floor was a raised platform of concrete, three feet by six, sloped with a round ridge running along the top, to give the appearance of a bed and a pillow. After waiting for some minutes expecting some kind of bedding, and no signs of any coming, I hailed a warder and demanded some covering, which he failed to bring. Eventually, when the officer on the watch came round to enquire "if I was all right" I protested it was a scandal to be left without some kind of bedding. He flung in, later, a couple of rough sheets after the style of army blankets.

It is a queer sensation to find you are behind prison bars. The hurly-burly of daily life is superseded by a ghostly silence. At first I cogitated on what, precisely, was the charge against me. I accepted the fact of being arrested as a communist as a matter of course, but what was the specific charge, and were others arrested? I had known of big swoops on our movement. Was this another one?

With such thoughts jumbling my brain, and reflections on this strange new world—for the prison system is a world of its own—contrasting it with the other world, its trials and struggles, its trivialities, humours, pathos and tragedies, I spent a restless night.

About seven o'clock in the morning my relatives, in accordance with the practice of allowing friends outside to send in meals to a prisoner until the final conviction, sent in some breakfast. About half-past eight I was taken down to a room adjoining the court-room. Here was a motley collection of Saturday night drunks, prostitutes, thieves, and one coloured seaman who had stabbed a man in a drunken brawl. It was interesting, though tragic in

some cases, to join in the conversation of these unfortunates. They talked freely of their doings—bragged and blustered and swore at friends, enemies, and policemen. One woman got hysterical and went into a fit. She fell on the concrete floor, convulsed and at moments screaming, while the warder looked on, passive and indifferent. We all began protesting that the woman was seriously ill, and demanding that a doctor be fetched. Finally, a wardress appeared. She just smiled and started to bully the woman, who was an old-timer apparently. "Come on now, Aggie, none of your nonsense," she said, and tried to hustle her on to her feet. Unable to get her to stand up, she gave her a swearing to and left her. Just then my name was called and I had to go before the magistrate. I could not help thinking how easily that poor woman might succumb, and the outside world would learn of "another death from natural causes."

The proceedings before the magistrate consisted of my formal identification as a person being wanted by the Metropolitan Police in London, and only lasted two minutes. I was then led back to my cell to await the 1.30 p.m. train for London! In conversation with the detectives who were to accompany me, I learned that Gallacher had been arrested the same night in Paisley, and I concluded there had been a round-up, which proved to be the case. In all, twelve arrests were made. These included the whole political bureau; the secretaries of the Minority movement, the Unemployed movement, the Labour Research department, the Young Communist League, the London District Committee of the party; and the editor of the *Workers' Weekly*.

Gallacher and I, accompanied by two detectives in a special compartment of the 1.30 from Central station, arrived at Euston station, where we were met by a crowd



of C.I.D. men with a covered-in van, and driven off to Bow Street police station to spend the night. We were at first put into the same cell, and were just congratulating ourselves on our good luck, when we were separated. However, Bow Street proved more comfortable than Glasgow. I had a long wooden form to stretch upon, and lavatory accommodation. We were brought before the magistrate in the morning and released on bail.

The proceedings at Bow Street, before Sir Chartres Biron, began the first week of October, and lasted for three weeks. These proceedings before a magistrate are part of the judicial system in this country, in which the public prosecutor, in a case like ours, acts on behalf of the Government, through the Home Office. His case was to prove conspiracy and sedition, and to have us sent for trial at the High Court before a Grand Jury. As evidence, various party documents were cited (in my case, *The Communist Review*, of which I had been editor for three years), and speeches, and police touts were produced as witnesses that we met regularly in 16 King Street, W.C.2—our party headquarters—to carry on our “conspiratorial” work.

We had no doubt, from the very beginning, that the Government intended to put us away in view of the pending struggle with the miners and the Trade Union Congress. And so we applied our minds to proving the class character of the prosecution and revealing to the whole working class the meaning of the arrests and the hollowness of the so-called democracy in England. We had ample evidence in that the very people who were conducting the prosecution—Joynson-Hicks, Douglas Hogg (now Lord Hailsham), etc.—had been engaged in the Ulster rebellion against the threat of Irish Home Rule. We tried to show that what was sauce for the goose was

sauce for the gander. I was making a strong point of this during the examination of witnesses, when the magistrate—looking terribly bored—said: “Why go into all this: this is a long time ago.” To which I retorted: “You are taking us back to 1797” (the date of Acts under which we were being tried). This provoked applause in the court, and two people were put out.

We were sent for trial at the Old Bailey before Mr. Justice Swift and a jury. The fact that there were twelve of us created a difficult situation. At the proceedings in Bow Street, six of us conducted our own defence. To continue this at the Old Bailey was going to prove a serious business for us financially since it meant prolonging the proceedings. We had no funds, except what was collected by our Defence Committee from sympathetic workers all over the country. At the same time we were also pre-occupied with the necessity for making a political as distinct from a legal defence. We therefore decided to appoint three of our number (Campbell, Pollitt and Gallacher) to defend themselves, and to retain the lawyers (Sir Henry Slessor and W. M. Pringle) as counsel for the remaining nine to watch over all legal aspects of the case. This enabled us to prepare three final speeches with an agreed sub-division of labour, and to ensure our own political defence of the party, and what it stood for.

Following the verdict of “Guilty” by the jury—a collection of professional and bourgeois people—the judge divided us into two groups of six each. Those who had already served sentences he sent to prison for twelve months in the second division. The other six, of whom I was one, were one by one asked to give an undertaking to leave the Communist Party. On each one refusing to give such an undertaking sentence of six months’ imprisonment

in the second division was pronounced. This demand on the part of the judge confirmed the whole character and purpose of the prosecution. He and the Public Prosecutor had declared we were not being prosecuted for our opinions, but for belonging to *this* Communist Party, which was a section of the Communist International and advocating the methods of Bolshevism. The hypocrisy of saying that one may hold pious opinions on Communism as long as one does nothing is only too transparent. There is no doubt the Government, having in mind their preparations for the impending General Strike, hoped by this prosecution to strike a deadly blow at our party and to intimidate workers from joining its ranks without taking the open course of declaring the party an illegal organisation. I was the last to answer the roll-call, and went below to join the boys, who were all in good spirits after the good fight made. And so to Brixton Prison.

Brixton Prison is used as a detention house for prisoners undergoing trial and for prisoners who are in the first division. We had a little wing of the prison to ourselves. Here we were initiated into making up our beds—folding our blankets in a special way that has become a sacred law with warders; cleaning the cells and corridors; stitching mail-bags, etc. The fact that we were kept here for a few days gave rise to speculation in our minds as to the possibilities of an early release. As is customary amongst prisoners, rumours ran rife, and gossip enlarged upon them until at the end of a week, all doubts were removed when we were bundled into a van and moved to Wandsworth prison. All speculation was now at an end. “Ah,” said Gallacher to me as we got into the huge wing where we were to spend our time, “this is it all right. This *is* prison.” He was an old hand in prison, having served several sentences as a political prisoner in Scotland

and England, and felt as proud of his knowledge as a craftsman of his skill.

