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LABOUR IN WAR TIME

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

# THE WORLD OF LABOUR

A STUDY OF THE PRESENT AND FUTURE  
OF TRADE UNIONISM

BY

G. D. H. COLE

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY WILL DYSON

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# LABOUR IN WAR TIME

BY

G. D. H. COLE

AUTHOR OF "THE WORLD OF LABOUR"



LONDON  
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## PREFACE

THE present book has a strictly limited aim. It does not discuss in any way the question whether Great Britain's participation in the present war is right or wrong, either from the Labour or from any other standpoint. It aims merely at giving a short account of the manner in which the war has affected Labour and of the industrial problems to which it has given rise. The general question of "war and class-war" has been introduced only in so far as it is relevant to the determination of the attitude adopted by Labour during the war on industrial questions.

It is, of course, impossible for a book of this kind to be quite up-to-date. I have stopped with the passage of the Munitions Act.

G. D. H. COLE.

MAGDALEN COLLEGE,  
OXFORD.



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# LABOUR IN WAR TIME

## CHAPTER I

### WAR AND CLASS-WAR

IT is a commonplace that those who talk most glibly of national solidarity are those who least understand what national solidarity implies. The cry against "setting class against class" has always been raised in the interest of those who desire to preserve the *status quo*, and never on behalf of the oppressed. The appeal, in fact, has always been to a false idea of national unity: at the best it has come from the benevolent autocrats of Toryism or the benevolent bureaucrats of Liberalism. Those to whom democracy is more than a political catchword have refused to be deceived by such specious solemnities: they have seen that only a radical change in the present economic system can make national solidarity either possible or desirable. The division of the nation into masters and servants is not swept away merely by calling them employers and employees: it can disappear only with the collapse of the wage-system and the establishment of industrial democracy.

But all this, it may be said, is the reasoning of peace time. A nation at war, we are told, must set

aside for the time being all minor antagonisms: industrial and social dissensions must give way before the supreme need of the nation as a whole. This is indeed the feeling of many who are not deluded by peace time pleas for unity: recognising the fact of the class-struggle, they hold none the less that it should be suspended "for the duration of the war only."

It must be admitted that much of the somewhat artificial philosophy of international relations which the Labour movement constructed for itself in times of peace now proves to have been shallow and unreal. No one, who is not of the most incorrigible and self-satisfied section of either Jingoese or pacifists, will deny the need for revision and restatement of the Labour position. But there is danger that the great bulk of the leaders, at any rate, will be stampeded into accepting the philosophy of national unity too nearly at its face value. If indeed the old internationalism is crumbling, all the greater need for a new internationalism that shall take its place.

It will be universally agreed that the great mass of the workers alike in Great Britain, in Germany, and in France—wherever, in fact, there is an articulate body of working-class opinion—desired peace at least up to the moment when war actually broke out. Between the organised workers of the European Powers there is no quarrel capable of provoking war, no national antagonism strong enough to stand against the very real sense of international working-class solidarity. Yet it is undeniable that, when once war had broken out, the majority of those who had been against intervention were prepared to support their respective countries in the trenches, in Parliament, and in the workshops.

It was clearly not without uneasiness that they came to this decision ; but there was never any doubt how they would decide. International Congresses before the war had made it plain, from the speeches delivered if not from the resolutions passed, that in the event of war actually breaking out most of the various Labour and Socialist bodies would be likely to place their national before their class loyalty. They were conscious of the conflict of loyalties ; but clearly they held their national loyalty, in the circumstances, the more binding. Only the simplest type of revolutionary intelligence would be prepared, without further debate, to declare this decision a breach of class-faith. The situation in which the organised workers found themselves was indeed extraordinarily difficult. They desired to support their country, and they desired—or at least the best of them desired—to be true to their class, both nationally and internationally. Their quarrel was with capitalism, national and international ; yet they found themselves fighting for one capitalist State against another. The situation was none the less ironic because the capitalist State for which they fought was in some sense their own.

Here, then, is the problem which the revolutionary is compelled to face. Is allegiance due first of all to the nation, which includes some of all classes, or to the class, which includes some of all nations ?

On the one hand, national divisions are clearly, in the majority of cases, natural divisions also. Whatever may be true of the British Empire, the unity of all the inhabitants of Great Britain is not the merely artificial unity of legal subjection to a common sovereign. Nations are real persons, and the individuals who compose them are conscious of their part in the national

life. This does not mean that the group-consciousness of the nation absorbs or submerges the consciousness of the individual ; but it does mean that the individual, to whatever groups besides he may feel an attachment, cannot see with indifference the defeat or downfall of the nation to which he belongs. The tie that binds together the members of a community is far stronger than mere neighbourhood : it is the tie of a common descent or at least of a common inheritance.

The mere force in history of the national idea is enough to prove this, if indeed proof is needed. Where nationality has been threatened, other considerations have generally been put aside. The cosmopolitan crusades of mediæval Christendom failed more than once through national antagonisms. Not even the great cosmopolitan idea of the mediæval Church could annihilate nationalist considerations, though, broadly speaking, the whole of each nation sincerely professed loyalty to the Church. Is then the cosmopolitan class loyalty of the modern Labour movement, to which only a part of each nation owes allegiance, likely to be strong enough to stand against the call of the State? I say "of the State" and not "of the nation," and therein lies the final complication of the problem.

This power of the national idea is based not only on the community of blood or tradition which binds the members of the nation together : it gets powerful support from other sources. The nation is small enough and compact enough to be recognised as a unit : the spirit of the national idea is made flesh in the daily life of every citizen. Not so the cosmopolitan idea of class ; for the toilers are scattered over the world, lacking community of neighbourhood, blood, tradition,



or language, united only by the bond of a common exploitation. It takes either a rationalist or a sentimentalist to be a cosmopolitan—and most men are neither. They love realities and, still more, manageable realities.

Now, the State, which is the national machine, is a reality and a manageable reality. It does things, right or wrong: it is capable of being influenced, as capitalism has taught the workers to their cost. It is manageable, even if it is now managed by the wrong people. Cosmopolis, on the other hand, has no Parliament: it does not act, or pass laws, or coerce offenders. It is, at the most, a mere ideal, scarcely even based on fact; and, on that account, the ordinary man thinks little of it.

The man in the street, then, is a nationalist, and that very easily makes him a statist. The welfare of his nation seems to be bound up with the success of the State which claims to express the national unity, and he is therefore easily induced, in times of stress, to throw in his lot even with a capitalist State. Moreover, the inducement becomes greater in proportion as the State extends its hold. The politician who said, "We are all Socialists now," only meant that nowadays we all recognise the immense extension of State activity that has taken place.

Precisely this recognition of the State has often been proclaimed by modern Socialists as the dividing-line between themselves and the Anarchists. The political Socialists have set out to capture the State and all the national political institutions: the Anarchists, regarding the State merely as the "protector of property," have sought rather to destroy it. Anarchism, then, owes no loyalty to the State: even if the Anarchist

believes in nationality, he seeks to realise the triumph of nationality through the overthrow of national Governments. For him, no conflict of allegiance can arise; his duty is to his class, and the revolution to which he looks is a cosmopolitan class movement.

The Socialist, on the other hand, who seeks to capture the State, obviously must seek also to keep it alive and vigorous. It is an instrument which he desires to wrest from his enemy, and he therefore wishes to keep it bright and ready for use. When it is the State and not capitalism that is threatened, he argues that he must fly to its aid, even if this brings him into temporary alliance with the capitalist. He may strive to prevent his State from entering into war; he may refuse to aid it in a war of wanton aggression; but as soon as "the national existence is threatened," his duty, he holds, is with the capitalists on the barricades. And if, in the hour of trial, the capitalists are still busy making profits out of the fighting-line, it is his business, he believes, to hold the barricades alone in the common interest.

If this line of argument is valid, the occasions on which Labour should support the capitalist State in war time are not simply those in which the State has a righteous cause, but those in which "the national existence is threatened." The reason for Labour's support lies not in the righteousness of the cause, but in the danger to the State. It is in the main not as moralists, but as nationalists, that the Socialists can justify their action. Arguments about "brave little Belgium" are, on this showing, as irrelevant as arguments about "the sinister menace of Czarism": it is the threat of foreign domination or

trade supremacy that induces all classes to make common cause.<sup>1</sup> This is clearly the justification for their policy put forward by the Socialists of Germany.

Furthermore, it goes far to explain the difference between the Labour attitude to the Boer War and the Labour attitude to-day. In the Boer War, it was never suggested that the nation was seriously threatened. In the present war, it can be argued that the nation is threatened, and our cause is at any rate no worse than that of our enemies. If not, then, our cause, at least our danger, induces many Labour leaders to support the war, and induces many of these who think we should have remained neutral to say with Mr. MacDonald that "we ought to go through with it."

There is, however, still an important minority among Socialists that holds it always wrong to support any war entered into by a capitalist Government. This minority is important, because it claims to be alone true to the principles of internationalism, to have alone kept its head when all other Socialists and Labour men have broken faith. No act of a capitalist Government, these somewhat pathetic pacifists affirm, can alter the fact of human brotherhood. Have not the workers constantly affirmed their international solidarity? And can their faith be shaken by an act that is none of theirs—by the act of capitalists and exploiters?

This division of opinion among Socialists is of the

<sup>1</sup> It is nevertheless clear that the violation of Belgium did more than anything else to make Labour support the present war. This one event certainly counted, in men's minds, far more than all the logical theories in the world. The violation was certainly a crime; but no less certainly it was for the Government a very fortunate accident.

greatest importance for the future of the working-class movement, both in this country and internationally. It is therefore worth while, even in the midst of war, to attempt a clear statement of the position. And I shall begin by affirming that no solution of the problem can be of the slightest use, unless it both recognises nationality as having a real claim on the workers and at the same time safeguards the class-idea and class-loyalty.

The history of the world has been the history of two wars—the war of nation with nation and the war of class with class. Nor have these wars been less real because they have been the wars of indefinables. No one can define a nation, and no one can say exactly where one nation leaves off and another begins. In exactly the same way, there is no definition of class that will hold for all times and places, and no one can say exactly where the dividing-line between class and class should be drawn. Yet class war and national war, though sometimes, for centuries on end, one or other has seemed in abeyance, have been the constant accompaniment of man's social life.

Moreover, these two wars have reacted on each other in curiously complicated ways. In both cases there is an appeal to the loyalty of the individual, whether the loyalty is to country or to class. Hitherto, save at moments of exceptional stress, it cannot be denied that "national" spirit has been far stronger than "class" spirit. But the growth of industrialism and the spread of popular education have tended to foster class-consciousness, while cosmopolitan finance and international trade have weakened the "little national" spirit which comes of isolation. For many years, the workers of the world, and still more the

“ intellectuals ” attached to the cause of Labour, have been debating on the rights and possibilities of this conflict of loyalties. The drama that is being enacted in Europe to-day is not merely a drama of national antagonisms : its deepest interest is psychological. From it we may hope to learn at last the true relation between nationalism and class-consciousness.

But all that, it may be said, we know already. The bastard internationalism of the Labour and Socialist movement collapsed last August like a house of cards, and only a miserable remnant of devotees was left repeating the old phrases amid the ruin of their hopes and their ideals. This is true in a sense ; but in another sense there can be no profounder mistake. Only the first act of the drama has been played. The democracies of Europe have failed to prevent war : but in the midst of war they are thinking, feeling their way towards a clearer conception of nationalism and of internationalism, clearing their minds of cant, and preparing to face the future. The real conflict—the conflict of ideas—is only beginning.

The Labour movement has always been vague and uncertain in its attitude to nationalism and to Governments. It has appeared on one day as the champion of oppressed nationalities, and on the next day it has declared that the workers have no country. In Great Britain it has stood for reduction of armaments, on the ground that we need only a large enough force for defence ; yet at the same time it has counselled active intervention on our part in Persia and elsewhere. It has dallied with the doctrine of non-resistance ; yet it has cherished aspirations to be the knight-errant of world democracy. In short, it has claimed to have

everything both ways ; and, in consequence, all its plans have ended in smoke.

For the last quarter of a century the Labour and Socialist bodies in the various nations of Europe have been slowly drawing together into International Federations. In 1889 the first International Socialist Congress<sup>1</sup> met in Paris : in 1900 there grew out of it the more permanent International Socialist Bureau. In 1901 was held the first formal International Trade Union Congress, out of which has grown the International Federation of Trade Unions. During the 'nineties less formal international Labour Congresses were several times held, and in 1894 the first International Congress of Textile Workers set a precedent which has since been followed in many of the chief industries. There are now International Federations of Miners, Textile Workers, Metal Workers, Wood Workers, Transport Workers, etc., mostly centred in Germany, but drawing their members from almost every country in Europe.

Labour has thus built up the skeleton of an elaborate international organisation. The bodies concerned fall into two clearly distinct groups. On the one side are the various political parties and Socialist Societies, whose Federation forms the international political organ of the movement : on the other side are the International Federation of Trade Unions and the various International Federations of single industries, all these latter forming the industrial organs of international Labour.

What was the attitude of these bodies and of the

<sup>1</sup> The old Marxian "International" was formally wound up in 1876. The movement of 1889 was Labour's second attempt at international organisation.

sections composing them to the prospect of war up to last July? In the main, the industrial organisations did not attempt to face the problem. The International Federation of Trade Unions is almost purely a statistical and debating body, and has hardly considered the possibility of united industrial action; and when, some years ago, the French General Confederation of Labour sent in to the Congress resolutions dealing with anti-militarism and the General Strike against war, the International Trade Union Congress definitely refused them a place on the agenda, on the ground that they would be more properly raised at the International Socialist Congress.

The International Federations of the various industries have also naturally avoided the discussion of the general question of internationalism. They exist to deal with the problems which are common to the workers in certain industries wherever they are carried on, and the excellent work which they do could only be hampered if the internationalist red herring were drawn across their track. The International Transport Workers' Federation, for instance, has also refused to table a resolution on the General Strike against war, apparently on the ground that it might complicate relations with the German authorities.

It is, then, in the main to the International Socialist Congress and to the International Socialist Bureau that we must look for a definite pronouncement on the attitude of Labour to war. There, in the reports of the Congress of 1907, we shall find the record of the most important debate on the question and of the resolution carried at the close.<sup>1</sup> As it was the policy

<sup>1</sup> A good account of this debate is to be found in H. N. Brailsford's *The War of Steel and Gold*, pp. 187 ff. The whole of chapter vi. of Mr. Brailsford's book deals with this question.

recommended by the International in 1907 that the Socialists of Europe at least began to put into effect last July, both the debate and the resolution are of the greatest importance for an understanding of the Labour position.

The discussion arose at the instance of the French delegates, who had for more than ten years before been holding heated arguments about it in France, where the Syndicalist Confederation of Labour and a section of the Socialists, led by Hervé, had advocated uncompromising anti-militarism. In response to the challenge of the Syndicalists, Jaurès and the leaders of the Socialist Party formulated their policy of anti-militarism, and carried it to the International Congress for discussion.

The actual debate, which ended in the passing of a specially drafted resolution by unanimous vote, was remarkable chiefly for the conflict of views between the French and German Socialists. Alike in rejecting the idea that Socialists should support their country, "right or wrong," they differed in the alternative policies which they suggested. The French held that the Socialist Parties should be guided by the rights and wrongs of the particular occasion, and should always throw their weight against the aggressor, even if it were their own country. The Germans, on the other hand, preferred to be guided by the general character of the contending Powers, and held that Socialists should take the side most likely to forward Socialism and democracy. Bebel declared that he would shoulder a rifle for Germany against Russia on these grounds: it did not appear whether he would as unhesitatingly have taken the part of Great Britain or France against Germany.



While the various nations differed in their view of the right tactics to adopt if war should actually break out, they all agreed that it would be the duty of Socialists in every country to use all their endeavours to prevent war from breaking out. So far, the action taken by them in 1914 follows the lines laid down in the resolution, of which the final wording was as follows :

*If war threatens to break out it is the duty of the working-class in the countries concerned and of their Parliamentary representatives, with the help of the International Socialist Bureau as a means of co-ordinating their action, to use every effort to prevent war by all the means which seem to them most appropriate, having regard to the sharpness of the class war and to the general political situation.*

*Should war none the less break out, their duty is to intervene to bring it promptly to an end, and with all their energies to use the political and economic crisis created by the war to rouse the populace from its slumbers, and to hasten the fall of capitalist domination.*

Like most resolutions that are carried unanimously at the end of a controversial debate, this declaration merely avoids the greatest difficulties. It falls, as we have seen, sharply into two parts. On the action to be taken in face of the threat of war, its instructions are clear and definite ; for on this point all Socialist and Labour bodies are agreed. On the action to be taken in the event of war its answer is evasive and ambiguous.

Last July it became very suddenly the duty of European Labour to put the first clause of the resolution into effect. During the week or so when the decision for war or peace seemed to hang in the balance, Socialist and Labour bodies in all the countries con-

cerned held imposing meetings and demonstrations to protest against intervention by the countries to which they belonged. The International Socialist Bureau met and counselled this course, and its lead was everywhere followed with alacrity. But despite demonstrations and resolutions, the working-class leaders well knew that the decision for peace or war would not in reality rest with the workers, that in fact the crisis through which Europe was passing was the result of a long series of diplomatic manoeuvres in which the workers had had no say, and that it was in reality vain to protest at the eleventh hour. Labour everywhere protested on principle ; but from the first the tone of its protest was dead and hopeless. It gained only this : that the workers in every country can say that, down to the outbreak of war, they kept faith with the International.

What, then, of the second clause in the resolution, round which the controversy really centres ? In this clause there were two recommendations, dealing respectively with the war in its international and in its social aspects. In the first place, the workers were urged to intervene promptly in order to bring the war to an end, and in the second place they were " to use the political crisis created by the war to rouse the populace from its slumbers, and to hasten the fall of capitalist domination."

It is comparatively easy to urge that your country shall not intervene in a war : it is far more difficult to urge that it shall make peace when it has once entered upon war. Until war has actually begun, there is always the possibility of arbitration, of a conference of the Powers, or the like : when the nation is at war, peace suggestions, however necessary they

may be, are very difficult to make. A nation at war almost inevitably develops a belief in the righteousness of its cause ; it almost inevitably comes to believe that till it has destroyed, or at least clipped the wings of, its adversary, there can be no secure peace. In short, it easily—and the more easily the larger the area of conflict—comes to look on itself as the saviour of the world. The will to live and the will to power are strong in the consciousness of nations, and they easily become the will to kill and the will to domination. All the greater, no doubt, is the need for a public opinion that will press for peace on terms honourable to all concerned ; but as Labour bodies consist of men, and not always of very wise or clever men, their nationalism readily goes Jingo under the stress of the national crisis. Thus, there has been practically no attempt in any country, except by small minorities in the working-class bodies, to give effect to the second clause of the International's command. The Independent Labour Party in Great Britain, certain Russian and Austrian Socialists, and a minority of the German Socialists, together with a certain number of French Trade Unionists, have demanded peace, and a larger section has demanded that the Governments shall publish in advance the terms on which they are prepared to make peace ; but apart from these scattered and, for the most part, unofficial endeavours, nothing has been done. The official parties and working-class organisations seem convinced of the rightness of their respective countries' causes : the Germans wish to humble Czardom and punish Great Britain, while the British and the French speak of crushing German militarism.

Doubtless, as this is an English book, my readers will say that our national feeling is easily explained

by the righteousness of our cause. It is no part of my plan to discuss the ethics of the present war, and I will only make the answer that is relevant to my purpose. It is clear, I reply, that if this were a German book, the average German would say the same. Herein lies the weakness of the policy recommended by the French delegates to the International Socialist Congress. Socialists, they maintained, should always oppose the aggressor. But who is the aggressor? It is no doubt simple to decide such a question in times of peace, and with the aid of hypothetical instances ; but an international body is seldom likely to agree in singling out the aggressor when all Europe is ablaze. The International can have no common policy so long as it tries to apportion the blame : its only consistent course is to go on in war time demanding the reference to arbitration or to a conference of all the Powers which it urged when war threatened. It will not be listened to in any case ; but here, too, it has the chance of keeping its hands clean. Under capitalism, that would seem to be all the Socialist can hope to do in international affairs.

If the recommendations which we have discussed seem academic and unreal, the third suggestion of the International brings us back with a start to the world of realities. The workers of all countries are definitely urged to use the situation created by the war for the purpose of undermining the capitalist system. It is when we come to discuss this clause that the omissions in the International resolution become most obvious. It is manifest that a working-class body, if it uses the situation created by the war as a weapon against capitalism, may well hamper the nation in the conduct of war. Yet of this the resolution says not a word.

It does not say under what circumstances, if ever, the workers ought to support a war; and though clearly most of the speakers at the Congress thought that there were such circumstances, its last recommendation seems to imply that the working-class organisations should stand aloof and look after their economic interests. In fact, this clause conceals the real unwillingness of the International to commit itself on the one point that is of practical importance.

For here we come at last to a question which has been faced by organised Labour—or at least by its leaders—and decided in a manner which has made a real difference. For in the economic sphere Labour, more especially in war time, cannot be pushed aside as a nonentity; politically more impotent than in peace, it finds its economic power increased tenfold. Not only can it hold up the ordinary supplies of the nation: it can prevent munitions of war from reaching the firing line.

The actual course pursued by the British Labour movement we shall be able to follow in more detail in the next chapter: here I am only discussing the general principle involved. Should the workers use the opportunity created by a war “to hasten the downfall of capitalist domination” or should they not? The International Socialist Congress apparently answers that they should, and thus in effect surely says that it is not right for the workers to support any war.

It would be clearly absurd at the same time to say to one's country, “Go in and win,” and to cut off its supplies at the source. If Labour determines to support a war, it implicitly determines also to supply the necessary munitions, and undertakes to attempt no offensive movement likely to hamper the nation in the

conduct of war. In short, it cannot, at least upon a large scale, attempt "to hasten the downfall of capitalist domination."

There are, then, three possible courses before a national Labour organisation, if it desires to act logically. It may decide that the wars of capitalist Governments are not, and cannot be, its business, and it may accordingly declare its absolute aloofness.<sup>1</sup> In this case it is clearly free to follow the advice of the International, and to use the situation created by the war for the purpose of undermining capitalism. But such an attitude, as we have seen, really involves the repudiation of nationality. Logical enough, it is so flagrantly a violation of natural instincts that it cannot, in the last resort, be sustained.

In the second case, while affirming the duty of defending their country in case of need, the workers may decide that, in a particular war, the national security is not threatened, and may in such a case hold themselves at liberty to stand aloof from the war and reap what benefits they can from the economic situation it produces. This is a logical attitude, consistent both with nationalism and with internationalism, but not applicable to all cases.

Thirdly, the workers may decide that the national security is threatened and that it is their duty to come to their country's aid. In such a case, as we have seen, they cannot logically take advantage of the economic situation for an attack on capitalism, if in so doing they hamper the country in the conduct of war. This seems to have been the position taken up by the

<sup>1</sup> For practical purposes, though not in theory, the so-called "Tolstoyan" attitude of non-resistance coincides with this first view. Thus, Tolstoyans and working-class cosmopolitans are now found together in the "stop the war" movement.

majority of British Labour leaders on the outbreak of war. It remains to enquire what action the workers, if they hold this view, are still entitled to take.

The enemies of Labour will of course claim that, for the period of the war, the workers must hand themselves over tied and bound to their lords and masters, that they must submit to every indignity and to every exaction, without protest and without retaliation. This plea is obviously the merest nonsense. At the most the worker is only bound not to hamper wantonly the work of war—that is, not to take the offensive against capitalism where such action is likely to be hampering in its effects. If the capitalist is entitled to demand the maintenance of the *status quo* to this extent, clearly the workers are entitled to demand it absolutely. Labour is the aggressor in its war with capitalism; and if Labour gives up for the moment the right of aggression, there is a double reason why capitalism should surrender its right of retaliation. The State, as it exists to-day, is a mere parody of the true expression of the national unity: Labour, in granting it allegiance, is offering it service by virtue of what it might be. The State, then, at least owes Labour the return of not serving out to it a double measure of kicks in exchange for its ha'pence.

We shall have to deal with this whole question more thoroughly when we come to consider the actual experiences and actions of Labour in Great Britain during the present war. Here it is enough to lay down the general principle. Even if Labour decides to support a particular war, and thereby implicitly undertakes to do nothing to hamper the successful prosecution of it, this by no means implies unconditional surrender on the part of the workers. They

have the right to see that the *status quo* is maintained, they have a right to fair treatment by the State and by the employers, they have a right to be taken into the Government's confidence wherever they are closely concerned—in short, they have rights as well as duties, and not least among their rights is the right to be treated as responsible beings. Moreover, they have the right, if these just claims are not granted, to use their economic power for the purpose of enforcing them.

We return, then, to the point that the double allegiance of the worker exists no less in war time than in peace. It is his duty, as well as his right, to act as a citizen of the nation to which he belongs ; but it is also his duty, as well as his right, to see that the war is not used by his enemies for the purpose of exploiting still further the class of which he is a member. He has on his conscience this double system of rights and duties ; but the obligations that fall upon him are not irreconcilable.

But, it may be urged, this solution forgets internationalism altogether. The worker's duty to his class, as it is here conceived, seems to be his duty to his class within the nation, not to the exploited of every nation. What has become of the fine old Marxian cry, " Workers of the world, unite ! You have nothing to lose but your chains, and a world to win " ?

It is indeed true that the theory here advanced is not *cosmopolitanism* ; but it is, I maintain, *internationalism*. That is to say, it does not deny the validity and the value of all national boundaries, traditions, and aspirations, or seek to confound all social sense in a vast, vague sentiment of the individual brotherhood of all men. It is based on nationality, and the brother-



hood on which it rests is the brotherhood not of individuals but of nations. It is truly international, in that it seeks to preserve nations and nationality while removing national antagonisms.

The world will become a Socialist world when, and only when, the nations of the world become Socialist nations. The pure class-conscious cosmopolitan of some Socialist theory is as unnatural and as unreal as the pure "economic man" of the older economists. If the pure economic man of capitalist thought confronted in the real world the pure class-conscious proletarian of revolutionary thought, the class-war would soon be over. As things are, consciousness of class is at the most only one of two dominant ideas: and if it sets itself in opposition to the idea of nationality, it will, even if it scotches nationalism, only destroy itself in the process. The way to class-emancipation lies through national action. Internationally, the workers must be always ready to hold out a helping hand from one country to another; but the real battles will be fought out in each separate national group. This applies not only to political battles, but at least as much to industrial battles. The wage-system will end when National Guilds replace it.

## CHAPTER II

### LABOUR AND THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

“ IF war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working class in the countries concerned . . . to use every effort to prevent war. . . .” This, as we have seen, was the policy prescribed to Labour organisations by the International Socialist Congress of 1907. Let us see how it worked out in actual practice last July.

The Austrian Note to Servia was delivered on July 23, and the declaration of war followed on Saturday the 25th. During the week-end the Austrian Socialist deputies published a manifesto protesting against the war, and anti-war demonstrations were held in Berlin and elsewhere under the auspices of the German Socialist Party. The first body to move in Great Britain was the British Socialist Party, whose Executive passed on the 28th a resolution protesting against the Austrian Note and declaration of war, and congratulating continental Socialists on their efforts to keep the peace. On the same day, protests against the war were passed by the French and German sections of the International Socialist Bureau, while the French Socialist deputies passed a resolution in which they urged the French Government “to act towards our

ally, Russia, so that this Power, under the pretext of defending Slav interests, should not be allowed to satisfy aggressive designs. This effort corresponds with the German Socialists' demand for pacific pressure by their own Government on Austria, its ally." The next day the French General Confederation of Labour issued a manifesto against war.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the International Socialist Bureau had been summoned at Brussels. At this meeting the French, German, and Austrian delegates alike declared that the workers in their countries were unanimously against war. It was decided that the International Socialist Congress, which was to have been held in Vienna late in August, should be held in Paris on August 9. It need hardly be said that, in the event, the Congress was not held.

The first duty of the Bureau was to carry out the terms of the 1907 resolution. This it did by issuing the following declaration :

In assembly of July 29 the International Socialist Bureau has heard declarations from representatives of all nations threatened by a world war, describing the political situation in their respective countries.

With unanimous vote, the Bureau considers it an obligation for the workers of all concerned nations not only to continue but even to strengthen their demonstrations against war in favour of peace and of a settlement of the Austro-Servian conflict by arbitration.

The German and French workers will bring to bear on their Governments the most vigorous pressure in order that Germany may secure in Austria a moderating action, and in order that France may obtain from Russia an undertaking that she will not engage in the conflict. On their side the workers of Great Britain and Italy shall sustain these efforts with all the power at their command.

The Congress urgently convoked in Paris will be the

vigorous expression of the peaceful will of the workers of the whole world.

As the Congress was never held, this was as far as international action carried the workers. We can now proceed to trace the course of events in Great Britain, which closely resembles their course in the other countries concerned.

The first to issue a pronouncement were the Labour Members of Parliament, who, on July 30, passed unanimously the following resolution :

That the Labour Party is gratified that Sir Edward Grey has taken steps to secure mediation in the dispute between Austria and Serbia, and regrets that his proposal has not been accepted by the Powers concerned ; it hopes, however, that on no account will this country be dragged into the European conflict in which, as the Prime Minister has stated, we have no direct or indirect interest, and the Party calls upon all Labour organisations in the country to watch events vigilantly so as to oppose, if need be, in the most effective way any action which may involve us in war.

Two days later, on the day when the assassination of Jaurès became known, the British Section of the International Socialist Bureau issued its manifesto in accordance with the decisions of the International.

### MANIFESTO TO THE BRITISH PEOPLE

The long-threatened European war is now upon us. For more than 100 years no such danger has confronted civilisation. It is for you to take full account of the desperate situation and to act promptly and vigorously in the interest of peace. You have never been consulted about the war.

Whatever may be the rights and wrongs of the sudden, crushing attack made by the militarist Empire of Austria

upon Servia, it is certain that the workers of all countries likely to be drawn into the conflict must strain every nerve to prevent their Governments from committing them to war.

Everywhere Socialists and the organised forces of Labour are taking this course. Everywhere vehement protests are made against the greed and intrigues of militarists and armament-mongers.

We call upon you to do the same here in Great Britain upon an even more impressive scale. Hold vast demonstrations against war in every industrial centre. *Compel those of the governing class and their Press who are eager to commit you to co-operate with Russian despotism to keep silence and respect the decision of the overwhelming majority of the people, who will have neither part nor lot in such infamy. The success of Russia at the present day would be a curse to the world.*<sup>1</sup>

There is no time to lose. Already, by secret agreements and understandings, of which the democracies of the civilised world know only by rumour, steps are being taken which may fling us all into the fray.

Workers, stand together therefore for peace! Combine and conquer the militarist enemy and the self-seeking Imperialists to-day, once and for all.

Men and women of Britain, you have now an unexampled opportunity of rendering a magnificent service to humanity, and to the world!

Proclaim that for you the days of plunder and butchery have gone by; send messages of peace and fraternity to your fellows who have less liberty than you. Down with class rule. Down with the rule of brute force. Down with war. Up with the peaceful rule of the people.

(Signed on behalf of the British Section of the International Socialist Bureau.)

J. KEIR HARDIE.

ARTHUR HENDERSON.

Thus on August 1 the bodies affiliated to the

<sup>1</sup> Italics mine.

International, including not only the Independent Labour Party, the British Socialist Party, and the Fabian Society, but also the Labour Party, were decisively against war and against the Russian alliance.

The next day, Sunday, August 2, a great anti-war meeting was held in Trafalgar Square under the auspices of the British Section. Among the speakers were Mr. Keir Hardie, Mr. Arthur Henderson, Mr. Will Thorne, and Mr. Lansbury. The following resolution was carried with enthusiasm by a crowded meeting representative of all sections of the working-class movement :

That this demonstration, representing the organised workers and citizens of London, views with serious alarm the prospects of a European war, into which every European Power will be dragged owing to secret alliances and understandings which in their origin were never sanctioned by the nations, nor are even now communicated to them ; we stand by the efforts of the International Working-Class Movement to unite the workers of the nations concerned in their efforts to prevent their Governments from entering upon war, as expressed in the resolution passed by the International Socialist Bureau ; *we protest against any step being taken by the Government of this country to support Russia, either directly or in consequence of any understanding with France, as being not only offensive to the political traditions of the country but disastrous to Europe, and declare that as we have no interest, direct or indirect, in the threatened quarrels which may result from the action of Austria in Servia, the Government of Great Britain should rigidly decline to engage in war, but should confine itself to efforts to bring about peace as speedily as possible.*<sup>1</sup>

This was on Sunday : on the Monday followed the German threat to Belgium and Sir Edward Grey's

<sup>1</sup> Italics mine.

speech in the House of Commons. In the debate Mr. Ramsay MacDonald made his last pronouncement as leader of the Labour Party.

“Whatever may be said about us,” he said, “we shall say that this country ought to have remained neutral, because in our deepest hearts we believe that is right, and that alone is consistent with the honour of the country and the traditions of the party now in office.”

On the same day Mr. Will Crooks gained the distinction of being the first member of the Labour Party to declare for war. The day after, Great Britain was actually at war with Germany.

The declaration of war at once changed the situation. The first part of the policy recommended by the International had been tried in vain: Labour had failed to prevent war. The important question that now faced the workers was the attitude they ought to adopt in war time. Were they “to intervene to bring the war promptly to an end,” and, if so, how? And were they “to use the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the populace from its slumbers, and to hasten the fall of capitalist domination”?

Labour’s first move was in the direction of safeguarding its economic interests. Already, before the declaration of war, the Joint Board of the Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress, and the General Federation of Trade Unions had summoned a representative conference of the most important working-class bodies for the purpose of forming a National Labour Peace Emergency Committee, presumably for the purpose of carrying on agitation against British intervention. The declaration of war changed the character of this conference, which met on August 6. The suggested

peace campaign was abandoned, and instead of a "peace committee" Labour formed the "War Emergency Workers' National Committee," of which the duty was to be the safeguarding of Labour interests. As we shall have much to say of this Committee in a later chapter, we need here only notice its formation. Up to this point, Labour was still keeping to the spirit of the International resolution, in at least one respect, by concentrating on its own peculiar problems.

It is, however, interesting to notice that, even when the declaration of war was inevitable, some of the promoters of the Labour conference had not given up the idea of a Peace Committee. Mr. Arthur Henderson, interviewed in the *Daily Citizen* of August 5, said of the work of the proposed committee: "One important thing will be to come to a decision to take all necessary steps for the promotion of an early and permanent peace." In the same interview he laid stress on the economic collapse which might be expected to follow the outbreak of war, and in the need for a strong body to serve as a mouthpiece of the claims of Labour.

The resolutions passed at the great Labour conference on August 5 had, in fact, no reference to the ethics of the war or to the need for peace. The conference dealt solely with the economic situation caused by the war and adopted a series of recommendations intended to assist the workers in facing the industrial crisis. This concentration on the work of relief was endorsed the following day by a resolution adopted by the Executive Committee of the Labour Party.<sup>1</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> The Executive Committee of the Labour Party is a different body from the party meeting of Labour M.P.'s. The Labour Party is a federation of Trade Unions and Socialist bodies, governed by an Executive Committee and represented in Parliament by the Labour members, who, as we shall see, took a rather different line.



resolution was published on August 7 with the following covering letter :

DEAR SIR—We beg to inform you that a special meeting of the National Executive of the Labour Party was held on August 5 and 6 to consider the European crisis, when it was decided to forward to each of the affiliated organisations the following resolutions :—

“ That the conflict between the nations of Europe in which this country is involved is owing to Foreign Ministers pursuing diplomatic policies for the purpose of maintaining a balance of power ; that our own national policy of understandings with France and Russia only, was bound to increase the power of Russia both in Europe and Asia, and to endanger good relations with Germany.

“ That Sir Edward Grey, as proved by the facts which he gave to the House of Commons, committed, without the knowledge of our people, the honour of the country to supporting France in the event of any war in which she was seriously involved, and gave definite assurances of support before the House of Commons had any chance of considering the matter.

“ That the Labour movement reiterates the fact that it has opposed the policy which has produced the war, and that its duty is now to secure peace at the earliest possible moment on such conditions as will provide the best opportunities for the re-establishment of amicable feelings between the workers of Europe.

“ That without in any way receding from the position that the Labour movement has taken in opposition to our engaging in a European war, the executive of the party advises that, while watching for the earliest opportunity for taking effective action in the interests of peace and the re-establishment of good feeling between the workers of the European nations, all Labour and Socialist organisations should concentrate their energies meantime upon the task of carrying out the resolutions passed at the Conference of Labour organisations held at the House of Commons on August 5, detailing measures to be taken to mitigate

the destitution which will inevitably overtake our working people while the state of war lasts."

Your attention is specially called to Clause 3 of the attached resolutions, agreed upon at the Labour and Socialist Emergency Conference. Citizen committees are being formed in county and urban areas, and every effort should be made to secure a fair and adequate representation of Labour, including woman, upon these committees. We also urge the great importance of all Labour organisations giving every possible assistance in the relief work organised by these citizen committees.—Yours very sincerely,

W. C. ANDERSON, *Chairman.*  
ARTHUR HENDERSON, *Secretary.*

On the same day as the Labour Party Executive met the Labour members held their weekly meeting, at the close of which the announcement was made that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald had resigned the leadership of the Party, and that, for the time being, Mr. Arthur Henderson would take his place.

The cause of Mr. MacDonald's retirement was given as "disagreement with some of his colleagues on certain aspects of the European crisis." Already the forces of Labour were becoming divided: some wished to sink all differences in the "national danger," while others thought that the working-class movement should continue to take an independent line.

It is important to understand that this cleavage did not coincide with the division between those who thought the war ought to be supported and those who thought it should still be opposed. Speaking at Leicester the day after his resignation, Mr. MacDonald made his position quite clear. He dwelt on the share which British foreign policy had had in bringing about the war.

“ We are not fighting for the independence of Belgium,” he said. “ We are fighting because we are in the Triple Entente ; because the policy of the Foreign Office for a number of years has been anti-German, and because that policy has been conducted by secret diplomacy on the lines of creating alliances in order to preserve the balance of power. We are fighting because we have got prejudices against very strong commercial rivals.”

Mr. MacDonald continued with a plea for good feeling towards Germany, and for frank recognition of her national greatness. “ But,” he said, “ whatever our view may be on the origin of the war we must go through with it.” A month later, on September 11, Mr. MacDonald went even further. The following letter from him was read at a recruiting meeting in Leicester :

MY DEAR MR. MAYOR—I am very sorry indeed that I cannot be with you on Friday. My opinions regarding the causes of the war are pretty well known, except in so far as they have been misrepresented, but we are in it. It will work itself out now. Might and spirit will win, and incalculable political and social consequences will follow upon victory.

Victory, therefore, must be ours. England is not played out. Her mission is not accomplished. She can, if she would, take the place of esteemed honour among the democracies of the world, and if peace is to come with healing on her wings, the democracies of Europe must be her guardians. There should be no doubt about that.

Well, we cannot go back, nor can we turn to the right or to the left. We must go straight through. History will, in due time, apportion the praise and the blame, but the young men of the country must, for the moment, settle the immediate issue of victory. Let them do it in the spirit of the brave men who have crowned our country with honour in the times that are gone. Whoever may be in the wrong, men so inspired will be in the right. The

quarrel was not of the people, but the end of it will be the lives and liberties of the people.

Should an opportunity arise to enable me to appeal to the pure love of country—which I know is a precious sentiment in all our hearts, keeping it clear of thoughts which I believe to be alien to real patriotism—I shall gladly take that opportunity. If need be I shall make it for myself. I want the serious men of the Trade Union, the Brotherhood, and similar movements to face their duty. To such men it is enough to say “England has need of you”; to say it in the right way. They will gather to her aid. They will protect her, and when the war is over they will see to it that the policies and conditions that make it will go like the mists of a plague and the shadows of a pestilence.—Yours very sincerely,

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

It is clear then that what caused Mr. MacDonald to resign was not his refusal to accept the fact of war and the responsibility involved in it, but his desire to preserve a free hand in criticism, to be free to state the case against British diplomacy and to criticise the Government. Already the cry of national solidarity was being used to stifle criticism, and there were some among the working-class leaders who, in the first flush of their new-found patriotism, were inclined to accept the muzzle that capitalism was not slow to thrust upon their mouths.

Mr. MacDonald's resignation and other indications made it plain that the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party had thrown in their lot with the war and the Government. The Labour Party Executive, on the other hand, and the Workers' Emergency Committee had urged concentration on relief work, and had said nothing about the war as such. The division of opinion was first publicly proclaimed when

the National Administrative Council of the Independent Labour Party, which is the largest Socialist society in the country, launched its manifesto on August 13. This document must be quoted in part, as it is the only authoritative expression of opinion against the war that this country has produced. It begins with a long denunciation of British foreign policy, of the Triple Entente, of the doctrine of the balance of power, and of the race of armaments. It continues with an attack on secret diplomacy, and points out the horror and waste that war involves. It then ends by reaffirming its faith in internationalism and Socialism in the following terms :

The war conflagration envelops Europe: up to the last moment we laboured to prevent the blaze. The nation must now watch for the first opportunity for effective intervention.

As for the future, we must begin to prepare our minds for the difficult and dangerous complications that will arise at the conclusion of the war.

The people must everywhere resist such territorial aggression and national abasement as will pave the way for fresh wars; and throughout Europe the workers must press for frank and honest diplomatic policies, controlled by themselves, for the suppression of militarism and the establishment of the united states of Europe, thereby advancing toward the world's peace. Unless these steps are taken Europe, after the present calamity, will be still more subject to the domination of militarism, and increasingly liable to be drenched with blood.

We are told that international Socialism is dead, that all our hopes and ideals are wrecked by the fire and pestilence of European war. It is not true.

Out of the darkness and the depth we hail our working-class comrades of every land. Across the roar of guns, we send sympathy and greeting to the German Socialists.

They have laboured unceasingly to promote good relations with Britain, as we with Germany. They are no enemies of ours but faithful friends.

In forcing this appalling crime upon the nations, it is the rulers, the diplomats, the militarists who have sealed their doom. In tears of blood and bitterness the greater democracy will be born. With steadfast faith we greet the future : our cause is holy and imperishable, and the labour of our hands has not been in vain.

Long live Freedom and Fraternity ! Long live International Socialism !

The Independent Labour Party was the only Socialist body that took a definite line against the war. The second large Socialist society, the British Socialist Party, decided, through its executive, to support the war, though subsequent conferences of the members have made it more than doubtful whether this support reflected the view of the rank and file. The Fabian Society, true to its traditions, made no pronouncement, and confined itself to taking an active part in suggesting measures for the relief of distress. The Trade Unions, too, remained for a time silent : to their action in the crisis we shall refer later.

Through the latter half of August the Labour bodies were mainly occupied in trying to adjust themselves to the new economic situation. It was not until the end of the month that any important new step was taken in defining the Labour attitude to the war. The Government and the Opposition together, under the terms of the party truce, decided to initiate a parliamentary recruiting campaign, and the Labour members were invited to take part. The majority of them accepted this invitation, and it became necessary, if the Party was to act as a whole, that the endorsement of the National Executive of the Labour Party should

be obtained. An emergency meeting of the National Executive was held on August 29, and the following resolution was agreed to, though it is clear that there was considerable difference of opinion. The terms of the resolution seem to imply that the Labour members had already practically committed the Party.

That in view of the serious situation created by the European war the executive committee of the Labour Party agrees with the policy of the Parliamentary party in joining in the campaign to strengthen the British Army, and agrees to place the central office organisation at the disposal of the campaign, and further recommends the affiliated bodies to give all possible local support.

Mr. Arthur Henderson, who was soon afterwards made a Privy Councillor, was accordingly appointed, together with the Prime Minister and Mr. Bonar Law, as a President of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, while Mr. James Parker, Mr. F. W. Goldstone, and Mr. J. Pointer were also placed on the Committee.

This decision naturally gave rise to considerable discussion, opposition to participation in an inter-party recruiting campaign being by no means confined to those who were opposed to the war. It was widely held, even among those who thought that Labour ought to appeal for recruits, that it would be better for the Labour bodies either to run a separate recruiting campaign of their own, or to leave sections and individuals to take action on their own responsibility. There were many who held that recruiting was no business of Labour as such, and still more who felt unable to appear on the same platform with members of capitalist parties.

The duty of Labour, these dissentients held, was to safeguard the interests of the workers. A capitalist

Government could not be expected all of a sudden to change its spots, and there would therefore be need for continual vigilance and criticism not only in Parliament, but more especially up and down the country. It was felt by many that such criticism would be impossible from a common platform, and that the working class would only stultify itself by sinking its identity. A certain number of the Labour M.P.'s, including the I.L.P. members, and a greater proportion of Labour leaders outside Parliament, have acted in accordance with this view.

It does indeed seem absurd to suppose that the class-struggle can be altogether eclipsed by any national crisis. A national crisis means that the nation has many difficult problems to face, and a capitalist Government, left to itself, is hardly likely to face them in a manner agreeable to the workers. Surely at all costs the forces of Labour should have preserved their identity : but participation in an inter-party recruiting campaign was hardly the best way of doing this. Still less so, it would seem, is participation in a Coalition Cabinet : yet to this, too, Labour has at last come.<sup>1</sup>

The decision of the Parliamentary Labour Party, however, mattered the less in this case, as Parliament is clearly not an important body in time of war. Despite the immense mass of ill-digested legislation which the war has produced, it is nonsense to pretend that Parliament has gained in prestige during the last six months. Emergency legislation has not, in fact, emanated from Parliament at all : Parliament has

<sup>1</sup> When Mr. Henderson was invited to join the Coalition Government, he placed the proposal before a meeting of Labour members, which actually rejected it. It was subsequently carried by a majority at a joint meeting with the Executive of the Labour Party.



abrogated in favour of the Cabinet. The result has been that, more nakedly than ever, the course of legislation has been determined by an open conflict of economic forces. The Cabinet has proposed; the final decision has depended on the amount of pressure which conflicting interests have been able to apply. Thus, the Stock Exchange and the bankers at once secured full protection: Labour, on the other hand, having foolishly begun by signing away its economic power, has only gained small concessions after infinite trouble and at the cost of receding from its original attitude.

What really matters to Labour, in times of war no less than of peace, is to keep its economic power undiminished. This means that the industrial organisation must be kept in repair, and that there must be no slackening of effort in the industrial field. Having sketched the history of Labour's changing attitude to the war itself, more especially in the political sphere, I come now to the action taken by Labour on the industrial field.

There are two bodies which attempt to co-ordinate the work of the Trade Unions in the economic sphere, the Trades Union Congress, which has over three million members in its affiliated organisations, and the General Federation of Trade Unions, which has about one million, in most cases also affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. Only the second of these is affiliated to the International Federation of Trade Unions. The Trades Union Congress is administered by a Parliamentary Committee, and the General Federation by a Management Committee. Both these Committees have issued manifestos on the war.

The manifesto of the Management Committee of

the General Federation of Trade Unions is important because that body is in touch with the international Trade Union movement. It begins by defining its attitude to the war as such, and concludes that "the responsibility for the war does not rest upon the policy or conduct of Great Britain."

Having declared itself convinced of the justice of the war, it proceeds to discuss the economic problems that arise out of it.

Not less imperative than the problems of national defence are those problems which affect the political and economic life of the State during the war, and which will continue to affect it long after the war is over. The consideration of these does not imply hostility or lack of patriotism: it simply indicates foresight, and a desire to turn the extraordinary circumstances of the war to national account.

The manifesto goes on to point out the significance of the newly assumed Government control of transport and of the fixing of maximum food prices: "The impossibilities of years became actualities in an hour when the alternative was national disaster." It criticises the Government's relief measures as utterly inadequate, demands reasonable subsistence wages for soldiers and sailors and their dependents, useful work for the workless, and the co-ordination of charitable funds. It presses especially for Government aid to the Trade Unions which are affected adversely by the crisis. In short, it makes some attempt to sketch an industrial programme for Labour during the war, identical in most respects with the policy pursued by the War Emergency: Workers' Committee, with which I deal in a later chapter. At the same time, while it emphasises its connection with the Interna-

tional, and the fact that "it is, and always has been, on the side of international as well as industrial peace," it supports the war, and pronounces Great Britain blameless in a far less uncertain manner than any other Labour manifesto had then dared to do.

The larger industrial body, the Trades Union Congress, as represented, or possibly as misrepresented, through its Parliamentary Committee, issued its "Manifesto to the Trade Unionists of the Country" at the beginning of September. This document must be quoted in full.

GENTLEMEN—The Trade Union Congress Parliamentary Committee, at their meeting held yesterday, had under consideration the serious position created by the European war and the duty which Trade Unionists, in common with the community in general, owe to themselves and the country of which they are citizens.

