SERVING MY TIME

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AN APPRENTICESHIP TO POLITICS

BY

HARRY POLLITT

LAWRENCE & WISHART LTD.
81, CHANCERY LANE, W.C.2

First published March 1940
Twice Reprinted 1941
Reprinted 1950

Printed in Great Britain by
The Camelot Press Ltd., London and Southampton

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PREFACE

It is a pleasure and an honour to be asked to write a few words on the occasion of this new edition of Harry Pollitt's autobiography. *Serving My Time* needs no introduction. It is already a classic of the British working-class movement.

Nearly ten years have passed since the first edition appeared in the spring of 1940. During these ten years it has helped to teach many thousands the background and traditions of the working-class movement and of the fight for communism in Britain. The appearance of this new edition will enable it to carry forward this teaching for many more thousands.

This is a book which can be placed in the hands of men and women of every political outlook and of no political outlook. They will find its story full of life and racy humour, as enthralling to read as a novel. And in reading it they will learn, through the background and experiences it describes, through the pictures of the workers' struggle, and through the personality that shines through it, something of what communism means and what the working-class movement means, in a way that direct political teaching alone can never give.

Harry Pollitt is known throughout the world as a leader of international communism and the foremost representative of communism in Britain. His record in the vanguard of militant socialism and trade unionism goes back to the formative period of the modern working-class movement in the years of the great labour upsurge before 1914 and during the war of 1914. He played an active part in the formation of the

Communist Party and in all its early struggles. A member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party since 1922, he became General Secretary in 1929, and for all these years has borne the heat and burden of the day in building and carrying forward the Communist Party to its present strength and influence.

Everything about Harry Pollitt defeats the conventional caricatures which the sedulous hacks of the millionaires and Transport House strive to spread about "Communist agents," "Stalin's men," "Russia's fifth column," and all the rest of the nonsense. He is as English as a Lancashire rose or an oak. Honour and integrity breathe from his every utterance. He has the disciplined, practical capacity of the skilled industrial worker; and he has also the deeply humane, broad and widely read culture of the finest representatives of the class-conscious skilled workers of Britain, which so often puts to shame the hollow smattering and abysmal ignorance of many so-called "educated" people. He knows the people of every part of England, Scotland and Wales as the hollow of his hand. If he is able to draw crowds like no other speaker in any part of Britain, it is not only because of his gifts as an orator, or because of his capacity for simple political explanation, and for kindling enthusiasm, but because he is close to every man and woman in his audience and able to express for them their own hopes, fears and aspirations.

Above all, Harry Pollitt is the embodiment of incorruptible loyalty to the cause of the working class and of socialism. "It suits to-day the weak and base, whose hearts are fixed on pelf and place." Harry Pollitt is not of those who "haul the glorious emblem down." He has never forgotten the burning hatred of capitalism,

imbued from his earliest memories and only strengthened by experience. He has never weakened in his passionate devotion and unquenchable confidence in the victory of the working class and socialism.

Twenty-seven years of common service with Harry Pollitt in the Executive Committee of the Communist Party, of experience of his unfailing patience and helpfulness, and of his personal friendship have been one of the happiest privileges of my life.

When Pollitt expresses the characteristically modest hope at the close that his book may be "useful to new comrades in the labour movement," he has certainly accomplished that aim. His narrative shows the experiences that have helped to make a workers' leader. At a time when slander of Communists is the cheap stock-in-trade of every hack, renegade and petty careerist, this book is a breath of fresh air from a revolutionary working-class fighter.

The courage, the humour, the many-sided humanity, the deep loyalty to comrades, the tireless energy and undying inspiration and capacity of inspiring others—all that makes the personality of Pollitt breathes through this book.

This instalment of autobiography carries the story only to 1929. It is to be hoped that in the turmoil of events Pollitt may yet find time to carry forward the story through the ensuing decades, during which he has played so leading a part in building the Communist Party and in the vanguard of every fight of the people and of all those who are striving for the glorious future of a Socialist Britain.

R. PALME DUTT.

October, 1949.

INTRODUCTION

I DEDICATE this book to the memory of my mother. Many writers have done the same, and no doubt each is perfectly sincere in thinking that his was the most wonderful mother in the world. I make no apologies for saying that about mine.

Her name was Mary Louisa Pollitt. Her grandfather was one of the most active rank-and-file members of the Chartist Movement in Lancashire and Yorkshire; her father, a woodworker who did a great deal to bring about the organisation of his craft.

My mother was my pal. I confided to her all my hopes and all my ambitions. She it was who guided my every step in the working-class movement.

Polly was the name by which everybody knew her. My mind is crowded with memories as I write these lines—memories of watching for her to come home from the mill, tired out, the once rosy cheeks in which my father so delighted, faded by ten-hour day after ten-hour day in the hot, noisy weaving shed, by frequent confinements and by never-ending poverty.

Never shall I forget her struggles to make both ends meet, to keep her home spotlessly clean and her children as well dressed as those of her neighbours. On Whit-Sunday, the day on which all Lancashire mothers would rather die than not provide new clothes for their children, we would set off, all dressed up, to visit our more prosperous relations, who always used to ask Ella and Jack and me if we had any pockets, then feel in them and leave a penny behind. On our way back to

Wharf Street, Droylsden, we used to feel as rich as the Rothschilds.

Often I could not wait for her to get back from the mill, but went part of the way to meet her. No matter how tired, how worried, how haunted by visions of the washing, cleaning, baking, and mending awaiting her when she got home, she was never too worried to greet her children with a smile.

All the neighbours in the street used to come to her with their troubles—as if she had none of her own. In the mill, as I discovered when I began to work with her, it was "Polly this" and "Polly that," all the day long, and never have I known her fail any who turned to her for help.

As I grew up, I seemed to draw closer and closer to my mother. What a lot she taught me! I used to listen spellbound to her first explanations of economics and industrial history. Every Tuesday night, she used to rush home from the mill, break the back of the washing, and then she and her sister Emily would go to hear somebody called Joe McGhee, a tinsmith, teach them economics; the things that mother of mine did with pennies and halfpennies would have made Adam Smith turn in his grave.

On rare occasions there would be great excitement in our house. Henry Irving was coming to the Theatre Royal in Manchester or the Carl Rosa Opera Company. Then all the cleaning had to be done on Friday night, and mother and her sister would go straight from the mill to queue up for the gallery at the Theatre Royal.

It was starting work as a half-timer with mother that really opened my eyes to the kind of world we live in.

Every time she put her shawl round me before going

to the mill on wet or very cold mornings, I swore that when I grew up I would pay the bosses out for the hardships she suffered. I hope I shall live to do it, and there will be no nonsense about it. I hated whatever system was responsible—not that at that time I knew anything about systems, but I felt instinctively that something was wrong.

About this time, my lovely little sister, Winifred, was dying, though I didn't know it. The family doctor, who loved her as if she had been his own, visited the house night and day, battling for her life. He is still a friend of the family, this old doctor, whose only Bible now, as then, is the *Manchester Guardian.*

One Sunday night, he whispered something to my mother and gave her a slip of paper before he left the house. Mother asked me to take it to Eastman's, the chemists in Fairfield. It was a prescription for ipecacuanha wine to make my sister sick. It meant going down a long dark lane, and I was terrified. Never shall I forget how terrified I was. I can understand what Poplar children felt like when they were evacuated to the country in the autumn of 1939.

Hatred mingled with fear. I would pay God out. I would pay everybody out for making my sister suffer. I was unconsciously voicing the wrongs of my class, wrongs that one day the working class in Britain will pay out as surely as they have done in Russia.

I hadn't been working long in the mill before girls attracted my attention. How could I help it when I was the only lad in the weaving shed.

One day, somebody told my mother that she had seen me standing in a dark entry with a girl. I was twelve at the time. The noise of the looms made it impossible for anyone to hear in the weaving shed, so

we all became expert lip-readers, an art which stands me in good stead now that I am a little deaf. My goodness, how that woman's lips worked as she told my mother of my outrageous behaviour! One would have imagined that I had got every girl in Droylsden in the family way!

Some days later, I found a copy of a pamphlet by Mary Wollstonecraft on my bed telling all about the unfolding of a flower, and I must say I never admired my mother's delicacy more than I did after reading this pamphlet. At the same time, I am bound to confess that I was never more full of curiosity in all my life.

When I began to get active in the working-class movement, it was to my mother that I went with all the hard questions, and when I began to speak in public, I used to get up on a chair and practise all my speeches on her, and my Grandma Charlesworth would say, "Yon lad ul mak a parson, Polly." After every meeting, she wanted to know every question I had been asked, and how I answered them. I got more help and education from Mary Louisa Pollitt than from anyone else in the world.

We had no family Bible in our house, but we had a Chambers's Dictionary and a grammar, and her efforts to correct my grammar and pronunciation used to make my brain whirl. What a dog's life she led me! I could tell many funny stories about her efforts, but one will have to suffice.

In 1938, I was doing a round of meetings for the Left Book Club with Victor Gollancz and the Dean of Canterbury. One Tuesday night we were in Hull, and after the meeting the Dean made some flattering remarks about "my excellent address," and how the simple way I put things across was a model. The next

night we were in Sheffield, and the Dean was even more complimentary, remarking that I "had a great command of the English language." I could not resist the temptation of writing to my mother and telling her about this.

The following Sunday I addressed a crowded demonstration in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester. My mother was there. I thought that, judging by the response of the audience, I had made an effective speech, but, on getting home to Openshaw that night, my mother greeted me with "Well, Harry. Damn the Dean! You made three mistakes in grammar to-night."

Now, I ask you, what hope have you of creating an effect with a mother like that.

I have never missed writing to her every week since I left the family fold in 1915. When I was in prison in 1925–6, I asked the Governor for a special letter on the occasion of her birthday, and explained that until I had been under his care I had never missed writing to her. He listened, quite unmoved, but, when I had finished, said to the warder, in as gruff a voice as possible: "See that A.44 has a special letter."

I could quote many interesting passages from her letters. For instance, after the betrayal of Republican Spain in March, 1939, I delivered a speech at Lambeth Baths which was published in the *Daily Worker*. A few days later I got a letter from my mother in which she said:

> Your speech at Lambeth explained the situation very clearly. You must always explain a situation as plainly as possible to the workers, so that they will understand. Blatchford's success as a writer was due to his simple way of putting his case. One would have to be a real dunderhead not to have understood. I always remember the first

> article of his in the *Sunday Chronicle* before you were born. One of his critics had written to him and signed himself "Humanitas." After Blatchford had said a few words to him, he said, "And, Humanitas, I'll tell thee why." He then went on to explain the capitalist system, and I saw the light of day; it was all made plain and simple.

I have tried to keep this advice in mind when writing this book: to explain the events of my early life as simply as possible, in the hope that other working-class lads, faced by the same sort of problems, may be helped to find a revolutionary solution to them. The exact nature of these problems has changed, must change, from month to month, but fundamentally they remain the same and, in essence, can be reduced to the single one: how to agitate, educate and organise the workers to build up their revolutionary proletarian party, which can lead them forward to the conquest of power and the establishment of Socialism.

The other quotation is from a letter after the Press had made a great to do about my being "sacked" as Secretary of the Communist Party in 1939. I had written to Mother explaining what the differences were, and that removal from my position was the only course open to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Her letter in reply was typical of the woman. After various remarks in which motherly love came before politics, she went on:

> One thing I do know. I would not lose my dignity, because your marking-off tools are here, and I have kept them in vaseline ready for use at any time.

And on that note I will close this little dedication, save to say two things: my mother was the greatest woman who ever lived, and that her idol, who she

followed through every step of his career, was William Gallacher, M.P.

Postscript

I finished writing the above at one o'clock in the morning of November 1st, 1939. At that hour my mother died in a Manchester hospital to which she had suddenly had to be taken. I had no idea she was ill. Only three days previously I had written to her asking her advice about some portions of this book, and telling her I was writing a preface in honour of her. My sister told me she was never able to read this letter.

So has closed the life of a working-class woman and mother typical of millions, their names never heard of, save in their own homes, but they are in truth the salt of the earth.

A neighbour who had known my mother all her life wrote to me after her death and said:

> You will never know how great a woman your mother was, and what an inspiration to all around her. It is not enough to present her as a working-class woman. She was a cultured lady in the best sense of that term. Good manners were part of her, and had not to be, nor were, taught to her. Her table was always spotless—shining cutlery and always a few flowers—and the whole home, though only plain, always gave me the feeling of a happy and homely atmosphere.

A foundation member of the I.L.P., for over fifty years a Co-operator, a member of the Ashton and District Weavers' Association to the day of her death and a foundation member of the Communist Party. Such was the record of the mother to whom this book is dedicated.

Chapter I

EARLY DAYS

I was born in the little textile village of Droylsden, Lancashire, on November 22nd, 1890. It was the usual kind of working-class street in the usual Lancashire village, only Droylsden was known as "the silly country."

It was called Wharf Street, but anything less like the picture conjured up by the name it would be hard to imagine. Needless to say, the inhabitants without exception fondly thought that it was the abode of the élite of Droylsden society.

It was a mean little street, with flagged pavements and unpaved roadway, lit by a solitary dim light at the top, near the house of the local policeman (whose wife proved a good friend to our family during many hard times). At the bottom was the canal, and on its banks a cotton-waste factory.

Across the road at the top of the street was Fairfield Square and the Moravian Settlement. It was as restful to walk through this square then as it is now to walk off Fleet Street into the Temple Gardens.

The local mill-owners lived in Fairfield, and those we called the "big nobs." I was not very old before I acquired the same hatred for them that I feel to-day. My mother was a weaver in Benson's factory, and she worked until I had almost finished serving my time as a boilermaker, when things got easier for us.

I was the second child, the first one, a boy, having lived only a few hours. Then my sister Ella came along, the twins, Winifred and Stanley, and my brother Jack. During each of these more or less interesting events (it depends entirely on how you look at it!), my mother worked until her confinement was upon her, and was back in the factory as soon as possible afterwards.

My sister and I were carried out of our bed at 5.30 every working day to be left in the care of Granny Ford for 4*s.* a week, until it was safe to leave us in bed to look after ourselves, and that wasn't very long. Mother came rushing home from Benson's in the breakfast half-hour to give us our breakfast, and my first actual recollection is of one such morning when I was sitting with my back to the fire and a cinder flew out and stuck on the back of my neck. But Benson's bell was ringing them back to work, and a neighbour had to come in and make a fuss of me and stop my crying. George Ogden, the Manager of Benson's, may have had many good qualities in his capacity as Captain of the St. Mary's Church Lad's Brigade, but soft-heartedness with his weavers when they were late was not one of them.

My early life was full of the things common to most working-class children—a home whose outstanding characteristics were poverty, sickness and death; the dread of getting into debt and the struggle to keep everything so clean that people thought you were better off than you ever dared hope to be.

When the twins were born, I remember my sister and me being taken to sleep with the children next door, and the following morning being solemnly conducted upstairs to see what the doctor had brought my mother in his little black bag. When I got down, my eyes all agog with wonderment that *two* could be

produced from such a small bag, it was to hear the woman from next door say to another neighbour, "Poor Polly! Whatever will she do now!"

And "Poor Polly" it was with a vengeance. One of the twins died at three months. It was my first experience of death. I did not understand it, but I did not like the heavy black and the solemn face of Mr. Rayment, the local undertaker. I pulled at my mother's skirts and begged her "to hide the coffin behind the curtain, and then Mr. Rayment wouldn't find it." Then came a very long illness for my mother, but, long before she had really recovered, back she was at Benson's. By this time, my sister and I, like every other working-class child in Lancashire, had become little mothers and fathers long before our time. I used to take the babies up to Benson's at half-past five in the evening to meet mother, and everybody used to stop and look at my sister Winifred, who was one of the most beautiful babies I have ever seen. To-day I came across a picture among my papers which I cut out of a magazine I found in the barber's shop after she had died. It was the picture of an angel, which I had cut out, I remember, because I thought it was "the dead spit of her," as we say in Lancashire.

We all had to muck in and help with the housework. Oh, that Lancashire cleanliness! That cleaning of the front step and flags! That scrubbing down of the backyard! Those steel fenders and fire-irons! Those brass candlesticks that had to be polished till you could see your face in them!

My father was a blacksmith's striker and a life-long trade unionist; and his forbears, too, had played their part in working-class struggles. He was one of the wittiest men I ever met. Everybody in the workshop

called him "Happy Sam," on account of his cheerful disposition and the fact that he was always laughing and singing.

Father liked a drink. He thought he was robbing the publican if he sat in the Crossley Arms without a full glass. Like so many other workers, he was always going to beat the bookmaker, only the bookmaker always beat him—but he had as many excuses as the devotees of Littlewood's nowadays.

My mother did not know one end of a horse from the other; racing form was a sealed book to her, but rarely did Derby Day pass without her putting her tanner on one of the first three horses in her only flutter of the year.

Family relations became strained at one stage and, after a family conference, my mother decided to leave my father. I remember it as vividly as though it were to-night. Mother carried one child, I carried the other, and my Aunt Emily—the best friend my mother ever had—carried the family belongings. Off we set up Market Street, Droylsden, to live with our grandmother. Half-way there, we met Father, a little drunk, but not too drunk to notice the Pollitt cavalcade. He gravely raised his cap and said, "Good night, Mary Louisa." What could you do with a man like that? Two days later, we were back in the family fold, and, of course, Father fervently promised that never, never again would he walk on the same side of a street that flaunted a public-house sign.

Once Father really did reform and go teetotal. He took Mother to the Palace in Manchester, where the star turn was La Milo. Never as long as I live shall I forget his description. It made him break the pledge the next day (or that was his excuse).

I have seen the most fierce domestic quarrels come to naught as Father went into the kitchen to do the washing-up and sing: "There's one little wish grant to me: See that my grave's kept green." And when in later years, his son who now writes these lines was telling his mother all about his own exploits, Father would again recall us to earth by singing: "But what about poor old father?"

Always getting into debt—but never failing to repay every penny—when at the end of a life of sheer slavery, knocking hell out of heavy metal, he was paid off, he was miserable because he had to live on his children. A Lancashire lad was my father, with the same Lancashire spirit that manifested itself at Peterloo.

Father used to do the washing-up and I the wiping. As soon as he had finished his meal, whether anybody else was ready or not, the things began to disappear from the table. "Come on, Harry. Let's get it over," he would say, and into the kitchen we hurried to begin the washing-up partnership. That habit has stuck to me all my life. It is the joke of my family now that when I am at home they are never allowed to finish their meal in peace before I am clearing the table and getting ready to perform at the sink.

Friday dinner-time was pay-time for my mother. Home she hurried and made out the list for the Co-operative Stores, which I never heard referred to as anything but "the Stores." As soon as I got home from school in the afternoon it was my job to go and do the shopping. Never shall I forget the terror that struck me as I was about to enter the Stores one Friday afternoon and found that the precious half-sovereign that I was always entrusted with had vanished. Visions of no food

for a week, and what would happen to me when I told the family I had lost the money flashed through my mind, and I began to cry lustily. Joe Hallsworth, now the Secretary of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, who always served my mother at his counter, came out into the street to ask what was the matter, and lo and behold! he found the half-sovereign delicately balanced on one bar of the grating over the cellars of the Stores. Men may have discovered gold mines, may have broken the bank at Monte Carlo, but never will any have known the elation that I felt when that half-quid reposed in my hand again. It was not usual for me to lose money, for I knew only too well how precious it was and how hard my mother had to work for it; nor did she ever forget to say before I went out on my errands: "Now, our Harry, if anyone stops you and asks you to run an errand for them while they hold your purse, never have anything to do with them. They are bad women."

But the account of these minor tragedies does not mean that there was no brightness and gaiety in my young life. There was, in plenty. I was up to all sorts of mischief. On Sunday afternoons we were all packed off to Sunday school, because every family where both father and mother worked wanted a bit of peace on Sunday afternoon to enjoy a sleep. So I went the round of the Sunday schools, changing my partiality for the various denominations at an astounding pace, principally because I was expelled from most of them for some mischievous prank or other.

I stuck longest at the Moravian Sunday School, where I was considered very bright, and my teacher, who always set me to read long passages from the Bible, prophesied a great future for me as a preacher.

On week-days, all the lads in the street attended the Band of Hope, the Christian Endeavour, the Confirmation Class—in fact, everywhere that there were possibilities of getting up to mischief.

At the Confirmation Class I was gaining flying colours, until I regrettably lost my laurels. The final test was on a Thursday night, but Thursday night was fire-iron cleaning night in our home, and I had to clean those infamous things. The parson was so upset that his star pupil was not present that he came out to see where I was. He found me on my knees, true, but polishing, not praying. He sternly admonished me for my deliquency. He was a great, fat, well-fed man. I thought of my mother, slaving her inside out to earn our living and keep our house neat and clean, and when he started on where I should go to for cleaning fire-irons instead of attending Confirmation Class, I retaliated by telling him where he could go to. That ended my hopes of Confirmation! He never spoke to me again, except one Easter Sunday, which was a special occasion on which the public could go into the Moravian Cemetery. He found me and my gang having the time of our lives playing hide-and-seek behind the gravestones, and his language as he admonished us had nothing in common with that used in the Book of Common Prayer.

There followed a long period of exclusion from these well-meaning religious bodies. My career at the Congregational Church had come to an untimely end when one evening, Miss Rathbone, the lady in charge, felt inspired to ask us all to kneel down at the form and pray. "Perhaps little Harry Pollitt would like to lead us in prayer." Like a shot, little Harry took his chance, and chimed out:

Hold the fort, the donkey's coming
In a little cart.
The wheels are smashed, the shafts are broken,
And the donkey's fagged.

Miss Rathbone's reaction was to take me by the scruff of the neck and deposit me outside. This summary justice I did not in the least resent, but when Miss Rathbone, who worked in the same weaving shed as my mother, reported the story of my sacrilege to her the very next morning, I felt a little disgusted.

My career at the Band of Hope came to an untimely end in this way. There was a huge old organ in the room and the lads of the village thought it would be a good idea if I got inside it and at the right moment caused a little light amusement. Arnold Rathbone was delivering a ponderous lecture on the evils of strong drink, when loud "Miaows! Miaows!" began to resound through the room. Arnold searched everywhere, and at last found me in the organ and I regret to say lost his temper and pitched me out neck and crop.

One thing helped to prevent my complete exclusion from all these institutions. I was a bit of a reciter and in great demand at every local concert. My speciality was a wonderful recitation about the evils of alcohol. The theme was the life of a drunkard and his wretched home, and how one night the publican refused to let him have a pint on tick, so he went teetotal, and then, what a miraculous change came over his home! It was most inspiring.

All my recitations had a moral in those days—as a matter of fact, they still have to-day. But it was my father's delight to hear me recite my teetotal speciality

and sign the pledge form just to see my face light up before sauntering forth on a Saturday night. I regret to state that it never influenced his subsequent wanderings in the slightest.

But the gilt was soon off the gingerbread, for no sooner had I got in than I would hear: "Harry Pollitt will now recite, and then he will leave the room."

Only once did I ever get a good hiding from my father. It was a good one; that's why I remember it. A milk cart was standing at the top of our street. The milk-girl (and what a size that girl was!) was lower down the street serving her customers. The brilliant thought struck our gang that a block of wood thrust between the spokes of the cartwheel might result in interesting consequences. I was chosen to carry out the experiment, which I promptly did, quite unknowing that an all-seeing eye was upon me. Back came the milk-girl, stepped into her cart, signalled to the horse, who started off, only to be pulled up with such a jerk that the milk can was hurled out of the cart, and we had the exciting experience of witnessing a river of milk flowing down the gutters.

The thrill was short-lived. A stern father's hand descended on my coat collar, and I couldn't sit down for days. My mother was sorry for me, and as soon as Father had closed the door on his way out to the Liberal Club, I came to the top of the stairs seeking sympathy. But Father had foreseen precisely that step, and promptly returned to the house, and I got it again. I have never liked milk since that day.

In November, 1939, I was in Droylsden and went to look at the school where I was supposed to receive my early education. It is now a shoe-repairing factory, and a good job, too, that it is no longer a school. How my

teacher could teach any youngster in such surroundings is a complete mystery to me. Small, ill-lighted, no space, all cramped into cheerless rooms, a playground where you couldn't swing a cat—this was the school of tens of thousands of Lancashire lads like me.

Then I got my first job to augment the family income. It was in a little rag-shop at the bottom of the street. I started at eight o'clock on a Saturday morning and finished at one o'clock. What a loathsome job it was. I got exactly sixpence for it, but to my mother it meant a lot. I was terrified of that rag-shop, because, being small, I had to crawl into all the little dark places where the rats were. I was frightened of rats then, and I'm frightened of them now. I once confided this fear to some rivet-carriers when I was a bit older. It was a mistake, because that night, when I put my hand in my jacket pocket, I found a dead rat in it and promptly passed out.

But happier days were at hand. I was nearly twelve years old by now, ready to sit for my half-time examination. I thought the day would never come, but one wet Saturday morning I finally found myself with a small crowd of boys and girls of my own age walking to Ashton-under-Lyne, three miles away, to sit for the examination that would permit those who passed to go to the mill as half-timers.

All our conversation on the way was on what kind of sums they would give us. Would there be very hard words in the dictation? Would there be composition? We need not have worried. The mill-owners who controlled the educational bodies took precious good care that the biggest dunce in the school could pass it. What did they care? They wanted cheap labour, and intended to see that they got it. Within a very few days,

the certificate came saying that Harry Pollitt had passed and could now work half-time.

I was delighted, but not so my mother. She bitterly regretted the step which had to be taken, but it saved her from paying half a crown a week to some other half-timer to help her with her four looms.

At first it was a great thrill, but the thrill soon wore off. One week it meant getting out of bed at five-thirty in the morning, being in the mill by six, half an hour for breakfast, work until dinner-time at half-past twelve, and then school from two o'clock till four. The next week, it was school in the morning, and the mill from half-past one till half-past five.

The night before I started work, my father said he had a warning to give me. I had taken the part of the villain in that well-known song, "The Gypsy's Warning" and wondered what was coming. He said: "Now Harry, tha's starting work. Tha'lt be called once, and once only. Think on't." Father was always at work at least fifteen minutes before the buzzer went, and he got me into the same habit. I never remember being late for work once during all the years I have worked in mill, factory, boiler-shop or shipyard.

At last the night that seemed eternal came to an end, and I walked proudly up the village street with my mother to Benson's Mill. Of course, I had been inside many times before and seen the looms working, but I imagined it would be quite different when I helped work the looms myself. The roar of the machinery started, and I was quite deafened. I soon got used to the routine. I was the only lad in the weaving shed, all the other half-timers being girls. They all made a great fuss of me, and told me "I had a little face as round and rosy as an apple." On Fridays, when I was on

afternoon turns, I must have got many more toffees than were good either for my teeth or my digestion.

The usual tricks played on a learner were played on me, but the weavers, being a cut above the cardroom operatives (as they thought) played only polite, ladylike tricks on me. It was left to the buxom girls and women in the cardroom to break me in by taking my trousers down and daubing my unmentionable parts with oil and packing me up with cotton waste.

The romance soon wore thin. I seemed hardly to have got into bed when it was time to get up. Like every other half-timer, I fell asleep more often than not in the middle of school. On very bad mornings, when it was raining or snowing hard, Father would call me, and then when he had gone to work, Mother would creep up and say, "Stop in bed this morning. I'll manage till breakfast-time." On other occasions, I would walk to the mill with my head under my mother's shawl to protect me from bitter cold and wind. Then came my thirteenth birthday, and I finished with school altogether and went to the mill full-time. I passed out of the weaving shed into the warehouse, and here acted as runner for the cut-lookers, bringing weavers to the warehouse to be reprimanded for faulty work, taking the cloth out of the cut-lookers' frames and putting in fresh cuts. This was a very happy period. I had the run of the whole mill, and it was my special delight to be able to get to the boiler-house or the engine-room. Of course, I was always getting into trouble, but somehow or other, I got out of it again. One very difficult moment for me was when I was sent for the first time to bring the head mechanic's tea from his house. I had never heard him referred to as anything but "Old Pie Can," so I went as bold as brass to

his door and asked his wife for "Mr. Piecan's tea." The silence was intense, and she asked me a few questions, to which, like Bret Harte's character, "Truthful James," I replied. But I did not enjoy the telling off that "Pie Can" gave me the next morning.

Then I had to fetch the Manager's tea as well, and it may be the fact that I invariably used to drink some of it and pinch some of his cake as well that inculcated my belief in the principle of confiscation.

The head cut-looker suggested to me that I might still further augment the family income by selling programmes at the various social and educational functions at the Co-operative Stores. I jumped at it, and had the time of my life making a copper or two and listening to the concerts and lectures at the same time.

It was on this programme-selling job that I organised my first strike. There was always a lot of talk at the mill, which my keen ears did not miss, about the "Co-op. Committee and their wives doing themselves well" at the annual dinner and concert which wound up the season. Thought I to myself, "Why not the programme-sellers as well?"

On the night of the great affair, I went with the other two lads up to the biggest wig of all the Committee-men, and told him that unless we had supper like all the others, we wouldn't sell the programmes. It was too late to get any other lads, so we won our supper.

It was also about this time that I heard my first Socialist lectures. My mother took me one Sunday night to the Whitworth Hall, Openshaw, to hear Philip Snowden. I still remember one phrase in his speech which has always stuck in my memory: "Only when capitalism has been abolished will it be possible to abolish poverty, unemployment and war."

Another big event was a Co-op. Education Committee lecture given by the Socialist parson, Conrad Noel. The Droylsden Co-op. Hall was not a third full, and when Conrad Noel came on in his priest's robe, I could hear the audience gasp. But I was very, very much interested in everything he said. I could catch then the drift of many conversations that went on in our home between my mother and her sister, and when I heard that there was a Socialist Sunday School in Openshaw, I was on to it like a shot.

But the burning topic of conversation at home now began to be what I was going to do when I grew up. I knew what I wanted to be, a boilermaker—more than any small boy has ever yearned to be an engine-driver or a cowboy. My father, who all his life had a hard, slogging job, either in the forge or over the tube plate fire in the boiler-shop, was against this. "I've done enough slogging my guts out for nowt for one family," he would say. "Tha get thy feet under t' table."

"Getting one's feet under the table" meant for Father getting a soft job and plenty of money. Until the day of his death he hoped for this for me. He was proud of what I was doing in the revolutionary movement, but in his latter years, conversations invariably ended as he put on his coat to go out for a pint: "Harry, get thy feet under t' table like J. H. Thomas and that crowd. They've found out which side their bread's buttered on."