As A.2.47, I settled down to the daily routine, full of curiosity and observation about the place and its inhabitants. We were together with prisoners serving time for housebreaking, assault by violence, blackmail, embezzlement, incest, theft and fraud, etc. Political prisoners are not classified as such in the British prison system, and do not receive different treatment from the other prisoners. All prisoners are regarded as criminals and subject to the same regulations concerning food, work, and recreation.

The shop I worked in was like a factory, in which there were as many as 120 men employed at a time. After a month we had two books a week from the library, and also two educational books which we could retain indefinitely. I made a practice of summarising in an exercise book all the books I read—about seventy-two for the period I was in. I found this method instructive as well as giving occupation to the mind.

I settled down to the life with a philosophical indifference. I had worked in worse foundries, and the discipline was no harsher while on the job. In the evenings I read and applied myself to the French language.

There were six of our men in the shop in which I worked. Three of us were put to sewing mailbags, and the other three worked at a long table, cutting the material to the prescribed lengths. We all faced a warder who was raised upon a platform in a conspicuous position, so that he could overlook everyone. In front of us were rows of sewing machines, which kept up a whirring noise so that the prisoners could carry on conversations without being spotted. And when the warder on the lookout got dozing, under sheer ennui, the conversations became a perfect

hubbub of tongues. Our groups discussed political problems, naturally, and indulged in rather fantastic speculations as to the situation outside. Every newcomer to the shop was tapped for information; everyone who had a visit or a letter was pumped for news of the outer world. The gravity with which every scrap of news, or opportunity for news, was seized upon was, for me, at times highly diverting.

One day we were all excited to hear Hannington was to have a visit. We solemnly put our heads together and thought of all the events of political interest we wanted to hear about. I believe altogether we wrote down eighteen questions. The day and the hour came. Hannington went off, and after an hour that seemed a month, he returned smiling. One by one he recited the answers to all our queries, and was feeling proud of himself at doing his party duty. "What about the baby, Wally?" I enquired. "How big is she now?" "Christ!" he replied, "I never got a chance to look at her." And it suddenly dawned on him, and us, that we had monopolised his visit for political questions and left him no time to enquire about his family and domestic affairs. The absurdity of the incident broke down our gravity, and notwithstanding our remorse, the laughter and humorous remarks continued for days afterwards.

I attended an evening class in French, and also a class in English literature, while in prison. This latter was a great relief. There was an old fellow in charge who was fanatical about Shakespeare. We selected a play and each one assuming a character, we read round the class. He would stop us at times to delve into folk-lore or mythology. Sometimes he got so wrapped up in his erudition as to spend the whole time relating stories of the ancients, of which he had a great store.

Perhaps because he was a Shakespearean fanatic, he was scornful of Bernard Shaw, which amused me very much. One night he had come unprepared, and unguardedly invited someone to make a speech to occupy the evening. I offered to do so and was accepted. I took up his speculations of the previous meeting on the origin of ideas. I put before him the dilemma as to whether we were born with a ready-made stock of ideas, or only the tendency to think. Assuming the latter, I related thoughts to tradition and environment, and set out to prove how Shaw had taken the conventions of his times and shattered them, thereby opening the way for the reception of new ideas, and for amusement declared Bernard Shaw as great a man as Shakespeare, and worthy of public honour. With the old chap's interruptions and the merriment of the other prisoners, we had a lively and interesting night, but no more speeches.

The week-ends were the most trying. We knocked off work at twelve o'clock on Saturday till Monday morning at nine. Usually on Sunday afternoons we had a concert programme in the chapel, when third-rate singers and musicians would be present to entertain the ungodly prisoners. I generally preferred open-air exercise instead, as the whole atmosphere of the chapel was stifling. The one concert I did enjoy was on Christmas Day. There was a musical party with a concertina amongst other instruments. The concertina player gave a recital of old music hall ditties and invited us to accompany him. Gallacher and I enjoyed ourselves singing chorus after chorus of old songs of twenty years back. My acquaintance with the music halls came in handy.

Much has been written and said about the "human touch" that characterises the modern prison. I do not want to convey the impression that prison is a sanatorium,

but there has undoubtedly been a slackening, in some prisons, during the last twenty years, of the rigorous discipline and treatment meted out to prisoners. However, the conditions in all prisons are by no means uniform. Some are worse than hell.

I remember an old Bolshevik, who spent six months in a Scottish prison, telling me that our Scottish prison system was more revolting and barbarous than the conditions of a Czarist prison. He spoke of the awful silence; the isolation; the useless labour in cells; the barbarous practice of making prisoners stand with their face to the wall while inspection was being made, and so forth, and the poor quality of the food.

The individual prisoner is still at the mercy of bullying warders. The Governor is a law unto himself, the legislation notwithstanding. He can make or break a prisoner, and invariably accepts the warder's word against that of a prisoner, in the name of discipline. It is the solitary confinement; the deadly silence; strict censorship of personal letters; penalties against talking, and ridiculous, useless labour—unpaid, of course—that gets on a man's nerves. One has to cultivate the philosophy of the stoics to come out of prison unscathed.

I came out in April 1926, and resumed my party work where I had left off, bringing to it the fruits of reflection during an enforced period of retirement upon the accumulated experience of a quarter of a century's pioneering.

*Appendix No. 1*

CENTRAL EMERGENCY COMMITTEE  
ASSOCIATED IRONMOULDERS OF SCOTLAND

FELLOW MEMBERS,

The existence of District Emergency Committees in the West of Scotland has led to the formation of a Central Committee, whose function in future will be the co-ordination of all work common to the various Districts attached.

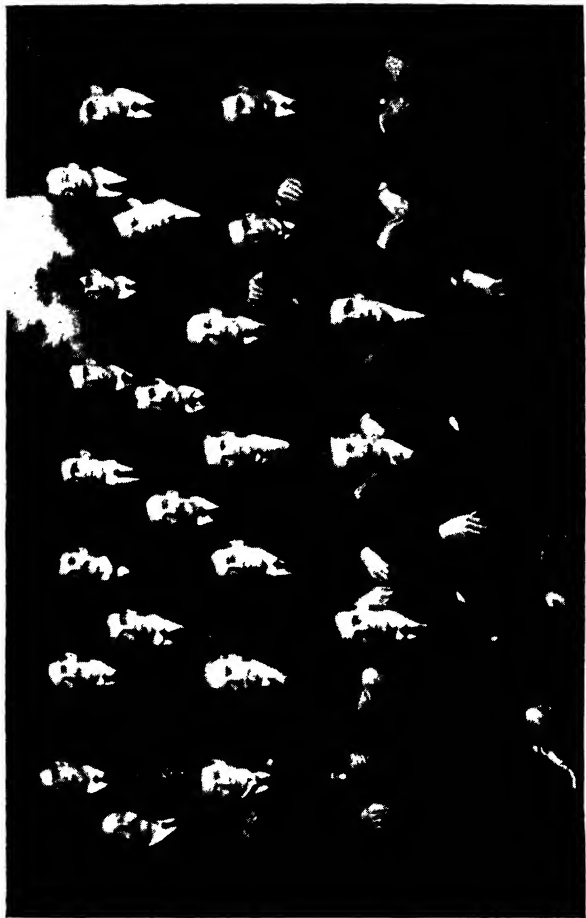
It is the fate of every new movement to be misunderstood. An explanation of the reason for its existence, who are its promoters, and what are its objects becomes, therefore, of primary importance, if suspicion and distrust are to be removed. We respectfully place this circular before you in the hope that you will give it your careful and earnest consideration.