They were especially gratified at the manner in which the Labour Party in the House of Commons had responded to the appeal made to all political parties to give their co-operation in securing the enlistment of men to defend the interests of their country, and heartily endorse the appointment upon the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee of four members of the party, and the placing of the services of the national agent at the disposal of that committee to assist in carrying through its secretarial work.

The Parliamentary Committee are convinced that one important factor in the present European struggle has to be borne in mind, so far as our own country is concerned—namely, that in the event of the voluntary system of military service failing the country in this its time of need, the demand for a national system of compulsory military service will not only be made with redoubled vigour, but may prove to be so persistent and strong as to become irresistible. The prospect of having to face conscription, with its permanent and heavy burden upon the financial resources of the country, and its equally burdensome effect

upon nearly the whole of its industries, should in itself stimulate the manhood of the nation to come forward in its defence, and thereby demonstrate to the world that a free people can rise to the supreme heights of a great sacrifice without the whip of conscription.

Another factor to be remembered in this crisis of our nation's history, and most important of all so far as Trade Unionists and Labour in general are concerned, is the fact that upon the result of the struggle in which this country is now engaged rest the preservation and maintenance of free and unfettered democratic government, which in its international relationships has in the past been recognised, and must unquestionably in the future prove to be the best guarantee for the preservation of the peace of the world.

The mere contemplation of the overbearing and brutal methods to which people have to submit under a government controlled by a military autocracy—living, as it were, continuously under the threat and shadow of war—should be sufficient to arouse the enthusiasm of the nation in resisting any attempt to impose similar conditions upon countries at present free from military despotism.

But if men have a duty to perform in the common interest of the State, equally the State owes a duty to those of its citizens who are prepared—and readily prepared—to make sacrifices in its defence and for the maintenance of its honour. Citizens called upon voluntarily to leave their employment and their homes for the purpose of undertaking military duties have a right to receive at the hands of the State a reasonable and assured recompense, not so much for themselves as for those who are dependent upon them, and no single member of the community would do otherwise than uphold a Government which in such an important and vital matter took a liberal and even generous view of its responsibilities toward those citizens who come forward to assist in the defence of their country.

We respectfully commend this suggestion to the favourable consideration of the Government of the day.

Long life to the free institutions of all democratically-governed countries !

Yours faithfully, the Parliamentary Committee,

J. A. SEDDON	W. MOSSES.
( <i>Chairman</i> ).	J. W. OGDEN.
W. J. DAVIS	J. SEXTON.
( <i>Vice-Chairman</i> ).	A. SMITH.
A. EVANS.	H. SMITH.
H. GOSLING.	J. B. WILLIAMS.
J. HILL.	J. E. WILLIAMS.
J. JENKINS.	C. W. BOWERMAN
W. MATKIN.	( <i>Secretary</i> ).

Thus, the Trades Union Congress, like the General Federation of Trade Unions, pronounces unhesitatingly in favour of the war, without even the reservations contained in every manifesto issued by the various Socialist bodies. It whole-heartedly endorses the Labour participation in the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, and seems undisturbed by economic considerations.

This manifesto, it will be noticed, deals only with recruiting. We have now to sketch the action taken by the Parliamentary Committee and by the Trade Unions in their own sphere of industrial activity.

The Trades Union Congress was to have been held at Portsmouth in September ; but on August 13 the Parliamentary Committee issued a notice that it was "postponed for a short time." In fact, it was cancelled altogether. That is to say, just when Labour problems of every sort were bound to become acute, the one representative body co-ordinating the Trade Union forces was abolished by order of the Trade Union leaders themselves.

Doubtless, the reason advanced was that a still

more representative body, in which the political and the industrial sides of the movement were co-ordinated, had been constituted specially to deal with the War Emergency. Doubtless, too, it was feared that the Congress might fall out about the war, and so split the movement just when unity was essential. But neither of these reasons ought to have weighed against the paramount need to keep the rank and file awake to industrial problems. Though the War Emergency: Workers' National Committee covers a wider field than the Trades Union Congress, it is not a more representative body: it is a self-appointed council of leaders, and not a democratically chosen body of delegates representing the rank and file. Such a Congress ought to have been summoned, if not last September, at any rate as soon as possible, to formulate a common policy on such questions as overtime, Trade Union regulations, and the like. These are peculiarly Trade Union problems with which the Congress would have been far better fitted to deal than a composite body like the Workers' National Committee. As Mr. Mellor and myself wrote, with only too much foresight, in the *Daily Herald* of August 20:

At any moment the Government and the capitalists whom they represent will be able to abrogate all the laws on the plea of "national emergency." If Labour continues throughout the war to allow gains won by industrial warfare in times of international peace to be filched from it, it is laying up a store of misery and hardship in the future. All the old battles will have to be fought over again, and, instead of being further on the road to emancipation, Labour will have lost ground.

None the less, the Congress was cancelled, and the pledge that it should be held at the earliest possible

moment was never redeemed.<sup>1</sup> Much excellent work has been done, as we shall see, by the Workers' National Committee ; but the rank and file of the Unions have never been consulted or invited to take counsel together. A Trades Union Congress is, however, to be held in September 1915, and it is to be hoped that here at last the rank and file will be given a chance of formulating the policy they desire the leaders to pursue. The character of the demonstrations in the big industrial centres convened by the Workers' National Committee indicates that they are likely to press for a less acquiescent policy. It may, however, well be the case that months of irritant tactics on the part of the employers and the Government have changed their temper, and that, had they been consulted last August, they would have taken much the same line as their leaders took in their name.

Be that as it may, the declaration of war was the signal for an "industrial truce." The important strikes which were in progress when war broke out were quickly settled, generally without consultation of the rank and file. The two strikes of agricultural labourers in North Essex and in Herefordshire were settled on August 4 by the granting of the men's terms : a few days later the impending lock-out covering the whole Scottish coalfield was averted by the decision of the owners to withdraw temporarily their claim for a reduction of wages, without prejudice to their

<sup>1</sup> This scrapping of national Labour machinery has not been confined to the Trades Union Congress. Early in the war, the *Daily Herald* was forced to become a weekly, and in June the *Daily Citizen*, in which hundreds of thousands of pounds of Trade Union money had been sunk, came to an inglorious end. Though the *Citizen* never succeeded in expressing the true spirit of the Labour movement, the loss is a calamity. It is to be hoped that the *Herald* will be able again to become a daily later on.

action in the future. The general strike in the building trades at Oxford was settled by a reference to arbitration, while in the important and difficult dispute between the Mersey Docks Board and its employees work was resumed without a settlement, the question at issue being held over till the end of the war. Finally, the long lock-out in the London building industry was settled without consultation of the men during the second week in August, the questions still in dispute being referred to the National Conciliation Board. Of the conflicts actually in progress, only in a few insignificant cases was there no immediate settlement.

Not only were actual disputes terminated : impending forward movements were also cancelled.

A special conference, representing the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, the Management Committee of the General Federation of Trade Unions, and the Executive Committee of the Labour Party met on August 24 and passed the following among other recommendations :

That an immediate effort be made to terminate all existing trade disputes, whether strikes or lock-outs, and whenever new points of difficulty arise during the war period a serious attempt should be made by all concerned to reach an amicable settlement before resorting to a strike or lock-out.

The other resolutions were in the nature of requests for Government action for the prevention of unemployment by the stopping of overtime, and for the provision of adequate relief funds to meet the unemployment that could not be avoided. To these requests I shall recur in a subsequent chapter : the point I desire to make here is that the industrial truce was declared, not conditionally on the granting of these demands,



but absolutely without conditions. The demands were only made subsequently in the form of requests, with no sanction of economic power behind them.

Moreover, many of the Unions issued special circulars to their branches and passed Executive resolutions deprecating strikes in war time. On all hands, an industrial truce was declared, on the initiative more of the men than of the employers. The number of new industrial disputes fell from 99 in July 1914 to 15 in August, as compared with 109 and 102 in 1913. During the first seven months of 1914 there were 836 disputes, involving 423,000 workers: during the last five months there were only 137, involving only 23,000, and at the end of December there were only 10 very small disputes in progress.

Moreover, the railwaymen who had just put forward a national programme, and who were negotiating with the Companies for an improved scheme of conciliation, accepted—or rather their Executive accepted in their name—a temporary continuation of the old unsatisfactory conciliation scheme, and consented to drop the National Programme for the period of the war. The autumn of 1914, which had seemed likely to be a period of great industrial unrest, was, in fact, a period of almost unbroken tranquillity.

A glance at the records of the War Emergency: Workers' Committee will show that this was by no means because there was a complete absence of discontent. Many employers, mostly in the smaller trades and in commerce, took advantage of the situation to reduce salaries or staffs, while the Committee had continually to protest against the unfair treatment of the workers by contractors in the service of the Government. Hut-building and clothing scandals were par-

ticularly numerous, and a Trade Union official went so far as to say that "if there is a contractor who is particularly infamous as a sweater, the War Office can be trusted to give him a large order."

These cases are, however, independent of the situation in the staple industries, in which the employers were only too glad for the most part to accept the industrial truce. For, as the exploited class, Labour is necessarily the aggressor in the war with capitalism, and an industrial truce therefore means, as a rule, that the employer gets what he wants—the preservation of the *status quo*. As things turned out, he got in this instance a great deal more; for in many important branches of industry the effect of the war was an unexpectedly large increase in profits, while, on the other hand, as we shall see, the growth of prices left the workers far worse off than they had been before the war.

As I shall explain in a later chapter, these causes led, early in 1915, to a partial resumption of industrial hostilities. I am here concerned only with Labour's action at the beginning of the war. How far was Labour right in declaring an industrial truce last August?

I gave, in the last chapter, a general view of the rights and duties of Labour in time of war. We have now to ask how far the actual course pursued last July was in accordance with the principles there laid down.

What is most evident is that, economically as well as politically, Labour was taken altogether by surprise. If the deliberations of the International had given the workers but doubtful guidance for their political action in the crisis, there had been still less an attempt to forecast the industrial situation that would be

created or the action that Labour ought to pursue. We have already noticed the ambiguity of the advice given by the International on this point: and it is clear that the recommendations there made were not based on any intelligent forecast of the probable position. Industrially, as well as politically, the mind of the workers was in a state of bewilderment when war broke out.

The supremely important decision as to Labour's industrial policy was therefore taken on the impulse of the moment, without much forethought or foresight. For the most part the Unions contented themselves with declaring an industrial truce without any attempt to lay down the conditions of the truce. They made no provision for taking action in the event of an undue inflation of either profits or prices, and still less did they attempt to obtain concessions in return for the concessions they themselves were making. They did not go to the Government and the employers and say, "If you wish us to keep the peace these are our terms," though this was the course pursued by the various capitalist groups whose interests were affected by the war. They said, "We will keep the peace," and then went to the Government cap in hand.

It is, of course, easy to prophesy after the event, and we can readily see now that the effect of this policy has been, in the long run, to create industrial disturbance rather than to prevent it. A firm stand at the outset might well have modified profoundly the Government's industrial policy. It is, however, not difficult to find extenuating circumstances. The Labour leaders had no idea what was going to happen: they feared immense dislocation of employment and a consequent weakening of economic power. Some of

them, no doubt, feared that an attempt to stand up to the Government might end in disastrous defeat for Labour.

In the main, however, they were certainly actuated much less by this fear than by an instinctive, if mistaken, idea of patriotism. They desired to see the country united, and they were prepared to make concessions in order to secure unity. In their haste they unfortunately made their concessions without first obtaining corresponding concessions from the other side. This initial abdication is largely responsible for subsequent bickerings, and is a lamentable chapter in the history of British Trade Unionism.

What, then, had they a right to demand? I do not suggest that they ought to have conducted a great forward movement for better conditions or for the overthrow of capitalism. But surely they should have demanded, and insisted on, guarantees that their economic position would not be worsened by the war, that prices would be kept down, or, as an alternative, wages raised, and that the Trade Unions would be taken into the Government's confidence and used as the official means of dealing with the problems that arose in connection with the workers. Had they insisted on this last demand, the neglect and contumely which have since been poured upon the Unions by the Government would have been impossible.

Moreover, there is another concession which Labour has clearly the right to demand as the price of its co-operation. No sooner was war declared than private capitalism was found inadequate for its conduct, and the State was forced to step in either to save the capitalists or to secure efficient service. Where such extensions of State interference are to the advantage

of Labour, the workers have surely a right to demand that capitalist control shall not be restored intact at the end of the war.

I have given reasons for thinking the entry of Labour into the inter-party recruiting campaign wrong in any case ; but the decision to take part in it should at least have been combined with insistence on these demands and on the right to urge them from the inter-party platforms. This, I believe, was the policy recommended by the British Socialist Party.

The industrial truce, then, was declared unconditionally. But strikes were not the only form of Labour activity that the war brought to a standstill. Last summer the Trade Unions were engaged on several important schemes for setting their own house in order. Most of these schemes seem to be in abeyance, at least for the period of the war, though an important fusion of Unions in the clothing industry has been accomplished, and the engineering and shipbuilding Unions have now resumed the attempt to formulate a scheme of closer unity. Two projects of the greatest importance must be mentioned here—the Triple Alliance and the proposed transport and general labour amalgamation.

Before the war meetings were being held for the elaboration of a policy of united action among miners, railwaymen, and transport workers, numbering not far short of a million and a half of organised workers. Nothing has been heard of this project since the war broke out, and, in view of the independent negotiations that have been carried on since by miners and railwaymen, there seems to be a danger that nothing will come of it. It is probable that there are some among the men's leaders who would welcome its collapse, as

they fear the revolutionary possibilities of such a movement ; but of this it is difficult to speak without very intimate inside knowledge.

The second scheme is one for the fusion of all the very numerous competing, overlapping, and sectional Unions of transport workers and general labourers into a single great national organisation. Even before the war there were signs of a desire to side-track this proposal ; the effect of the war emergency seems to be that it is shelved altogether. There are of course difficulties in the way of carrying through such a scheme completely during the war ;<sup>1</sup> but it would at least be quite possible to use the war period for the formulation of a completely satisfactory scheme, and to bring into actual being as a temporary expedient a close type of federation which would make the actual amalgamation later on a mere matter of form.

Even if it is only for the period of the war, the abandonment of these schemes is a calamity. It is clear that the restoration of normal industrial conditions at the "outbreak of peace" will be a difficult and a perilous business, in which Labour will need all its wits and all its strength. In this coming struggle the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen, and transport workers ought to have provided the nucleus of a united Labour army, round which the Unions in other industries could rally. The transport and general labour amalgamation, too, would be of the greatest importance in such a situation. The less skilled workers will have most intricate problems of their own to face at the close of the war, and it is of the

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the law demands a two-thirds majority of the whole membership for all Trade Union fusions. This it would in some cases be impossible to get owing to the absence of members at the war.

greatest importance, both to themselves and to the skilled workers, that they should be strongly organised. If the present chaos of conflicting Unions still exists when peace returns, it will be almost impossible for them to present a united front to the capitalists. Labour should at all costs push on with its schemes for better organisation during the war, conscious that with peace will come its time of supreme trial.

If, under the influence of a sort of war-panic, Labour has been careless of its industrial organisation at home, if the Trades Union Congress has been abandoned and amalgamation schemes postponed, what has happened to the international Trade Union organisation ?

Of the International Federation of Trade Unions little has been heard since the outbreak of war. A letter written by the Secretary, C. Legien of Germany, on August 27<sup>th</sup> to Mr. Appleton, of the General Federation of Trade Unions, was published in the October *Federationist*, together with Mr. Appleton's reply. Herr Legien expresses his determination to keep in touch with the Trade Unions, "at least in neutral countries," protests against the accusations of inhumanity made against the Germans, and asserts that the action of the Social Democrats in voting for the war credits "cannot by those in other lands be regarded as a reproach, if this fact is borne in mind, that Germany found itself at war with both Russia and France."

"In this matter," he continues, "the Social Democratic Parties of other lands, which have greater Parliamentary influence than we, have done just the same. In any case, our decision cannot be so interpreted that we have abandoned the ideals of the international significance of the Labour movement."

This, however, tells us little about international

Trade Unionism. In fact, the only important movement in connection with the International Federation was made in February, when the representatives of the French General Confederation of Labour and the General Federation of Trade Unions met in London and sent a joint letter to Mr. Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labour, asking him to use his influence to secure the removal of the headquarters of the International Federation of Trade Unions to a neutral country, preferably Switzerland. Mr. Gompers wrote to Herr Legien in this sense ; but up to the present there has been no result. A special conference has been summoned to Holland to consider the question ; but it seems doubtful if this will be at all representative. The allied nations are opposed to the conference, and urge immediate removal of the headquarters to Switzerland. So far at any rate as this country is concerned, the affairs of the International Federation of Trade Unions are for the time being suspended.

Nor are there many signs of activity on the part of the International Federations in special industries whose headquarters are also, in the majority of cases, situated in Germany. The only exception is the International Transport Workers' Federation, whose Secretary, Herr Jochade, has kept regularly in touch with Great Britain. An interesting account of his views appeared in the *Federationist* for December 1914.

At the outbreak of war the International Transport Workers' Federation was about to call a conference consisting of one delegate from each nation to draw up a revised constitution. This, Herr Jochade says, will be done as soon as peace is restored. The following further extract from the *Federationist* is of especial interest :



Jochade, or one of his colleagues, says that it was the impression that the international machinery should have been used to attempt to prevent the present awful catastrophe, but states that the International Federation exists expressly for economic rather than political action. There is a comment to the effect that we had better honestly state that our international movement had not the political, and even less the Trade Union, influence to prevent the war, for which all the nations had been preparing for years.

Clearly the writer is here thinking of the general strike against war which has been so long suggested in Socialist and Syndicalist circles. This was the policy which was put forward by M. Hervé before the International Socialist Congress of 1907; this was the subject of the resolution tabled by the French General Confederation of Labour for discussion at the International Trade Union Congress, and ruled out of order by the Committee: this is the action which Mr. Keir Hardie has long been advocating in this country. Now that we have had actual experience of the way in which Europe goes to war, it seems unlikely that the suggestion will be revived; but it is worth while to make a few comments upon it.

The general strike against war is clearly a political rather than an industrial act, in so far as the two can be distinguished. It was on this ground that the International Federation of Trade Unions referred the suggestion to the International Social Bureau, as belonging rather to its province. In fact, where in the past, as in Belgium, a general strike has been declared for a political object, the body controlling it has been rather the Socialist Party than the Trade Union movement. It was in pursuance of this idea that the British Section, in accordance with the decision of the International Socialist Bureau and of the Labour

Party Conference, sent a circular letter to all affiliated societies in 1912, including all the Unions affiliated to the Labour Party, asking for their views on the following question :

Are you in favour of the organised Working-Class Movements of all countries being asked to come to a mutual agreement whereby in the event of war being threatened between any two or more countries, the workers of those countries would hold themselves prepared to try to prevent it by a mutual and simultaneous stoppage of work in the countries affected ?

It appears that practically no answers were received, and that there was not the smallest indication of willingness to proceed along the lines suggested. It is one of the ironies of fate that the whole question was to have been rediscussed, in the light of similar enquiries in all countries, at the International Socialist Congress in August 1914. The last Congress, held in 1910, rejected the motion by Mr. Keir Hardie and M. Vaillant in favour of a general strike against war by 131 votes to 51, and "in the resolution which was finally carried laid special emphasis on the need for political action, so that the workers, by controlling the machinery of Government, would have the deciding voice in the matter."<sup>1</sup>

There is, in short, save among the French Syndicalists, no indication of any general desire that the policy of the general strike against war should be adopted. I can only refer to what I have said in an earlier book :<sup>2</sup> "The strike against war may be ruled out at once as a sheer impossibility."

I have dealt with the manifestos published by the various sections of the Labour movement at the time

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the covering letter sent with its questions by the British Section in 1912.

<sup>2</sup> *The World of Labour*, p. 147.

of the outbreak of war. It remains to continue the series with one or two important documents of later date. On October 15, "to clear away once and for all misconceptions which have been circulated as to the attitude of the British Labour movement," the following manifesto was issued, signed by most of the Labour Members of Parliament, by the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, by the Management Committee of the General Federation of Trade Unions, and by other Labour leaders :

The British Labour movement has always stood for peace. During the last decade it has made special efforts to promote friendly relations between the peoples of Great Britain and Germany. Deputations of Labour representatives have taken messages of goodwill across the North Sea despite the obstacles to international working-class solidarity which existed. In turn, German Labour leaders on similar missions have been welcomed in this country by the organised workers. A strong hope was beginning to dawn that out of this intercourse would grow a permanent peaceful understanding between the two nations.

But this hope has been destroyed, at least for a time, by the deliberate act of the ruler of the military Empire of Germany. The refusal of Germany to the proposal made by England that a conference of the European Powers should deal with the dispute between Austria and Servia, the peremptory domineering ultimatum to Russia, and the rapid preparations to invade France, all indicate that the German military caste were determined on war if the rest of Europe could not be cowed into submission by other means. The wanton violation of the neutrality of Belgium was proof that nothing, not even national honour and good faith, was to stand between Germany and the realisation of its ambitions to become the dominant military power of Europe, with the Kaiser the dictator over all.

The Labour Party in the House of Commons, face to face with this situation, recognised that Great Britain,

having exhausted the resources of peaceful diplomacy, was bound in honour, as well as by treaty, to resist by arms the aggression of Germany. The party realised that if England had not kept her pledges to Belgium, and had stood aside, the victory of the German army would have been probable, and the victory of Germany would mean the death of democracy in Europe.

Working-class aspirations for greater political and economic power would be checked, thwarted, and crushed, as they have been in the German Empire. Democratic ideas cannot thrive in a State where militarism is dominant; and the military state with a subservient and powerless working class is the avowed political ideal of the German ruling caste.

The Labour Party, therefore, as representing the most democratic elements in the British nation, has given its support in Parliament to the measures necessary to enable this country to carry on the struggle effectively. It has joined in the task of raising an army large enough to meet the national need by taking active part in the recruiting campaign organised by the various Parliamentary parties. Members of the party have addressed numerous meetings throughout the country for this purpose, and the central machinery of the party has been placed at the service of the recruiting campaign. This action has been heartily endorsed by the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress, which represents the overwhelming majority of the Trade Unionists of the country. The Committee, in a manifesto on the war, states :

The mere contemplation of the overbearing and brutal methods to which people have to submit under a government controlled by a military autocracy—living, as it were, continuously under the threat and shadow of war—should be sufficient to arouse the enthusiasm of the nation in resisting any attempt to impose similar conditions upon countries at present free from military despotism.

The policy of the British Labour movement has been dictated by a fervent desire to save Great Britain and

Europe from the evils that would follow the triumph of military despotism. Until the power which has pillaged and outraged Belgium and the Belgians, and plunged nearly the whole of Europe into the awful misery, suffering, and horror of war, is beaten, there can be no peace. While the conflict lasts England must be sustained both without and within; combatants and non-combatants must be supported to the utmost. The Labour movement has done and is doing its part in this paramount national duty, confident that the brutal doctrine and methods of German militarism will fail. When the time comes to discuss the terms of peace the Labour movement will stand, as it has always stood, for an international agreement among all civilised nations that disputes and misunderstandings in the future shall be settled not by machine guns but by arbitration.

The most notable absentees from the list of signatories to this document are among the Labour Members, and include Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Snowden, Mr. Jowett, and Mr. Keir Hardie. There are certain names absent from the General Federation of Trade Unions' list; but this has probably no significance. The document seems to represent the almost unanimous opinion of the Trade Union leaders.

The second important document is a series of resolutions passed at an informal conference of the Socialist and Labour Parties of the Allied Nations, held in London on February 14, 1915. France, Belgium, Russia, and Great Britain were represented, all sections of the political Socialist and Labour movement in this country being invited.<sup>1</sup> The resolutions were carried unanimously, with the endorsement of the I.L.P. representatives.

<sup>1</sup> The representatives of the French General Confederation of Labour were only with difficulty persuaded to remain when they found that representatives of the Trade Union movement in Great Britain had not been invited.

(1) This conference cannot ignore the profound general causes of the European conflict, itself a monstrous product of the antagonisms which tear asunder capitalist society and of the policy of colonial dependencies and aggressive imperialism, against which international Socialism has never ceased to fight, and in which every government has its share of responsibility.

The invasion of Belgium and France by the German armies threatens the very existence of independent nationalities, and strikes a blow at all faith in treaties. In these circumstances a victory for German imperialism would be the defeat and the destruction of democracy and liberty in Europe. The Socialists of Great Britain, Belgium, France, and Russia do not pursue the political and economic crushing of Germany; they are not at war with the peoples of Germany and Austria, but only with the governments of those countries by which they are oppressed. They demand that Belgium shall be liberated and compensated. They desire that the question of Poland shall be settled in accordance with the wishes of the Polish people, either in the sense of autonomy in the midst of another State, or in that of complete independence. They wish that throughout all Europe, from Alsace-Lorraine to the Balkans, those populations that have been annexed by force shall receive the right freely to dispose of themselves.

While inflexibly resolved to fight until victory is achieved to accomplish this task of liberation, the Socialists are none the less resolved to resist any attempt to transform this defensive war into a war of conquest, which would only prepare fresh conflicts, create new grievances, and subject various peoples more than ever to the double plague of armaments and war.

Satisfied that they are remaining true to the principles of the International, the members of the conference express the hope that the working classes of all the different countries will before long find themselves united again in their struggle against militarism and capitalist imperialism. The victory of the Allied Powers must be a victory for popular liberty, for unity, independence, and autonomy

of the nations in the peaceful federation of the United States of Europe and the world.

(2) On the conclusion of the war the working classes of all the industrial countries must unite in the International in order to suppress secret diplomacy, put an end to the interest of militarism and those of the armament makers, and establish some international authority to settle points of difference among the nations by compulsory conciliation and arbitration, and to compel all nations to maintain peace.

(3) The conference protests against the arrest of the deputies of the Duma, against the suppression of Russian Socialist papers and the condemnation of their editors, as well as against the oppression of Finns, Jews, and Russian and German Poles.

So far as the allied nations are concerned, this is the nearest approach there has been during the war to international action among Socialists. Socialists of some neutral countries have also conferred; and it is announced that there will shortly be a representative meeting, including Socialists of the nations at war. But, on the whole, the International Socialist Bureau has been perforce inactive; nor does the present bitterness on both sides seem likely to make its restoration after the war more easy.

Throughout this chapter we have necessarily been dealing almost entirely with the resolutions and opinions of leaders. Save by acquiescing in the actions of the leaders, the rank and file gave no sign of their view in the earlier months of the war. In later chapters we shall see a change in this respect, beginning with the meetings of protest against food prices and the Clyde strike. It may be that the absence of definite evidence as to the attitude of the rank and file during the early months is due largely to the fact that the workers had no definite attitude. They were

bewildered, and it took them time to collect their thoughts.

One piece of evidence that might be useful is unfortunately only available in a very incomplete form. There are no reliable figures showing the total enlistment among Trade Unionists, though the following table, prepared by the Workers' Emergency Committee, indicates the position in certain cases some time ago. It is not stated at what date the figures were compiled; but they were laid before the Committee in February 1915:

TRADE UNIONISTS IN THE ARMY AND NAVY.

Trade Union.	Members enlisted.	Average weekly wages.
Beamers, Twisters, etc. . . .	500	28s. to 50s.
Blastfurnacemen . . . .	1,060	32s. 6d. to 96s.
Boot and Shoe Operatives . .	2,960	..
Builders' Labourers, National Association . . . . .	1,000	25s.
Bookbinders and Machine Rulers	500	34s.
Bleachers, Dyers, etc. . . .	1,500	30s. to 35s.
Card and Blowing Room Operatives . . . . .	400	30s. to 35s.
Coachmakers . . . . .	1,000	40s.
Clerks . . . . .	500	35s. to 40s.
Gasworkers and General Labourers . . . . .	14,495	18s. to 60s.
Ironfounders . . . . .	1,400	36s. to 43s.
National Amalgamated Union of Labour . . . . .	4,500	23s. to 40s.
Machine Workers . . . . .	650	34s.
Plasterers . . . . .	250	42s.
Postmen's Federation <sup>1</sup> . . .	10,000	35s. (London) 26s. (Provinces) 11s. (part-time) 36s. 10d. (general)

<sup>1</sup> The figures for these districts are incomplete.



TRADE UNIONISTS IN THE ARMY AND NAVY—*continued*

Trade Union.	Members enlisted.	Average weekly wages.
Railwaymen, National Union of	45,000	35s. (guards) 50s. (drivers)
Shipwrights, etc. . . . .	1,000	42s. to 100s.
Shop Assistants . . . . .	8,000	27s. 6d.
Steel Smelters . . . . .	2,700	25s. to £10
Stevedores . . . . .	700	45s. (minimum)
Teachers . . . . .	4,500	40s. to 140s.
Typographical Association . .	1,200	30s. to 50s.
Toolmakers . . . . .	550	38s.
Vehicle Workers . . . . .	6,000	39s. to 56s.
Watermen, Lightermen, etc. . .	250	50s.
Workers' Union . . . . .	4,000	..
In addition to above there must be added many tens of thousands from the Transport Trade Unions		
Ayrshire Miners . . . . .	1,700	36s. to 45s.
Bristol Miners . . . . .	150	30s. to 35s. (with house and coal)
Derbyshire Miners . . . . .	3,700	41s. 8d.
Cannock Chase Miners . . . . .	700	40s.
Clackmannanshire Miners . . . .	250	40s. to 50s.
Cleveland Miners . . . . .	900	32s. 6d.
Cumberland Miners . . . . .	1,100	42s.
Durham Miners . . . . .	30,000	30s. to 35s. (with house and coal)
Forest of Dean Miners . . . . .	450	28s.
Lanarkshire Miners . . . . .	7,000	35s.
Lancashire and Cheshire Miners <sup>1</sup>	4,000	32s. 6d. to 42s.
Leicestershire Miners . . . . .	550	40s.
Mid and East Lothian Miners . .	2,000	37s. 6d. to 45s.
Northumberland Miners . . . . .	10,000	(40s. with house and coal)
North Staffordshire Miners . . .	3,500	30s. to 38s. 9d.
North Wales Miners . . . . .	3,000	35s.
Nottingham Miners . . . . .	3,500	..
Old Hill (Staffs) Miners . . . .	360	22s. to 35s.
Stirlingshire Miners . . . . .	1,000	35s. to 40s.
South Derbyshire Miners . . . .	400	30s.
South Wales Miners <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	20,000	26s. 8d. to 60s.
West Lothian Miners . . . . .	600	24s. to 40s.
Yorkshire Miners . . . . .	15,000	32s. to 100s.

<sup>1</sup> The figures for these districts are incomplete.

These figures were exceedingly incomplete at the time of publication, as they take account only of the largest Trade Unions. They are, of course, now far more incomplete.<sup>1</sup> But even so they indicate a very considerable response from the better-paid workers to the call for recruits.

If it is inquired what were the motives that led to this enlistment, it is at once clear from the wages given in the above table that mercenary considerations can have had little to do with them. Doubtless, many men enlisted owing to actual or prospective unemployment ; but the majority of these were unskilled workers and many of them non-unionists. The above table shows that there was a large enlistment among workers who were not threatened with unemployment and who were actually earning good wages. To assign their respective shares to other motives, such as patriotism, love of change, and love of adventure, is a task beyond my power. The reader will be in a better position to estimate the part played by economic causes in facilitating recruiting when he has read the next chapter.

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the number of enlisted miners according to the above table is 115,000, whereas according to the Coal Mining Organisation Committee, 191,170 miners had already enlisted in February. Many more enlisted in the months immediately following.

## CHAPTER III

### THE WAR AND EMPLOYMENT

WHEN war broke out, the workers, the capitalists, and the Government seem to have been equally in the dark as to its probable effects upon industry. No one knew what would be its reaction upon the credit system and on external trade ; no one knew how far the home demand was likely to suffer contraction ; no one foresaw the scale on which the war would be carried on, or the immense demands it would make upon production. It was, of course, anticipated that a few industries ministering directly to military needs would be busy beyond their wont ; but even here nothing like what has actually happened was expected in the early days of August. On every side people made up their minds that there was bound to be a very severe dislocation of the industrial machine, if not a complete collapse. The event has in the main falsified these expectations, though that is far from meaning that no problem of unemployment has existed or now exists. What was not realised was that side by side with unemployment there would soon be the opposite problem of a shortage of labour.

That is to say, few persons anticipated that Great Britain would raise its army to anything like the

present strength, or that anything like the present amount of stores and munitions would be required. Armies consume largely even in peace time: under the conditions of modern warfare their consumption is enormous. The war is costing us several million pounds a day, and much of this goes in commodities which provide work at home. Moreover, the allied Powers are getting from us a great part of their stores and munitions.

At the beginning of the war there were a number of reasons which led every one to expect widespread unemployment. Chief among these was, no doubt, the expected collapse of the credit system, which became to some extent actual in the early days of the war. Even before this country was actually at war, there were plentiful signs of impending collapse. Birmingham, for instance, which produces largely for export, was already suffering considerably on August 2, and there was great uneasiness on the Newcastle coal exchange. It was foreseen that if the mechanism of international credit suffered even the most temporary collapse, on the one hand foreign orders could not be delivered and new orders could not come in, and on the other hand there would almost at once be a serious shortage of raw materials which would throw the whole system out of gear. The cotton industry was, of course, the most seriously affected; but the iron and steel trades were also in a bad way, and the dislocation at once communicated itself to the coal-mining industry. In the Fifeshire coalfield alone nearly 20,000 men were said to be workless on August 4. A few days later the industry and transport services of Liverpool were almost at a standstill, and the Yorkshire woollen industry was in a serious state of

depression. Moreover, in the prevailing uncertainty, all classes at once began to economise, and the luxury trades suffered heavily. With the measures taken to relieve this distress, which fell with exceptional severity upon women workers, I shall deal in later chapters. Here I am only concerned to state the position.

In any estimate of the effects of the war on employment it is necessary to take into account the state of trade before the war. The following is the summary given in the *Board of Trade Labour Gazette* for August of the position in July 1914 :

Employment in July showed a further decline, but still remained good on the whole at the end of the month. There was little change in the building, iron and steel, tinsplate, and engineering trades, but the shipbuilding trades were not so fully employed, and there was a decrease in the number of pig-iron furnaces in blast. There was some recovery in the lace and hosiery trades, but employment in other branches of the textile industries showed a further contraction, especially in the cotton trade.

Compared with July 1913, employment showed a falling-off in most of the principal industries. The decline was most marked in the pig-iron, iron and steel, cotton and woollen trades. In the tinsplate trade there was a considerable increase in the number of mills working.

Thus, even before the war, employment was on the down-grade. The position, however, was serious only in one instance. The cotton industry, after experiencing a period of very great prosperity, was declining rapidly ; and so certain was the prospect of further contraction that an agreement to limit production by extending holidays and working short time had already been reached between employers and employed. In other cases, trade was still prosperous, though there was a decline from the great boom of 1913.

In the case of the cotton industry, the war brought instant disaster. The temporary collapse of credit and, when that cause had been removed, the high insurance premiums on cargoes stopped the influx of raw material, while, on the other hand, export became difficult—for a time almost impossible—and there was a serious contraction of demand both at home and abroad. The Indian market, always liable to violent fluctuations according to the plentifulness of money in India, was especially affected. Fully 200,000 cotton operatives were at one time totally unemployed, and many more were on short time. At the beginning of September the Weavers' Amalgamation alone had 88,551 members totally unemployed, while among Cardroom Operatives the percentage unemployed varied between 20 and 50. Burnley, which was producing 75 per cent of its normal output in July, sank to 25 per cent in August, and even to 20 per cent in October. This was, no doubt, an extreme case; but many other towns were not much better off. For the earlier months of the war, until the revival of credit and the fall in insurance rates, the outlook in Lancashire was gloomy in the extreme.

We are fortunately provided with fairly full figures on which to form an estimate of the total amount of unemployment caused by the war. Not only have we the regular monthly returns of the Board of Trade, which are often misleading: we have also the special reports drawn up by the Government in October, December, and February. These contain figures covering 4,000,000 workers in industry, showing the state of employment in the various months. The following tables refer solely to industry: they cover the big employers more completely than the small

ones, and may therefore incline to underestimate the amount of unemployment; but in the main the impression conveyed by them can be relied upon. No figures are given for August, when the dislocation was at its worst: but as the August phenomena were largely temporary, this is really an advantage. They show the state of affairs, first, before the war; secondly, when things and persons began to adjust themselves to new conditions; and, subsequently, as more and more enlistments reduced the displacement of male labour to less than nothing. The tables exclude transport, commercial work, and State and municipal employment, which, if they were included, would certainly not increase the proportion unemployed.

These figures are most expressive when, as in the Government's report last October, they are expressed in actual numbers instead of percentages.

## EMPLOYMENT IN JULY, SEPTEMBER, AND OCTOBER 1914.

	September.		October.	
	Males.	Females.	Males.	Females.
Still on full time . . .	4,214,000	1,203,750	4,676,000	1,392,750
On overtime . . .	252,000	47,250	364,000	132,750
On short time . . .	1,820,000	810,000	1,211,000	585,000
Contraction of employment . . .	714,000	189,000	749,000	139,500
Known to have joined the Forces . . .	616,000	..	742,000	..
Net displacement (-) or replacement (+) .	-98,000	189,000	-7,000	139,500

Thus in September, out of about 9,250,000 wage-earners in industrial occupations, including about 2,250,000 women, 98,000 men and 189,000 women

were out of work, despite the fact that 616,000 such men had joined the Forces.

In October the displacement of women's labour in industrial occupations had only fallen to 139,000, whereas, though less men were being employed, the net displacement of male labour had fallen to 7000.

First, then, it is obvious that after the first month or so the actual hardship was very unevenly distributed between men and women. Loss of work drove many thousands of men into the army: the displaced women, on the other hand, were thrown back on various forms of charity or relief. With the measures taken to provide such relief I shall deal later: I am here concerned only with the fact that there was an enormous displacement of women's labour. This was largely due to the depression in most branches of the textile and clothing industries, in which the greater number of women wage-earners are employed.

Let us turn now to the corresponding figures for December and February, expressed this time as percentages of the total volume of industrial employment last July.

STATE OF EMPLOYMENT AT VARIOUS DATES SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF WAR COMPARED WITH STATE OF EMPLOYMENT IN JULY.

(Numbers employed in July = 100.)

	Males.				Females.			
	Sept. 1914.	Oct. 1914.	Dec. 1914.	Feb. 1915.	Sept. 1914.	Oct. 1914.	Dec. 1914.	Feb. 1915.
Employed in July . . . . .	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Short full time . . . . .	60.2	66.8	65.8	68.4	53.5	61.9	66.6	75.0
On overtime . . . . .	3.6	5.2	12.8	13.8	2.1	5.9	10.8	10.9
On short time . . . . .	26.0	17.3	10.5	6.0	36.0	26.0	19.4	12.6
Contraction of numbers employed . . . . .	10.2	10.7	10.9	11.8	8.4	6.2	3.2	1.5
Known by employers to have joined the Forces . . . . .	8.8	10.6	13.3	15.4	-	-	-	-
Net displacement (-) or replacement (+) . . . . .	-1.4	-0.1	+2.4	+3.6	-8.4	-6.2	-3.2	-1.5



We can see from this table that, whereas there was a net displacement of 0.1 per cent (or 7000) male wage-earners in industry in October, there were actually 2.4 per cent (or 168,000) more such wage-earners either in employment or known to be with the Forces in December, and 3.6 per cent (or more than a quarter of a million) in February 1915. Among women, the contraction of labour in the same group of occupations fell from 6.2 per cent (or 139,500) in October to 3.2 per cent (or roughly 75,000) in December, and 1.5 per cent (or roughly 35,000) in February. Since then there has undoubtedly been a very great reduction of unemployment, and in addition new sources of both male and female labour have been tapped.

If we ask whence the new male labour has come, the answer is that it has come partly from the absorption of those who were unemployed last July—of whom, it should be observed, the above tables take no account—and partly by the entry of new labour into the industries concerned. This has taken the form both of a return to work of men who had ceased to be so employed, and of a transference of labour from commercial and other occupations to industry. The first of these applies with even greater force in the case of women employed in certain industries: in woollen work, for instance, a good many married women have returned to their old occupations.

The monthly returns published in the *Board of Trade Labour Gazette* indicate the nature of the surplus labour available for absorption in the various industries last July, and the extent to which it has actually been absorbed. The facts are clearest in the case of the trades compulsorily insured against unemployment under Part II. of the National Insurance Act. In

these cases figures are available for the whole, or nearly the whole, of the workers employed, and there is a much smaller margin for error than in the case of the Trade Union unemployment returns.

The following is the table showing the state of employment in insured trades last July, with comparative figures for a month and for a year earlier :

Trade.	Number insured.	Unemployed at end of July.		Increase (+) or Decrease (-) in percentage unemployed as compared with a	
		Number.	Percentage.	Month ago.	Year ago.
Building and Construction of Works . . .	956,890	36,599	3.8	..	-0.2
Engineering and Ironfounding . . .	817,931	26,549	3.2	-0.1	+0.9
Shipbuilding . . .	264,217	12,491	4.7	+0.6	+1.3
Construction of Vehicles	209,985	6,376	3.0	+0.4	+0.4
Sawmilling . . .	12,029	381	3.2	-0.4	+1.0
Other insured work-people . . .	64,546	1,016	1.6	..	+0.7
All insured work-people	2,325,598	83,412	3.6	+0.1	+0.5

I give now the comparative percentages for succeeding months :

PERCENTAGE OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN INSURED TRADES.<sup>1</sup>

	July.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April.	May.
Building and Construction of Works . . .	3.8	6.2	6.3	5.3	5.4	5.0	4.5	3.5	2.2	1.7	1.4
Engineering and Ironfounding . . .	3.2	6.6	4.9	3.2	2.3	1.8	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.5
Shipbuilding . . .	4.7	4.9	4.4	3.9	2.7	2.1	1.2	1.1	0.9	0.9	0.7
Construction of Vehicles . . .	3.0	7.5	5.6	3.9	3.3	2.9	1.8	1.4	1.0	0.8	0.5
Sawmilling . . .	3.2	4.1	3.6	2.5	2.3	1.8	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.2
Other insured work-people . . .	1.6	3.2	2.5	1.7	1.3	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.4
All insured work-people } .	3.6	6.2	5.4	4.2	3.7	3.3	2.6	2.0	1.4	1.1	0.9

<sup>1</sup> The figures refer in every case to the end of the month.

Thus, in the insured trades, which, it should be pointed out, do not include any of the industries most severely hit by the war, the general level of unemployment had become normal, or less than normal, by the end of November, and would have been normal in October, but for the continued depression in the building industry. By the spring of 1915 only an almost irreducible minimum of unemployment due to unavoidable causes was left in the engineering and shipbuilding industries. The surplus labour was absorbed, and, as we have seen from earlier tables, a great deal of labour was attracted from outside.

It will be well to set beside these figures the Trade Union percentages, which are compiled from returns sent to the Board of Trade by Unions which pay unemployed benefit. They are less reliable, since they cover only certain trades in the industries to which they refer ; but they are important as almost the only statistical indication of the effect of unemployment on Trade Unionists as distinguished from the general body of workers. The figures for insured trades, of course, cover Unionists and non-Unionists alike.

I begin with the table showing the state of Trade Union unemployment in July 1914.

[TABLE

## TRADE UNION PERCENTAGES OF UNEMPLOYED.

*(Based on 3138 Returns.)*

Trade Unions with a net membership of 988,946 reported 28,013 (or 2.8 per cent) of their members as unemployed at the end of July 1914, compared with 2.4 per cent at the end of June 1914, and 1.9 per cent at the end of July 1913.

Trade.	Membership at end of July 1914, of Unions reporting.	Unemployed at end of July 1914.		Increase (+) or Decrease (-) in percentage unemployed as compared with a	
		Number.	Percentage.	Month ago.	Year ago.
Building <sup>1</sup> . . .	72,559	2,291	3.2	+0.3	-0.1
Coal Mining <sup>2</sup> . . .	166,866	792	0.5	..	+0.1
Iron and Steel . . .	37,662	2,078	5.5	..	+2.5
Engineering . . .	233,985	7,908	3.4	+0.4	+1.5
Shipbuilding . . .	74,365	4,896	6.6	+2.2	+3.8
Miscellaneous Metal . . .	37,035	519	1.4	-0.1	-0.4
Textiles <sup>2</sup> :—					
Cotton . . .	88,567	3,455	3.9	+1.7	+2.3
Woollen and Worsted . . .	8,641	370	4.3	-0.8	-0.4
Other . . .	62,700	1,205	1.9	+0.7	+0.6
Printing, Bookbinding, and Paper . . .	67,274	1,688	2.5	-0.7	-0.8
Furnishing and Wood-working . . .	56,466	1,299	2.3	+0.3	-0.1
Clothing . . .	67,768	1,127	1.7	..	+0.1
Leather . . .	4,270	221	5.2	+0.5	+1.0
Glass . . .	986	6	0.6	+0.1	+0.2
Pottery . . .	7,503	55	0.7	-0.1	+0.1
Tobacco . . .	2,299	103	4.5	+0.9	-0.2
Total . . .	988,946	28,013	2.8	+0.4	+0.9

<sup>1</sup> The Trade Union Returns relate mainly to carpenters and plumbers.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the ordinary short time which occurs in all trades, it should be noted that in the mining and textile industries a contraction in the demand for labour is more generally met by a reduction in the time worked per week by a large number of work-people than by the discharge of a smaller number.

A comparison of these figures with those for insured trades at once shows how wide is the margin for error in this table. There are 956,000 "insured" building workers; the Trade Union percentages, which are, of course, wholly incomplete, only cover 72,000 of these. The engineering figures only relate to 233,000 out of 817,000, and the shipbuilding figures to 74,000 out of 264,000. Apart from building, however, there is some correspondence in the figures. In engineering the percentages are 3.4 in the Trade Union and 3.2 in the Insurance figures: in shipbuilding they are 6.6 and 4.7. I give the figures for subsequent months for what they are worth.

Trade.	July.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April.	May.
Building . . .	3.2	7.4	5.6	3.0	1.8	2.1	2.2	2.6	2.7	2.8	3.2
Coal Mining . . .	0.5	1.3	1.9	2.5	1.6	1.4	0.9	0.9	0.3	0.2	0.1
Iron and Steel . . .	5.5	7.6	2.6	3.1	1.9	3.0	2.1	2.2	1.6	2.2	1.9
Engineering . . .	3.4	7.1	4.8	3.3	1.8	1.4	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.6
Shipbuilding . . .	6.6	6.3	5.7	6.5	2.8	1.9	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.5
Miscellaneous											
Metal . . .	1.4	9.0	4.0	2.2	1.5	1.4	1.1	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.4
Textiles:—											
Cotton . . .	3.9	17.7	14.5	9.2	6.3	5.2	3.0	2.2	2.5	2.5	2.7
Woolen and											
Worsted . . .	4.3	7.2	6.1	6.1	5.1	3.7	1.7	0.9	0.7	1.1	2.8
Other . . .	1.9	6.1	8.2	6.4	6.5	5.2	3.9	2.2	1.1	0.9	0.8
Printing, Book-											
binding, and											
Paper . . .	2.5	7.4	7.0	6.7	4.7	4.5	5.0	4.2	3.7	3.4	3.6
Furnishing . . .	2.3	9.8	8.3	6.2	4.5	8.1	7.4	6.5	4.6	3.9	3.0
Wood-working . . .	2.3	9.8	8.3	6.2	4.5	2.2	1.9	1.6	1.1	1.0	0.8
Clothing . . .	1.7	5.3	2.6	1.5	1.3	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.3
Leather . . .	5.2	6.2	4.2	2.9	2.1	2.4	1.8	1.3	1.3	0.7	0.8
Glass . . .	0.6	1.1	1.6	1.7	2.0	1.9	1.8	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.3
Pottery . . .	0.7	2.7	1.5	1.3	1.4	1.0	1.3	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.1
Tobacco . . .	4.5	14.0	20.5	12.8	6.5	6.3	4.9	3.7	3.6	2.8	2.4
Total . . .	2.8	7.1	5.6	4.4	2.9	2.5	1.9	1.6	1.3	1.2	1.2

These figures clearly show that whereas up to the end of 1914 there was still considerable uncertainty and fluctuation, early in 1915 the various industries had found their equilibrium, and the proportion of unemployed became almost a fixed quantity, though,

despite the very low percentage already reached, there was still a continuous decrease in engineering and shipbuilding unemployment. When it is remembered that bad trade in the textile industries is generally met by working short time, the figure of 17.7 per cent totally out of work in the cotton industry at the end of August is nothing short of appalling.