After one of these discussions on my future career, it was decided that I should apply for a job that was going in the Stores for a butcher's boy. I had no ambitions in this direction, but it was proposed that I should go to the slaughterhouse to get "blooded." I

did. The men were just fetching in a lamb, and the bleating touched my heart, so that, without waiting for the finishing process, I ran, crying bitterly, to the mill to meet my mother, exclaiming, "Mother! Mother! I can't be a butcher. I couldn't bear to kill a little lamb." She was on my side instantly.

Eventually it was settled that boilermaking it was to be, and so an uncle was approached to "speak for me" at Gorton Tank, the great railway locomotive building plant of the Great Central Railway. Uncle George made so great a palaver about this that after he had gone, my father said, "Anybody would think you were being put in t' Cabinet instead of Gorton Tank." When I was fifteen, I was told, I should be a tradesman. I knew very well what a sacrifice this would mean for my home. It meant very low wages as an apprentice until I came out of my time at twenty-one.

I started at Gorton Tank on October 2nd, 1905, as a rivet-carrier, then went into the foreman's office for a time. The clerk in this office was the dues collector for the local branch of the Railway Clerks' Association, and he gave me the job of going round the various offices to collect the dues. Then on to the marking-off slab, and through all the general run of plating.

Until I was twenty-one I never missed attending night school four nights a week and doing all the homework that was given. I took up mathematics, machine-drawing, construction and designing, tin-plate development, shorthand and economics, and by 1912 had finished serving my time. Then I was made a first-class member of the Boilermakers' Society, feeling very much awed at the ceremony which had to be gone through before I was initiated into being a Brother, and enjoined to remember not to set class against

class, and to become a loving husband and tender father, as well as a strict observer of morality and the laws of the land. The emphasis that the Branch President laid upon the latter section was most noticeable, for by this time I had become well known in the locality as "one of those damned Socialist agitators."

Nevertheless, I had a great feeling of pride and craftsmanship in becoming a member of the Boilermakers' Society, and hoped I would bring as much credit to the organisation as one of my uncles, W. Kidd, had done. He entered the Boilermakers' Society in 1844 and had over sixty years' unblemished record.

In 1909 I went with my mother to the Openshaw I.L.P. Hall in Old Lane, where she proposed me as a member of the Independent Labour Party. Dick Coppock, of the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives, and W. H. Hutchinson, National Organiser of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, will remember this hall, for they were both members of the same branch.

I was accepted and given a warm welcome and a short explanation of the policy and principles of the Independent Labour Party (a procedure, by the way, that we have been remiss in not adopting in the Communist Party).

The Openshaw Branch was very active and go-ahead. We used to love describing ourselves as "revolutionary Socialists," and for a long time the Branch had been growing more and more critical of the Labour Party to which it was affiliated. Dissatisfaction came to a head on June 10th, 1909, when the Openshaw Branch seceded from the Independent Labour Party, which was followed up on September 2nd by secession also from the Gorton Trades Council.

This initiated my career as a young and ardent disciple of Socialism. I went through all the hard, slogging work of that time, trying to spread Socialism among the very reserved, skilled workers of Openshaw; chalking the streets to advertise meetings, collecting dues, cleaning the premises (for years Charlie Openshaw and I cleaned the top room of the Socialist Hall in Margaret Street every Sunday morning, in preparation for the evening lecture), selling literature, carrying the platform to the street corner, taking the collection. On Sunday mornings, I attended classes in industrial history and economics. In the afternoon I went to the Secular Hall in Rusholme Road to listen to G. W. Foote, Chapman Cohen, Lloyd and many, many others. In the evening, back to the Socialist Hall to listen to the lectures that were given without fail every Sunday night. What a hive of activity the Socialist Hall in Margaret Street, Openshaw, became! Every night in the week, something or other was going on: classes in industrial history and economics, socials to raise money, choir practice, lectures, the whole round of local Labour life and work.

This hall was one of the most beautiful workers' meeting places in the country. It was built by the members themselves, and the present generation can have no idea of the labour of love that went into the making of it. The majority of the members were craftsmen in one trade or another, and they put all they knew into the construction of their hall. Robert Blatchford opened the Socialist Hall when it was finished, and a proud day that was.

Few people know the names of those who built up the movement round that Margaret Street hall: Dick Hollins, Harry Fisher, Bill Williams, Gilbert Roberts,

Alf and Emily Gerring, Jim Crossley, my mother, Charlie Openshaw, Albert Adshead, Ted Somerset, the Treasurer (and there never was another like him), Jack Munro, now Secretary of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council.

When I visit my old home in Openshaw, I always make a point of going to see the old Hall, and sad and bitter thoughts pass through my mind as I remember its history, and how through neglect and stupidity it was lost after the last War, only to become to-day a furniture repository.

During all these early years I was reading everything I could lay my hands on. I rushed for the *Clarion* and the *Freethinker*, every Friday night when they came to the house; I knew *Merrie England* and *Britain for the British* and *Not Guilty* off by heart. I read those early pamphlets, *Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy* and *Was Jesus Christ a Socialist?* again and again; then the series of pamphlets came out on the Erfurt Programme and *Wage, Labour and Capital*; *Value, Price and Profit*; Prince Kropotkin's booklet, *The State*; and *Fields, Factories and Workshops*.

I got hold of all the publications of the Rationalist Press Association, and from the local library all the classics of English literature, but in this field my greatest craving was for poetry, so when the comrades smile now as I get a little bit of poetry off my chest to wind up a speech, let them see in this not at all a bad idea, which goes back to my very young and salad days in the Movement.

I read every minute I could, and my favourite trick was to wait until the family were all in bed, then creep downstairs, light a candle and sit reading half the night.

It was on one such occasion, when I was enthralled reading Haeckel's *The Riddle of the Universe*, that my mother came down about two o'clock in the morning, rather suspecting what was taking place. I never heard her come down the stairs, and when she stood there in her white nightgown and said, "Our Harry, come to bed," I thought it was a ghost and promptly fainted. It was some time after that before I did the night-reading trick again. I still prize all those early pamphlets, dirty and greasy with finger-marks from reading snatched in the workshop at odd minutes when the boss wasn't looking.

Chapter II

THE MANCHESTER COUNTY FORUM

From 1910 to 1914, it was the custom of the comrades with whom I was most closely associated to spend our Saturday evenings at the County Forum in Market Street, Manchester.

How eagerly we listened to those debates. I noted the methods of all the giants of the Forum: the tall and stately Mr. Gray, who always reminded me of the photographs I had seen of the late Arthur Balfour, an out-and-out Tory; and then the bearded Radical, Mr. Whittle. When the Grays and Whittles got going, it seemed good to be alive. True, the debates were not very varied, centring as they did around the themes of "Free Trade and Tariff Reform" or "The Tory Party or the Liberal Party" or "Will Socialism Destroy the Independence of the Working Man?" etc.

Mr. Gray would rise to take the floor, his bowler hat and umbrella being always a part of him. I never saw him without either, and firmly believed he would be totally incapable of presenting his case without them.

When Mr. Whittle started, he could be heard a mile off, and invariably when he had got to his loudest, some wag in the audience would cry, "Speak up, Whittle!" and he never failed to fall for it.

Then there was Mr. Winter, the anarchist, and Mr. Thompson and Bob Whitehead, staunch defenders of Socialism.

Being youngsters, we sat modestly at the back, never daring to speak. I attended the Forum for two years before plucking up courage to address what to me at that time was an august and critical assembly.

The Forum brought me into close personal contact with a character known to most old Socialists in the North of England, called Moses Baritz. I had seen him take the floor scores of times, and although his withering scorn for the Grays and Whittles was biting enough it was nothing to the contempt he reserved for the reformist Labour elements.

When we came out of the Forum, we used to stop at the bottom of Tib Street, where there were always groups of people "arguing the toss," as it was called. One could hear every subject under the sun being hotly discussed. It was a real rough and tumble this, but first-class experience, providing every type of question and answer and every conceivable point of view.

I hope that I have always been a good listener, but as I sat week after week in the Forum, the thought kept passing through my mind, "Go on, boy. Have a go. You could put a case better than they do." Thus, in all my youthful conceit, I got up one Saturday evening. Once on my feet, I was terrified at the sight of Moses Baritz sitting right in the front; his great prototype was never more terrified at the apparition of the burning bush than I was at this spectacle, but it was too late to retreat. What I said and how I said it I have no idea, but immediately I sat down, up got Moses. "Now for it," I thought. "I'm going to get it in the neck like all the others," for nobody ever heard Moses say a good word for anyone. To the amazement of the whole assembly, and to me most of all, there poured out what

for Moses, was such high praise that I was still blushing a week later. "A remarkable effort for one so young," he concluded. "Here is a socialist of promise."

At the end of the debate, Moses came up and introduced himself, and that started a friendship which we kept up to the day of his death, although I am bound in honesty to relate that never again had Moses a good word to say for my politics.

I couldn't get home fast enough to tell my mother. Alas and alack! I must have been "dizzy with success," for when next Saturday evening I sailed into the debate with unbounded confidence, Moses got after me with withering criticism which knocked all the conceit out of me. I thought I would never dare show my face in the Forum again. I never said a word to my mother about that when I got home.

Moses was a remarkable character. Few men have got their living in such a variety of ways. He was at one time a frequent contributor to the *Manchester Guardian* on musical topics, and was a musical critic of standing. On one occasion he worked his passage to Montreal, where he became musical critic for a leading paper. A famous *prima donna* came to the city, and Moses was allotted the job of writing up her concert. Between her groups of songs, a lesser-known artist was sandwiched in. The next day, Moses' report consisted of a column extolling the virtues of the unknown artist, and concluded with the single sentence: "Madam So-and-So also sang."

The following day Moses was fired, and worked his passage back to England on a cattle-boat. He came up to Openshaw during the time Bill Gee was conducting a week's Socialist propaganda for our branch, and his remarks on entering our hall and seeing Red Flag

toffee and chocolate for sale, and adverts. for Co-operative boots, were most cutting.

When we met again, our group was going all "arty." Miss Horniman was running the Gaiety Theatre at that time, and we were all frequently to be found in the gallery. But when a famous opera company came to the Theatre Royal to perform *Tannhäuser*, and as the advertisement said it would be supported by a specially augmented orchestra, we invited Moses to come along with our group.

We knew Moses as an authority on Wagner—indeed, one of his most brilliant lectures was on the subject of "Wagner and Socialism." After standing in the queue for hours, we got good seats in the gallery, but no sooner had the orchestra played the Overture than Moses sprang to his feet and shouted in a voice that could be heard all over the theatre, "Come out, comrades! It's a scandal to allow Wagner to be murdered like this. I wouldn't have that band in my house to play at a Christmas party."

The comrades meekly followed the leader out, but one at any rate felt that he had been robbed that night.

It is a great temptation to write incident after incident about Moses Baritz. The last time I met him was on the train from St. Pancras to Manchester shortly before he died. The whole train was familiar with my sins of omission and commission by the time we arrived at our destination. The only time he interrupted his castigation was while the train was going through the Peak District, when he stopped to expatiate loudly on the theory (with which I entirely concur) that England has the loveliest countryside in the world, but "Look," he said, "how the vandals of imperialism are desecrating Derbyshire to get more and more profit."

I was glad that the County Forum made it possible for me to know Moses, but also because it was a first-class training ground, and I enjoyed every minute that I spent there. Many was the tip I learnt which helped to equip me as a speaker and an agitator; for the two are by no means the same thing. I always noticed some Socialist stalwarts standing outside the Forum as the debates ended selling pamphlets and literature. It many times seemed a thankless task, but they stuck it night after night, and if they sold but a few, they inspired many through the few.

Looking back at those evenings spent in debating at the Forum, it is easy now to criticise. With rare exceptions, the discussions on politics were only reproductions of the arguments put forward in the capitalist Press, and based on the economic and political writings of orthodox authors. We had yet to discover that the working class, if it is to find the way forward, needs to tackle its problems in a new way; that its theory, as well as its practice, must be revolutionary. True, I had heard of *Capital*, but I had not yet read it, and had no idea of the great armoury of ideological weapons that lay ready to hand in the writings of Marx and Engels. To-day things have changed, and there can be few, if any, gatherings of workers for discussion in which some at least of the audience have not studied these great thinkers and their followers, Lenin and Stalin.

And yet, in spite of this drawback, our meetings were of great value to all of us—at any rate to me. They opened my eyes to the existence of all sorts of experiences outside the routine of home and work. As I see it now they were one of the influences that created the demand for a fuller life, a life in which culture and ideas should have their proper place. In other words,

they helped to put flesh and bone on the framework of Socialism. This aspect of Socialist propaganda must never be forgotten, for the culture the working class will create when it comes to power will not be something that starts from nothing. It will embrace the whole proceeding culture of the past, and infuse it with new power and strength; and the demand for this new culture, this wider, freer life, is a force that enriches our whole political outlook.

Chapter III

ON THE SOAP-BOX

I was about seventeen years old when I first tried my hand at public speaking. First attempts have a way of sticking in one's mind, and as I write this I can remember as though it were yesterday the first time I took the chair at a meeting in the Margaret Street Hall for a Miss Boltansky, who was lecturing on "Eugenics." No doubt I learned a lot from that lecture—at all events, I was told my face was a study as I listened to her remarks on some aspects of the subject that night.

The ice once broken, I was soon keen on taking the chair at the street corner. That was a very different proposition, but I liked it. Never once did I hang back when it was suggested that I should do it; on the contrary, I am not sure that I didn't push forward for the job.

The great ambition of us all at that time was to take the chair for Bill Gee and F. G. Jones. We used to have these comrades for what we called "Week's Missions for Socialism." Bill Gee we advertised as the "Socialist Dreadnought," and F. G. Jones as the "Silver-tongued Orator." Bill Gee was my idol. My secret hope was that one day I should become as good a speaker as he. So when one Sunday night I was asked to take the chair for him outside the Gransmoor Hotel in Openshaw, my cup of happiness was overflowing.

I have always taken a great deal of time and trouble in preparing my speeches, for I believe it is an insult to

an audience to do otherwise, but never have I taken more care than for the ten minutes I had at my disposal that Sunday evening. Everything went well, and from that night on I have always had a warm feeling of friendship for Bill Gee. He helped me enormously with advice on what to read and how to study and get my ideas across. His name means nothing to the present generation, but the old-timers in many parts of the country remember Bill Gee with affection, in spite of his brutal frankness and unconcealed likes and dislikes.

On certain things, Bill was a martinet, and rightly so, and I have always tried to follow out his insistent demands: always start meetings on time; always boost the literature; always finish the meetings before the pubs close—the workers like to have time for a drink.

An entirely different personality was F. G. Jones, who, I think, was the greatest orator I have ever heard. He had a fine, commanding presence, a fine voice and perfect diction; when he spoke the greyness of Openshaw faded, and his audience saw, instead, the Openshaw that Socialism could—and will—create. People talk about "following the gleam." F. G. Jones showed more than a gleam; life and work seemed easier the next day and for many days after that. Reading William Morris always had the same effect on me. *News from Nowhere*, the poem, *Come hither, Lads and Hearken*—how they painted the picture of what Socialism will do, gilding the lily a little, if you like; but I liked it then, and like it now.

There is not half enough of this type of propaganda to-day. We have all become so hard and practical that we are ashamed of painting the vision splendid—of showing glimpses of the promised land. It is missing from our speeches, our Press and our pamphlets, and

if one dares to talk about the "gleam," one is in danger of being accused of sentimentalism. Yet I am convinced it was this kind of verbal inspiration that gave birth to the indestructible urge which helped the pioneers of the movement to keep fight, fight, fighting for freedom, when it was by no means as easy as it is to-day.

I had not yet been the actual speaker at a meeting. I have previously mentioned how I used to go to the Secular Hall in Rusholme Road, Manchester. One Sunday afternoon I went with Dick Hollins, a real old Socialist stalwart. He had sons and daughters older than I, but he used to like taking me to meetings, and especially to the Secular Hall. This Sunday afternoon the speaker was G. W. Foote, and in the course of his lecture he related how, when he was a young man, Charles Bradlaugh asked him to become Secretary of the National Secular Society, "And," said Foote, "with the sublime audacity of youth, I agreed."

That same evening, I went to the Socialist Hall at Openshaw, where Bert Killip, well known in Leeds and West Ham, was to speak. For some reason he did not turn up. This was a great blow, for Killip was a very effective and witty speaker. The hall was full, the comrades were discussing what to do, when someone said as a joke, "Harry, you'd better take it on." With the sublime audacity of youth, I answered like a shot, "All right. I will."

What I said I couldn't tell you if you offered me the Crown Jewels. I only remember that when I was introduced I thought my mother's eyes would come out on her head, and that when I got home it appeared I had made so many mistakes in grammar that nothing would ever remove the stain from the Pollitt escutcheon.

Anyhow, after that there was no stopping me. I had got the bit in my teeth and I never seem to have shaken it out.

I never pass Old Lane, the Cransmoor Hotel, the Half-Way House, Taylor Street—all old traditional open-air meeting places—without remembering with some amusement the speeches I inflicted on the working men and women of Openshaw, very few of whom, I hasten to add, ever stopped to listen, and small blame to them either. They remained quite unmoved by my eloquence about primitive Communism, chattel slavery and feudalism, mercantilism, modern capitalism and Socialism, which were the basic themes of all our speeches in those days. We hardly mentioned the every-day fight against capitalism, nor did we agitate for an immediate programme. That would have been reformism, and anathema to us.

My first leaflet was on "Reform *v.* Revolution," and I shall never forget my pride when the Openshaw Socialist Society decided to print it. I have kept it all these years, but, however easy it is now to laugh at a young revolutionary's presumption, I can still remember the ecstasy of seeing myself in print for the first time.

Nothing perhaps better reflects the atmosphere in which we carried on our work in the revolutionary movement at that time than this leaflet. There we were, young, eager, anxious to do all that was possible to arouse the workers, and yet we were unable to rise above the sectarian ideas of little groups, completely cut off from the mass movement, at the same time as we ourselves thought we were such an indispensable part of it.

And while you say to yourself, "How on earth could

he write such a thing?" and, even more emphatically, "How did he kid anybody to print it?" remember also that we had none of the Marxist and Leninist classics that are within reach of all to-day. Our available literature consisted of the *Communist Manifesto*, the Kerr edition of Marx's *Capital*, the Social Science Library (also published in America), the Daniel de Leon pamphlets, and that was about all. Furthermore, most of these were beyond the reach of a lad whose spending money, until he was twenty-one and came out of his time, was the princely sum of 1*d.* out of every 1*s.* of his wages—that is to say, exactly 1*s.* 3*d.* a week. Even so, every penny I could scrape up went on books. Members of the Socialist Club used to pay 3*d.* a week into a Book Club, and that was how I started to build my library.

I had read of the great doings that rich families indulged in when the son and heir came of age. In the mill where I worked, the weavers used to collect to buy a present for the bosses' sons. But when I reached man's estate, and my mother gave me for a twenty-first birthday present Volume I of *Capital*, I felt I owned the world. It was the same feeling that comes over a worker when he realises for the first time that our class owns one-sixth of the world—the Soviet Union.

My reputation as a speaker began to grow, and during the summer months between 1911 and 1914 I received invitations to go and address meetings in every part of Lancashire and Yorkshire: Liverpool, Oldham, Bolton, Leeds, Huddersfield, Grimsby. In those days I looked such a kid on the platform that on my first visits the comrades thought I had been sent to deputise for my father, and were very chary of introducing me as the principal speaker.

The place I visited most frequently was Liverpool, and I always remember my first experience there. I had prepared what I thought was a very good lecture. It was the Sunday after the loss of the *Titanic* on her maiden voyage to America. The Press had regaled us with stories of how the ship had gone down with the orchestra playing "Nearer My God to Thee." My Secular Hall training came in very well on themes such as these, and I was going to treat them to some real Voltairean boilermaker's satire.

The Chairman was a well-known Liverpool character called Sugar, and he started the meeting at seven o'clock by explaining that he would make a few introductory remarks "to indicate to the audience the points that the well-known speaker from Manchester, Harry Pollitt, would enlarge upon." He indicated them so fully and successfully that he was still going strong when at nine o'clock I was getting on the tram to catch my train back to Manchester, without ever having got on the platform.

Truth, however, compels me to add that the large audience enjoyed every word Comrade Sugar uttered, and didn't care in the slightest that the star from Openshaw had never been permitted to so much as wink, never mind shine!

It was at Liverpool, too, that I had my first debate. A short while previously, I had attacked Bishop Weldon at a public meeting in Manchester. This had created some local interest, and when one Sunday night in Bootle a Liberal schoolmaster challenged me to debate on "Liberalism *versus* Socialism," I was in my element.

The debate was held on a glorious summer evening. It was the evening that the *Aquitania* first came to the Merseyside, and I remember the pride of craftsmanship

that filled me as I watched its majestic progress down the river.

The comrades told me I did very well in that debate. The schoolmaster wound up his speech by telling the audience that "it was clear he had made a mistake in debating with a boy whose only education was from penny pamphlets." This was supposed to shrivel me up, but, on the contrary, moved me to spring to my feet and say that I was "proud that penny pamphlets enabled a worker to wipe the floor with a supposedly educated schoolmaster."

During the big Dublin strike of 1913, the Openshaw Branch was very active collecting money and food and popularising the cause of the strikers. The names of James Connolly and Jim Larkin were very familiar to me, but imagine my surprise when I got a request from the Grimsby Branch of the British Socialist Party to go and deputise for Jim Larkin at the Tivoli Theatre, Grimsby. Ernest Marklew was to have been the Chairman, but, as he had been involved in Divorce Court proceedings, it was not thought advisable for Jim Larkin to appear on a public platform with him because of the prejudice that the Roman Catholic elements would be able to whip up against him.

I had met Marklew on many occasions when he had spoken in Openshaw, and greatly admired his oratory. This was the first really big meeting I addressed, for I was still only a "street-corner boy." I remember that the collection for the Strike Fund was over £17, greatly to the delight of my old comrade, David Walmsley, who was to be the Secretary of the Grimsby Branch of the Communist Party from its foundation to the day of his death in November, 1939.

In my spare time I used to go out with the Openshaw

Clarion Cycling Club, and a grand bunch of comrades they were. I have heard a lot of scoffing at fellowship, but in this Club it was a reality which made hard, poverty-stricken young lives much brighter.

Every Sunday morning when I was not speaking, off we would go. "Boots!" was the greeting we gave, "Spurs!" the answer we got. It was mainly into the little Cheshire villages that we went, and just before dinner-time Harry Fisher would cry: "All off, and give them ten minutes of the gospel." Most of the Club members were also in the Margaret Street choir, and either Harry Fisher or Jim Crossley (who was always a kind of elder brother to me) would lead off the song, which was generally:

> In youth as I lay dreaming,
> I saw a country fair,
> Where plenty shed its blessings round
> And all had equal share.
> Where poverty's sad features
> Were never, never seen,
> And idlers in the brotherhood
> Would meet with scant esteem.

This singing made people stop, and then I would make a ten-minute speech. Very few ever stopped to listen, but we felt we had done our duty. We would wind up with "England, arise!", and on our way we would go. Returning in the evening, we would repeat the performance on another village green. Grand times!

If only a few of the clever people who to-day have fallen under the spell of phrase-mongering and scoff at such "sentimental stuff" would go out a little and see for themselves our English lanes and village greens, their work would become a great deal more effective.

Many a lad who called out "Boots!" and many a lad who replied "Spurs!" got from that movement the same inspiration that later sent others to Spain to go into action crying "Red Front!" with fist clenched in salute.

Personally, I have never been enamoured of salutes, slogans and badges, although I entirely appreciate the class significance that lies behind the use of these methods of propaganda.

Writing about the *Clarion* Club brings back an incident to my mind that my mother told me about. The day that the first issue of the *Clarion* came out, my father and mother had gone to Manchester. Father was carrying me in his arms, as my mother related to me in after-years, and when he heard "Buy the *Clarion*," he said, "Here, Polly. Hold our Harry while I buy this paper." It was bought every week after that until Blatchford went Jingo in 1914.

At Easter, 1912, the Annual *Clarion* Meet was held at York. Like modern Dick Turpins, off we set. On Sunday morning, we went to see York Minster, and I stood awed by the superb craftsmanship. Often had I listened to F. G. Jones contrasting Mediæval workmanship with the shoddy stuff turned out in this machine age in which we live to-day. I didn't know anything about Gothic or Norman architecture, but when I stood outside York Minster I realised the idealism and the devotion of mason and bricklayer, and thought of the thousands of building-trade workers living to-day in shoddy homes, their lives one long round of poverty and insecurity of employment.

On the Sunday evening of these *Clarion* Meets it was customary to hold a big demonstration. On this occasion, Robert Blatchford was to be the main attraction, but he did not appear. There had to be an overflow

meeting, which I was asked to keep going while the "big speakers" addressed the main gathering. I remember a torrent of words pouring forth (for then I spoke even faster than I do now!), then the Chairman tugged my coat, and my little hour of glory was at an end.

The next speaker was Fred Bramley, at that time a *Clarion* Vanner, later to become General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress. Fred started off by saying he did not know who this boy was who had just been speaking, but "he thought that one day he might become a leading figure in the Labour movement."

In 1923 I had to go to the offices of the Trades Union Congress to make a request of Fred Bramley. I was active by that time in the British Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions, and there was war to the knife between ourselves and the official trade union movement. I asked to speak to Fred Bramley, and he refused to have me admitted. I sent word back that I wanted to see him about the *Clarion* Meet in York in 1912. His curiosity aroused, he invited me in, when I reminded him of the incident to which I have just referred. Fred's sense of humour was always keen, and the request which I had originally come to make was promptly granted.

In 1912, the Openshaw Socialist Society took part in the Unity Conference in Manchester at which the Social Democratic Federation and a number of independent Socialist Societies merged to form the British Socialist Party. But our Branch was never very happy in the B.S.P. We were always in disfavour with Head Office, and especially with the late H. M. Hyndman. I never had any personal contact with Hyndman, but I disliked him for his arrogance and

snobbishness from the first moment that I set eyes on him on the platform, and matters were not improved when, in answer to certain criticism which I made on behalf of the Openshaw Branch of the B.S.P. on electoral policy, he described our Branch as being composed of "impossible anarchists."

He described us in this way because we were the first branch to put up revolutionary Socialist candidates against Labour candidates for the Manchester City Council in the Labour stronghold of Openshaw. Openshaw was one of the first places to return Labour candidates, and the late J. B. Williams of the Musicians' Union was one of the first Labour Councillors for the district. In 1906, John Hodge was returned as the first Labour M.P. for the Gorton Division, of which Openshaw is a part.

Our candidate in the 1911 Municipal Elections was Bob Whitehead of Moss Side, an old and respected Socialist. The Labour candidate was H. Laurie, who later became Labour M.P. for Hyde and Stalybridge. It was a very bitter fight, not only on political issues, but because of the former close personal friendship between Whitehead and Laurie.

Oh, the enthusiastic work that was put into this fight! Our meetings were marvellous. Our chalking was the talk of all the big factories. We were confident of victory and, as we waited for the result to be declared in Manchester Town Hall, we solemnly discussed how we would carry Bob Whitehead shoulder high down the Town Hall steps. The result was announced. Laurie got 1,628 votes, Whitehead, 148. Were we dismayed? Not a bit! Did I not declaim from the steps of the Town Hall that "this result is historic, and a moral victory for revolutionary Socialism."

We fought again in the 1912 Municipal Elections—a better campaign than the first. Better meetings, better literature sales, boundless enthusiasm. Again, fond dreams of certain victory. This time our candidate got 260 votes. Was there depression or down-heartedness? Not on your life! We walked along the Town Hall corridor singing the "Red Flag," and once more I held forth from the steps to the effect that "year by year the morality of our cause becomes clearer to the people."

It was one of those filthy November nights that only Manchester can produce, but that didn't stop us from holding a victory meeting outside the Margaret Street Hall (which not a solitary person, with the exception of our own small band, attended!) and to these faithful few we explained the world-shaking effect that 260 votes for revolutionary Socialism would have on the international situation. With bared heads, in the pouring rain, again we sang the "Red Flag." Next morning the very boiler-plates seemed lighter to handle! What glorious salad days those were.

Which reminds me of a special Branch meeting we called when the news of the success of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in the 1912 General Election was announced. My old comrade, Albert Adshead, solemnly got up and proposed that we send a telegram to August Bebel, congratulating him on the success of the S.D.P. and assuring him that "he and his Party had the full backing of the Openshaw Branch."

If, however, the eyes of the world were not exactly on Openshaw, the eyes of some astute Tory Party agents were. The name of Otto Kahn was being freely mentioned as the prospective Tory candidate for Gorton and Openshaw. Coming out of work one dinner-time, I was surprised to see waiting for me a deputation of

the members from the Openshaw Branch. It appeared that some representative of Otto Kahn had got in touch with them and proposed that we run a revolutionary Socialist candidate in Gorton. All expenses would be paid, and the money to start off the campaign handed over to an appointed comrade who must stand outside a certain bank in Piccadilly with a flower in his button-hole, "and no one would know anything about the transaction." As Secretary of the Branch, what had I to say? The deputation wanted to know.

Although my precious dinner-hour was quickly slipping by, I had plenty to say, and I said it! I fairly boiled with indignation and let fly right and left. It was suggested that perhaps there was no need to get so hot and bothered, because that was exactly what had happened in the Ashton-under-Lyne Election in 1910, when Bill Gee had been our revolutionary Socialist candidate and a large sum of money had been handed over to certain Ashton comrades, of which Bill Gee knew nothing. Innocent that I was, I never had such a shock in my life, and used language that would not be permitted in a ladies' seminary. The offer was turned down with a bang. The only other time I have been as angry was when, after I had been removed from my position as General Secretary of the Communist Party in October, 1939, a well-known editor sent a telegram offering me £20 if I "would state my views in his newspaper." I sent him a letter which I knew he would understand, and he had the decency to make a prompt apology.

I have had many offers of this kind, and every one has been given equally short shrift, although I think that the man who once came to the Communist Party office in King Street, opened his bag and showed me

250 £1 notes "which," he said, "are yours if you will run a Communist candidate in Hackney," must have wondered precisely how he was thrown out of the building. At that particular time I was nearly frantic trying to raise money to keep the *Daily Worker* going, and perhaps my state of mind contributed to the celerity with which that unfortunate guy was deposited in Covent Garden.

What glorious days all these were. One never felt tired: rushing home from work to get to classes on economics, industrial history and political economy; hurling passages from Marx at each other; quoting, with even greater confidence than the author, passages from Gibbon's *Industrial History of England* at audiences who did not seem to believe you. How confident and cocksure we were; but we all had that indestructible faith that I can see grips increasing numbers of workers at the present time.