The rapid growth of industrial and military conscription rendered possible by the war crisis, and supported by the provisions of the various legislative measures introduced since 1914, has placed our interests in the foundry in a very dangerous position.

There is an undoubted encroachment on many of our hard-won rights as moulders, and if the industrial changes have not been so forcible in the foundry as in kindred trades, this is not for lack of a desire on the part of the employers so much as in the nature and difficulties of our work, but with the growth of specialisation, repetition work, etc., made possible by the more simple and standard form of patterns; and should the war go on for any considerable time yet, we are certain to be met by more rapid and drastic changes.

Since the power of various trade union executives (our own included) has been reduced to a minimum by the various Emergency Parliamentary Acts which have been passed since the war began, any changes in foundry conditions calling for immediate and drastic action throws the rank and file largely on their own resources. An unofficial movement, therefore, representative of every shop and organised into districts, becomes necessary to safeguard our common interests.





CENTRAL EMERGENCY COMMITTEE ASSOCIATED  
IRONMOULDERS OF SCOTLAND



Let it be clearly understood that while there is no desire to supersede District Committees or Executive work, but, rather, recognising their limitations, to act when these are reached, we must be prepared to meet with shop action every change and encroachment proposed for the foundry.

Vigilance is not only needed by our union officials at head office, but must be exercised directly in the shops affected. A greater sense of responsibility for shop conditions must be assumed by every member if proper safeguards are to be made.

By such direct action, not only would we save the time of our officials, often wasted in worrying about irritating grievances, which they are lukewarm about since they are removed from the shop concerned, but there would arise a spirit of self-reliance and self-respect, which are primary conditions for success.

This workshop vigilance is rendered urgent and necessary by a memorandum issued recently by the Employers' Parliamentary Council, in which is to be found the following quotation:

“ May it be assumed that the lessons of the war have convinced even the Labour unionists responsible for the old and fatal policy that the rules and customs can in the very nature of things never be restored ? There are many indications that warrant this assumption, and if it can be made a matter of mutual agreement between employers' associations and the Labour unions, the outlook for British industry will be full of hope and promise. If not—well, the writing is on the wall, and there can be no mistaking its direful meaning.” (See *Glasgow Herald*, August 15th, 1917.)

Surely there can be no two meanings as to the “ writing on the wall.” The facts are, that we are up against a vigorous offensive on the part of employers, which is to be continued as one of the many “ after the war problems.” No time must be lost, therefore, in drawing closer our ranks, in exercising greater watchfulness in the foundry, and assuming a greater measure of shop control than we have done in the past.

Bearing in mind, however, the abnormal war conditions at present, and their influence upon our official Association, it must be apparent that an unofficial movement, free from the legal restrictions which tie the hands of our officials, becomes the only alternative to *intimidation* and *servility* in the foundry.

We therefore call upon and urge every district in our Associated Ironmoulders of Scotland to immediately set about the formation of

a District Emergency Committee, composed of two delegates from each shop.

Wherever there exist two or more districts in a certain area, these should be linked up into a Central Emergency Committee to co-ordinate district work.

Any further particulars or enquiries for personal explanations should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary,

ALEX. LIDDELL,  
26 GLADSTONE STREET,  
ST. GEORGE'S CROSS,  
GLASGOW.

1917.

*Appendix No. 2*

FALKIRK AND DISTRICT IRONMOULDERS' EMERGENCY  
COMMITTEE

*President*—P. M'GOVERN.

*Vice-President*—ALEX. M'MURRAY.

*Treasurer*—GEORGE DUNN.

*Secretary (pro tem.)*—W. SPICER.

October 1917.

The Committee was formed in September on the visit of a deputation from Glasgow Emergency Committee. Ten shops of the district sent delegates to hear the deputation explain the aims and objects of this Committee, with the result of the formation of a similar Committee in Falkirk. The two speakers gave the position as it stood in Glasgow and West of Scotland District, and it was agreed to call a mass meeting on Sunday, so that the Falkirk and District Moulders would get a chance of hearing and judging for themselves the exact position as it affected themselves.

The meeting was held, and was well attended, Mr. Thomas Bell and Mr. M. M'Grail being the speakers. The general expression of the meeting was in support of the action taken by the men, and at the end of the meeting a motion was agreed to, that the members go back to the various shops, discuss the matter, and bring their findings to a meeting on the following evening. This was done, with the result that twenty-two shops represented by forty-four delegates attended. An agreement was arrived at. As a meeting was being held on the Tuesday night by the Joint Executives on the wage question, by 26 votes to 16 it was decided to postpone definite action, although the reports on the whole from the shops were in favour of a stop-work policy on the Wednesday in favour of supporting the men who were out on the streets.

Mr. P. M'Govern was asked to act as chairman; Mr. M'Murray, vice-chairman; Mr. George Dunn, Treasurer; and William Spicer, secretary.

The two mass meetings, held in Town Hall, were well attended, the Press being excluded for obvious reasons. The position of the

Glasgow Emergency Committee's action was very much in evidence at the first meeting, but on the following evening Mr. Bell and Mr. M'Bain defended the action that the Emergency Committee had taken up, and showed in numerous instances that they were neither antagonistic nor disloyal to the official organisations. There were now three foundries which had stopped work in support of the Glasgow men, viz. Callender, Diamond, and Gothic—about 200 moulders. On the Thursday evening it was agreed that, if the other works remained at their work, these men consider their position jointly, and go back to work on the following Monday. This was done, and they agreed to go back on the Monday, but the Diamond men went back with the Glasgow men, who decided to return to work on the Thursday, October 4th, after being idle about three weeks. This decision was arrived at at a mass meeting in the City Hall, Glasgow, after hearing the report of the deputation of the Conference in London between the representatives of Labour, Ministry of Munitions, and the Treasury, on the one hand, and representatives of the two Executives and Central Emergency Committee, on the other hand.

The official Executive Council's reply indicates progress, viz., "We now agree to make a demand for an advance of wages of 100 per cent. on pre-war rates to all moulders, including apprentices, throughout Scotland, to come into operation immediately." This was accepted unanimously.

In sending on this report to Falkirk, it was agreed that the Emergency Committee had justified its existence, and that it was desirable to keep it in working order to meet and deal with future matters affecting the working conditions in the foundries.