It should, moreover, be remembered that all these tables relate to the end of the various months. They therefore leave altogether out of account the temporary, "panic" unemployment of the earlier weeks of August.

The cumulative evidence of all these figures gives a perfectly clear conclusion. Apart from certain luxury trades, which affect many women, there is no real problem of unemployment to-day. The problem is rather one of shortage, especially of skilled labour. This, however, is no indication of the future course of events, as much of the production of to-day is artificial. There must be, sooner or later, a retransfer of labour at least as great as that which dislocated industry during the latter months of 1914. But, severe as this dislocation was, it was not, taken as a whole, worse than the dislocation caused by a severe depression of trade. We weathered it, thanks to the relief caused by enlistment; but there will be no enlistments to help us weather the "outbreak of peace." Instead, there will be a return to the labour market of those who have been with the Forces.

Broadly speaking, then, it is true to say, at any rate in the case of male wage-earners, that whereas unemployment was the problem during the first few months of the war, scarcity of labour is far more the problem to-day. This does not indeed apply univer-

sally : in certain trades there are still men unemployed. These are, however, in the main workers in highly skilled and specialised occupations, who, despite the collapse of their own trade, find it difficult or impossible to transfer to any other. This is true as a rule only of old or middle-aged men, or of workers in highly localised industries, and it does not, in any case, present a grave problem.

So far I have dealt solely with the general volume of employment. It should not, however, be assumed that because there are now few male wage-earners out of work, all of these are now back at their old trades. The recovery of industry has been to a great extent not natural, but artificial. That is to say, it is now working to satisfy a temporary and exceptional demand, which will not persist in the same form after the war. Industry may, then, be expected to revert largely to the old channels ; for the moment there has been a great deal of adaptation and transformation.

This is borne out very forcibly by the following table, in which the contraction or expansion of the number employed since the war is given by industries. The figures relate solely to males, and the industries are divided into the following three groups :

1. Industries in which there is a marked shortage of male labour, and in which it has been necessary to attract men from the outside ;

2. Industries which are in a fairly normal condition as regards male labour ; and

3. Industries in which the contraction of numbers employed is considerably greater than the withdrawal of men for the Forces.

## EMPLOYMENT IN DECEMBER 1914 AND FEBRUARY 1915 COMPARED WITH EMPLOYMENT BEFORE THE WAR.

Trade Groups.	DECEMBER 1914.				FEBRUARY 1915.				
	Approximate Industrial Population Census, 1911.	Contraction or Expansion of numbers employed.	Known to have joined the Forces.	Net Displacement (-) or Replacement (+).	Contraction or Expansion of numbers employed.	Known to have joined the Forces.	Net Displacement (-) or Replacement (+).	On Short Time.	On Overtime.
<i>Group 1.</i>									
Shipbuilding . . . . .	164,000	- 6.0	13.6	+ 7.6	- 2.4	13.9	+11.5	0.7	44.5
Leather and Leather Goods	67,000	- 1.0	14.2	+13.2	+ 2.5	16.0	+18.5	2.6	40.7
Chemicals (including explosives) . . . . .	122,000	- 3.3	15.4	+12.1	+ 1.2	17.4	+18.6	1.0	24.1
Engineering . . . . .	665,000	- 8.7	14.0	+ 5.9	- 9.1	16.1	+ 7.0	3.6	29.8
Woollen and Worsted . . . . .	129,000	+ 0.7	7.2	+ 7.9	+ 0.3	9.0	+ 9.3	3.3	27.1
Boot and Shoe . . . . .	199,000	- 3.3	9.9	+ 6.6	- 1.1	10.9	+ 9.8	1.3	36.1
Hosiery . . . . .	18,000	- 0.7	7.5	+ 6.8	- 2.7	12.3	+ 9.6	3.9	14.7
Iron and Steel . . . . .	311,000	- 7.5	13.9	+ 6.4	- 5.7	16.1	+10.4	5.7	15.7
Food . . . . .	315,000	- 5.6	13.4	+ 7.8	- 8.6	16.1	+ 7.5	2.5	16.0
Sawmilling . . . . .	44,000	- 6.2	14.2	+ 8.0	-12.0	16.1	+ 4.1	10.1	6.3
Coal and other Mines <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	1,164,000	-10.4	13.7	+ 3.3	-13.8	17.2	+ 3.4	2.3	0.6
<i>Group 2.</i>									
Clothing . . . . .	235,000	-14.1	12.5	- 1.6	-13.7	14.0	+ 0.3	11.5	14.1
Paper and Printing . . . . .	240,000	-12.2	12.5	+ 0.3	-14.1	14.4	+ 0.3	9.9	8.5
Linen, Jute, and Hemp . . . . .	42,000	- 8.2	15.0	+ 6.8	-12.1	17.1	+ 5.0	27.7	4.9
Cotton . . . . .	259,000	-13.3	9.6	- 3.7	-11.1	11.6	+ 0.5	11.2	2.2
Cycle Motor, Carriage and Waggon Building . . . . .	202,000	-17.5	14.3	- 3.2	-17.8	16.9	- 0.9	6.4	23.7
China, Pottery, and Glass . . . . .	83,000	-11.2	13.3	+ 2.1	-16.3	15.5	- 0.8	16.6	2.7
<i>Group 3.</i>									
Building . . . . .	1,023,000	-21.5	12.2	- 9.3	-22.9	14.7	- 8.2	7.1	7.0
Furniture and Upholstery . . . . .	141,000	-20.3	13.5	- 6.8	-23.5	15.3	- 8.2	14.0	4.1
Brick, Cement, etc. . . . .	78,000	-20.2	13.5	- 6.7	-27.2	15.6	-11.6	14.6	3.0
Tinplate . . . . .	23,000	-11.5	8.3	- 3.2	-14.2	11.0	- 3.2	29.6	0.2

<sup>1</sup> In the case of Coal Trade, the Miners' Eight Hours Act prevents the working of overtime in the ordinary sense, though it does not limit the number of shifts that may be worked per week.

In practically every case—the only important exception being the woollen industry—there is a contraction in the number employed since last July; but this contraction varies very much in different cases, and a comparison with the enlistment figures at once shows that in certain industries a great deal of new labour has been called in. Thus, in shipbuilding,



nearly 14 per cent have enlisted, yet the contraction in the numbers employed only amounts to 2.4 per cent. Coal-mining, where the enlistment is 17 per cent and the contraction nearly 14 per cent, seems the only outstanding instance in which it has been impossible to call in much new labour. Conversely, cotton operatives have not to any great extent transferred themselves to other industries. Agriculture, of course, is not included in the return, which relates solely to industry proper.

Indeed, transference to new occupations is perhaps the most remarkable feature in the whole situation. Those who prophesied widespread unemployment usually based their forecasts on a clear demonstration that this or that industry was bound to be greatly depressed. Very often their forecasts were right in this respect ; but there was after all far less unemployment than they had expected. The surplus labour, where it did not or could not enlist, transferred itself with surprising rapidity to industries in which a boom could be anticipated. In a few months, many thousands of workers had changed their occupations, and settled down to their new tasks. For instance, the depression in the building trade has not had the expected results, because vast numbers of men, including some furniture-makers, have found work on hut-building and similar jobs. Even on August 19, Mr. Herbert Samuel was already saying that the first stress of unemployment had been considerably abated, and that things had turned out to be not so bad as they were expected to be.

But, if the general situation soon gave cause for congratulation, this did not mean that there were not considerable sections of wage-earners in severe distress.

The Lancashire cotton trade was paralysed, and is still, except where there are large Government contracts, only recovering slowly: women in the other textile trades, in the clothing industry, and in many smaller luxury trades, not to mention women clerks, dress-makers, domestic servants, and charwomen, suffered most severely. What is most surprising, and a striking comment on the Government's lack of foresight, is that in the woollen industry, which has now for months been working overtime to supply khaki for the troops, unemployment was allowed to grow continually worse down to September. The General Union of Textile Workers had 426 members unemployed in August, whereas in September the number rose to 1113. By November it had no one at all out of work.

Again, the Boilermakers had over 4000 members unemployed right up to November, whereas now there has been for some months a cry for more men. Nothing was for some time done to give such men work, and they were allowed to be driven by unemployment into enlisting just when their services were about to be urgently required in industry.

Enough has been said to show that the incidence of unemployment has throughout the war been spread very unevenly among the various trades. This naturally meant that the burden fell with altogether unequal severity upon the different Trade Unions. In a few cases the war has actually meant increased financial prosperity, despite the advantageous terms which most Unions have given to their members who are absent on military service; in others, it has meant, if not ruin, at least severe financial stress and almost entire depletion of funds. The cotton industry furnishes the most striking example of such losses,

though the Lacemakers, the Felt Hatters, and other Unions have suffered no less heavily in proportion to their strength.

I shall now proceed to examine the suggestions made, and the steps actually taken to enable the workers to weather the crisis of last autumn.

## CHAPTER IV

### LABOUR AND THE GOVERNMENT—THE FIRST PHASE

IN an earlier chapter we saw how Labour treated the Government on the outbreak of war : we have now to enquire how the Government treated Labour. Claiming to act in the name of the whole nation, demanding the co-operation of all classes, setting aside by profession all party considerations, the Cabinet might surely have been expected, if only by those who did not know it, to take the workers into its confidence and to devolve upon them rights and responsibilities as well as duties. In fact, it did nothing of the sort : Liberalism, even in war time, lost none of its distrust of democracy and freedom. It put off the workers with as little as it could give, and, thanks to the lack of decision on the Labour side, it got off with very little indeed. The first phase of the class-struggle under war conditions ended in the rout of the Labour forces. Steps were indeed taken in the direction of extending State control, and these steps were acclaimed as " Socialism " ; but in their real task of gaining freedom and responsibility the workers were given no encouragement whatsoever. The war opened no one's eyes : the blind only continued, rather more rapidly than before, to lead the blind into the Servile State.

At the outset the Government acted wisely in scotching a purely panic rise in food prices by the supposedly "utopian" and "uneconomic" course of fixing maximum prices. This move was entirely successful in stopping an artificial inflation which must, in any case, soon have ceased. On August 2 the Board of Agriculture sent round a reassuring circular on the subject of the food supply, and on August 5 a further statement was issued by a special Cabinet Committee on Food Prices. The subsequent Government purchase of sugar, hailed as a further instalment of "Socialism," seems to have been less successful.

When the Government assumed control of the railways for the period of the war, this, too, was called "Socialism," though it did nothing to change the *ownership* of the railway service, and involved merely a temporary change in administrative control. In a Socialist society the Government would, no doubt, own the railways; but it is the most elementary of logical errors to conclude that the administrative change was "Socialism." Yet many who call themselves Socialists were no less foolish than the Bishop who wrote in December: "We have had a taste of Socialism, and we like it."

The outstanding domestic problem at the beginning of the war was that of dealing with unemployment. In the last chapter I made some attempt to show the magnitude of the problem: I shall now try to show how it was met, as well as how Labour asked that it should be met.

Inevitably, the Government got in first. The Labour conference which became the War Emergency Workers' Committee met on August 5, and on the same day the Government announced the appointment

of a Government Committee to deal with distress, under the chairmanship of Mr. Herbert Samuel. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was Labour's representative on this Committee, which issued a circular on August 6. This circular announced that an appeal for a National Relief Fund was about to be issued by the Prince of Wales, urged the necessity of subscribing to this fund, asked employers not to dismiss their staffs, announced the readiness of the Local Government Board to consider schemes under the Unemployed Workmen Act, and made the following further pronouncement :

Steps are being taken to form central committees in the boroughs, the larger urban districts, and the counties, under the chairmanship of the mayors and chairmen of councils, which will consider the needs of the localities and control the distribution of such relief as may be required. These committees will include representatives of the municipal, education, and poor law authorities, distress committees, Trade Unions, and philanthropic agencies. Attention is at the same time drawn to the importance of securing the services of women as members of these committees.

The Prince of Wales's Fund and the Local Relief Committees, together with certain recommendations for expediting public works under local authorities, the Road Board, the Development Commission, and other agencies, formed the Government's plan for relieving distress. In the following circular, issued to mayors and other heads of local Committees on August 8, the Local Government Board gave its definition of the powers and scope of these Committees :

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD, WHITEHALL, S.W.

*August 8, 1914.*

SIR—I am directed by the Local Government Board to refer to the Circular which they addressed to you on the

6th instant with regard to the formation of a Local Representative Committee for dealing with any distress which may arise in consequence of the war, and to state that they will feel obliged if you will forward to them as soon as possible particulars on the enclosed form of the constitution of the Committee.

The Cabinet Committee on the Prevention and Relief of Distress have had under consideration questions relating to the organisation of the work and the procedure of the local Committee, and I am directed to acquaint you with their views in regard to these matters.

The primary duty of the Committee will be to survey the existing conditions of employment in the locality, and to consider what measures might be adopted with a view to preventing distress through lack of employment and alleviating such distress should it unhappily occur.

It is in the highest degree desirable that employers should do all in their power to avert the sudden closing of works, and also that temporary appointments should be made to fill all vacancies caused by the mobilisation of His Majesty's forces.

The Committee, including as it will representatives of Local Authorities, public bodies, and philanthropic agencies, will comprise amongst its members persons who are intimately acquainted with local industrial conditions, as well as those who have experience in matters such as those with which the Committee will be called upon to deal. It will thus be well equipped for forming an accurate estimate of the situation and for concerting measures for the prevention and mitigation of distress. If any of the local industries show signs of failing, the Committee should at once inform the Local Government Board, who will bring the matter before the Cabinet Committee.

In the event of distress becoming acute, the Committee will be responsible for the co-ordination of all relief agencies in the locality, whether official or voluntary, as well as for the distribution of grants made from the National Fund. For this purpose it will be necessary that the Committee should have a register of assistance.

The Board are addressing a communication to the Guardians requesting them to provide the Committee with a list of the persons in receipt of poor relief. If the Distress Committee have opened a register, a copy of this should be made available. The Committee itself should also keep a register of the persons who receive assistance from the National Fund.

It is suggested that the register should be kept on a rough card index system, possibly with reference to areas or streets.

The object of the register is to enable the Committee readily to discriminate between applicants for assistance and to avoid overlapping.

It is not intended that the organisation of the Local Committee should be utilised by persons who have been for a continuous period in receipt of relief, and such persons should be referred back to the Guardians.

With regard to other applicants, it is highly desirable that any relief afforded should take the form of work for wages when it is possible to provide work. In this connection the Local Authority will, of course, continue to push on all works already in progress, and it is hoped that in many cases they will be able to expedite other schemes of public work and thus absorb a considerable amount of labour. In other cases the Distress Committee in co-operation with the Local Authority will probably be able to initiate schemes of work by which provision could be made for the more deserving and necessitous cases. Such schemes will be aided by grants made by the Board out of the money provided by Parliament for the purposes of the Unemployed Workmen Act. In areas where there are no Distress Committees similar schemes of work can, it is hoped, be devised which can also be aided by the Local Government Board out of public funds.

The Local Education Authority will have received from the Board of Education a circular with respect to the exercise of the powers for the feeding of school-children conferred by the Act which has just been passed by Parlia-



ment, and the Committee will, of course, take this into consideration.

The National Fund will be available for, and generally speaking should be restricted to, those cases which for various reasons cannot be dealt with by any of the methods of assistance above indicated. It may be mentioned that the work of the National Relief Fund will be closely co-ordinated with that of the Cabinet Committee.

The Board have no doubt that the Clerk to the Local Authority would be willing to give the Committee the benefit of his experience and advice, and, if so desired, to place his staff at their disposal. They direct me to add that they understand that many offers of help have been made by various persons and organisations, including women's associations, and the Committee will probably desire to avail themselves of such assistance if necessary.—  
I am, Sir, Your obedient servant,

H. C. MONRO, *Secretary*.

The Chairman of the County Council,  
The Lord Mayor,  
The Mayor,  
or  
The Chairman of the Urban District Council.

At the same time, forms were issued asking for a list of the organisations represented on the Committees, and showing the number of women members.

It is patent that the above circular was not intended to give any very clear indication of the Government's policy. It said very little about the principle on which money would be distributed for relief, and it held out only slender hopes that money would be forthcoming in adequate amounts for the prevention of unemployment. It clearly stated that "it is highly desirable that any relief afforded should take the form of work for wages when it is possible to provide such work"; but it showed no sign of being prepared to pay for the general adoption of that very expensive policy. And,

where the alternative policy of relief was adopted, it gave no guidance as to scales of relief or as to the conditions on which relief was to be given. It was, as we shall see, on these faults in the scheme that the Workers' National Committee concentrated its criticism.

The immediate result of the Government's policy was that, on the one side, money poured steadily into the National Relief Fund, and, on the other, a network of Local Relief Committees sprang up all over the country. For the most part these Committees were essentially not of a character likely to be acceptable to Labour. "Responsible," as the Government told them, "for the co-ordination of all relief agencies in the locality, whether official or voluntary," they inevitably consisted largely of "social workers," of those who had long been connected with the Poor Law, the Charity Organisation Society, and other relief agencies. The Labour representatives, even where they were given seats on the Committees, were nearly always swamped by the mass votes of the officials and charity-mongers. The social worker, long used to the relief of a peculiar type of distress, could not realise that the special distress created by the war was of a quite different character and demanded different treatment. Accustomed to bullying the very poor, the Committees set out with eagerness to bully the regular wage-earners whom the war had thrown out of work. They prepared case-papers, they made house-to-house visitations, they tried to pry into every detail of the private lives of those who, through no fault of their own, found themselves unemployed. The idea of "deterrence," familiar to the charitable mind, entered largely into these practices, and secured

a great measure of success. In many districts, notably in parts of Lancashire where the distress was acute, the self-respecting wage-earners refused to go to the Relief Committees, preferring to exhaust savings and accumulate debts. In these cases the Committees became the Mecca of cadgers and undeserving cases, and when the workers were at last driven to appeal to them, their habits of inquisition had grown even worse than before.

It cannot be denied that these mischievous inquisitions were in fact stimulated by the circular sent out from the Local Government Board on August 17, in which the following paragraph occurred :

It will be necessary for the Committee in determining the question of assistance to be given in any case to have regard to all the circumstances of the applicant, and for this purpose they should ascertain—

The ordinary occupation of the applicant ;

Dependents ;

In the case of insured persons, the Approved Society to which applicant belongs and number in that Society, or if a Deposit Contributor his number ;

Whether registered at Labour Exchange ;

Any special qualification or experience for any class of work ;

Date and place of last employment ; and

Any source of income.

In particular, they should have on record any sickness or disablement benefit, meals given to school children, unemployment benefit, half-pay or other assistance from employer, or aid from charitable funds. It will, of course, be desirable to obtain this information in a manner which will not appear unduly inquisitorial to the applicant.

The mild disclaimer in the last sentence did little or nothing to mitigate the ferocity of the "social

experts," who had no intention of wasting the opportunity of a life-time.

The Government's proposals were fully elaborated in the following memorandum, which was sent out from the Local Government Board on August 20.

#### MEMORANDUM FOR THE GUIDANCE OF THE LOCAL COMMITTEES FOR THE PREVENTION AND RELIEF OF DISTRESS.

1. The National organisation that has been set up for the purpose of dealing with any distress which may arise in consequence of the war is not intended to deal with cases of ordinary poverty. While it may not always be possible to discriminate between ordinary distress and distress caused by the war, it is not intended that the local committees which have been constituted should supersede the Poor Law authorities.

2. The Committee is entrusted with the duty of co-ordinating all relief agencies in the locality with a view both to preventing overlapping and to seeing that cases which require assistance are not overlooked.

3. It is essential for these purposes that a register should be kept on the lines laid down in the Board's circular letter of the 17th August.

4. Obviously the best way to provide for persons thrown out of their usual employment as a result of the war is to provide them with some other work for wages. Wherever possible, such work should be work which is normally required to be taken in hand either by public authorities or private employers. It is only when these fail that recourse should be had to relief works. Accordingly the Committee should co-operate as closely as possible with any Board of Trade Labour Exchange or other agency in its area to which any applicant for assistance for whom suitable work either in his own locality or elsewhere may be available could be referred. The Labour Exchanges have been instructed to co-operate with the Committees

in regard to this matter, and will be prepared to take any steps desired to invite notification of vacancies from employers.

5. The Committee will have the advantage of including among its members persons who are well acquainted with the conditions of industry in their area, and, as pointed out in previous circulars, it is one of the first duties of the Committee to make themselves acquainted with the conditions of local trade and industry.

6. For this purpose the Committee should, so far as possible, use the existing agencies, such as the Labour Exchanges (in respect of the conditions of employment) and the Poor Law authorities (in respect of pauperism), and should make further inquiries of their own only in so far as it is found to be necessary to supplement this information. The Labour Exchanges have been instructed to give such general information as is in their possession as to the state of employment.

7. Where the demands of the normal labour market are inadequate the Committee should consult the local authorities as to the possibility of expediting schemes of public utility, which might otherwise not be put in hand at the present moment.

8. Whatever work is undertaken by local authorities, whether it be normal work or expedited work, it should in all possible cases be performed in the ordinary way by men specially suited to that particular class of work and selected as such in the ordinary labour market, rather than by men selected from the register of applicants to the Committee. The men engaged should be required to conform to the ordinary standards of competence in that class of work, and should of course be paid wages in the ordinary way.

9. Under the Unemployed Workmen Act, 1905, Distress Committees are empowered to provide or contribute to the provision of work for unemployed persons, and in areas where such a Distress Committee has been set up, able-bodied men out of employment, for whom no work can be found through a Labour Exchange, should be

referred to that Committee. Work so provided would, in suitable cases, be aided out of the Parliamentary grant for the purposes of the Unemployed Workmen Act.

10. Where relief works are provided, each man should only be employed a certain number of days per week.

11. So far as possible applicants for assistance should be offered work which they can perform efficiently, and no assistance from the Relief Fund should be offered to any person for whom suitable work is available.

12. Single men who are physically fit and within the prescribed ages for enlistment in the army, navy, or territorial forces should not ordinarily receive assistance from the local Committee until other applicants have been provided for.

13. Relief without work should only be given when no other means of assistance are available, and so far as it may prove necessary in the last resort to provide relief without work, it must be recognised that the demands upon the funds available will in all probability be such as to make it impossible to do more than to provide relief upon a minimum scale.

14. In cases in which it is necessary to give relief it is essential that the principles upon which such relief shall be given shall be definitely laid down by the Committee in order that persons in similar circumstances may receive similar treatment.

15. For this branch of their work the Committee will doubtless find it desirable to appoint a special sub-committee or sub-committees composed of members who are specially experienced in the relief of distress.

16. In determining the allowance to be made the Committee should take into consideration all the sources of income at present available for the household. As suggested in the circular letter of the 17th August, they should take steps to ascertain whether the applicant or any members of his family are in receipt of sickness, disablement, or unemployment benefit, whether they are receiving half-pay or any assistance from their employers or are on part-time employment, whether the children are receiv-

ing meals provided by the education authority, and whether they are receiving aid from charitable funds or any other sources.

17. So far as practicable, allowances should be made, not in money, but by way of food tickets on local shops or stores. These tickets should be given to the women rather than to the men.

In this document there is still no guidance on the question of scales of relief, and no attempt to deter Committees from deterrent methods of administering relief. On the other hand, there is a clearer insistence on the need for providing as much useful employment as possible at regular wages, and it is emphasised that the labour for such work should be taken on in the ordinary way. "Relief" works were not to be instituted till everything had been done to maintain the volume of employment. At the same time, further defects emerge: renewed stress is laid on the objectionable circular of August 17, and in clause 12 a definite beginning is made in the system of economic compulsion to enlist, which has since been carried further, and was, in fact, carried further at the time by some Local Committees. Moreover, the objectionable system of giving food tickets instead of money was recommended to the Committees.

This last provision at once led to abuses, of which the action taken by the Newcastle Relief Committee was only a particularly glaring example. This Committee, not content with issuing food tickets, actually published a "list of goods which may be purchased in exchange for Food Coupons at prices as under," and proclaimed that "only goods named in above list are purchasable with a Food Coupon." Thus the workers had their diet prescribed to them by the

Relief Committee, and, in addition, there was no provision for the purchase of clothes or other necessaries besides food.

Such extreme examples were fortunately exceptional, and the worst cases were corrected by the Local Government Board under pressure from the Workers' National Committee. Lesser abuses, however, prevailed to an alarming extent, and the workers not only found their right to representation refused in many districts, but also, where they were represented, could do little against the combined efforts of "charitable" persons and capitalist representatives. All over the country the Relief Committees earned an unpopularity which did much to irritate the workers, and was calculated to destroy that sense of national unity which the Government presumably desired to stimulate.

Nor was this the only complaint made against the Government's scheme. The Government Committee early in August issued an appeal for the centralisation of all Relief Funds. Local needs, they said, would be relieved out of the National Fund, and there was no need for separate local funds. This manœuvre having succeeded, everything obviously depended on the administration of the central fund, which soon amounted to several million pounds. It is quite clear that the Government soon decided that its policy should be to spend as little as possible. £120,000 was granted at once for the relief of distress among the families of soldiers and sailors; but the Local Committees found the greatest difficulty in getting grants. For a long time the National Relief Fund maintained the greatest possible secrecy as to its disbursements, and when at last a very incomplete account of its work up to March 1 was issued, it was found that £1,400,000 had already



been expended on relief for the families of soldiers and sailors, a charge which should obviously have fallen, not on a fund intended primarily for the relief of civil distress, but on the Government directly.

Not only was parsimony the ruling principle of those who administered the National Relief Fund : efforts were also made to economise in other directions. The Government had only attempted at the outset to justify its relief policy on the ground that relief should be a last resort, and that everything should first be done to maintain the volume of employment. But such a policy was totally contradicted by the speech which the Chancellor of the Exchequer made to representatives of the municipalities on September 8—a speech which, carefully worded as it was in order to enable the Chancellor to reply to critics, bore in every sentence the moral that local authorities should economise. Mr. Lloyd George referred to the immense financial needs of the war, which, he said, would be fought with silver bullets. No one who heard or read his speech could help going away with the impression that he desired as little money as possible to be spent. The following paragraph contains the gist of his speech :

We must relieve distress. We must see that our people suffer as little as is possible under these terrible conditions, and therefore we are prepared to meet you, but we do not want a penny spent which is not absolutely essential to relieve distress, because, after all, if you go into the market it is the same market we go into. We raise the 10 millions for you in the same market as we raise the 10 millions for our armies on the Continent. Therefore, in my judgment, the last few hundred millions may win this war. This is my opinion.

Mr. Samuel, on behalf of the Local Government

Board, also made a significant reply. For the present, he said, the Local Government Board only asked local authorities to prepare schemes which must necessarily take some time to elaborate, so that if in any locality distress arose, or was imminent, these schemes could be put into operation without a moment's delay. He also expressed his fear that distress would be far worse after the war.

These two speeches should be read in connection with Mr. Samuel's speech in the House of Commons two days later, when, as we have seen, he said that there was no evidence of any widespread distress. In fact, the Government, having been to some extent stampeded into adopting the policy of preventing unemployment at the beginning of the war, were openly anxious to abandon it by the beginning of September, partly because the distress was, in fact, less than they had anticipated, and partly because they had realised what the prevention of unemployment was likely to cost. By working for the mere relief of distress through inquisitorial and deterrent Local Committees, they did succeed in getting off very cheaply—of course at the cost of the workers.

With the Government's special policy in dealing with distress among women—which, as we have seen, was more serious than among men—we shall be concerned in a later chapter. Here I will only mention the formation, in the third week of August, of the Queen's Work for Women Fund and the appointment of an Advisory Committee, on which women workers were very strongly represented. Whatever the merits of this scheme, it is certain that the Government itself deserves little of the credit for it.

We are now in a position to comment upon the

Government's provision for the relief and prevention of distress taken as a whole. The first thing that emerges is the considerable divergence between its professions and its practice. Proclaimed with a great flourish of trumpets, the policy of preventing unemployment was, in the majority of cases, soon allowed to lapse, while in relieving actual distress the Government and its advisory Committees were as parsimonious as they dared to be.

Criticism, however, can be levelled not only at the administration of the Government's scheme, but also at the scheme itself. In the first place, the whole idea of relieving distress out of a national voluntary fund was bound to lead to parsimony. The existence of the Prince of Wales's Fund all along hindered the provision of any effective relief, because it seemed to relieve the Government of any further responsibility. The avoidance of responsibility and the shuffling off of it on to other incompetent bodies seems, indeed, to have been the chief characteristic of the Government's action.

Secondly, the working of relief through the Local Committees was at once a further avoidance of responsibility and a grave mistake in itself. The Local Committees, as we have seen, usually adopted the mental outlook of the Charity Organisation Society and similar bodies. Relief was given to those in distress owing to the war, not as a right, but on conditions and as a charitable dole.

Yet surely the Government might have realised that the distress due to the war was altogether different from the distress of normal times. The war brought certain industries to a standstill, and reduced to distress, not the submerged tenth of the industrial popula-

tion, but the ordinary regular and self-respecting wage-earners. To offer such workers relief on the principles on which relief in this country is ordinarily administered was an insult and an outrage. It was cheap, no doubt ; but it was also mean and dishonourable. The wage-earners who were thrown out of work by the war had a right to demand, not conditional relief, but either work at wages or unconditional maintenance. They should have been given not doles but wages, and, instead of being watched and abused at every turn, they should have been left no less free in the spending of their allowances than the Trade Unionist is free in the spending of his unemployment benefit, or the worker under Part II. of the Insurance Act in the spending of his State benefit.

It is not very profitable now to go into details concerning the more statesmanlike courses that were open to the Government. Wholesale extension of Part II. of the Insurance Act to all workers, which was one of the courses suggested, was probably not the best way ; but it would not have been difficult to devise a scheme whereby the payment of benefit to all persons thrown out of work could have been administered by the Labour Exchanges on the same principle as they now administer Part II. Workers would have been compelled—as indeed they generally were—to register at the Exchanges, and unconditional out-of-work pay could have been given them till work at reasonable wages was found for them. Such a policy would have had the merit of recognising the right of the citizen to maintenance by the community in a crisis not of his making, and it would have saved the workers from the charity-mongering excesses of unemployed members of the upper and middle classes.

A truly democratic Government would have combined this remedy with another of far greater significance. Instead of neglecting Trade Unionism, which has built up a great machine capable of being used for the prevention of distress, it would have taken the Trade Unions into partnership, and would have used them as organs of the nation. A scheme on these lines was actually put forward early in the war.<sup>1</sup> The Trade Unions might have been subsidised by the State to the extent of any disbursements beyond the average of recent years which they might have to make to their unemployed members; and, further, a grant might have been given to enable those who joined a Union to come into benefit at once, without the usual probationary periods. The adoption of such a scheme would have made the Trade Unions, which understand the work, the Government's accredited agents in the distribution of unemployment pay, and would have left the Local Committees—or better the Labour Exchanges—the residuary task of relieving those who remained outside the Unions.

Such a course, however, which would have involved the national recognition of Trade Unionism, did not find favour with the Wilful Wontsees of the Liberal Government. They chose the cheapest method, and refused to grant either rights or responsibilities to the organised workers. Thus even the far too moderate requests made by the representatives of Trade Unionism were first shelved and then, for the most part, refused.

Having summarised and commented generally upon the Government's action, we may now turn to the

<sup>1</sup> See the *Nation*, September 5 (Trade Unions and the War), September 19 and October 3 (Relief or Maintenance); and articles by the present writer in the *Manchester Guardian* for September 11 and 23.

Labour criticism and demand. Unfortunately this demand pursued two independent courses, which there was for a long time little or no attempt to co-ordinate. On the one hand we have the Workers' National Committee, accepting in principle the Government scheme and trying to get the Government to put its principles into practice; on the other hand, we find the Trade Unions, through the Joint Board, pressing the Government for special help to tide them over the crisis. We must deal separately with these two aspects of the Labour demand.

The War Emergency: Workers' National Committee was formed at a conference of Labour and Socialist bodies held on August 5, which elected an Executive Committee representative of the Trades Union Congress, the General Federation of Trade Unions, the Labour Party, the Miners' Federation, the National Union of Railwaymen, the Women's Trade Union League, the Women's Labour League, the British Socialist Party, and the Fabian Society. To these were added subsequently the Co-operative Union, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, the Textile Factory Workers' Association, the Transport Workers' Federation, the Women's Co-operative Guild, and other bodies. It is thus in one sense the most representative Labour body there has ever been, inasmuch as no body has contained members from so many sections of the Labour movement. In another sense it is not representative at all; for most of its members were never appointed by the organisations they are there to represent. The Committee was elected by the Conference, which was a self-appointed body. But, despite its constitutionally anomalous position, the Workers' National Committee does deserve to be called

the most representative Labour body that has ever existed, for never before have the Trade Unions, the Labour Party, the Co-operators, the Socialist Societies, and the women's Labour bodies worked together in a single great organisation. Labour has long needed such a co-ordinating Committee, and attempts have from time to time been made to form one, never with any chance of immediate success, till the war crisis came as a dissolvent of old animosities. It is to be hoped that the excellent beginning will have a still better continuation; not only that the Committee will persist after the war, but also that it will be regularised and democratised. It needs to be made really representative of the bodies whose members now compose it: it needs to have its functions defined and its constitution approved. The useful work of criticism it has done already leads to the hope that either it or its successor will do much in the future to remedy the prevailing disorder of Labour organisation.

The Conference of August 5, which created the Workers' National Committee, itself passed the following resolutions:

That arrangements be made at once to press upon the Government and municipal authorities measures for officially controlling: (a) the purchase and storage of food; (b) the fixing of maximum prices of food and trade necessities; and (c) the distribution of food.

That the citizen committees proposed to be set up be urged to guard against the exploitation of the people by unnecessarily high prices.

That an appeal be issued to all Labour, Socialist, Co-operative, and women's organisations to render whole-hearted assistance in the work of the citizen committees.

That the Government be urged to appoint a standing departmental committee to stimulate and co-ordinate the

efforts of Government departments, local authorities, and other employers to maintain the aggregate volume of employment by keeping their staffs at the fullest possible strength, and, if circumstances allow, to undertake additional enterprises in order to prevent the occurrence of as much unemployment as possible.

That an appeal be made to the Government for the powers under the Development Commission and Road Board, together with the Unemployed Workmen Act, to be put into extensive operation in order that works of public utility may be expedited.

That an appeal be made to the Board of Education to use its influence on local education authorities to adopt the Education (Provision of Meals) Act, including the powers contained in the Amending Bill about to become law.

That the Local Government Board be requested to issue a circular to health committees calling upon them to arrange to supply milk to nursing mothers, infants, young children, and sick people.

Thus, at the outset, the Conference adopted the policy of demanding the prevention of unemployment in preference to the mere relief of distress as it occurred. At the same time, it urged Government control of food prices, and called on local authorities to adopt the Provision of Meals Act, which, partly through Labour pressure, was amended so as to extend its scope and make it easier of general adoption.

The Executive Committee, which has met regularly through the war, lost no time in getting to work; nor was there any dearth of work for it to perform. Throughout the early months of the war it was kept busy in attempting to hold the Government to its promises. It began with an effort to secure adequate Labour representation on the Local Committees. For instance, early in September, Mr. J. S. Middleton,



the Secretary, wrote to the Local Government Board giving a list of districts, including several important industrial centres, in which the local bodies had ignored the Government's circular advising the representation of Trade Unions on the Committees. In this work it was in the main successful, though, as we have seen, the Trade Union representatives were in almost all cases too few to alter the character of the local bodies.

The outstanding activity of the Workers' National Committee in August was its advocacy of the policy of preventing unemployment. A Memorandum, issued early in the month by the Fabian Society, drew attention to the importance of this policy. It had a wide circulation in this form, and attracted still more notice when it appeared in an enlarged form as a pamphlet by Mr. Sidney Webb, entitled *The War and the Workers*. Suffering yet another metamorphosis, it reappeared in a different form as *The War Emergency: Suggestions for Labour Members on Local Committees*, published by the Workers' National Committee. In fact, the Workers' National Committee was engaged, during the earlier months, in pushing a policy sketched out for it by the Fabian Society, or, what is much the same, by Mr. Sidney Webb.

In its advocacy of the prevention of unemployment in preference to the mere relief of distress, this policy was essentially sound, though, as we saw, the Government lost no time in shuffling out of it as soon as they found their chance. In the form advocated by Mr. Webb, it was open to mere objection. Where useful and productive work could not be found, Mr. Webb urged, on the lines of conditional relief laid down in the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, that the Local Committees should "find really educational

employment." Instead of recommending unconditional maintenance, Mr. Webb wished to hand over the unemployed to the tender mercies of the Committees, in order that the men might be "taught how to cook and to sew and to cobble" and the women taken on at Women's Training Centres. There could be no objection to such provisions if they were voluntary; but Mr. Webb's suggestion was that they should be the conditions on which alone relief could be obtained. He refused to recognise the workers' right to unconditional maintenance, and conceded only a conditional right.

These objectionable provisions, however, entered less into the Committee's work than the completely sound attempt to secure the maintenance of the volume of employment. They continually recommended schemes of various kinds to the Government, particularly building and improvement schemes suitable for execution by local bodies with State assistance. This, however, is far from exhausting the catalogue of their early activities. Soon they realised the unwillingness of the self-respecting Trade Unionist to appeal to the Local Committees. To meet this difficulty they continued their efforts to improve the Committees, and, further, issued the following resolution on August 25 :

The committee strongly urges upon all wage-earners who may be thrown out of work or become poverty-stricken to apply at once for employment or relief to the organised national or local committees before they attempt to sell or pawn any of their furniture or personal effects.

In the case of persons who apply for Poor Law relief, if it is clear that they need relief in consequence of the war, they should not be paid out of the rates but out of the

special fund until such time as they can be dealt with by the local committee.

That there should have been need for such a resolution is the best possible indication of the lamentable spirit displayed by many Local Committees.

By September the general lines of the Government policy were settled, and attention shifted to questions of administration. Foremost among these was the question of the scale of relief to be adopted by the Local Committees. It was not until the fourth week of October that the Government Committee and the Executive Committee of the National Relief Fund jointly fixed model scales of relief, which were to operate with only slight variations over the whole country. The official scales, arrived at after considerable dispute, were as follows, and it was further announced that, in determining the amount of relief to be granted, all sources of income available to the household should be taken into account, with the exception of income from savings, including sickness and unemployment benefit :

	London.		Outside London.	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
One adult . . . . .	10	0	8	0
Two adults . . . . .	14	0	12	0
Each additional adult . . . . .	4	6	4	6
Two adults and one child . . . . .	15	6 <sup>1</sup>	13	6 <sup>1</sup>
Two adults and two children . . . . .	17	0 <sup>1</sup>	15	0 <sup>1</sup>
Two adults and three children . . . . .	18	6 <sup>1</sup>	16	6 <sup>1</sup>
Two adults and four children . . . . .	20	0 <sup>1</sup>	18	0 <sup>1</sup>
Maximum coming into household	20	0	18	0

<sup>1</sup> Less 6d. per week in respect of each child receiving meals at school.

This totally inadequate scale, which in fact replaced an even lower one that had been communicated privately to the L.G.B. inspectors, was opposed by

the Workers' National Committee which had already, on October 5, laid down the scale which it considered adequate, and forwarded its recommendation to the Committee of the National Relief Fund. The scale suggested by Labour was this :

	s.	d.
One adult . . . . .	12	6
Two adults . . . . .	17	6
One adult and one child . . . . .	15	0
Two adults and one child . . . . .	20	0
Two adults and two children . . . . .	22	6

2s. 6d. for each additional child, and an additional  
3s. 6d. for adoption in London boroughs.

Thus the Committee fought in vain to secure from the Government the adoption of a twenty-shilling family minimum. There were only a few Local Committees that defied the Government by continuing to pay relief on a more adequate scale.

No sooner had Labour suffered defeat in the combat for a more satisfactory scale than a new cause of dispute arose.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the war a good many Trade Unions imposed levies on their members on behalf of the National Relief Fund, on the understanding that their members in distress would receive relief from it on an adequate scale. This was done especially by the miners ; but it was not long before dissatisfaction with the administration of the Fund became articulate and threatening. On November 23 a deputation was appointed to interview the Executive of the Fund on the position of Trade Unionists in relation to it. The complaints were in the first place that relief was refused until the applicant was in a

<sup>1</sup> All through this period the Committee was also engaged in a vain struggle to secure the exclusive use of the National Relief Fund for civil distress, while the Government showed itself bent on securing all it could for the dependents of soldiers and sailors.

state of destitution, and in the second that inquisitorial methods were being adopted. On both points the reply was that such was not the intention of the L.G.B. circulars; but nothing was done. The Workers' National Committee thereupon made the demand "that the Government Committee should agree to arrangements being made for Trade Unions to collect contributions for the National Relief Fund from their respective memberships, to dispense relief to their necessitous members, and to remit the balances to the Central Fund." The refusal of the South Wales miners to go on paying into the Fund on the old terms had already led to the adoption of such a scheme in their case, and the Government now declared its willingness to consider proposals for extending the practice.

No wonder Trade Unionists, who for months had been paying perhaps sixpence a week voluntarily into the Fund, resented the inquisitions to which they were submitted as soon as they wanted anything out of it. There can have been few such contributors who did not realise bitterly that the whole policy of Trade Union contributions to the Relief Fund had been a mistake, and that the Unions would have been far better advised to form a central fund of their own for the relief of distress among Trade Unionists, or like the National Union of Teachers,<sup>1</sup> to form special funds for the relief of their own members. The same disgust at the administration of the National Fund as led some localities to raise Local Funds of their own soon spread among the workers; the Government's tardy recognition of the bare possibility of granting Trade Unionists

<sup>1</sup> This policy was only adopted by the National Union of Teachers when, having paid large sums into the National Relief Fund, they became thoroughly disgusted with its administration.

some sort of share in the administration of relief came much too late to be of use and has, in fact, been almost inoperative.

It is impossible even to outline the whole of the immense mass of detailed work done by the Workers' National Committee during the earlier months of the war. No one who reads through its minutes can help being struck by the wide range of the subjects discussed. There are only one or two further aspects of its work to which I have space to refer. It is impossible to pass by without mention the work of the special Government Contracts Sub-Committee, which became especially active about the middle of November, when the War Office's hut-building operations were in full swing. Both in pressing for the publication of full lists of Government contractors and in tracking down cases of sweating among hut-builders and clothing employers the Committee did admirable work. The Government Departments, especially the War Office, cold-shouldered it as much as they dared, and there is no doubt that much sweating went unnoticed and unchecked; but there is equally little doubt that a vast deal of sweating was prevented by the activity of the Workers' National Committee. The widespread sub-letting of hut-building contracts by War Office contractors was especially productive of sweating, and the Committee, before which many actual employees came to give evidence, was able to prove not merely sweating, but scandalously inflated profits in many cases. The Workers' National Committee pressed in vain for a full Government enquiry into contracts. Though this was never secured, it takes away nothing from the value of the Committee's work.

With some aspects of the Committee's activities

we shall have to deal later, when we come to the special questions to which they relate. Thus, I have reserved the whole question of Child Labour for a special section : all problems relating to women are treated in another chapter ; and the work of the Committee with regard to prices, which forms the second phase of its struggles with the Government, is reserved to the following chapter. Nor have I entered into its attempts to secure better payment for the dependents of soldiers and sailors, though this campaign, started on October 2 by a letter from Mr. G. N. Barnes in the *Daily Citizen*, stood for some time in the forefront of the Labour programme, and actually achieved a very considerable raising of the allowances payable to dependents. I have said enough to show that the War Emergency : Workers' National Committee became the representative Labour body, and to a great extent replaced Parliament as the organ of Labour's political criticism. Of defects I shall have something to say later on.

So far we have been speaking only of one side of the Labour demand, which, as we saw, pursued, through the early months of the war, two independent courses. While the Workers' National Committee was acting as watchdog for Labour in connection with relief work, the Joint Board, representing the united forces of Trade Unionism and the Labour Party, was pressing the Government for a fairer treatment of the Unions. As we have given reason for believing that the right course in the crisis would have been to make the Unions the national agencies for relief, it is important to follow out the actual demand made by them in some detail. We shall see that they did not act in a manner calculated to get concessions from the Government.

In the first place, the Joint Board did not meet till August 24 to consider the report drawn up by Mr. Henderson on Trade Unions and the crisis. Mr. Henderson pointed out that the result of the war had been to produce in some Unions a very high rate of unemployment, which, if it continued, would mean insolvency. The funds of the Unions, he said, could only be realised, on short notice and in the war emergency, at very great loss, while in some cases the funds would be quite insufficient to meet the situation. He urged the Joint Board to agree on a policy and to approach the Prime Minister with a view to its adoption.

After discussion, the Joint Board appointed a deputation, and passed a series of resolutions. It should be noticed that the closing of all strikes was recommended unconditionally, and not on condition of the Government's granting the Unions' requests. The Unions, on the other hand, were only asked to subscribe to the Prince of Wales's Fund "in the event of the Government agreeing to make the necessary provision for unemployment." None the less, the refusal of the Government did not prevent many of them from subscribing. Labour pursued its usual policy of giving first and then appealing in vain to the gratitude of the Government. Moreover, as we shall see, the very vagueness of the demand made it easier for the Government to refuse the requests conveyed in the following resolutions, which were sent to the Prime Minister together with the request that a deputation should be received :

1. That an immediate effort be made to terminate all existing trade disputes, whether strikes or lock-outs, and whenever new points of difficulty arise during the war period a serious attempt should be made by all concerned



to reach an amicable settlement before resorting to a strike or lock-out.

2. That the Government be requested to use its influence with the employing classes so that wherever possible there may be brought about a complete cessation of overtime in order that unemployment may be minimised. It is also suggested that short time should become operative in any trade or workshop where full time cannot be maintained rather than that the non-employment of many workers should be rendered necessary.

3. That the Government be requested to take into consideration the serious position in which Trade Unions must inevitably be placed if compelled to use their funds to make provision for unemployment existing during the war period, and to take steps through the provision of an appropriation grant for subsidising the unions or by giving the necessary assistance through the local Relief Committees, which will enable all working-class citizens to obtain uniform assistance and incidentally enable the unions to continue the payment of sick, superannuation, and similar beneficent benefits.

4. That in the event of the Government agreeing to make the necessary provision for unemployment those unions whose rules provide for unemployment benefit agree to suspend to the extent of the weekly amount of the Government subsidy payment of this benefit during the war period, including the benefit under the Insurance Act, Part II., and to carry into effect the following proposals :

- (a) That all members of the union called up as Reservists or as Territorials, or who may volunteer for service during the war period, shall be free from the payment of contributions and levies during their service in the ranks, when absent with the colours, except where rates of pay during such service equal or exceed ordinary trade rates, but to be reinstated on application upon resumption of civil life and upon production of certificate of discharge.

- (b) That the unions be recommended to urge upon their working members to subscribe liberally to the Prince of Wales's Fund.

The deputation, which saw the Prime Minister on August 27, made two important requests. It asked, first, that where Unions found it necessary to realise their funds they should be helped in this respect by the Government; and, in the second place, that the Government should give the Unions an appropriation grant to enable them to meet the drain on their funds. Throughout, though the deputation made its request gravely and Mr. Asquith answered "sympathetically," it was quite clear from the tone on both sides that neither expected anything to come of the interview. The following is a fair sample :

The PRIME MINISTER—I do not know exactly what you are asking.

Mr. HENDERSON—I am trying to explain if my two colleagues have not.

The PRIME MINISTER—They have pointed out the trouble and necessity for relief; but I want you to put in a concrete form what you want the Government to do. I understand this proposal about insurance. I do not say whether it is practicable or not. That is quite intelligible. Let me call your attention to the words of the trade resolution: "To take steps through the provision of an appropriation grant for subsidising the unions."

Mr. HENDERSON—That is the point I am coming to.

The PRIME MINISTER—I want to have that explained.

Mr. HENDERSON—I was proceeding to say that it was a tall order. It is a tall order.

The PRIME MINISTER—I am afraid it is a very tall order; but I want to know how tall it is.

In reality the trouble was not that the order was too tall, but that it was not tall enough. Had the Unions openly demanded the exclusive right to

administer relief to their members, they would have had a far better chance of securing it than they had of securing an appropriation grant to save them from insolvency. They went as petitioners in bankruptcy ; they should have gone with a demand for responsibility.