But, on looking back over this period, I have as my clearest recollection the importance we placed on penny pamphlets and Socialist literature generally. There never was a finer literature stall than that to be found at Margaret Street, Openshaw, at the time I write of. It was the first place we made for on entering the hall. It was Charlie Openshaw's greatest delight. He was always on night work, but must have got very little sleep going round Manchester in the daytime looking for new books and in general attending to his precious literature duties. The thrill with which he proudly announced one Sunday night that he had got copies from America of Louis Boudin's *Theoretical System of Karl Marx* made us all get copies and agree to pay for them at so much a week.

I never remember a meeting in those days at which

one of the chief duties of the Chairman was not that of seeing that the literature was well advertised and sold direct from the platform. The way we passed these pamphlets round the workshops! My copy of *Merrie England* is in my house now, dirty, hardly readable for oil grime and dirty finger marks. We clubbed together to buy books, to send to America for everything that the firm of Charles Kerr got out, and put our coppers together to publish penny pamphlets. I have said many "Long lives" in my time, but I will never get tired of saying, "Long live the penny pamphlet."

Workers of a younger generation than mine have no idea of the sacrifices that were made to publish pamphlets and leaflets in the days about which I am writing. I know now they were not the best types of pamphlets; they rarely dealt with any of the practical problems the workers had to face, but there was an enthusiasm to sell them, to pass them along, to get them paid for, which sets an example to many sections of the working-class movement to-day. I am not exaggerating when I say we considered the Literature Secretary a key position in the Branch, and the selling of literature generally the most important of all our political duties.

And, saying this now, I accompany it with a plea for more emulation of the same spirit to-day, when to the present generation the priceless Marxist-Leninist classics are available at a price that would have made our mouths water when we were all starting our lives. We had few bookshops then, and when I go round the country to-day and see the fine series of Workers' Bookshops and Collet's Bookshops, I wonder sometimes are we making the fullest use of them.

Chapter IV

WORKSHOP EXPERIENCES

While I was serving my time as an apprentice plater, I heard many derogatory expressions about workers in the boilershop who were known to be Socialists, and I determined to do two things: first, to become as good a craftsman as possible; secondly, never to lay myself open to being sacked unless it could be clearly seen as a case of victimisation. And I tried to keep rigidly to both these rules during all the years I worked at my trade.

It was the custom in those days for quack merchants to stand outside the work gates in the dinner-hour selling their various concoctions. I noticed one man who sold herbal remedies, and simultaneously urged his customers to join a trade union, putting across generally very good propaganda for Socialism. His name was H. Laurie, and he has been mentioned before in this book. Specially did he urge the labourers to join the Workers' Union. My father, who was in the strikers' section of the Blacksmiths' Society, was always very bitter about the snobbery of the craftsmen, and I had not been working very long before I became appalled at the way in which the platers treated their labourers, or "helpers" as they were called. There was a world between them. The helpers might have been inferior beings from some remote planet. I rebelled at this, and in my small way, though still only an apprentice, tried to help the organisation of the labourers.

Their wages were 17*s.* 10*d.* a week, and when Hugh Laurie began his propaganda for trade-union organisation, I did all I could to carry it on in the shop.

In November, 1912, I finished my apprenticeship. In common with the other apprentices, I had the choice of staying on at Gorton Tank for a further two years, working my money up to full tradesman's wages, or finding a job in another workshop and going on to my full money at once. The circumstances at home left me with no alternative, and March, 1913, found me working for a small constructional firm in Levenshulme, just outside Manchester. My wages were £2 1*s.* a week, and believe me, the first time that I drew my two sovereigns and a shilling, Paradise seemed to have opened its doors. I couldn't get home fast enough. That week was the first slight easing from grinding poverty that my mother had ever experienced.

To get to Levenshulme ready to start work at 6 a.m. I had to get up at 4.30, and 5.15 found me standing outside the Monkey House at Belle Vue, waiting for a tram and reflecting on the progress of civilisation. I soon became a shop steward in this firm, organised the labourers and saw to it that all members of the Boilermakers' Society were in good standing.

The Manager was a holy terror. His nickname was "Speedy." His favourite trick was to rush into the shop, blowing a referee's whistle, in answer to which the nearest man to him had to run and see what was wanted. He was a bully of the worst type, and it was necessary to cure him; so we had a meeting, and agreed that the next time he mistook us for dogs and blew his whistle, every man-jack would drop everything and run.

I can see him now, as he rushed, puffing and blowing,

into the shop. Out came the whistle and the clarion call sounded. Every machine stopped—every tool was dropped, and all the men rushed in the direction of the amazed Speedy! He turned all colours of the rainbow and was temporarily bereft of speech. Without a word, he retired to his office, and equally silently we resumed our work, though inwardly very happy. Next morning, he blew the whistle again. Exactly the same thing happened. Never again did we hear that whistle.

I worked over a year in Levenshulme, and never lost a minute, even if it did mean getting up at 4.30 a.m.; so comrades who groan at my insistence on punctuality to-day now know how the habit began!

In July, 1913, I left Levenshulme to go, with a pal, to Barrow-in-Furness, where our applications for jobs had been accepted. We left our bags in the station and made straight for the shipyard, only to find that as our train was running into Barrow, the boilermakers in Vickers were voting for strike action over some caulking question. The foreman asked us to stay in Barrow, as the strike wouldn't last long. After several days, the boilermakers' delegate advised us to return home. We did so, and the day we got back to Manchester, the strike ended.

Then started a period of all-round experience of the many sides of the trade of plater. I worked in various boiler, constructional and locomotive shops. It was at Tinker's boiler-shop in Hyde that I first learnt the custom of the brick in the air. The first day after a holiday we would all take our checks off the board, make a ring in the yard, and the oldest boilermaker, resplendent in white moleskins and blue jacket, would pick up a brick, advance to the centre of the ring, and announce: "Now, lads. If t' brick stops i' th' air, we

start; if t' brick cooms down, we go whoam." I do not remember any occasion on which we did not "go whoam."

Early in 1914 I began to work at Beyer Peacock's in Gorton as a plater in the locomotive shop, and we were very happy there. My father worked in the same shop and, as he was very popular, everyone made me welcome, in spite of the fact that I was "a foreigner from the Tank." One would have imagined that the Tank was in darkest Africa, instead of being separated from Peacock's only by the main railway line of the Great Central Railway, for there was great rivalry between Tank men and Peacock's men, each believing that they were the salt of the earth amongst boiler-makers.

After a few months, I was sent for by the foreman and asked to take over the big furnace. I could hardly believe my ears; it was a very hot, and heavy, but highly skilled job. It was, in addition, the biggest money in the boiler-shop, and I wanted that money badly to help at home and to buy books. I jumped at the chance, though it lessened my popularity with the other boiler-makers, who shook their heads very dubiously at the job being given to "a foreigner."

It was while I worked in Peacock's that an incident took place which I relate only because it shows up a streak in my character which people sometimes find difficult to understand. It happened in January, 1915.

It was the practice in this shop that if you "made a bloomer" and spoilt any material, you had to pay for it out of your piece-work earnings at so much a month. Many platers paid for their mistakes for years on end. I made my mind up right at the start that under no circumstances could I agree to such a principle. At

that time I was very much influenced by Marx's *Value, Price and Profit*, and was particularly tireless in explaining to as many workers as possible all about surplus value. The evil day came. I had fifteen copper plates to flange for locomotive fire-boxes. The order was for the South African Government, and these fire-boxes were unusual in that they were cranked, which made the job especially difficult. The copper was German made, and I did not like the look of it from the moment the plates were brought to the furnace. Two of the plates had been rejected at once as being bad material, and the rest were not much better. We had done thirteen and were congratulating ourselves that the damn' job would soon be finished. But the fourteenth had not been in the furnace ten minutes when I had a hunch that something had gone wrong, and called the gang of six strikers to pull it out. Two-thirds of it was what we called "black," but the top part was dull red, and two pieces, the size of a man's hand, had fallen off as if they were bits of clinker.

It was a Monday, which meant that some of the gang were a little under the weather after the week-end "booze up," but the sight of those two missing pieces quickly sobered them. The leading striker was called Harry, one of the best lads I ever worked with. As the plate was lowered on the flanging block, he came up to me and said, "Harry, lad, that's b——d the contract, but don't thee lose thy temper and refuse to pay for it. We'll all muck in. Tha's t' best fellow we've ever worked for. Tha treats us like human beings." The pardonable feeling of pleasure that swept over me did not prevent me from noticing the rest of the men in the shop coming and gathering round the furnace. I noticed some pitying glances, but I also noticed that some did not attempt

to disguise their delight that the "b—— foreigner had made a slip-up and would have to pay up like they had done."

The buzzer went, and off I went to the office to fetch the foreman.

"Mm," was all he said. I was dumb, waiting for the worst. It came, after a few minutes' inspection. "Ninety quid's worth there. Come into the office." When we got there, he said, "Now lad, what art tha going to do? I don't want to lose thee. I know all about thy principles, but nearly every plater in this shop is paying off money."

I said, quietly and firmly: "I am very sorry, but I cannot agree to pay for this spoilt material. The firm gets the profit out of me, and it must stand the loss." The foreman replied: "Don't be daft, lad. We'll make it easy for you. Pay as little as you like, at so much a month out of your piece-work money. Tha's got a job for life here, and it looks to me as if tha doesn't know when tha's well off."

Backward and forward we argued. It was no use. "Well, go back and think it over. Don't be hasty. T' world hasn't come to an end yet."

So back to the furnace I went and told the gang what I intended to do. They thought I had gone mad. My father, who worked across the shop from me, was watching me like a cat watches a mouse. I knew he was thinking all sorts of things, but chiefly was ashamed that the Pollitt honour had been besmirched by my mistake in allowing the copper-plate to get to a heat where pieces of the metal dropped off. I also knew that in his secret heart he was wondering: "Now, will the young devil have the guts to stick out for what he has always said he would." He had no need to fear. That

afternoon, to the astonishment of the whole shop, I got my money and walked out.

When Father came home at tea-time, he walked through the house to the kitchen, then sat down to his tea, and said: "Tha's a stubborn b——, but tha did reet." And that was the last time the subject was ever mentioned.

Chapter V

THE WAR, 1914–18

The Sunday that war was declared found me speaking for the Ashton-under-Lyne Branch of the B.S.P. Jim Crossley and I walked from Openshaw to Ashton, and Jim thought that there might be a little bother at the meeting, as Ashton was a barrack town and there would be plenty of soldiers about. I had quite recently been listening to Arthur Haycock outside Peacock's, lecturing on Norman Angell's *The Great Illusion* and I had bought a copy of the book. I decided to test the sentiments of the audience by giving them some facts out of it for a start, until I had warmed up a bit. I had never heard at that time anything about what the attitude of a revolutionary should be towards imperialist war; I had never read more than the most cursory references to the Basle Resolution in *Justice*. But I did understand what war meant, and knew that this war was not a war which the workers could support. I did realise that they ought not to be taken in by the fairy tale about the German eagle having twisted the lion's tale, an insult that only war could wipe out.

The meeting started. There was a fair on the Market Ground, and my platform consisted of a circus cart with high sides; and what a blessing those high sides were to prove before the meeting was finished! There was a big crowd—lots of red-coated soldiers in the audience. A lot of muttering could be heard, but whilst pretending to be blissfully unaware of it, I was only too

conscious that a rough-house was in store. As my speech progressed, I became more and more open in my denunciation of the War, calling upon the workers to use the opportunity to make war on capitalism. After about three-quarters of an hour, a big fellow pushed his way to the front and yelled out: "Eh, you silly mugs, letting 'im get away with his gab. Can't you see he's spell-binding you. He sticks up for the Germans. Let's get him out of it! Let's get him off t' cart."

That started it. I had often seen Sanger's Circus come to town, and gazed at the wonderful dinner-time procession round the village where I lived, but never had I thought that one fine day I should be dragged round Ashton Market Ground in a circus cart. But that's what happened! The Chairman and I armed ourselves with the two chairs in the cart, and in this way prevented the angry audience from climbing in to bash us. It was a real rough house while it lasted, and finally two policemen arrived on the spot. They escorted Jim and me to the Openshaw tram, with much fatherly advice not to be b—— young fools and come back again the next night, which was what I had promised the crowd I would do.

It didn't take my mother two minutes to see that something out of the ordinary had happened, so she had to be told about it. When I assured her I was going again the next night, all I heard was, "We'll see about that."

When I got home from work on Monday at half-past five, and went upstairs to change, I could not find my clothes. I knew my mother must have taken them to my auntie's house round the corner, and it would be no use trying to get them, so I had my tea, and without a word went off to Ashton in my working clothes.

The meeting never took place. The crowd was there, ready to lynch me if I dared to say a word. In fact, I would never have been permitted to get up even to show my "steely blue eyes" (as the *News Review* on one occasion described them—only they happen to be brown!). The same policeman was there, and once again, gently but firmly, he led me to the tram with lots of advice about kids whose napkins were not yet dry trying to tell the world what it ought to do.

But I had tasted blood, and when the Moss Side Branch of the B.S.P. proposed that a Liverpool comrade and I should address a meeting outside the Yeomanry Barracks at Brookes Bar, the meeting couldn't take place soon enough for me. When it started, however, it couldn't finish soon enough either!

We saw from afar that we had an audience all right. Youthful vanity might have been pardoned for thinking that the fame of the speakers might have had something to do with it. But the nearer we got to the meeting, the clearer it became that the audience was not only waiting eagerly for us, but was by no means filled with the milk of human kindness either. My comrade and I decided that discretion was the better part of valour. He began with an exquisite dissertation on certain aspects of English literature, on which he was an authority, though not always interpreting the authors which he quoted in a way they would have endorsed. Then it was my turn—on this occasion resplendent in a light suit and a straw hat (later in the meeting to be contemptuously referred to as the "donkey's bedding"). With my most pleasant smile, I announced that I would say a few words about the War and what the workers ought to do. And those few words were all I did say, for the roar went up of

"Bloody German! Pull him off!" etc. I tried to make myself heard above the din, but my eloquence was wafted away unheard on the evening breeze.

Then a young officer had the bright idea of forcing me to render "God Save the King" as a solo. I am a pretty versatile bloke, but singing was never one of my accomplishments. Those who love me most in the world assert most emphatically that I am the world's worst singer. In my time I have cheerfully attempted "Nellie Dean" and "Sweet Adeline," but I was determined that if the heavens fell, God would never save the King in answer to any request of mine.

I was pinioned to the platform by soldiers. "Come on, you. You wanted to talk. Now sing instead." But never a note emerged. Then fists got to work, and some nice footwork which had never been provided for in the Queensberry rules. In the middle of the scrimmage, I noticed a woman forging through the crowd, making a way for herself by lashing out right and left with a very serviceable umbrella. She got through, seized hold of me, the soldiers being too much flabbergasted to interfere, and said, "Come on, comrade. You come with me." It has not usually been a practice of mine to heed the invitations of unknown women, but on this occasion I stuck to this one like a limpet, and we finally emerged from the fray. Meanwhile, "God Save the King" was being lustily and fervently, if untunefully, sung, and my poor "donkey's bedding" kicked all over the place.

When we got some distance away, the woman said, "I'm a suffragette, and used to rough handling. Good night and good luck, comrade."

So ended our attempt to storm the Yeomanry Barracks.

After leaving Peacock's, a pal and I got a job in Harland and Wolff's, Belfast. On the Saturday evening we had to catch the boat for Belfast, some of the comrades thought it would be nice to have a little farewell party. It was a good party, but unfortunately (as it seemed at the time) we missed the train, and consequently the boat. The Sunday papers next day reported U-boats in the Irish Channel, and my pal, who believed in safety first, decided that we should leave Ireland alone. So we started work in Armstrong-Whitworth's in Openshaw, plate levelling. I soon became shop steward and had a splendid bunch of workmates alongside of me. We won many concessions, and abolished many irritating restrictions perpetuated by the Manager, known as "Glass-Eye," who was the most objectionable type of bully. We once went on a deputation to him, with demands of a character that made his glass eye fall clean out—but we won our demands!

The urge for new experience soon began to make itself felt, and in June, 1915, several of us decided to try to get work in Thornycroft's shipyard in Southampton.

Shipyard work was new to me. For a time the terms in common usage were double Dutch, but we soon got into our stride. I tried to get in touch with the Southampton Branch of the B.S.P., but found that it had gone out of existence. I then attended lectures in the I.L.P. Hall, in which Fred Perriman was the leading spirit, but I could not stomach the pacifist character of the propaganda and so gave as much time as I could to reading and studying, buying as many books as I could possibly afford. I am quite sure that I was the best customer that W. H. Smith and Gilbert's in Above Bar ever had.

The boilermakers were very well organised in Thornycrofts. The leading shop steward was a riveter called Jack Paterson, for many years the District Delegate of the Boilermakers' Society. Before long, I had many friends, especially Harry Ratcliff, the boilermakers' official delegate, former Chairman of the Executive Council of the Boilermakers' Society. Later I went to live with the Ratcliff family, and, although I strongly disagreed with the line that Harry Ratcliff took in later years, some of the happiest years of my life were those I spent in his home.

My hatred of capitalism and war was fanned to fever heat by the spectacles I witnessed in Southampton: the midnight marches of the troops from the Common to the docks *en route* for France; the day when the *Mauretania* sailed for the Dardanelles, every inch of space crammed with lads from Lancashire, the overwhelming majority of whom had handled guns for the first time just before boarding, and who were mown down trying to reach the shore when they got to Gallipoli; and the white hospital ships with the green bands round their hulls and a big red cross painted on the side. I watched them steam slowly into the docks every morning, and an indelible picture of the agony and suffering that they were bearing was impressed upon my mind. My bedroom window looked out on to the railway line connecting Southampton with Netley, and I used to see the ambulance trains pass by on their way to the hospital. On Sunday mornings, we would frequently walk to Netley and, seeing the wounded soldiers, get a little idea of the real price of glory.

All this increased my determination to try in every way to fight against that war. It developed the spirit

which encouraged me to give the late Dr. Macnamara, a representative of the Ministry of Munitions in 1915, the shock of his life.

The shipyard workers had been asked to give up their holidays on account of the national emergency, and a meeting of representatives of all trades was called to hear a statement by Dr. Macnamara. I was one of the boilermakers' representatives. Dr. Macnamara painted a terrifying picture of what the boys were going through in France, of the need for increased production, common sacrifice, etc. I could see it was having an effect on the delegates and that my job was to puncture it.

This was the first time in my life I had come face to face with one of the "big nobs" of the Government. I was twenty-five years of age, looked upon as little more than a boy, but I got up and said my say. "You have painted a terrible picture, but the responsibility is yours—yours and your Government's. The British and German workers had no quarrel, but you are sending them to slaughter one another. Our stand for the maintenance of trade-union rights is for the benefit of the lads at the Front, for if we give up what they have won, they will never forgive us when they come home. There is no such thing as common sacrifice, and you know it. Your class caused this war. Mine wants to stop it."

Macnamara was furiously angry, but so were some of my colleagues. In fact, one of them took it upon himself to apologise for my "rudeness." But Macnamara did not get the agreement from us that he was so confident his eloquence would win, and that was all that mattered.

I noticed during this encounter with Macnamara

that the attitude of most of my fellow delegates confirmed a previous impression I had gathered during the War. When a question of defending the workers' interests arose, they would follow you to a man on what they called "defending the Society's business," but the minute you introduced what they called "Socialist politics," they did not hesitate to express their resentment. This was certainly the case with the boilermakers, and when we emerged from this particular meeting, one old Tory riveter came up to me and said: "Look here, Brother Pollitt. You put our case better than anyone else, but just keep the politics out! We're trade unionists, not Socialists." When this same brother was in the Chair and I rose to my feet, he invariably warned me: "Now, Brother Pollitt, remember, Society business, not politics!"

This attitude was a great obstacle to developing action against the War as such, though it was relatively easy to stimulate resistance against any threat to trade-union conditions. So I watched my step and went about my job in such a way as to try to kill the two birds with one stone.

During the summer of 1915 there was a great deal of talk about dilution, and we boilermakers swore that we would not tolerate it under any circumstances. Rumours began to circulate in Thornycroft's shipyard that dilutees were coming on such and such a day, but nothing happened until suddenly, on September 21st, 1915, five were introduced, and that put the fat in the fire. Every boilermaker, no matter of what section in the trade, downed tools, and we adjourned to a hall in Woolston to hold a mass meeting. All the local boilermakers' leaders spoke about the need of standing solid against this menace to our trade. Then I got up to say

a few words. It was the first big meeting of boilermakers that I had addressed in Southampton, and I put into that speech everything I knew. Looking back at it now, I realise that it wasn't so very much, but the eyes of the worthy brothers began to pop out of their heads at the flow of eloquence. As usually happens when a fluent speaker holds the floor on such an occasion, I was immediately nominated and elected to the Strike Committee.

Thus started a two weeks' strike. I have had many arguments with comrades in the Communist Party who were shop stewards during the War as to whether this was the first big wartime strike. We are all anxious to have the honour of being connected with such an event to our credit, but the capitalist Press did not seem to think there was much credit in it, to judge by what they wrote at the time.

The Strike Committee met every day to review the situation, and frequent mass meetings were held, the first on the day after the strike began, because the official boilermakers' delegate, who had been away from Southampton when the strike started, was sent back post haste to get it called off and threaten us with all kinds of dire consequences as per the Boilermakers' Rule Book. Poor Harry Ratcliff! What a job he had with us, despite his constant reiterations: "It's the Rule Book, the whole Rule Book, and nothing but the Rule Book." That didn't shift our determination to get those dilutees out of the shipyard (and it didn't stop Harry Ratcliff from doing everything he possibly could to help us, either!).

It was the usual custom to while away the time before the meetings opened to have a sing-song, and this inspired a newspaper placard to the effect that:

While our boys die in France,
Boilermakers sing and dance.

One Wednesday evening an official mass meeting was called in the Watts Memorial Hall to hear statements by J. T. Brownlie and Mr. Moses of the Patternmakers. The hall was crowded to capacity. The meeting opened with a request from the Chairman to give fair play for the speakers, he doubtless anticipating that they were in for a difficult time. He was quite right. Mr. Moses cut no ice at all. In fact, by the end of his speech he was completely inaudible. Then up got the late J. T. Brownlie, supremely confident, the famous smile on his face, as much as to say: "I've been through all this scores of times. I'll soon wear this lot down!"

Off he started. "The ship of State is at sea. A storm comes on. All lives are in danger. The whole crew must pull together to get the ship safely back to port. Etc., etc., etc." This nautical analogy was strangled almost at birth, for a boilermaker got up and shouted: "That's fine, but you wouldn't send piss-pot jugglers into the engine-room." And with that homely expression, the meeting came to an untimely end.

Two or three days later, fifty of us were summoned to appear at the Court of Winchester under some Section or other of the Munitions Act. The same day, when I returned to my lodgings from a strike meeting, I found the street lined with wounded soldiers who had been brought from Netley Hospital to give me the bird good and proper. They did so very thoroughly. I walked past this misguided body of workers without turning a hair, but when I got indoors it took me all my time to persuade my landlady that her house wouldn't be wrecked.

The trip to Winchester was made the occasion for a big demonstration of boilermakers, carrying with them the banners of their various branches. The sedate old town of Winchester was well shaken out of its somnolence that day, but the case was adjourned to the following Saturday in the Court Room at Above Bar, Southampton, the idea being that between Wednesday and Saturday we might be brought to our patriotic senses. An amusing incident marked the end of our trip that day. On Winchester Station, while waiting for the train, there was a great disturbance and excitement—one brother had lost his teeth over the edge of the platform! Down on the permanent way descended the whole crowd, to the anger of the station officials, who were afraid we should be cut to pieces. The dentures could not be found. When work was resumed after the strike, a collection was made in the shop to buy new ones. They looked fine, but three months later he came to me with a most worried expression on his face and said: "Harry, you remember when I lost my teeth that day we went to Winchester? Well, I didn't. I've never worn my best trousers from that day to this, and when I put them on I wondered what was sticking into me, felt in my back pocket, and there they were!"

Saturday arrived. The Strike Committee was to meet Henry Slesser, now Lord Justice Slesser, with a member of the firm of Kenneth Brown, Baker and Baker, at the Star Hotel. The Judge was called Atkin, and he was assisted by two assessors, one for the employers and one for the boilermakers. Ernest Bevin was our assessor.

The idea of the Conference in the Star Hotel was to get us to call off the strike and so enable the Court to give a verdict that would not foment further discontent. Slesser and our Solicitor, assisted by Harry Ratcliff,

tried every argument under the sun to bring us round. Suddenly, in the middle of the proceedings, we heard the skirl of bagpipes and the tramp of soldiers marching to the docks. Instinctively I knew that this was all prearranged, for the soldiers invariably left the docks at midnight. Sure enough, our Solicitor led me to the window and, pointing dramatically to the marching Highlanders, said: "Pollitt, can you stand here and see those men march on their way to the front and refuse us permission to go into Court and tell the Judge you will start work on Monday? I know whose influence carries here. What you recommend, the Committee will accept."

"Sorry," I replied. "If my policy were adopted, those men would be marching away from the docks, not to them. They are being driven to France by the same gang that is trying to drive dilutees into the shipyards. We may not be able to stop the soldiers, but at least we can stop the dilutees."

A vote was taken, and every member of the Strike Committee voted against going back to work, so we adjourned to the Court Room. It was soon over. The Judge sternly admonished us about our duty to King and country, and added the usual rigmarole. The whole lot were given a choice of a fine of £5, with three weeks to pay, or prison for three months for impeding the production of munitions. Each of us was strongly recommended to call off the strike at the mass meeting which was to be held that night.

The streets of the town were seething with excitement and, judging by the shouts and catcalls, many of the people in the crowd thought that shooting at dawn was too good for us. The Watts Memorial Hall was packed that night. The Court proceedings were

reported, and once again we had to listen to propaganda extolling "the Rule Book and nothing but the Rule Book." Nevertheless, the recommendation not to call off the strike was unanimously endorsed. The District Delegate then insisted on a further mass meeting next morning in the Woolston Picture Palace, and a ballot vote was taken on the issue.

This was one of the stormiest meetings I have ever witnessed. There was a majority for resuming work, and the men were instructed to go to work next morning. Then pandemonium broke out. I can see big Harry Mitcham of Canning Town now, striding down the gangway of the theatre, wielding a chair above his head and threatening sudden death to anyone who told him to work with blacklegs (as the dilutees were invariably called).

When we started work again, the boilermakers subscribed most of the money required to pay the fines of £250, and the remainder was soon made up in response to the following appeal issued by Boilermakers' Branches all over the country:

United Society of Boilermakers and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders

BOILERMAKERS' STRIKE AT SOUTHAMPTON

WORTHY BROTHERS,—On behalf of the boilermakers who were on strike at J. I. Thornycroft's, Southampton, we are desirous of placing before you the real facts of the dispute, so that our Members throughout the Society shall have the opportunity of carefully considering our case, in order to arrive at a correct judgment of the position.

This is all the more necessary after the grave misrepresentation that has appeared in the public Press, who have never yet published our side, so that the public have been grievously misled.

On July 15th, 1915, a deputation of our Members met the Management of J. I. Thornycroft's on the question of their employing non-union men on our work. After a full discussion, it was agreed by the Management that, pending a decision by the Chief Munitions' Tribunal on this question, no more non-union men should be started, and the men already there be transferred to other work.

It was on that agreement that we then remained at work, and we naturally expected that this agreement would be kept, and also that the vital clause in the Munitions Act, where it is stated "That there shall be no change in the Working Conditions, without consultation with the workmen concerned," would also be carried out.

We regret that neither have been fulfilled, and so, when our Members were informed that five non-union riveters and holders-up withdrawn from the Army had been started, they expected that, in view of their own agreement, the firm would transfer them to other work when requested by our Members.

This the firm refused to do, and our Members then held a meeting in the yard. They were addressed by the Manager, who stated it was not in his power to remove them, and who, in reply to a question, also said that, "If 200 such men were sent, I would start them." Upon hearing which our Members decided that, in justice to our own trade-union boilermakers to the number of 8,000 now in the Army and Navy, they could not work alongside incompetent non-union men.

If it could have been shown that our own resources were exhausted, and that these five men were necessary to increased production, we would have remained at work, but knowing so well the inefficient system of the yard, and numerous cases of where our own Members are passed out through work not being ready or the air plant not working at the required pressure, we felt that some drastic action had to be taken.

When we also know of a squad of riveters coming 200 miles to work at Thornycroft's, being placed on time work, in three days they had eight Heater Lads, never had a set hammer, etc., at the end of that time were given their cards and allowed to go back on commercial work, we are of the opinion that the firm are trying to introduce non-union men under the protection afforded by the Munitions Act.

We came out on strike on Tuesday, September 21st, 1915, and for nearly a fortnight the representatives of the men did everything possible to arrive at a settlement; all they asked was that the non-union men be transferred to other work, and we would return to work, and submit the matter for arbitration. The firm refused to do this, and the only advice we got from the Munitions' Department was: "Return to work." Our Members also refused the advice of the E.C., which was similar to the Munitions' Department; so that fifty of our Members were summoned before a General Munitions' Court on October 2nd, 1915, and, despite the eloquent appeal and damning evidence put forward by our Counsel, Mr. Slesser, these Members were fined £5 each, with three weeks to pay, failure of which meant three months in prison.

On October 3rd, 1915, a ballot was taken, and showed a majority in favour of resuming work, pending arbitration, the bulk of the Members being under the impression that when we had resumed work the non-union men would be transferred. However, a deputation met the firm on this point, but were met with a blank refusal. Our Members remained loyally at work, and on Friday, October 8th and October 9th, we placed our case before Sir George Askwith, whose decision will be given in the next monthly report.

The Counsel engaged to defend our Members, after hearing our case, suggested we had a splendid chance of prosecuting the firm for having broken the Second

Schedule, Par. 7, Munitions of War Act. This we have decided to do, and the trial takes place on October 20th, 1915. This will be the first case where the employers have been summoned in connection with this most vital clause of the Munitions Act and, as a result of the evidence we have, we are hopeful of a decision in our favour. Whichever way it goes, however, it will clearly show how the trade-union movement stands in relation to the Act.

You have here the true facts of the strike, and, as each Member will realise, to fight this case to a finish means money and, although we have applied to the E.C. for £250 to pay the fines with, they have refused because we acted contrary to their advice, and this despite the fact that two members of the E.C. visited Southampton and, after hearing our case, and the provocation we received, admitted "the justice of our cause," and that they thought "men never had a better case to fight on."