Your district, Falkirk, is urged to keep itself intact, and retain connection with the Central Emergency Committee. There are now ten foundries represented on the Falkirk Committee, and they think there are many questions which they could take up. Too many unions up and down the country recognise the powerlessness of the present position, owing to the Munitions Act, Treasury Agreements, and Defence of the Realm Act, hence the reason for Shop Committees or Emergency Committees, which were not primarily instituted to deal with wage questions, but to educate the members to the conditions prevailing in some of the shops. The lighting, smoke nuisance, and insanitary condition of many of the shops in the district are a disgrace. Amalgamation between the two Societies will never be an

accomplished thing until the present method of conducting the ballot is done away with, and becomes a shop question. These are a few of the things which could be gone on with at present. The question of old existing jobs and the rain-water goods grievances were under consideration at last meeting. If these matters are to be gone on with, it is not ten shops in the district that should send their representatives, but not a shop should be left out, and then your Executives will have the necessary force, and will not doubt the efficacy of a definite educative programme towards rousing interest in Labour affairs. The main function of the Committee would be to see that the officials carried out the wishes of the members.

The present Committee, in sending out this Report and Financial Statement, know that by the collections at the meetings and collections at the works, they have their moral support. It is left entirely in your hands to make the Committee what you wish it.

There is a feeling being created that the men who have taken part in the meetings are against the present officials. We think it is the other way about. For it is where the officials are working, both Executive and District, who have done the utmost to misrepresent the present dispute.

We trust that you will continue to give the Committee your moral and financial support.

On behalf of Committee,

WILLIAM SPICER, *Secretary*.

*Appendix No. 3*

CENTRAL EMERGENCY COMMITTEE OF MOULDERS  
26 Gladstone Street, Glasgow.

FELLOW WORKERS,

I have much pleasure in submitting to you the Quarterly Report of the work done by the Central Emergency Committee. At the first National Conference held under the auspices of the Emergency Committee on January 2nd and 3rd, 1918, many resolutions were discussed and passed which were of great importance to us as foundry workers. The real value of these conferences depends on how far you can bring these resolutions into practice. We were not able to deal with all the resolutions during the first quarter of the year, but I hope by submitting this report it will convey to you what we have been able to do through the support given to us by the members throughout the trade.

The following were the Resolutions which were passed at the Conference in January 1918 :

1. Shorter Working Day. 2. Shop Conditions. 3. Hourly Rate and Levelling up of Wages. 4. Abolition of Piece Work. 5. Depression of Trade. 6. Unofficial Committees.

SHORTER WORKING WEEK

The C.E.C. put all their energies into the question of the Shorter Working Day, feeling that this was the question of greatest importance.

For this purpose we got into touch with the other foundry trades and formed a Joint Committee. This Committee decided to circulate a leaflet on the subject and to call a mass meeting of the foundry workers.

This meeting was arranged and just previous to its taking place the Man Power Bill of the Government was presented to the workers. This Committee decided it was advisable to take advantage of the mass meeting to have this matter discussed.

The Food question was also considered and ultimately the three resolutions which you are all familiar with were placed before the mass meeting and fully discussed and carried unanimously. Following the mass meeting the Joint Committee met and decided to issue



the resolutions to all the foundry workers in Scotland to get their opinions.

As a result of these ballot papers being issued we were asked to send speakers to Bathgate and Edinburgh to address the foundry workers on the resolutions placed before them. Speakers were sent and the meetings were a success, and we feel sure they went a long way in breaking down many of the prejudices that exist among the crafts in the foundry. There was strong opposition on the Man Power question, especially from Dundee and Arbroath, and the numbers who voted on this question indicates that, as compared with the other two resolutions. The C.E.C. continued their efforts on all three questions. The Joint Committee met and considered the next step to take in view of the votes, and the following letter was sent to the various Emergency Committees.

“ CENTRAL EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

“ 26 Gladstone Street,

Glasgow, February 17th, 1918.

“ DEAR COMRADE,

“ A meeting of the Joint Sub-Committee of the Foundry Workers was held in the Central Halls, when the result of the vote on the Shorter Working Day, Man Power, Food Control, was submitted. The figures are as follows:

1. Shorter Working Day	..	3,092 for,	192 against.
2. Man Power .. .. .	..	1,647 „	672 „
3. Food Control .. .. .	..	2,938 „	72 „

“ These figures are for and against the resolutions submitted in the voting paper.

“ After some discussion it was agreed that we submit the following recommendations to your Executive Committee for their consideration and approval or otherwise. ‘ That we demand a Shorter Working Week of 44 hours without any reduction in wages, and that same come into operation not later than June 1st, 1918.’

“ Further, that the hours be from 8 a.m. till 5 p.m., with one meal hour from 12 noon till 1 p.m., also that 20 minutes of a spell be given forenoon and afternoon; 4 hours on Saturday.

“ If this recommendation meets with your approval you are requested to have a copy of same placed before your official Executive Council through the usual constitutional channels.

“ This will force the officials to move in the matter. I may say that the Associated Ironmoulders have already taken a vote on the shorter

working week of 44 hours, and pressing your officials it would make it more general and thereby secure a better chance of success.

“Owing to the smallness of the vote on the Man Power we decided to delay action and await developments.

“With regard to Food Control, it was decided to delay until we got information as to how the other organisations were going to deal with it.

“On behalf of Sub-Committee.

“ALEX. LIDDELL, *Secretary.*”

“With reference to my letter of February 17th which was sent to the Executive Committees represented by the Sub-Committee, and arising out of the recent votes, official and unofficial on the question of a Shorter Working Day, it will be seen that a substantial majority favour a change, thus vindicating our action in raising the question. It is imperative that the matter must not be allowed to rest with merely taking a vote.

“Pressure must be exerted through the Districts upon our official Executives if we are to realise such a desired object as a reduced working day, and that at an early date.

“I am therefore directed to draw your attention to the ‘resolution’ contained in the above mentioned letter and to urge you to press it upon your District, both in the shops and official District Meetings. Such action ensures the matter being kept to the front and receiving adequate attention.

“You are also asked to send resolutions to the Executive Council through your District Committee demanding that in reckoning wages each day stands by itself.

“On behalf of the C.E.C.,

“A. LIDDELL, *Secretary.*”

This action of the Emergency Committee forced the official E.C. to take a vote on the Shorter Day, Man Power and Affiliation to the Scottish Trades Union Congress. This vote also revealed a large majority in favour of a Shorter Working Day. It was agreed by the C.E.C. that we should not let this matter rest with the taking of a vote, but that we should press the officials to intimate our demand to the Employers as contained in the above letter.