The Prime Minister evidently saw that for the time being there was nothing to fear from the Unions. He therefore returned an evasive answer and tried to shelve the whole question. The Joint Board was kept waiting for its answer till October, and then the Government produced a scheme which bore only the most distant resemblance to the demands made by the deputation. No help was to be afforded to the Unions in the realisation of their funds : all that was given was an extension of the subsidies made to Unions under Clause 106 of the Insurance Act. Under that Act, any Union, on complying with stringent conditions, could obtain from the Board of Trade a refund of one-sixth of its total expenditure on Unemployment Insurance. To this were now, in certain cases, to be added special emergency grants. These grants, however, were only to be made on the following conditions :

1. That the Association should be suffering from abnormal unemployment.

2. That the Association should not pay Unemployment Benefit above a maximum rate of 17s. per week (including any sum paid by way of State Unemployment Benefit).

3. That the Association should agree while in receipt of the emergency grant to impose levies over and above the ordinary contributions upon those members who remain fully employed.

The amount of the emergency grant (in addition to the refund of one-sixth already payable) will be either one-third or one-sixth of the expenditure of the Association

on Unemployment Benefit (exclusive of Strike Benefit). The rate of the grant will be determined by the amount of the levy in accordance with the following scale :

Maximum rate of Unemployment Benefit paid by Association.	Rate of Weekly Levy required to obtain Emergency Grant of	
	One-sixth.	One-third.
Not more than 17s. . . .	3d.	6d.
„ „ „ 15s. . . .	2d.	4d.
„ „ „ 13s. . . .	1d.	2d.

For example, an Association paying unemployment benefit at the rate of 12s. a week will by imposing a levy of 2d. per week on the employed members be qualified for an emergency grant of one-third of its expenditure, *i.e.* a total refund of one-half, taking into account the present refund of one-sixth.

The same Association, if it prefers only to impose a levy of 1d. per week, will be qualified for an emergency grant of one-sixth, *i.e.* for a total refund of one-third.

Associations paying higher rates of benefit would have to impose higher levies in order to qualify for the same proportionate refunds.

Applications will also be entertained for emergency grants, which will be subject to special conditions, in respect of expenditure already incurred by Associations on unemployment benefit since August 4, 1914.

Many of the conditions attaching to this scheme are obviously unfair in their incidence. It seems, in fact, to be worked on the principle that "unto him that hath shall be given." Where a Union is rich enough to pay out large sums in benefit, and able in addition to exact a sixpenny levy, it secures a proportionately large refund : where it is too poor to pay much in benefits and unable to exact so high a levy,

it gets nothing. Moreover, the whole principle of a compulsory levy was surely wrong. Unemployment due to the war should be a charge upon the community and not upon the trade affected. As I said before, the statesmanlike course would have been to refund to the Unions all sums over the average of past years spent on out-of-work benefit. Here, too, however, the Government desired to get off as cheaply as possible, and had no desire to give the Unions any share in national responsibility. How cheaply they have got off appears from the following table, which shows the amounts spent on emergency grants up to the end of March.

Trade Group.	Applications Granted.		Amounts Paid.		
	Number of Associations.	Membership.			
Building . . . . .	1	61	£	s.	d.
Metal <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	18	8,372	4	6	3
Cotton <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	133	220,954	1,165	11	2
Other Textile . . . . .	7	5,402	64,772	4	7
Printing . . . . .	6	23,260	2,120	13	9
Woodwork . . . . .	8	17,302	4,948	13	8
Other Trades <sup>3</sup> . . . . .	9	8,427	1,801	7	0
TOTAL . . . . .	182	283,778	1,943	8	8
			76,756	5	1

<sup>1</sup> Textile Machinery and Jewellery workers.

<sup>2</sup> Including Bleaching, Dyeing, and Finishing in Cotton.

<sup>3</sup> Leather workers, Basket makers, Hatters, Tobacco (Cigar) workers, etc.

Thus, the total grant amounts to £76,000 for seven months, and of this £64,000 has gone to the cotton industry. Yet we know from the annual reports of the cotton Trade Unions that this sum has been utterly inadequate to save them from enormous losses

on last year's working. For the first quarter after the beginning of the war, the Oldham Cardroom Association alone expended £23,000, and to set against it an income of only £7500, a loss of well over £15,000 on the quarter's working. The Government's scheme was miserly to the last degree, and it is to be hoped that the Unions will remember it against them in the future.

This brings us to the end of our double survey of the Labour demand and of the Government's action for the relief of distress. This we may call the first phase in the relations between Labour and the State during the war. In the main, it clearly amounts to a defeat of the Labour forces, due mainly to the fact that a Government hostile to Labour was in possession of the national resources, but also partly to the failure of Labour itself to press its case. A more determined demand at the beginning might well have saved much of the bickering that has happened since.

The commercial interests affected by the war made no such mistake, as indeed they encountered no such determined opposition. Throughout, where business has been unable to go on "as usual," business has been compensated.<sup>1</sup> Labour alone has been expected to make every sacrifice without return or gratitude. Employed, even the war worker was sometimes handed over to the sweater; unemployed, he fell into the clutches of the Relief Committee: as consumer, he was the victim of profiteers whom the Government would not control; but as soon as he stirred a finger in his own interest, he was proclaimed a traitor and ordered back to work.

I come now to the second phase—to the struggle of Labour against high prices and exploitation.

<sup>1</sup> Business not necessary for the war has been allowed to suffer along with labour.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SECOND PHASE—PRICES AND PROFITS

WE have seen that Labour, or rather the Labour leaders, proclaimed an industrial truce without any guarantee that the existing rates of real wages would be maintained. Laying down the sword of industrial action, they trusted to the Government to secure them against exploitation by a rise in prices. Any encouragement they may have received from the Government's action during the first weeks of August has certainly not been reinforced since then. All the demands of Labour for the reduction of food and coal prices were treated either with a bare denial of their possibility or with a contemptuous "Wait till June."

The struggle of Labour against high prices forms the second phase of its conflict with the Government. As we shall see, it was not until the "prices campaign" had been definitely proved fruitless that the real industrial unrest began. Labour did everything it could to persuade the Government to take action on the nation's behalf: it was only in face of a definite refusal that some of the rank and file determined—all too hesitantly—to take action on behalf of themselves and their fellows. The Labour unrest followed the prices campaign, and was to a great extent a result

of its failure. There can be little doubt that the policy of making the prices campaign the first plank in the Labour platform was from the first a mistake. Many among the rank and file felt this all along, and an earlier wages campaign would certainly have met with a far more satisfactory response.

It is a commonplace, as well as an obvious fact, that every rise in prices means a fall in real wages unless it is counterbalanced by a corresponding advance. The trick of nullifying wage advances by means of a rise in prices is well known to capitalism, and the rise in the cost of living is often used by the workers as an argument for an increase in rates of wages. The industrial truce left the employers free to raise prices, while it prevented the workers from securing higher wages. It therefore involved an immediate fall in the real rates of wages.

It is often said, by those who admit the fall in standard rates, that the balance was in fact restored by the increase in actual earnings. Increased rapidity in production, better factory organisation, Sunday labour, and overtime, we are told, increased the actual earnings of the workers more than the rise in prices depressed them. This extraordinary argument gives rise to several important considerations.

In the first place, the workers, it seems, ought to be content to work longer hours for the same real reward. This argument is presumably based on the plea for "sacrifice among all classes," of which we shall have more to say later on. Here let us only notice that it totally ignores the effect on the worker of overtime, Sunday labour, and speeding-up (which is what is usually meant by "better factory organisation"). Labour for long hours, seven days or even six days a



week, means overstrain and physical harm, and leads in many cases to sickness and prolonged absence from work. Large earnings in one week may, then, often be counterbalanced by no earnings at all the week after. When too long hours is added work done under abnormal conditions of speeding-up (in the name of national service) the risk is multiplied twofold. Higher earnings for a time are poor payment for long-lived, or even permanent impairment of earning power.

Secondly, there is an even greater flaw in the "higher earnings" argument. It is true that, in certain trades, not a few workers are earning money more than adequate to meet the rise in the cost of living. Let it be added that, for the work they have done, they richly deserve far more than they have got. It is also true that the transference of labour from one occupation to another has resulted in very many cases in largely increased earnings. The silver workers of Sheffield and the jewellery workers of Birmingham, for instance, who are now doing work on munitions, are earning as a rule far more than they ever earned at their old trades. But, admitting these cases, what are we to say of the distribution of the increase? The higher earnings have come only to certain workers in certain highly necessary jobs: millions of workers in other industries, no less truly necessary, have had no share in them. Many were working short time or not at all during the early months of the war: not a few, despite the shortage of Labour, are still unemployed or on short time. In many cases these workers have even now received no advances in wages: in nearly all, the earlier months of the war meant for them a serious fall in real wages and earnings, and often in nominal wages and earnings as well. Those who have gained

in purchasing power are, on the one hand, the workers in some skilled trades—whose gains are almost wholly the result of increased exertion and overtime—and, on the other, the dependents of some of the less skilled workers who have enlisted. A vast army of wage-earners, especially among those who could least afford it, have lost heavily in real earnings as a result of the war.

The reason why Labour decided to inaugurate a "Food Prices Campaign" now becomes apparent. It needed a programme which would have something to offer to every class of worker, that would do something to relieve the pressure in every working-class household, that would help not only the organised Trade Unionists, but also the vast mass of helpless and grossly underpaid male and female labour that could do nothing to help itself. All grades of workers alike needed greater purchasing power, and this a fall in food prices would give them.

Add to this the ascertained fact that in certain quarters large fortunes were being made by shipowners, coalowners, and coal merchants, purveyors and preparers of food and other classes of capitalists. Face to face with this exploitation, face to face with the common need of the community, the War Emergency: Workers' National Committee embarked upon its campaign in favour of lower prices for food and fuel. It failed: indeed, success was hardly to be expected. The Government was not frightened of the workers, and therefore it did nothing for them.

Before we pass to the record of the Labour Food Prices campaign, it will be well to have before us the facts about the rise in prices and also the ascertained movements of rates of wages from month to month.

The following table shows the rise in the retail prices of foodstuffs from August 1914 to June 1915. It is calculated so as to include those commodities in which there was no change of price as well as those which were affected by war conditions. It is compiled from successive issues of the *Board of Trade Labour Gazette*, and is the result of special information furnished from all the chief centres. It may therefore be regarded as authoritative.

PERCENTAGE INCREASE OF RETAIL FOOD PRICES ON NORMAL PRICES IN JULY 1914.

	July.	Aug. 8.	Aug. 29.	Sept. 12.	Oct. 1.	Oct. 31.	Dec. 1.	Jan. 1.	Feb. 1.	Mar. 1.	Apr. 1.	May 1.	June 1.
Large Towns . . . .	100	116	111	111	113	113	117	119	123	125	125	127	132
Small Towns and Villages	100	115	109	109	111	112	115	117	120	122	122	124	129

The articles included are meat, fish, flour, bread, sugar, milk, potatoes, margarine, butter, cheese, eggs, tea, coffee, and cocoa.

There has thus been a net increase in the cost of food of more than 30 per cent, and the upward tendency still continues. The 15 per cent increase during the first week of August was largely a panic increase, which was checked partly by the Government's action in fixing maximum prices, but still more by the natural evaporation of the panic. The disquieting fact is that since the middle of September there has been a continuous steady increase, most marked about the New Year, and that there is no indication that a climax has been reached.

The real meaning of these percentages can be conveyed more easily in terms of actual expenditure than by the percentage method of the Board of Trade. If a family was spending 25s. on food during a week of

last July, it would have to spend 33s. at the end of May 1915 in order to secure the same amount of commodities. Since that date there has been a further increase.

The only statistical comparison that can be made with this table showing the rise in prices is the table, published monthly by the Board of Trade, showing changes in rates of wages. This table—which excludes rural workers, seamen, railwaymen, police and Government employees—furnishes a fairly reliable guide to the movement of standard rates of wages, though not, of course, to the fluctuation of actual earnings. It should be mentioned that the decreases given in the table are in nearly all cases the result of automatic sliding scale agreements in the iron and steel trades and in coal-mining.

CHANGES IN RATES OF WAGES.<sup>1</sup>

	Increases.		Decreases.		Total Increase or Decrease.	
	Numbers affected.	Amount per week.	Numbers affected.	Amount per week.	Numbers affected.	Amount per week.
August . .	18,708	£1,010	36,200	£1,188	54,906	-£178
September .	2,142	173	..	..	2,142	+173
October . .	58,081	2,297	9,182	180	67,263	+2,117
November .	31,452	3,502	147,405	5,385	178,857	-1,883
December .	49,658	3,692	..	..	49,658	+3,692
January . .	44,770	4,240	77,535	2,324	122,305	+1,916
February .	149,988	?	3,650	?	153,638	+17,889
March . .	446,267	72,713	..	..	446,267	+72,713
April . .	192,655	12,894	..	..	192,655	+12,894
May . .	969,680 <sup>2</sup>	188,485	..	..	969,680	+188,425

<sup>1</sup> This table excludes agricultural workers, seamen, railwaymen, police and Government employees.

<sup>2</sup> 823,900 persons and £169,333 of this increase are accounted for by the mining industry.

A corrected estimate in the *Board of Trade Labour Gazette* for May gives aggregate figures showing the net increase during the first five months of 1915. During the period from January to May, 1,987,444 workers had their rates of wages changed, either permanently or for the period of the war. The result of these changes was an increase of £343,374 per week, or an average of nearly 3s. 6d. per head.

It is important to notice how these increases were distributed among the various industries, and the mining industry alone accounted for £171,187, or half the total increase ; engineering and shipbuilding trades £81,359, or rather less than half the remainder. The transport trades claimed £25,618, the textile trades (*i.e.* woollens) £15,665, the iron and steel trades £9310, and the building trades £3775. It will be seen that the important increases are confined to trades doing work essential for the conduct of the war.

The biggest increase was in May, when a million workers engaged in coal-mining received increases ; but still little or nothing has been done for the workers in less essential industries. The demands of the cotton workers, for instance, have been rejected in the most cavalier manner by the cotton employers. Two million wage-earners form only a very small proportion of the whole number, and it is noticeable that women workers have received hardly any benefits.

It is clear, then, that, apart from certain favoured industries which have been in a strong enough position to make terms, the rise in prices has meant a serious decline in the spending power of the workers. It remains to enquire to what causes the rise is to be attributed.

As Professor Bowley has stated in a lecture on

"Prices and Earnings in Time of War," only some of the causes are such as could be anticipated before the outbreak of war. The stoppage of supplies from certain Continental countries, higher insurance rates, and so on, were causes which could be calculated in advance. But, in fact, since the first weeks, these causes have been quite secondary in importance. Shipping has not been greatly interrupted, and insurance rates have been low in comparison with what was expected.

On the other hand, causes which were not taken into account beforehand have had a very great effect. It was anticipated that the prices of home products would not greatly change. Here, no less than in the case of imports, calculations have been thrown out by the increase in freight charges. The amount of shipping has been greatly curtailed by the commandeering of many vessels for Government service, while the German submarine campaign has also reduced the number of vessels available. The docks, working with reduced or less skilled staffs than normally, have had to cope with an immense mass of Government work, and there has been much congestion, involving expensive delays and storage of produce. The supply of railway trucks has not equalled the demand, or at any rate the supply has not been so organised as to meet the demand. Last, but not least, the power of monopoly, operating through the "rings" which control most of our principal industries, has been exercised unscrupulously at the expense of the people. The rise in prices has, in fact, been due even more to internal conditions than to the effect of the war on importation and exportation.

The history of the attempts of Labour to combat

the forces making for high prices will bring out these points in more detail. The Labour prices campaign falls into two distinct periods, the first extending from August to October 1914, and the second from January to March 1915.

We have seen, in Chapter IV., that the programme outlined by the Labour Conference of August 5, which called the War Emergency : Workers' National Committee into being, contained two general proposals. It pressed for the prevention of unemployment, and it passed the following significant recommendations :

That arrangements be made at once to press upon the Government and municipal authorities measures for officially controlling : (a) the purchase and storage of food ; (b) the fixing of maximum prices of food and trade necessities ; and (c) the distribution of food.

That the citizen committees proposed to be set up be urged to guard against the exploitation of the people by unnecessarily high prices.

These resolutions, as we saw, were passed during the first week of the war, when the first "panic" rise in prices was at its height. The upward movement began on August 1, was accelerated on August 3, and reached its height on August 8, when prices were 15 or 16 per cent above the July level. From that point there was a steady fall till September 12, when they were about 10 per cent above the July level. During this period of slightly falling prices following on the panic rise, negotiations were going on between the Workers' National Committee and the Board of Trade on the question of Government control ; but it was not till September 28, when the rise had set in anew, that energetic action began to be taken. On that date the Food Prices Sub-Committee presented a

report in which it urged that the Board of Trade should be requested to state what action it was taking with regard to the supply of sugar, meat, and cereals, and that an interview should be requested with the Board of Agriculture on the development of agricultural resources. The week after, this last matter was pressed further by the passage of the following resolution :

That the price of wheat having risen to a figure (38s. to 45s. per quarter) which allows a reasonable margin of profit for home growers, who are being advised, against the truest interests of the nation, to refrain from growing more wheat until prices rule considerably higher, this Committee is of opinion that the Government should appoint a Royal Commission on Wheat with the following definite objects :

1. To commandeer all present stocks of English wheat at prices from 35s. to 40s. per quarter.
2. To sell the same at current market prices. In case of a surplus to pay a bounty of 5 per cent to the growers and the balance into the Treasury.
3. To secure that all holders of land other than market gardens up to five acres in extent shall put at least one-fifth of their holdings, where suitable, under wheat, and maintain the same from year to year under the conditions set out above.

On October 26 the Committee issued its programme, including the following demands dealing with food prices :

5. The encouragement and development of home-grown food supplies by the National Organisation of Agriculture, accompanied by drastic reductions of freight charges for all produce, in the interests of the whole people.
6. Protection of the people against exorbitant prices, especially in regard to food, by the enactment of maxima and the commandeering of supplies by the nation wherever advisable.



Thus already in October the burden of heavy freight charges was making itself felt and the need for a national campaign to deal with food prices was faintly realised. Nevertheless, the matter seems for the time to have been carried no further. The Food Prices Sub-Committee was allowed to lapse, and the Workers' National Committee turned its attention to other questions, especially to the pressing problem of the administration of the National Relief Fund, with which we have already dealt, and to the deplorable conditions under which Government contracts were being allotted and executed.

The beginning of the real Prices Campaign dates from January 14, 1915, when the Workers' National Committee reissued its demand of October 5, and reappointed the Food Prices Sub-Committee. By this time food prices were considerably over 20 per cent above the pre-war level.

The Sub-Committee lost no time. A week later it issued an exhaustive Memorandum dealing with wheat prices, tracing the rise unmistakably to the increased freight charges. It was pointed out that the commandeering of ships for Government service and, even more, the driving of German commerce from the seas, had created a situation highly favourable to British shipowners, who had not hesitated to exact the full monopoly prices for the service of their vessels. As a statement in the *Journal of Commerce* for November 27, 1914, declared :

The opportunities now open to British shipping are obvious. There are no more cut rates by subsidised German vessels. German ships being swept off the sea, we have now no serious competitors in the carrying trade of the world.

The Memorandum admits that congestion at the docks, due to the partial closing of the East Coast ports, has to some extent affected carrying charges ; but it goes on to prove that the actual rise in freights is in no way accounted for by the increase in standing charges. In short, it shows conclusively that ship-owners have not scrupled to exact full monopoly prices. In addition, it points out that many of our vessels continue to carry between foreign ports, and urges the recall of vessels flying the British flag for home service. Its general recommendation is in the following terms :

That the most effective action that the Government can now take to reduce wheat prices is to intervene to remedy the deficiency in carrying-ships ; and we recommend, therefore, that the Government should at once take steps to obtain the control of more ships and itself bring the wheat from Argentina and Canada at the bare cost of transport.

From the wheat supply the Committee passed to the question of coal. A second Memorandum, dealing with Coal Prices, was issued on January 28. Here the Committee found itself faced with the exploitation of the consumer by three distinct groups of capitalists : coalowners, coal merchants, and shipowners. Sometimes, where the colliery owned its own shipping or acted as its own merchant, a double profit was accruing to it ; but as a rule there were found to be three distinct bodies of exploiters.

The most astonishing fact revealed by the Committee's enquiries was the margin of profit accruing to the London coal merchants on the cheaper kinds of coal. A large proportion of the output of the collieries is sold to manufacturers and merchants on contract

prices arranged in advance; but there generally remains a surplus, which is sold at current prices at the pit mouth. Basing its conclusions mainly on the conditions governing the London supply, the Committee found that the great bulk of the house coal on sale had been contracted for at prices ruling before the war. Nevertheless, the prices at which the surplus coal was being sold by the colliery companies were found to be governing to a considerable extent the retail prices for all classes of coal. That is to say, the difference between contract prices and current prices, not to mention a big margin over either, was going into the pockets of the coal-merchants.

This contention was fully borne out by the figures published by the Committee, showing the margin between contract and current prices and advertised retail rates per ton in London:

Quality.	Advertised prices in London. <sup>1</sup>		Contract Prices.			Current Prices.								
			Pit mouth.	Rail rate.	Total.	Pit mouth.	Rail rate.	Total.						
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.				
Best Wallsend (selected) .	32	0	14	0	8	2	22	2	20	0	8	2	28	2
Silkstones .	32	0	14	3	7	6	21	9	19	0	7	6	26	6
Derby Brights .	31	0	13	6	7	6	21	0	18	0	7	6	25	6
Bright Nuts .	30	0	12	6	7	6	20	0	18	0	7	6	25	6
Best House .	30	0	11	6	7	6	19	0	18	0	7	6	25	6
Best Kitchen .	30	0	11	3	7	9	19	0	17	0	7	9	24	9
Hard Cobbles .	30	0	10	0	6	7	16	7	17	0	6	7	23	7
Hard Nuts .	30	0	9	9	7	6	17	3	17	0	7	6	24	6
„ .	30	0	9	9	7	0	16	9	17	0	7	0	24	0
Stove Coal .	30	0	9	9	6	3	16	0	15	0	6	3	21	3

<sup>1</sup> NOTE.—These prices are for deliveries of quarter ton or more. When bought by the cwt. by the poorer section of the people the prices vary from 1s. 9d. to 2s. per cwt., or 35s. to 40s. per ton.

The most important fact emerging from this table is that the margin of profit to the merchant is far greater in the cases of the cheaper kinds of coal than of the more expensive. In comparison with winter prices in 1913, the more expensive kinds of coal went up 2s. to 3s. a ton, while the cheaper kinds went up from 6s. to 8s. Allowing 3s. per ton, which is the usual estimate for cartage charges and cost of delivery, there is a marginal profit still to be accounted for of 5s. or 6s. in the case of the more expensive kinds of contract coal, and of no less than 11s. in the case of the cheaper varieties. The Memorandum points out that the supposed competition between the London coal merchants is really an illusion, that some firms trade under various names, apparently in competition one with another, and that prices are always fixed by a close ring. The case against the merchants is made out beyond the possibility of doubt : they exacted large monopoly profits throughout the winter of 1914-15.

The case against the coalowners is less glaring, but no less clear. At the time when the Memorandum was issued, certain small rises in miners' wages in Cumberland and elsewhere had been more than balanced by reductions in Northumberland and Durham. The net result of all changes in miners' wages had been a considerable decrease. Nevertheless, though from September to November contract prices were higher than current prices at the pit mouth, there was already in the New Year a very considerable increase in current over contract prices, and no part of this had gone to the workers. As the advances subsequently obtained by the miners through arbitration conclusively prove, the coalowners, too, were exacting an exorbitant profit.

Thirdly, just as the increase in overseas freights had increased wheat prices, the increase in coasting freight charges affected the price of coal and diverted much coal from the sea to the railways. Thus additional congestion was created, and prices were forced yet higher. The colliery companies which own their own ships made a double profit.

The Committee therefore issued the following recommendations :

1. That maximum prices for coal should be fixed by the Government.

2. That railway trucks, belonging both to the separate railway companies and to private traders, should be pooled and run to their fullest economic use.

3. That in fixing shipping freights for vessels under their control the Government should have regard to normal rates rather than to the excessive rates inflicted by private shipowners. We also reiterate our demand for public control of general merchant shipping.

4. That the Government commandeer coal supplies and distribute to household consumers through municipal or co-operative agencies.

5. That district conferences on this and kindred subjects be organised in various industrial centres.

In these two Memoranda the Prices Campaign of the Workers' National Committee took shape, and it was arranged that a series of District Conferences should be held on February 13, on the same lines as the November conferences on Military and Naval Pensions, in the chief industrial centres.

Two days before the date fixed for these Conferences an important debate on prices took place in the House of Commons. The Labour Party had tabled a motion in the following terms :

That, in the opinion of this House, the present rise in

the prices of food, coal, and other necessities of life is not justified by any economic consequence of the war, but is largely caused by the holding-up of stocks and by the inadequate provision of transport facilities. This House is therefore further of opinion that the Government should prevent this unjustifiable increase by employing the shipping and railway facilities necessary to put the required supplies on the market, by fixing maximum prices, and by acquiring control of commodities that are or may be subject to artificial costs.

This motion was, however, set aside by the Government, and preference was given to a non-committal motion tabled by a Mr. Ferens, a Liberal Member. The Labour motion was therefore moved only as an amendment. The debate occupied two days, February 11 and February 17, and between these two days the District Conferences occurred.

The debate on February 11 must rank among the principal causes of Labour unrest. Mr. Asquith chose this occasion for making his famous "Wait till June" speech. He asserted that things were not so bad as they had been after the Franco-Prussian War, or as "the most sober-minded and best-informed judgments in the country would have apprehended." Apart from a slight concession in the matter of pooling railway trucks, he pooh-poohed in succession each suggested remedy, and ended by suggesting that conditions might improve if the nation would quietly "wait till June." Mr. Bonar Law, being in opposition, made a slightly more sympathetic speech.

The Prime Minister's speech acted as an irritant. When the District Conferences met two days later, there were clear signs of a changing spirit among the workers. Conferences in London, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bradford, Cardiff, Leicester, and Portsmouth

passed a resolution endorsing the demands made by the Workers' National Committee. The preamble was in these terms :

That this conference expresses its deep indignation and disappointment at the refusal of the Government to take effective measures to deal with the alarming rises in the cost of food and fuel. It appeals to the House of Commons to force the Government to take immediate steps to relieve the unsupportable burden which the cost of the necessaries of life is imposing upon the working classes, and to demand that the following definite proposals be substituted for the policy of inaction put forward by the Prime Minister.

The terms of this resolution were not stringent enough to please the great London Conference, at which the following amendment was carried :

That we express our approval of the splendid stand made by Mr. J. R. Clynes, M.P., in the House of Commons on Thursday during the debate on food prices. Further, we express the hope that the Labour Party, in view of the Prime Minister's speech, will force the issue in support of their own resolution to a division unless a more satisfactory statement be secured from the Government.

The importance of this amendment lay in the fact that the Labour Party had announced that it would not press its amendment to a division. The tone of the other Conferences was hardly less militant, and in Manchester a resolution urging a complete cessation of work in default of drastic action by the Government was carried.

When the debate was resumed on February 17 a new Labour amendment was moved, advocating the fixing of maximum prices and Government control of commodities likely to be subject to artificial costs.

The debate, in the course of which Mr. Runciman made another "cold water" speech, while Sir Harry Verney at last conceded, on behalf of the Government, an enquiry into coal prices, was memorable for a scathing attack on the Prime Minister by Mr. Philip Snowden. The Labour attempt to secure a division on the amendment was defeated by the Speaker, who refused to put the question. There seems, however, to have been no adequate protest against this from the Labour benches.

The Workers' National Committee met the next day and resolved, in view of the unsatisfactory attitude of the Government, to call a National Conference on March 12. At a subsequent meeting it was decided that this Conference should be asked to endorse the Committee's proposals with regard to the prices of food and coal.

When the Conference actually met, it proved once again to be more militant than had been expected. The resolutions endorsing the proposals of the National Committee were carried, and the following significant addition was passed, in face of the opposition of several Labour members, though only by a majority of one vote :

That should the Government decline to carry out what is demanded by this Conference the Conference calls upon the Labour Party in the House to take all and every measure possible—by drastic political action, by dividing the House or by any other steps—to force the Government to take action in the manner indicated.

"I hope," said the Chairman, Mr. Arthur Henderson, after the vote had been taken, "that after that vote you will allow the Labour Party some discretion." As nothing has been done by the Government, and the



Labour Party is now represented in a Coalition Ministry, it seems to have taken all the discretion it needed.

With this climax the Labour campaign against high prices virtually came to an end, at least for the time. It failed to move the Government to take any drastic action, and it is at least plausible to attribute its failure to the fact that there was no economic power behind it. Though there were already abundant signs of anger, there was no sign of any widespread breakdown of the industrial truce. The Government still felt safe in flouting the workers, and its feeling of security was justified by results.

One small concession Labour did gain. A Committee of six was appointed by the Government to enquire into the causes of the rise in price of household coal, and on this Committee were Professor W. J. Ashley, Mr. Will Crooks, and Mr. J. J. Dent. Its Report, issued at the beginning of April, bore out the contentions of the Workers' National Committee. It pointed out that prices had risen steadily from September 25, and that, in the case of good quality coal, there had been a rise of 9s. a ton by February 17, as against 2s. in the winters of 1912-13 and 1913-14. Moreover, the inferior qualities had risen far more, and large quantities of poor coal, which could usually find no market, were being sold at highly profitable rates. The rise in price, the Committee held, was first occasioned by a temporary scarcity in November, but had not passed with the resumption of more nearly normal conditions of production and transport. It was shown that while prices were not fixed by "definitely constituted" rings, they were in effect settled for the whole industry by a few leading firms, and that, as owners and merchants had a common interest in high

prices, these had been maintained at an unduly high level. The recommendations of the Committee must be set out in full :

The Committee direct attention to the fact that certain owners have made a practice of reducing their deliveries under contract, on the ground of reduction of output. The Committee have grave doubts as to the legality of this practice, and cannot but regard it as highly questionable when it enables the coalowner to sell a larger quantity of " free coal " at greatly enhanced prices.

The Committee regard the outlook for next winter as serious and requiring immediate consideration. They consider that the question can only be dealt with by measures affecting the coal industry as a whole (including gas and industrial coal as well as household coal) ; and they recommend :

(a) The temporary restriction of exports to neutral countries ;

(b) Consultation with the London County Council and other public bodies concerned, with a view to considering whether those bodies should not, during the coming summer, acquire and store in or near London stocks of household coal to be sold to traders supplying small consumers during next winter ;

(c) A further reduction of freights on the interned steamers now being used to convey coals, especially gas coals, from the North ;

(d) Use for coal transport of suitable enemy ships condemned by prize courts ;

(e) " If prices do not shortly return to a reasonable level, the Government should consider a scheme for assuming control of the output of collieries during the continuance of the war."

It is now some months since this drastic report was published, all too late for the winter of 1914-15. It is to be hoped, though the Government has given no sign as yet, that its recommendations will be put in

force soon, with a view to the possible conditions next winter. Early action is essential if the next winter is not to be merely a repetition of the last ; for contracts governing next winter's prices are already being entered into all over the country. Unless something is done on the lines laid down in this report, it must be said that the whole Labour agitation against high prices has been utterly without effect.

Throughout the foregoing section we have been speaking primarily of prices ; but through these has been the sinister hint that inflated prices are the correlative of no less inflated profits. In the agitation against the high price of wheat, Labour came face to face with the monopolistic power of the shipowners : in the coal Prices Campaign it found itself confronted by an unholy alliance of profiteers—coalowners, coal merchants, and, once again, shipowners. The distrust created by these experiences of business as usual had a great effect on the temper of the workers. Up to that point they had been content to sacrifice much in what they were told was the national cause ; but when once they began to believe that they were being "done," they began to examine the situation more carefully, and in a less acquiescent spirit. The beginning of widespread Labour unrest dated from the failure of the Prices Campaign, and originated in the workers' new-born sense of being cheated.

The lesson which the revelations brought about by the Prices Campaign served to bring home to the workers was all through the winter being learnt from other sources also. In the last chapter something was said about the work of the Government Contracts Sub-Committee of the Workers' National Committee. We saw how the Committee continually pressed for a

full enquiry into the conditions under which Government contracts were being given and executed, and how it was able to prove in many cases, especially in hut-building, not merely that the workers were being sweated, but also that shamefully inflated profits were being made. In hut-building, in army catering, in clothing, in transport services of all kinds, and in the getting and distribution of coal, it soon became apparent that business was very much as usual, and that undue profits were being extracted as a result of the war. The very strong suspicion that the same thing was happening in the engineering and ship-building industry had a great deal to do with the outbreak of Labour troubles on the Clyde.

Impossible to prove in detail till long after the event, the charge of undue profiteering has gained considerable support from the balance sheets and annual meetings of the great companies. In all industries ministering to the needs of the army and navy, the capitalists seem to be making a good thing out of the war. What wonder if the workers, commanded to make sacrifices in the name of patriotism by employers who are themselves making money hand over fist, refuse to acquiesce any longer in the absurd conditions created by the industrial truce. When the Prices Campaign had failed, Labour demanded not merely higher wages to meet the increased cost of living, but also the limitation of capitalist profits arising out of the war.

Thus Labour passes from the second phase, the war against high prices, to the third phase of Labour unrest. It would, however, be unfair to dismiss the Prices Campaign without some reference to the important practical work accomplished by the Co-

operative movement. In the panic of the first week in August the Co-operative Stores did very useful work in refusing to raise their prices unduly or to be infected by the momentary panic which surrounded them. Indeed, throughout the war many of the Stores and the two Wholesale Societies have tried to keep prices as low as possible, though a few Stores have resolutely refused to sacrifice high dividends in favour of more reasonable prices. Especially noteworthy was the action of some of the Stores in relation to the coal supply. Certain Stores, especially in the London district, refused to comply with the prices fixed on the Coal Exchange, and continued to sell at 27s. 6d. and 28s. when the outside price was 30s. for the same class of coal. The influence of the Stores in steadying prices has been very useful, and might be far more useful were there a greater element of central control to guide it.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE THIRD PHASE—WAGES IN WAR TIME

THE first result of the war was, as we have seen, an almost complete cessation of industrial unrest. The number of workers on strike fell from nearly 100,000 in July and 50,000 early in August<sup>1</sup> to 13,000 in September, and, after a slight rise, to 3000 in December, when there was no dispute of importance in progress. Moreover, these figures give an entirely inadequate idea of the real position. The only actual dispute of any magnitude that was in progress during July was the London Building Lock-out, then dragging to its close. But if there were singularly few disputes actually in being, there was the threat of very severe trouble. It is the suspension of all the threatened forward movements, far more than the closure of actual disputes, that is significant of the change of attitude.

I have now to show the circumstances that led, in the New Year, to the partial breakdown of this industrial truce, the terms of which can be most conveniently summed up by a reference to the emergency agreement made between the railway companies and

<sup>1</sup> Practically all the disputes in progress in August were survivals from the pre-war period. New disputes only involved 2000 workers.

the National Union of Railwaymen and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen. The railwaymen, it will be remembered, were negotiating to secure a better conciliation scheme and advances in wages, together with the other demands embodied in their National Programme. At the outbreak of war they abandoned their forward movement, and entered into the following agreement :

At a conference between the Railways' General Managers' Committee and representatives of the National Union of Railwaymen and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, on October 1, an agreement was arrived at with regard to the Conciliation Board Scheme. It was resolved that, notwithstanding the notice of determination which expires on November 30, 1914, the scheme of conciliation settled at the Board of Trade Conference on December 11, 1911, should remain in force, and that the men's side of the Boards on each of the several railways as at present constituted should continue to act, provided that either of the parties could give six weeks' notice to determine the agreement, and thereupon the parties should agree as to the arrangements to be adopted for the future.

It was further agreed that all existing contracts and conditions of service should remain in operation, and that no new agreements should be made by the companies either with deputations or Conciliation Boards during this suspensory period.

The last clause of this agreement explicitly recognised that nominal wages should remain the same during the suspensory period. Power was reserved to terminate the agreement ; but clearly the intention was the preservation of existing wage-rates during the war. Possible increases in the cost of living, though they already threatened, were not taken into account.

Three causes combined to create a partial change of attitude by the New Year. The first, but perhaps the least important, was the Government's policy in its dealings with Trade Unionism; the second was the rise in the cost of living; the third, probably the greatest in its psychological effect, was the growing suspicion that the capitalists were making a good thing out of the war. With these causes I have dealt in the foregoing chapters: it now remains to estimate the extent to which the truce broke down, and to give an account of the later events in Trade Union annals during the war.

It is simplest to begin with a table showing the actual number and extent of trade disputes during the war period:

LABOUR DISPUTES DURING THE WAR.

	Disputes beginning.	Workers involved in New Disputes.		Workers involved in all Disputes.
		Directly.	Indirectly.	
<i>June</i> <sup>1</sup> . . . .	118	33,606	7511	82,752
<i>July</i> <sup>1</sup> . . . .	99	45,747	3623	98,112
August . . . .	15	1,975	29	49,804
September . . .	23	2,972	383	13,025
October . . . .	27	5,026	4420	20,677
November . . .	25	4,665	427	8,061
December . . .	17	1,190	2	3,065
January . . . .	30	3,436	646	5,889
February . . . .	47	26,129	2878	31,060
March . . . . .	74	12,982	3377	33,903
April . . . . .	44	5,137	440	10,222
May . . . . .	63	39,913	8327	51,575

<sup>1</sup> The figures for June and July 1914 are given to show the fall in the number of disputes which followed the declaration of war.

It will be noticed that the revival of stoppages begins in February, which, it should be remembered,



was also the first month of the war during which there was any considerable increase in wages.<sup>1</sup>

Even after the revival there were singularly few stoppages of work, the total number of workers affected in either February or March being only a little over 30,000, as against 98,000 last July and 50,000 last August. Moreover, most of the stoppages were of very short duration, as may be seen from the following list, which includes every stoppage of any importance during the war period.

## PRINCIPAL LABOUR DISPUTES DURING THE WAR.

		Duration in Days.
Aug.	1,200 Miners, Bishop Auckland (abnormal places)	4
Sept.	750 Shipyard workers, Leith (alteration in walking-time allowance)	5
„	600 Leather workers, Birmingham (wages)	1
Oct.	260 Builders' labourers, Cork (wages)	34
Nov.	1,375 Miners, Ruabon (Minimum Wage Act)	4
„	1,000 Seamen, Liverpool (wages)	10
Dec.	None	
Jan.	500 Moulders, etc., Birmingham (wages)	5
„	266 Boot operatives, Rushden (refusal to work with non-unionists)	3
Feb.	700 Navvies, etc., Edinburgh (wages)	15
„	4,000 Carpenters and Labourers, Salisbury Plain (against deductions for bad time-keeping) <sup>2</sup>	...
„	8,350 Engineers, etc., Clyde (wages)	14
„	4,000 Jute workers, Dundee (wages)	6
„	5,000 Dockers, London (demand for engagement outside dock gates)	6

<sup>1</sup> See table on p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Strike soon broken. No actual settlement.

## WAGES IN WAR TIME

		Duration in Days.
Mar.	2,136 Miners, Merthyr Tydvil (against employment of non-unionists) .	2
"	464 Engineers, etc., Sandbach (wages-recognition) . . . . .	?
"	2,000 Dockers, Birkenhead (against new agreement . 4 week-end stoppages	
"	1,500 Stevedores, London (wages) .	5
April.	850 Miners, Pontardawe (against employment of non-unionists) .	7
"	600 Moulders, Paisley (wages) . . . . .	1
"	570 Malleable iron casters, etc., Walsall (wages) . . . . .	18
May.	1,500 Builders' labourers, Woolwich (wages) . . . . .	3
"	639 Building workers, Northampton (wages) . . . . .	24
"	3,000 Miners, Dudley (dispute about war bonus) . . . . .	3
"	5,000 Miners, Cannock and Pelsall (dispute about war bonus) . . . . .	3
"	700 Motor-cycle makers, Bristol (wages)	8
"	1,047 Engineers, Leicester (against cheap labour) . . . . .	?*
"	10,000 Hosiery workers, Leicester (wages)	2
"	6,900 Tramway workers, London (wages, etc.) . . . . .	19

\* Soon settled.

It can be seen at once from this table how insignificant both in number and in magnitude have been the strikes during the war. It would, however, be a profound mistake to interpret this as meaning that there has been no Labour unrest. Though the number of actual stoppages is so small, there have been, during 1915, many disputes which have been settled without stoppages, many claims for war bonuses or advances in wages, many cases in which friction has arisen over the employment of unskilled and female Labour. If the Clyde strike has been the only stoppage

of any magnitude, there have been several occasions when much larger stoppages have only been averted by the efforts of the Trade Union officials and the Government.

During the last five months of 1914 there were practically no important advances in wages. Only two cases deserve mention: 20,000 engineers in the London district secured advances of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent on piece rates, or 3s. a week or  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. an hour on time rates; and 15,000 Birmingham engineers won 5 per cent or 2s. a week. In January 1915 the advances were still confined to the engineering industry: 7500 Liverpool engineers secured  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent or 3s. a week, and 6100 Bolton engineers  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent or 1s. a week. In February the war bonus movement set in, and advances began to be won in other industries.

At the very outset the pitch was queered by the railwaymen. Forced at last by their own rank and file to make some demand, the railwaymen, about the middle of February, entered into a settlement under which the railway companies agreed to pay a war bonus of 3s. a week to all men earning less than 30s., and of 2s. a week to all who were earning more than 30s. There are several points in this agreement which call for comment.

In the first place, the concessions accepted were entirely inadequate to meet the rise in the cost of living. This was true not only of the 2s. advance given to the higher grades, but also of the 3s. advance which was received by the lower-paid workers. The acceptance of so small an advance by the railwaymen was used by employers in other industries as an excuse for refusing demands that real wages should be brought up to the pre-war level. When, for instance, the

transport workers put in for advances during February and March, the employers in certain centres countered by offering the same concessions as had been secured by the railwaymen. The following paragraph, written at the time by Mr. Robert Williams, Secretary of the Transport Workers' Federation, forms an excellent commentary on the railwaymen's settlement.

In London the position was certainly not helped by the settlement of the Railwaymen's proposals. For us, as transport workers, the position has been appreciably worsened by this example. In Hull, Bristol, Leith, Cardiff, advances have been secured ranging from 4s. to 7s. per week. In London the Employers' Committee countered the claim put forward by the Dockers' Union for an increase of 2d. per hour by saying that the cost of living had not increased more for dock labourers than for railwaymen, and the increase was accordingly fixed at 3s. per week for the permanent men and 6d. per day for casuals. Whatever desire men may have, in these circumstances, to face the issue is vitiated by the fact that this altogether unsatisfactory precedent has been established—the 2s. and 3s. of the Railwaymen. There is not the slightest doubt that the Manchester Ship Canal Co. will adhere to their similar offer to the Salford Dockers, on the same lines, and there is a warrantable presumption that the demands submitted in Liverpool for an increase of 1s. per day will be dealt with similarly.

If a further indication is needed, it may be found in the fact that the railwaymen themselves are already demanding a further advance.

Secondly—and this raises an important question of principle—the railwaymen obtained a "war bonus," and not a permanent increase in rates of wages. They thus set the fashion, and, just as they queered the pitch by accepting too little, queered it by accepting merely temporary concessions. When once a war

bonus had been accepted in any great industry, it became difficult, if not impossible, for workers in other industries to secure permanent advances.

What, then, is the case against the war bonus? It is, briefly, that it will involve Labour in a struggle for the maintenance of standard rates just when Labour is weakest—in the period immediately succeeding the war. In the words of the three “impartial” persons who form the Committee on Production, a war bonus is defined as “war wages, recognised as due to and dependent on the existence of the abnormal conditions now prevailing in consequence of the war.” What are the “abnormal conditions” in question? Is the reference solely to the increased cost of living, or does it include the conditions arising from dislocation of industry and the return of men from military service at the end of the war? The definition given by the Committee on Production clearly leaves the matter vague, and it may be confidently predicted that in some cases the employers will take advantage of this vagueness to cancel bonuses just when organised Labour is too weak to resist.

Sometimes the definition of a war bonus is made more explicit. Some advances are to terminate automatically six months after the end of the war. But what assurance can there be that industry will resume its normal condition within six months? It is probable that those who have made agreements on this basis will find their bonus removed from them just when they need it most.

In fact, the whole war bonus movement has been a mistake. In collective bargaining between employers and wage-earners, the cost of living is normally one of the factors that are taken into account. The

importance attaching to it in comparison with other factors varies ; but it is almost always present. Why, then, should not the usual procedure have been followed during the war ? It would then have been open for the employers to demand reductions when the cost of living fell. As things are, the employers will first terminate the war bonus, and then, having reverted to the old standard rates, will be free to put in for reductions on them also. The decision of that struggle will depend on the economic power of the parties ; but the war bonus system will cause the workers to go into the struggle with a severe handicap against them.

The concessions accepted by the railwaymen are all the more surprising when the position of the railways in war time is taken into account. Railwaymen are recognised national servants, and, as such, are prevented from enlisting for military service. This surely entitles them to a little consideration. Moreover, the terms under which the Government assumed control of the railways have been interpreted officially as involving the payment of a part—what proportion we have not been told—of the railwaymen's bonus out of the State Exchequer. At the same time, the Government has officially stated that it took no part in the war bonus negotiations, which were left wholly to the railway companies and the men.

If these facts are borne in mind, it is hardly possible to doubt that the railwaymen could have got far better terms had they offered a bolder front. But it was clear to the companies from the start that the men did not really mean business, and accordingly they were put off with ridiculously small concessions. This would not matter so much if they alone had to

suffer for their weakness ; but the effect of the settlement on wages disputes in other industries was immediate and all to the bad.

Fortunately, the railwaymen's settlement came too late to prevent more advantageous settlements for real wage advances, varying from 3s. to 7s. a week, to transport workers in Hull, Liverpool, and Birkenhead, Glasgow, Bristol, Leith, and other centres. Fortunately, too, the next important event in the world of Labour showed a greater spirit of militancy. On February 16 there began a stoppage which soon spread to nearly all the engineering shops on the Clyde, involving some 9000 workers. The strike, which was unofficial, came as the climax to a long series of negotiations. As it is not only the largest, but also by far the most significant, stoppage during the war period, a fairly full account of it must be given.<sup>1</sup>

The Union primarily concerned in the Clyde dispute was the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, though several other engineering Unions were also directly involved. In the Amalgamated Society of Engineers the initiative in wages movements and the final acceptance or rejection of the employers' offers rest, not with the National Executive, but with the district concerned. The Clyde area forms a distinct district, which has its own wage agreement with the employers. At the same time, the district is not wholly self-governing in relation to disputes: it is bound by certain "Provisions for Avoiding Disputes," agreed to by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Employers' Federation, and applying to all districts.

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed accounts, see the *Political Quarterly* for May 1915 (article by J. H. Jones), and the *New Statesman* for March 27.

In January 1912 the Glasgow engineers entered into a three years' agreement, under which a standard rate of 8½d. an hour was fixed. This agreement would thus in the ordinary course of events have come up for revision in January 1915. Before the war, in June 1914, the District Committee decided to press for an advance of 2d. an hour on the expiry of the agreement. *Thus the application made by the engineers was decided on before the war broke out, and independently of the rise in the cost of living due to the war.*

The three years during which the agreement ran were years in which other industries, and engineers in other districts, secured large advances in wages. The Clyde workers, however, adhered to their agreement, and therefore found themselves, on the outbreak of war, in a considerably worse position than their fellows in other engineering centres. The position was only tolerable because a considerable advance in January 1915 was looked upon as certain. During the period of the agreement trade had been booming on the Clyde, and the employers had netted large profits.

On December 16 the men sent to the employers their application for a rise of 2d. an hour. The employers, taking advantage of a technical flaw in the drafting of the application, delayed their answer till December 30, when they replied with a curt refusal of the demand as unreasonable. The reason for this manœuvre was clear. Under the "Provisions for Avoiding Disputes," there can be no stoppage of work till an application has been considered first by a local conference, and subsequently by a central (or national) conference of employers and workers. The result of the employers' delay was that there was no time for



the application to reach the Central Conference of January 8. This meant the postponement of the demand till the next Central Conference on February 12, and the clear loss of a month's potential advances in wages to the workers.

The District Committee, in response to this manoeuvre, at once ordered its members, failing a satisfactory reply, to cease work on January 20. This scared the employers into agreeing to a local conference on January 19. At this meeting, and at an adjourned session on January 22, the employers offered, first a farthing at once and another farthing in three months, and then an immediate advance of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. an hour. This was refused, and the question stood adjourned to the Central Conference of February 12.

By this time the men were thoroughly exasperated, both by the paltry offer made by the employers and by the unreasonable delay. An unofficial meeting demanded that no overtime should be worked till a Special Central Conference was summoned. The District Committee and the National Executive<sup>1</sup> in vain counselled the continuance of overtime: the men took matters into their own hands, and overtime ceased in the principal shops.