Therefore, worthy brothers, we are compelled to appeal to every Member of the Society to help us by his subscriptions as much as he can, in order that we can carry on this fight for our greatest "Principle," without fear or hindrance. We committed a breach of the Act by striking —admitted; for that every Member here is willing to pay; but we think that our fight is also your fight; and if the martyrdom and sacrifices of the pioneers of our grand old Society have not been in vain, then we are confident of your practical help and approval, and we can assure you that nothing will be left undone in order to keep unsullied our banner, with its glorious inscription of "A Union Yard for Union Men."

Yours fraternally,

C. PERNIE. J. PATERSON.
R. RICHMOND. N. CONNIS.
S. CONNIS. W. HEATHCOTE.
H. POLLITT.
H. S. RATCLIFF (*District Delegate*).

The Strike Committee.

This appeal brought in £790 7*s.* 7½*d.* of which £485 8*s.* 6½*d.* was collected in Thornycroft's shipyard and boiler-shop.

We went to London and placed our case before Sir George Askwith at the Arbitration Court in Old Palace Yard, but that immaculate gentleman was not in the least impressed and we lost the case.

I still treasure the silver watch, suitably inscribed, which was given me by the boilermakers for services rendered during this strike.

It is interesting to note that, in connection with this dispute, we made no appeal, financial or otherwise, to the workers of any other trade or industry. We were boilermakers and could stand on our own. And in all my workshop experience, with the exception of one big London strike in 1919, I have always found this to be the attitude of boilermakers everywhere. In realising this, we must remember that we celebrated the centenary of the Boilermakers' Society at Manchester in August, 1934, and 100 years of craft pride, craft outlook and craft independence cannot but produce such an effect.

Against this craft outlook I have always fought bitterly, because it has been one of the most effective weapons in dividing trade unionists, and preventing their full power and organisation being used against the employers. It is one of the hardest things to fight against, not only because of the craft and sectional outlook, but also because it is made the basis for strong-rooted mistrust of trade-union officials. The amalgamation of the trade unions on the basis of one union for each industry should in no way affect the pride of workmanship and craft; on the contrary, it should enhance this by the feeling of greater security and strength that

such a form of trade-union organisation would help to develop.

This strike had aroused considerable discussion all around the Southampton district, and I received a letter from the Dean of Southampton asking me to explain its origin. I did so in a rather long letter which led to further correspondence between the Dean and myself, followed by visits to the Deanery, where we had friendly talks about the working-class movement, the War and Socialism. On looking over my documents, I find that I still possess some of the Dean's letters, one of which reads as follows:

THE DEANERY,
SOUTHAMPTON.
October 4th, 1915.

DEAR MR. POLLITT,—Thank you very much for your letter. You are quite right in thinking that I am interested in Labour questions, and certainly I give the men credit for all you claim. I should never suppose that the faults will be all on one side. I try to keep an open and fair mind, and I sympathise with the men in many things. It does, however, appear to me that, granted all you claim as to your position and the employers' unfair use of the opportunity, the risk of German domination, with all the evils of Prussian oligarchy and the militarists, spells such certain ruin to the employers and employed alike in this country that wise men would put up with a good deal rather than check even for an hour the success of our forces. A friend from London to whom I read your letter said: "That man would be dead right at any other time, but doesn't it show how completely the workers are failing to realise the full meaning of the Prussian menace." In my humble and ignorant opinion, this country is finding through the War its way to Socialism and a more democratic method than would have been gained in a

half a century of the old condition of things, and the workers can well afford that questions like this one at Thornycrofts lie on one side until after the War. You will find then, as I think, that the progress made will far outbalance such incidents. You are too pessimistic about their effect.

Yours very sincerely,
NEVILLE LOVETT.

Naturally, I replied to this letter and subsequently met the Dean, and did not fail to give my view as to how Socialism would be brought about. But I would very much like to meet him now, and see whether the events which have taken place since 1915 have changed his opinions, or whether, if there was another strike at Thornycroft's, he would again trot out the "Prussian menace."

When after the strike I went to collect my tools, I found that a new job had been found for me. I was to work on a secret submarine in a specially guarded shed which cut me right off from the majority of the boiler-makers in the shipyard. It was no use kicking against it. I should have found little support if I had, for young as I was, I had learnt enough to know that popularity at the climax of an exciting strike and popularity after that strike has been lost are two very different things.

I stood it for a time, driven almost crazy by the way the various Admiralty surveyors would chop and change their instructions. One surveyor would pass a section, another would say it had to be altered, and after it had been altered accordingly, a third would come along and insist on what had been originally constructed being made again. This experience and mismanagement still further opened my eyes to the waste and mismanagement of capitalism, especially

during a war, when the armament firms still make huge profits, though not on the ordinary competitive basis.

On November 4th, 1915, I got a transfer to a boiler-shop where I came into contact with some of the finest craftsmen I have ever met. The Thornycroft water-tube boiler is world-famous, and so it should be, considering the magnificent craftsmanship of the men who construct it. It was during this period that the Lord Derby Attesting Scheme instigated the Armlet Badge for ammunition workers who attested. I agitated against having anything to do with this scheme and declared that if men wanted to fight they would join the Army and not seek refuge in an Armlet. Our group decided not to attest. Imagine my surprise when I was sent for to the Head Office and told that I had not yet attested, but that there was still time. Imagine my pleasure in telling the officer that every man in our gang refused to have anything to do with the scheme: and then imagine *his* exquisite pleasure in showing me the forms which, with five exceptions, every man who had sworn not to sign had signed—right on the dotted line! That incident gave me much food for thought, and I didn't forget it, but referred to it on every possible opportunity.

We heard little about the dilutees for some time after the strike, but during my stay in the boiler-shop I was sent out to make some adjustments to a boiler casing on a destroyer after its first trials. After one glance, I recognised the man introduced to me as my mate as one of the dilutees. What was I to do? It was against all my principles to work with him, but I knew that other boilermakers had done so, and if I got the sack for refusing, there would be little support for my action now that the strike seemed so remote. So I said, "Come

on. Let's get going," and climbed on the top of the boiler, while my mate had to get at the back to hand me up the various tools I wanted. I never remember a day on which I was so clumsy with my tools. I never seemed to be able to catch hold of them, and they kept dropping down—on his shoulders, on his back, on his feet. When I got back after dinner, I found no mate, and never saw him again.

But things began to get more and more difficult and I decided to change my job. A friend of mine spoke for me at Camper Nicholson's, the famous yacht-builders on the other side of the river at Northam. Then when I went for my cards, I was told I could only leave if I was going out of the town and had a military permit to do so. Off I went to the military offices in Southampton. They seemed quite glad I was bidding Southampton farewell, and made interested enquiries as to my destination. As one place is as good as another, I told them Cardiff. I was then given a document certifying that I, Harry Pollitt, was permitted to leave Southampton by the military authorities in command of this area. I often wished I had kept this interesting document, but it was raffled for some good cause or other.

I went to Salisbury, changed there for Manchester, went home to see my family, and returned the next week to commence my work in Nicholson's shipyard in February, 1916. It was very light work—pinnaces and adapting luxury yachts for naval purposes. I had often read about these luxury yachts, but one had to go on board to see with one's own eyes the sort of thing that the rich enjoy. These experiences came in very useful in propaganda later on.

I left Northam in November, 1916, went back to

Manchester and started work again at Whitworth's. But this job did not last very long, and then, with a pal with whom I had served my time and travelled all over the country, started work in a small shop in Swinton, Lancashire. I had not been there long before I was sent out erecting ventilation plants and tanks all over the country.

I happened to be in Manchester in March, 1917, when a meeting was organised in Pendleton Town Hall to celebrate the Russian Revolution, with E.C. Fairchild as speaker. A whip-round had gone out for all active comrades to be there in case there was any trouble. We all turned up, but the meeting was a tremendous success, and inspired those of us who were present to prepare for the next round in the class struggle.

The end of 1917 found me in Burntisland, Scotland, erecting a plant in an aluminium works. After this job, another old mate wrote and asked me to come to London to find fame and fortune. But before turning to this new chapter in my life, it may be useful to give some general impressions of the fight against the last World War.

It is not easy fighting against imperialist war, and there is at the present moment rather a tendency to think that all is plain sailing. The real fight has yet to come, but when it does come there is no doubt about one vital thing; that is, that the revolutionary movement is in a much stronger position to fight now than it was then, through the existence of the Communist Party and the *Daily Worker*.

During the course of the last War, it was my experience time and time again that the workers you mixed with every day, who respected you, who listened with interest to your arguments and suggestions, who you

never thought could be swept off their feet by jingoism and flag-wagging, could by some incident or other be so transformed, though perhaps only temporarily, that they did not appear to be the same people.

I have in mind the reaction to the sinking of the *Lusitania*. I saw workers who one could never have believed capable of such conduct go out and smash shops alleged to be owned by German people or people with German relations, and then a few days later pass the shops they had smashed up and feel thoroughly ashamed of themselves. It was the same after the first air raids, especially after the bombing of the North Street School in Poplar, in which so many children were killed. The flood gates were let loose, but again a few days later reaction set in, and those who had been amongst the most vicious were not quite so sure those they had attacked represented their real enemies. It was the same after workers had organised to smash up meetings at which "Stop the War" propaganda was being carried out. Shameful scenes were enacted on these occasions, which were regretted by many who took part in them, when, after the War, they found to their cost that the land fit for heroes was not going to materialise.

I noticed that after all such experiences as these people tended to pass one by pretending not to have seen one. A certain coldness and aloofness would grow up, but there was one sure way by which you could break through these temporary barriers between the militant workers and their mates. That was to bring their thoughts back to the problems in their own homes and factories; to suggest that if half the hatred shown against the Germans was to be shown against those who robbed them, who kept them poor,

who caused war, then we could soon have a new system of society in which the causes of poverty and war would be removed for ever. If this was followed up by some effective contrast between the conditions of the workers and of the rich people "up the other end"; the profits of the war-mongers; the corruption of the armament manufacturers; the Press stories about millionaires being made in a night, while millions were being slaughtered at the Front; the disparity between the gains of the rich and what the workers were sacrificing, especially in the giving up of trade-union rights that one felt would never be restored again—then this line of propaganda soon began to make its effect. And if this was backed up by handing round a pamphlet or two, the jingoism of the Bottomleys and Lloyd Georges could soon be nullified.

There was one book during the last War that I never tired of passing round to workers at such times. It was called *War, What For?* It gave startling facts and photographs about war, and I never found it fail to cool the passions raised by the Press—and the baser type of music hall—war propaganda. It must have gone round Thornycroft's shipyard scores of times, and was read and re-read. I used to keep it in my tool-box, and a plater named Bill Ledingham used to come on the ship where I was working and say: "Harry, let me have that book again. There's another silly b—— arguing the toss, and I want to convert him."

Every man of my generation who fought against the last War will, I am sure, bear me out in what I have just said, and agree with the following point: it was remarkable how the workers really believed the propaganda about the "War being a war to end war," and that "England would be a land fit for heroes to

live in" after the War was won. But when the aftermath came, the wage cuts and unemployment, when employers and the Government refused to restore the trade-union rights and customs that had been given up during the War as a temporary measure, there was not only anger and disillusionment; there was a real desire to find out how they could have been so tricked and betrayed.

I think this fact is playing its part at the present time. The workers are in a quiet and thoughtful mood. They may be deceived again; but there are many thousands of them this time who will not be swept off their balance, no matter how the war drums roll or to what depths of lying and infamy the Press and B.B.C. will stoop to work up opposition to those who want to end the present war and the system which has produced it. These workers will remember the last time.

Above all, in organising the workers' fight against war, one found how vital it was to see that the ordinary routine of trade unionism was carried on. The full-time trade-union officials in the last War became, as they are in danger of becoming again, an integral part of the Government's war machine. Their whole endeavour was to damp down workshop activity and plead for "common sacrifices and to think of the lads at the Front." They readily agreed to any suggestion that could lead to the suspension of regular trade-union meetings and conferences. They were hostile to every form of development in workshop and shop-steward organisation. In these circumstances, the workers in the workshops turned more and more for leadership to the militant workers, who would not accept the policy of class co-operation and who

demanded the carrying out of regular trade-union branch and district committee meetings. The militants never let an occasion pass, where attempts were made to worsen conditions, without making a fight, and it was this that gave the shop stewards their influence and power, and led to the growth of the National Shop Stewards Movement.

It is necessary in present circumstances to remember these experiences, for never is it so true as in wartime that power lies in the factory, mill and mine.

Chapter VI

LONDON: AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

When I used to live in Droylsden, an old fellow used to come round the streets every week singing in a dreadful voice a song that began: "The greatest city in all the world is London. At least, that's what the wealthy people say." This song flashed into my mind as I arrived at Euston from Burntisland, and it was not long before I found ample proof of the sentiments (which never failed to wring a penny out of Mother's pockets, no matter how hard up we were). Indeed, many and many a time since then I have said to myself: If only every worker could see the way the wealthy live in the West End of London, things would move considerably faster than they do as yet.

Together with my mates, I found lodgings in Poplar, and the next morning, January 23rd, 1918, started work in the Blackwall ship-repairing yard of Green and Silley Weir. My first job was to make a chart-house on a new type of ferry boat that ran between Richborough and France, the same type of steamer that now runs between Dover and Dunquerque. The ship was lying at Tilbury, and my arrival there was celebrated by an air raid.

I soon became active in London. I joined No. 11 Branch of the Boilermakers' Society, to which I have belonged ever since, and only in more recent times

have I ever missed any of the monthly meetings of the Branch.

I took every possible opportunity to find my way around London and explore all the places I had read about and longed to see as a kid. Talking with my mates in the shipyard made me realise how little Londoners know about their own city.

The first place I visited was Hyde Park. I wanted to listen to the famous "spouters," represented as such famous characters by the small provincial papers. What a disappointment I had the first Sunday afternoon I listened to them. Of course, I could not resist the temptation to heckle, and when invited to take the platform, promptly did so, thinking, "Now I'll show 'em." But it soon dawned on me that it was not what I was saying that interested the people who were listening, but the way I was saying it, for in those days it was a very broad Lancashire dialect indeed with which I entertained any audience, and soon I saw that this one thought that a second George Formby had come to town. This was my first experience of Hyde Park, and I could not help feeling that it was more a place of entertainment than of serious political discussion.

I joined the *Herald* League and the Workers' Socialist Federation, and became fully occupied. I also joined some educational classes, and in general managed to fill in every minute of my spare time.

In November, 1917, when news of the Russian Revolution came through, it had sent a thrill of excitement through every revolutionary worker. But information other than the distorted news that appeared in the Press was hard to get. I pounced on everything that dealt with the Russian Revolution, and the

knowledge that workers like me and all those around me had won power, had defeated the boss class, kept me in a growing state of enthusiasm. My chief propaganda, from the time of the Revolution to the period now being dealt with, was therefore largely in support of the Revolution and in direct connection with the Hands Off Russia Movement; and I soon became known in the shipyard as "the Bolshie," which naturally I considered a great honour.

This brought me in touch with many militant workers in other trades in the shipyards, and we began to discuss the formation of a River Thames Shop Stewards Movement. The electricians and woodworkers were the most advanced workers, and they made the first drive for the organisation of this movement. It was difficult at first to draw the boilermakers into it, because of their tendencies to sectionalism and insularity, but gradually we began to get this broken down, and soon not only the boilermakers, but every section of the trades engaged on the River Thames in shipyard work, had their shop stewards appointed and all were linked up. The card of membership of the River Thames Shop Stewards Movement was proudly displayed from Chiswick to Tilbury, and we formed shipyard committees, on which were represented the shop stewards from each trade.

I became the chief speaker and paid organiser, and stumped every shipyard on the river. I had a little portable platform, and with this tucked under my arm went all round, holding dinner-hour meetings, getting workers to take out our card of membership and helping to prepare for coming mass action.

In the evenings I was addressing trade-union branch meetings, and on Sundays big mass meetings

of the shipyard workers. The movement grew and grew. Its Secretary was Walter Day of the Electricians' Trade Union, and he was one of the most efficient men it was possible to work with. We launched a paper which was called the *Consolidator*, the Editor of which was J. Gilchrist of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers. He had a remarkably fluent pen and, as one of the lads in Blackwall Yard once remarked, "could almost kid you black was white."

When, on November 11th, an Armistice was declared, our movement was going very strong, and great interest was aroused in the demand that was then being popularised for an increase of wages of 15*s*. a week. The whole situation now became entirely different, and every worker was glad that the slaughter in France had come to an end.

By 1918 and the beginning of 1919 I had made contact with comrades all over London, especially those who claimed to be revolutionary workers. One night early in 1919 I attended a meeting in High Holborn of a body calling itself the Workers', Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Council. I can't say that I liked the majority of the people associated with this organisation, as I have never cared much for the peculiar dress which I saw in such profusion there, and never considered that sandals and flowing hair contribute to the popularity of our movement. The only two comrades connected with this body whom I did immediately like, and with whom I keep up a friendship at the present time, were Eden and Cedar Paul.

The truth is that I found the political smell of many of the people connected with such types of revolutionary organisations as were set up during the last

months of the war and the beginning of 1919 exceedingly unpleasant. Nevertheless, as their main policy was unquestionably the defence of the Russian Revolution and the need to follow the example of the Russian workers as speedily as possible, I kept contact with them and did speaking for them.

On January 18th, 1919, a Hands Off Russia Conference was organised in the Memorial Hall, London, sponsored by the London Workers' Committee, the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party and the Industrial Workers of the World.

Three hundred and fifty delegates from all over the country were there, and the Conference, whose purpose was to call a general strike against armed intervention in Russia, was opened by W. F. Watson. Arthur McManus and Sylvia Pankhurst were among the active revolutionaries also taking part. The official report of the Conference stated that: "Harry Pollitt pleaded for quick, strong action, urging the delegates to get in touch with big organisations, such as the miners, railwaymen and transport workers." And the resolution, amended after speeches by McManus and Sylvia Pankhurst, was adopted by an overwhelming majority. It read as follows:

> This rank and file conference of delegates from British and Irish Labour and Socialist organisations hereby resolves to carry on an active agitation upon every field of activity to solidify the Labour Movement in Great Britain for the purpose of declaring at a further conference, to be convened for that purpose, a general strike, unless before the date of that conference the unconditional cessation of allied intervention in Russia—either directly, by force or arms or indirectly by an economic blockade, by supplying arms or money to the internal opponents of

the Bolsheviks, or by any other sinister means endeavouring to crush the Bolshevik administration—shall have been officially announced, and will continue the strike and agitation until the desired announcement shall have been made, until we are satisfied as to the truth of the announcement, and until the allied attack on the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Germany are stopped, the blockade of Germany raised and the Allied troops withdrawn.

A committee of fifteen was appointed to see that the Hands Off Russia agitation and this resolution were carried through and implemented. On looking over the names of this Committee, I see that Jack Tanner, Albert Inkpin, W. F. Watson, Sylvia Pankhurst, Tommy Knight, George Sanders (later a national officer of the Transport and General Workers' Union) and myself, were among those appointed. Every effort was made to intensify all the work connected with the Hands Off Russia Movement, but we were not able to develop the mass movement to the point where the trade unions were prepared to take strike action. That only came later, when the London dockers stopped the *Jolly George* in 1920.

In January, 1919, I was elected London District Secretary of the Boilermakers' Society, and in this capacity had many opportunities for developing contacts and increasing the influence of the revolutionary movement. Great strikes were breaking out all over the country, and there were mutinies among the soldiers over delays in demobilisation and against certain regiments being sent to Russia to fight against the Bolsheviks. There was great dissatisfaction arising from the aftermath of the war; the news of the murder of Karl Liebnecht and Rosa Luxemburg roused great

indignation, and the revolutionary wave that was sweeping over the whole of Europe soon made its effects felt in the British Labour Movement.

It all helped develop a position where the most ardent of us thought that revolution was coming to Britain also. We had the strike for the forty-hour week on the Clyde, strikes in Liverpool, Southampton, Tyneside and Belfast.

In London, the River Thames Shop Stewards Movement, after much agitation, got sanction from every section of the shipyard workers to call an unofficial strike for an advance of wages of 15*s*. a week. The response to the strike call was magnificent, not a man remained at work from one end of the London river to the other. We sent our delegates to other parts of the country, to try to get linked up with the other strikes that were taking place. Joe Vaughan of Bethnal Green was sent to Glasgow. But it was impossible to get the kind of united leadership and common action that the situation demanded. The whole working-class movement was in such a state of ferment and such fighting trim as I had never seen before, but we were all fighting for different aims; there was no common policy or common strategy.

I now began consciously to feel the need for a working-class political party which could unite these gigantic struggles and give common leadership to them. We revolutionaries, as we called ourselves, not only lacked experience; we were also eaten up with rival jealousies and sectarianism. Each little group, whether the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party, the London Workers' Committee Movement or the Socialist Labour Federation, thought itself right and everybody else wrong. Not only that, but amongst

them all was the deepest suspicion of each other's motives. The workers were begging for leadership, which we could not give. I look upon this period of golden opportunities, when we failed to provide the workers with real leadership, as one of the blackest and most tragic in the whole of my experience.

The Thames strike lasted for five weeks, and every shipyard was absolutely solid—at least until the last week of the strike, when the inevitable dissatisfaction arose because, in the first place, we had not won our demands outright, and, secondly, because the official trade-union leaders were working against us, and had succeeded in setting the unskilled and skilled workers against each other.

Along with my fellow-members of the Strike Committee, I worked night and day during that strike. I never seemed to stop speaking at meetings for the whole five weeks, travelling from Chiswick to Tilbury; and when it wasn't strikers' meetings, it was committee meetings.

Most of the meetings were magnificent and, in addition to strike activity, an enormous amount of revolutionary propaganda was put over, especially in connection with Russia. So much so that, one Sunday morning, when I was speaking in Poplar Hippodrome, an old boilermaker came up to me and said: "Listen, Brother Pollitt. I can see through your game. This strike is to help Russia, not Poplar." I assured him that this was not the case, but that it would help both Poplar and Russia. This man was a splendidly loyal, fighting trade unionist. He had been a Secretary of the Boilermakers in London, had led strikes long before 1914, was a splendid workman, more fortunate than many in getting his share of what work was going in the

shipyards. He would never allow what he called "politics" to be discussed in the Branch if he could help it. But I saw him change as he grew older, as it became more difficult for him to obtain a job, and after long spells of out of work, his prejudice against politics began to disappear and gradually he changed his political views; not that he ever developed to embracing Communism, but he, like many more old trade-union stalwarts, has been forced by events and their own experiences to recognise there is a class struggle, although too old now to play a further active part in it.

Some trade unions—the Electrical Trades Union, for example—gave us their full support, at least as far as their London District Committees were concerned. In the London District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union the position of Sam Bradley (now a member of the Executive Council of the A.E.U. and of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party) arose. He was a leading official and willing to help us, but fearful of the consequences. However, when we learned that there was a chance that the workers in Woolwich Arsenal would join our strike, and being satisfied that even if Sam Bradley were suspended from office he would not fall into financial difficulties, a few of us met him in Canning Town, and he agreed to come in with his full support. He was a very fluent speaker (given, like me, to flights of poetry), with the advantage of experience as the first secretary of the National Shop Stewards Association and secretary of the Woolwich Arsenal Shop Stewards Movement.

I think that this was the last time that Sam Bradley ever risked any real contact with the revolutionary movement. He was suspended by the A.E.U. Executive Committee for two years because of his action, but

the quarrel was soon over, and when I meet Sam now, resplendent in spats and lemon-coloured gloves, it seems a far cry to those days in London's dockland.

Now the rot had set in in the strike. Ominous whispers began to circulate, prophesying a show-down on the following Saturday morning, when "those Bolshies would get what was coming to them." We had made no progress. The employers refused either to grant our demands or to meet us to discuss them, and in this attitude they had the full support of all the trade-union officials. On the Friday previous to the meeting I am going to tell of, I had been down to Grays and Tilbury addressing meetings of strikers. I got back to Poplar half frantic with pain, and so I made tracks for a dentist.

I sat as bravely in his chair as any man does—and that isn't saying much—while the cocaine was taking effect. Suddenly the dentist, forceps in hand, bent over me and whispered: "Do you know who I would like to have in this chair?" I replied "No." Whereupon he, with an expression like that on the face of the Mikado when he prescribes "something long and lingering," hissed: "That Bolshie they call Pollitt." I did not bat an eyelid, but it would have needed a Dante to describe my innermost feelings. The tooth finally came out, but nothing in the world will ever induce me to believe that the dentist did not know into whose brown eyes he was gazing.

On the Saturday morning, the Poplar Hippodrome was packed. A few cheers greeted the Committee, but the atmosphere was perceptibly chilly. The Chairman stated the issue: the continuation or the calling-off of the strike. Various speakers were called upon, but it was clear that a big section of the audience were only

waiting for one speaker, and when the Chairman breezily announced, "And now, brothers, Harry Pollitt," and I advanced to the foot of the stage, the storm broke, and never have I heard such a roar of hostility. It was well organised, and as soon as one section wore itself out howling another took it up afresh. On such occasions there is only one thing to do—stick it out. I stuck it for fifteen minutes, and it seemed a lifetime, but I finally succeeded in getting a quiet hearing. I got exactly the same rowdy reception at the overflow meeting in the Queen's Music Hall in High Street, Poplar, when I again stuck to my guns until I was able to get out what I wanted to say.

The voting went for the calling-off of the strike, and the following day work was resumed in all the shipyards. It was a great fight, and never was I more proud than when I received the following letter from a labourer who worked in the Blackwall Shipyard. I will omit his name for obvious reasons:

January, 1919.

DEAR SIR AND BROTHER,—You may not know me by name; still, we are fellow-workers in Blackwall Yard. Nevertheless, all what I am writing here comes from the bottom of my heart.

I have been to nearly all your meetings as I glory in hearing you speak. Now, I was at the Poplar Hip. when they all but sixty-one voted for down tools. What a reception did you have, Brother! And lo—what was that I heard last Saturday at the same place? They dared to hoot you, the dirty cowardly rotters, because up to that time you had not been able to shout to them, "Go back to-morrow and your wages is 15*s.* more per week." Those same men would raise their hats to their master after reducing their wages and standing them off for a few months. Had it not been, dear Brother, that I am rather

afraid of tumbling over my words, or perhaps not expressing them well enough (because I am a Dutchman), I would have gone on to the platform and told them what I thought of those (damn the 15*s.*; give me 2*d.* for half a pint).

I felt pained not being able to do anything on your behalf. I don't think I felt so grieved in all my life. Fancy a man fighting for a betterment on behalf of his fellow-workers to be hooted down. Thank goodness most of them are men and Brothers, as for those (the cowards and the blacklegs) I hope the time is not far off that they *shall be made to fight* for betterment of the working class.

Brother, whichever way the wind blows, whether we get the 15*s.* or a part of it or none at all, or whether I lose my job through this strike, I stand firm by you and our principle. No yard will behold me until you have said, "Go back," whatever my conditions may be.

Yours fraternally,

Labourer, Greens and Silley Weir, Blackwall.

We had done our best, but we had failed, as the workers all over the country had failed who had also been engaged in strike actions. I did not fully understand it all then, but the reason for our failure was the lack of a Communist Party, that could have welded and united all these strike actions together in one common mighty mass movement which, in view of the whole political situation, could have achieved resounding gains for the workers.

For a time the River Thames Shop Stewards Movement kept its propaganda going, ran its paper, organised a choir and an orchestra. They were happy days, but the failure of the strike had really struck a death-blow, and after a few months we had to close down. But our work left permanent results and drew many

workers into the Labour Movement as active participants who would never, otherwise, have been attracted to it.

It was part of my duty as District Secretary of the Boilermakers to attend various official conferences all over the country arising out of the industrial unrest, and on one occasion I attended a conference at the Ministry of Labour. Sir Robert Horne, the Minister of Labour at that time, presided over the conference, and after my speech came out with the usual flattery and corruption stuff at which he was an adept. I can best show the effect of this on me by quoting the article I wrote immediately after this conference, which was published in our paper, the *Consolidator*.[1]

AN OPEN LETTER TO SIR ROBERT HORNE, LABOUR MINISTER

DEAR SIR ROBERT,—In addressing this open letter to you from this "garden suburb" of Poplar, I do it with the express intention of conveying to you the feelings and expressions of one of the rank and file, who, being a striker, is anxious that the point of view held by the men in East London should be placed before you, in order that in your responsible position as Labour Minister, by being in possession of the true facts, you may be able to rise above the fetish of dignity and act on behalf of the Labour world, whose interests your Department is supposed to represent and safeguard.

It might be as well if it was stated quite candidly that your office and yourself are at the present moment viewed with the gravest suspicion, because the workers are of the opinion that up to now your whole attitude has been distinctly favourable to the employers, and that being so —and the facts are here to justify this assertion—if you are going to "make good," well, we will be quite frank;

[1] February 14th, 1919.

you have got to do something that will show the workers that you are a Minister of Labour and not a Minister of Capital.

We are fully aware that you are supposed to hold the scales of justice evenly balanced, and not to be swayed one way or the other, and, this being so, the humble and uneducated worker is beginning to ask why you don't do the "justice" stunt properly, instead of being "dumb" and "neutral," and all the rest of this humbug. We have repeatedly seen the statement in the Press that "the Government cannot intervene, and that Sir Robert Horne holds the same opinion"; but when it comes to the Government sending into the city of Glasgow thousands of soldiers fitted out with arms and ammunition, Maxim guns and a few spare tanks, we may be pardoned if we suggest that this seems very suspiciously like "intervention on behalf of the Glasgow employers," for the happy day has not yet arrived when it will be necessary to defend working-class homes of Cowcaddens from the designs of the Clyde shipbuilding employers.

Of course, you will say it is to defend property. If so, was that why Kirkwood and Gallacher, and that little boy of fourteen years of age were brutally batoned down on Friday, January 31st?

We don't remember, Sir Robert Horne, Scottish lawyer and Tory M.P., rushing into the Press, protesting against Government intervention.

Again, sir, when last week the E.T.U. threatened a strike in sympathy with the Belfast, Clyde and London men, and the Government threatened the leaders with prison and the confiscation of the E.T.U. funds, we cannot remember you protesting against this "intervention on behalf of the employers" by saying that the Government were trying to intimidate the E.T.U.