The E.C. have done so and fixed June 3rd as the date. Similar resolutions have also been sent on by the official E.C. for the agenda of the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

## MAN POWER

With reference to the Man Power question the Joint Committee had anticipated a vote to resist the Man Power Bill, hence they launched the Ticket Scheme in order to have funds to meet the necessary expenses. The E. and S. Federation of the Clyde District took up a strong attitude on this question and even threatened to down tools. They also allowed the unofficial Committees to work in conjunction with them. At the meetings held it was quite clear that this Federation did not represent the opinions of the rank and file, except the Moulders' officials who gave the figures of the vote taken. After several meetings it was agreed to await the result of the Allied Labour and Socialist Conference, and then call another meeting of all Delegates present and decide what to do. I regret to say this meeting has not been called, therefore the matter has got leave to drop.

## HOURLY RATE AND LEVELLING UP OF WAGES

With reference to this Resolution I wrote to Kilmarnock as instructed and I received a copy of the evidence put before the Committee on Production. This we intended to get typed and sent to other Districts, but owing to the pressure of work it was delayed. In the interval various shops outside the town took up the matter themselves and had received advances (five shops) of from 2s. to 3s. per week. Following this the General Secretary, J. Brown, offers to negotiate with the Employers on behalf of the District. He did so and the Employers turned it down.

The men employed in the town of Kilmarnock took up the question again and at a General Meeting it was agreed to approach the Employers and at the same time take a ballot of the men to hand in their notices if they were turned down.

The meeting of the Employers took place, and after discussing it the Employers refused to concede to their demands, and the deputation then intimated that they had taken a vote and it would possibly result in the men handing in their notices. On hearing this the Employers asked the deputation to advise the men to remain at work and refer the case to the Committee on Production, and if that body said it should be paid they would be pleased to comply with this decision. The deputation reported this to the meeting and also submitted the result of the vote, which showed 76 for stopping work and 42 against. The meeting, however, decided to take the advice of the Employers and ignore the result of the ballot, and John Brown was instructed to place the matter before the Committee on Production. When the

C.E.C. got to hear this I was instructed to write the Emergency Committee Secretary stating that if he had informed us of the meeting we would have sent down some of the C.E.C. to give assistance to the members in their fight for better conditions. Also, that the C.E.C. were prepared to render all assistance, financial or otherwise. The Kilmarnock Secretary replied thanking the C.E.C. and explaining that the meeting was rushed on them and no time given them to prepare. So the matter is now in the hands of the Committee on Production.

It was agreed to await the result of this case before going further with the Levelling up of Wages. This case shows clearly what can be done by shop action.

#### PIECEWORK

When the Government issued the  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. and the Piece Workers were excluded the C.E.C. immediately sent resolutions of protest to both officials and to the Ministry of Munitions. The reply from the Ministry was that owing to the many protests received by them they were going to consider Piece Workers. The E.C. also replied that they were claiming for the Piece Workers to be included, so that our protest, along with the others, brought about the Piece Workers receiving  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. At the same time we don't consider that satisfactory. In Arbroath the Moulders took this up in earnest. They had four conferences with the Employers and the Ministry of Munitions, and ultimately received 10 per cent. increase.

To come to the resolution on Piecework, enquiries were made from the Central representatives and they reported a strong desire for its abolition existed among the Piece Workers in Glasgow. This was due to the fact that the officials of the Central and Associated Societies had been negotiating with the Employers since 1912 to fix a basis price for Rain Water Goods, and up to February of this year nothing definite was come to. On this month all the men working on this class of work gave in their notices to stop work to enforce their demands. When the Employers saw the determination of the men they called in the assistance of the Government, who sent word to the official E.C. that if the men carried out their notice they would make a proclamation and bring them under the Munitions Act. The E.C.s then held joint meetings of the men and pointed out the position they were in owing to the threatened attitude of the Government. The Glasgow men maintained their demand for time rates, but they were outnumbered by the Falkirk men in the vote. A conference was then convened by the Government and the points that were not agreed on were settled

by arbitration. The prices now fixed were accepted by the Falkirk men. On the other hand a grievance still exists with the Glasgow men and they are of the opinion that the only solution for the trouble is time rates. We would like to know why the official E.C.s did not bring the full support of both organisations to assist these men in their demands; also, why the men who are directly affected and have a knowledge of the prices and the nature of the work were not at the conference.

It was difficult to get information from Falkirk owing to the lack of interest taken in the work of the Emergency Committee there, but the opinion was that there was no desire to give up Piecework.

#### SHOP CONDITIONS

Much could be done to better the Shop conditions if the members in the various Shops would show some initiative. For instance, the members in Shotts Foundry wrote to the C.E.C. asking to be supplied with copies of the Drinking Fountain Order, also the Ambulance Order. These were sent and the men approached the firm and demanded the facilities for drinking water as mentioned in the Order, with the result that they have now got it established. In order to attain success in our demands we should always get the others in the Foundry, Dressers, Labourers, Patternmakers, etc., to join us in our effort to make the conditions better.

In Weir's Foundry, Cathcart, the men approached the firm to get wash-hand basins, lockers, etc., and we understand that a Committee of the men was appointed to continue the negotiations. It was also reported to us that J. Allan, of Elmbank Foundry, Glasgow, offered to spend £5,000 on shop improvements, and they were awaiting the sanction of the Ministry of Munitions to go on with the work. The C.E.C. are of the opinion that if the members would only assert themselves and demand that they be treated as human beings and not merely as commodities, many of these sordid conditions could be removed. We also recognise the need for rousing the interest and enthusiasm of the Moulders on these questions and it was our intention to give lectures in the various districts on the subject. However, with the approaching clear nights and the amount of overtime that is being worked we decided not to go on with these meetings. We have still got this idea in view and will take the first opportunity to carry it out.

#### UNOFFICIAL COMMITTEES

We are in constant touch with the N.A.C. of the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee on various matters and especially Man Power.

We kept them posted up with all we were doing and they did likewise. On the information they received from all parts and especially the Engineers who demanded that dilutees go first, they as an N.A.C. of the Shop Stewards and Workers' Movement were not going to be parties to assist in such a demand. However, in the reports from all parts there was evidence of a strong desire for Peace and that the rank and file should be represented at the Peace Conference and should formulate the basis they thought would be best from the workers' point of view.

The N.A.C. drew up what they thought should be a good basis and asked us to send delegates to Sheffield to a Conference to discuss same. Owing to the very short notice we were not able to send a copy of their suggestion to all the Districts and ask them to send their opinions, and also delegates to conference. The C.E.C. considered that we should send a delegate as it was a very important conference.

The Conference after hearing reports from delegates and fully discussing the matter ultimately came to the following finding: That after hearing the reports and considering the influence of the present political and military situation that the matter drop meantime and that we go on with the work of organising the workers.

#### BELFAST STRIKE

An appeal was made to us for financial assistance to the strikers in Belfast. This was intimated at the Mass Meeting and a retiring collection was taken of £6 18s. 6d. Further subscriptions were received and a total of £13 14s. 9d. was sent. This was a very practical way of showing our appreciation of the valuable assistance they gave us during our strike. Since then they returned £6 18s. 6d. and intimated that the local Shop Stewards Committee were in need of financial assistance. The C.E.C. decided to make this amount up to £7 and they allotted £3 to Belfast S.S. and £4 to the N.A.C. of Shop Stewards.