In these circumstances the Central Conference met on February 12. The employers refused to give more than  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. an hour increase, and that was to be not a permanent increase but a war bonus. The National Executive of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, however, for reasons which have never been satis-

<sup>1</sup> They seem to have had cause to fear that the employers would treat the refusal to work overtime as a stoppage of work, and refuse, in accordance with the "Provisions for Avoiding Disputes," to negotiate further.

factorily explained, agreed to recommend this advance to their members. They had no power to accept it; they only agreed to submit it to a ballot of the Clyde district. The only explanation seems to be pure fright: they were afraid of Government intervention, and wanted their members to accept a settlement which they knew to be wholly unjust and inadequate. Their next step was no less unfortunate. They fixed the date for the return of ballot papers from the district for March 9, or nearly a month ahead, thus postponing the issue once again, despite the almost certain expectation that the offer would be rejected.

The immediate result of the Executive's action was a strike, no less against the dilatory and pusillanimous policy of the Union Executive than against the employers. On February 16 the stoppage began, and it rapidly extended from shop to shop, till about 8000 men were out. Moreover, disgusted with official leadership, the rebels created a new authority of their own. A Shop Stewards' Committee, which had had much to do with the cessation of overtime, was enlarged and formed into the Central Withdrawal of Labour Committee, which assumed control of the movement. This was essentially a body emanating directly from the rank and file, and dominated by impulses different from those which moved the Executive. Round it rallied the Industrial Unionist, Syndicalist, and Guild Socialist elements, and it clearly had the almost united backing, for the struggle that called it into being if not for the theory behind it, of the body of Clyde engineers. The new Committee claimed that, as it alone represented all the men on strike—*i.e.* all the Unions—the future negotiations

should be carried on by itself and not by the A.S.E. Executive.

These events forced the Executive to take action. The ballot, which was brought forward to February 24, resulted in the decisive rejection of the employers' terms by 8927 votes to 829. At this point the Government intervened. On February 26 the representatives of the employers and of the Unions concerned were summoned to meet the Industrial Commissioners, and the following letter, signed by the Chief Industrial Commissioner, was handed to both parties :

SIR—From enquiries which have been made as to the position of the disputes in the engineering trade in the Glasgow district, it appears that the parties concerned have been unable to arrive at a settlement. In consequence of the delay the requirements of the nation are being seriously endangered.

I am instructed by the Government that important munitions of war urgently required by the navy and army are being held up by the present cessation of work, and that they must call for a resumption of work on Monday morning, March 1st.

Immediately following resumption of work arrangements will be made for the representatives of the parties to meet the Committee on Production in Engineering and Shipbuilding Establishments for the purpose of the matters in dispute being referred for settlement to a Court of Arbitration, who shall also have power to fix the date from which the settlement shall take effect.—I am, yours faithfully,

G. R. ASKWITH,

*Chief Industrial Commissioner.*

This letter at once created a further storm. The wording suggested—and was clearly meant to suggest—a command, and it was asked what authority the Government had to order men back to work. On this

point a discreet silence was observed, and indeed the letter was clearly worded so that it could be read in two ways. The Government was "trying it on," and left "a loophole for escape should the men prove obdurate." Its "command" had no binding force; it was at the most a threat of future action.

Whatever its nature, it was quite enough to terrify the Executive Committee, which at once repaired to the Clyde and called for an immediate resumption, using as arguments, first, the Government's threat and the dangers of compulsory arbitration, and secondly, that rule in the "Provisions for Avoiding Disputes" which, it was said, prevented further negotiation till after a return to work. The Withdrawal of Labour Committee proposed an alternative policy, urging the men to resume on Thursday, March 4, three days after the expiration of the Government's ultimatum, and also recommending the adoption of ca' canny until a settlement was reached. In fact, the resumption began on Wednesday and was complete by the week-end. The policy of ca' canny does not seem to have been anywhere adopted.

Work was resumed; but the discontent remained, and even grew more bitter. On March 6 a further Central Conference met, but no agreement was reached. The question was therefore referred, by request of the Government, to the newly established Committee on Production. The employers accepted this reference to arbitration; the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, in accordance with its rules, took a ballot of its Clyde members on the question of accepting the Government award as final. On a very small vote, this ballot resulted decisively in favour of acceptance, despite the opposition of the Withdrawal of Labour

Committee, which decided to continue permanently in existence. It is clear that many of the malcontents must have abstained from this vote.

On March 24, the Government Committee issued its award in the following terms :

We have given full consideration to the arguments advanced by the respective representatives and to all the circumstances of the case, and our finding is that in settlement of the application for an advance the wages of the workers in the trades represented should be increased as follows, viz. :—1d. per hour or 4s. per week (according to the custom of payment in the various shops) on time rates, and 10 per cent on piece rates, the advances to come into operation as from the beginning of the first full pay week after February 22, 1915, and to be regarded as war wages and recognised as due to and dependent on the existence of the abnormal conditions now prevailing in consequence of the war.

Thus, instead of a permanent increase of 2d. an hour, which the Clyde engineers had already decided to demand before the war, they received only a war bonus of 1d. an hour. That is to say, whereas an increase of at least 1½d. an hour was due before the war to bring the Clyde engineers up to other great districts, they have secured no permanent increase, but only a war bonus quite inadequate to meet the rise in the cost of living since the war.<sup>1</sup>

The award created great discontent, and it is a great tribute to the men's forbearance that it was accepted at all. It cannot be said even now that the trouble is at an end; for the District Committee is considering a further application, independent of the

<sup>1</sup> The cost of living has risen even more in Glasgow than elsewhere, as house-rents have gone up about 10 per cent. This raising of rents seems to be peculiar to Glasgow.

war bonus, for an increase of 1d. an hour in standard rates. There seems every reason for the granting of such an increase, and it is probable that, if the war lasts long, the men will refuse to wait till it ends. Then, they know that they will be weak; now, with good leadership, they might get at least an instalment of the advance that is their due.

All through the Clyde strike matters were made much worse by the tone of newspaper comment. Any fair statement of the case clearly shows that the men had a very real and serious grievance: yet, while the Government was congenially engaged in terrorising the A.S.E. Executive, the capitalist press of both parties was no less congenially employed in flinging mud. The *Daily Chronicle*, in a leading article headed "For Shame!" spoke of the strike as an "indelible stain" on the honour of Scotland: other journals vied with one another in applying such epithets as "traitors." There was hardly any attempt to understand the case, or to apportion to the employers their due share of the guilt. The attitude of the Press towards Labour disputes is bad enough in time of peace: during the war it has done untold mischief from its own point of view. The comments of the newspapers on the Clyde strike and on the London tramway strike have taught the workers much about the real attitude of the governing class to Labour.

It was during the Clyde dispute that the Government first began to develop a Labour policy. In view of the impending offensive in France and Belgium it became pressing to expedite the manufacture of munitions of war. Accordingly, on February 4 the Government appointed a Committee on Production in Engineering and Shipbuilding Establishments "to

enquire and report forthwith, after consultation with the representatives of employers and workmen, as to the best steps to be taken to ensure that the productive power of the employees in engineering and shipbuilding establishments working for Government purposes shall be made fully available so as to meet the needs of the nation in the present emergency."

The Committee, which consisted of Sir G. Askwith, Sir F. Hopwood, and Sir G. Gibb, lost no time in getting to work, and by March 4 had issued four reports, covering six different questions. Since that date it has issued no general reports, but many awards dealing with wages and conditions of labour in various industries.

Its first report, issued on February 17, dealt with irregular time-keeping in the shipyards. Its recommendations had to do solely with the "broken squad" difficulty, which has for many years caused a great deal of time to be lost. Riveting work is carried out by squads of workmen, and the absence of one of these from any cause used to throw the whole squad idle. The Committee recommended the Government to intimate to both parties "that it is essential that the employers and work-people should agree upon and establish within ten days an arrangement for dealing effectively with the question of broken squads." To some extent, this recommendation was carried out. The Boilermakers' Society met the employers, and a reserve of workers was created, out of which the places of absentees were filled.

The second report, issued on February 20, dealt with two questions of great importance. The first section, on "Production of Shells and Fuses," recommended that production should be expedited by the

relaxation of Trade Union rules ; the second section suggested certain provisions for " Avoidance of Stoppage of Work " during the war period. These were followed on March 1 by a report on wages in the shipbuilding industry. On March 4 the Committee issued another very important report on " Demarcation of Work " and on the " Utilisation of Semi-skilled or Unskilled Labour." To all these reports we shall have to return.

After the issue of the second report, the Government expressed its concurrence, and extended the powers of the Committee so as to enable it to act as an arbitration court when disputes were referred to it by the parties. It will be convenient to deal first with its action as an arbitration court on wages questions. We have already referred to its decision in the case of the Clyde dispute.

The first important wages question referred to the Committee was the application of the shipyard workers for an advance of 6s. a week on time rates and 15 per cent on piece rates. This was a joint application from all the skilled trades in the shipyards, the Boilermakers and the Shipwrights being the two most important Unions concerned. The Shipbuilding Employers' Federation offered 2s. or 5 per cent. The Arbitration Committee might seem to have reached its award by the simple process of splitting the difference ; for it conceded 4s. or 10 per cent war bonus.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that this was a bonus and not an advance in standard rates, it seems to have been received with satisfaction in the shipyards. It was certainly far

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the shipyard labourers followed suit in obtaining, by negotiation, advances corresponding to those in the skilled trades.



better treatment than was subsequently meted out to the Clyde engineers.

It is at least plausible to look for the explanation of this difference rather to the circumstances of the two disputes than to abstract justice. The shipyard workers and their employers met in conference, and failed to agree, on February 23, when the Clyde strike was in full swing. The reference to arbitration took place on February 24, by agreement between the parties. It was then, from the point of view of the Government, supremely important to secure a satisfactory settlement. The shipyard dispute was of national extent, and affected, among other districts, the Clyde area. In view of the new spirit manifesting itself in the Labour world, it was imperative to satisfy the shipyard workers. Is it too much to say that these considerations had much to do with the comparatively good terms conceded by the Committee? If the Clyde engineers got little for themselves, they certainly helped the shipyard workers to a fairly substantial advance.

By the time the Committee issued its award on the Clyde dispute, these considerations were no longer paramount. The award was delayed as long as possible, and, thanks to the action of the men's own Executive, there seemed, for the moment, no further risk of trouble. The Committee appears to have settled the Clyde dispute in a punitive spirit, by conceding as little as it possibly could.

The subsequent wages awards of the Committee only call for passing mention. In March they required that the standard rates agreed to by masters and men in the boot and shoe trade must be paid by all employers, federated or unfederated, for Government work. They

were also entrusted with the settlement of the claims put forward by the Admiralty Dockyard employees, which they decided on lines roughly corresponding to their award for workers in private shipyards. During April they dealt with a much larger number of cases, the most important being that of the Manchester engineers, to whom they conceded 3s. a week or 7½ per cent on piece rates.

A body which has settled so many claims must, it would be thought, be acting on some defined, or at least some discernible principle. In fact, however, no such principle can be discovered. None is embodied in the terms of reference of the Committee, or in the subsequent order enlarging its powers: none has ever been proclaimed by itself. It gets no nearer a definition than to state as a rule that the increases which it grants are "war wages, recognised as due to, and dependent on, the abnormal conditions now prevailing in consequence of the war."

This would lead to the supposition that the Committee decides its awards by a reference to the change in the cost of living. But such a supposition cannot be reconciled with the facts. In hardly any case are the rises large enough to meet the increased cost, while the Clyde and the shipyard disputes, as we saw, were settled on totally different principles. In fact, the Committee's action appears to be purely opportunist: broadly speaking, it gives or refuses according to the economic power of the applicant.

This is only possible because the Government has refused to give any guidance. Throughout, the Government has given no indication of possessing any policy on the wages question except that of conceding as little as it can. This is clear, not only in its action

with regard to the Committee on Production, but also, still more markedly, in its relations to its own employees.

In March the National Joint Committee of Postal and Telegraph Associations petitioned the Postmaster-General for a war bonus. For several weeks no reply was received, and when the answer came it was in the following terms :

The Government have decided that the rise in the cost of living is not by itself a sufficient reason at the present time for increasing the wages of their employees. They regard this rise as a burden which must be shared in common by all classes in the country.

The rise in the cost of living appears, then, in the Government's eyes, to warrant rises in wages to those who are employed by private capitalists, at all events where the workers are strong enough to make refusal difficult ; but it does not warrant rises to the Government's own employees, who are no less hardly hit by the war. This doctrine of " a burden to be shared in common by all classes in the country " is the merest nonsense when it is applied to those whose wages are ordinarily such as to leave no margin to meet a rise in prices.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, in this case the Government was compelled to climb down. The postal Associations were indignant at the treatment received, and demanded that the question should be referred to arbitration. To this the Government finally agreed, with the proviso that it would resist the claim before the arbitrator. Despite its resistance a war bonus has now been secured ; but this is no credit to the Government.

<sup>1</sup> The only more infamous case is the Government's refusal to raise the scale of Old Age Pensions to meet the rise in the cost of living.

The same argument has recurred again and again in the case of local authorities. All over the country municipal employees have put in claims for war bonuses. In many cases these have in the end been granted, though they have generally been on a very inadequate scale; but there have been not a few instances in which the doctrine of equal sacrifices has been given as a ground for refusal. The burden of the increases, we are told, would fall on the impoverished rate-payer, and therefore the worker must be content to forgo his bonus. This is to say that the public service ought to be the least eligible of all forms of employment. But surely the State and local authorities ought to be model employers, and should show the way to the private capitalist. Instead, throughout the present crisis, they have lagged behind, and have made only the most niggardly concessions. Advocates of State and municipal control of industry would do well to ponder on these significant facts. Public authorities have not scrupled to use the argument that wages come out of public money in order to reject demands that have been conceded by the private employer.

This attitude was seen at its worst in the case of the London tram strike in May. The General Purposes Committee of the Council refused any war bonus to those of its employees who were earning over thirty shillings a week. The drivers and conductors on the trams then applied to the Highways Committee, their direct employer. The reasons given by the Highways Committee for refusing an advance were, first, that it was paying £80,000 a year in allowances to dependents of employees who had enlisted, and that it could not afford more, as the Council had insisted, despite protests, that the tramway receipts should bear the whole

of this burden. That is to say, the tramwaymen were to maintain, by accepting low wages, the dependents of those who enlisted, while the London County Council, at their expense, was to reap the glory of being a benevolent employer. The London County Council first threw an illegitimate charge on the tramway receipts, and then made it an excuse for keeping down wages. Secondly, it was argued that, since the receipts had to bear this charge, an increase in wages would have to come either out of the rates or from increased fares. In either case the consumer would be hit, and a municipality, existing to protect the consumer, could not suffer this. The long and short of it was that the tramwaymen were to get no bonus. Despite this mischievous reasoning, or perhaps because of it, the London County Council beat the tramwaymen.

It found opportunity, however, to add to itself one further injustice in the course of the dispute. It announced that it would take back no men of military age who were physically fit. Thus a public body not only refused reasonable wage demands, but also adopted the most detestable form of economic compulsion to drive its employees into the army.<sup>1</sup> It is no glory to the London County Council that its threat broke down in practice, and that many men of military age and fitness seem actually to have been taken back. It is a sign of the municipal attitude that blacklegs of military age and fitness were actually used to run cars during the strike.

Neither the State nor the local authorities as employers come well out of the present crisis. Their

<sup>1</sup> It is said that the War Office expressed disapproval of this policy.

object throughout has been, like that of the private capitalist, to yield as little as possible. No consideration of justice has weighed with them at all. No wonder, then, that the Government's nominees, the Committee on Production, have been guided by purely opportunist motives.

These motives were no less apparent when Mr. Asquith himself had to deal with the coal crisis that arose in April. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain decided to demand a war bonus of 20 per cent on earnings, and demanded a national conference with the coalowners on the question. The owners replied that they were ready to confer locally, through the ordinary local machinery for wage negotiation, but that their national organisation, the Mining Association of Great Britain, had no jurisdiction in wages questions. They refused to consent to a national meeting on the further ground that the circumstances differed so much from locality to locality that no national settlement was possible. When a deadlock seemed to have been reached, a national meeting was finally secured by the instrumentality, and under the chairmanship, of the Prime Minister, on the undertaking of the Miners' Federation that it should not be regarded as a precedent. At this conference, the miners refused the owners' offer of a 10 per cent advance nationally, to be followed by local negotiations for further advances. Finally, it was agreed to leave the question in the hands of Mr. Asquith, who, after considerable delay, decided that the amount of the bonus should be decided locally, with a reference to arbitration where the two parties failed to agree. Thus the miners, after all their talk, accepted for the moment compulsory arbitration, to which, as we shall see, they refused to accede at the

request of Mr. Lloyd George when the famous Treasury Conferences were held.

The results of the miners' applications, while they are by no means satisfactory, have not on the whole been as bad as might have been expected. Some districts where trade is adversely affected by the war did very badly: Northumberland and Durham, for instance, got only 15 per cent *on the standard*, or less than half of what had been demanded, and even this was to be merged in any future increases under the sliding scale. On the other hand, Lord Coleridge's award gave the workers in the Federated Area, which includes Lancashire and Cheshire, Yorkshire, the Midlands, and North Wales, an advance of 15 per cent on earnings. The Scottish miners also did fairly well in getting 18½ per cent on their standard, while South Wales got 17½ per cent, again on its standard. The full 20 per cent on earnings, however, was nowhere granted.

This struggle had, in fact, a deeper significance than appeared on the surface. It was really a struggle for the recognition and the centralisation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The forward spirits in the Federation have long desired to make it, instead of the local Associations, the unit for collective bargaining. This desire had much to do with the intensity of the demand for a national conference, though the ostensible reason, that, as the rise in the cost of living was everywhere equal, the bonus also should be equal, was a quite reasonable argument in itself. The employers on their side fully realised the accession of economic power which the centralisation of the Miners' Federation would mean, and their opposition to the national conference was dictated no less by this fear

than by a natural desire that, as profits varied from locality to locality, the bonus should also vary. The result was a compromise. The national conference was held, with the proviso that it should not constitute a precedent: the settlement was sectional, and varied in the different districts.<sup>1</sup>

Only one further wages dispute calls for separate mention, and of this it is more difficult to speak, as no award has yet been made. As we have seen, the great industry most severely affected by the outbreak of war was the cotton industry, in which any claim for increased wages would have been impossible during the early months of the war. During this period the cotton Unions were chiefly preoccupied with the relief of distress; and in almost all cases, despite Government subsidies, their funds were very seriously depleted. During this period emergency agreements for the prevention of disputes were entered into by the Card and Blowing Room Operatives in November, and by the Spinners in December. In March 1915 the Weavers, the section which had been most seriously hit by the war, applied for a war bonus, but the employers refused to grant this on account of bad trade, though they expressed sympathy with the position of the operatives.

When the crisis arose in May, it came on the spinning side of the industry. The Cardroom Amalgamation became convinced that trade had recovered to such an extent that excessive profits were being made in mills spinning 36 counts and below,<sup>2</sup> not only on Government contracts, but also on private work,

<sup>1</sup> For the recent events in the South Wales coalfield, see p. 226, note.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.* the coarser counts.



and that their demand for a bonus was justified. The employers refused to entertain this general application, while they professed themselves willing to grant a bonus where it could be shown that abnormal profits were being made on Government work. This assurance did not satisfy the cardroom workers, and notices were posted in certain mills. These duly expired, and a few strikes began without any nearer approach to a settlement. A few unfederated firms granted the demand, but the Masters' Federation not only stood firm, but also announced that it would declare a general lock-out unless the strikers returned to work. A general lock-out, it should be observed, is the customary weapon of the cotton employers. Thereupon the Spinners, who would be at once stopped by such a lock-out, declared their intention to regard it as a violation of agreement, and to demand a war bonus for themselves. This, in turn, the employers denounced as a breach of agreement.

The facts are these. In July 1910 the Spinners entered into a five years' wages agreement, which accordingly expires in July 1915. They had all along intended to apply for advances when this agreement ran out—naturally enough, since it has prevented them from sharing in the big advances gained in other industries during the last few years. They therefore found themselves in this position. If they allowed themselves to be locked out without making a demand, they would exhaust their funds and so be unable to press their claim in July. They therefore took the very natural course of treating the general lock-out as a declaration of hostilities, and decided to press their claim at once. Notices of the general lock-out were duly posted by the employers ; but before these

actually took effect the Board of Trade intervened, and the whole question was referred to the Committee on Production with the consent of the two Trade Unions and the three employers' associations involved. The award has not yet been issued : it will apply both to the Cardroom operatives and to the Spinners. If the general lock-out had occurred, not only the Spinners, but also the Weavers, who would soon have been stopped by shortage of yarn, would certainly have demanded a war bonus. In view of the reference to arbitration they are now asking to have their demand dealt with by arbitration at the same time ; and this is likely to be done.

When only wages movements are taken into account, it is clear from what has been said that the calm promise of the autumn is not being fulfilled this year. The Labour unrest is real and growing. But it should be borne in mind that in no single case have the workers asked for larger increases than the rise in the cost of living warrants. In practically every case the advances gained have been quite inadequate to meet the rise. If actual earnings are taken into account, this deficiency is made up in certain cases ; but this is only where long hours of overtime have been worked, and for such work Labour is surely entitled to extra payment. Moreover, the advances in wages have borne no relation to the need of the recipients : they have depended on economic power, and advances in rates have gone to the very workers whose earnings have risen. Workers in depressed trades, and especially women workers, have had little share in the increases : not only have their rates not been advanced ; their actual earnings have in many cases gone down. The whole position is, indeed, thoroughly unsatisfactory.

The wages question is, however, only a minor part of the great Labour problem to which the war has given rise. I turn now to examine the question in aspects which are of far greater ultimate importance to the cause of Labour.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FOURTH PHASE—THE ORGANISATION OF LABOUR

ON February 4, 1915, as we have seen, the Government appointed a Committee on Production in Engineering and Shipbuilding Establishments. It was with the formation of this Committee that the deliberate attempt to organise the nation for the production of munitions of war really began. For the first six months of the war, the provision of munitions was left in the hands of the War Office and the Admiralty, aided by a few technical advisers. Now it was perceived for the first time that a crucial question was the organisation of Labour. Left to itself, private capitalism was proving unequal to the task: the Committee on Production was the first attempt to deal with the problem in relation to the workers.

The shortage of skilled labour in the engineering industry was already becoming acute in November 1914. During the first months of the war there had been a good deal of unemployment, and no less than 10,000 skilled men who were soon to be urgently needed at home were allowed to enlist without protest. Lack of foresight on the part of the Government, if it did not create the scarcity, at least doubled its intensity. A little more preparedness for the emergency would,

in this, as in many other cases, have saved much trouble later on. No one seems to have anticipated the extent of the demands that would have to be made on the industry, and, even when this could be clearly foreseen, no one seems to have thought of securing at once that the necessary resources should be available.

However that may be, it soon became clear that the shortage of skilled men was a fact. The engineering employers in December approached the Unions with proposals for overcoming the difficulty; the Unions replied with counter-proposals, which the employers dismissed as useless. The Unions thereupon declared their willingness to meet the employers again in conference; the latter airily replied that they were willing to confer, provided the Unions first conceded all their demands. To this preposterous proposal the Unions answered, reiterating their readiness to confer, but refusing to make concessions in advance.

What, then, were the proposals which the employers made? They can be very briefly described. They demanded that the Unions should agree "not to press the following questions to an issue, but to confine themselves to noting any such by way of protest for the purpose of safeguarding their interests"—manning of machines and of hand operations, the demarcation of work between trades, the employment of non-Union labour and of female labour, and the whole question of the limitation of overtime. That is to say, the employers' demands covered the whole field of Trade Union working rules, and the proposal was that an absolutely free hand should be given to the masters, subject only to a right of protest, which could not be backed up by action of any sort on the men's side.

It is true that with these proposals the employers

coupled certain guarantees which they were prepared to give. They promised that the innovations should be for the period of the war only, and that they would revert to the old conditions at its close. They also undertook to pay to all workers the standard rates for the jobs on which they might, for the moment, be engaged. Why, then, in face of these promises, did the Unions remain obdurate ?

Their reasons are clear. In the first place, the guarantee came only from the federated employers. There are, however, many engineering employers not in the Federation, and it is in the unfederated shops that Trade Unionism is, generally speaking, weakest. If, then, the unfederated employers refused at the end of the war to revert to the old conditions, the Unions would have to fight a series of battles just where they are weakest, with the knowledge that, if they failed to bring the unfederated employers into line, the masters in the Federation would find themselves undercut by the lower rates paid outside, and would, sooner or later, themselves be forced to attempt to lower wages or to reimpose the emergency conditions. A mere guarantee from the Employers' Federation could therefore in no circumstances be enough ; it would have to be coupled with a guarantee from the Government that the unfederated employers would be brought into line.

Even if this difficulty were surmounted, a still graver objection remained. The employers demanded an absolutely free hand in setting unskilled and semi-skilled workers on the machines which are now the monopoly of the skilled men. The effect of this would be that, by the end of the war, there would be a great surplus of trained workers competing for a very

restricted number of skilled jobs. The policy of limitation, on which the rates of the skilled men rest, would be no longer possible, and the competition of those who returned from the front, and those who found their occupation of making war munitions gone, would depress the level of skilled wages all over the country to an unprecedented extent. Moreover, a fall in the rates of skilled men would inevitably be followed by a similar fall in the rates of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The engineers were asked, in the name of patriotism, to bring upon themselves an aggravated depression which would rob them of all the victories of the last half-century.

However anxious both parties might be not to hamper the Government, there could be no settlement on such lines. It remains to see, first, what were the counter-proposals made by the Unions, and, secondly, whether the employers could not have made a more reasonable demand. Let us begin with the suggestions made by the men.

They proposed that firms engaged on private work not connected with the war should be given Government work (in effect, an application to the Government to extend its contract list to firms then outside it), that those firms which were even then working short time should transfer their surplus workers to the busier centres; that a subsistence allowance should be paid by the Government to induce such workers to migrate; that skilled men should be drafted from other parts of the Empire (the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, it may be said, had still seven hundred unemployed members in its overseas branches), and that the skilled men who had enlisted should, wherever they were not needed for skilled work with the Army,

be recalled to the more pressing work which they had left. The five Unions concerned—the Engineers, the Steam Engine Makers, the Toolmakers, the United Machine Workers, and the Scientific Instrument Makers—contended that, if these proposals were carried into effect, the shortage would cease. Though this was no doubt an exaggeration, they would certainly have gone far towards solving the problem.

It may be admitted that these suggestions would not have completely met the case. This, however, was no reason for demanding that the men should accept the complete and unconditional surrender claimed by the employers, which would have involved widespread discontent, and might well have resulted in a policy of ca' canny. It is noteworthy that the employers' proposals were absolutely sweeping; they asked, not for the relaxation of this or that particular rule relating to demarcation, manning of machines, or the like, but, to all intents and purposes, for the complete and general abrogation of the rules as a whole. If they had come to the men with a request for the modification of some specific rule, there can be little doubt that their request would have received sympathetic consideration.

It was because they chose to ask for everything that the Unions were unwilling to give anything at all. They would have been mad to allow the employers, under pretext of the national emergency, to make a holocaust of all safeguards.

This was the position when the Committee on Production was appointed. Before the issue of its first report, the Government committed its first great error of tact in dealing with the question, and showed its utter inability to appreciate the working-class point



of view. On February 8 Mr. H. J. Tennant asked the Labour Party in the House to secure relaxations of Trade Union rules. His speech showed no sign of an understanding of the momentous issues involved, and contained no hint that the Government was willing to do anything to secure the workers against the results of relaxing their rules, or to prevent the extra profits due to such relaxations from going into the pockets of the employers. To the criticisms levelled against him by Labour members Mr. Tennant did not even deign to reply. His speech was an employers' speech, and it was justly resented throughout the world of Labour. Only a few weeks before, the Government had been overflowing with compliments to the workers: now there was a sudden change of face. Mr. Tennant's speech was the beginning of a series of attacks on Trade Unionism. The whole history of the months that follow is a curious medley of attacks on the working class coupled with attempts to get the Trade Unions to make concessions. It is a series of ridiculous errors in tact and wanton misrepresentations on the one hand, coupled with a half-sincere but faint-hearted attempt to give the workers at least an appearance of possessing rights and responsibilities in the conduct of industry. The Labour Party very justly resented Mr. Tennant's attack, and pointed out that in any case it was for the Unions themselves to decide what concessions they were prepared to make. Accordingly, the next stage in the struggle was the direct approach made to the Unions by the Government.

While the direct negotiations between the Trade Unions and the Employers' Federation were in progress, matters came to a head in one of the largest works in

the country. On February 18 the engineers at the Elswick works of Sir W. G. Armstrong, Whitworth & Company, tendered notice to cease work unless the firm dispensed with the unskilled labour which had been introduced on skilled jobs. The Company, which was engaged almost entirely on Government work, had taken on and set on skilled jobs various types of workers from depressed industries—coppersmiths, lacemakers, cotton operatives, silversmiths, and unskilled workers. The introduction of these workers constituted a breach of working rules.

The immediate result of the threat to cease work was a conference between the management and delegates from each shop in the works. As a result of this conference, strike notices were suspended and a provisional agreement was reached, pending the reference of the whole question to a Central Conference between the Unions and the Employers' Federation. The provisional settlement was important, as a number of the points urged by the workers were conceded.

It was at once admitted by the firm that, whatever labour was taken on, the district rate for the job concerned must always be paid. This being granted, the men put to the management two further questions, the answers to which constituted the substantial gain that they made. They asked, first, whether the firm would agree that the Unions should be allowed to inspect the credentials of the imported workers, and, further, to inspect the actual work done by them. After prolonged discussion, this concession on the employers' part was definitely made. The men's representatives then brought forward a further point. They demanded that the employers should furnish them with a complete return, showing the names of

all unskilled men taken on, and in addition the name of the Trade Union of which they were members. To this, too, the firm agreed. The men then asked for a guarantee that the services of all such workers would be dispensed with at the end of the war, and that copies of the list containing their names should be sent to every member of the Engineering Employers' Federation, with the instruction that they should in no case be employed. This guarantee was also given by the firm. Last, but not least, the management promised that, for the present, no further unskilled workers should be set on skilled jobs, and that the representatives of the skilled crafts should be first consulted in all cases in which doubt could arise. This meant that the question of introducing further unskilled labour would depend upon the settlement to be arrived at nationally by the Engineering Employers' Federation and the engineering Unions concerned, but the precedent created in the case of the largest firm had a material influence on the course of these negotiations.

The men, by the threat of industrial action, thus secured a small initial victory.<sup>1</sup> The national negotia-

<sup>1</sup> In other cases difficulties have been caused by the employment of Belgian refugees. A strike at the Wolsingham Steel Works, Durham, in February was due to this cause. Unskilled Belgians having been put on to skilled jobs, the men struck. After an interview between the firm and Sir Ernest Hatch, Chairman of the Government Departmental Committee for the Employment of Belgian Refugees, the strike was settled to the satisfaction of the British workers. A more serious case was that in which Belgians were compelled by the local Relief Committee to remain at work during the engineering strike at Sandbach. Here, too, Sir Ernest Hatch settled the case in favour of the men, and the Belgians were not allowed to go on working. Both these instances are typical of a number that have arisen in connection with the employment of Belgian refugees. Ultimately, most of the available Belgian labour has been absorbed without serious friction. The Committee

tions with the employers, however, did not result in a settlement of the question, though the Unions agreed to withdraw restrictions on overtime. The wider question of the suspension of Trade Union regulations became, in fact, for some time the most important point at issue in the great three-cornered contest between the Trade Unions, the employers, and the Government, to which the above events formed the prelude.

Before the Government made any direct approach to the Unions, the Committee on Production issued the series of important reports to which reference has already been made. Of the brief report on lost time in shipyards we have already spoken; of far greater interest is the second report, issued on February 20.

This contains two memoranda, of which the first deals with the production of shells and fuses, and the second with the avoidance of industrial disputes. It was followed on March 4 by a further report dealing with demarcation and the relations between skilled and unskilled workers.

The "shells and fuses" report is important as the first definition of the official policy with regard to Trade Union rules in particular cases. The provision of shells was one of the most urgent of the problems with which the Committee was appointed to deal; it also seemed one of the simplest, as, in the words of the report, "the only consumers of shells are the Government," and as shell-making is quite distinct from other branches of the metal industry. The

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insists on the payment of standard rates, and so prevents the undercutting of British labour, of which there were at first a good many cases. It also refuses to allow Belgian labour to be employed where British workers are available, or where there is a labour dispute.

following passages indicate the lines of the Committee's recommendations :

(1) We are of opinion that the production of shells and fuses would be considerably accelerated if there were a relaxation of the present practice of the workmen confining their earnings, on the basis of the existing piece rates, to "time-and-half," or whatever the local standard may be. We understand this practice is due to some extent to a desire to protect the piece rates ; we agree that the present circumstances should not be utilised as a means of lowering rates of wages, and we think the rates in question should be protected. This can be adequately done, however, by other means than restriction of earnings and output. As the only consumers of shells are the Government, we recommend that firms engaged in the production of shells and fuses should give an undertaking to this Committee on behalf of the Government to the effect that in fixing piecework prices the earnings of men during the period of the war should not be considered as a factor in the matter, and that no reduction in piece rates will be made, unless warranted by a change in the method of manufacture—*e.g.* by the introduction of a new type of machine. The protection afforded by this guarantee should remove apprehensions on the part of the men that their piece rates might be endangered, and we think, therefore, that the Government would be fully justified in calling upon each man to increase his production to the fullest possible extent, irrespective of his former limits of earnings or shop customs.

Any difference which may arise on this matter which cannot be settled by the parties directly concerned or by their representatives should be referred as suggested in our recommendation respecting "Avoidance of Stoppage of Work."

(2) We are satisfied that, in the production of shells and fuses, there are numerous operations of a nature that can be, and are already in some shops, suitably performed by female labour. We therefore recommend that, in order to increase the output, there should be an extension of the

practice of employing female labour on this work, under suitable and proper conditions.

The Committee thus recommended the abolition of restrictions on output, coupled with a guarantee that increased output should not be used as an argument for cutting down piece-rates—a guarantee only made possible by the fact that the Government is the only consumer. It further advised the introduction of female labour, “under suitable and proper conditions”; but it gave no indication what it would consider proper conditions, though it recommended that disputes on the matter should be referred to itself for settlement.

This agreement has been accepted by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, though no less than twelve branches, in London alone, are known to have voted against it.

The report on demarcation is no less noteworthy. It is common knowledge that, in normal times, questions of the demarcation of work between trades form one of the most fruitful causes of internal dissension in the Trade Union world, as well as a frequent source of dispute with the employers. Many Trade Unionists have long been no less impatient with these quarrels than the employers themselves, and there have been repeated attempts in peace time to set up machinery to deal with them. But nothing is more certain than the necessity for the existence of a clear delimitation of trades, while the present structure of Trade Unionism persists. The standard rates in the skilled trades depend largely on limitation of the supply of labour, and this is broken down no less if men of another craft become potential competitors than if the labourer is allowed to take the work of a skilled man. Disputes

between skilled tradesmen and labourers have never been recognised by the Unions as belonging to the category of demarcation disputes. A separate report dealing with them was therefore added.

The Committee began by pointing out the delay caused by the rules governing the demarcation of trades and the importance of accelerating the production of munitions. The following are its practical suggestions :

We understand that in the Government Establishments the demarcation restrictions are less numerous than in private shipyards and workshops ; where they exist in Government Establishments we think they should at once be suspended.

In private establishments we are of opinion that on work required for Government purposes or affecting the same the demarcation restrictions which at present exist in regard to the work of the different skilled trades in the engineering and shipbuilding industries should be suspended during the continuance of the war. The suspension should be accompanied by the following safeguards :—

(1) That the men usually employed on the work required are not available.

(2) That if no suitable labour is available locally, but men can be found from a distance who are unemployed or who can be spared from their existing employment, and the work is of sufficient magnitude to warrant the transfer of men from a distance, opportunity of employment shall be given to such men providing that the work in hand is not delayed by waiting for them.

(3) That the relaxation of existing demarcation restrictions shall not affect adversely the rates customarily paid for the job. In cases where the men who ordinarily do the work are adversely affected by relaxation, the necessary readjustments should be mutually arranged.

(4) That a record of the nature of the departures from the *status quo* shall be kept.

(5) That any difficulties which cannot be settled between the parties or their representatives shall be referred to the Board of Trade within seven days for speedy settlement. Pending such reference there shall be no stoppage of work.

(6) That the form of guarantee to workpeople which we have suggested in our Second Interim Report, of February 20th, shall be adopted.<sup>1</sup>

### *Utilisation of Semi-Skilled or Unskilled Labour*

Where an employer is unable to meet the requirements of the Government because of his inability to secure the necessary labour customarily employed on the work, we think it imperative that during the war it should be open to him to make greater use of unskilled or semi-skilled labour, with proper safeguards and adjustments to protect the interests of the workpeople and their trade unions. We have suggested, in our Second Interim Report, of February 20th, a form of guarantee which we consider satisfactory for the purpose of safeguarding the position of the trade unions and of the workpeople concerned.

If it is claimed by the workpeople or their representatives that the arrangements in any specific case are not necessary or are unduly prejudicial to their interests, the matter should at once be discussed between the firm and the men's representatives. If the question cannot be amicably adjusted, it should be referred in accordance with our recommendation as to "avoidance of stoppage of work."

I have left till last the more important section of the Committee's second report, issued on February 20. This deals with the "Avoidance of Stoppages on Work for Government Purposes." It begins with a preamble in the following terms :

Whatever may be the rights of the parties at normal times, and whatever may be the methods considered necessary for the maintenance and enforcement of those

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<sup>1</sup> See later, p. 181.



rights, we think there can be no justification whatever for a resort to strikes or lock-outs under present conditions, when the resulting cessation of work would prevent the production of ships, guns, equipment, stores, or other commodities required by the Government for the purposes of the war.

Its recommendation is as follows :

*Avoidance of Stoppages on Work for Government Purposes*

With a view to preventing loss of production caused by disputes between employers and workpeople, no stoppage of work by strike or lock-out should take place on work for Government purposes. In the event of differences arising which fail to be settled by the parties directly concerned, or by their representatives, or under any existing agreements, the matter shall be referred to an impartial tribunal nominated by His Majesty's Government for immediate investigation and report to the Government with a view to a settlement.

The Committee further recommended that, "in order to safeguard the position of the Unions and the workpeople concerned, each contracting firm should give an undertaking, to be held on behalf of the Unions, in the following terms " :

To His Majesty's Government.

We hereby undertake that any departure during the war from the practice ruling in our workshops and shipyards prior to the war shall only be for the period of the war.

No change in practice made during the war shall be allowed to prejudice the position of the workpeople in our employment or of their Trade Unions in regard to the resumption and maintenance after the war of any rules or customs existing prior to the war.

In any readjustment of staff which may have to be effected after the war, priority of employment will be given to workmen in our employment at the beginning of the war

who are serving with the colours or who are now in our employment.

Name of Firm.....

Date.....

Disputes arising out of this guarantee, it was urged, should be referred to arbitration under the conditions suggested in the case of threatened stoppages of work.

These recommendations, which had of course no force until they were confirmed by the Trade Unions concerned, led directly to the now famous Treasury Conference of March 17, which met the day after the passing of the Defence of the Realm Act that gave the Government power to commandeer any factory capable of turning out munitions of war.

Representatives of the Trades Union Congress, the General Federation of Trade Unions, and the chief Unions connected with the production of commodities needed for the war were invited to confer with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the President of the Board of Trade "to consider the general position in reference to the urgent need of the country in regard to the large, and a larger, increase in the output of munitions of war, and the steps which the Government propose to take to organise the industries of the country with a view to achieving that end." It is worth while to give a list of the organisations represented.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. *General.*

The Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress.<sup>2</sup>

The General Federation of Trade Unions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Miners' Federation of Great Britain was represented on the first day, but withdrew as it was unwilling to accept compulsory arbitration. See pp. 163 and 216 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Federations consisting wholly or partly of Unions which were separately represented.

B. *Engineering.*

Amalgamated Society of Engineers.  
 Steam Engine Makers.  
 United Machine Workers.  
 Amalgamated Toolmakers.  
 United Patternmakers.  
 Friendly Society of Ironfounders.  
 Associated Ironmoulders of Scotland.  
 Associated Blacksmiths and Ironworkers.  
 Electrical Trades Union.  
 Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding  
 Trades.<sup>1</sup>

C. *Shipbuilding.*

United Boilermakers.  
 Shipwrights' Association.  
 Sheet Iron Workers and Light Platers.  
 Shipbuilding Trades Agreement Committee.<sup>1</sup>

D. *Iron and Steel Trades.*

British Steel Smelters.  
 Associated Iron and Steel Workers.

E. *Other Metal Trades.*

National Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers.  
 General Union of Braziers and Sheet Metal Workers.  
 Operative Plumbers.

F. *Woodworkers.*

Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners.  
 General Union of Carpenters and Joiners.  
 House and Ship Painters and Decorators.  
 Scottish Painters.  
 Furnishing Trades Association.  
 Woodcutting Machinists.  
 Amalgamated Cabinet Makers.

G. *Labourers.*

Gas and General Workers.  
 Workers' Union.  
 National Amalgamated Union of Labour.

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<sup>1</sup> Federations consisting wholly or partly of Unions which were separately represented.

H. *Transport.*

National Union of Railwaymen.

National Transport Workers' Federation.

I. *Woollen.*

General Union of Textile Workers.

J. *Boot and Shoe.*

Boot and Shoe Operatives.

Thus the Unions from which those present were drawn, while they by no means included all the Unions concerned in the making of munitions, formed a very representative gathering, and covered a very large membership. How far the attitude of the leaders represented that of the rank and file is another, and a far more difficult, question.

To this great gathering Mr. Lloyd George made a speech in which he set forth his proposals. He began by insisting on the need for the national organisation of industry, and by quoting the example of France, in which he said, under stress of invasion, it had been accomplished by voluntary effort. He then referred to the Government's power to assume control of factories under the Defence of the Realm Acts; but, he said, "although we have the power, we cannot exercise it unless we have the complete co-operation of employers and workmen." He then passed to his suggestions. "Above all," he said, "we propose to impose a limitation of profits, because we see that it is very difficult for us to appeal to Labour to relax restrictions and to put out the whole of its strength, unless some condition of this kind is imposed." He then went on to say that he did not propose to discuss then and there the methods of limiting profits, as this would be a matter for subsequent discussion with the employers. He appealed to the workers to accept arbitration in Labour disputes and

to relax, under adequate safeguards, their Trade Union rules. In this part of his speech he followed the lines laid down by the Committee on Production. Lastly, he referred to the drink question, of which so much was to be heard later.

After Mr. Lloyd George had spoken, a Sub-Committee of seven was appointed to draw up proposals for submission to the Conference. This was done on the following day, in consultation with Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Runciman. The Sub-Committee was as follows :

- Arthur Henderson (Ironfounders).
- C. W. Bowerman (Parliamentary Committee).
- John Hill (Boilermakers).
- W. Mosses (Patternmakers).
- A. Wilkie (Shipwrights).
- Frank Smith (Cabinetmakers).
- J. T. Brownlie (Engineers).

On the following day an agreement was arrived at, and endorsed by the representatives of all the Unions with the very important exception of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, whose representatives were dissatisfied with the safeguards offered. This acceptance had, of course, as Mr. Henderson said in an interview, no binding force until it had been submitted to the Unions concerned. The agreement was in the following terms :

The Workmen's Representatives at the Conference will recommend to their members the following proposals with a view to accelerating the output of munitions and equipments of war :—

(1) During the war period there shall in no case be any stoppage of work upon munitions and equipments of war or other work required for a satisfactory completion of the war.

All differences on wages or conditions of employment arising out of the war shall be dealt with without stoppage in accordance with paragraph (2).

Questions not arising out of the war should not be made the cause of stoppage during the war period.

(2) Subject to any existing agreements or methods now prevailing for the settlement of disputes, differences of a purely individual or local character shall unless mutually arranged be the subject of a deputation to the firm representing the workmen concerned, and differences of a general character affecting wages and conditions of employment arising out of the war shall be the subject of Conferences between the parties.

In all cases of failure to reach a settlement of disputes by the parties directly concerned, or their representatives, or under existing agreements, the matter in dispute shall be dealt with under any one of the three following alternatives as may be mutually agreed, or, in default of agreement, settled by the Board of Trade.

- (a) The Committee on Production.
- (b) A single arbitrator agreed upon by the parties or appointed by the Board of Trade.
- (c) A court of arbitration upon which Labour is represented equally with the employers.

(3) An Advisory Committee representative of the organised workers engaged in production for Government requirements shall be appointed by the Government for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out of these recommendations and for consultation by the Government or by the workmen concerned.

(4) Provided that the conditions set out in paragraph (5) are accepted by the Government as applicable to all contracts for the execution of war munitions and equipments the workmen's representatives at the Conference are of opinion that during the war period the relaxation of the present trade practices is imperative, and that each Union be recommended to take into favourable consideration such changes in working conditions or trade customs

as may be necessary with a view to accelerating the output of war munitions or equipments.

(5) The recommendations contained in paragraph (4) are conditional on Government requiring all contractors and sub-contractors engaged on munitions and equipments of war or other work required for the satisfactory completion of the war to give an undertaking to the following effect :—

Any departure during the war from the practice ruling in our workshops, shipyards, and other industries prior to the war, shall only be for the period of the war.

No change in practice made during the war shall be allowed to prejudice the position of the workpeople in our employment, or of their Trade Unions in regard to the resumption and maintenance after the war of any rules or customs existing prior to the war.

In any readjustment of staff which may have to be effected after the war, priority of employment will be given to workmen in our employment at the beginning of the war who are serving with the colours or who are now in our employment.

Where the custom of a shop is changed during the war by the introduction of semi-skilled men to perform work hitherto performed by a class of workmen of higher skill, the rates paid shall be the usual rates of the district for that class of work.

The relaxation of existing demarcation restrictions or admission of semi-skilled or female labour shall not affect adversely the rates customarily paid for the job. In cases where men who ordinarily do the work are adversely affected thereby, the necessary readjustments shall be made so that they can maintain their previous earnings.

A record of the nature of the departure from the conditions prevailing before the date of this undertaking shall be kept and shall be open for inspection by the authorised representative of the Government.

Due notice shall be given to the workmen concerned, wherever practicable, of any changes of working conditions which it is desired to introduce as the result of this arrange-

ment, and opportunity of local consultation with men or their representatives shall be given if desired.

All differences with our workmen engaged on Government work arising out of changes so introduced, or with regard to wages or conditions of employment arising out of the war, shall be settled without stoppage of work in accordance with the procedure laid down in paragraph (2).

It is clearly understood that, except as expressly provided in the fourth paragraph of clause 5, nothing in this undertaking is to prejudice the position of employers or employees after the war.

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

WALTER RUNCIMAN.

ARTHUR HENDERSON

*(Chairman of Workmen's Representatives).*

WM. MOSSES

*(Secretary of Workmen's Representatives).*

March 19, 1915.

The refusal of the engineers to come in was so serious a matter that a further conference was held on March 25 between Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Runciman and the representatives of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. At this meeting the engineers gave their assent, on condition that the following further statements made by Mr. Lloyd George were put on record. There had been no statement about the limitation of profits in the general agreement, and the safeguards provided had seemed insufficient to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers' delegates :

(1) That it is the intention of the Government to conclude arrangements with all important firms engaged wholly or mainly upon engineering and shipbuilding work for war purposes, under which these profits will be limited with a view to securing that benefit resulting from the relaxation of trade restrictions or practices shall accrue to the State.



(2) That the relaxation of trade practices contemplated in the agreement relates solely to work done for war purposes during the war period.

(3) That in the case of the introduction of new inventions which were not in existence in the pre-war period the class of workman to be employed on this work after the war should be determined according to the practice prevailing before the war in the case of the class of work most nearly analogous.

(4) That on demand by the workmen the Government Department concerned will be prepared to certify whether the work in question is needed for war purposes.

(5) That the Government will undertake to use its influence to secure the restoration of previous conditions in every case after the war.

This statement was signed by Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Runciman, and four representatives of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

It is now time to comment more generally upon the results of this Conference, which was at once hailed with delight by all sections of the Press, from the *Times* to the *New Age*. The one side saw in it a way of breaking down "the tyranny of Trade Unionism," while the other saw in it a new step towards the full recognition of Trade Unionism by the State, or rather towards a full partnership between the Unions and the State in the control of industry. Mr. Lloyd George, in an interview published in the *Daily Citizen*, also took the latter line. He spoke of the Conference as "opening up a great new chapter in the history of Labour in its relations with the State." "If," he added, "Labour works this thing in a broad and generous spirit and not in a haggling spirit this document that was signed on Friday ought to be the great charter for Labour."