Where are you, O impartial Labour Minister? What becomes of all your sleek phrases about "wanting to help the workers"? Can you wonder that we are sick and tired

of you? Can you wonder that the rank and file look upon your office as a sham and a fraud? Can you wonder that we have neither faith nor hope in you, and that the sooner you lift the mask off the better you will be pleasing everybody, as we prefer the open enemy to the so-called friends of Labour who only prove their friendship for Labour by remaining silent when Labour is struggling for a place in the sun. Of course, you may retort: "The strikes are unofficial, and the trade-union executives are against the strikes." If that is your attitude, it ill becomes you, sir, for the whole of the strikers have remained loyal and steadfast for over four years. During the whole of this period these men have worked at increased speed, abnormal hours, and during that time they have seen men of your class, like Lord Fisher and Sir Edward Carson, desert the "ship of State" in the hour of her greatest need. If you base your so-called neutral attitude on the fact that the strikes are unconstitutional, my dear Sir Robert, why didn't you raise your lily-white hands in pious horror when your present chief, Mr. Lloyd George, brought about the downfall of Mr. Asquith by means as unconstitutional as the political records of this country will ever show? Yet we never recollect the impartial Sir Robert Horne ever raising one single protest. Therefore we may be pardoned for suggesting that you are not "playing the game" towards the class which by the sacrifice of its sons on the battlefields and the sacrifice of its trade rights on the industrial field is fully entitled to its due reward.

We are not appealing to your charity, for we know you have none. I remember the first time I saw you in the conference room of Montagu House. The thought struck my mind: what a cold, hard face you had! Your carriage, your manner, your bearing, the whole atmosphere around you made me realise there was little to hope from you. I could feel you were not of our class—you, who have never toiled a day of your life in mine,

mill or shipyard; you, who never for a moment have known the soul-destroying fear of unemployment; you, who have never stood in the cold, damp air of early morning in the "market" of the shipyard in order to get a job. You, who, through the whole of your life, have never known what it is to want, to scrape a few coppers to pay into a trade union. Why, how can you represent Labour? You, who don't feel for Labour, how can you judge our aims and aspirations? Why, your holding of such an office is a sham and hypocrisy, and the sooner that you resign and go back to the Law Courts or carry on the business of a Tory M.P., the sooner you will be true to yourself and make way for a man who can represent Labour.

In the first days of your trial you have failed us, and the present strikes are nothing to what will come in the future. The worker is awakening and slowly but surely realising his true worth in society, and in his early struggles towards freedom, in his blindness, he expected you as Labour Minister to help him and guide him in his struggles; but your attitude has only proved what many of us have always believed, that you neither can nor dare help him, because if you did a single action that the employers could cavil at, why, through the pressure they control in Parliament, we would find Sir Robert Horne, Labour Minister, resigning through ill-health.

Therefore the issue is plain. If the Government can "interfere" to protect employers, it can "interfere" to strengthen the workers, and aid them in their struggle towards that reconstructed England that your Government so glibly talks about, and all the present strikes, official and unofficial, are simply the expression of demands that have been put up for years and demands that are not one bit extravagant.

During this crisis, when the Press are so constantly assuring us that Sir Robert Horne is sympathetically considering the situation, etc., we would ask you to rise, if you dare, to the possibilities that are yours, and by

throwing dignity, tradition and custom on one side, prove that you are competent to grapple with these problems in a sensible and intelligent manner; and if you do this, then there is a chance of you being able to justify your existence. If you cannot, and you intend to preserve the hostile and bitter attitude you have shown during the past month, then believe me, sir, the great army of workers will not for long tolerate you in the pleasant environment of Montagu House, but will insist on your resignation for having failed in your duty as an impartial Minister of Labour.

In conclusion, I would appeal to your sense of justice and honour, that at least, if you cannot assist us, you can refrain from assisting the employers by protesting in the Press and the House of Commons that your Department have had nothing to do with the damnable and unwarranted military interference in Glasgow and Belfast.

Remember, Tonypandy, Featherstone and Llanelly are still bitter memories, and the present unrest is taking place at a period when working men are hourly and daily becoming increasingly alive to their own interests. If you can help them in their fight—well, sir, get on with it; and if you cannot, well, get out and save the country the expense of keeping up a Labour Ministry that is a snare and a delusion and incompetent to deal with the grave problems of the present industrial unrest.

During the winter of 1919 I was conducting classes in industrial history and economics, and it was during one of these classes in Water Lane School, Stratford, that I met Percy and Elizabeth Glading. In the course of one of my lectures, I happened to make a joke about the influence of sheep and the woollen industry, and noticed Percy's eyes twinkling with merriment. At the end of the class, he came up and invited me to his home for tea, and that started a friendship which I value

more than anything else in the world. Their home became my home, and their love and comradeship is one of the most precious memories of my life.

When the Police Strike broke out in London in 1919, one of the leaders came to my lodgings in Poplar and asked me to go out on the street corners and explain the case of the police strikers.

I readily agreed to do so, and started off outside the Cock Tavern in East Ham, at Beckton Road, Canning Town, and the East India Dock Gates, Poplar. It was not easy. I would not go so far as to say that as a general rule policemen are popular with the masses, especially with London's dockers, and the dockers in particular kept interrupting me with "Harry, how can you stick up for the coppers? They batoned us down in the Dock Strike in 1912." I pointed out that we were all workers and should stand by one another, and in the end the opposition was broken down, but it was one of the hardest jobs I ever undertook.

In September, 1919, I was approached by Pat Coates on behalf of a group of people in London to see if I would become the National Organiser of the Hands Off Russia movement. I had a very good job in Blackwall Yard, and was happy with my mates and in my work, but I knew it was my duty to take this job on, so I left the shipyard with many regrets.

A decision was taken to have the Head Office in the heart of an industrial area in the North. This sent me to Manchester, and what better centre could there be? What better hall to work from than the Margaret Street Hall, about which I have written earlier in this book? For within a mile of Margaret Street, Openshaw, stood the great factories of Armstrong-Whitworths, Gorton Tank, Beyer Peacocks, Crossleys, chemical

factories, textile mills and mines. And a 1½*d.* tram ride brought one right into the heart of Manchester itself, and all the great factories surrounding the great metropolis of the North.

The chief officers of the Hands Off Russia movement were Pat Coates, Marjorie Neilson and myself. I went all over the country, visiting trade-union branches and trades councils, addressing meetings and arranging opposition to all the leading statesmen who might be touring the country at that time. In Birmingham, Lord Cecil was advertised to speak in the Town Hall to a more or less select gathering on behalf of the League of Nations Union. We had tickets printed like the official ones, and from the gallery I tried to break up Cecil's meeting. But we were specially keen to get after Lloyd George, who was to be the guest of honour at the Annual Dinner of the Master Cutlers in Sheffield. The things we did to try to gate-crash that dinner, and the dreams we had of what could be done if it came off! But they remained dreams, and the night of the dinner found me addressing exactly six people outside Attercliffe Baths, with Alderman Smith—as he now is—as my Chairman.

Then I was sent to Edinburgh to deputise for Colonel Malone, in the Foresters' Hall. He was one of those who found it fashionable to become a revolutionary in the days after the War, but one small dose of prison was enough to cure him. It was my first meeting in what I had been brought up to believe was "Red Scotland." It was a good meeting—but Scotland was not quite so Red as I had expected.

After a time I grew dissatisfied with the work, since I felt that not enough was being done to develop mass work amongst the decisive sections of

the trade unionists. I thought I could do more for Russia in the docks and shipyards than in an office, and so I asked to be relieved of my job, and returned to London. I was out of work for some weeks, it being obvious that I was being barred from the shipyards. Finally, I got a job in Fraser's boiler-shop in Bromley-by-Bow—and some job it was. I have always been used to hard work of one sort or another, and the lack of modern machinery in this shop gave me an opportunity to bare my big right arm with a vengeance. However, I got on all right until March 21st, 1920. It was the first day of spring. The sun was shining, and even Poplar looked radiant when my mate and I set out to work. I looked the sun full in the face and said to him: "It's the first day of spring. There are daffodils at Kew. Let's go." Back we went to our lodgings, changed our clothes and off to Kew we went. We had a glorious day and a glorious evening, too.

I never went back to Fraser's. But it is apparently true that gods do move in a "mysterious way their wonders to perform," for I received a visit from a foreman boilermaker at the London Graving Dock, who said he had heard that I was victimised. He said he was a member of the Salvation Army, and did not believe in punishing a man for his activity on behalf of the workers, and that if I would show up at the Graving Dock he would give me a job. I never look a gift horse in the mouth, and jumped at this chance of getting back into the shipyard again.

My main sphere of activity at this time was with the Workers' Socialist Federation, doing propaganda for Russia. Sylvia Pankhurst was, of course, the leading spirit in the Federation, and she had a remarkable gift of extracting the last ounce of energy, as well as the last

penny, from everyone with whom she came in contact, to help on the work and activities she directed from Old Ford Road. She was loved in Poplar and, though I often heard that Sylvia was very difficult to get on with, I never found it so. I covered the greater part of London with her group. We held meetings on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings, afternoons and evenings. The W.S.F. was made up of the most self-sacrificing and hard-working comrades it has been my fortune to come in contact with, and I felt for Mrs. Walker of Poplar, to whom I shall refer again, the same sort of affection as existed between me and my mother.

This work laid the basis for the movement which finally led up to the strike of the *Jolly George*, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Chapter VII

THE *JOLLY GEORGE*, 1920[1]

The news of the revolutionary overthrow of Tsarism by the workers and peasants of Russia in 1917 evoked a tremendous response among the whole working class of this country, and an equally terrific hostility from the ruling class. Never was such a stream of filthy propaganda poured out against any Government as was poured out by the gentlemen of Britain against the first Workers' Republic in the history of the world. Against the might and influence of the capitalist Press and the Government's statesmen, our resources for conducting propaganda for solidarity with the Russian Revolution seemed very limited, but the sympathy with workers' Russia grew. Various working-class organisations took part, and in the summer of 1919, when the "Hands Off Russia" movement was formed, a great deal of work had already been done.

At this time I was very active in London with a group of comrades associated with Sylvia Pankhurst in the Workers' Socialist Federation. Many of these comrades could be seen standing outside the London docks and shipyards on Fridays and Saturdays, selling "Hands Off Russia" literature, and our members were also selling literature inside the dockyards and shipyards. Day after day we were posting up placards, sticky-backs and posters on the dock-sides and in

[1] The following chapter, with the exception of a few paragraphs that have been added, is reprinted from my contribution to the volume, *We Did Not Fight*, by kind permission of the publishers, R. Cobden-Sanderson, Ltd.

various places in the ships and lavatories. Sylvia Pankhurst kept us continuously supplied with copies of Lenin's *Appeal to the Toiling Masses*. This was considered by our democratic rulers as a seditious document, so that it had to be printed illegally. My landlady in Poplar one day expressed surprise that my mattress seemed to vary in size from day to day, and "that I must be a rough sleeper, as it was so bumpy." She little knew that inside the mattress we kept our copies of Lenin's *Appeal*, and each day took a supply to distribute amongst the workers in the docks and shipyards.

Every Saturday night and Sunday found the group addressing meetings and distributing literature. I remember how indefatigably the late comrade, Mrs. Walker of Poplar, used to work for the "Hands Off Russia" movement. She toiled like a Trojan. If on a shopping morning you went down Chrisp Street, Poplar, you could rely upon seeing Mrs. Walker talking to groups of women, telling them about Russia, how we must help them, and asking them to tell their husbands "to keep their eyes skinned to see that no munitions went to help those who were trying to crush the Russian Revolution."

Our Sunday night meetings at the East India Dock gates grew in size and enthusiasm. Then began the attempts of the Allies to use Poland as their main hope for crushing the Russian Revolution. Rumours flew thick and fast in Dockland, and soon we began to hear that such-and-such a ship was carrying munitions to Poland. Whilst we could never trace actual shipments, we redoubled our propaganda, and there could not have been a place in Poplar where the cry of "Hands off Russia!" had not been heard. Then we

received definite information that two large Belgian barges lying in the East Dock at the back of the Blackwall Shipyard were to be transformed so that they could transport war material to Poland. I was ordered to work on these barges, and asked point blank, "Were they for war purposes—to help Poland against Russia?" I was told "Yes." So I refused to work on this job, got sacked, and will confess was greatly disappointed that, in spite of my influence with the shipyard workers, I did not succeed in getting strike action on this job. Every man was receiving extra wages, and whilst these men would have willingly followed me if it had been a purely trade-union question, this issue did not appeal to them in the same light.

It was a danger signal! We became frantic with the thought that we were letting our Russian comrades down. That shipyard was bombarded with "Hands Off Russia" appeals. The men were ordered to work on a Sunday to finish the job. Our group was outside the shipyard that Sunday morning at 7 a.m. When the men came along, we gave each one a copy of Lenin's *Appeal to the Toiling Masses* and made many personal appeals. At nine o'clock it started to snow, and at 10.30 a.m. all the men were ordered home, but paid double time for the whole day to offset our propaganda.

That night we had a meeting in the Hall at Old Ford Road, Bow. It was a shocking night and a shocking meeting. I think all of us felt the position very keenly. After the meeting, I met an old workmate who cryptically said, "What are you worrying about, Harry? It'll all come right in the end." And when a few weeks later the news came through that the towing rope attached to the barges had broken while they were

proceeding across the North Sea, and the barges had sunk, it looked almost as if his prophecy had something of inspiration about it!

Rumours about munitions being loaded for Poland in the East India Docks became more insistent, until one day rumour turned out to be a fact. Guns and aeroplanes appeared on the dock-side labelled "O.H.M.S. Munitions for Poland." This was at the very moment when in Parliament Bonar Law was indignantly denying that the British Government was sending any war material whatsoever to Poland.

On May 1st, 1920, the Danish steamer *Neptune* left the East India Docks. We had failed to stop her, but it was clear that the dockers were in a restive mood. They didn't like the business. They were getting ready to act. But it was with heavy hearts that we joined the May Day Demonstration in Poplar to march to Hyde Park. It seemed such an awful contradiction: international solidarity in Hyde Park—munitions being shipped from Poplar to kill our Russian comrades. From Hyde Park, however, came new inspiration. Back to Poplar! Wherever our meetings could be held, we were on the job. Mrs. Walker worked herself to a standstill. There must be no mistake this time.

Two revolutionary firemen signed on this boat, and their plans were well laid. The owners and the Government thought that all was well. The boat got as far as Gravesend, and up came the two firemen. They called a meeting on deck to explain to the deckhands that they were carrying munitions against Russia, and what about it?

The Captain came down and demanded to know what was going on. It was made very plain to him.

While the argument was proceeding, another ship coming up the Thames struck the munition ship. There was no further argument. It was towed in a sinking condition to the dock and that was the nearest it got to Poland.

The news of this incident soon spread in Poplar, and was talked about wherever sailors and dockers gathered together. It happened that in these early days of May, one of the Walford Line of "*Jolly*" boats, the *Jolly George*, was waiting for cargo in the East India Dock. The cargo soon arrived, again labelled "O.H.M.S. Munitions for Poland." Would the dockers follow the lead of the seamen? They soon showed they would. They sent a deputation to Fred Thompson and Ernest Bevin, the London and General Secretaries respectively of the Dockers' Union, and received assurances that the Union would stand by them if they took action on the *Jolly George*.

On May 10th, *The Times* was, oh, so happy! The Poles were carrying all before them. Kiev had been captured by the Poles. "Heavy Defeat of the Red Army" screamed "Thunderer" and in its leading article it triumphantly proclaimed:

> "The fall of Kiev is a great triumph for the Poles and their Ukrainian allies, as it is a heavy blow for the Bolsheviks. The city was entered, according to the Russian wireless, on Friday, after heavy fighting during Thursday and that day, and by the latest reports, the Russians are in retreat, followed by Polish cavalry. King George expresses the traditional feelings of the British people when he conveys to Marshal Pilsudsky on the occasion of the Polish National Festival their 'most cordial congratulations and good wishes for the future of the Polish state.' "

Naturally, the enemies of Russia were jubilant—so jubilant that all the Parliamentary denials that Britain had been sending munitions to Poland were now dropped. Britain must be in at the kill, but let it be done in the traditional "gentlemanly" manner. It was left to Winston Churchill to do the job.

> "The British War Office have given no assistance to the Poles in this enterprise, but both the British and the French Governments in former periods—last year, and so on—have helped to strengthen and to equip the Polish Army, that being an essential part of the policy of the Treaty" (*The Times*, May 12th, 1920).

Not so fast, gentlemen! Other events are taking place that will make the fall of Kiev a Pyrrhic victory.

The London dockers have taken strike action on the *Jolly George* on May 10th, 1920. The coal-heavers have refused to coal the *Jolly George* on May 10th, 1920. They struck better than they knew!

Soon the news is all over Britain. Every worker is triumphant. Wherever the *Jolly George* and the London dockers are mentioned, scenes of enthusiasm are witnessed. Questions are asked in the House of Commons about the matter, and the same Bonar Law who on May 6th, 1920, denied that munitions had been sent to Poland, now admits that both the British and French Governments have been supplying munitions to Poland free of charge since October, 1919.

The offensive against Russia goes on, but the counter-offensive *for* Russia gathers momentum.

The strike on the *Jolly George* has given a new inspiration to the whole working-class movement. On May 15th, the munitions are unloaded back on to the dockside, and on the side of one case is a very familiar

sticky-back: "Hands Off Russia." It was only small, but that day it was big enough to be read all over the world.

The British workers were now thoroughly roused. They were ready for any action to defend workers' Russia. Councils of Action were set up everywhere. The movement was on its mettle. Labour leaders were forced to pay heed to the mass feeling. The emergency conference of the Trades Union Congress, Labour Party and Parliamentary Labour Party had adopted on August 9th, 1920, a resolution in which it stated that:

> "It therefore warns the Government that the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war" (i.e. the war upon Russia).

In this open war, the Allies and especially Britain had long been preparing to participate as direct combatants, and they met at Hythe, also on August 9th. But the game was up. The threat of general strike action called a halt. The open war plans had to be abandoned.

The strike on the *Jolly George* had won its greatest victory. It was the action which completely changed the international situation—a change that was forced on the British Government.

Let Winston Churchill testify to this:

> "The British Labour Party had developed a violent agitation against any British assistance being given to Poland. . . . Councils of Action were being formed in many parts of Britain. Nowhere among the public was there the slightest comprehension of the evils which would follow a British collapse. Under these pressures, Mr.

Lloyd George was constrained to advise the Polish Government that the Russian terms do no violence to the ethnographical frontiers of Poland as an independent state, and that if they were rejected the British Government could not take any action against Russia" (*The World Crisis*, "The Aftermath," p. 269).

So the workers won. So they can win again, if now, every hour and every day, they make their preparations for actively fighting war. The strike weapon has now been finally rejected by the labour leaders as a weapon of struggle against war, but none the less it is one of the most powerful weapons the workers possess. However, it needs to be emphasised again and again that to ensure its success, the work of preparation must be unending.

The strike of the *Jolly George* was the result of two years' tremendously hard and unremitting work on the part of a devoted band of comrades in East London. To-day this lesson should be brought home on every possible occasion. There is widespread pacifist feeling —there is mass patriotic propaganda conducted by the National Government, but there is all too little militant anti-war propaganda being carried out, which is a grave reflection on all those of us who claim to be actively opposed to war.

Never was there such a need to be vigilant, to be on guard. If at any time between 1930 and 1933 we could have organised one protest strike in a munition factory or in a rail depot or on a dock-side or ship, where munitions were being made or exported to Japan, we could have struck a mighty blow in defence of the Soviet Union, which means in defence of the working class of Britain and of all who love peace and hate war.

We must remember that never again will the Government be so clumsy as to flaunt their bold "O.H.M.S. Munitions for ——" in the rail depots and on the docks. They have learned from the *Jolly George*. So can the workers. To those who fear victimisation—why, if any docker on the *Jolly George* had been victimised there would have been riots in Poplar! The whole movement was ready to stand by the dockers. The working class is ready to stand by those who are in the position to strike effective blows against the warmongers now.

Not by pacifist appeals, but by action, can we retard and prevent war and build up that power and organisation that can end capitalism, the cause of all wars.[1]

There is one detail, not without interest to-day, that I might add to this account of the *Jolly George*. Some time afterwards I was working in the West India Docks and heard that a Polish steamer was going to load munitions for use against Russia, at what are now the Hays group of wharves. I rushed out of the docks to 16, King Street, because I knew that the *Communist* would be coming out and there was still time to get this news into the paper. Perhaps I looked rather dirty in my overalls, for I had considerable difficulty in penetrating into the editorial sanctum, where the Editors of the *Communist*, Francis Meynell and Raymond Postgate, were at work. They were poring over old books, which meant nothing to me, as I did not know that Francis was an expert on typography. I told my story and saw at once that they were more interested in old books than in the business I had left my work

[1] This was originally written before the outbreak of the present war. The remainder of this chapter has been added since.

to report upon. So I went back to my work calling them names their parents would have blushed to hear said about their offspring.

To-day, when once again a great part of the world has been driven to war by the greed of the imperialist Powers, one realises how comparatively easy it seemed in the years immediately following 1918 to organise action against war. Then "Never again!" was the common cry. The great majority of the people of Britain were disgusted with the horror and misery of a war which, as they had come to realise, had been fought purely and simply in the interests of the big capitalists and giant monopolist concerns. The experience of four years of war had not been lost upon the people. More and more they saw through the sham pretexts on which their husbands, sons and fathers had been driven out from their homes to be uselessly slaughtered, as much by the incompetence of their own generals as by the enemy. Above all, the workers, who had done nine-tenths of the fighting and nine-tenths of the paying—by worsened conditions of work, higher cost of living and indirect taxation—were in no mood to allow themselves to be offered up in further sacrifice, especially when that sacrifice was directed against their own brothers in the young Soviet State, who had succeeded in overthrowing their capitalist war-making rulers.

But to-day the position is different. The horror of those four years has been deadened by time, and new generations are being summoned to fight who, in 1918, were children or unborn. Now more than ever, therefore, it is imperative for us, who remember the last time, to warn them of what we know. Now more than ever it is the duty of every Socialist, of every

class-conscious worker, to expend all his energy in tearing away the mask of ideals with which the imperialist rulers of the world seek to hide the true face of this war for profits.

As I write this, though the new world war has been in existence for five months, the inferno of bombs and gas and blood has as yet scarcely been unloosed. And yet already in Britain (not to speak of the other countries, Germany and France, where conditions are much worse) the suffering of the common people has begun: their homes have been broken up by evacuation; their children let loose upon the streets in thousands, without schools or medical attention; their trade-union rights, fruit of a hundred years of struggle, are being threatened; and while the cost of living rises steeply, hundreds of thousands of workers, already living at or below the poverty line, are glibly informed by this Government of bankers' and industrialists' representatives that they must expect no increase of wages.

Yet there is one other point to be borne in mind. The struggle against imperialist war reached its highest stage in England *after* the last war, in the fight leading up to the stopping of the *Jolly George*. Already to-day, though the struggle is as yet far from that stage, it is led by men and women whose understanding of imperialism and whose determination to end it once and for all is more firmly rooted and more clearly conscious than it was in 1920; and we can count on the same vigilance being shown by the rank and file of the Labour movement as was shown by the men who stopped the *Jolly George*.

Chapter VIII

THE FOUNDING OF THE C.P. AND MY FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

In the course of the months dealt with in the previous chapter, there were various conversations between the representatives of the Socialist Party, British Socialist Party, South Wales Socialist Society, the Workers' Socialist Federation and prominent leaders of the National Shop Stewards' Movement concerning the desirability of finding a basis upon which a single revolutionary political party of the working class could be formed in Britain.

My chief work at that time was in the shipyards and trade unions, and I took no part in these negotiations, although I was familiar with the difficulties. Every leading revolutionary recognised that there could be no effective progress unless there were one united party, but personal differences and jealousies prevented its achievement.

After the Second Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in 1920, however, great progress was made, because there the knotty point of the correct attitude of a united Communist Party towards the Labour Party had been defined. Certain comrades and organisations were in favour of affiliation. The B.S.P. had affiliated some years earlier to the Labour Party and its delegates had played their part at subsequent national conferences, but until the Second

Congress of the C.I., the majority were against affiliation.

I was one of that number and up till the return of the delegates from the Second Congress I maintained a rigid point of view on the subject. I even went specially to attend an emergency meeting of the Openshaw Branch of the B.S.P. on this question and the vote went my way. Albert Adshead, who fought hard for affiliation as a revolutionary tactic, told me that I would regret having swayed the branch on a wrong political line. He was right.

Then came the report of the Second Congress of the Communist International, and I heard Bill Gallacher explain how Comrade Lenin had torn to shreds all the arguments against affiliation to the Labour Party. This made me sit up and take notice with a vengeance, for here was something new in our lives, something more realistic and practical than we revolutionary dreamers had ever experienced.

Lenin's name rang like magic in my ears: it meant Russia, it meant working-class power, it meant victory over the bosses, it meant Socialism. I had not yet had the opportunity of reading many of the basic works of Comrade Lenin, but those I had managed to get hold of I had read again and again. His *Appeal to the Toiling Masses*, for instance, I knew by heart. I thought that never before had there been such a flaming appeal to the class instincts, solidarity and international duty of the common people.

After listening to Bill Gallacher and Thomas Bell, I was in the end convinced that affiliation to the Labour Party was the correct policy, and I agreed also that it was the duty of any serious Communist Party to try to

achieve this, not in its own interest, but for the sake of the millions of workers attached to the Labour Party through their trade unions or otherwise.

I am not here in any way attempting to write a history of the Communist Party, but only to give some idea of its main developments, and I would like, here, to mention two comrades with whom I have been closely associated ever since those days, and to place on record my indebtedness to Bill Gallacher and Thomas Bell. There could not be two comrades more dissimilar in character or methods of work. Many of my readers may know Bill Gallacher—restless, lively, always active in the fight, with his pugnacious habit of driving home his points by banging on the desk or table as if he meant to kill you if you dared argue ! He licked me into shape in no time. No one has ever told me where I got off more often than Bill Gallacher, but always at the right time and place and in the right manner—and that is the main thing.

Thomas Bell was of another type altogether ; many comrades thought him dour and sullen, but this was never my opinion. There never was a comrade more devoted to the revolutionary cause than Tommy, and I have to thank him also for knocking off many rough edges. I am especially indebted to him for a little lecture he delivered in 1920 on how to speak to workers, and his final advice: "Always treat the workers seriously; the more seriously you treat them, either when speaking to them or writing for them, the more effective your appeal will be." Now some of my comrades often chide me about a recurring phrase in my articles: "and serious-minded workers will realise . . ." Well, that came from Thomas Bell and has stuck to me all my life. It was Tommy also who advised me

not only what to read of the Marxist classics then available for the first time, but how to read them, which is equally important. He and I had many political battles in the early days of the Communist Party's development, but we always remained good comrades, and I am proud to count him among my friends.

To continue my story. At last agreement was reached between all the parties I have mentioned, and the Communist Party was formed. I attended the convention as a visitor, not as a delegate. But at that time the Revolution was by way of being fashionable, and I cannot help thinking that many of the people with "big names" were attracted by that fact and flirted with Communism and the Communist Party in order to be in the swing of things. Certain people did not hesitate to make workers like myself feel that we were very small fry indeed. Robert Williams, Walton Newbold, Ellen Wilkinson, William Mellor, Lieut.-Colonel Malone, all appeared at the Cannon Street Hotel Conference in 1920. But I felt at the time that perhaps some of the workers would still be in the Party long after the big-wigs had found comfortable careers in brighter limelight—and with fatter salaries than ever the C.P. would be able to offer.

I was not far wrong. We did not have long to wait before the persecution began and the blizzard blew most of them out of the Communist Party. I know that this interpretation of their actions will be hotly denied. Of course, Communists "are difficult to get on with," they will say, and "It was not possible to agree with the C.P. tactics"; but what I have said represents the blunt truth and they know it.

For instance, there was the case of one of the people mentioned who once spoke of the "breeze from the Far East blowing across Europe to sweep away capitalism," but when Inspector Parker of Scotland Yard came to our office to arrest Albert Inkpin, the man I am referring to felt the breeze keenly enough to allow himself to be carried right out of King Street, and he was never seen within its precincts again.

As a member of the Openshaw Branch of the British Socialist Party, which merged with other organisations into the Communist Party of Great Britain, I became a foundation member of the Party, but my work for some time after this was in the trade unions. In fact, I am afraid I was looked upon more as a militant trade unionist than as a Communist. There was a great deal of truth in this. All my activity had necessarily been in the workshops and trade unions, and naturally had influenced my outlook and way of looking at things. I was only beginning now to have the chance of studying the fundamental works of Marx and Lenin and, of course, the experiences of the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks were invaluable in helping me forward from an outlook based on militant trade unionism to Communism.

However, be this as it may, I soon became what is known as a "national speaker"—in other words, a man regarded as important in any area except that in which he was born ! Organisations in the provinces used to book me for week-ends, and I travelled all over the country, returning to London on Sunday nights in time for work in the shipyard on Monday.

In the autumn I grew interested in propaganda work for what was called the Red International of Trade and Industrial Unions, and in February, 1921,

Ted Lismer asked me to become the London Organiser of the British Bureau of R.I.L.U. The aim was to popularise the principles of the Red International among trade unionists in opposition to the International Federation of Trade Unions, or the Yellow International, as we delighted in calling this body.

During the time that the late Alfred Purcell and Robert Williams were in Moscow in 1920, they had discussed with a number of the leaders of the Russian trade unions the advisability of forming some organisation, other than the Yellow or Amsterdam International, which would link up the trade unionists of the whole world on an international scale. The Russian comrades were quite modest in their proposals, but both Purcell and Williams wanted to go much further, and suggested many amendments to the draft manifesto announcing the formation of the Provisional Council. Readers will get some idea of their aims from the following quotations from this manifesto, a document which initiated a world-wide campaign and opened a conflict which has lasted for many, many years :

> Thus the leaders of the Amsterdam International stand condemned as leaders of the working class. They have preached peace where there can be no peace. They have turned to the capitalist International, and scorned the Workers' International. From such leadership we must turn away. Such an International we must destroy. From these conclusions there is no escape. The world is now divided into two great divisions, and
>
> WE MUST MAKE OUR CHOICE
>
> as to which camp we belong to. On the one side is the capitalist class with its League of Nations, its Supreme Council, its remnants of the Second International, its

"yellow" Amsterdam International, its Léghiens and Jouhaux, its Hendersons and Braces and Thomases, its Gompers and Barnes—traitors all to the working class by their preaching of "class peace"! On the other side is the Communist International and all that is loyal and true to the working class. Supported by millions of organised workers, it is led by comrades who realise the tremendous task history is thrusting upon the workers, who dare to tell the workers what they must fight for and who are unafraid to be with them in the struggle. To this side must come every man and woman who hates hypocrisy and cowardice. To this side we must rally our labour unions. There is no alternative for the workers who mean to win through to victory over capitalism.