#### EACH DAY TO STAND BY ITSELF

Many complaints were received regarding the working of overtime and if any time was lost by the workman during that week it was deducted at overtime rate. This was due to the fact that a certain number of hours per week had to be worked before they got time and half. Districts were asked to send on resolutions to the E.C. demanding that each day stand by itself in reckoning of wages. We are pleased to note that the E.C. has taken action on this question.

#### VICTIMISATION OF SHOP STEWARDS

Two cases of victimisation were reported to us by the N.A.C. of

Shop Stewards. In Coventry there were 14 men dismissed and the others came out on strike, and in Southport one man got victimised for his activities in the Shop Steward movement. The others struck work in sympathy. The C.E.C. were asked to give all assistance possible. We sent in strong resolutions to the Government protesting against these cases, and with this, along with the definite decision of other Committees throughout the country to down tools, the men were reinstated.

BRANCH OF THE ENGLISH SOCIETY IN GLASGOW

English members working in Glasgow and the West of Scotland held a meeting and decided it would be an advantage to them to have a branch established in Glasgow. They asked the assistance of the Emergency Committee to take a vote of their members on the question. The result showed 78 in favour and 5 against. They are now negotiating with the officials.

Considering the many obstacles and misrepresentations that the C.E.C. have had to contend with, we feel that the work done since our inauguration justifies our existence. We appeal to all members for their continued support.

On behalf of C.E.C.,

ALEX. LIDDELL, *Secretary.*

## SHOP STEWARDS' CONFERENCE

Manchester, January 5th and 6th, 1918.

We attended, as instructed, at the above Conference, and the following is a correct report of what transpired:

The first day's proceedings began at 3.30 p.m., and over forty delegates from all parts of Scotland and England were present.

Arthur MacManus, President of the N.A.C. of the Shop Stewards, presided over the Conference, and, after extending a welcome to the delegates, he dealt with the greater capacity of the Shop Stewards, *because of its basis of organisation*. Direct representation from the workshop gives a fuller and a truer expression of the feelings of the rank and file than any other organisation hitherto in existence. The existing method of from twenty to thirty men, congregating at some particular meeting place, to express the wishes and desires of from two to six hundred or probably more workmen in a particular district, demonstrates the fallacy of existing methods, and the great need there is for such an organisation as the Shop Stewards. Its birth has been due to the momentous times we are passing through, and there is no doubt it will deal very effectively with serious problems in the immediate future. Extensive and thorough organisation is absolutely essential to the success of the movement, and every worker interested must not spare himself in his efforts to attain this.

Our Committee, though not so broad in its scope, is certainly run on somewhat similar lines and our efforts should be to broaden out to embrace the whole industry.

After the Chairman's speech, the Secretary (George Peat of Manchester) reported on negotiations that had taken place between the Amalgamation and Shop Stewards Committees. There is no need to go into detail on this matter, since the ultimate result was that the amalgamation movement threw in its lot with the Shop Stewards' movement, accepting its basis entirely, and a complete fusion was accomplished on Sunday, when both movements conferred jointly. It should have been mentioned earlier that both movements



met in conference separately, on the Saturday, to consider the fusion, and also to consider the advisability of forming a new Union.

The following Resolution explains the result of the considerations as to the formation of a new Union:

“ We, at this National Conference of Shop Stewards, do not think the time is opportune for a new industrial Union, and endorse the decision of the last Emergency Conference.”

That decision, of course, was against a new Union.

The following Resolution explains the basis of the Shop Stewards' movement, which was accepted unanimously at the joint Conference on the Sunday:

“ All representatives to any Shop Stewards' Conference, and all Officials who may be elected by the Conference, shall be accredited delegates representing the men in the shop, and shall be members of a workshop or Shop Stewards' Committee.”

The most of Saturday evening was devoted to a discussion on the proposed Man Power Bill, and reports were given as to the feeling that exists in the following large industrial centres, Sheffield, London, Woolwich, Chatham, Tyne District, Barrow, Isle of Wight, Invergordon, Halifax, Coventry, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool and the Clyde District. The essence of all the reports submitted was to resist any further taking away of men to the army. It was agreed that the discussion be continued on the Sunday, when the Amalgamation Conference and the Shop Stewards would meet conjointly.

The Conference adjourned at 10.50 on Saturday night.

Sunday forenoon was devoted to reports from the separate conferences of the previous day. George Peat reporting for the Shop Stewards and W. F. Watson for the Amalgamation Conferences, and as was previously stated, an amicable arrangement was come to that enabled us to complete the fusion of the two bodies.

A uniform scale of contributions was agreed to as follows:

- 1d. per week to be paid by all workers to their Shop Stewards.
- 1d. per month per member to be paid by Shop Stewards to the District Committee.
- 1d. per quarter per member to be paid by District Committee to the N.A.C.

The present financial position of the movement is deplorable, and if it has to exist, then we must be more active in providing the necessary money, otherwise the whole movement must mark time.

Both George Peat and W. F. Watson made a special appeal for finance, and it is to be hoped that this appeal will meet with the response it deserves.

On the election of Officials it was agreed that the Officials and the N.A.C. be elected provisionally, and that all nominations for an accredited Committee be sent to G. Peat, who was elected Provisional Secretary. The country was divided into five divisions as follows: Scotland, North-East and South-West England, Northern, Midland and Southern, each division to have one representative on the N.A.C. The Officials elected provisionally were as follows: A. MacManus, President; George Peat, Secretary; J. T. Murphy, Assistant Secretary, and the Provisional Committee, Scotland, S.W.—A. MacManus, N.E.—Smith. England, Southern—W. F. Watson and J. Tanner. Midland—Dingley and Deleny, and Northern—Finnigan, Keighly and Hirst.

Sunday afternoon was the most important part of the Conference as we dealt exclusively with the Man Power proposals and the food question.

Many proposals came before us on Man Power, some districts like ourselves demanding the conscription of wealth, others demanding Peace by negotiations.

Halifax proposed that we refuse to allow skilled men to be taken until all dilutees had been sacrificed, but this was unanimously rejected as we all felt if the workers desired the further continuance of the war, then they should be prepared to make all the sacrifice necessary, but if they were not prepared to sacrifice themselves, then they should not ask others to do so, but that they should put the necessary pressure on the Government to introduce reason where force had so tragically failed. The suggestion to join the Russian Government in their efforts to negotiate a peace, was received with considerable enthusiasm, and it was generally felt that a strong resolution should be sent to the Government.

The following Resolution probably describes the different trends of thought on the subject, as its composition is an effort to embody all the suggestions put before the Conference.

I.—“That this national Conference of Shop Stewards, directly representing the organised workers in the Engineering and Ship-building Industry, informs the Government that we refuse to accept any agreement on the Man Power proposals that may be arrived at as between the Trade Union Officials and the Government.

II.—“ That this Conference is resolved to actively resist the Man Power proposals of the Government, and demands that the Government shall at once accept the Invitation of the Russian Government to discuss peace terms.