As the *New Age* said upon this occasion: "Being a man without either prejudices or principles, Mr. Lloyd George has a capacity for pouring himself into any set of circumstances and taking their shape." The danger of such a man, however, lies in the facility with which he can adopt the phraseology of the moment without understanding its spirit. There can be no question that the "great charter" of Labour means something very different to Mr. Lloyd George from what it means to Mr. Orage—if, indeed, it means to the former anything at all, and did not merely serve him as a convenient form of words. It was no doubt a very significant departure for the State to confer with the great Unions, over the heads of the employers, concerning the organisation of industry; but despite this step in advance, it may be argued that the effect of the recommendations adopted was to weaken, rather than to strengthen, Trade Unionism.

For, in the first place, the Conference did not, as was at the time assumed, speak with a united voice. The miners, refusing to accept compulsory arbitration on any terms, left at the end of the first day; the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, whose concurrence was vital to the settlement of the problem of war munitions, refused to concur in the recommendations issued by the Conference. The "complete agreement" of which all the papers made so much was, in fact, no agreement at all. The miners were bent on pushing their demands, irrespective of the Government's schemes; the engineers were not prepared to accept the agreement without further safeguards; the transport workers, though they signed, pressed for a separate advisory committee to deal with questions of transport alone.

Complete agreement was, no doubt, brought con-

siderably nearer by the entry of the engineers into the agreement ; but even so, the document left many problems unsolved. Compulsory arbitration was accepted ; but no indication was given by the Government of the principle by which they wished the arbitrators to be guided in wages disputes.

What is far more important is the question of what is going to happen when the war ends. This was at the bottom of the delay of the engineers in coming to an agreement with the Government. Obviously, if the Trade Unions relax their rules for the period of the war, they must be given safeguards that their rights will not be infringed later on. The original demand of the employers, as we have seen, was for a holocaust of all rules and regulations ; it was at least encouraging to find that the Government did nothing to countenance so preposterous a claim. The recommendations provided for special scheduled relaxations of particular rules.

But there remained one fatal weakness in the Government's scheme. While the employer was to deposit with the Government a guarantee that he would return to the old customs after the war, absolutely no State machinery was set up by which relaxations were to be scheduled now and refusals to return to the old rules prevented later on. The task of scheduling relaxations was left to the employers and the Unions, and it is not difficult to see that there will be no dearth of disputes after the war as to the nature of the old customs and the departures from them. The Government promised, at the second conference, to " use its influence," but still nothing was said about the form which its interference should take. The workers cannot be expected to abandon their hard-won rules

—the Magna Charta and Habeas Corpus of Labour—unless they are sure that the general guarantee given by the employer will be enforced in every particular instance. Inevitably, numerous disputes will arise as to the restoration of old rules. There must be in every district bodies equipped with the knowledge and the power to see that workers get their due. In fact, now, it would seem, is the time for the establishment of those Industrial Courts, purely judicial in character, and confined to questions of interpretation, for the trial of Labour cases which have been so long suggested without avail.

The view seems to be very general that Trade Union rules form a material drag upon production, and that their removal will mean a great impetus to industry. This is very far from being the case. There are certain rules restricting the employment of semi-skilled workers, which, in view of the shortage of skilled workmen, are now hampering production. These rules might be relaxed for the time being, provided real safeguards for their restoration can be afforded to the workers. But the bulk of the Trade Union working rules are not of this character. They are designed to protect the workman at his work, and are really a species of industrial health legislation extending the principles embodied in the Factory Acts. Especially is this the case with the rules relating to overtime and to the number of workers required for the manning of the various machines. They are essentially protections for the worker against sickness and industrial accident, and with their removal will go a big increase in both. The employer, careless of the future of the employee, may desire to live only for the day, and to sweep away all these restrictions; but if the nation

wants the maximum production over a considerable period of time, it will be wise not to be too hasty in helping the employer to overwork his men. Already, overtime rules and the like have been strained to breaking-point, and already there is an alarming increase in the number of trade unionists who are on sick benefit. If the employers are given their way, and if the process of speeding-up is carried further, the result may be a momentary acceleration of production, but in the long run it will be a decrease. Trade Union rules serve the interests of the nation as well as the interests of the men who framed them.

The Treasury conference was significant in that it seemed to mark the adoption of a new Labour policy by the Government. Till then, the workers had been ignored wherever possible ; no attempt had been made to conciliate them, presumably because they seemed, judged by their Parliamentary leaders, perfectly ready to give everything for nothing. It would appear that the Government at last realised that there was a growing volume of discontent ; but if it desired to allay this and to secure Labour's co-operation, it would have done well to begin by raising the wages of all Government servants to meet the rise in prices, and by laying down the same principle for the guidance of the Committee on Production and of the various arbitrators it may appoint. When it had done that, it would have been able to consult the Trade Unions with better hopes of a really final settlement ; but it should beware of attempting to impose a general measure of compulsory arbitration against the will of the great mass of workers, or of taking at their face value the interested appeals of employers for the abrogation of the essential safeguards of Trade

Unionism. For the working rules of the Trade Unions, and not last week's provisional agreement with the Government, form the true charter of the liberties of Labour.

Since I have passed certain unfavourable comments upon the Treasury agreement, it is only fair that I should mention the fact that it has struck some qualified observers in another light. Writing in the *Daily Citizen* on March 24, primarily for the purpose of getting the Amalgamated Society of Engineers to agree to the document, Mr. G. N. Barnes gave the following summary of its provisions :

1. The document provides for the maintenance of existing rates of pay for any particular job, so that there is no danger of a reduction of wages. On the contrary, there is in this stipulation as to rates of pay a double safeguard. It not only maintains the wage-rate, but sets up a tendency towards ultimate automatic displacement of the new class of labour. The employer, if he has to pay the same rates of pay, will want to retain the higher degree of skill.

2. The provision as to rates being based on the job rather than on the individual worker affords a means of lessening the wretched squabbles about demarcation of work which have weakened and discredited trade unionism. It has been open hitherto to the employer to employ a worker on lower pay on the ground of a lower degree of skill. That has been, in fact, the underlying cause of most demarcation trouble. This document removes it for the time being. The employer must pay the same for a job, no matter who does the job.

3. The employers are to register any change in workshop practice, and, where practicable, give notice of it to the workpeople, who, providing there is no stoppage of work, will then have a right to demand discussion of it. This is actually an improvement on the existing working agreement between engineering employers and the Amal-

gamated Society of Engineers, because under that agreement employers are not required in any circumstances to give notice of change. Moreover, under the new document any change has to be recorded, and such record has to be open to Government inspection. The document, therefore, provides for a return on the termination of the war to pre-document conditions.

4. Employers are to be required to give an undertaking embodying the above provisions as a condition of getting Government work, and even then they have to be subject to another condition limiting their profits, this latter to be made a feature of the separate agreement between them and the Government. Employers, therefore, become really civil servants. They will have no interest in reducing wages. On the contrary, they will be disposed to increase them, because their profits will be in the form of interest on outlay.

5. An advisory committee is to be appointed representative of the organised workers engaged in the production of Government requirements for consultation either by the Government or by the workmen. This committee will consist of trained and trusted trade union leaders, who, in this connection, will have as their chief concern the interests of organised Labour. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers' members may rest assured that nothing will be assented to which will be in any way unfair or unnecessary, or likely to weaken trade unionism.

I conclude, therefore, that the legitimate interests of engineers are quite safe. There is one omission in the document, namely that there is no provision for subsidising unskilled or semi-skilled workers' unions when the war is ended. We are calling upon these men to serve our turn in the war, and we are deliberately planning then to throw them overboard. This is not fair; they are willing to take the risk. But that is no reason why we should take advantage of them. We should be ready when the time comes to ease their lot by a special subsidy under Part II. of the Insurance Act. Perhaps Mr. Lloyd George will make a note of this.

The validity of this reasoning depended on the assumption that the Government guarantees were satisfactory. I have already given my reasons for rejecting this assumption.

So different a critic as the *New Age* also welcomed the Conference as a beginning of a system of partnership between the State and the Unions. "Never before in the history of human society," said the writer of "Notes of the Week" on March 25, "has the executive of a great State addressed so frank, so egalitarian an appeal to the proletariat of their nation."

The real question is whether the frankness of the appeal was more than verbal. This obviously depended on the working-out of the scheme laid down at the Conference. The first step was the formation of a Labour Advisory Committee, consisting of the seven Trade Unionists who had drafted the scheme, to advise the Government on questions connected with the organisation of Labour. This Committee was duly appointed as soon as the Engineers had accepted the agreement; but there were for a long time practically no signs of its functioning, except that it issued a highly adverse report on the Government White Paper on "Lost Time." It came to the fore again, as we shall see, with the formation of the Ministry of Munitions in June.

Far more important are the local Armaments Committees which soon afterwards began to be set up in some of the chief centres, especially the North-East Coast and the Clyde. These two committees consist of an equal number of representatives of employers and workmen, together with a certain number of Government and other supposedly "im-



partial" representatives. If the Treasury agreement was to have any meaning, it was obviously necessary to create local machinery for the purpose of carrying it into effect. This could only be done by means of local Committees and Sub-Committees in touch with every workshop.

The North-East Coast Munitions of War Committee was the first to be established and will serve to indicate the character of the others.

Though there are grave dangers still to be faced, it may be said that, on the whole, the workers did not make a bad beginning, thanks largely to the efforts of Mr. John Hill and the boilermakers. On the North-East Coast Committee they have seven representatives as against seven of the employers and a certain number appointed by the Government. In actual voting they will clearly still be outweighed by the supposedly "impartial" nominees of the State; but if the Trade Unions rise to the occasion, mere voting will not be the deciding factor. The Trade Union representation on the Committee is strong enough, if it only uses its strength to good purpose, to secure reasonable terms. The mere fact that, on such a body, the workers have been able to secure nominally equal representation with the employers proves that neither the Government nor the masters dare offend the Trade Unions at the present time. They know full well that the compliance of organised Labour is absolutely essential to the rapid output of munitions, and they are now prepared, much against their will, to make concessions. Everything upon the Committee will depend on the use which the Labour representatives make of their new-found power. If they refuse to be terrorised into giving way when the

employers make unreasonable demands they have a good chance of making satisfactory terms.

The Committee has, moreover, a far wider significance than any immediate advantage the workers can hope to gain from it. It will go down to history as the first definite and official recognition of the right of the workers to a say in the management of their own industries. Here for the first time the nominees of the workers meet those of the masters on equal terms, to discuss not merely wages, hours, or conditions of labour, but the actual business of production. Under stress of the emergency the workers are being recognised, however grudgingly, as partners in industry.

This does not mean that Trade Unionists should have thrown up their caps and proclaimed that the revolution had come. Never was there such need as there was during May and June for wise and wakeful leadership and for a vigorous and intelligent rank and file. Later developments have clearly shown that neither the Government nor the employers have the smallest intention of giving Labour an inch more than they are forced to give, and that both will be equally eager to take back at the earliest opportunity any advantage that may now be wrung from them. Moreover, Labour was being asked to make large concessions in return for the infinitesimally small share of responsibility which was being conceded to it.

If, however, the Trade Union leaders had been persuaded to play their cards well, they might have been able to make it impossible for the State to return to its time-honoured practice of ignoring Labour. They might have succeeded in forcing the State to abandon to some extent its old alliance with capital, and to join them in wringing from the employers not

only better wages but some share in industrial responsibility and self-government. The capitalist system has been tried in the present emergency and has proved itself wasteful, anti-social, and inefficient. This even the capitalist Government has been compelled to recognise, and it has turned at last to the Unions to help it out of its difficulty.

It was never expected, of course, that the Committees would by themselves solve the problem: they were merely an instrument which the workers could have used, if they had realised the position, for the purpose of fighting the capitalist in the heart of his own country—the control of industry. If, on the other hand, as recent events seem to indicate, the Trade Unions desire to commit suicide, the more perfect the weapon the more finished a job they are likely to make of their self-destruction. It is vital that Trade Unionists should be alive to the opportunities and the dangers which confront them. The wage-system will only be destroyed when the capitalist ceases to control industry.

As I write, we have had a few weeks' experience of the working of these local Committees, and already very grave defects have presented themselves. The most serious fact is that they have so far had neither definite functions nor definite powers: as in the case of much of the machinery set up during the war, the Government founded them, and then refrained from telling them what to do and from empowering them to do what they wanted to do. On the Clyde, for instance, one of the chief tasks of the Committee has been to stimulate good time-keeping. It has had no powers whatsoever under the law in this respect; but of this the bulk of the workers have not been aware. It has therefore employed a gigantic system of bluff, com-

manding where it has had no right to command, and, for the most part, getting itself obeyed. Probably the same is true of other centres.

In other centres, while the employers are showing great activity on the Munitions Committees, the working-class leaders are remaining utterly apathetic. In some important centres the workmen's side of the Munitions Committee has hardly met; in other cases the leaders have not even thought it worth while to claim equal representation on the local Committees.

At first it seemed possible that this lack of definite function was largely due to the inchoate condition in which the national organisation of industry still remained, and that it would be altered as the Ministry of Munitions got into full working order. This expectation has been completely falsified by the scheme finally adopted by Mr. Lloyd George, in which, as we shall see, the Trade Unions seem to be given no powers at all.

No sooner were the Treasury Conferences over and a provisional settlement arrived at in the case of Trade Union rules than the nation was informed that, after all, Trade Union rules were not the cause of the insufficient output of munitions. Drink was found to be the evil, and was stigmatised by Mr. Lloyd George as worse than the Prussians. At once all the papers became full of frenzied attacks on the slack and intemperate habits of the working-class, although, only a week or two before, they had been acclaiming the great settlement arrived at between the State and the Trade Unions. Prohibitionists saw a chance of forcing their policy on the country under cover of the war, and Mr. Lloyd George went about insulting the workers whom he had so recently cozened.

The whole campaign was very carefully arranged. It began with a deputation from the Shipbuilding Employers' Federation to Mr. Lloyd George. It was continued in the Press and in a series of speeches by Mr. Lloyd George, which even drew a reply from Mr. Asquith. Just when all over the country we were being told that drink was the cause of the small output, Mr. Asquith went to Newcastle and made a speech which discredited the whole idea. "Nor, again," said he, "is it true or fair to suggest that there has been anything in the nature of a general slackness in this branch of industry on the part of either employers or employed. I am told on the best authority that the main armament firms registered the very high average figure of from sixty-seven to sixty-nine hours per week per man."

The campaign reached a climax with the publication, on May 1—Labour Day—of a *Report and Statistics of Bad Time kept in Shipbuilding, Munitions, and Transport Areas*, presented to the House of Commons by Mr. Lloyd George. This consists of reports from various officers in the service of the War Office and the Admiralty, from the Home Office, from certain factory inspectors, and from the Shipbuilding Employers' Federation. This astonishing document, since it bore the Government imprint, was at once treated as authoritative by the greater part of the Press, which did not hesitate, on the strength of it, to denounce large sections of the workers as slackers and drunkards. In fact, it contains hardly any definite figures: it is drawn up throughout in an *ex parte* manner, and, even taken at its face-value, it does not substantiate the allegations which it makes. The Labour Party's protest in the House of Commons was certainly

none too strong. "Until some method is found," said Mr. Arthur Henderson, "whereby the other side of the case can be stated, it will be impossible for the Government to expect from the Labour Party a continuance of that solid support which they have given during the period of the war." And, what is far more important, it is impossible for the Government to expect the co-operation of Labour in the workshops if insults of this kind are to be flung at them without a chance being given them to reply.

Mr. Henderson dwelt on the fact that "all the evidence against the workers is that of employers or officials." "The workmen's side of the case has never been stated, and, what is more, has never been asked." The Government seems to have accepted the allegations of the shipbuilding employers at their face-value—it even printed them in an official document without giving the workers a chance of answering them—and it is plain, from the White Paper itself, that a lead was given to Government officials to sum up against the workers. Methods like these are calculated to have a far more adverse effect on output than any amount of drinking.

Let me examine the allegations made in the White Paper in more detail. In the first place, it is noticeable that throughout no comparative figures are given. Though the employers often speak of what they call "normal time" under peace conditions, they make no comparison between the actual hours worked during, say, March 1915, and a similar month in peace time. The fact is that the "normal time" to which they refer has no relation to actual time worked; they are comparing the actual hours worked now with a full week under peace conditions. The comparison

is, then, obviously absurd. In the second place, no figures are given of the time actually worked during the earlier months of the war. It is, to say the least of it, probable that the publication of these figures would show that much of the lost time at present is due not to drink, but to overstrain. The rapid growth in the number of Trade Unionists drawing sickness benefit supports this contention.

Moreover, no indication is given of the method adopted by the employers of reckoning lost time. All the figures which show a considerable amount of time lost refer to ironworkers in the shipyards. But such work is carried on under conditions which almost necessarily involve the loss of time. The work is to a great extent outdoor work, and is affected by weather conditions. If the weather is bad, either the work is stopped and time is lost, or the worker, if he goes on working, is exposed to climatic conditions that cannot but impair his efficiency and drive him to the public-house. The boilermaker often leaves his work wet through; he has the choice of catching cold or adjourning to the nearest public-house. Only now are the employers beginning to build shelters under which the boilermaker can work. Had they done this long ago, they would have saved the country a large proportion of the time that has been lost on these processes.

Again, the employers seem to assume that they have a right to expect a full week's work from every worker. In view of the very heavy nature of much shipyard work, this contention is in itself absurd. It is the more absurd in that they appear to ignore the fact, the importance of which is recognised in some of the reports by Government officials, that the average

physique and character of the men are now nothing like what they are in times of peace. Many of the best workers have enlisted, and the men who have been taken on in their places are in many cases, apart from drink, physically incapable of a full week of such hard work as, say, riveting. Lost time due to the "broken squad" difficulty, which is in the main the employers' own fault, is also ignored.

If the employers are careless in their allegations, they are at least careful in their reticences. They have made no answer to the men's allegations that they are keeping many men on private work, and so delaying Government work, and that they are keeping the best men on private work, and giving the Government the benefit of the inefficient. A Government purporting to be impartial should surely have taken account of the criticisms passed upon each other by both sides.

So much for the employers' evidence, which forms the most heavily documented part of the White Paper. It is tainted at the source, and can only be considered when the men have been given an opportunity of answering it. I come now to the evidence of Government officials.

The figures showing the hours worked in Government dockyards are highly satisfactory, and reflect credit on the officials and on the workers. The system under which work is organised in the Government yards is, however, so different from that obtaining in private shipyards as to afford no basis of comparison. The Government workers have been afforded reasonable periods of rest; the Government's best workers have not been allowed to enlist; the Government has no profitable private contracts to which it can divert its best workers.



Apart from the reports of the Home Office and the Factory Inspectors, the official evidence is, for the most part, mere generalisation. It ranges from Sir John Jellicoe's letter, which is obviously a mere second-hand impression based on the one-sided evidence which alone he has had an opportunity of hearing, to absurd generalisations like that of Captain Greatorex, Director of Naval Equipment, who roundly declares that "the condition of labour is deplorable."

More might have been learnt from the reports of the special inspectors sent out by the Home Office to some of the big centres ; but these have unfortunately been condensed into a series of impersonal reports of a somewhat one-sided character. Even so, they cannot be said to bear out the alarming statements of the employers and the War Office and Admiralty officials. They lay stress on the fact that inefficient workers are now being regularly employed, and they point out certain useful reforms which might well be carried out by the employers. For instance, where there is no "pooling of squads," the absence of one man often sends all the rest to the public-house ; but this difficulty can be, and is being, overcome. Moreover, the system of paying the whole wages of a squad to the head man of it leads to treating. And so on.

One very important report, which is in danger of being overlooked, is that of the Factory Inspector for the Clyde district. "There does not appear," he says, "to be any noticeable increase of drinking since the war began. The quantity consumed is about normal. The same men frequent the same premises, and those inclined to drink too much continue as before the war commenced. . . . While drinking is an important cause of bad time-keeping, it is only one

cause. . . . Riveting is hard and exhausting work, and it is frequently and necessarily carried on in trying conditions—exposure in winter to bitter cold and damp. The temptation to take a morning or a day off during very cold or very hot weather is great, as the riveter knows he is indispensable at present, and will not lose his job if he does lie off.”

Certain obvious recommendations may be made as a result of these statistics. Sunday labour is wasteful, and conduces in the end to lost time, if it is made a regular practice. It should therefore be abolished, in the shipbuilding yards at any rate. Secondly, a very large proportion of the lost time is lost before breakfast. As Mr. Brownlie, Chairman of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, suggested some time ago, better time would be kept if work started later, as at Woolwich Arsenal. Thirdly, excessive hours do not mean good work; the shipbuilder’s normal day of nine and a half hours is too long. Changes in these directions would make far more difference to output than any restriction of the facilities for drinking. The same may be said of the provision of canteens, which, where it has been put into effect, has had the result of diminishing drinking without compulsion.

With the few figures in this White Paper that relate to engineers and metal workers other than shipyard ironworkers, it is not necessary to deal, since it is admitted that not even the shadow of a case has been made out against them. Drinking, as in normal times, is only at all serious in thirsty trades, such as riveting and some forms of dock labour, especially coal-heaving. With regard to shipyard ironworkers, enough has been said to show that the statements in the White Paper

should be received with the greatest reserve, and that Labour had a full right to resent the publication of such *ex parte* documents without any answering statement of the men's case. Mr. Henderson pressed in the House for a Committee of Enquiry with Labour representation, and the Government apparently granted this ; but, at the time of writing, there are no signs of the Committee's report. Labour has clearly a right to demand that the charges made should be either withdrawn or substantiated.

The whole episode matters the less in that the whole drink agitation now seems to be dead and buried. The Government has indeed secured further powers over licensed premises in munition areas ; but Mr. Lloyd George's far-reaching proposals for liquor taxation have met with ignominious defeat at the hands of the licensed interests, and have been completely dropped. It is a queer commentary on the state of Britain that they should have been averted not by the action of the workers, whom Mr. Lloyd George had insulted, but by a handful of brewers, publicans, and distillers.

Since these events there have been great changes in the Government itself. The Liberal Government has fallen, and has been replaced by a Coalition Ministry, including Labour as well as Unionist representatives. What is of more immediate relevance is the establishment of a separate Ministry of Munitions, with Mr. Lloyd George at its head.

The Liberal Ministry fell partly owing to the machinations of a section of the Press, which, despite its success, suffered a good deal of discredit. It therefore sought to recover its prestige by raising the cry of conscription. In view of the absurdity of demanding

conscription when we had already more soldiers than we were able to arm, this cry was changed, in some quarters, into the cry for industrial conscription. Every one, it was urged, who was not a soldier or a worker in some absolutely essential trade, should be forced into the making of munitions, and martial law should be proclaimed in the workshops.

It is difficult to argue seriously with those who make these proposals, in view of their obvious absurdity. The number of unskilled workers who can be profitably employed is strictly limited by the number of skilled workers available. So far the whole difficulty has lain in the shortage of skilled workers. It may be possible to increase the number of these : indeed, this is already being done. Men are being brought back from the Colours, skilled men are being imported from Canada and elsewhere, and very large numbers of semi-skilled and unskilled workers are being promoted. But there is absolutely no indication that, even with this increase, there will be any shortage of unskilled workers. On grounds of expediency, there is absolutely no reason for compulsion either in the army or in the workshop.<sup>1</sup> Those who advocate compulsion want compulsion for its own sake, and not for any practical benefit it would bring.

As I write, Parliament has just passed a Bill proposing to establish a compulsory National Register of all persons of both sexes between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five. Forms are to be sent out on which each person may state whether he or she is engaged on any form of war work, or able and willing to take up some form of war work, the nature of which he is apparently expected to suggest. As of the

<sup>1</sup> On the shortage in agriculture, see Chapter IX.

87,000 women who enrolled themselves some months ago on the voluntary register of war workers only about 2000 have been found employment, there seems no reason for going in search of more female labour. Nor is there any shortage whatsoever of any save skilled male workers, and for these it cannot be suggested that a comprehensive national system of registration is of the smallest use. It seems probable that the register scheme was started in the Coalition Cabinet by the conscriptionists, who thought it would make both military and industrial conscription easier. Then it was probably whittled down in the course of Cabinet discussion to its present ridiculous shape. "*Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.*"

The real problem, as the Government well knows, is the problem of organising the Labour that is already in the workshops. In this connection, the solution which naturally suggests itself to the military and to the governing-class mind is martial law. We have already seen a beginning made in this direction with the notorious Dockers' Battalion of Liverpool, blessed by capitalists, some Trade Union officials, the Director of the Liverpool Labour Exchange, and Lord Derby. It is necessary to say something about this extraordinary body, more especially as Mr. Lloyd George, on his visit to Liverpool to organise Labour, saw fit to go out of his way to inspect it, and as there is more than a hint of imitation of it in the special bodies of munition workers who have now been enrolled.

The Dockers' Battalion consists entirely of members of the National Union of Dock Labourers, and no man can continue to belong to it unless he pays his Trade Union dues regularly. The President and Vice-President of the Union are sergeants in the battalion,

and Mr. James Sexton, the General Secretary, has given it his blessing. Yet there is not the smallest doubt that it is exceedingly unpopular with the Liverpool dockers.

On April 18 a meeting was held, confined to members of the Union, at which Lord Derby, Mr. Sexton, and others were to speak, for the purpose of explaining the objects of the battalion and clearing away suspicion with regard to it. In such a meeting, at which only Trade Unionists were present, not a single speech could be delivered, so great was the men's suspicion that the battalion was intended to act as a strike-breaking body. In the middle of May a docker was sent to prison for describing a member of the battalion as a scab, and there have been many similar incidents.

The speech which Lord Derby intended to make was communicated to the Press.

“What put the idea into my head,” he says, “was that so many dockers were men who would like to be soldiers, but were prevented by medical reasons or by age from taking service, though these causes did not prevent them from being good dockers. I also wanted to prevent any idea of soldiers being brought in to do the work of the port, and I thought it would be a good idea to form a number of companies to do as far as possible anything the Government wanted, to wear khaki uniform, and to be entitled to the medal for service at the end of the war. When I decided to form them I had to try to avoid two things, one of which was that there should be no displacement of any one now in employment, and to disarm any suspicion that this was a strike battalion. . . . In order to avoid it being in any way a strike-breaking battalion the rule was made that only Union men should be admitted.”

However, on another occasion, as reported in the *Times* of April 9, Lord Derby, while asserting that it was not a strike-breaking battalion, as it would be

worked "in conformity with Union rules and military discipline," added that he would not "look on it as a strike-breaking battalion if it came to be used to do the work of men who were fighting their own superior officials and by so doing had been delaying goods going to the front." In view of the troubled state of the port, and of Lord Derby's own statements, the Liverpool dockers seem justified in regarding the battalion as suspect. If it was not founded for the purpose of breaking strikes, it might at any rate very easily be converted to such base uses. Soldiers have already acted as strike-breakers more than once during the present war,<sup>1</sup> and the Dockers' Battalion, being subject to military discipline, could clearly be used in the same way.

The workers are rightly suspicious of every attempt to introduce martial law into industry. Many of them remember how Briand crushed the great French railway strike, and the mere threat of compulsion has been enough to cause one great Trade Union to ask the Trade Union Congress to inaugurate a national campaign against it. The temper of those who favour compulsion was well exemplified in a letter from Lord Methuen to the *Times* in January. Speaking of compulsory training in South Africa, he adds this comment :

We worked on Lord Kitchener's admirable Australia

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<sup>1</sup> On February 19 the Isle of Man authorities used soldiers to unload a vessel during a strike. At Northampton, members of the Army Service Corps acted as blacklegs under orders at the end of February. Territorials were sent back to their old work at Messrs. Foden's motor-works during a strike in April. Royal Engineers took the place of joiners on strike at Stobs Camp, near Edinburgh, in April; and the Birkenhead gasworks were kept going by soldiers during a strike of municipal employees.

scheme in forming the Citizen Army in South Africa. Little did we anticipate that within three years this force should have *scotched a strike* and quelled a rebellion.

The same desire to crush industrial rebellion is behind the demand for military conscription and the demand for industrial conscription. The workers would do well to resist both equally.

It would indeed be madness for the Government to try to force a system of martial law upon the workers. If industry is to be organised nationally, it can only be so organised by and through the great industrial organisations. The way is open to a full partnership between the State and the Trade Unions, and there was at one time a hope that this was the course the Government intended to follow. The debate early in May, when the Government introduced into the House of Commons its Bill establishing a Ministry of Munitions, was significant. The Bill, in its original form at least, seemed to sanction the application of industrial conscription by Order in Council. This roused so much opposition that the Government amended the Bill in Committee to rule out that possibility. This did not of course mean that the Government could no longer adopt industrial conscription; it meant only that it must secure compulsory powers by special legislation if it desired them.

The first indications of the Government's policy were furnished by Mr. Lloyd George's early speeches as Minister of Munitions, and especially by the second great Conference with representatives of the Unions<sup>1</sup> held on June 10, presumably for the discussion of this

<sup>1</sup> For the bodies represented, see the account of the first Conference, p. 182. The miners were again, significantly, absent.



very question. At this Conference Mr. Lloyd George made the following statement :

They talk about the conscription of labour. I don't want conscription of labour at all. All I want to do is to be able to place men where they are most needed to increase the output of munitions.

The Conference passed a resolution empowering the National Labour Advisory Committee appointed in March " to agree to such measures as, without detriment to the interests of the workers, will ensure an adequate supply of the necessary munitions for the prosecution of the war with the greatest vigour."

When Mr. Lloyd George said that he did not want industrial conscription, he meant, as his later actions clearly proved, that he knew a trick worth two of that. He felt that the Trade Union leaders, at any rate in the munition industries, were safely in his net, and he proposed to land his fish in the easiest way. Already, in the Committees set up soon after his appointment as Minister of Munitions, there were signs that the Trade Unions were to be conceded as little as possible. In Manchester, for instance, the Central Committee consists entirely of business men without any Trade Union representatives. There is also a Labour Advisory Committee, consisting of an equal number of representatives of employers and employed, to deal with specifically Labour questions. It seems likely that the only power that will be possessed by this Committee will be that of facilitating the abrogation of Trade Union safeguards.

Even while he posed as deprecating compulsion, Mr. Lloyd George, in his early speeches as Minister of Munitions, was always hinting darkly at his powers under the Defence of the Realm Acts. These Acts

conferred on the Government practically unlimited power over the employer. Works can be commandeered, and the employer can be ordered to produce whatever the Government needs, and to put in such machinery as it commands. The question of compensation is left to be settled privately; but the Government's policy so far does not lead to the belief that it is likely to behave ungenerously to the propertied interests. Over Labour, the Acts gave the Government wide, but limited, powers. It could order the worker to work as it directed, while he remained in employment; but there was nothing in the Acts to prevent him from throwing up his job, either individually or in concert with others. That is to say, there was nothing in the Acts to justify industrial conscription or to prevent strikes. This was made clear by a question and answer in the House of Commons on March 10.

MR. PONSONBY—One of the results of the Bill would seem to be that in all works to be taken over by the Government the employees would be placed under military law.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE—No, nothing approaching that; there is not a single phrase in the Bill which would justify that suggestion.

During June, the whole position of the worker was changed by the introduction of the Munitions Bill, which represented the Government's attempt to mobilise the nation's industrial resources. Some of its clauses codified and made compulsory the decisions of the Treasury Conferences held in March; but the measure as a whole went much farther, and made far greater inroads on the rights and powers of Trade Unionism. It was, in fact, a highly dangerous measure, and none the less dangerous because Mr. Lloyd George

succeeded in persuading many of the Trade Union leaders to accept it.

The new Minister of Munitions was far too clever to act without consulting the Trade Union leaders in advance. As we saw, a series of conferences was held during June, at which he laid before them his proposals for meeting the emergency. The National Labour Advisory Committee, in consultation with him, drew up proposals, which were incorporated, in the form in which he accepted them, in the Munitions Bill. These proposals were put before a full Conference of Trade Union leaders representing the munition industries,<sup>1</sup> and were carried by a majority, though a minority expressed itself against the provisions making arbitration compulsory. Presumably in order to stifle public discussion, and to prevent opposition from gathering force among the rank and file of the Trade Unions, the results of this Conference were not made public until Mr. Lloyd George introduced his Bill, and the Bill was then rushed through without any adequate discussion in Parliament. It is scandalous that a measure vitally affecting the whole position of Labour should have been hurried through in this fashion at a moment's notice. It is a scandal that the Government should have taken this course; it is still more a scandal that the Trade Union leaders and the Labour Party should have acquiesced in it.

The Bill, when it was made public, proved to be even worse than had been expected; nor did the amendments inserted during its one day in Committee improve it in any important particular. It is necessary to criticise its provisions in some detail, since it has defined anew the whole status of the worker.

<sup>1</sup> But not the miners or the cotton operatives.

First and foremost, it is a measure of compulsory arbitration. On all kinds of munition work (which is very widely defined in the Act) strikes and lock-outs are forbidden, and, failing direct settlement without stoppage between the parties, disputes must be referred to arbitration. Such reference may be either to the Committee on Production, or to a single arbitrator appointed by the Board of Trade, or to a court of arbitration representing the two parties with an "impartial" chairman nominated by the Board of Trade. If the parties fail to agree on a method of reference, this, too, is decided by the Board of Trade.

Moreover, compulsory arbitration does not apply to munition work alone, but also to any difference on "any other work of any description if this part of this Act is applied to such a difference by His Majesty by Proclamation on the ground that in the opinion of His Majesty it is expedient in the national interest that this part of this Act should apply thereto." Thus, by mere proclamation, without any reference to Parliament being necessary, workers in any industry may be subjected to compulsory arbitration.

This position is not really modified by an amendment inserted by Mr. Lloyd George in Committee. We saw that the miners left the first Treasury Conference, and were not represented at subsequent conferences, because they refused to accept compulsory arbitration. While the Munitions Bill was in preparation, they, and also the cotton operatives, held separate conferences with the Government, at which attempts were made to shake their resolution. Nevertheless, thanks largely to the stand made by Mr. Robert Smillie and Mr. Vernon Hartshorn on behalf of the miners, both industries refused to accept the suggestions made. They

argued that they had already elaborate machinery for the settlement of disputes, and that the existing methods would be quite adequate, and far more effective than the suggested compulsion. In the speech in which he introduced the Bill, Mr. Lloyd George said that if the miners refused to come under the Act he would not force them to do so. At a further meeting, he asked them for some sort of guarantees against stoppages during the war.

Whether or no the answer they made was unsatisfactory, the Bill as it stood after amendment, included all industries. All the miners and cotton operatives got was the insertion of the following provision :

If in the case of any industry the Minister of Munitions is satisfied that effective means exist to secure a settlement without a stoppage of any difference arising on work other than munition work, no proclamation shall be made under this section with respect to such difference.

Thus Mr. Lloyd George saved his face, and preserved his right, as a last resort, to impose compulsory arbitration on the miners and cotton operatives ; but he yielded to the extent of allowing that this should be done only as a last resort. The miners did gain something by standing out against his blandishments.<sup>1</sup>

On the clauses dealing with compulsory arbitration Mr. Philip Snowden, who showed himself throughout the one Labour member who was really alive to the sinister nature of the Bill, moved the following very important amendment :

In considering any application for an advance of rates or

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<sup>1</sup> They did not gain much ; for the South Wales miners have now been scheduled under the Act, in consequence of their refusal to accept Mr. Runciman's proposals for the settlement of their dispute (July 16).

wages the arbitration tribunal should take into account any increase in the price of necessaries which may have taken place since the beginning of the war, or since the previous advance of wages or rates was made.

The passing of this amendment would have remedied one of the most serious defects in the Government's Labour policy. Yet Mr. Snowden's amendment was defeated by 79 votes to 11. Even the Labour Party did not vote for it, apart from the I.L.P. group, though Mr. J. R. Clynes and Mr. W. C. Anderson spoke for it. Mr. Lloyd George resisted, and was seconded by Mr. John Hodge. Thus the Government refused to allow the arbitrators that guidance which would have gone far to remove the workers' suspicion of them. Even Liberal papers, like the *Nation* and the *Manchester Guardian*, expressed their deep regret that this amendment was not accepted. The Government preferred to maintain its earlier policy, on which comment has been passed in an earlier chapter.<sup>1</sup>

The second part of the Act deals with the abrogation of Trade Union rules and the limitation of capitalist profits, which go together. In both cases, the Act applies only to a specially created class of "controlled establishments."

Any rule, practice, or custom not having the force of law which tends to restrict production or employment shall be suspended in the establishment, and if any person incites or encourages any employer or person employed to comply, or continues to comply, with such a rule, practice, or custom, that person shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

A special schedule attached to the Act provides that the abrogation of Trade Union rules shall be for

<sup>1</sup> See p. 158.

the period of the war only, that a record of relaxations of rule shall be kept (apparently by the employer) and shall be open to Government inspection, and that the employment of unskilled and semi-skilled labour shall not affect the usual rates of wages in the district for the class of work concerned. Compulsory arbitration extends to disputes on these questions.

Although the Act gives legislative form to the Government's promise to use its influence to secure the restoration of pre-war customs after the war, it does not appear that these provisions meet the objections to the abrogation of Trade Union rules raised in an earlier part of this chapter. The reader is referred back to what was said there.<sup>1</sup>

The relaxations covered by the Act apply only to "controlled establishments," and there is at present no indication of the number and character of the establishments it is intended to control. This does not mean that, where an establishment is not controlled, there are to be no relaxations of Trade Union rules, but that such relaxations will be made under the provisions which existed before the Bill was introduced, always with the threat that, if relaxations are not allowed, the Government will proclaim an establishment to be "controlled."

Limitation of profits under the Act also applies only to controlled establishments, which are establishments specially proclaimed by Order of the Minister of Munitions. In such establishments the "standard profits" are to be ascertained, and war profits are to be limited to "an amount exceeding by one-fifth the standard amount of profits." "The standard amount of profits for any period shall be taken to be the average

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 190 ff.

of the amount of the net profits for the two corresponding periods completed next before the outbreak of war." Presumably in most cases periods means years. If this is so, employers are to be limited to a profit exceeding by one-fifth the profits made during the greatest boom in British engineering.

This limitation is farcical. The workers are being compelled to give up trade customs for which they have been fighting for decades, while the employers are asked to be content with only 20 per cent clear gain over and above what they could make on the top of a trade boom. To say the least of it, Mr. Lloyd George's application of the doctrine of equal sacrifice seems "tinged with a certain bias."

In addition, it is far from certain that even this limitation will be effective. It is no such easy matter to compute net profits, especially as allowance is to be made to the employer for new machinery which he installs to meet the Government's needs. Capitalist book-keeping will almost certainly prove equal to cheating the Exchequer of even the small deductions it proposes to make. There is no effective way of limiting profits without abolishing them. The only reasonable course was for the Government to assume complete control of the munition industries, and to pay a fixed rate of interest on *bona fide* capital to all owners.

Here again, however, the issue is complicated. The Government has expressly said that this special limitation of profits in controlled establishments is independent of any general taxation of war profits that may be imposed later on. It is doubtful whether such a tax can be easily imposed so as not to be evaded. There is no doubt that the Government could take



over the munition industry, and abolish profiteering in it altogether.

An essential part of the Bill is the special provision for the enlistment of voluntary workers. The agreement between the Trade Union leaders and the Government included provision for the raising of a voluntary force of skilled workers, to work at standard rates under special Government control. This enlistment was actually begun before the Munitions Bill was introduced: the Trade Union leaders gave their help; the National Labour Advisory Committee issued a special appeal to skilled workers to enlist; and within a fortnight nearly 100,000 were enrolled.

So far as rates of wages are concerned, this special class of workers is fairly treated. The standard rate of the district is guaranteed, and where a man is moved into a district other than his own, he is guaranteed that his wages shall not be decreased if the district rate is lower. Special subsistence and travelling allowances are to be paid where they are needed. This force of workers is to be absolutely mobile: the worker binds himself for six months to work wherever he is wanted in any controlled establishment. At the end of six months he has the option of re-enlisting.

This, presumably, is Mr. Lloyd George's adaptation of the "Dockers' Battalion" scheme. It is certainly less objectionable, inasmuch as the workers are not subject to military law; it presents, however, the same dangers of blacklegging, and it is actually inferior in that apparently membership of a Trade Union is not required of the enlisted workman.

In general, the object of the scheme is to attract men who are now working on work other than war work. No workman engaged on war contracts is

accepted. There is a good deal of evidence that employers who are making a good thing out of private contracts are offering opposition to the enlistment of their men. There is even a case in which a man was discharged by his employer, presumably as a deterrent to others, for offering his services to the Government. This is possible, because the Government does not at once engage the man, but only takes his name and then pursues enquiries to see if he is suitable and can be spared from his previous employment.

The enlisted worker, as we have seen, binds himself for six months. There is a further very dangerous provision in the Act which applies to all workers on munitions work in controlled establishments :

A person shall not give employment to a workman whose last previous employment has been on or in connection with munitions work in any establishment of a class to which the provisions of this section are applied by order of the Minister of Munitions, unless he holds a certificate from his last employer that he left work with the consent of his employer or a certificate from the munitions tribunal that the consent has been unreasonably withheld, or unless a period of six weeks, or such other period as may be provided by Order of the Minister of Munitions, as respects any class of establishment, has elapsed since he left his last previous employment.

This drastic interference with the liberty of the subject, though it confers on the employer an almost infinite power of bullying his workers, whom he can do out of another job if they rebel, seems to have passed almost unnoticed.

Lastly, I come to the question of penalties and tribunals. An employer who locks out his men contrary to the Act may be fined £5 a day for every man locked out, while a workman may be fined £5 a

day for going on strike contrary to the Act. For failure to comply with any regulation in a controlled establishment a workman may be fined £3, while other offences are punishable by a fine of not more than £50. For all these cases, except that of failure to comply with regulations in a controlled establishment, a special Munitions Court is provided, and all cases under the Act are removed from the ordinary courts.

The enforcement of regulations in controlled establishments is entrusted to special Munitions Tribunals. These are to consist of an "impartial" person appointed by the Minister of Munitions, "sitting with two or some other even number of assessors, one-half being chosen by the Minister of Munitions from a panel constituted by the Minister of Munitions of persons representing employers, and the other half being so chosen from a panel constituted by the Minister of Munitions of persons representing the workmen." These tribunals have power to fine, and in the event of the fine not being paid, to cause the employer to deduct it from wages. Thus the deplorable practice, begun by the Insurance Act, of giving the employer power to deduct from wages on behalf of the State, is carried still farther, and the inferior status of Labour is emphasised once more by Act of Parliament.

Moreover, the whole machinery of discipline under the Act is utterly unsatisfactory. As Mr. Duke, a Conservative lawyer, pointed out in the debate on the second reading, it would have been far better to entrust to the Unions themselves the task of looking after their own members. As it is, they have gained no sort of recognition from the State. The preliminary negotiations once over, the Unions have been thrust on one side. The local Munitions Committees are still left

wholly without defined function, and the men's side of these Committees is given no power on the question of Trade Union rules. Instead, the workers are handed over to an "impartial" person, and even the representatives they are allowed appear merely as assessors before him, and are not elected by the workers, but nominated by the Minister of Munitions.

Such was the inglorious climax reached at the end of June by the movement for the organisation of Labour. The settlement reached with the passage of the Munitions Act is so unsatisfactory, and shows so little appreciation of the real problems to be faced, that it will inevitably break down, if the workers have a spark of life left in them. Probably in a few months' time the whole dreary farce will be played over again. The Government will make a great parade of taking the workers into its confidence; the workers will fail again to use the opportunity when it presents itself. Either that will happen, or, if the world of Labour remains undisturbed, its calm will mean not efficiency but stagnation.

For this lamentable state of affairs the Government is only partly to blame. The Trade Union leaders have miserably failed to rise to occasion after occasion. On both sides there has been a lamentable dearth of imagination. The Government has tried to give the Unions as little as possible, when it ought to have thrust responsibility and power upon them: the Union leaders have shown no sign that they recognise their chance of getting at last a foothold in the control of industry. Only in independent quarters has there been any sign of a saner spirit. The *New Age* and the *Herald* have pressed for full partnership between the State and the Unions, and the same cry has

been taken up by Radical journals like the *Nation* and the *Manchester Guardian*, and even by the Conservatives. The *Daily Telegraph* has pressed for the abolition of profiteering. The *Round Table* has urged the Government to concede rights and responsibilities to the Trade Unions.

In the Unions themselves, the rank and file have been given no opportunity of expressing their point of view. The negotiations have been conducted, or at least controlled, by persons who seem incapable of seeing an inch beyond their own noses, and the malcontents have not had a chance to make themselves heard. Those Labour leaders who have joined the Government appear to have lost no time in adopting the governing-class point of view. Only a few exceptions have appeared: Mr. Smillie and Mr. Hartshorn, on behalf of the miners, have taken up a less subservient position, and Mr. Philip Snowden has redeemed many past mistakes by the line he has taken over the Munitions Act. Needless to say, his attempt to be independent at once induced the new Labour jacks in office to attempt to throw discredit upon him.

Practically, then, the outlook could not well be more gloomy than it is now; but there is hope even in the gloom. Independent minds are everywhere beginning to realise facts which those who are in power refuse to see. The failure of the Government and the Trade Union leaders is teaching those who think that only by granting a responsible share in the control of industry to the Trade Unions, and by forcing it upon them if need be, can the workers be persuaded to give of their best, or production be organised efficiently. It is useless to set up Committees without giving them power: there can be no true organisation of Labour

until the workers cease to be treated merely as an element in the cost of production, and come to be treated as so many human beings, possessed of wills, desires, and sensibilities, who must be humoured rather than commanded, and given responsibility rather than the lash. There seems little chance that those who have the power to carry this policy into effect will have either the sense or the courage to do so. Whatever may happen, it will be seen in the future that this was the only hope of a truly national organisation of industry.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written there has been further trouble in the South Wales coalfield, where the negotiations for a new agreement and a new wage-standard reached a complete deadlock, owing to the refusal of the owners to meet the men. The question was then referred to the Board of Trade; but the miners refused Mr. Runciman's very inadequate offer, and came out on strike. The South Wales area was then proclaimed under the Munitions Act; but the miners stood firm, and not only got most of their demands, but also succeeded in practically smashing the Act on the first occasion on which it was used. No penalties were exacted under it, and no attempt was made to apply it to any individual.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WOMEN AND THE WAR

It is very difficult, but at the same time very necessary, for Labour to define its attitude towards the problems of women's employment that have arisen out of the war. For the most part these problems are not new, and, to a limited extent, Labour has had to deal with them in time of peace; but the effect of the war has been greatly to increase their magnitude, and to make the call for their solution infinitely more urgent. In every direction the coming of war has had the effect of speeding up the process of industrial change; it has caused tendencies to become far more marked, and has turned into actualities what seemed only distant possibilities. This is the case more especially with regard to women's labour.

For some time, theoretical discussions of the position of women in industry have been claiming more and more attention. The feminist movement—far wider than the suffrage movement and for the most part seeing in the vote only a symbol of emancipation—has its industrial no less than its political side. Its claim is essentially for the removal of barriers—for the right of free entry into any and every sphere of activity, irrespective of the difference of sex. "Let

woman be given the right of entry," demands the feminist, "and then let her be judged on the same terms as man, by her fitness. If she holds her own, her entry is justified: if not, out she goes again, and no harm has been done."

In pursuance of this policy of "free entry," the feminists have seized the opportunity which the war has afforded them of claiming the right to trades and professions which have hitherto been open only to men. Moreover, many of them have declared unequivocally that, having achieved an entry, they do not intend to be again ousted when the war ends. Many of them are set on the permanent conquest for woman of new industrial territory.

It is clear that this opens up difficult problems for the male wage-earner, who may well find his job taken, or his standard of life threatened, by the competition of female labour. He is apt to regard woman much as the Australian regards Chinamen, or as the American regards East European immigrants, as interlopers, whose different standard of life renders them not only dangerous, but also unfair, competitors in the labour market. And the history of woman in industry gives some warrant for this attitude.

Last, but not least, there is the point of view of the community as a whole, which, taking into account the points of view of both men and women, has to consider what solution of the problem will conduce to the greatest good of the mass of the people. In order to do this, it has to consider the effect of industrial life on the health and character of the sexes, and the immediate social effect likely to be produced by radical changes in the class of labour employed in industry.