The Provisional Executive Committee (composed of the undersigned) accordingly invites every industrial organisation, whether Trade Union or Industrial Union, National Shop Stewards' Committee or Trade Union Federation, to elect the delegates to the

WORLD CONGRESS OF TRADE AND INDUSTRIAL UNION ORGANISATION

convened for May 1st, 1921, in Moscow. Make May 1st, 1921, a Labour Day to be remembered in the annals of Labour History. Upon this day let all the Labour Union Forces of the West rally to the centre of the proletarian revolution and shape anew an international organisation and an international policy capable of leading the workers to victory. Pass the attached resolutions at your Branch meetings, your Committee Meetings, your Meetings in the Mills and Mines and Workshops. Work with all your strength to make this International Congress a mighty weapon in the world-wide liberation war of the working class.

To this call and challenge there can only be one reply! "We, the organised workers of Britain, will join with the Russian workers, the Red International of Trade and Industrial Unions, and, together with the Communist International, shatter the remaining bulwarks of capitalism and build the work anew under the Red Banner of the

"WORLD-WIDE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT."

(*Extract from Manifesto of the Provisional International Council of Trade and Industrial Unions to the Organised Workers of Great Britain.*)

My work, then, consisted of explaining the objects of the Red International of Trade Unions to the trade union branches and trades councils in the London area, trying to win the affiliation of these organisations to the London Committee, and obtaining their support for a representative delegation of British trade unionists to be sent to Moscow for the first Conference of the Red International, originally planned for May, 1921, but later postponed until July, 1921.

I was very happy in this work. Every night found me in some trade-union branch or other, and, without boasting, I think I can claim to have addressed as many trade-union branches since 1921 as any man in the Labour movement. I used to feel particularly proud when I was invited into the branch-room immediately I arrived and heard the Chairman say to the members: "You know that rules do not provide for the presence of strangers; but we know Brother Pollitt, and he can listen to our business until it is time for his address."

Then came a busy period organising conferences and travelling the country addressing mass demonstrations in support of the principles of the manifesto referred to above. When the miners came out on strike in 1921,

we became busier still. Like all the militants, we expected great things from the Triple Alliance, and for us as well as the miners Black Friday was black in every sense of the word. Nor did we mince our words in saying what we thought about the leaders of the Triple Alliance. The Communist Party expelled Bob Williams for his part in this gross betrayal, the forerunner of the even greater betrayal during the General Strike in 1926.

It was about this time that I first came into personal contact with that great revolutionary, Tom Mann. Not that it was by any means the first time that I had seen or heard him—not by a long chalk! I remember walking to Manchester with my father to listen to Tom Mann when I was a kid, and, in particular, the occasion of his debate with Frank Rose in the old Gaiety Theatre. How Tom strode about that stage! How he hammered home the points of his policy! "That's how I want to be," I whispered to my father, and I walked home on air. Soon afterwards I bought all Tom's little Syndicalist Library, which I still have.

In 1921 Tom made an appointment to see me at Peckham Road, where he lived, as the General Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. What a welcome he gave me, while he sized me up and wondered what surprise I was going to spring on him. He soon found out: I asked him if he would become the first Chairman of the British Section of the Red International when he retired from his office as Secretary, and go as a delegate to the First Congress in Moscow in July. He agreed to my proposals, and thus began my long friendship with one of the most lovable comrades the working-class movement has ever produced.

Then I went to Plymouth for a mass demonstration

n support of the Red International, and here came into contact with the forces of law and order. Dan Hillman, at that time the West of England Organiser of the Dockers' Section of the Transport and General Workers' Union, took the Chair. The Duke of Windsor, then Prince of Wales, happened to be on his way home from Japan, and due to arrive at Plymouth in a few days. I am afraid I urged the audience to give him the kind of reception that Royalty does not appreciate. A man in the hall who had a grievance against the Government, due to his treatment after the War, shouted out that he at least would bring himself to the notice of the Prince—a promise which he duly carried out, only to receive a short sentence in prison for attempting to approach the Royal Personage.

Five days after my speeches at Plymouth I was arrested in East Ham and taken to Scotland Yard. No charge was made against me, but I was placed in a detention cell. If I had any hope of peace and quiet it was soon dispelled, for all the cells were occupied by Sinn Feiners, who did not stop singing and shouting the whole of Saturday night and Sunday. On the Monday afternoon, when I was taken under escort to Plymouth, they were still keeping it up.

I was charged with making inflammatory speeches and remanded for a week. This did not worry me, except that my mother was seriously ill at the time, suffering from a complete nervous breakdown, and I was anxious about how the shock might affect her.

The authorities were then busy rounding up many Communist speakers, and so I prepared myself for a term of imprisonment. I took very great care over my defence and refused the services of a solicitor. I felt resigned to my fate, but I must confess that the fact

that I would not now be able to go to Moscow, the Mecca of my dreams, was a heavy blow. I tried to console myself with the thought of "some other time." Dan Hillman and his daughter gave me every assistance in preparing my speech for the defence, in fact I think we sat up all the night before the trial in Dan's office, rehearsing the questions I was to put to the police witnesses and the arguments justifying my actions at the meetings.

It was a full bench of magistrates, and, though I cannot now recall the whole of my speech, I remember that I made a passionate defence of what I had said against the ruling class and royalty. I told of my childhood experiences, which had nothing at all to do with the case, and as no one stopped me I went on, though to no effect.

The magistrates duly deliberated and sentenced me to a fine of £10 or one month's imprisonment. A woman in court promptly paid the fine, and I was a free man again. It's a funny thing, but every time I have stepped out of a police court I have thought of Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, and the lines,

> "I never saw sad men who looked with such a tearful eye,
> Upon that little tent of blue we prisoners call the sky."

—and certainly the sky does look nicer from the outside of a prison.

I caught the night train to Manchester to see my mother, for I had a question to ask. Should I now go to Moscow or did she want me to stop at home until she was better? Without a minute's hesitation, she answered: "All my life I have wanted to go abroad and see other people and their countries, and get new

experiences. Now you have the chance, Harry, you must go. Never mind me." So back I went to London to make the final preparations for going to Moscow.

At last I set sail. I had thought the day would never come. It seemed even longer waiting than the time when I was twelve years of age and was going to see the sea at Lytham for the first time in my life. Tom Mann and I were going together, and we started from the East India Dock on the s.s. *Baltanic*. It was the dock in which I had worked; every man working there knew me, and when they saw me going aboard they gave me quite a send-off. But there was also some shaking of heads, and one old boilermaker shouted out: "Are you sure it's safe to go, Harry?" I assured him it was.

That was the first time I had left England's shores, and I have regretted ever since that I mislaid the diary I kept about the voyage. There were only a few passengers besides Tom and myself, and these kept their distance, for the Chief Engineer, having recognised Tom Mann, had told them who this notorious person was, and apparently frightened them all.

I particularly noticed two middle-aged passengers, obviously husband and wife; the man had only one arm. I was in the saloon once and found this man in a kind of seizure, and went for help. This broke the ice between us, and we grew quite chatty, without either of us knowing the other's name. When the ship was passing down the Kiel Canal past one of the shipyards we looked over the side and the roar of the pneumatic hammers brought a light to my face and also, I noticed, to his. He took my arm and said: "Young man, I wish that the London shipyard workers could hear that noise. It would make them work hard and beat German

competition. And I should like that Bolshevik called Pollitt to hear it. It might teach him not to stir up unrest in the London shipyards."

It gave me great pleasure to introduce myself, and his surprise knew no bounds. "Well, to think that such a nice young man as you should be that man! Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Fletcher, and my sons run Fletcher's Shipyard in Millwall." Then it was my turn to be surprised, for although I had not worked in what we called "the Hogg Yard," I knew well every boilermaker in it, and it was proverbial in the industry that nobody ever turned down a job in that yard.

After that it was plain sailing. He introduced me to his wife, and we had many interesting conversations about the Labour movement, the conditions of the workers and Socialism. When I returned from Russia I found a pile of books at my lodgings which had been sent by Mr. Fletcher, and until he died he used to send me boxes of apples and pears grown on his estate. But they did not succeed in diverting me from my aims!

We called at Danzig, Libau and Riga before disembarking at Reval. I wonder if Tom Mann remembers our walk on the sands at Libau. It was a glorious summer day. The entire population seemed to be out sun-bathing. I may as well mention that this was the first time I had seen either sun-bathing or naked bodies, and to my shame I must confess I stared hard enough to lose my eyesight! Tom took as keen an interest in the proceedings as I, especially when we came across a man well over 6 feet in height, stark naked, swinging a cane and smoking a huge cigar as he strode along the shore. I nearly died laughing, but it didn't upset the *sang froid* of that man.

We went ashore at Reval and proceeded to an

address where we were to enquire about arrangements for getting to Petrograd, as it was then called. To while away the time, we went to a restaurant for a meal and to discover, if possible, some person who spoke enough English to help us buy food for our journey. There was a small band which played "Alexander's Rag-Time Band" in our honour! Tom is always generous with tips, and I think it is very likely that the band-leader in that Reval Restaurant is still bowing in recognition of the tip he received that day. Incidentally, let me say, I have never known Tom see a beggar in the street, a match-seller or a singer without stopping to give him money.

When we were finally fixed up for Petrograd we were ushered to a *wagon-lit* coach all to ourselves. Wonderful, it seemed to me—obviously once the property of the Tsar! But the pitying glances of the people on the platform soon warned us that things were not quite as marvellous as they appeared. "Going to Petrograd? They must be mad!" the expression on their faces seemed to say. And it turned out to be the slowest journey of my experience. We had hours to wait at the frontier town of Narva before our engine appeared to take us the next stage. But the local soviet warmly welcomed us at their offices and treated us as honoured guests. Tea, bread and eggs were consumed and then we explored the town. It bore all the traces of heavy fighting, but when we found in the central square a huge church and in front of it two great statues, one of Marx and the other of Lenin, we felt happy and raised our hats.

During the rest of our journey we saw the dastardly work of the counter-revolutionaries before they were driven off Soviet soil: blown-up bridges and damaged

permanent way—in fact, we crossed one river on a bridge which we felt every minute must collapse. But in the end we reached Petrograd.

It was only after many difficulties that we succeeded in finding the headquarters of the Communist Party, but delays did not bother us, nor anything else. We were in Red Petrograd at last. Tom Mann's name was well known to the Party comrades, and a right royal fuss they made of us. They apologised for only being able to offer us black bread and tea, but for Tom and me, in our elation at having reached the Promised Land, it was a banquet such as Lucullus might have envied.

Then we set off on the final stage of the journey to Moscow. Moscow! My feelings at seeing Moscow for the first time no words of mine can describe. So I will not attempt any description, but confine myself to a very naïve confession: we were both extremely eager to see the leaders of the Russian Revolution in the flesh, and I, for my part, was excited to see the great bell in the Kremlin which I had read about when I was a kid at school.

There were some days to wait before the Congress of the Red International opened, and these we spent in sightseeing. I remember thinking it rather funny when I noticed on my first day, at the big stores at the top of what is now known as Gorki Street, that the only goods in the window were Morton Christmas puddings marked with a 1913 label! There were many hungry people in Moscow just then, but even they could not face these Christmas puddings. It is a far cry from the traditional workhouse joke about Christmas pudding to Moscow, but it was this that sprang to my mind as I gazed on that array of Morton's products.

I met many comrades from Britain in Moscow, and one day was asked if I would like to go on an excursion with Tom Mann and Nat Watkins, Comrade Hewlett from South Wales, and some miners from Fife. We were to visit Tula on a train drawn by some new kind of engine fitted with a new propeller. Owing to some misunderstanding, Tom and I missed the bus that was to take us to the station, and perhaps it was as well for us that we did, because the train met with an accident and many comrades were injured, and among those killed was Comrade Hewlett, whose untimely death deprived the South Wales miners of one of their most valiant fighters.

The Third Congress of the Communist International was then taking place in the great hall of the Kremlin in Moscow, and soon those of us who were members of the Communist Party were co-opted on to the British delegation.

Before the Congress started, however, our group was taken on a tour of the Kremlin, and many amusing incidents occurred in connection with the things that had stuck in our minds when we were at school and reading about Moscow and the Kremlin.

But when at last the Congress opened and we went to the great hall, the splendour of the scene almost made my eyes start out of my head. The gilt and glitter, the columns, the gold decorations, the object resembling a huge golden eye above the Presidium—I was fascinated by it all. It was my first view of anything so ornate, lavish and magnificent, and I remember the thought that went through my mind: "They try to kid us workers at home that the bosses will allow us to vote them out of enjoying luxuries of this sort." There rose before me a mental picture of the orgies that this hall

must have witnessed, the grandeur of the dresses and uniforms. Money must have poured out like water to tickle the degenerate palates of those pre-revolutionary parasites. And, by contrast, everything that I had ever read about Russia came back in a flash. The poverty, the misery and oppression, the Black Hundreds, the trail of exiles to Siberia, the Cossacks' knouts, Bloody Sunday in 1905, the armed intervention of Churchill and Lloyd George, the famine and the blockade.

But now, in this hall once occupied by tyrants and oppressors, sat the revolutionary workers from every land. For me it was the portent of world victory for the workers. I had thought many times in Lancashire that it would be impossible for me to hate the ruling class more than I did, but when I looked round this hall and remembered that similar splendour still existed in Buckingham Palace and every other capital in the world, based on the exploitation and misery of the working class, that hatred intensified to fever heat. I vowed—and I hope I shall never break that vow—that I would do everything in my power to strive with my comrades of the Communist Party to smash the rule of the exploiters for ever.

I realise now, as I look back, that these impressions of the contrast between a country where the good things of life belong to the people and a country where a tiny class use them to enslave the masses affected me more, during my first visit to Moscow, than the speeches and resolutions.

One afternoon we were all waiting for Comrade Lenin to come to the Congress to make his report on the New Economic Policy of the Soviet Union. Imagine my excitement. I was going to see with my own eyes the greatest revolutionary figure that had ever lived. Tom

and I were walking up and down an ante-room of the main hall when suddenly we felt the atmosphere grow tense, and we heard the whisper: "Lenin is coming." And there was Comrade Lenin, his papers in his hand, striding quickly up the corridor and acknowledging the loving salutations that met him on every side.

Tom Mann said he must speak to him, and advanced as Lenin came towards us. How glad he was to greet Tom Mann! His face lit up with pleasure as he told Tom how closely he had followed his activities all over the world. I was only able to shake his hand. My name meant nothing to Lenin, but that handshake meant everything in the world to me, and I seemed to walk to my place in the Congress Hall literally on air.

It is not my purpose to give any résumé of the speech Lenin made on that occasion. It can be found in the English edition of his *Selected Works*. I only know that, as I listened to the translation, I was struck by its simplicity and by the homely way Lenin spoke and made the most difficult questions crystal clear.

That day on which I met Comrade Lenin was the greatest of my life.

I must recall one more impression of Moscow and the Third Congress. It was the closing night. The speeches were finished. Each delegation began to sing its revolutionary songs. First the Russians with their hymn in memory of those who had toiled and died in the service of the Revolution. Never shall I forget that haunting tune, the whole glorious history of the Bolsheviks seemed to be reflected in the song. I looked round to see if there were tears in other eyes, for I am afraid that they were falling unrestrainedly from mine, but I didn't care, and when I saw other people affected in the same way, I knew that nothing can ever break the bonds of

comradeship that bind all Communists together. There were more Russian songs. Then the German, French, Balkan, Italian, Spanish comrades made their contributions. The British and Americans made a poor show, for neither country had yet produced any worthy revolutionary song.

Finally the "Internationale" was sung, and we let ourselves go with a vengeance! The Third Congress was ended.

To leave the hall one had to walk down a marble staircase; a sense of elation and revolutionary pride gripped us all. I walked down with Olive Arnot, and at the bottom Robin Page Arnot came up to us and said, "You both walked as gracefully and proudly down that staircase as if you were the principal boy and girl at the Drury Lane pantomime." And so we did, for we felt that the whole world was ours at that moment.

The First Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions opened in a place known as the Hall of Columns. I will not say a word about this Hall, except that it is doubtful whether any workers from Britain ever visited the Soviet Union without describing it.

It was here that I met for the first time Comrade Losovsky, who was the General Secretary of the R.I.L.U. until after Hitler's advent, when it was felt that the changed situation no longer made it possible, in the interests of world trade-union unity, for the R.I.L.U. to maintain its separate existence.

Here, too, I met that grand old fighter, Mother Bloor, from the United States of America, and how well I remember her meeting Tom Mann and the hearty salutation with which he greeted her. Earl Browder, now General Secretary of the Communist Party of the United States, and William Z. Foster,

Chairman, I also met for the first time, and began a friendship which has grown closer with the passing years.

What battles were fought at that Congress! For the first time I realised how polite we British people are in our polemics. Every nationality under the sun was represented, the majority non-Communists. Trade unionists from Britain and from America, together with the I.W.W., anarcho-syndicalists from France, Spain and Italy, together with trade unionists from the same countries. Coats were flung off, arms waved in the wildest gesticulations, hard names flew all over the place while the discussion on the first draft programme went on. Certain anarchists intrigued to use the Congress as a demonstration in support of their aims. Several delegates raised stormy protests against politics being allowed in trade unions at all. One felt that at any moment the speakers would resort to blows. But under the skilful leadership of Losovsky, agreement was finally reached on a platform of principles that would form the guiding line for the work of all militant trade unionists throughout the world. The essence of this platform can be stated in a few words: it was to win the trade unions away from the policy of class collaboration to class struggle; to make them affiliate to the Red International of Labour Unions instead of the Amsterdam International, to unite every trade-union struggle and work out a common policy and tactic suited to the different conditions prevailing in each country.

Immediately the Congress had finished, it was necessary for me to leave Moscow for London. I had received word that I had been elected as delegate of the Boilermakers' Society to the Labour Party Conference, the

General Federation of Trades Union Conference and the Trades Union Congress. It was a position to which I was elected for the following seven years.

I missed the first two of these annual conferences through being out of the country, but was very anxious to be back in time to attend the Trades Union Congress of 1921, being held in Cardiff. So Ellen Wilkinson and I left Moscow together for London. Our route took us through Petrograd, Reval, Riga, Danzig, and then we decided to cover the rest of the journey by train in order to meet Phillips Price in Berlin. Our plans worked out well and we spent a very pleasant evening with him and gained some very interesting information on the German situation.

Tom Mann had gone down to the famine area to see for himself what conditions were like, with a view to a big agitation for food for our Russian comrades, and I undertook to organise a London conference at which Tom could report on his impressions. This took place in the Memorial Hall on October 15th, 1921, and the reports on the Congress of the R.I.L.U. and conditions in the famine area of the Soviet Union had an important effect.

From there I went to Cardiff, and took my place as a delegate at my first Trades Union Congress. I had an opportunity to see in the flesh all the leading figures of the British trade union movement. I can't pretend that I felt in the least overawed by what I saw or heard, and the same feeling came over me as in the Manchester County Forum: "You can do better than they can. Have a go!" And have a go I did.

J. H. Thomas had moved a resolution on disarmament, demanding that Labour should be adequately represented at the International Conference that the

President of the U.S.A. was calling, and I opposed the resolution on the grounds that it was unrealistic and did not face the facts. I pointed out that it was idle to talk about universal disarmament as a practical political measure when it was clear that armaments are as necessary to the perpetuation of the capitalist system as unemployment. And I went on: "You are spending £63,518,000 on education in this country. You are spending on battleships and the upkeep of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force £207,827,000. There is the contrast! How are you going to solve the questions put forward? How are you going to tackle that problem until you have got the international organisation of the trade union movement everywhere? The international organisation of the trade union movement is the most important task with which this Congress is faced, and it will not face it because it does not view the problem from the right point of view. Mr. Poulton said, in his presidential address, that internationally our work was of increasing importance, and that the need was paramount to have an understanding with the workers of other countries. Yes, but the International, of which Mr. Thomas is president, the Amsterdam International of Trade Unions, never protested, nor did the League of Nations, of which Mr. Clynes is such a shining light, when munitions were sent into Russia, nor was the work hindered when warships carrying the League of Nations' flag transferred munitions and troops to Russia. Every personality associated with the Amsterdam International is the same personality who in 1914 said : 'Boys, we are at war. We must forget the international situation. Love of country must come first.' And they deserted the International, and the International fell to pieces, and

it is because of that that I am in the happy position of pointing out the real situation of the disarmament question. The world-wide social revolution—that is it!"

Speaking later in support of a resolution that Congress should send £1,000 for the relief of famine in the U.S.S.R., I concluded with one or two observations that are perhaps worth recalling to-day:

"My last word," I said, "is this: This famine has provided another opportunity, not only for French militarists, but also American and English militarists. Who can forget that story of shame which the *Daily Herald* published a fortnight ago about Mr. Hoover's private secretary using the Red Cross American Relief Mission for the purpose of stopping the Hungarian Revolution? . . . Russia to-day is surrounded by a series of hostile states—Estonia, Latvia and others—subsidised by English and French money, with English munitions, and wherever you go you see soldiers in English khaki and English agents and English spies, all waiting for a favourable opportunity to spring into Russia and crush the Revolution."[1]

After this speech Ben Tillett came up to congratulate me, but the thought of the part he had played in supporting the imperialist war was stronger than the memories of his earlier struggles, and I am afraid I was not very friendly to him. On the other hand, as a result of my championing the policy of the R.I.L.U. and my denunciation of the Amsterdam International,

[1] Since I wrote this chapter it has been reported in the Press that the present National Council of the T.U.C. has voted £1,000 in aid of the Mannerheim white-guard Government of Finland. Remembering the enthusiasm and unanimity of Congress in 1921 in support of the Soviet Union, it is impossible to forgo registering my disgust that the money of British trade unionists should to-day be sent to the enemies of the Soviet Union.

Edo Fimmen, the fraternal delegate from the latter, paid me back properly in my own coin.

One further point it is of some interest to recall to-day. On behalf of the Boilermakers' Union, I moved a resolution demanding a forty-four-hour working week and the prohibition of systematic overtime. It was seconded by G. Wyver of the *Building Trade* Workers, who had already won the forty-four-hour week. But Brownlie of the A.E.U., though he declared himself in favour, proposed that no decision should be taken by Congress, pending the completion of investigations then being carried out by a Committee composed of employers' and workers' representatives. As a result, the discussion was adjourned, and eventually the resolution was held over. That was in 1921, three years after the ending of the last "war for democracy." Now, nineteen years later, when the workers of this country have already been called upon again to fight for the same "bosses' democracy," the forty-four-hour week has receded like a dream and men and women are being urged to work unlimited overtime. This is the demand of the employers, of the capitalist Government, whose policy has brought us to war. But more important for the workers of this country is the fact that this also is the demand of their own leaders in the trade unions and the Labour Party. A gloomy enough commentary on a quarter of a century of capitalist "progress," but one which is burning its lessons deep into the minds and hearts of the working men and women of Great Britain.

Chapter IX

A TURNING POINT

The end of 1921 and the beginning of 1922 found the capitalist offensive against the workers in full swing. Unemployment was widespread; attacks on wages and workshop conditions were the order of the day; all the fairy tale promises of an "England fit for heroes to live in" were being betrayed right and left.

The Communist Party and the British Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions were taking a leading part in organising the resistance of the workers and helping to develop common forms of action which would render that resistance more effective. The campaign was carried out under the battle cry of "Stop the Retreat!"

For the official trade-union leaders were in a state of hopeless retreat, completely demoralised and doing their damnedest to spread the rot among the rank and file, but without success. The example of the miners' great fight in 1921 was now followed by the engineers in the great lock-out in 1922 and by the strike of the London boilermakers. These two fights were the high points in the workers' efforts to prevent a worsening of their conditions.

In February, 1922, I was invited, with Arthur McManus, the Chairman of the Communist Party at that time, to take part in an international conference that was going to take place in Moscow. The offensive of the capitalist class against the working class was now

being waged on an international scale, and the leaders of the revolutionary movement of all lands were anxious to exchange experiences and see what forms of activity could be adopted on an international scale that would assist the workers to resist their class enemies.

The journey as far as Riga was uneventful, but we had to wait some days there before being able to proceed on the final stage of the journey to Moscow. An incident occurred on the train from Riga that is perhaps worth relating, because it throws light on the methods adopted to take part in active intervention against the Soviet Union under the cover of humanitarian work.

The suffering in the Soviet Union at that time as a result of the famine was terrible, and the best of the humanitarian sections of the people all over the world were rallying to the assistance of the Soviet people. There had been angry denials in the Press that anyone would stoop so low as to make such efforts the cover under which counter-revolutionary activity would be carried on. The Soviet Press, however, had drawn attention from time to time to the fact that such work was being done, and certain Americans had been suspected of using famine relief work for the purpose of doing espionage on the side. I have referred to one such example at the end of the last chapter and had drawn the attention of the T.U.C. to the report in the *Herald.*

I happened to be an eye-witness on this journey from Riga to Moscow of another incident that gave me much food for thought. There were only two coaches going direct to Moscow, and we packed like sardines into them. The corridors were also ram-jam full of food packages and parcels. A party of Americans going to

the Soviet Union in connection with the distribution of food were in the same coach as myself; they came on the train very drunk, one disreputable specimen in particular being in a hopeless state. They had a plentiful supply of drink with them, and they made the night hideous with their disgusting behaviour. The person I have just referred to ran amok during the night, pulled out a revolver, which he waved wildly about, and shouted to all and sundry what he was going to do to the "bloody Reds when he got to Russia."

His companions saw that he was giving the show away a little too openly, so they got hold of him and held him down. But fortunately there were other people on the train and, when it got to Moscow, the American gentleman was soon disarmed and on his way back to the United States of America.

That journey took four days and nights. On my first visit to Russia in 1921, we had crossed the frontier from Estonia in the night. But this time it was daylight, and I got a wonderful thrill as the train stopped half-way in Russia and half-way in Latvia. Then the Latvian soldiers got off the train and the Red Army men came on, and so we slowly steamed on to Socialist soil.

It meant much more to me than just crossing a frontier, for it was a crossing from capitalism to Socialism. I have been to the Soviet Union scores of times, and every time we go over the border I get exactly the same feeling as I experienced in 1922. Always I make a point of watching the faces and expressions of other passengers as they leave the capitalist world, ruled by the exploiting class, and pass over into the world of Socialism, where the workers

are triumphant. Sometimes I have seen vicious hate and fear, but far more often an expression of love, delight and pleasure. I am sure Maurice and Barbara Dobb will not mind if I make a reference to their reactions as I watched them cross the border from Poland into the Soviet Union. I had met them on the train at Berlin and we made the rest of the journey together, and as we neared the border after leaving Stolpce, they couldn't restrain their excitement; and Maurice's face lit up in a way that I am sure his students have not often seen as he expounds to them the mysteries of economics.

After the Conference was over, Arthur McManus, Nat Watkins and myself travelled back from Moscow to London, and we had many exciting adventures on the way back. There was an amusing one, however, when we got to the German frontier. It was bitterly cold, but the three of us were taken and stripped naked in a little cabin and given more than the once over. We looked rather funny, you may be sure, in this state, more because we were blue from cold than anything else, but the German officials thought we were carrying documents and "Russian gold." I was bringing back one of those Russian dolls that you take apart, until the last doll is a teeny-weeny little thing. The one I had came into eleven parts, and as the official got nearer and nearer the end of the process of taking them apart, with true German thoroughness placing each one on the top of my portmanteau until he came to the last little doll of all, he at last, on finding nothing, lost his temper and kicked the lot all over the floor. It was impossible not to smile, whereupon he sternly reminded us that we were not in Russia now.

If I remember rightly, my old comrade Nat Watkins

was arrayed in the attire of a clergyman. He had been, he told the German officials, on a mission of Christian exploration to Russia; and, indeed, the top of Nat's bag was nothing but Bibles and religious tracts. But when underneath they discovered some of the first anti-religious posters that had been issued in Russia, it took Nat a long time to explain why he was carrying them.

We arrived back in London to take part in the Policy Conference of the Communist Party, which had been convened in March, 1922, and was held in St. Pancras Town Hall. Looking back on it, one realises that it was far from being a satisfactory conference. The divergent viewpoints, the petty jealousies, had not yet been eliminated from the various groupings which had merged into one united Communist Party. Moreover the deep-rooted sectarianism which had till then characterised the revolutionary movement in Britain and weakened the effectiveness of our policy and work still played its part. The adventurers and careerists referred to in another part of this book were also true to type, finding excuses to desert the Party now that the romance of revolution was fading and hammer blows were beginning to rain on the Communist Party in the shape of police persecution.

The greatest weakness, however, revealed itself during the discussion on the united front, and many of the delegates showed that they did not understand the importance of this question. The fight for the unity of the working class must necessarily take different forms, according to the concrete situation in which the movement finds itself, but under all circumstances we fight for unity only in order to strengthen the working-class movement, to help it forward, to eliminate its divisions and sectionalism, and to enable it to exert its full power

and influence in every phase of the class struggle. Whatever the form the united front may take, whether it is of an all-embracing character that includes the most divergent elements or whether, in a different situation, it is primarily a question of unity being built up over the heads of the official Labour leaders, the aim is always the same: to strengthen the position of the workers against all those who seek to attack them, to weaken them, or to keep them divided and place false obstacles in the way of working-class advance and the development of the mass movement towards achieving its Socialist objective. There has never been, and never will be so far as the Communist Party is concerned, any ulterior motive in our fight for working-class unity. It is only the interests of the masses with which we are concerned, for, being a party of the masses, our interests are their interests and there can never be any question of utilising the mass movement for some other separate and sectarian aim.

It was this understanding of the position that was missing at the St. Pancras conference, and the dissatisfaction in the Party expressed itself in the demand for the appointment of a Party Commission which could make a thorough investigation into the whole question of our organisation, our Press and our propaganda.

R. Palme Dutt, Harry Inkpin and myself were appointed as the three members of this Commission, and we worked at the job for many months, until, in Party circles our work became the subject of much discussion and not a few good and bad jokes.

Nevertheless, the work of this Commission constituted a turning-point in the history of the Communist Party. Every meeting and discussion had to be carried out in the evenings and week-ends, in additon to the

daily duties that the three of us were involved in. But at last the final Report of the Commission was presented to the Battersea Conference of the Communist Party, in the autumn of 1922, and after much discussion was adopted unanimously.