III.—“ This Conference further demands the immediate conscription of wealth, and that adequate provision shall be made as a national right for all victims of the war.

IV.—“ That this Conference recommends that national action shall be taken to enforce these demands, and delegates are instructed to at once ascertain from the workers in their districts what form this action shall take and acquaint the N.A.C.”

On the food question it was reported that the London Committees were very active and that a National Vigilance Committee had been formed.

A Conference under its auspices had been held on the 11th and 12th December, and another Conference was to be held on the 12th and 13th January.

Its policy is a constructive one, as they are out for effective control of the Production and Distribution of all food stuffs.

The following resolution was unanimously agreed to on this question:

“ That this Conference, representing the National Workshop and Shop Stewards' movement supports the programme of the National Food Vigilance Committee to obtain the effective control of the Production and Distribution of all food stuffs.”

This is a correct report of all that transpired at the Conference, and we have done our best to put it before you as we think it could be easiest followed and understood. Our business is not to report each item as it came up for consideration, but rather to report each item of business in as connected a manner as possible.

We thank you for the trust you have put in us and we hope you will be satisfied with this Report.

JAMES GARDNER }  
ALEX. LIDDELL } *Delegates.*

*Appendix No. 5*

**RANK AND FILE CONVENTION\***

Central Hall, London, March 10th, 11th and 12th, 1920.

There were in attendance at this Convention 200 Delegates representing all the main industries, socialist parties, and unofficial committees in England, Scotland and Wales. The delegates were drawn from 24 Trade Unions, comprising two Executive Councils (Associated Ironmoulders of Scotland, and Nelson and District Weavers Society), three District Councils and 61 Branches. The other delegates represented :

9 Workers Committees, National Union of Police and Prison Officials, National Union of Ex-Service Men, Trade Union Staffs Guild, 11 Branches of the I.L.P., 9 Branches B.S.P., 4 Branches Workers Socialist Federation, 2 Branches S.L.P., 3 Herald League, 3 Hands Off Russia, 1 Labour Party, 1 Young Socialist League, 1 Branch I.W.W., 1 Stepney Communist League, 1 Plebs League and 17 Branches of various organisations sent letters of greetings and approval of the objects of the Convention.

The proceedings were opened by Arthur MacManus, Chairman of the National Administrative Council of the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee movement. He said: " While appreciating the necessity for a conference to talk over affairs, it was also necessary that something more than talk follows on the deliberations. The rank and file should make the opportunities for voicing their views direct, not merely, as in the past, allow the official caste to speak in the name of labour without any mandate. He went on to criticise the tendency to call for a conference with the employers instead of putting up a fight. Before this development of official tactics the only alternative to a strike was legislation. Now, as a result of manœuvring, a new means

\* There were thirteen main resolutions discussed and passed which reveal the variety and character of the problems dealt with. The remarks and resolutions here reproduced are taken from the Official Report issued by the Convention Secretary, M. F. Hebbes, 10 Tudor Street, London, E.C.4. (T. B.)

of putting off direct action has been discovered. This gives the reactionary officials the power to speak out boldly for action only to end up with a conference or commission. They must repudiate commissions, which only waste time until the ferment has cooled down. The Workers' Committees Movement offers the best means of the expression of the will of the workers, and through that movement to put into effect their ideas."

The first Resolution taken was No. 6 on Nationalisation and the Miners' Question as a matter of emergency. After a full discussion a Mines Committee of 15 was set up to deal with all questions of assistance to the miners. Resolutions 1, 2 and 10 were discussed and dealt with and the first day's proceedings closed.

The second day's proceedings were opened by William Gallacher in the chair. In his opening remarks he referred to what had transpired at the Trades Union Congress during the day. He referred to the statement of Clynes that nothing would suit Mr. Lloyd George better than a policy of direct action. He agreed that no one could speak with greater authority on the opinion of Lloyd George than Mr. Clynes. As a matter of fact he was Mr. George's lap-dog. . . . Mr. Clynes continually plays on the cowardice of the working class. "Don't take direct action—it means bloodshed. You'll get hurt." But right through their lives they are getting hurt in the workshops. They are not going to break the power of the capitalist without getting hurt. Therefore they must go forward to stimulate courage in the workers. It is their business to see that capitalism is not rehabilitated. It is groggy now, and should be attacked. The Trades Union Congress would never do anything to disturb the boss's sleep.

Resolutions 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12 and 13 were disposed of in this session and the following additional resolutions were agreed to: (1) "This Convention, recognising the grave danger that threatens the lives of Bela Kun and other leading communists in Hungary, calls upon the British Foreign Office to arrange a safe passage to Soviet Russia for the above mentioned comrades." (2) "That this Convention, recognising the dearth of skilled labour in Russia, elects a committee to draw up a scheme to facilitate the emigration of engineers and other artisans desirous of going to Soviet Russia, and that the Trade Unions be asked to give their financial assistance to the scheme." (3) "That in view of the fact that the Government has decided to grant passports to members of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress, this Convention decides that application should be made for passports for

a Rank and File delegation to get to Russia and investigate and report from a Rank and File point of view."

The session closed after hearing a report on the Terror as it existed in America, and a vote of fraternal greetings was sent to the I.W.W. and the American Communist Labour Party.

The third session was devoted to a discussion on the miners' situation, and how to assist them in their demands (Resolution XI). The following resolution was also carried: "This Convention expresses its disgust with the decision of the Trades Union Congress to drop direct action for the middle class political action, as advised by the Labour leaders, to secure the demands of the miners. We express our disapproval of the recommendations of the Miners' Executives, to demand 3s. a day increase without first consulting the rank and file. As we consider this amount totally inadequate we recommend the rank and file throughout the coalfield to support the claim put forward by the South Wales Miners for an immediate increase of £2 a week. We advise the rank and file to strike for the above amount, if necessary, and we call upon all sections of the workers to support the miners in the demand for a general strike, so as to bring about the downfall of capitalism."

Additional resolutions were (1) (not detailed in the report) but condemning that Trade Unionism which made possible the continual betrayal of the rank and file, and pledging the delegates to work for its replacement by machinery which would ensure that all power be vested in the rank and file. (2) "This rank and file convention sends greetings to the martyred communist workers of Hungary. It condemns the white terror instituted by the present Government of Hungary and condoned by the British and other Allied Missions in Budapest; it further calls upon the British Government to follow the example of the Italian Government which under the pressure of the socialist workers of Italy has instructed its Embassy in Vienna to intervene on behalf of the Hungarian Socialists."

After a statement by Jack Tanner and considerable discussion and evidence which was replied to by W. F. Watson, the following resolution was passed with three dissentients: "That this Rank and File Convention does not consider W. F. Watson to be a fit and proper person to sit on any committee appointed by this Convention."