These three points of view all deserve to be heard



and taken into account. There are, of course, other points of view which, although the same claim cannot be made for them, are likely to play an important part in settling the problem. Chief among these is the point of view of the employer, who is seeking always to reduce the cost of production, and therefore to buy his labour in the cheapest market—the cheapest, that is, when the efficiency of the labour he buys is taken into account. How far, we need to know, are the employers likely to contend for the retention of women in industry after the war?

All these questions can only be answered in the most provisional way, and cannot be answered at all until we have made a short survey of the facts. Before we can know how the position of women in industry is going to be affected by the war in the long run, we must know roughly how it has been affected so far. This it is not easy to discover with any accuracy, and I fear the facts given in this chapter are hardly less sketchy and incomplete than the conclusions I shall attempt to draw.

As we have seen, the unemployment of the early months of the war fell with far greater severity upon women than upon men. The net contraction in the total number of women employed in industry amounted to roughly 190,000 in September, 139,000 in October, 75,000 in December, and 35,000 in February. Moreover, during the five weeks ending on April 16, 1915, 89,577 women and 20,815 girls registered at the Labour Exchanges, while only 37,607 vacancies for women and 12,215 for girls were notified by employers. Though women's employment has been growing continually less bad, there is still a considerable number of women workers unemployed.

The steps taken to meet this unemployment in the early days of the war deserve study. Early in August there was set on foot an organisation called Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, which was to provide comforts for the troops by voluntary labour. Attention was at once called to the fact that, unless great care was taken, this scheme would only make worse the severe unemployment already prevailing among women. As a result of these protests the following official statement appeared in the papers on August 17 :

The details of the plan which the Queen has had under contemplation for some days to collect money to finance schemes of work for women unemployed on account of the war will be announced in a day or two.

It is the wish of Her Majesty that these schemes should be devised in consultation with industrial experts and representatives of working-class women.

There has been evident misunderstanding concerning the aims of the Queen's Needlework Guild, some people feeling alarmed at the possibility that the enlistment of the voluntary aid of women workers would tend to restrict the employment of other women in dire need of paid work. Voluntary aid was meant to supplement and not to supplant paid labour, and one of the Queen's very first cares when the Guild appeal was decided upon was to avoid the infliction of any hardship.

The matter has been under earnest consideration ever since, and the announcement that representatives of working women will be called into consultation provides a guarantee that everything possible will be done to safeguard the interests of women workers.

In accordance with this scheme the Queen's Work for Women Fund was started, nominally as a part of the National Relief Fund, and nominally under the control of the National Relief Fund Committee. The money was, however, set aside for the special purpose

of providing work for women, and the control was left almost entirely in the hands of the Central Committee for Women's Employment, which was appointed on August 20. This Committee, of which Lady Crewe is Chairman and Miss Mary Macarthur Honorary Secretary, consists of fourteen members, including five representatives of working women, approved by the War Emergency : Workers' National Committee.

The Committee at once got to work. In the words of their own Report, they "realised that it is better that workers should be self-maintaining than dependent upon relief, even when that relief is given in the form of work. . . ." The Committee, in these circumstances, considered it to be their duty to use such opportunities as were given to them to increase the number of firms and workers participating in the supply of Government requirements, and for this purpose they created a special Contracts Department, under the direction of Mr. J. J. Mallon.

This body did very useful work in inducing the War Office to extend its contracts to firms usually engaged on other kinds of work, as well as in persuading firms to adapt themselves to the changed conditions. Very soon it became necessary to extend this side of the work, and the Committee itself began to tender for contracts. It was found that many dressmaking and needlework firms, themselves too small to secure War Office contracts, could be helped if the Committee itself took up a large contract, and then distributed the work among them. The following is the list of the chief contracts which the Committee has taken up :

(a) 20,000 cut out Army grey shirts to be made up.

(b) As from October, when the above-mentioned contract expired, 10,000 similar shirts per week. The Com-

mittee in this case became responsible for the cutting as well as the making of the shirts.

(c) 105,000 flannel body belts for the French and British Armies.

(d) 2,000,000 pairs of Army grey socks.

With regard to these contracts the Committee makes the following statements :

(1) The work is only undertaken where the ordinary trade is fully employed.

(2) The work is undertaken at trade prices and is self-maintaining. Advances made from the National Relief Fund in connection with certain contracts are merely working capital which at the completion of the contract will be returned in full.

(3) The conditions as to the remuneration of workers have been (since October last) those usual in women's trades, that is to say, payment is mainly by piece, and the limits as to weekly earnings which apply in the Relief Workrooms are not observed.

In the case of the order for shirts, a time rate of wages was at first paid, but when the workers had gained experience, the piece rates ordinary in the trade were substituted. The workers quickly learnt their jobs, and, whereas at first 59 workers produced less than 800 shirts a week, in January 44 workers were already producing 1400, and the average wage of these 44 exceeded £1. At the start the wages paid had only slightly exceeded those in the relief workrooms.

The Committee also did something towards the promotion of new trades ; but it would seem that it did still more in discouraging mushroom outgrowths of the campaign for capturing German sweated industries.

On a larger scale, and more in the public eye, has been the Committee's relief work. This has been of

two chief types: some relief workrooms have been organised directly by the Central Committee, while others have been under Local Relief Committees. In both types of workroom the first necessity was to avoid competition with ordinary trade. This was realised from the beginning by the Central Committee, but not, according to the Committee's own report, by local relief committees. The Central Committee has therefore had to insist, as a condition of making grants, that the goods made shall neither be offered for sale, nor distributed gratis to persons possessing purchasing power. "Difficulty has been experienced in enforcing this principle, chiefly owing to the desire of the local committees to make articles for the troops."<sup>1</sup>

Insistence has in all cases been laid on the principle that the work provided in the workrooms should be educational in character, though it is of course not so to the same extent as in the special training centres that have been set up especially in London. It seems doubtful whether this principle has really been carried out effectually in many of the workrooms.

One of the most vexed questions with which the Committee had to deal was that of the wages to be paid in the workrooms. A scale was fixed in August, in accordance with which there was to be a minimum scale of 3d. an hour, and the maximum number of hours worked was to be 40 per week. A maximum wage per week of 10s. was also fixed; but, in view of the rise in prices, this was raised to 11s. 6d. and the maximum number of hours to 46 late in March.

These rates were in some quarters roundly denounced as sweating, and certain members of the

<sup>1</sup> The goods made have as a rule been distributed to necessitous persons, under the direction of the Relief Committees.

Committee seem to have put up a strong fight against them. In defence of its action, the Committee points to the women's rates fixed by the various Trade Boards, which, they say, "may be taken roughly as an indication of the lines below which, in the public interest, wages under any circumstances should not be allowed to drop." They further point out that "the lowest minimum so far determined by a Trade Board for a trade of any magnitude has been 3d."

Certainly, the Committee seems to have fixed the lowest wage that it could have done, because "it was felt undesirable to fix wages either so high as to attract from ordinary employment, or else so low as to fall below the barest subsistence level." Perhaps the fault lies less with the Committee than with the Government and the Trade Boards themselves, which have done nothing to raise their minima in view of the increased cost of living.<sup>1</sup> Whoever may have been at fault it is clear that both the rates paid and the maximum were scandalously low, and Dr. Marion Phillips and Miss Bondfield were fully justified in their campaign demanding a rise of a halfpenny an hour. They did not, as we saw, apply to the work done by the Committee or its sub-contractors for the Government on commercial terms.

In all cases the Factory Acts have been observed,

<sup>1</sup> "In the House of Commons yesterday Mr. W. C. Anderson (Labour Member for Attercliffe) asked the President of the Board of Trade whether any steps had been taken to bring before the various Trade Boards (which fixed legal minima rates of wages at from 2½d. to 6d. per hour at a time when the cost of living was at least 20 per cent lower than at present) the question of revising these rates, affecting virtually 250,000 wage-earners.

"Mr. Runciman said it was for the workers' representatives on the Trade Boards to raise the question of an increase if they considered it to be warranted."—*Daily Citizen*, February 24, 1915.

and the workrooms inspected by the Factory Inspectors. Measures have been taken to ensure the speediest possible return of the workers to ordinary industry, and registration at the Labour Exchanges has been insisted upon. "Local committees have, however, been advised that no workers should be prejudiced by refusal to accept work of an unsuitable character or at an inadequate rate of wages."

The schemes run by local Relief Committees are, in the main, on the same lines as those directly under the Central Committee. In every case it was insisted that the scheme should be controlled by a special Women's Employment Sub-Committee, on which local women's labour organisations were adequately represented. The control of the scheme was then left to this sub-committee, which had to make frequent and full reports to the Central Committee, as a condition of the renewal of grants. Central control was thus secured.

On the whole, it seems that the result of these schemes has been beneficial. The women have been found to adapt themselves readily to new tasks, and a great deal of training has been given—especially at the Training Centres—in the various domestic arts. The whole report issued by the Central Committee is well worthy of study, and contains many interesting features into which it is impossible for me to enter. Up to January 23 it appears that about 9000 workers had passed through the workrooms, 4908 being still employed in them at that date. Since then many of the rooms have been closed, sometimes too precipitately, as trade has improved.

This short survey of relief measures accomplished, I come to questions which, instead of receding into

the limbo of history, are becoming more and more acute as the war proceeds. Hitherto, we have been dealing with the relief of women thrown out of work by the war : we have now to deal with the incursion of women into new branches of industry as a result of the war.

Probably many people have still very little idea of the extent to which this has already happened. In fact, the total number of women who have found their way into new trades is now very large, and shows every sign of increasing.

All through the early months of the war this process was going on naturally. Women were moving freely from industries that were depressed to those that were busy, and, in the busy trades, many married women and others who had ceased to be employed were returning to their old occupations. In some cases, indeed, transference was found to be impossible : of the cotton weavers who went to Yorkshire in search of work in the woollen mills, the great majority soon returned. Housing was too bad, and wages and conditions of employment too unsatisfactory, to retain these workers except in one or two centres. In other cases, where the skill of the women was highly specialised, it was found unprofitable to turn them on to other trades. But, despite these exceptions, on the whole women passed very freely from one trade to another.

Nevertheless, there remained in March a considerable surplus of unemployed women. At this moment the Government, acting under various influences, launched a scheme of national registration, and invited all women who were " prepared, if needed, to accept paid work of any kind—industrial, agricultural,



clerical, etc.—to enter themselves upon the Register of Women for War Service ” at the Labour Exchanges. “ The object,” it was said, “ is to find out what reserve force of women’s labour, trained or untrained, can be made available if required.” Within a fortnight 33,000 women enrolled their names upon this register.<sup>1</sup>

The Government’s action did not pass entirely without protest. The following resolution was at once passed by the Workers’ National Committee :

That this Workers’ National Committee has had under serious consideration the circular “ War Service for Women ” issued by the Board of Trade. The Committee points out that there are still 60,000 men and boys and 40,000 women and girls on the live register of the Labour Exchanges for whom the Board of Trade has so far failed to find situations or provide training, whilst many thousands more are working short time. It further points out that the object of the circular appears to be specially directed to obtain women’s labour in agriculture, and that absolutely no safeguards are proposed to guarantee good conditions and fair wages. The Committee is strongly of opinion that in drafting women into any industries care must be taken to prevent the stereotyping of bad conditions and low wages or to endanger standard conditions where they obtain ; that this should be secured by a tribunal representative of the organised wage-earners—men and women ; and that further efforts should be made to find situations for those persons now on the register before taking steps to bring in fresh supplies of female labour.

This resolution was largely prompted by the belief that the Farmers’ Union was behind the War Service scheme, and was trying to get cheap labour instead of raising the wages of men on the land.

<sup>1</sup> In all about 87,000 women registered. At the end of June, employment had only been found for 2000 of them, though some others, who were also registered at the Labour Exchanges, had found jobs for themselves.

Even more significant is the manifesto issued by the Women's Freedom League in reply to the Government scheme.

The Women's Freedom League are glad to note the tardy recognition by the Government of the value of women's work brought before the country in their scheme of war service for women. We demand from the Government, however, certain guarantees.

Firstly, that no trained woman employed in men's work be given less pay than that given to men.

Secondly, that some consideration be given when the war is over to the women who during the war have carried on this necessary work.

Thirdly, that in case of training being required proper maintenance be given to the woman or girl while that training is going on.

Recognising that the Government's scheme offers a splendid opportunity for raising the status of women in industry, we urge that every woman should now resolutely refuse to undertake any branch of work except for equal wages with men. By accepting less than this women would be showing themselves disloyal to one another, and to the men who are serving their country in the field. These men should certainly be safeguarded on their return from any undercutting by women.

Finally, seeing that the Government are now making a direct appeal to women to come forward and help in the defence of their country, and that fresh responsibilities are being thrust upon them—thousands through the loss of their husband being left to perform the duties of both father and mother—we feel that this is an opportune moment for the Government to guarantee that before they leave office they will bring before the House of Commons a measure for the political enfranchisement of women.

We urge all suffragists to support us in this demand  
*now.*

At almost the same time the Treasury Conference

between the Government and the Unions arrived at the first agreement limiting Trade Union rules, and admitting women to trades from which they had previously been excluded. In that agreement the following provision occurred :

The relaxation of existing demarcation restrictions or admission of semi-skilled or female labour shall not affect adversely the rates customarily paid for the job.

This, of course, applied only in the case of Government work under the agreement. Miss Sylvia Pankhurst wrote to ask for further light on the subject, and received from Mr. Lloyd George this reply :

*March 26, 1915.*

DEAR MISS PANKHURST—The words which you quote would guarantee that women undertaking the work of men would get the same piece-rates as men were receiving before the date of this agreement. That, of course, means that if the women turn out the same quantity of work as men employed on the same job, they will receive exactly the same pay.—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) D. LLOYD GEORGE.

This answer was so obviously inadequate that Miss Pankhurst at once wrote again. On the point raised in this second letter the Government seems so far to have given no guarantee : <sup>1</sup>

DEAR MR. LLOYD GEORGE—Many thanks for your letter with its valuable explanation that women are to receive the “ same piece-work rates as men were receiving before the date of this agreement.” I conclude that the women will also receive any war bonus and increase of

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover, early in June the *Daily Telegraph* printed what purported to be a private Treasury circular laying down for women clerks and typists, taken on by the Government to fill vacancies caused by enlistment, rates of wages far below those paid to male workers.

wages as a result of the war, which would have been paid had men been employed. It is important to know also, whether the same time rates are to apply in the case of women as those which were paid to men; because if this were not the case, employers might merely engage women to work on time rates to avoid paying the standard rate to men.

I hope that you will be able to give me a definite answer on this point, as you will understand how anxious women are in regard to the matter.

This correspondence, and the manifesto of the Women's Freedom League, bring us to the heart of the question. How is the introduction of women's labour likely to affect standard rates? And how far are the women who come in under the National Register, or any other scheme, likely to act, willingly or unwillingly, the part of blacklegs?

We can best estimate the chances by running through in turn the chief industries in which women's labour has been, or is likely to be, largely introduced as a result of the war. I omit agriculture, of which I shall have to speak separately in the next chapter.

It will be well to begin with the most obvious case—that of clerical labour. Typing, has, of course, been a women's trade for some time, and the number of women clerks has been growing steadily. The effect of the war has been very greatly to speed up this process, and especially to increase the small number of women clerks in commercial houses. On the railways, the problem of women clerks was already rousing opposition in the Railway Clerks' Association long before the war, the men complaining that the women could only take day work, and that thereby their own spells of night duty were made more frequent. Here, too, the effect of the war has been to speed up a process

that had already begun. Women booking-clerks are still rare ; but women are becoming common in the head offices of the Companies. The number of women insurance clerks has also increased.

But in one of the most important branches of clerical work, the Civil Service, there has been as yet hardly any change. The Civil Service Commission recommended greater employment of women ; but, despite protests, no steps have been taken to put this into effect. In the postal service alone, which already employed a very large number of women before the war, women's labour has extended into new grades.

Lastly, women have at last got a foothold in the banks, though not yet to any great extent. In this case, the change seems likely to be permanent : it is being accompanied by a process of regrading, which separates off some of the simple and mechanical work and entrusts this to women paid at a lower rate than the old bank clerk, whose duties thus become more specialised. We shall meet this problem of regrading more than once again in our survey of the various industries.

One of the biggest openings for women has been found in the shops. Many of the big provision houses have taken on women assistants for the first time, and the great stores, such as Whiteley's and Harrod's, have increased the proportion of women to men. Women have been in many cases engaged as doorkeepers and lift-attendants. Here, again, the development seems likely to be to a great extent permanent, largely because it is doubtful whether the men will desire to return to their old jobs, but also because women's labour is cheaper. In this connection, it should be noticed that the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants,

Warehousemen, and Clerks, which includes over 20,000 women among its 90,000 members, refused at its Annual Conference this year (1915) to demand equal pay for men and women. In practice, it is, I believe, raising no objection to the employment of women where they are paid four-fifths of the men's salary. The justification given for the difference is that duties are often to some extent rearranged so that the heavier work falls on the men ; but it does not appear that the men have been given increases to compensate them for this.

Waitresses, too, are being taken on in many hotels and restaurants in which men used to be employed. The permanency of this development probably depends largely on the extent to which foreign waiters return at the end of the war. The Waiters' Union, far from raising objection to the employment of women, is actually training them specially for the work.

So far we have been dealing with occupations which are only in the wider sense of the word industrial. These occupations probably still account for a very large proportion of the women who have taken employment for the first time.

In industry proper, by far the most important problems are those connected with engineering and the metal trades. In engineering proper practically no women were employed at the beginning of the war. Right at the start, attempts were made to introduce them as minders of the simpler machines ; but for the most part these attempts were successfully resisted by the workers. Already, however, before the Treasury Agreement, a certain number of women had found their way in, and since then the numbers have increased. Even now, women are mainly confined to

subsidiary branches of engineering, such as the manufacture of shells, in which they are largely employed as fillers. The chief change is that they have found their way into the engineering workshops, and are now working together with the male operatives, even if they are engaged in different processes. This has already given rise to the proposal that women should be admitted to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers : this suggestion, which is under discussion as I write, is almost certain to be rejected.

It is important to remember how large a proportion of the women employed in engineering works are engaged in trades that minister directly to the war, and will be at any rate greatly reduced when it ends. This fact seems likely to make it more difficult for the women to hold permanently the ground they have gained in the present emergency. At the same time, many women, having been trained to use the simpler machines for one process; might easily pass on to another, and therefore difficulties between them and the men seem almost certain to arise. In engineering the incursion of women is greatest in the Manchester and Newcastle districts, and has had less effect in Sheffield.

In the smaller metal trades women have made much greater headway, especially in the Birmingham district. Here women have long been employed to a considerable extent ; but the war has very greatly increased their number. Many women have passed from the depressed jewellery trade to trades ministering to the needs of the army and navy.

In the woollen industry the effect of the war has been not so much to open new trades to women as to call back to work married women and others who had

ceased to be employed. It is improbable that the majority of these, except in so far as they are or become widows, will desire to remain after the war.

In the cotton industry, which has been depressed, there has been as yet little change ; but the agitation for the reintroduction of women into the spinning processes is being renewed. Lancashire has for some time suffered from a shortage of piecers—a shortage which is natural in view of the lowness of piecers' wages and of the difficulty of becoming a spinner. The war has caused a larger proportion of piecers than of spinners to enlist, and has thus made the shortage worse. The Spinners' Amalgamation, however, will certainly resist any attempt to reintroduce women, who are now only employed as piecers in a few mills, mostly near Manchester.

In the clothing industry the war has again recalled retired workers, and many women have passed from depressed trades to clothing work. It seems probable that the necessary return of many of these women to their old occupations will be difficult, as they may well have lost some of their old skill.

It is impossible to mention in detail all the smaller industries in which women's labour has been affected by the war. I pass therefore to the last great group—the transport industries.

On the railways, though the number of women employed is still small, the change is highly significant, and is certain to have very great consequences. I have already spoken of the railway clerical service ; but the introduction of women is by no means confined to this type of work. Several big companies have taken on women as carriage-cleaners, and here it seems certain that their cheapness will make them a permanency.



More important still is the coming of women ticket-collectors on some of the great lines. Here, too, the work is easily performed by women, and it seems probable that the number will be greatly increased. Yet a further development is seen in the new Maida Vale Underground station, which is staffed entirely by women, all of whom are apparently being paid lower wages than men receive for the same work. It is necessary to point out that the conditions on the Underground, which is without goods traffic and where there is practically no portorage, are entirely different from those on other lines. The development is therefore not so startling as it sounds; but it is startling enough to hear the demand put forward that the whole Underground service should be staffed by women, including engine-driving. It is pointed out that there are plenty of women motor-drivers, and that Underground motormen need no very special skill. Though no such far-reaching changes are probable yet awhile, the Companies have now definitely announced their intention to employ women permanently in many grades.

The policy of the National Union of Railwaymen was defined in June by the officials at a demonstration preceding the Annual Meeting of the Union. The officials appreciated the fact that in some grades women's labour had come to stop, and declared that the Union would insist on the same rates being paid to women as to men. The Annual Meeting has since admitted women to the Union; but, in fact, where women have been taken on, it seems that they are everywhere being paid lower rates than men, even when they are working in the grades for which the Conciliation Boards have fixed rates of

wages, and although these rates are not explicitly confined to men.

Perhaps the problem of which most has been heard during the war is that of women tram-conductors. The proposal to employ women as conductors was first mooted by the Edinburgh Tramway Company in February; but on this occasion the male workers successfully resisted the innovation. Subsequently the proposal was made in many centres, including Glasgow, London, Liverpool, Newcastle, Salford, and Brighton. In Glasgow 400 women have been taken on, and smaller numbers are at work at Salford and Brighton. At the latter centre the women are being paid only 4½d. an hour.

An important point is the attitude of the two Unions catering for tramway workers. Mr. A. Smith, President of the London and Provincial Licensed Vehicle Workers' Union, has spoken strongly against the employment of women in London. "No more uncongenial work," he said, "or work for which she is more unfitted, could be given to a woman." The London tramwaymen are themselves strongly against the proposal, and at a large meeting demanded permission to withdraw their labour if the suggestion was pressed. In London, however, there seems no likelihood of its adoption.

The other Union, the Amalgamated Association of Tramway and Vehicle Workers, has also clearly defined its position, and in doing so has rejected the advice of its Executive. When the proposal was first mooted for Lancashire, Alderman Jackson, the General Secretary of the Union, was asked his opinion.

"I don't see," he said, "how we, as a union, can raise any logical objection to women earning their living as

tram-conductors during the period of the war. But there must be two safeguards. We will insist that women employed as tram-guards shall receive precisely the same pay as men. In the second place, we make a condition that after the war the women must be removed in favour of the men whose places they have taken. These conditions being observed, I don't see any objection to women working in that capacity if they think they can do the work.

"If such a thing came about, the Union would certainly accept the women as members."

Subsequently the question came up for discussion at the Annual Conference of the Union. The Executive proposed that women's labour should not be opposed, but that safeguards on the lines suggested by Alderman Jackson should be exacted. The Conference, however, passed a resolution emphatically protesting against the employment of women on any terms.

The foregoing is a brief survey of the facts and tendencies of women's employment as it has been affected by the war. There are, doubtless, many important omissions which an exacter knowledge would supply. But, inadequate and scattered as they are, these facts form a basis for a certain amount of generalisation.

Between the Census of 1901 and that of 1911 the proportion of women to men in all forms of employment hardly changed. There was a slight increase in the proportion of women in the professions, and perhaps a very slight decrease in industry proper. The only change that was at all marked was in age, the proportion of young women to older women having become very much higher. This makes it clear that a greater number of unmarried women were entering industry, but that the average duration of industrial employment was shorter, and that married women

were remaining in industry less than formerly. Hence, to some extent, the very large reserve of retired women workers that was found to be available in certain cases, especially in the woollen industry.

The fact that married women, apart from the professions, show a decreasing desire to remain in employment makes the industrial problem caused by women's labour in one respect simpler and in another more difficult. It means, on the one hand, that, if trade is normal, a large proportion of the women who take up work in the present emergency will not desire to remain in industry, and therefore will not compete with male labour after the war. On the other hand, it means that women's labour will be difficult to organise. It is a well-known fact that one of the things that make it difficult to build up a strong Trade Union movement among women is that so often women do not expect to be all their life wage-earners, and therefore take a more perfunctory interest than men in the conditions under which they are employed. The shortness of the working life will clearly intensify this evil, which makes especially hard the organisation of women's emergency labour.

Nevertheless, the path of organisation must clearly be pursued. Even if a large proportion of the women who are now finding employment do not remain in industry, enough will assuredly remain seriously to menace existing conditions and standard rates, unless great efforts are made to organise them. The suggestion was made in the *Federationist* that women employed as war workers should be given a war Trade Union ticket. In default of some such scheme the women should join the Union appropriate to their trade on the ordinary terms, and, where necessary,

the ranks of the Unions should be opened to them on the same terms as they are now open to men. It is highly undesirable, in view of the possibility of future trouble, that women should be organised in separate Unions of their own. Where this is perforce the case, there ought at least to be the closest possible co-operation with the men's Unions.

This point of view was put forward very clearly at a National Conference of Trade Unions with women members and other women's Labour bodies, which was called together on April 17 by the Workers' National Committee. Miss Macarthur, who presided, criticised very strongly the Government's National Register of Women, and also those women's organisations which had accepted it without demanding safeguards. In view of the continued unemployment of many working women, she regarded the Register as unnecessary and dangerous. The chief resolution, which was proposed by Miss Margaret Bondfield, was as follows :

That this Conference, representing the women's trade union, Labour, Socialist, Co-operative, suffrage, and kindred organisations, declares that as it is imperative in the interests of the highest patriotism that no emergency action should be allowed unnecessarily to depress the standard of living of the workers or the standard of working conditions, adequate safeguards must be laid down for any necessary transference or substitution of labour, and it therefore urges :

(a) That all women who register for war service should immediately join the appropriate trade union for which they are volunteering service ; and that membership of such organisation should be the condition of employment for war service ;

(b) That where a woman is doing the same work as

a man she should receive the same rate of pay, and that the principle of equal pay for equal work should be rigidly maintained ;

(c) That in no case should any woman be drafted from the war register to employment at less than an adequate living wage, and that the stereotyping of sweated conditions must at all costs be avoided ;

(d) That adequate training with maintenance should be provided for suitable women whom it is proposed to place in employment under the foregoing conditions, and that in choosing candidates for such training preference should be given, where suitability is equal, to the normal woman wage-earner now unemployed ;

(e) That in any readjustment of staffs which may have to be effected after the war priority of employment shall be given to workmen whose places have been filled by women.

(f) That the women who are displaced in this way shall be guaranteed employment.

This very fair-minded resolution represents the considered view of the women's Labour movement. It demands equal pay for equal work (a demand which needs to be supplemented by Miss Sylvia Pankhurst's demand for equal time-rates as well as equal piece-rates) ; it claims that all women taken on during the war should join the appropriate Trade Union ; and it frankly recognises that, where women take men's places during the war, the men have a full right to reinstatement when they return.

No number of resolutions, however, will make the problem simple. Advocates of equal pay for equal work are at once met by the fact that, as often as not, the taking-on of women involves a redistribution of duties, so that after the change neither the man nor the woman is doing exactly the work the man was doing before. The problem in these cases is essentially

the same as that of adjusting standard rates to changed methods of production in ordinary times, and the difficulties to which such adjustment has again and again given rise do not lead to confidence that the present problem will be easily solved. The acceptance of four-fifths of the male rate of wages as a satisfactory standard by the Shop Assistants' Union is a rough and ready attempt to deal with the difficulty. Clearly the solution will be infinitely more difficult to find if men and women are not in the same Unions.

A second reflection which will inevitably occur to the male wage-earner is that even if, for the period of the war, women workers secure approximately equal rates of payment—a very big “if”—this gives no guarantee that equal rates will be maintained after the war. As women find themselves displaced by the men who return, will they not begin to compete in the labour market by accepting lower wages? If they do, no reasonable person doubts that the employers will buy Labour in the cheapest market. How far such undercutting takes place will clearly depend in the main on the extent to which the Trade Unions succeed in organising women's labour during the war. This, again, will depend mainly on how hard they try to organise it. To this question I shall have to return in my final chapter.

I cannot, however, end the present chapter without a few more general remarks. The question whether it is desirable that women should be employed in industry at all is, to say the least of it, somewhat academic. They are firmly established in industry, and are almost as much bound to it by the bondage of wage-slavery as the male wage-earner. Women's place in industry will in the long run be decided mainly

by women themselves ; if they desire to remain in industry no one can say them nay ; if they desire to leave industry they will do so as soon as an alternative method of economic independence is offered them. Till then they cannot leave, even if they would.

This necessity does not make them any the less dangerous competitors. Though the proportion is probably growing less, a very large number of employed women are only partially dependent on the wages they receive, and the numbers in this position are augmented at the moment by separation allowances, and will be permanently augmented by widows in receipt of inadequate pensions from the Government. How far, it is often asked, does this make them more dangerous to the maintenance of standard rates ?

The question hardly admits of a simple answer. The girl who lives at home and only desires to earn her pocket-money is undoubtedly often willing to accept scandalously low rates, and so drags down the whole standard of remuneration in certain trades and districts ; but it is at least arguable that the woman who possesses a small income of her own has a keener sense of her rights than others, and is more inclined to stand out for reasonable wages. The pensioners, of whose competition some Labour leaders are so fearful, surely belong in the main to the latter class.

Ultimately, the position of women in industry will depend on their fitness for industrial life. This, however, is not the governing principle in the opening of new trades to women during the present emergency. Much work is being done by women to-day for which they are eminently unfitted, and probably more of such work will be done by them in the near future. The problem is very real, and the menace to Trade



Union standards and conditions very real also. Probably there is no adequate solution ; but clearly the danger can be reduced to the most manageable dimensions by getting the women into the Trade Union movement. If this is not done while the war lasts, men and women alike will suffer for it on the declaration of peace.

## CHAPTER IX

### CHILD LABOUR—THE FACTORY ACTS

MEN and women are, at least in great measure, responsible for looking after their own industrial life, and industrial action and organisation afford the remedy for most of the evils which beset their working lives. Even where the State intervenes in industry, we have given reason for holding that it should, wherever it can, work through the appropriate industrial organisations. The child, however, stands in quite a different position from the adult, and it is clearly for the State to lay down the terms upon which he or she shall be allowed to enter the labour market. For here the question is primarily not industrial, but educational.

Our national system of education was bad enough before the war began ; but advantage has been taken of the war to make it worse. The existence of half time has long thwarted the endeavours of those who believe in education, and exemptions from school attendance were, before the war, given on ridiculously easy terms. Yet the opportunity has been used to secure yet further relaxations and exemptions, so that an even greater number of children than before has been sent into the labour market before the ridiculously

early school-leaving age to which we still cling. It is important that the motives behind this policy, and the dangers attending it, should be widely realised.

Before the war, there were already a quarter of a million children of school age exempted for employment in various occupations. About 34,000 children between twelve and thirteen years of age were employed as half-timers under the Factory Acts. About 60,000, aged thirteen, were in full-time employment. About 9000 children under thirteen years old were employed in agricultural districts; while about 170,000 of school age were in other forms of full-time employment. In addition to this quarter of a million, another 300,000, while in full-time attendance at school, were employed out of school hours.

The total number of children specially exempted from school attendance during the war seems, in comparison with these figures, quite small: up to the end of January it amounted to only 1591. Between February and April there were 3811 further exemptions for agricultural employment alone. Nevertheless the new departures are of great importance, since unless care is taken, they may well be used as precedents after the war.

Industrial employment in the narrower sense accounts for but few exemptions. The great majority have been made in order to allow of the increased employment of children in agriculture. Thus, while 9000 children under thirteen were employed in agricultural districts before the war, 3811 were specially released for rural work between February and April 1915. The full figures, showing the special exemptions granted both in industry and in agriculture during those five months, are set out in the following tables

# 256 CHILD LABOUR—THE FACTORY ACTS

taken from the Board of Education White Papers on *School Attendance and Employment.*

RETURNS OF CHILDREN EXCUSED FROM SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, SEPTEMBER 1, 1914, TO JANUARY 31, 1915, owing to circumstances connected with the war :

## COUNTY AREAS.

	Number of Children normally liable to attend School who have been allowed to leave School and enter Employment.		Number of Children who have entered Agricultural Employment.		Number of Children who have entered Factory or Workshop Employment.		Number of Children who have entered other Employments.	
	Boys.	Girls.	Boys.	Girls.	Boys.	Girls.	Boys.	Girls.
Between 11 and 12 years of age .	54	..	54	..	..	..	..	..
Between 12 and 13 years of age .	920	1	884	1	4	..	32	..
Between 13 and 14 years of age .	563	52	449	24	26	1	88	27
Total . .	1538	53	1388 <sup>1</sup>	25	30	1	120	27

## URBAN AREAS.

	Number of Children normally liable to attend School who have been allowed to leave School and enter Employment.		Number of Children who have entered Agricultural Employment.		Number of Children who have entered Factory or Workshop Employment.		Number of Children who have entered other Employments.	
	Boys.	Girls.	Boys.	Girls.	Boys.	Girls.	Boys.	Girls.
Between 11 and 12 years of age .	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Between 12 and 13 years of age .	9	4	1	..	..	..	8	4
Between 13 and 14 years of age .	531	224	5	..	91	13	172	148
Total . . .	540 <sup>2</sup>	228 <sup>2</sup>	6	..	91	13	180	152

<sup>1</sup> The discrepancy of one is accounted for by Berkshire, who furnished no particulars as to the age of one child exempted.

<sup>2</sup> The discrepancy is accounted for by the fact that Cardiff furnished no information as to the nature of the employment of 263 boys and 59 girls, while Middlesbrough furnished no information as to the nature of the employment of 4 girls.

Thus, in all, over 2000 boys and nearly 300 girls of school age had been specially exempted from school attendance by the end of January—that is to say, before the second agitation for wholesale exemption set in. The great majority of the boys entered agricultural employment. By the end of April, as we have seen, the number had reached over 5000 for agriculture alone.

It is not at first sight apparent why farmers should have secured this preferential treatment. Scarcity of labour, we are told, prevails in industry as well as in agriculture. The answer seems to be, in fact, not that the farmers' need is great, but that they got in first.

The demand that children should be released from school for farm work at an even earlier age than the regulations permit is not new. The farmers, as a class, have never believed in education, and have always sought to secure a plentiful supply of boy labour. This is partly because boy labour is cheap, but also because, if boys are put on the land early, they are less likely to get "fantastical notions" into their heads, and so to become discontented with the disgraceful conditions of rural labour, and emigrate or migrate to the towns.

With the coming of the war, the farmers saw their opportunity, and lost no time in availing themselves of it. Applications were at once made, on the plea of scarcity of labour, for the granting of exemptions to boys. These applications were made to the local Education authorities, and it became necessary for the Government and the Board of Education to define their attitude when local authorities began to write to headquarters for permission to grant exemptions.

The Government's policy was defined in answers

to questions in the House of Commons during August 1914. The following summary is taken from a report presented by Miss Susan Lawrence to the Workers' National Committee :

On August 25 Mr. Charles Bathurst asked Mr. Asquith whether the Government would enable boys over eleven to assist farmers during the autumn and winter. Mr. Asquith replied, " It would appear the matter is well within the discretion of the local authorities, who have already had their attention called to it by the Board of Education."

On August 31 Mr. Pease made a more compromising answer to a question by Sir F. Flannery, who asked that the Board of Education would issue a notice that boys who were temporarily engaged in field work would be excused from attendance and both their parents and themselves relieved from penalties. Mr. Pease answered that the Board could not do this, but that " that matter is one which, I think, can safely be left to the discretion of local education authorities and magistrates, with whom the enforcement of the law for school attendance rests."

Though these relaxations were probably intended by the Government to apply only in extreme cases and for a limited period of unusual pressure during the harvest season, they were the signal for a national campaign by the farming interest, which prevailed upon many County Councils to grant them the use of child labour. Between September 1914 and January 1915 West Sussex released 186 children, Huntingdonshire 168, Somerset 158, Gloucestershire 125, Bedfordshire 112, West Suffolk 88, Yorkshire (East Riding) 83, Wiltshire 63, and the Soke of Peterborough 58. Many other County Councils released smaller numbers. These figures are for agricultural employment alone, but in twelve out of the thirty counties for which the Board of Education possesses

figures the exemptions were not confined to agriculture. In the aggregate, however, 85 per cent of those exempted in these areas took up agricultural employment.<sup>1</sup>

In most cases the exemptions were not given for any definite period, and the farmers therefore continued to use child labour when the period of pressure was passed. Nor do any satisfactory conditions with regard to wages seem to have been imposed. According to the Board of Education, "the wages vary below a maximum of 7s. a week," and "the following reply given by one county may be regarded as fairly typical":

2 at 6s., 1 at 5s. 6d., 9 at 5s., 5 at 4s. 6d., 6 at 4s., 1 at 3s. and meals, 1 at 2s. and meals, 1 lodged and boarded no pay. 3 at nil (working for parents).

It is extremely significant that in all cases the worst offenders are those counties in which rural wages are lowest. The North of England provides hardly any exemptions: the underpaid South is the first to adopt the expedient of still cheaper labour.

The agitation against child labour took some time to gather force, and did not become important till the

<sup>1</sup> Between February and April, 3811 further exemptions were granted. The counties which offended most during this period were the following. Of the old offenders West Sussex gave 148 further exemptions, Huntingdonshire 73, Somerset 156, Gloucestershire 106, Bedfordshire 203, West Suffolk 64, Yorkshire (East Riding) 167, Wiltshire 157, and the Soke of Peterborough 48. New offenders, or counties which had previously granted few exemptions, were in some cases even worse: Kent released 507, Worcestershire 210, Hertfordshire 177, Essex 132, Notts 125, Oxfordshire 118, Hampshire 109, Warwickshire 108, Cheshire 99, Northants 94, East Suffolk 87, and Anglesey 78. Some of these exemptions may be renewals of old exemptions, in the cases in which these were originally granted for a limited period. Only in one case has much use been made of the special powers of exemption under Robson's Act 1899. This is Holland (Lincolnshire), which has exempted 63 children in this way.

Workers' National Committee took the matter up in earnest in January. About the same time there began a renewed agitation on the part of the farmers for still greater relaxations.<sup>1</sup> They contended that enlistment had caused such scarcity of labour that they could not carry on their work unless children were released in even greater numbers. On February 4 the matter was again raised in question time in the House of Commons.

Mr. PEASE said that since the outbreak of war the Board had been in correspondence with a number of local education authorities on the subject of the employment of children who would not in normal circumstances be exempt from school attendance. He had no power to suspend or to authorise local education authorities to suspend the operation of their by-laws, and consequently an authority when considering the question of enforcing its by-laws, had no occasion to apply to him for sanction, though in some cases they might have done so under a mistaken impression. The industry in which the employment of children was contemplated was in most cases agriculture, in one case the metal industry, and in some cases it was not specified.

Mr. PETO asked the right honourable gentleman whether he would take steps to secure the exemption from school attendance during the currency of the war in all rural areas of all boys over the age of twelve years who could show that they can obtain agricultural employment.

Mr. PEASE—It is for the local education authority, in the first instance, to consider whether in any particular case there is a reasonable excuse for non-attendance at

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<sup>1</sup> The farmers also demanded that grants should continue to be paid to local authorities in respect of children exempted from school attendance. This, which would have meant that, instead of losing, the local authority would gain money on every child it exempted, was wisely refused by Mr. Pease, on behalf of the Government, in reply to a question in the House on February 10.



school, and whether proceedings should be instituted to enforce compliance with the by-laws. I have no ground for supposing that the duty of enforcing their own by-laws is harshly or inconsiderately discharged by local education authorities, but in my own opinion no case has been made out or could be made out for the wholesale exemption of boys over twelve in rural areas, which is suggested by the honourable member. Such a course would, moreover, require legislation, which the Government do not propose to introduce.

This answer, though it showed that the Government did not intend legislation, by no means satisfied the opponents of child labour. In effect, it left the matter in the hands of the County Councils, many of which are dominated by the farming interest. In Worcestershire, for instance, the Education Committee refused to grant exemptions, but was overruled by the full County Council.

Was the action of the Board of Education in leaving matters to the local authorities sound? And were the local authorities within their rights in following the Prime Minister's advice and refraining from prosecutions? These points were raised in a letter sent to the Press by Mr. A. J. Mundella, of the National Education Association, on February 8. This letter is worth quoting in part :

It is evident that the farmers and the county councils are being misled by the Board of Education as regards the employment of children. Such letters of the Board as are published are more or less in the following words : " The Board have no power to give directions overriding the law with regard to school attendance and the employment of children, but the local authority is under no obligation to take proceedings for non-attendance if they are satisfied that there is a reasonable excuse for non-attendance " ; and they generally go on to say that they

are sure the local authority will use this "reasonable excuse" provision with great discretion. There they leave the matter, and the farmers at once claim to stretch this elastic "reasonable excuse" provision so as to cover every child over eleven or twelve years of age whom they want to employ.

May I point out that the Board of Education tell only half the story? It is true that the law says "unless there is some reasonable excuse" (section 74, 1870) with regard to non-attendance at school, but there is no such proviso with regard to employment. School and work are two entirely separate things; and because the Act of Parliament recognises unspecified excuses for a child's absence from school (from toothache downwards), it does not recognise such excuses as justifying the truant school-boy being employed for wages whilst so absent.

The law as to employment is clear and definite, with no elastic loopholes; and any person who employs any child under fourteen before that child has reached the standard of attendance or attainment definitely prescribed by law is liable on summary conviction to a penalty not exceeding 40s. (section 6, 1876). It is the duty of the local authority to prosecute; and the statute makes no provision for an allegation by the defendant employer of a "reasonable excuse" for his offence. And if the local authority fail to fulfil their duty "the Board of Education may, after holding a local enquiry, make such order as they think necessary or proper for the purpose of compelling the authority to fulfil their duty" (section 16 of 1902); and the statute says nothing about "reasonable excuses" absolving the Board of Education from carrying out the law.

It is, then, very doubtful whether the special exemptions were legal, but the farmers clearly placed sufficient reliance in the co-operation of the local authorities to chance this. At the Annual Meeting of the National Farmers' Union on February 24 "members were advised to employ suitable boys over

twelve on farms, with the consent of the parents, the prevailing impression being that rural education authorities would not initiate prosecutions."

Before this, on February 11, a deputation from the Workers' National Committee attended on the President of the Board of Education to discuss the question. A representative of the National Union of Teachers then said that his Union had acquiesced in the employment of children withdrawn from school only on the understanding that it was a temporary measure for the harvest period. The Secretary of the Agricultural Labourers' Union contended that there was no actual shortage of workers, but that the wages were so poor that men were diverted to other occupations. Mr. Pease's reply was in the nature of an excuse. He admitted that the replies given by himself and the Prime Minister "had given encouragement to farmers to believe that the Government would look rather easily on any exemptions of the children from school attendances." He said they were naturally anxious at the beginning of the war to secure recruits and to get the harvest in as well. "The words we used applied to a particular emergency, and had been misconstrued subsequently as applicable to the whole farming year." He repudiated any intention on the Government's part to reduce the school-leaving age. Mr. Pease continued as follows :

It was rather a curious fact that where wages had been highest there had been shown no tendency on the part of farmers to demand the help of the children, but where cheap labour was required the children were withdrawn. With reference to woman labour Mr. Pease remarked that the wages offered were practically no more than pocket money, and the same was true in the case of children.

The Government were investigating the labour supply, and a committee of farmers were also co-operating with the labour exchanges as to the provision of adult labour.

On February 25 a debate on the whole question was started in the House of Commons by Mr. Keir Hardie. In this debate Sir Harry Verney, on behalf of the Board of Agriculture, said that the policy of the Board was "to encourage the use of every available form of labour in preference to withdrawing children from school." The Board suggested as expedients to meet the shortage, first, the raising of wages, as a means of attracting back those who had left farm labour for other occupations. Further, it was suggested that use might be made of Belgian, and possibly of Dutch and Danish, labour, and that the Irish labourers, who usually come to England at certain seasons, might be brought over earlier. If there was still a shortage, the Board advised the employment of women. Sir Harry Verney pointed out that the demand for boy labour came from those counties in which women did not work in the fields: he mentioned that in Scotland the proportion of women farm workers to men was 41 per cent, and in Northumberland 31, whereas in Bedfordshire it was only 0.5 and in Wiltshire 1.2. This being so, where, he asked, was the necessity for child labour?

Mr. Pease, on behalf of the Board of Education, said that he hoped the result of the debate would be to deter local authorities from relaxing their regulations. "The Government absolutely declines," he said, "to introduce legislation, which in their opinion would be of a retrograde character, by allowing the exploitation of boy labour."

A second debate on the same subject took place on March 4, when Mr. Chaplin returned to the charge

on behalf of the farmers. On this occasion Mr. Asquith made an entirely meaningless speech, in which he said that the question of boy labour was "entirely a question of degree and relative expediency." The first part of his speech, which was punctuated by Opposition cheers, seemed to imply a withdrawal of what Mr. Pease and Sir Harry Verney had said: the second part was a less satisfactory reaffirmation of the principles they had laid down. The general result was that the issue was clouded, and the farmers and local authorities were encouraged to go on and chance the consequences.

After these debates, the Board of Agriculture decided to hold special conferences with the farming interest, and local conferences were arranged between the farmers and the Labour Exchanges. The farmers were also asked to produce locally definite evidence of the shortage of labour. Representatives of the Agricultural Labourers' Union and other Unions have in vain sought admission to these conferences, though their demand has been backed by the Workers' National Committee.

So far as it can yet be estimated, the general result of these enquiries reveals that the permanent shortage of labour has been greatly exaggerated, and, outside a few districts, applies only to certain skilled workers whose places cannot in any case be taken by children. There is, undoubtedly, a real shortage of extra men who can be called in for the hay and grain harvests; but the Agricultural Labourers' Union seems to be right in saying that there is no great dearth of ordinary labourers that could not easily be made up by the offer of adequate wages. The harvest difficulty has now largely been met by the Government, which is

willing to allow soldiers temporary leave to help in harvest work.

It is important to understand that the raising of wages, recommended by the Trade Unions from the beginning as a means of meeting the shortage, has not been seriously tried. Only in Scotland do the workers seem to have secured at all adequate advances. In England there have been a certain number of concessions; but these have almost always been bitterly resisted by the farmers, and have been as a rule on a quite inadequate scale. The farmers, as a class, have learnt nothing; they have still refused to recognise Trade Unionism or to advance wages. On these grounds the Workers' National Committee has pressed the Government to legislate for securing a living wage for rural workers.

The farmers have done their best to keep down wages; but there can be no doubt that the war has meant for them greatly increased profits. This is not in the main the result of any cornering of wheat, but of the natural rise in prices due to the scarcity of imported wheat. For the home-grower it is a well-known and obvious fact that high prices mean high profits. The farmers, then, could afford to pay a reasonable wage; but they absolutely refuse to do so while there is a chance of securing cheap labour from other sources.

These were the considerations that led the Agricultural Labourers' Union to look with suspicion on the proposal to introduce women's labour. As we saw in the last chapter, the formation of the National Register of Women for War Service was widely suspected of being, at least in part, an attempt of the farmers to get cheap labour. The Trade Union,

holding that the shortage was caused by low wages, objected to the labour of women being introduced till wages had been raised.

An investigation of this subject was conducted by the Workers' National Committee, which made the following recommendation :

We are of opinion that until substantial advances in wages have been offered no proposal to substitute either child or female labour should be considered.

We, therefore, support the Agricultural Labourers' Union in their demand for better wages before any other source of supply is considered.

Should the offer of increased wages fail to draw a satisfactory response, and the question of women being transferred to agriculture become an urgent problem—and the necessity of British farmers being induced to sow still larger areas with wheat this year indicates its greater urgency—then it should be clearly laid down that no women are to be allowed to engage in labour ordinarily undertaken by men, except at the same rates of pay.

The Workers' National Committee concluded that the shortage was real, but remediable. Men had been attracted from farming to the towns, to hut-building work, etc., and these men would return if better wages were offered. Enlistments only accounted for about half the shortage.

The women's bodies generally welcomed the proposal to reintroduce women into agriculture, in some cases with more enthusiasm than sense. Housing conditions in the districts where the shortage is greatest effectually prevent the introduction of women from outside, and seriously stand in the way of replacing those who have enlisted. Very often no cottages are available, and it is impossible to turn out the wives and families of those who have enlisted, though some employers have

even taken this scandalous course. If women are to be employed, they must be in the main the women of the district. As we saw, the proportion of women employed is lowest where there is the greatest shortage of men, and therefore there should be a large reserve of women available in these districts.