It may be of some interest to quote the terms of reference on which the Commission had to work, and to give the Introduction to its findings.

Terms of Reference

To review the organisation of the Party in the light of the Theses, and to make detailed recommendations to the Executive and to the Annual Conference for the application of the Theses.

In particular it shall be the function of the Commission:

(1) To draft such revisions of the Constitution as may seem necessary to bring it into accord with the Theses.
(2) To examine and report on the existing divisions, areas and other units.
(3) To draw up a full scheme for the co-ordination and direction of groups and nuclei in the trade unions and other working-class organisations, and to make recommendations as to the first steps to be taken in the practical operation of this scheme.
(4) To consider the organisation of the Party centre, and make recommendations.
(5) To bring under review the Party Press and other forms of propaganda in order to make possible a more effective fulfilment of the Theses in these respects.

The Commission shall be empowered to call for reports from any and every section of the Party organisation, and shall have access to all necessary documents for the

purpose of conducting its enquiries, but shall have no executive powers.

The Commission shall issue a first report not more than one month after the date of its appointment, and shall present a complete report to the Annual Conference. Wherever advisable or possible, the Executive shall put into operation interim recommendations without delay.

Report on Party Organisation. October 7th, 1922. Commission: R. Palme Dutt (*Chairman*), H. Inkpin, H. Pollitt.

DEAR COMRADES,—In presenting our Final Report to the Party Conference, we should like to beg the indulgence of the members for the haste with which we have had to complete its preparation, as well as for the shortness of time which even so has been left to members for its consideration in its final form.

To attempt in the spare time of five months to cover and work out, not in easy rhetorical phrases, but in practical detail, every phase of revolutionary organisation is not an easy task, and it has not been rendered easier by the fact that we have had to spend so much of our time in immediately necessary re-organising work at Headquarters. We can only plead that we have preferred to risk inevitable minor discrepancies or repetitions and necessities of corrections in detail rather than leave any essential portion of our work uncovered. It is our hope that at a later period a series of manuals may be prepared by competent hands for the various phases of Party activity, which will present in greater detail and with practical hints the work here rapidly sketched out.

For those who are making the acquaintance of the proposals here given for the first time, we would recommend that they read first the section on the General Aim in order to secure a preliminary idea of what is involved. Let them get a firm hold of the principles aimed at—namely, the principles of the working party and central

direction—before coming on to any questions of detail: and then only in the light of these principles, which have already been accepted in ratifying the Theses, let them consider the practical details of the proposals as a means of realising them. It should be remembered that the proposals which are set out are not the ingenious scheme of a few individuals, but represent the deliberately chosen policy of the whole International based on the experience of the world revolutionary movement.

Certain alarms and misunderstandings which naturally arise on a first acquaintance with the proposals need to be dispelled at the outset. In the first place, what is here set out is not a fancy scheme which must be carried out in every detail on the morning after the Conference. On the contrary, we have deliberately described the working of a Party with a fully developed system of organisation, in order that we may have before us a common plan to guide us: but the actual achievement of this will be a matter of gradual building up, stage by stage, in a manner to assist the current work of the Party, and not to hinder it. We must be prepared for results at first to be slow.

In the second place, and most important of all, organisation must not be regarded as a panacea. Organisation has no meaning at all apart from policy. For the specialised task of the Commission, we have had to deal with organisation as if it were an object in itself. But it is not, and in normal times the Congress ought never to be having to concentrate its attention on questions of organisation. Organisation is only important as a means of achieving a certain policy: otherwise it is dead. Its value, therefore, depends on the value of the policy calling for it. The success of the Commission's proposals will depend on the leadership of the new Executive thrown up by the Congress. And that is why we should like to say as our last word to the Party that the main task before the Party now is to discover a strong Executive.

In conclusion, we should wish to thank all those all

over the country who have helped us in our efforts, and to hope that the result will prove of assistance in building up on stronger foundations the revolutionary movement of this country.

With fraternal greetings,

The Party Commission.

R. PALME DUTT (*Chairman*).
H. INKPIN.
H. POLLITT.

September, 1922.

Report on Organisation. Presented by the Party Commission to the Annual Conference of the Communist Party of Great Britain, October 7th, 1922.

There can be no doubt at all that the Report of the Party Commission brought about a decisive change in the whole policy, practice and methods of work of the Communist Party. When the authoritative history of the Party comes to be written, it will have to pay great attention to this Report and the turning-point it represented for us all. For it brought about a new conception of what a Communist Party is, how it works, the function of its Press, the correct methods of work in the factories, trade unions and localities, and the decisive place that agitation and propaganda occupy in the work of a Communist Party.

It was received with enthusiasm by the Party membership, who saw in the proposals advanced the opportunity to make a complete break with all the old, bad traditions—sectarianism and personal differences—that had contributed to retarding the development of a mass Communist Party.

Looking back now on this period, I think the mistake we made in the drafting of the Report was that the

Commission attempted to do too much, and that it would have been better to have concentrated on a few things rather than to attempt so much at one time.

The chief work of this Commission fell upon R. Palme Dutt, who put an enormous amount of work into it, both in the meetings of the Commission and in the drafting of the final Report. It was during the work of this Commission that I met Dutt for the first time, and began an association which has been invaluable to me in collective work and thought; and it was at the Battersea Conference that Dutt and I were elected to the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

During the whole of this period I was working in the shipyards, and I had also made my début as a delegate to the annual conferences of the General Federation of Trade Unions, and the Labour Party. It was at the Edinburgh Conference of the Labour Party that I spoke for the first time in support of the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party.

There was a visitor in the gallery at this conference who was very interested in the whole of the proceedings. It was Borodin, who happened to be in England at the time, and whose whereabouts were betrayed by a spy in the Party, with the result that Borodin was arrested and afterwards deported from the country.

The Trades Union Congress that year was held at Southport, and again I took the floor on many occasions, and was attacked as usual by the big guns, but gave as good as I got.

After the Battersea Conference of our Party, I was elected to the Organising Bureau, and also placed in charge of trade-union work, in addition to my activities as London Secretary of the British Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions.

I liked this work very much, for I have always been most emphatic in my opinion that active work inside the trade unions is absolutely indispensable in any serious attempt to improve the conditions of the workers. Such work helps to deepen the class consciousness, unity and solidarity of the trade unionists and helps them to fight against the false policy of class co-operation practised by those who dominate the leadership of the trade-union movement. It helps to win the trade unionists and their organisations for Communism.

It will best show my attitude at this time, perhaps, if I quote from a document that I issued in the early part of 1922 on behalf of the London Committee of the R.I.L.U.[1] It was published and sent to all trade unions with whom we had contact in the London area. I only quote it now because I think there are still some points of presentation in the document that may be of use and value to active trade unionists at the present time.

Policy

It is the duty of every active worker of the R.I.L.U. to participate in every action and question concerning the trade unions. It is not enough to call for the revolution; we must relate our principles and experiences to the every-day struggles of the trade unionist. The unions are experiencing a testing time that gives better opportunities for propaganda than we have ever had. These opportunities must be made use of, and we are suggesting the following ideas in order that our propagandists should follow out a uniform policy:

(1) Point out how the unions were formed to demand higher wages, shorter hours, better working conditions;

[1] Further information about the Red International of Labour Unions will be found in the next chapter.

for a time the unions were able to successfully obtain for their members better conditions, because when capitalism was developing, it was forced to give way here and there. This marked the period when the craft unions were at the height of their power. When war broke out, English capitalism had reached its zenith, and the race for supremacy in the struggle for the control of the world market resulted in the War with Germany. During the War, conditions obtained which cannot be repeated. There was a huge demand for skilled and unskilled labour in the engineering and shipbuilding industries; this demand could not be met. The unions then had economic powers, and obtained higher wages, etc. This artificial success attracted thousands of workers to the unions who had not been organised before.

Funds began to accumulate, membership to grow, the unions to get more and more powerful; the workers thought this state of affairs would continue. The present trade depression has proved the testing time, unparalleled for unemployment, the unions unable to maintain the conditions won during the War. Wage reductions are the order of the day; already the working hours are in danger of being extended for those who are in work. The union funds depleted, members leaving in thousands, the morale of the movement gone, faulty leadership and poor vision complete the picture of the state of the trade unions at the present time.

(2) Trace the effect of labour-saving machinery in industry and its particular effects upon craft unions. Quote examples of how this constant introduction of machinery simplifies the processes of production and is responsible for displacing skilled craftsmen by the hundreds, and this augmenting the unemployed market to be a menace to those still employed. The moral is: *One union for one industry, irrespective of craft and occupation. If exploitation is common to all workmen, then all workmen must organise into a common union to abolish exploitation.*

Unemployment

The present crisis has proved that the unions, even in times like the War years, cannot accumulate funds that enable them to pay out unemployed benefit for any lengthy period without being called upon to make special levies to eke out the funds. We must therefore explain that, *as unemployment is necessary under capitalism* and the workers are not allowed to run industry for themselves, we demand that *unemployed benefit must be a charge upon the industry and not the trade unions.* The adoption of this policy would relieve the unions of a tremendous burden and enable them to develop more and more into *fighting organisations rather than only function as relieving unions.*

Urge all members of your union who are out of work to join the local unemployed committee, *where all the unemployed are organised irrespective of their different grades into a compact virile body.* The experiences thus gained of working and acting unitedly with all workers *when out of work*, will stimulate the tendency to similar action *when in work.* Make a point of showing how little it matters when the worker is hungry, whether he is a *craftsman or a labourer* they both have to take the same chance and both get the same treatment from the *Poor Law Guardians.*

Adopt as your slogan: "*Work or maintenance at highest trade-union rates.*" Show that under capitalism this is impossible, and then go on to urge the abolition of such an inhuman system. Advocate the adoption of shorter hours, so as to spread the available work over the number of workers to do it, whilst retaining the weekly district wage.

Wage Reductions

Here, immediate action is necessary. Get your branch to demand the *General Council of Trade Unions* to issue a definite ultimatum to the employers *that no further reductions will be tolerated.* A special trades congress should be

convened so that the whole union movement can agree on a plan of campaign and action, not only to resist reductions, but to *immediately challenge the employers' right to run industry.* If the unions would only take up the offensive against the employers, they would rally the movement together again.

Support this argument by an analogy: The trade unions are like an army in battle; the army is retreating; they are being pressed farther and farther back. Suddenly a command rings out: "The retreat cannot be allowed to continue. The army must put their back to the wall and stand their ground; otherwise, hopeless and lasting defeat must follow." A call like that stiffens the backs of the soldiers, and many a position has been retrieved. *The unions must put their backs to the wall; it is either united resistance or defeat, and the decisive moment is now. There is no fear of the unemployed wanting to blackleg; they are better organised than the employed.*

No Extension of the Working Week

In your speeches, show how the employers, by the use of the Press and speeches, are preparing the ground for the introduction of a campaign to lengthen the working hours per week. Already, the railwaymen, textile workers and building trade workers are threatened. Lord Weir is conducting a campaign amongst the engineering and shipbuilding employers in support of a fifty-three-hour working week. There must be united resistance to this. Here, also, the employed are sure of the support of the unemployed.

If the unions fail to act, then we must popularise the idea of getting our members to work the existing hours and then leave the factory. Remember, this tactic only wants a start and it would immediately catch on. *The unions would either have to support it or once again prove their inability to defend the conditions we have already got.*

Trades Councils

The London Committee urge that more attention should be given to the trades councils that now exist in every locality. In times of crisis, these councils play a very important part, and with the fervour in the Labour world increasing, it is easy to see that the importance of capturing these councils by the revolutionists cannot be over-estimated. Our immediate task should be to extend the basis of the trades councils' representation. We must urge that delegates be elected from the various factories in a district, so that eventually they are really *trades councils*, composed of delegates from the workshops; instead of delegates from the various trade-union branches, as they are composed at present.

The unemployed organisations in the various boroughs must be represented immediately on the local trades councils, because they are directly representative of masses of workers denied the *right to work*, but who constitute a great weapon in any struggle between Labour and capital, and direct contact with trades councils enables that weapon to be used by Labour, because in the event of a social conflict no blacklegging would take place.

This question can be developed at great length, but enough has been written to show our objective. Every branch that is represented on a trades council should see that its delegate is a revolutionary who realises the potentialities of the council. Remember the part these councils would have had to play when the National Council of Action was formed or if the Triple Alliance Strike had materialised, and it is easy to see that in the very near future the trades councils will play an ever-increasing part in the class war. Therefore our slogan must be:

"Capture the trades councils!"

Delegates who are now on trades councils should support—

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(1) Unemployed organisations being directly represented.
(2) Where a delegate from a factory is elected, he should sit on the existing trades council in that locality.

Control of Industry

The foregoing arguments, well used, will enable us to drive home the necessity of abolishing capitalism and the adoption of Communism. This involves the control of industry by the workers engaged in industry. The workers must be trained to the idea of their ultimately *controlling their industries.* Therefore, we must advocate the forming of workshop committees, such committees to be composed of one delegate from each occupation or grade in a department. Each department to be linked up into a central works committee.

Its purpose must be to regulate workshop conditions, demand decent canteen arrangements, adequate sanitary conveniences, the right of the workers to be consulted in any change of staff or productive process, the right to appoint foremen, to investigate order books, particularly when any dismissals are threatened. Rectify all shop grievances by approaching the management as representing all the men and not a section, thus demonstrating to the older members the efficiency and effectiveness of your works committee as against the present way of waiting for some paid official to come down and remedy your grievance. Efforts must always be made to get the office staff represented on the works committee, *and one delegate from the works committee should be elected to the local trades council.*

The wages bill, the profits account, the total production of the factory, the amount of raw materials used, where they come from and how, all these facts should be ascertained and tabulated, the numbers of actual workers, the

number of office staff and directors, foremen, etc., should be noted. *The idea must be constantly encouraged amongst the workmen that the factory will one day be theirs to administer in the interests of the community. They must therefore be educated to work for the speedy realisation of that object, and also so that they will be able to run the factory efficiently.*

In conclusion, we suggest that if your propaganda is carried on on the lines laid down you will widen your sphere of influence, your words will command attention, your branch will endorse and support your views. Other workers will hear of your propaganda and will be eager to help; so the ideas will spread. The agitation will grow; more unions will be compelled to drop their reformist methods and by constant pressure will be forced to adopt our revolutionary policy and tactics. The unions will learn through struggle. With experience will come wisdom. Avoid personalities. The principles we have to propagate are too big for any time to be wasted on personal attacks. We can establish our influence on knowledge and facts, and the workers, with their new outlook, will then be able to discriminate between efficient and inefficient leadership.

Everywhere strive for the advanced men to hold official positions, so that the control of your union gradually passes into the leadership of revolutionists.

Wherever an official position is vacant, let the Head Office be acquainted, so that we can get the best men nominated, and from these choose the most capable and fearless comrade to contest the position and by our united efforts get him elected.

May I appeal to you to throw yourself whole-heartedly into the fight. It's a long and bitter struggle, but the victory is worth the sacrifice.

Chapter X

THE NATIONAL MINORITY MOVEMENT

In 1923 I was in charge of the trade-union work of the Communist Party, and during the Dockers' Strike in the early part of that year the Party brought out a daily strike bulletin for the dockers. This was not the first time we had tried bringing out a daily paper; we had made the attempt in the General Election in 1923, when one edition was brought out in London and another in Scotland. These efforts afforded us useful experience, but what difficulties we had in getting printers to undertake the job! And then more difficulties arose when we discovered that printers' machines do not always work according to plan.

Things were not going too well in the Party at that time; though the Report of the Party Commission had been adopted, as shown in an earlier chapter, it came up against a great deal of scepticism and resistance in practice. The first big break in the old sectarian traditions of the Party was a decision to change over from the usual type of weekly journal, the *Communist*, as it was called, to a weekly newspaper which we called the *Workers' Weekly*.

R. P. Dutt was the first Editor of the *Workers' Weekly*, and I worked in close collaboration with him. Every Saturday evening it was our custom to meet and review the previous week's contents and prepare for the next issue.

Those were grand days. We made a drive to get the

whole Party turned on to selling the *Workers' Weekly*, and in a few weeks the circulation had been increased from the old *Communist* figure of 19,000 to 33,000. We were accused of turning the Party into a paper-selling agency—in fact, this was one of the mildest criticisms which we had continually to meet. But that didn't worry us. We stuck to our guns and the paper began to get a real foothold in the Labour movement. I think it was in the *Workers' Weekly* that the first efforts were seriously made in British working-class journalism to give workers' correspondence its real importance. We printed as many letters as possible, and made them a regular feature of the papers, and they certainly did a great deal to help us sense what was going on in the factories, to interpret the moods and demands of the masses and to give a correct lead in the editorials.

The *Workers' Weekly* was a fighting weekly paper of the workers, and under the editorship of Comrade Dutt and, later, Comrade J. R. Campbell, became one of the most effective weekly journals ever published in the country. It would be a very useful experience for many of our Party writers to-day to look over the files of the *Workers' Weekly*. They would gain inspiration and find a little more of the punch that is often missing in working-class journalism to-day.

In spite of the success of the paper, the Party made no great numerical progress and persisted in many of its sectarian habits. The result was that in 1923 a commission of the Communist International was appointed to study the British question, and a representative delegation went from this country to Moscow. Our discussions there were to prove of the greatest value to us, and we had the great advantage of being able to discuss our problems with men who had great experience in

the revolutionary working-class movement of many countries.

My journey with Tommy Jackson had coincided with the Curzon ultimatum to the Soviet Union in 1923. We were held up for a long time in Berlin, and passed the time by doing a series of meetings for the German Communist Party. We were also sent to Hamburg to address a demonstration organised by the Party in connection with the conference that was taking place there to bring about the fusion of the Second and the Two-and-a-half International, as it had been wittily named. It was here that I met one of the most lovable characters I have ever known in the Communist movement—Comrade Julius. We began an association which I shall always value. I have run into him in many parts of the world since, and nothing has ever been too much trouble for him in the way of making a comrade comfortable or helping with advice.

I also met Phillips Price, who made it possible for us to keep close contact with all that was going on in the Conference. I met all the leading figures of international Social Democracy, and they ran true to the same type as I had encountered at our own Labour and Trades Union Congresses—stout, elderly gentlemen who knew how to dine and wine well and who would never have deceived even a child into believing that they had any interest in the class struggle and the bitter fight to achieve Socialism. They were quite satisfied with capitalism; at least, they always gave me the impression that they felt they had more to gain under capitalism than they would ever have under Socialism.

Tommy and I shared a bed in the hotel at Hamburg, and one night our slumbers were disturbed by a loud

knocking at the bedroom door, and on opening it we found two very polite-looking gentlemen. They showed their credentials, which proved them to be members of the Special Branch of the Hamburg Police. You can tell the Special Branch the whole world over—they all look the same, talk the same and act the same. They demanded our passports and our business. My sleeping partner, now thoroughly aroused, demanded to know what was the matter. I shall never know whether it was the sight of the angry Tommy at three o'clock in the morning that frightened off the police, but they hastily retired and never troubled us again.

Back in England one of the most urgent problems that confronted us was how to bring the Party closer to the workers. It was necessary to make a decisive turn towards masswork in the factories, trade unions and working-class organisations, and to try to end the old sectarian traditions of the British revolutionary movement once and for all.

There emerged from this general policy the idea of trying to organise the Left minority inside the trade unions and the Labour Party in order to fight for the demands of the masses and, at the same time, to attempt to change the whole reformist policy and leadership of the official Labour movement.

The existence of the British Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions gave facilities for making a start in the trade unions without further delay; and it was because of this, perhaps, that the chief emphasis was laid on work in the trade unions, while the wider aim in the discussions previously referred to was never carried out. The activity inside the Labour Party became known as the Left Wing Movement.

A national conference of trade-union delegates was

organised by the British Bureau in August, 1924, and at this meeting the National Minority Movement was officially launched. I was elected General Secretary, and held this position until August, 1929, when, on my appointment as General Secretary of the Communist Party, it was taken over by Arthur Horner.

On looking back, it seems to me now that one of the chief weaknesses of the M.M., as it was popularly called, was that it tended to create the impression that it was a separate and rival body to the trade unions and to the Trades Union Congress, although this was never its true aim. But in preparing the material for this book, I have had to go over all the documents and publications of the Minority Movement, and I can state without the slightest hesitation that, despite mistakes and weaknesses, it did a great deal of good work inside the trade unions.

We had miners', metal, building, distributive, dockers', seamen and railwaymen's sections, and for all these industries an excellent series of publications was brought out from time to time, as well as monthly papers covering the special activities of all the militant trade unionists. Trade-union branches, district committees and trades councils were affiliated to the M.M., and as a result, an organised drive against us was launched by the Trades Union Congress.

The comrades associated with the British Bureau of the R.I.L.U., whose work was continued by the Minority Movement, had been among the first to raise the demand for a general council with full powers to direct the policy and strategy of the whole trade-union movement. They were the first to campaign in an organised way for the trades councils to be given their real and decisive place in the trade-union and Labour

movement. Under the inspiration of the M.M., the first National Council of Trades Councils was convened, and this made such a big impression that the Trades Union Congress began to organise the trade councils and to develop the National Council of Trades Councils, which to-day forms a part of the Trades Union Congress machinery.

The second National Conference of Trades Councils was held in Birmingham on November 17th, 1923, and I was invited to take the chair. The lead which was given to this Conference will be found in the following speech:

> COMRADES,—In opening this Conference, I want first to thank the Executive Committee for asking me to preside at this important representative Conference. It is very encouraging indeed to find such a large attendance of delegates, coming from all parts of the country and representing over a million workers. This is a very significant sign of the times, and is indicative of the deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the present position of the working-class movement, and of a desire to see what steps shall be taken to remedy the existing weaknesses.
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> Meeting as we do, barely two months after the Plymouth Trades Union Congress, which openly betrayed the bankruptcy of ideas and leadership existing in the movement, we are faced with a situation of desperate urgency. The working class is defeated and disunited, and nowhere are there signs of a move forward. A terrible responsibility is thrown upon this Conference. Thousands of workers, besides those whom you represent, are watching our deliberations and decisions, hoping that they will be such as will indicate a move forward, as well as give a lead to the whole working-class movement.
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> The Conference meets at a time when two million of our class are out of work; when there is no possibility of

work being found for them; when real wages are lower than they have been for a generation; when those who are working are doing more work for less wages than ever before; when the conditions under which we work are more unbearable than ever; and when workers are forced to grin and bear insults and indignities, because if they speak out they will be sacked. Those who are out of work are wondering when they are ever going to work again, and those in work are wondering how soon they will be out of work. Already the fourth winter of unemployment is upon us. Capitalist politicians are even now pointing out that their schemes of relief will not be applicable until next winter. What does this mean to the working class? What has it meant up to now? Is it not written in the millions of miserable homes and the ever-increasing want and misery of our class?

The workers find themselves absolutely at the mercy of the capitalists. There is no common policy or programme, no common leadership, nothing but confusion and disunity and the petty jealousies of leaders and sections of workers. There is no attempt to rally the forces of the whole working class in the common struggle.

What is the prospect of any improvement? Every worker here, as well as outside, must wonder when things are going to get better, when trade is going to improve, when wages are going to rise, when the housing problem is going to be solved. Many still believe things will improve, that capitalism will stabilise itself, and this at a time when, in every country in the world except Russia things are getting steadily worse, when democratic institutions and ideas are being smashed right and left under the hammer blows of capitalism, fighting for its very life. Because the situation is not quite as bad here, large sections of workers think that these things are only happening in other countries because they are foreigners. But the capitalists of this country know better; they understand in what desperate straits they are, and they are

trying every conceivable policy to stabilise things and get trade going again.

The only way out for the capitalists is to crush the workers and lower their standard of life to the lowest level. This means the extension of the present working hours, lower wages, increased production, the smashing of the workers' organisations and the losing of dearly-won rights of combination and other means of defence. Everywhere capitalism is breaking up: look where you will, it is the same picture that meets the eye—a picture of hunger, misery and want, accompanied by the ever-increasing persecution of the working class.

There is no way out for the workers until they are prepared to take over the whole system of production themselves. We are brought to-day face to face with the battle against the whole organised power of capitalism. Unless we can overthrow the fortress—the Government—and set up our own power in its place, and our own control of production, we cannot move forward. But are we ready for this terrific struggle which is facing us? We are not. And the present position of the workers is eloquent testimony to this fact. Neither in the trade unions nor the Labour Party is there any attempt to bring about united action even for the most elementary demands. During the capitalist attack of the last three years, there has not been a single strike or lock-out where any common resistance was offered. The workers have even been unable to act unitedly upon the rents, housing and unemployment issues. Yet until we can get united action on these and similar issues, we shall continue to be defeated. The united front of the workers is not a magic phrase or luxury: it is our greatest need and necessity. Even if we continue to go along our present lines, circumstances will force us finally to adopt this policy.

Look what is happening in Germany, where the workers are far more politically conscious than they are here. The lesson of the need for unity of action in the

struggle against the capitalists is now only being learnt under a rain of bullets and with starvation rampant. There, as here, the workers thought that the vote was enough, or that amalgamation was the magic cure, and so they went their way. But now, when the conditions of the German workers are appalling in their horror and misery, the workers realise how little these things count when it comes to the fight for bread, and so they have been compelled more and more to work and act on the basis of the united front. Socialists, Communists and industrial unionists—all have been brought together in their struggle for bread and the fight against the German capitalists. What a terrible price the workers have had to pay in precious lives and misery because they have been so late in coming together—a price which they are now paying with their blood, and may even have to pay in defeat and the postponement of all their hopes for tens of years, because the workers were not ready in time.

Surely this lesson is not going to be lost upon us! Now, while our comrades are fighting the capitalists in Germany, by every means in their power, they are fighting a struggle the result of which must have a great importance and influence on the working class in this country. If the German workers are defeated, it means the suppression of their trade-union organisations, it means an open capitalist dictatorship which will smash all pretence of democracy, it means the declaring illegal any workers' organisations fighting against capitalism, and that means the signal for the capitalists here to renew the attack on a scale previously thought impossible, and which, for a certainty, along our present lines of organisation, must result in further defeats and in the demoralisation of the whole movement.

We must recognise we have to face the same situation here. Are we going to be too late? Or are we going to profit from our own experiences and the experiences of

our German comrades? We must fight along common lines for common demands, and these the demands the workers are ready and willing to fight for. The Conference has a great chance if it will take it. What is wanted in our movement now is a rallying centre to face up to the mistakes that have been made, and to show the way forward in order to reverse the present position and to give a new lead to the movement. This the Conference should attempt to do.

The trades councils are peculiarly well fitted at the present juncture for this task. Face to face with the local experience of every problem and struggle, they see in direct contact the working out of every mistake and weakness of the movement. Forced to deal with the domestic problem of the movement in every locality, they alone are in the best position to see what the present sectionalism and disunity and lack of policy means in living practice. They are in a very much stronger position to voice the direct needs and demands of the workers than harassed officials amid the routine of a head office, unable to look outside the blinkers of their particular union. The opportunity is in the hands of the trades councils if they can see the position clearly and show the path ahead.

I am aware of the general criticism levelled at any attempts of the trades councils to do this, and the cold shoulder that will be given by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and the Executive Committee of the Labour Party, who look upon the trades councils as the Cinderellas of the Labour movement. We must break down this conception of our functions. The confusion and stagnation of the movement has become patent to all, and the crowning exhibition of the recent Trades Congress has revealed the helplessness of the existing leadership even to tackle the problem.

The trades councils are able to voice what at present has no voice or expression in the whole movement—the

feeling of the mass of the workers. Expression has got to be found for this, and a place for it has got to be found in the movement, and that is what we are out to do.

We are not out in antagonism, as is falsely suggested, to the rightful central body of the movement, the Trades Union Congress. Instead, we are out to bring into that body the expression of the feeling of the mass of the workers.

The "Back to the Unions" campaign has shown that any attempt to carry out a common campaign depends for its execution on the trades councils. When it comes to organising a national campaign, the General Council has no machinery; everything has to be put on to the trades councils, which at present are not organised for the task. The General Council has, in fact, to act through the trades councils, which are not represented either on the General Council or at the Trades Union Congress. In the same way, when the threat of war arises and the Joint Council of Congress and the Labour Party calls for councils of action to be formed, it is the trades councils that constitute the rallying centre around which such councils are formed. The General Council, in fact, at present is a head without a body. Only the trades councils can supply the body and the life blood.

But the task which falls on the trades councils at the present moment is even heavier than this, because the central organs are failing to lead. This failure throws additional burdens and problems on the local organs. Not only does it become the rôle of the trades councils to voice the immediate demands and feelings of the workers and to afford the means of carrying through common campaigns: they are also forced to take the initiative in endeavouring to force a lead upon the central organs of the movement.

This Conference has the opportunity to supply what is the greatest need of the movement: a rallying centre to gather up a common movement that will so increase

in volume and strength as to compel a new leadership in the central organs of the movement, a facing of the problems of the working class and unification of the working-class army.

What are the issues facing the workers at the present time?

The biggest and most urgent issue is the question of unemployment. As the position stands, the unemployed are without any hope at all; the Government will not move to do anything that even touches the fringe of this problem, and our own movement has no programme nor has it yet attempted to organise such united action as would have compelled the Government to move. Even the adoption of what demands the unemployed themselves have put forward is not yet definite: still less, any serious attempt to secure them. The recent controversy on the one-day general strike in support of the unemployment demands and the rapid dropping of the proposal by most sections shows how far we are yet from any campaign that means business. What is wanted now is a common programme on unemployment that will bring behind it the united action of the whole working class. This is the most urgent issue before us, and the first steps to take if we are to retrieve the present working-class position.

The next big issue confronting the workers is the question of wages and hours. Already it is apparent to all that the capitalists are preparing new attacks on wages and working hours. At present, the confusion of the whole movement on this issue is appalling. While some sections of the Labour army are still retreating before new wage reductions, others are putting in for increases. There is no co-operation in this, and the Federation employers are able to play with the situation as they did in the initial stages of the capitalist offensive. It must be obvious to all of us that it is no longer any good to attempt the fight on sectional lines. If we are not to continue to be

beaten, we must have a concerted policy on wages and hours under a common direction.

The same applies to other issues, such as housing, the Rents Act, etc. On all these the workers are faced with immediate questions demanding immediate action on their part.

Even more than this, the present struggle of the German workers, fraught as it is with the gravest consequences to the whole international working class, demands that we should have a common policy on how best we can help them during their struggle, and so carry out the pledges that have been made at the last two Trades Union Congresses.