#### RESOLUTIONS

##### SOLIDARITY WITH SOVIET RUSSIA

RESOLUTION I.—This Convention of British Workers sends greetings to the Russian Soviet Republic, and expresses its enthusiastic admiration

for the great constructive work of Communism achieved by the Soviets. The Convention congratulates the Red Army on its splendid fight against the united attacks of the capitalist governments, and proclaims its solidarity with the Workers' Soviet Republic of Russia, and with all the workers of the world struggling for the overthrow of international capitalism. This Convention condemns the Parliamentary Committee for not placing the question of the intervention in Russia on the Agenda of the special Congress. It calls for a full account of the conversations which have taken place between the Parliamentary Committee and the Government on this question, and asks whether a pledge has been obtained to conclude an immediate peace with Soviet Russia.

#### INTERVENTION IN RUSSIA—THE GENERAL STRIKE

**RESOLUTION II.**—This Convention deplores the long toleration by the British workers of the attack which the capitalist forces of the world are making on Soviet Russia.

It now urges the Delegates at the Trades Union Congress to declare for the use of the industrial organisations to force the Government, by means of the General Strike, to stop all forms of intervention—whether by land or air forces, by the Navy, by the blockade, by financing the enemies of the Soviets, or by the use of the League of Nations, or conquered or weaker States—and immediately to remove all barriers to trade with Russia, and establish Peace with Soviet Russia on the basis of No Annexations, No Indemnities, the Right of the Peoples to Self-Determination, and of non-interference in Russia's internal affairs.

*(In the case of an adverse decision by the Trades Union Congress, it will become the duty of the unofficial Convention to decide its policy, and Societies are asked to instruct their Delegates in that sense.)*

#### IRELAND

**RESOLUTION III.**—This Convention demands immediate and complete Independence for Ireland, and the withdrawal of British troops from that country. It calls for a Special Conference of Irish and British Rank and File Representatives, to decide what action British Labour can take to assist the Irish workers in their struggle for emancipation.

#### INDIA AND EGYPT

**RESOLUTION IV.**—This Convention sends Cordial Greetings to its fellow workers in Egypt and India, and demands the withdrawal of

British troops from Egypt, and the restoration of Independence to that country.

It protests against the outrages perpetrated on the Indian people who demonstrated against the oppressive Rowlatt Acts. It demands the Independence and Self-Government of the Indian people, and the emancipation of coloured workers equally with those of other lands.

It condemns that Imperialism which would keep the Eastern and coloured workers in subjection, and which confines its professed aspirations to the welfare of "white-manity," ignoring Humanity, which embraces the peoples of every colour, race and creed.

#### EVILS OF CAPITALISM

**RESOLUTION V.**—This Convention recognises that no expedients for the limitation of profiteering, joint control by workers and employers, or such devices as the capital levy, and nationalisation, can emancipate the workers from poverty, unemployment and exploitation, and that to emancipate the working class, the entire capitalist structure must be overthrown and replaced by a Communist form of society.

#### NATIONALISATION

**RESOLUTION VI.**—This Convention recognises that no scheme of nationalisation will be of any temporary or permanent benefit to the workers which does not remove the capitalist class from power, and calls upon the workers to prepare industrial machinery to take control of the means of production and distribution, independently of capitalism.

At the same time the Convention recognises that Direct Action should be used to compel the Government to accede to the mine workers' demands.

This Convention, therefore, calls upon the Trades Union Congress to take steps to bring about a general strike to wrest the mines from the capitalists.

This Convention decides to elect a special Mines Committee:

1. To press forward the strike policy.
2. To consult with the unofficial Reform Committee of the miners, with a view to formulating and urging upon the workers a scheme for the socialisation and workers' control of the mining industry.
3. To enlarge the demands of the strike in the direction of the general socialisation of the land and all industry.

#### THE HIGH COST OF LIVING

**RESOLUTION VII.**—This Convention recognises that the high cost of living, which is causing untold misery to the workers of this and every



other country, is the natural result of the World War of capitalist rivalries, and the attacks which are now being made on Soviet Russia, the granary of Europe. Nevertheless, the existence of hungry people in a world of plenty is no novelty, but is a feature of the capitalist system, both in peace and war. It therefore urges the workers to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism, and to form Workers' Committees capable of dealing with social administration on the workers' behalf.

#### UNEMPLOYMENT

**RESOLUTION VIII.**—This Convention repudiates increased production under Capitalism and points out that whilst unemployment is chronic under capitalism, and is now acute in every capitalist country, in Soviet Russia, under the fertile influence of Communism, there is no unemployment; on the contrary, there is work for an unlimited supply of workers.

#### PARLIAMENT AND THE SOVIETS

**RESOLUTION IX.**—This Convention declares that the Parliamentary and Local Government system existing in this country to-day was built up to meet the requirements of the capitalist system, and for the legislative and administrative suppression of the working class, and that the Soviets (or Workers' Committees) are the organisations that the workers of all countries are choosing for themselves, as the natural machinery to be used for the overthrow of the capitalist system, and for the administration of a Communist Republic.

#### THE SOVIETS

**RESOLUTION X.**—This Convention, recognising that Social and Industrial Service will be the basis of future society, calls upon the workers to prepare for the creation of Soviets, consisting of:

1. Delegates from all kinds of industrial workers, elected on the workshop basis.
2. Delegates from the land workers.
3. Workers' delegates from villages and hamlets in areas where the population, for technical reasons, cannot be divided for purposes of representation on industrial lines.
4. Delegates of working women not industrially employed, appointed to represent the area in which they live, by the women of those localities.

All representatives to be instructed by those they represent, and subject to recall at any time. All control of policy and action to be vested in the rank and file.

No representation to be given to those who live by employing others for private gain or on accumulated wealth.

Economic Soviets to consist of representatives of the above groups, with power to co-opt in any advisory capacity representatives of Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies and Technical Staffs.

#### TRADES UNION CONGRESS AND THE MINERS

**RESOLUTION XI.**—This Rank and File Convention condemns the cowardice of the Trades Union Congress for its refusal to adopt direct action on the miners' question. It recognises that the decision to adhere to Parliamentary methods will settle nothing.

It calls on the workers in all other industries to show solidarity with the miners in their expected strike. The convention pledges itself to support the miners in their demand for an immediate increase of £2 a week, and in their struggle for the Sovietisation of their industry. A vigorous propaganda for the Sovietisation of all industries and of the land should be carried on amongst all sections of workers. Rank and File Conferences should be held in every industry to formulate schemes for workers' control, which should be printed and circulated as has been done by the unofficial clement amongst the South Wales miners.

#### WHITE GUARDS

**RESOLUTION XII.**—This Convention calls the attention of organised Labour to the fact that the Government has organised "Citizen Guards" to oppose the workers, and urges that steps be taken to deal with the situation thus created.

#### THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL

**RESOLUTION XIII.**—This Convention greets the Third (Communist) International inaugurated in Moscow, and calls upon all workers' organisations here represented to adopt the Communist platform, and to link up with the Third International. It urges the representative delegates here present to secure the withdrawal of their organisations from the Second International and the Labour Party and their affiliation to the Third International.

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