We may now try to sum up the position so far as agriculture is concerned. The Government did almost irreparable damage in August 1914 by leading farmers and local authorities to believe that school exemptions might be given on a large scale and for indefinite periods. This played its part in preventing the farmers from raising wages so as to keep men on the land. Though the Government has since then made some attempts to retrieve its first mistakes, it is still allowing many exemptions to go unchallenged, and the Prime Minister's last speech on the subject was a renewed encouragement to the farmers.

Moreover, the demand for boy labour is not really so much an attempt to remedy the shortage of workers as an attempt to establish a precedent which will hold good after the war. This point was well emphasised in a letter from the Bishop of Oxford published in the *Times* of March 5 :

The ground of anxiety lies in the consideration that the existing shortage is not likely to be temporary. In other words, I do not believe that the young men who have enlisted for the war are likely to return to the land, under the old conditions, after the war. I have taken the opportunity of consulting a number of clergy who know the lads well. They have all expressed the same opinion. The lads are already greatly improved by military service and better feeding. They are greatly pleased with themselves. They are tasting what seems to them a more interesting life than they knew before. Whatever they



become after the war, they will not return to what they were. It is therefore not a temporary but a permanent shortage of labour that has to be met. It must be met, I believe, by improving wages and conditions so as to attract labour to the country ; and this improvement had better be begun at once and on a systematic scale. Also education should not be curtailed, but in every way improved so as to make rural education a better preparation for rural life. To meet the shortage by withdrawing boys prematurely from school on a large scale is a disastrously reactionary measure, which it will be hard to reverse.

There are few signs that the Government, or the country, is alive to this danger. We might well learn in this matter from France, where the Minister of Education has issued to local authorities a circular containing the following passage :

The existing laws on the attendance of boys at school must be maintained this year with more strictness than ever. . . . It would be disgraceful to see children robbed of their education as if the military service of their fathers had left them only the choice between beggary and premature wage-labour.

I pass now from agriculture to industrial employment, which is also covered by the tables given on p. 256. It will be seen from these tables that, in county areas, 150 boys and 28 girls were released from school for non-agricultural employment between September and January. In urban areas the numbers were 534 and 228. These figures, small in bulk, are in a few individual instances, particularly disgraceful. Cardiff alone released no fewer than 263 boys and 59 girls, Widnes released 86 boys and 58 girls, South Shields 42 boys and 29 girls, and Gateshead 34 boys and 22 girls. Thus, these four centres accounted for 593 out of a total number released for all purposes in

urban areas of 768. No action seems to have been taken against these urban authorities. The fact that these exemptions for industrial purposes are confined to a very few centres, and that they have not been applied for in the great industrial towns proves that there is no need for them. Industry as a whole gets on quite well without them, though there have been in other centres a good many cases of illegal employment of boys without special exemption. The superintendent of school attendance officers for Paddington said in February that 650 cases of illegal employment of schoolboys had been brought to his knowledge since the outbreak of war, and that 100 summonses had been issued against the employers.

In fairness to the Government it is necessary to report the cases in which it has done its best to discourage the employment of children of school age in industry. On February 4, the day on which the Government refused legislation to allow the wholesale employment of children in agriculture, Mr. McKenna, as Home Secretary, made the following reply to a question in the House :

As regards the employment of children in agriculture I have no jurisdiction. As regards their employment in factories, the only powers which I possess to sanction their employment otherwise than in accordance with the provisions of the Factory Act are those conferred by section 150 of the Act, which authorises the grant of exemption in cases of public emergency. I have not made any order under this section modifying the provisions in the Act as to the employment of children, nor should I be prepared to make any such order except in an extreme case, where I was satisfied that this was necessary for the purpose of accelerating the work being done under an urgent navy or army contract. No proposals have been

made to me for the withdrawal of children twelve years old from school, nor have I received any reports from the factory inspectors on the subject.

Later in the month the nut and bolt manufacturers of Darlaston applied to the Staffordshire Education Committee for permission to employ boys between thirteen and fourteen years old on naval and military work. The Committee then asked the Home Office not to enforce the Elementary Education Act respecting the employment of children "during the period for which the Board of Education might consent to the suspension of the school attendance by-laws." The Home Office replied that the employment of children not qualified for exemption from school "could only be justified in a special case where the Admiralty or War Office certified that, owing to the shortage of labour, an important contract for war material was being unduly delayed." The Admiralty and War Office, however (who had also been approached by the Darlaston manufacturers), had not made any recommendations in favour of relaxation, as proposed, either generally in respect of the Darlaston works engaged on such contracts or on behalf of any particular firm. On the contrary, the War Office had deprecated the employment of the boys in question, except as an extreme measure. Further, it was pointed out that the Board of Education had no power to authorise the suspension of the school attendance by-laws, and that they would be much averse from any general relaxation of them. In these circumstances the Home Secretary regretted that he could not see his way to comply with the Committee's suggestion.

This action by the Home Office caused the suggestion to be dropped. It affords an instructive example

of what might be done if other departments would bring equal pressure on reactionary local bodies.

I cannot close this chapter, which deals with the effect of the war upon the more defenceless types of wage-earners, without saying something of the administration of the Factory Acts<sup>1</sup> during the period of war. On this question it is very difficult to speak, because no data are yet available, or are likely to become so until very strong pressure is put on the Government to produce them. All that is known is that, almost at the beginning of the war, the Factory Acts were relaxed in the interest of the munition firms. As to the extent of the relaxations and the use that has been made of them there is no reliable information. It appears, however, that very full use has been made, and that in some cases firms have exceeded the powers given to them.

A particularly unpleasant case is that of a firm of engineers in Leeds. Early in April this firm was prosecuted by the Home Office for breach of the Factory Acts. They had obtained relaxations giving them power to work female employees from 6 A.M. to 8 P.M. on ordinary week days and 6 A.M. to 2 P.M. on Saturdays. The summonses were in respect of two

<sup>1</sup> Attempts were also made during the early days of the war to suspend the operation of the Mines Eight Hours Act and to extend the employment of women in the mines and reduce the age for the employment of children above or below ground. A special committee, including miners' representatives, reported on these and other questions at the end of May. It recommended that there should be no extension of the employment of women and children, and that relaxations of the Eight Hours Act should only be made, if at all, locally by agreement between employers and employed. It also recommended to all intents and purposes that further enlistment among miners should be prevented. There was already at the end of February a net shrinkage of  $13\frac{1}{2}$  per cent in the numbers employed.

girls who went to work at 6 o'clock on a Friday morning. One girl worked for thirty hours at a stretch, the other for 25½ hours. Possibly the second girl would have gone on longer; but at this point she met with an accident. One of the girls was less than eighteen years old.

The case came up before the Leeds Stipendiary Magistrate, who dismissed it on grounds of "national urgency." This did not satisfy the Home Office, which again brought the case up, this time with the consent and countenance of the War Office. At this second trial Mr. Marshall Hall, K.C., for the defence, described the prosecution as "a piece of fatuous folly, only justified by supreme ignorance." He said that, instead of bringing a prosecution, the Home Office "ought to have struck a special medal" for the girls. "Now," he said, "is not the time to talk about Factory Acts." The magistrate again refused to register a conviction, merely dealing with the case under the Probation Act, and calling on the defendants to obey the law. There seems no reason, in face of his action, for their doing this.

This case provides an insight into the state of mind which makes the exploitation of women's and children's labour such a real danger. Those in authority have lost their heads completely, and seem willing to sanction anything, if it is only done in the name of patriotism. In this particular instance we have it on the authority of both the Home Office and the War Office that they disapproved of the action taken. The Home Office representative at the trial quoted the Master-General of the Ordnance Department as saying that "the extension of hours of labour does not produce very satisfactory results or increase

the supply of munitions of war." In short, the motive behind attempts to suspend the Factory Acts and the Education Acts is often not so much patriotism as the desire to destroy the social legislation that was slowly built up during the last century. Against such attempts Labour ought to be always on its guard: if it once allows the administration of these Acts to be relaxed, it will be no easy matter to restore even the unsatisfactory state in which these questions stood before the war.

## CHAPTER X

### LABOUR AFTER THE WAR

It is less profitable to ask what will be the position of Labour after the war than to ask what Labour can do now to prepare itself for the "outbreak of peace." Whatever may be the position of industry when the war ends, whether trade be good or bad, whether prices be high or low, whether labour be scarce or plentiful, it is certain that the organised workers will have many difficult problems to face and that their power to confront them successfully will depend largely on their action while the war lasts. It is therefore of supreme importance that they should not allow their minds to be so taken up with other things as to neglect the urgent problems of labour organisation. All through this book we have been chronicling new departures that are of fundamental importance to Labour. We have seen how the State has assumed a new rôle in industry, how the Trade Unions have been almost forced to assume a more responsible position in the national economy, how invention has been speeded up, and how old methods of organisation are breaking down among both employers and employed. We have now to attempt the difficult task of estimating Labour's power of adapting itself to the

new situation, and of suggesting the immediate measures that ought to be taken. We have to pick up the scattered threads of the preceding chapters and to attempt roughly to describe the new conditions.

It is patent that much will depend upon the state of trade at the end of the war. When we remember how wrong most of the prophets went in estimating the effect of the war on employment during 1914, we have every right to be cautious in forecasting the effects of peace. Already, those who are bold enough to prophesy differ very widely in their forecasts, according, in general, as they set out from one or other of two sets of premises.

The optimists generally reason more or less in this way. The war has caused, and is causing, an immense destruction of life and property. The loss of working lives cannot yet be replaced, and will mean a fall in the number of producers. The property that has been destroyed, on the other hand, can and must be replaced. There will, then, be fewer workers and more work. This means good trade and no unemployment.

The pessimists, on the other hand, start not from an estimate of national needs, but from a survey of available capital. Money, they say, will be dear after the war: there will be difficulty in obtaining capital for industrial enterprises because taxation will be heavy and there will therefore be less saving. Whatever national needs may be, they hold, therefore, that trade will be depressed and employment scarce.

The optimists point to the rapid recovery of France after the war of 1870, and to the rapid restoration of San Francisco after the great earthquake. The pessimists point to the state of trade in England during the years immediately succeeding the Napoleonic wars.



It may be doubted whether any of these parallels really affords enlightenment.

The balance of the argument seems to incline to a modified optimism. The last hundred years have greatly increased the adaptability of the economic system, and it seems likely that the capital will be forthcoming for the restoration of the property that has been destroyed. This can only mean, for the richer classes at any rate, a reduction of personal expenditure, and the State will undoubtedly have to play an important part as financier in setting industry again on its feet, whatever method it adopts for this purpose ; but there seems no ground for the pessimistic assumption that the economic system is so inelastic that production will fall off just when it is most needed. The problem will be that of securing adequate saving ; for the means of reproducing industrial capital under the present system is that of personal saving by the investor. Instead of spending his income on what is immediately consumed, he must, if capital is to be reproduced, save and invest. If individual saving is not enough to meet this problem, the State will have to step in, and, by taxation, save and invest on behalf of the nation.

Fortunately, this problem is of much less magnitude in the case of Great Britain than of France or Belgium. Merchant shipping apart, we have as yet suffered no great industrial losses, though the stoppage of a great part of our annual industrial production represents a very serious capital loss. This, however, will probably affect overseas investment more than home investment, and need not, therefore, have a serious effect on employment at home. For Great Britain the problem is not so much that industrial capital will have to be replaced

on a large scale—though this is true—as that industry will have to undergo an enormous transformation. The war has diverted production into unfamiliar and unnatural channels: the problem will be that of restoring it to the old channels. We shall have, in the first place, to recover the markets we held before the war, or to secure others as good, and, in the second place, to retransform our factories and reorganise our workers for the production of the munitions of peace.

These two processes will be going on simultaneously, and both of them will take time. While, therefore, we may be optimistic about their ultimate results, we may with reason be pessimistic about the period of transition. It seems probable that immediately, or soon, after the war there will come a slump, at least in some of our chief industries. How long this slump lasts will depend mainly on the rapidity with which markets are recaptured: but, long or short, it will be the period during which the destiny of Labour will most probably be decided.

I am here attempting to deal with the future of trade only in so far as it affects the workers directly, that is, in relation to the all-important problem of employment. The danger clearly is that during the slump after the war the employers will take advantage of Labour's temporary weakness not only to cut down wages and secure long agreements unfavourable to the workers, but also to make an attack, open or veiled, upon Trade Unionism itself. It is against this that the workers have to be on their guard.

As we have seen, the great majority of the wage advances given during the war have taken the form of bonuses, which hold good only while the peculiar circumstances created by the war continue to exist. In

discussing the "war bonus" method, and in particular the awards of the Government Committee on Production, we saw the uncertainty as to the conditions governing such advances. "War wages, recognised as due to, and dependent on, the existence of the abnormal conditions now prevailing in consequence of the war" might, we saw, mean several things. Does it mean that, as soon as prices fall, the bonus automatically ceases? In this case, Labour may have to negotiate new agreements when, though prices are low, trade is bad and there is an over-supply of workers. If so, will not Labour be compelled to accept unfavourable terms, and probably be tied down to them long after trade has recovered? Or does it mean, as it surely should mean, that the bonus will continue until industry can be regarded as normal once again? It is for this interpretation that the workers should press now, and the Committee on Production should be compelled to make its meaning more explicit.

On the other hand, some bonuses are to terminate six months after the end of the war. This period is surely far too short to allow of the restoration of industry to normal conditions. Since the bonus movement has been allowed to spread, the best course now is to see that the bonuses are not removed till Labour is strong enough to confront the employer on equal terms.

Wages, however, are not the only, or even the most vital, problem. The danger is that capitalism will use the "outbreak of peace" as a signal for a concerted attack on Trade Union rights. The danger of this was made manifest in our discussion of the relaxation of Trade Union rules and of the general relations between Trade Unionism and the Government during

1915. The employers, in demanding a general abrogation of Union rules, had in mind, there is only too much reason to believe, the situation after the war no less than the need for speeding up the production of munitions.

There are, no doubt, some Trade Union rules which no reasonable person wishes to see restored. Of such a nature are some, though by no means all, of the regulations dealing with the demarcation between trades. Some of these rules are part and parcel of an old-fashioned system of craft Unionism which is no less clogging to production than it is destructive of effective Trade Union action. The limitation of craft in many cases urgently needs breaking down, and, provided this is not done by substituting the lower-paid for the higher-paid worker, the collapse of many demarcation rules would be no cause for regret.

This, however, is true only of some rules governing demarcation between skilled trades, and is not true at all of the rules preventing unskilled and semi-skilled workers from doing what is regarded as skilled work. As we saw in an earlier chapter, disputes between the skilled and the unskilled are not recognised by the Unions as demarcation disputes; but this does not mean that they are not of the greatest importance. Unless and until not merely one industry, but all industries, become blackleg-proof, it will be necessary for the workers in skilled trades to limit the supply of labour in those trades. If an over-supply of workers in them is allowed to arise, standard rates will inevitably fall, and the whole fabric of Trade Unionism will be menaced. Waterside workers, engineers, textile operatives, and many other classes of workers are fully alive to this danger, from which

comes the greater part of the opposition to the withdrawal of Trade Union rules for the war period.

We have seen that the first need, when rules were relaxed, was that full guarantees of a reversion to the previous conditions should be given by the Government as well as the employers, and we have given reason for believing that the actual guarantees afforded by the Munitions Act will prove utterly ineffectual. What, then, are the Trade Unions to do ?

It may be said that this question shows too much consideration for the skilled workers and all too little for the semi-skilled and the unskilled. This is not so. It is true enough that, up to the present, the Trade Unions of skilled workers have shown scant sympathy for the unskilled. Where the skilled man has been the direct employer of the less skilled, as in spinning, he has almost uniformly kept his wages down and exploited him just as the capitalist would have done. Where both are alike directly employed by the capitalist, the skilled men have too often shut the less skilled men out of their Unions, or only admitted them on impossible terms. Seldom indeed have they done anything of their own free will to improve the conditions of the less skilled, though in this respect there has been a marked improvement during the last few years. The great miners' strike of 1912, for instance, was in the interests of the lower-paid workers, and a great miners' movement on behalf of the surfacemen seemed to be imminent before the war. In the engineering shops, too, where the conservative instinct is as a rule very strong among the skilled men, there have been, in certain localities, refreshing examples of action on behalf of the unskilled. Broadly speaking, however, it is true that the skilled workers have treated

the unskilled workers badly. This has led very naturally to a marked spirit of hostility to the skilled in some of the unskilled labour Unions.

But, despite these facts, it is in the main true that, if the skilled worker suffers, the unskilled will suffer also. Skilled rates of wages to a great extent determine the rates paid to less skilled workers, and, if the former fall, the latter will be likely to fall with them. If, then, the unskilled, in their resentment against the skilled, assist the masters against them, they will in the long run be prejudicing their own interests. A permanent relaxation of Trade Union rules, admitting unskilled workers to work on any skilled job, would in the end force down the general level of wages, and hurt all classes of workers alike.

The interests of skilled and unskilled are, then, really identical, and it is essential that closer co-operation between them should be secured before the war ends. Attention has already been drawn to the apparent breakdown of the many amalgamation schemes that were being formulated before the war, and to the need for carrying these through with all the more vigour because of the war. It would, however, be utopian to imagine that amalgamation during the war is likely to do very much towards solving the problem. Important as amalgamation is, there is more immediate hope in other methods of co-operation between Unions which may, later on, lead to amalgamation. In particular, the local Munitions Committees in the great armament centres will force the workers, whatever their Unions, to co-operate more closely, and the considerable possibilities latent in these Committees will entail common action that may well pave the way to complete fusion. In these cases

skilled and unskilled will have to co-operate, and it is to be hoped that the need of the moment will teach them so to compose their differences as to realise the advantages of unity in the future.

There can, however, be no settlement unless the skilled Unions very greatly modify their outlook. They must realise that they exist not merely to raise the wages and better the conditions of the skilled, but to fight for all the workers in the industry. They must recognise, far more than they have done in the past, that all have a common struggle before them, and they must be prepared to sacrifice their conservative craft prejudices. Above all, they must recognise the inevitable tendency of the modern industrial system to break down the barriers between skilled and unskilled.

This, indeed, is the crux of the whole matter. For a long time, the process of invention has been profoundly changing the function of the worker in production. Where, not so very long ago, there were a large number of skilled workers and a large number of almost unskilled labourers, there are now a smaller proportion of highly skilled and a smaller proportion of unskilled jobs. There has come into being, between the skilled and the unskilled, a vast body of semi-skilled labour, minding machines which take the place of the skilled worker.

This development the war has accelerated to an almost incredible extent. In one year, it has done more to change the methods of production than could have been accomplished in a decade of peace. When, therefore, after the war, the attempt is made to restore the various grades of labour to their old positions, it will be found that in many cases these positions no longer exist.

If, then, the skilled and the unskilled are still without means of organised co-operation, or if, worse still, they elect to fight one another for the possession of the various processes and the right to handle various tools, the employers will seize their opportunity. Wherever he thinks it will pay, the employer will pick the cheapest grade of labour and fight its battle against the more highly paid grades. And then, when the skilled Trade Unions are broken, the employer will turn upon his late allies, and a general reduction of wages and worsening of conditions will take place.

All this will only happen if the Unions prove themselves incapable of rising to the situation that now confronts them. It is absolutely necessary that, wherever possible, Unions should amalgamate on industrial lines : it is no less necessary that the skilled Unions should open their ranks to semi-skilled and unskilled workers, and that they should admit these grades not as inferiors, but on absolutely equal terms. This does not prevent the laying down, within the industrial Union, of lines of division between craft and craft, or the limitation of the supply of labour in any craft ; but these questions should be settled within one Union, and not by conflict between rival Unions.

This need for admitting the unskilled workers to some kind of membership in the skilled Unions applies no less to those who are called " war workers " than to those who were in regular employment before the war. The " war workers " form the most dangerous body of competitors whose rate-cutting powers the Unions have to fear. If they are left unorganised, many of them will inevitably consent to accept employment below Trade Union rates after the war is over, and, no less inevitably, many of them will consent to black-



leg in case of disputes. Somehow or other, they must become Trade Unionists, and by far the best course seems to be that of enrolling them as emergency members in the Unions catering for the class of workers whose work they are doing. This should not be in any way prevented by the fact that many of them will leave the industry when the war ends : it is the reason for making them emergency, instead of ordinary, members. The difficulty of defining emergency labour, great as it is, should not be insuperable.

This argument applies no less to women's labour than to men's. It is far more dangerous for Labour to leave the women and the male unskilled workers unorganised than it is to admit them to the Unions as emergency members. There is also far less risk of friction if the women are in the same Union with the men than if they are compelled, in self-defence, to organise apart. The women need the men's help in securing fair rates and conditions ; the men need to organise the women for fear of being undercut.

A few difficulties have to be faced in the application of this general principle. A large proportion of the emergency workers will certainly find their way into the general labour Unions, in which many of the unskilled were already enrolled before the war. It is no less necessary for the general labour Unions to enrol them *as emergency members* than it is in the case of the skilled Unions. This done, the provisional solution lies in closer co-operation between the skilled Unions and the general labour Unions.

A second problem arises in the case of Trade Unionists who, owing to the war, have shifted from one industry to another. Thus, textile workers of various kinds are employed in armament factories in

the North of England and the Midlands, and a good many compositors are now working in Woolwich Arsenal. In these cases, doubt is raised whether the worker should join the Union of his temporary trade, or keep on with his old Union, or both. The only safe answer seems to be that, whenever possible, a special arrangement should be entered into between the Unions concerned, but that in any case the worker should join, as an emergency member, the Union of his temporary trade, maintaining, if possible, membership in his old Union. Special arrangements between the Unions are very desirable wherever any number of workers are concerned.

A great Trade Union campaign is needed for the organisation of emergency workers and all other non-unionists. Such a campaign is already being attempted in some industries: the General Union of Textile Workers, for instance, is doing its best to organise the non-unionists in the woollen industry. But there is still ample room for a national campaign, not confined to any one industry, but aiming at the elimination of the non-unionist as such. In some industries at any rate the conditions created by the war are highly favourable to active Trade Union recruiting. As the Unions become more obvious responsible partners in industry, they can offer new inducements to the non-unionists. Ideally, the best solution would be the organisation of all emergency workers in one great Emergency Labour Union under central control; but, as there is no chance that this will be done, I have recommended what seems the second-best course. It will in any case be necessary to make arrangements for these emergency Trade Unionists to join the Unions of the trades which they join after the war. "Once

a Trade Unionist always a Trade Unionist," must be the watchword of the movement.

Nevertheless, however successful the Unions may be in increasing their membership, they will have difficult problems to face at the end of the war. That which bulks largest is of course the return to industry of men now on military service. This will mean, in a great many cases, the displacement of emergency workers: in others, the returning soldier will find himself out of a job, and will become a dangerous competitor in the labour market.

It is not easy to estimate the real gravity of this problem. Certainly it is sometimes exaggerated. Some persons seem to assume that where two million men have enlisted two million men will return; but this is, of course, to take no account of the very heavy casualties. Many will not return at all, and many more will return incapacitated for their old jobs.

Of those who return in good health and without loss of limb, a large proportion will probably be rapidly absorbed. This, at least, we may expect to be the case with most of the skilled men, including the very large body of miners who have enlisted. This will entail a large displacement of emergency labour, only a part of which is likely to be absorbed at once into its old occupations. There will then be left on the labour market the remainder of the displaced men together with the able-bodied soldiers who do not return to their jobs. In the main, it is probable that the preference of the employer will go to the soldier, and that, if there remains a large surplus of labour, it will consist mainly of emergency workers who will only be slowly absorbed. If these workers have been organised as Trade Unionists during the war, they will then be

less likely to undercut standard rates. The risk is, however, in any case very grave.

It should not be assumed that the surplus will be anything like as large as the number of displaced workers. Many of those who are now employed in industry, especially women, are very unlikely to wish to retain their employment after the war. Especially in the woollen industry, many married women have returned to their old occupations, and most of these will probably be ready to retire when the war is over. There are also not a few superannuated workers who have taken up employment for the war period only.

In addition to all these classes of workers, there remains the important class of partially disabled soldiers. These men will probably return in many cases with inadequate pensions, which they may well be ready to eke out with insufficient wages. But though there is a problem here, it is probably not very grave, and it does not in any case greatly affect the staple industries. The partially disabled are more likely to find work in the smaller trades. Here they may be powerful competitors; but their competition will not materially affect the general position, since it is the strength of the workers in the great industries that must necessarily determine this.

The gravity of the whole problem of demobilisation will depend in the main on the policy which the Government elects to pursue. If the whole army is discharged at once when the war is over, for a time at least the labour market will be seriously overstocked, and the position of Labour gravely menaced. If, on the other hand, only those workers who have definite jobs to go to are discharged immediately, and the rest remain till they can safely be drafted back into industry,

the problem will largely disappear—that is, if trade becomes good within a reasonably short time. If there is a long spell of general bad trade, nothing can prevent Trade Unionism from being seriously weakened and Trade Union rates from being heavily reduced.

Nothing, that is to say, except a change of spirit in the world of Labour. If the workers who return from the war return in a spirit of industrial militancy, there are quite different possibilities. Throughout the foregoing anticipations, it has been assumed that the spirit of the workers and of Trade Unionism will remain roughly the same as it has been in the past, reformist and pacific, with, at the most, only spasmodic outbreaks of a more violent character. Is it probable that this will be the case?

Mr. Sidney Webb, in a speech delivered to the Hermes Club, said, apparently with satisfaction, that the workers would return from military service in a more disciplined frame of mind, and that one effect of the war would be to crush the spirit of revolt. It is very much to be doubted whether he is right. It seems at least as probable that those who return from a life spent in the open air will be far more intolerant of the routine and the petty oppressions of workshop life, and far readier for some sort of revolt against it. There is at least a hope that the coming of peace will herald the coming of a more militant Trade Unionism.

One other remark made by Mr. Webb in the same speech is worthy of mention. The war, he said, would result in a very great increase in the industrial power of the State. This is undoubtedly true, and it is a fact that Labour would do well to face. The breakdown of private capitalism under the strain of war has meant, to a considerable extent, the substitution of

crude and temporary forms of State control over industry. Doubtless, in many cases the State will only too readily hand the control back to the private capitalist ; but the matter will not end there. Where State control has once been exercised, it can easily be exercised again ; and it is at least doubtful whether there will ever be complete restoration of private enterprise. The railways, for instance, may quite possibly be permanently nationalised, though production will almost certainly pass back into private control. But, whatever the immediate effects of the war, State interference, both in Labour disputes and in the control of industry, will have become far easier, and the workers will have to be on guard against the use of the State's power in the interests of capital and against themselves. Compulsory arbitration is a danger not lightly to be dismissed.

The gravity of this peril again depends largely on the action taken by the Trade Unions during the war. Had they played their cards well, the increase in the power of the State would have been paralleled by an increase in the power of Trade Unionism : if the State would have secured a foothold in the control of industry, Labour would have done so no less. If the Unions had used the opportunity afforded them by the " national organisation of Labour," and if, at the same time, they had not neglected to strengthen themselves by eliminating, as far as possible, the non-unionist and by improving their own organisation, the war might have set on foot that partnership between the State and the Unions which alone can afford even a provisional solution of the industrial problem. But, now that the Unions have given all and demanded nothing in return, their reward will be a weakening of

power which will set back for decades the whole movement towards industrial freedom. The passing of the Munitions Act deprives them of their last chance of retrieving the situation.

There are, it must be confessed, few enough signs that the workers are alive to the urgency of the problem. The Trade Union Congress, suspended last year, is indeed to meet this September ; but it does not seem that the event is being regarded as of any great importance.<sup>1</sup> Yet surely never before has the movement been confronted with such tremendous issues. Could this year's Trade Union Congress be a truly representative Parliament of Labour, and not merely a collection of somewhat old and world-weary officials, there would be a unique chance before it. The Trade Union movement as a whole has never taken counsel on the situation created by the war ; but what is needed is a common policy to be pursued in every industry and by every Union. Could the Congress be persuaded to elect a live Committee to investigate all the problems arising out of the war and to suggest a policy to a special Congress to be summoned as soon as possible, Labour might yet equip itself with a common policy and be in a position to take full advantage of, or at the worst lose as little as possible by, the situation after the war. If something of this sort is not done, it seems only too likely that one Union will pull one way and one another, and that the movement will be defeated piecemeal, when unity might have secured a victory. For nothing is more certain than that, for Labour, the coming of peace between nations means the coming of war between classes.

<sup>1</sup> The Agenda contains only one group of resolutions of the slightest interest. These deal with women's labour. No other vital problem is even touched upon.

About the future of the international Labour movement, I have only this to say. The best chance of rebuilding it is to keep the national movements strong. For the moment, the task of Labour in Great Britain is to maintain its own vitality unimpaired. If each national movement does that as it should, the international will soon be rebuilt, and it is reasonable to hope that the new internationalism of Labour will have more power and more understanding than the old.



# APPENDIX

## THE MUNITIONS ACT

AN Act to make provision for furthering the efficient manufacture, transport, and supply of munitions for the present war, and for purposes incidental thereto.

Be it enacted by the King's Most Excellent Majesty by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :

### PART I

#### SETTLEMENT OF LABOUR DIFFERENCES

1. (1) If any difference exists or is apprehended between any employer and persons employed or between any two or more classes of persons employed, and the difference is one to which this part of this Act applies, that difference, if not determined by the parties directly concerned or their representatives or under existing agreements, may be reported to the Board of Trade by or on behalf of either party to the difference, and the decision of the Board of Trade as to whether a difference has been so reported to them or not and as to the time at which a difference has been so reported shall be conclusive for all purposes.

(2) The Board of Trade shall consider any difference so reported, and take any steps which seem to them expedient to promote a settlement of the difference, and in

any case in which they think fit may refer the matter for settlement, either in accordance with the provisions of the first schedule to this Act, or if in their opinion suitable means for settlement already exist, in pursuance of any agreement between employers and persons employed for settlement in accordance with those means.

(3) Where a matter is referred under the last foregoing sub-section for settlement, otherwise than in accordance with the provisions of the first schedule to this Act, and the settlement is in the opinion of the Board of Trade unduly delayed, the Board may annul the reference, and substitute therefor a reference in accordance with the provisions of the said schedule.

(4) The award on any such settlement shall be binding both on employers and employed, and may be retrospective, and if any employer or person employed thereafter acts in contravention of or fails to comply with the award, he shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

#### PROHIBITION OF LOCK-OUTS AND STRIKES IN CERTAIN CASES

2. (1) An employer shall not declare, cause, or take part in a lock-out, and a person employed shall not take part in a strike in connection with any difference to which this part of this Act applies unless the difference has been reported to the Board of Trade, and twenty-one days have elapsed since the date of the report and the difference has not during that time been referred by the Board of Trade for settlement in accordance with this Act.

(2) If any person acts in contravention of this section he shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

#### DIFFERENCES TO WHICH PART I. APPLIES

3. The differences to which this part of this Act applies are differences as to rates of wages, hours of work, or otherwise as to terms or conditions of or affecting employment on the manufacture or repair of arms, ammunition, ships,

vehicles, aircraft, or any other articles required for use in war, or of the metals, machines, or tools required for that manufacture or repair (in this Act referred to as munitions work), and also any differences as to rates of wages, hours of work, or otherwise as to terms or conditions of or affecting employment on any other work of any description if this part of this Act is applied to such a difference by His Majesty by proclamation on the ground that in the opinion of His Majesty the existence or continuance of the difference is directly or indirectly prejudicial to the manufacture transport, or supply of munitions of war.

This part of this Act may be so applied to such a difference at any time, whether a lock-out or strike is in existence in connection with the difference to which it is applied or not, provided that if in the case of any industry the Minister of Munitions is satisfied that effective means exist to secure the settlement without stoppage of any difference arising on work other than on munitions work, no proclamation shall be made under this section with respect to any such difference. When this part of this Act is applied to any difference concerning work other than munitions work, the conditions of labour and the remuneration thereof prevailing before the difference arose shall be continued until the said difference is settled in accordance with the provisions of this part of this Act.

## PART II

### CONTROLLED ESTABLISHMENTS

4. If the Minister of Munitions considers it expedient for the purpose of the successful prosecution of the war that any establishment in which munitions work is carried on should be subject to the special provisions as to limitation of employers' profits, and control of persons employed, and other matters contained in this section, he may make an order declaring that establishment to be a controlled

establishment, and on such order being made the following provisions shall apply thereto :

(1) Any excess of the net profits of the controlled establishment over the amount divisible under this Act, as ascertained in accordance with the provisions of this Act, shall be paid into the Exchequer.

(2) Any proposal for any change in the rate of wages, salary, or other emoluments of any class of persons employed in the establishment, or of any persons engaged in the management or the direction of the establishment (other than a change for giving effect to any Government conditions as to fair wages or to any agreement between the owner of the establishment and the workmen which was made before the 23rd day of June 1915), shall be submitted to the Minister of Munitions, who may withhold his consent, within fourteen days of the date of the submission, provided that if the Minister of Munitions so directs, or if the Minister's consent is withheld, and the persons proposing the change so require, the matter shall be referred for settlement in accordance with the provisions of the first schedule to this Act, and the consent of the arbitration tribunal, if given, shall in that case have the same effect as the consent of the Minister of Munitions.

If the owner of the establishment, or any contractor, or sub-contractor employing labour therein, makes any such change, or attempts to make any such change, without submitting the proposal for the change to the Minister of Munitions, or when the consent of the Minister has been withheld, he shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

(3) Any rule, practice, or custom not having the force of law which tends to restrict production or employment shall be suspended in the establishment, and if any person induces, or attempts to induce, any other person (whether any particular person or generally) to comply or continue to comply with such a rule, practice, or custom, that person shall be guilty of an offence under this Act. If any question arises, whether any rule, practice, or custom is a rule, practice, or custom which tends to restrict production or employment that question shall be referred to

the Board of Trade, and the Board of Trade shall either determine the question themselves, or if they think it expedient, or either party requires it, refer the question for settlement in accordance with the provisions contained in the first schedule to this Act. The decision of the Board of Trade or arbitration tribunal, as the case may be, shall be conclusive for all purposes.

(4) The owner of the establishment shall be deemed to have entered into an undertaking to carry out the provisions set out in the second schedule to this Act, and any owner, or contractor, or sub-contractor who breaks or attempts to break such an undertaking shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

(5) The employer and every person employed in the establishment shall comply with any regulations made applicable to that establishment by the Minister of Munitions with respect to the general ordering of the work in the establishment with a view to attaining and maintaining a proper standard of efficiency, and with respect to the due observance of the rules of the establishment. If the employer, or any person so employed, acts in contravention of or fails to comply with any such regulations that person shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

(6) The owners of an establishment shall have power, notwithstanding anything in any Act, Order, or deed under which they are governed, to do all things necessary for compliance with any provisions of this section, and any owner of an establishment shall comply with any reasonable requirements of the Minister of Munitions as to information or otherwise made for the purposes of this section, and if he fails to do so shall be guilty of an offence under this Act. Where in any establishment munitions work is carried on in some part of the establishment, but not in other parts, the Minister of Munitions may, if he considers that it is practicable to do so, treat any part of the establishment in which munitions work is not carried on as a separate establishment, and the provisions of this Act shall take effect accordingly.

SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS AS TO THE LIMITATION  
OF THE PROFITS OF A CONTROLLED ESTABLISHMENT

5. (1) The net profits of a controlled establishment shall be ascertained in accordance with the provisions of this section and rules made thereunder, and the amount of profits divisible under this Act shall be taken to be an amount exceeding by one-fifth the standard amount of profits.

(2) The standard amount of profits for any period shall be taken to be the average of the amount of the net profits for two financial years of the establishment completed next before the outbreak of the war, or a proportionate part thereof.

(3) If in any case it appears, or is represented to the Minister of Munitions, that the net profits or losses of all or any other establishments belonging to the same owner should be brought into account, or that the average under this section affords or may afford an unfair standard of comparison or affords no standard of comparison, the Minister may, if he thinks just, allow those net profits or losses to be brought into account, or substitute for the average such an amount as the standard amount of profits as may be agreed upon with the owner of the establishment. The Minister of Munitions may, if he thinks fit, and shall if the owner of the establishment so requires, refer the matter to be determined by a referee or board of referees appointed or designated by him for the purpose, and the decision of the referee or board shall be conclusive on the matter for all purposes.

(4) The Minister of Munitions may make rules for carrying the provisions of this section into effect, and these rules shall provide for due consideration being given in carrying out the provisions of this section as respects any establishment to any special circumstances, such as increase of output, provision of new machinery or plant, alteration of capital, or other matters which require special consideration in relation to the particular establishment.

VOLUNTARY UNDERTAKING TO WORK FOR MINISTER  
OF MUNITIONS

6. (1) If any workman, in accordance with arrangements made by the Minister of Munitions, with or on behalf of trade unions, enters into an undertaking with the Minister of Munitions that he will work at any controlled establishment to which he may be assigned by the Minister, and be subject to the penalty imposed by this Act if he acts in contravention of, or fails to comply with, the undertaking, that workman shall, if he acts in contravention of or fails to comply with his undertaking, be guilty of an offence under this Act.

(2) If any employer dissuades, or attempts to dissuade, a workman in his employment from entering into an undertaking under this section, or retains, or offers to retain, in his employment any workman who has entered into such an undertaking after he has received notice from the Minister of Munitions that the workman is to work at some other establishment, that employer shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

PROHIBITION OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WHO  
HAVE LEFT WORK IN MUNITION FACTORIES

7. (1) A person shall not give employment to a workman who has within the last previous six weeks, or such other period as may be provided by order of the Minister of Munitions as respects any class of establishment, been employed on or in connection with munitions work in any establishment of a class to which the provisions of this section are applied by order of the Minister of Munitions unless he holds a certificate from the employer by whom he was last so employed that he left work with the consent of his employer or a certificate from the munitions tribunal that the consent has been unreasonably withheld.

(2) If any workman or his trade union representative complains to a munitions tribunal in accordance with

rules made with respect to those tribunals that the consent of an employer has been unreasonably withheld, that tribunal may, after examining into the case, if they think fit, grant a certificate which shall for the purpose of this section have the same effect as a certificate from the employer.

(3) If any person gives employment in contravention of the provisions of this section he shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

#### REGULATIONS AS TO BADGES

8. (1) The Minister of Munitions may make rules authorising the wearing of badges or other distinctive marks by persons engaged on munitions work or other work for war purposes, and as to the issue and return of any such badges or marks, and may by those rules prohibit the use, wearing, or issue of any such badges or of any badges or marks indicating or suggesting that any person is engaged on munitions work or work for war purposes except as authorised by those rules.

(2) If any person acts in contravention of or fails to comply with any such rules he shall be guilty of an offence against this Act.

#### APPLICATION OF PART II. TO DOCKS USED BY ADMIRALTY

9. This part of this Act shall apply to any docks used by the Admiralty for any purposes connected with the war as it applies to establishments in which munitions work is carried on, with the substitution in relation to any such docks or persons employed in any such docks of the Admiralty for the Minister of Munitions.



## PART III

AMENDMENT OF THE DEFENCE OF THE REALM  
(AMENDMENT) (No. 2) ACT, 1915

10. The following paragraph shall be substituted for paragraph (d) set out in Sub-Section (1) of Section 1 of the Defence of the Realm (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1915, and shall be deemed to have been contained in that Act, namely—(d) To regulate or restrict the carrying on of any work in any factory, workshop, or other premises, or the engagement or employment of any workman or all or any classes of workmen therein, or to remove the plant therefrom with a view to maintaining or increasing the production of munitions in other factories, workshops, or premises, or to regulate and control the supply of metals and material that may be required for any articles for use in war.

## POWER TO REQUIRE INFORMATION FROM EMPLOYERS

11. (1) The owner of any establishment in which persons are employed if so required by the Minister of Munitions shall give to the Minister such information in such form and in such manner as the Minister may require as to :

(a) The numbers and classes of persons employed or likely to be employed in the establishment from time to time.

(b) The numbers and classes of machines at any such establishment.

(c) The nature of the work on which any such persons are employed or any such machines are engaged from time to time.

(d) Any other matters with respect to which the Minister may desire information for the purpose of his powers and duties. And the Minister may arrange with any other Government Department for the collection of any such information.

(2) If the owner of any establishment fails to comply with this section he shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

#### PENALTY FOR FALSE STATEMENTS, ETC.

12. If any employer or the owner of any establishment or any workman for the purpose of evading any provision of this Act makes any false statement or representation or gives any false certificate or furnishes any false information he shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.

#### PAYMENT OF MEMBERS OF ARBITRATION AND MUNITIONS TRIBUNALS, ETC.

13. There shall be paid out of moneys provided by Parliament to any person, being a member of an arbitration tribunal, munitions tribunal, or board of referees under this Act, or being a referee under this Act, and to any other officers required in connection with any such tribunal or board, such remuneration and travelling or other expenses (including compensation for loss of time) as the Minister of Munitions or Board of Trade, as the case may be, with the sanction of the Treasury, may determine.

#### PENALTIES

14. (1) Any person guilty of an offence under this Act :

(a) Shall, if the offence is a contravention of or failure to comply with an award, be liable to a fine not exceeding £5 for each day or part of a day during which the contravention or failure to comply continues, and if the person guilty of the offence is an employer, for each man in respect of whom the contravention or failure takes place ; and

(b) Shall, if the offence is a contravention of the provisions of this Act with respect to the prevention of lock-outs, be liable to a fine not exceeding £5 in respect of each man locked out for each day or part of a day during which the contravention continues ; and

(c) Shall, if the offence is a contravention of the provisions of this Act with respect to the prohibition of strikes, be liable to a fine not exceeding £5 for each day or part of a day during which the contravention continues ; and

(d) Shall, if the offence is a contravention of or failure to comply with any regulations in a controlled establishment or any undertaking given by a workman under Part II. of this Act, be liable in respect of each offence to a fine not exceeding £3 ; and

(e) Shall, if the offence is a contravention of or failure to comply with any other provisions of this Act, be liable in respect of each offence to a fine not exceeding £50.

(2) A fine for any offence under this Act shall be recoverable only before the munitions tribunal established for the purpose under this Act.

#### MUNITIONS TRIBUNALS

15. (1) The munitions tribunal shall be a person appointed for the purpose by the Minister of Munitions sitting with two or some other even number of assessors, one-half being chosen by the Minister of Munitions from a panel constituted by the Minister of Munitions of persons representing employers and the other half being so chosen from a panel constituted by the Minister of Munitions of persons representing workmen, and the Minister of Munitions may constitute two classes of munitions tribunals, the first class having jurisdiction to deal with all offences and matters under this Act, the second class having jurisdiction so far as offences are concerned to deal only with any contravention of or failure to comply with any regulation made applicable to a controlled establishment or any undertaking given by a workman under Part II. of this Act. The Admiralty shall be substituted for the Minister of Munitions under this provision as the authority to appoint and choose members of a munitions tribunal to deal with offences by persons employed in any docks declared to be controlled establishments by the Admiralty.

(2) The Minister of Munitions or the Admiralty shall constitute munitions tribunals as and when occasion requires.

(3) Rules may be made for regulating the munitions tribunals or either class of munitions tribunals so far as relates to offences under this Act by a Secretary of State, and so far as relates to any other matters which are referred to them under this Act by the Minister of Munitions, and rules made by the Secretary of State may apply, with the necessary modifications, to any of the provisions of the summary jurisdiction Acts or any provisions applicable to a court of summary jurisdiction which it appears expedient to apply, and any provisions so applied shall apply to munitions tribunals accordingly. In the application of this provision to Scotland the Secretary for Scotland shall be substituted for the Secretary of State, and in the application of this provision to Ireland the Lord-Lieutenant shall be substituted for the Secretary of State.

(4) A person employed or workman shall not be imprisoned in respect of the non-payment of a fine imposed by a munitions tribunal for an offence within the jurisdiction of a tribunal of the second class, but that tribunal may, without prejudice to any other available means of recovery, make an order requiring such deductions to be made on account of the fine from the wages of the person employed or workman as the tribunal think fit, and requiring the person by whom the wages are paid to account for any sums deducted in accordance with the order.

#### POWER FOR COMPANIES TO CARRY ON MUNITIONS WORK

16. Any company, association, or body of persons shall have power, notwithstanding anything contained in any Act, order, or instrument by or under which it is constituted or regulated, to carry on munitions work during the present war.

## RULES TO BE LAID BEFORE PARLIAMENT

17. Any rule made under this Act shall be laid before each House of Parliament forthwith, and if an address is presented to His Majesty by either House of Parliament within the next subsequent twenty-one days on which that House has sat after any such rule is laid before it praying that the rule may be annulled, His Majesty in Council may annul the rule, and it shall thenceforth be void but without prejudice to the validity of anything previously done thereunder.

APPLICATION OF DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE ACTS TO  
MINISTRY OF MUNITIONS

18. The Documentary Evidence Act, 1868, as amended by the Documentary Evidence Act, 1882, shall apply to the Minister of Munitions in like manner as if that Minister were mentioned in the first column of the schedule to the first-mentioned Act and as if that Minister or a Secretary in the Ministry or any person authorised by the Minister to act on his behalf were mentioned in the second column of that schedule and as if the regulations referred to in those Acts included any document issued by the Minister.

## INTERPRETATION

19. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires :

(a) The expression "lock-out" means the closing of a place of employment or the suspension of work or the refusal by an employer to continue to employ any number of persons employed by him in consequence of a dispute, done with a view to compelling those persons or to aid another employer in compelling persons employed by him to accept terms or conditions of or affecting employment.

(b) The expression "strike" means the cessation of work by a body of persons employed acting in combination or a concerted refusal or a refusal under a common understanding of any number of persons employed to continue

to work for an employer in consequence of a dispute, done as a means of compelling their employer or any person or body of persons employed, or to aid other workmen in compelling their employer or any person or body of persons employed, to accept or not to accept terms or conditions of or affecting employment.

#### SHORT TITLE AND DURATION

20. (1) This Act may be cited as the Munitions of War Act, 1915.

(2) This Act shall have effect only so long as the office of Minister of Munitions and the Ministry of Munitions exist. Provided that Part I. of this Act shall continue to apply for a period of twelve months after the conclusion of the present war to any difference arising in relation to the performance by the owner of any establishment of his undertaking to carry out the provisions set out in the second schedule to this Act notwithstanding that the office of Minister of Munitions and the Ministry of Munitions have ceased to exist.

#### SCHEDULES

##### SCHEDULE I

1. Any difference, matter, or question to be referred for settlement in accordance with the provisions of this schedule shall be referred to one of the three following arbitration tribunals :

(a) The Committee appointed by the First Lord of the Treasury known as the Committee on Production ; or

(b) A single arbitrator to be agreed upon by the parties, or in default of agreement appointed by the Board of Trade ;  
or

(c) A Court of Arbitration consisting of an equal number of persons representing employers and persons represent-

ing workmen, with a chairman appointed by the Board of Trade.

2. The tribunal to which the reference is made shall be determined by agreement between the parties to the difference, or in default of such agreement by the Board of Trade.

3. The Arbitration Act, 1889, shall not apply to any reference under the provisions of this schedule.

## SCHEDULE II

1. Any departure during the war from the practice ruling in the workshops, shipyards, and other industries prior to the war shall only be for the period of the war.

2. No change in practice made during the war shall be allowed to prejudice the position of the workmen in the owners' employment or of their trade unions in regard to the resumption and maintenance after the war of any rules or customs existing prior to the war.

3. In any readjustment of staff which may have to be effected after the war priority of employment will be given to workmen in the owners' employment at the beginning of the war who have been serving with the colours or who were in the owners' employment when the establishment became a controlled establishment.

4. Where the custom of a shop is changed during the war by the introduction of semi-skilled men to perform work hitherto performed by a class of workmen of higher skill the time and piece rates paid shall be the usual rates of the district for that class of work.

5. The relaxation of existing demarcation restrictions or admission of semi-skilled or female labour shall not affect adversely the rates customarily paid for the job. In cases where men who ordinarily do the work are adversely affected thereby the necessary readjustments shall be made so that they can maintain their previous earnings.

6. A record of the nature of the departure from the conditions prevailing when the establishment became a controlled establishment shall be kept, and shall be open

for inspection by the authorised representative of the Government.

7. Due notice shall be given to the workmen concerned wherever practicable of any changes of working conditions which it is desired to introduce as the result of the establishment becoming a controlled establishment, and opportunity for local consultation with workmen or their representatives shall be given if desired.

8. All differences with workmen engaged on Government work arising out of changes so introduced or with regard to wages or conditions of employment arising out of the war shall be settled in accordance with this Act without stoppage of work.

9. Nothing in this schedule (except as provided by the fourth paragraph thereof) shall prejudice the position of employers or persons employed after the war.



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