All these are issues that concern equally, and unite, the whole working class without distinction of sections. A national programme must be of such a character as to rally the whole movement and to bring into play all the forces of the movement equally on the political and trade-union side. It is a mistake to relegate certain dominant issues as purely the concern of the Labour Party or the Trades Union Congress respectively, for this means to sterilise the full effectiveness of our forces. Our aim must be to bring the whole working-class movement into play on the issues most urgently affecting the working class under a common leadership. And this brings me to what must be the second part of any programme in the reorganisation of the Labour forces to meet new demands.

On all the issues that confront the working class, the central need is united action which can bring the whole powers of the movement into play. For this reason, any programme that is to rally the working class at the present point must deal with the biggest weakness of the trade-union movement: the lack of any central direction or authority.

A real General Council must be established with power to direct the whole movement, and not only with power,

but under responsibility to Congress to use that power and direct the movement on the lines laid down each year by Congress. To effect this will mean, not only the extension of the powers of the General Council, but the re-organisation of the present trade unions to establish unity on the only basis on which it can be established—the industrial basis—and to prevent the present overlapping and sectionalisation that bar the way to united action.

If a clear and simple programme can be drawn up at this Conference to cover these issues, there is no question that it would awaken the support of almost every active element in trade unionism to-day, and what is more, would be the means of reviving the interest and enthusiasm of many who have let themselves fall into such indifference and apathy. In addition, the campaign for such a programme, going beyond sectional issues and temporary or local agitations, would itself be the first step to unite the movement.

But to carry out such a campaign the first need is to make the trades councils themselves stronger, more representative and better organised to meet the demands of local leadership responding adequately to national issues. At present in most cases the councils are made up of representatives of local trade-union branches. This is perhaps inevitable in small places where district committees of unions are non-existent, or in very large towns where, in addition to the main trades council—for example, the London Trades Council—each separate borough has its own trades council. Such a position is true of most large places, and practically no means of inter-communication exist between these many councils, so that all is left to the activity and initiative of the active members, and each locality goes ahead without regard to the lack of support they receive or otherwise from the rest of the trades councils. The Conference must tackle this problem of tightening up the local and district

machinery of the council. When this is done, they are then in a strong position to force their demands through the various trade unions and to the Trades Union Congress.

For example, the various boroughs around London can continue to have their councils made up of representatives from the trade-union branches and the local unemployed committees. From this local council, delegates can be elected to serve on the London Trades Council, together with representatives from all the trade-union district committees, as well as from the district council of the unemployed. It may be stated that something like this exists at present, but, owing to many important abstentions, it does not function, and, in any case, the weakness of most large trades councils is that few district committees of unions take an interest in the trades council activity.

Yet it is obvious that month by month the councils are forced to play an increasingly important part in the movement. If, from this Conference, an Executive Committee is elected that can meet, say, monthly, it is then in a position to see exactly what activities are being pursued by the councils, and also can co-ordinate such activities. It would be possible for such an executive to work out the details of a programme such as I have indicated, and how best to get for it the fullest support—first, through the district trades councils, secondly, through the local trades councils, and, finally, right through the trade-union branches. Such a body, working hand in hand with a leading General Council (on which the trades councils should be represented), would revitalise the movement.

In conclusion, let me urge upon every delegate present the necessity of all of them pledging themselves to return to their locality determined to do everything that is possible to see that the decisions reached at this Conference get, not only wide publicity, but also the greatest volume of

support. We are all serious-minded workers grappling with serious problems; it is a hard and long struggle we are engaged in. Many difficulties and setbacks will be met with. These we can and must conquer. All of us should be proud to be active in our movement. The objective we have in view is worth all the energy, time and sacrifice we may have to make, and remember that, few as we are, there are more of us than ever before, that now we have reached a new stage in the battle, demanding new ideas and conceptions: these it is our duty to popularise.

And so we go forward, full of hope, confidence and enthusiasm for our movement, and full of bitterness and hatred against capitalism and all who defend it, and, defeated and demoralised as the workers may be at present, signs are not wanting that out of our defeats and confusion valuable lessons are being learned. And now to our new tasks. Soon we shall move forward, united and organised, to carry out the immediate tasks of to-day, and to consolidate our army for the final struggle of to-morrow, when, triumphant and victorious, we shall smash through the barriers that now stand in our way, and our age-long fight will be ended and the beginning of the co-operative commonwealth will be made possible.

The Minority Movement conducted great campaigns for trade-union unity on a national and international scale, and one of the most effective conferences ever held in Britain was organised by the M.M. in 1925.

Every August, a National Conference was held, attended by hundreds of delegates from all over the country, at which serious discussions on trade-union policy took place and programmes were worked out corresponding to the situation prevailing at the time.

These conferences were always attended by prominent international trade-union fraternal delegates, and many of the British delegates, who had never before met workers from other lands, had their sense of international solidarity deepened by the presence of Russian, French, Belgian, Indian and American visitors.

All this work soon drew a reply from the more reactionary trade unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress, and it was soon made impossible for delegates to stand for any official positions in their trade unions if they were members of the Communist Party or the Minority Movement. The National Union of General and Municipal Workers took the lead in this anti-democratic procedure, and it was quickly followed by many other unions.

The fight which I put up at National Conferences of the Labour Party and at the Trades Union Congress soon brought me into disfavour with the Executive of the Boilermakers' Society. Despite the very "left" phrases used by John Hill in the monthly address to the members of the Society, he organised, under pressure from certain elements on the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and National Labour Party Executive Committee, a campaign to prevent me from being elected as the Boilermakers' delegate to these National Conferences.

The first round in this campaign was fired against me in the November, 1927, Monthly Report, in a statement signed by John Hill and Brother Porter, my co-delegate—the latter, in my opinion, being persuaded to do this by Hill. I was in Russia at the time, and answered the attack in the following statement which I sent to every branch of the Boilermakers' Society:

To the Members of the Boilermakers' Society

January 3rd, 1928.

Where I Stand

Worthy Brothers,—The delay in replying to the attack upon me in the November Monthly Report is due to the fact that after my trial at the Old Bailey[1] I went to Soviet Russia as part of the rank-and-file delegation which had been sent there to celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

Whilst in Russia, I was taken ill with appendicitis, and had to go to hospital, which delayed my return to England. Of course, when I returned a few days ago, I saw the report of the Edinburgh Trades Union Congress, and was neither surprised nor frightened.

It is no accident that Brothers Hill and Porter should have chosen the same moment as Havelock Wilson[2] to attack me, and I am bound to draw the members' attention to the fact that at the very moment I was on trial at the Old Bailey the Boilermakers' Report containing the attack was being printed.

The policy I took up at the Edinburgh T.U.C. was exactly the same as I have always taken since 1921, when you honoured me by electing me as your national representative to the annual conferences of the G.F.T.U., the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress. I have never sought to hide my views. I am a Communist, one of the principal leaders of the Minority Movement, and will not sacrifice my political principles for any position the Boilermakers or any other organisation can offer me.

My enemies wait from 1921 to 1927 before they consider the time ripe for the attack. Of course, the members will have noticed that for years, whenever I have been nominated for any full-time official position in the Society, I have been disqualified on some pretext or other; but

[1] *See* Chapter XV. [2] *See* pp. 258 ff.

the Executive Council had hoped that, because I was a Communist, the members would not vote for me.

To their amazement, they have found that for six years boilermakers prefer an honest fighter (even though they may not agree with all his opinions) to a deaf-and-dumb delegate who goes to national conferences for a holiday at a good rate of pay.

The rules of our Society, Rule 54, Section 5, provide for a meeting of your representatives to these national conferences the day before they commence, in order that the delegation may discuss the various resolutions on the agenda. Since 1921 such meetings have never taken place.

I challenge the Executive Council and Brother Porter, "who was honoured at the Edinburgh T.U.C. by being appointed a teller," to show where in any single instance, either by correspondence to the Branches or in the Report, the Executive Council have asked any branch of the Society to send in resolutions either for the agenda of the Labour Party Conference or the T.U.C. When my Branch sends in resolutions, however, they are "out of order" because the Executive Council have already sent in (without consultation with the membership) as many resolutions as they are entitled to. I suppose this is called democracy!

My position is rendered more difficult because Brother John Hill is a member of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. Because I dare to criticise the gentlemen who betrayed the General Strike, capitulated on the Trade Unions Act, broke with the Russian trade unions and have now agreed with the industrial peace propaganda of Havelock Wilson, they have put pressure to bear on Brother Hill to attack me in the Report, in order that you may be frightened by "Communism" and innuendoes about "Russian gold" not to elect me as your representative again.

During the War, Ramsay MacDonald, John Hill and all those who took up an unpopular anti-war attitude

were accused of being bought by German gold. No sincere worker, even though he disagreed with their policy at that time, ever believed such an infamous lie. Neither is the equally infamous lie in my case believed.

During 1926 I sent many articles to the Report for publication, every one of which was refused. Any brother who is known to support my policy is also refused space in the Report. You are told that at national conferences, due to my policy, Boilermakers' interests are neglected. That is a lie! I have moved the most important Boilermakers' resolutions and got them carried. I challenge a single case to be brought to prove that I have neglected the Boilermakers' interests.

In passing, it is perhaps worth mentioning that at a meeting of Liverpool boilermakers held in the Boilermakers' Hall in 1925, Brother John Hill referred to me as "the most brilliant young man of the Boilermakers' Society," but times have changed, and apparently it is not brains or honest convictions that are wanted or welcomed, but merely the type of delegate who will put his hand up with the crowd and support the policy of J. H. Thomas, Havelock Wilson and the General Council now about to go into an "industrial peace" conference with the very capitalists who are responsible for your present appalling position. I am not prepared to do that even if I am never again elected.

There it is: the attacks of John Hill, John Porter and Havelock Wilson all take the same form. I leave you to judge whether I am responsible for your low wages, no home donation, reduced superannuation, etc.

At Edinburgh I exposed the policy of Havelock Wilson in trying to smash the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. I spoke in favour of the Minority Movement's policy of closer trade-union unification; and in favour of Soviet Russia and the Russian trade-union movement. Is that wrong? You are the judges.

The General Council, of which John Hill is a member,

were silent at Edinburgh on the Havelock Wilson question, even when reactionaries like Herbert Smith and Jim Sexton supported me.

The members may have noticed that, prior to this year, reports of conferences have not appeared. That was because I refused to sign them, and when reports have appeared, I will undertake to say I have drafted them and made considerable concessions in order to get unanimity amongst the Boilermakers' delegates.

I tell you frankly, however, that the Edinburgh Congress and the Labour Party Conference were both defeats for the working class. Winston Churchill said of the Edinburgh T.U.C.:

> "He was glad to see that the Socialists had been converted to his view of the Russian Bolsheviks. By their action they had ratified the Government's action in turning them out of London."

Sir William Joynson Hicks said:

> "Really I am the best friend of the Trades Union Congress. I am trying to help them in their war against Communism."

The *Economist*, the organ of the City of London financial interests, said:

> "It is said in the City that the proceedings at Edinburgh are largely responsible for the brighter tone of the stock market."

Of the Blackpool Conference, the capitalist Press said: "It showed practical sense"; and the *Manchester Guardian* said of the chief resolution (that on the mining situation) that "even the Liberals would support it."

Do the boilermakers want me to support policies that call for such praise from the avowed enemies of the working class? If so, I am not your man! I look upon a national conference as a place where every delegate, irrespective of

his trade or occupation, endeavours to think out the implication of the resolutions submitted, and to discuss them and make a contribution to the debates, not from the viewpoint of a section, but from the standpoint of the working-class movement as a whole.

That is what I have tried to do since 1921. Despite all the wire-pulling and warnings in the Report, you have continued to elect me, as Brothers Hill and Porter say, "by large majorities." It will be for you again this year to make the decision. You know where I stand. I am a Communist and proud of it. I will not sacrifice my opinions for anything the Society can offer.

When the members of the Society register their vote on fundamental issues, I will carry out and respect their decisions. Until then, I claim the right to express what I consider to be the best policy—the policy the members of the Society would expect me to carry out. I might have "spoken more often than any other delegate at Congress." I was defeated every time, but came up smiling, with the consolation that, at any rate, I had something definite to say which commanded respect even from those who differed from me.

Finally, brothers, I would remind you that the advance guard are always the pioneers. Our time will come! The existing leadership is responsible for your present position. We have exposed, and will continue to expose, them. It is because we have done this that the Thomas-Wilson combination has forced Brothers Hill and Porter into their present policy. I leave the decision to you.

Yours fraternally,

(*signed*) HARRY POLLITT.

In February, the Executive Council announced that they intended to prohibit Communists from standing for election as delegates to the Labour Party and Trades Union Congresses. This ruling was challenged

by Aitken Ferguson, and a ballot vote took place. By one of the most corrupt votes in the history of the Society, the ruling of the Executive was upheld. This was promptly interpreted by the Executive to mean that no member of the Communist Party or Minority Movement was eligible to stand for any official position of any kind in the Society.

I took the best legal advice in the country on this ruling and was informed that if I cared to challenge it in a court of law there was no doubt that the Executive Council would lose the case. I was strongly tempted to do this, but was reluctant to take my case into a capitalist law court. I see now that I was mistaken. It is sometimes necessary to use any weapon that may be at hand to defeat such unscrupulous tactics as those which the mandarins at Lifton House (the Head Office of the Society) had been guilty of.

The chief concern of the Executive Council at that time was not so much to prevent me going to the Labour Party Conference as to prevent me from standing for the Executive Council, for which I had been nominated. Thus did official trade-union "democracy" assert itself, and I was unable to attend either the Trades Union Congress or the Labour Party Conference again as a delegate. I have gone since as a visitor, and on many occasions have been amused when some understrapper of Transport House, before allowing me to have a ticket, has asked me to give a pledge not to make a disturbance in the public gallery. And I cannot refrain from saying that it is a great deal more satisfaction to be a delegate than a visitor, especially when some of the clever fellows, like Herbert Morrison, take one's name in vain, knowing that they will not have to risk a reply.

The question of raising finance to carry on the activities of the Minority Movement was always an acute one. How I used to smile at all the yarns about "Moscow gold" with which the Fleet Street scribes entertained their readers! If only they could have shared some of our headaches, have known the dodges and subterfuges we contrived in order to keep going! If they had known the self-sacrifice made by trade unionists to help us, they could not have written the kind of drivel they did!

I was supposed to be something of a wizard at raising hard cash—regular donations, membership fees, affiliation fees, grants from trade unions, raffles, sweepstakes (only, of course, they were always called by other names). Even the most die-hard trade-union functionary likes his little flutter, and many a one helped the M.M. without knowing it. One of my favourite methods was to outline a campaign, a leaflet or a pamphlet, and then write to as many friends as I knew all over the country and ask them if they would give 2*s.* 6*d.* or 5*s.* towards expenses. I never failed to get what was required, or to keep those who subscribed informed as to how their money had been spent.

In August, 1929, I was keen to get out a pamphlet on imperialism, and had written as usual to a number of friends, when I thought I would take a chance and appeal to Bernard Shaw. In reply, I received the following letter:

THE MALVERN HOTEL,
GREAT MALVERN,
September 5th, 1929.

DEAR MR. POLLITT,—What a job! Karl Marx all over again; the same old game, working out exactly to specification.

I cannot give any money to the N.M.M. because that would commit me to all the delusions of the middle-class literary idealists of 1848, to the class war, the revolutionary proletariat and all the other figments of British Museum Socialism.

But your kindness in sending me a copy of that report reminds me that I forgot to send you a present on your last birthday; and I hasten to repair that deplorable omission.

Fraternally,

G. BERNARD SHAW.

George Bernard Shaw will never know what a god-send his £5 was at that time.

Thinking I might exploit Shaw's birthday present idea, I tried to get H. G. Wells also "to hasten to repair a deplorable omission." Alas! the reply I received was both short and to the point:

DEAR POLLITT,—If I were you, I wouldn't keep a birthday.

Yours,

H. G. WELLS.

And to think that in my callow youth I once spent my last tanner buying Wells's *Kipps*!

Chapter XI

LENIN'S DEATH

In January, 1924, I had to go to Moscow to attend a conference of the Red International of Labour Unions, but when I reached Berlin I was unable to get a *visa* from the Polish, Latvian or Lithuanian Consulates. The official at the Polish Consulate was very delighted about this, and boastingly showed me my photograph in a black book, explaining that I "was on the black list and would not get a *visa*." There was nothing for it but to try to get on a steamer from Stettin to Reval, in Estonia, and find some comrades to help me on my way.

I found myself stowed away on a small ship that was leaving Stettin for Reval the same night, and I had not been long in my hiding-place before I discovered that I had a companion. I could no more understand his language than he could mine, but instinctively we knew that we belonged to the same political party and were bound for the same destination, and that was a source of mutual consolation.

The journey seemed endless, and when we began to penetrate the frozen sea, guided, as I later learned, by an ice-breaker, we experienced the strange feeling, as one does in such circumstances, that the sides of the ship were closing in on us and would crush us at any moment.

On our arrival at Reval, we stayed on board until nightfall, when arrangements were to be made to get us ashore. Immediately, as we walked along the dock, I noticed by the flare of the lights that many dockers were

wearing black bands round their arms, and continually I heard the name "Lenin" on the lips of the workers, who stood talking softly in little groups. When I got to my rendezvous, the first question that was put to me was, "Have you heard? Lenin has died."

I was thunderstruck by the news, and knew now only too well the significance of all the black mourning bands.

I stayed in Reval for a day and a night, and never have I seen such grief-stricken people as those going about their business while I was waiting for a train. I spent some time by the sea-front, and the weather was terrifically cold, which I felt all the more because I was not properly clad for such a temperature, but when I saw a great schooner tied up to the quay-side, covered with icicles from stem to stern, her beauty made me forget my discomfort. She shone clean and silvery, sparkling in the winter sunshine, and as I gazed, I thought, "Comrade Lenin is dead, but he has left the greatest heritage of all time, and it will shine through the ages like this ship in the sunlight."

That night I caught the train from Reval to Petrograd, and one whole coach was reserved for the flowers sent by the Russian comrades living in Reval to be placed on Lenin's tomb. The revolutionary movement in Estonia was at that time illegal, and as I paced up and down the platform waiting for the train to start, I was struck by the many poorly-dressed workers who crept furtively up to the train, quietly threw a few flowers into the carriage with an inscription written on a card attached to them, and then stole away. It was so loving and so simple. It was symbolic of the love and reverence which Lenin inspired among the working people of the whole world.

At Petrograd, as Leningrad was then called, everyone was taking wreaths and flowers to the station, and ny train seemed to be loaded with them.

I was met in Moscow by Bob Stewart and his wife, who soon made me forget some of the discomforts of my journey. Bob told me he had been out to Gorki with an international delegation to bring back Comrade Lenin's body to lie in state in the House of the Trade Unions in Moscow.

Moscow's history is old and varied. It has witnessed many scenes, but never have such scenes been witnessed in any city as those which took place in Moscow during those tragic days. The House of the Trade Unions, once the scene of the pomp and glitter of the Tsarist aristocracy, and since the Revolution the place where some of the most important Soviet and international congresses have taken place, was selected as Comrade Lenin's resting-place, so that his own people, the working people, could pay their last tribute and see once more the face of this mighty leader of the Russian workers and peasants and of the world proletariat.

I was honoured by being chosen to act as one of the Guard of Honour during the time Comrade Lenin lay in this great hall. But it was not I as an individual who was selected—I was chosen as a representative of the British working-class movement. The tribune on which Lenin lay was set in a blaze of light, and the great hall was decorated with flowers and the flags of the various organisations of the Communist Party. Outside the hall stretched queues a mile long, and they lasted for four days and nights, as workers and peasants waited their turn to pass by and salute their beloved leader for the last time. Train after train was coming into Moscow,

bringing representatives from every town and village in the Soviet Union.

As they passed by the bier, their thoughts were plain to all. They were saying to themselves: "Our comrade lies here, the man who has not only been our leader, but our friend and our brother," and the tears which they wiped unashamedly from their eyes showed their love and their loyalty to Lenin and the Party which he had built.

Countless factory meetings were held in every corner of the Soviet Union, which passed resolutions expressing the workers' sorrow, but also pledging their determination to defend the Russian Revolution and carry on the struggle for Socialism, so that the ideals for which Lenin had given his life could be brought to fruition and the Red Banner of Socialism go on from triumph to triumph.

As I stood with the Guard of Honour, the spectacle of these simple people—workers, peasants, their wives and their children—paying homage to their lifelong friend and comrade, and the haunting, plaintive music sweeping through the hall, brought to my mind thoughts which cannot be expressed in any words. There were no gaudy uniforms, no glittering medals, no ostentation and pomp. Yet no king, emperor or tsar ever was rewarded by such grateful and understanding homage.

On Sunday morning at seven o'clock we assembled for the final farewell in the Hall of Columns. The place was packed. The last Guard of Honour took up its position—the leaders of the Soviet Union and of the Communist International. Comrade Krupskaya, Lenin's faithful comrade in arms, who fought by his side for over thirty years, took her place among her comrades. Then the Funeral March was played for

the last time before the procession started out on its sad journey to the Red Square, and as the last notes died away, the massed bands of the Red Guard struck up the "Internationale."

I remember so well my impression that never had the "Internationale" carried such a message of hope and triumph. It rang out like a death-knell to pessimism and defeatism. I felt that in the song was embodied the answer of the Russian workers and peasants to those who, like ghouls, saw in Lenin's death the removal of a barrier to their hopes of being able to destroy the Revolution and its achievements.

All is silent. The coffin is closed and carried slowly down the stairway, through the corridors, and out into the windswept streets. Outside, a sea of faces. Fluttering red banners against a background of snow. It is the coldest day, they say, since 1812, but the people have stood in the streets all night.

In the Red Square, where Lenin spoke so often to his comrades, teaching, explaining, leading them forward to new battles against difficulties, his coffin is laid on the raised platform. The crowd stands silent and erect, but, even in that piercing cold, heads are bared in solemn reverence.

There are no speeches, for who can speak at such a moment? A comrade advances and reads out the names of the provinces and towns represented at the funeral. The coffin is to lie on the platform until four o'clock.

It is now ten o'clock in the morning. The Guard of Honour, chosen from the various factories, provinces, organisations and regiments of the Red Army, is to be changed every ten minutes. Only the Kremlin chimes break through the silence. Then a comrade again advances and cries: "Workers of the world, unite."

The "Internationale" is sung, and the great march past begins.

At four o'clock, the cannons crash out the final salute. I felt their roar must have echoed round the world. In every town and village of the Soviet Union, the people stood in silence. In every country, the proletariat mourned its dead leader. Then, for the last time, I saw them lift up Comrade Lenin's body and carry it down to the vault beneath the Mausoleum. The bearers were Lenin's oldest comrades, those who, under his leadership, in exile, in prison, or working illegally, had built up the Party which carried through the Revolution and won power for the workers. For seven long years, they had withstood the assaults of counter-revolution, blockade, famine, civil war and the open hostility of world capitalism. They have won through, as we in Britain will win through.

As Bob Stewart and I stood there, we pledged ourselves and the Communist Party to which we belong to prove worthy of our trust, and to build up in Britain a revolutionary party of which we could be proud. And Comrade Lenin would desire no greater tribute, no greater memorial, than the building up of a Communist Party in Great Britain that will lead the working class in the age-long fight to smash capitalism and achieve the emancipation of the workers.

Chapter XII

THE CAMPBELL CASE

At this moment, when the Communist Party is leading the fight against the imperialist war, it is not out of place to say a few words about the famous Campbell Case of 1924.

A Labour Government had taken office in January of that year, for the first time in the history of British politics. Tremendous hopes, and not a few illusions, were aroused among the mass of the workers that at last a real battle would be joined between the capitalist class and the working class. How little these workers knew the character of the men who had come to power on the basis of the workers' sacrifices and activity, and who had not the slightest intention of doing anything that would disturb the even tenor either of their own way or of that of the capitalist class they were always pretending to fight.

The workers had not long to wait before they saw that, when it came to the class struggle and its damping down, there was not a particle of difference between the Labour Government and any Tory Government that had ever ruled. Immediately the dockers, tramwaymen and locomotive engine drivers and firemen came out on strike to improve their conditions, the same reactionary and repressive legislation of the capitalist State was put into motion to intimidate the strikers.

True to its traditions in leading the fight against

imperialist war, the Communist Party, early in 1924, began to make preparations for its usual anti-war campaign, which always culminated on the August anniversary of the last imperialist war. The Labour leaders had said many things about their detestation of war and what they would do to prevent war if ever they came into power, and especially how they would democratise the armed forces, and so prevent them from ever being utilised against the workers in industrial disputes. On this occasion the anti-war campaign was closely linked with the struggles of the colonial peoples against British imperialism, and in particular of the people of China, at that time making a heroic stand in defence of their national revolution.

I was asked to draft an appeal to the fighting forces on behalf of the Communist Party, and accordingly an open letter was published in the *Workers' Weekly* of July 25th, 1924. In this I pointed out that the men in the armed forces were almost entirely drawn from the ranks of the working class and that, therefore, they themselves would not want to be forced to act against their fellow-workers. Moreover I stressed that there was a danger of this in view of what had happened in the past, when, for instance, at Tonypandy in 1911, soldiers had been ordered to fire on the strikers.

I read out what I had written to Johnny Campbell one Saturday afternoon in the office at King Street, London, and got a rather old-fashioned look. At that time he was the Editor of the *Workers' Weekly*, and he agreed the appeal would be published in the next issue of the paper.

A few days after publication, John Ross Campbell was arrested, and this began a series of events which eventually led to a General Election in which the

Labour Government was defeated; not because of the Campbell Case, but because of its own cowardly behaviour, lack of principle, failure to stand up to the workers' class enemies and fight them, and also because of the disillusionment of the masses with the policy of the Labour leaders.

A great outcry arose from the whole Labour movement at Campbell's arrest. Thousands of the most active workers remembered the famous "Don't Shoot" leaflet issued by Tom Mann in 1912, and the campaign that had then been organised to secure Tom's release, and so they again went into action, reinforced by thousands of others who had not forgotten either the last war or their class duty in the existing situation.

So great did this campaign against the action of the Labour Government in arresting Campbell become that when the case came on at Bow Street, Sir Patrick Hastings was forced to state that the Government did not intend to proceed with the prosecution.

The name of John Ross Campbell became famous throughout the land, and, making full use of the feeling of the workers, the Communist Party carried out an anti-war campaign which will long be remembered by all who took part in it.

The Tories made the Campbell Case the basis of a sustained attack on the Labour Government, but the Labour leaders never attempted to fight back on an issue which would have won them the overwhelming support of the majority of the people.

The allegation was made that it was the Communists who had been responsible for the downfall of the first Labour Government, by the Campbell Case and the "Zinoviev Letter." This was not the case. The real reason for the defeat of the first Labour Government

was its policy of class co-operation instead of class struggle, and its refusal to organise the masses for active fight to improve their conditions, to fight against imperialist war and to develop the mass movement forward to the stage when the decisive struggle for power could be placed on the order of the day.

The reasons are exactly the same as those which, as I write, are paralysing the Labour Party in the present imperialist war and tying official Labour hand and foot to the power of the bankers, industrialists and landlords, as represented by the Chamberlain Government.

Chapter XIII

A GREAT YEAR—1925

The fall of the Labour Government in 1924, the direct result, as I have said, of the political cowardice of the Labour leaders, handed over the offensive to the most reactionary sections of the capitalist politicians, the mouthpieces of industrial and finance capital. The Tory Party was returned to Parliament with a big majority—in itself evidence of the workers' disgust with their leaders' pusillanimity—and Stanley Baldwin, as Prime Minister, appointed a thoroughly right-wing Cabinet. It was typical of the Government that the post of Home Secretary was given to Sir William Joynson-Hicks, later Lord Brentford, but always remembered as "Jix," one of the most active and vicious opponents of the progressive working-class movement who ever held office. It was largely thanks to him that the volunteer strike-breaking organisation for the maintenance of supplies was later set up in preparation for the General Strike, and it was he who, in 1927, was to authorise the Arcos Raid, which led to the breaking-off of relations with the U.S.S.R.

That this Government was out for a large-scale attack on the working-class movement soon became clear, but, as we shall see later in this chapter, they were met with determined resistance. Though MacDonald and his closest followers, after their brief taste of top-hatted pomp, were all too ready to fall back into the cap-in-hand attitudes of collaboration and conciliation, the

ferment of revolt was brewing in the masses, and was to find expression in the decisions of the Trades Union Congress and the Minority Movement. But there is one incident that took place early in 1925 which is worth mentioning here because it goes to show that fascist methods are not so impossible in this country as many people tend to think.

I was engaged at the time on a big oil-tanker in the dry dock at Tilbury, and had agreed to speak at a demonstration in support of the Minority Movement in Liverpool on March 15th. Accordingly, I left work at dinner-time on Saturday, intending to travel up to Liverpool in the evening and back overnight on Sunday, in time for work on Monday morning. Before going to the station, I had to telephone my office on business, and was told that an enquiry had been made as to what train I was catching, so that the comrades could meet me at Liverpool. This, however, was so usual that at the time I thought nothing of it.

At Euston I got a carriage to myself, only to be joined just as the train started by another passenger. We did not speak during the journey, as far as I remember, but I did notice that several times a man passed my carriage, but again attached no importance to it.

Eventually the train stopped at Edgehill, and immediately the train drew in, the carriage door was thrown open and a group of men standing outside shouted, "Come on, comrade! We have a car waiting for you." Now, to have a car waiting for me at Edgehill was so unusual that I smelt a rat at once. I stated that I had no intention of leaving the train until it got to Lime Street. Then the gang got hold of me and dragged me from the carriage. I appealed to the other

passenger for help in vain, and it dawned on me that he was also in the game. The handle of my bag was left in my hand, and the body of it torn from me in the struggle. By this time we were out on the platform, the train was disappearing, and I was being dragged to the barrier, struggling violently.

Now, anyone who knows Edgehill Station knows how difficult it is to get through the small barrier where the ticket collector stands, but on this occasion there was no difficulty. He had been informed that a dangerous lunatic, who might give his attendants a lot of trouble, was being brought up from London, so the gates were thrown open wide to allow the fascists to get me through. No ticket was asked for, and I still possess mine from Euston to Liverpool.

Then I was hustled into a car and driven away. The gang crowded round me in such a way that it was impossible for me either to shout, struggle or in any way attract attention, and eventually we got to a small hotel somewhere in North Wales.

I had been very ill the previous week with bronchitis, and my doctor had strongly advised me to stay off work. During the night of my kidnapping I had one or two bouts of coughing, and I think it rather frightened one of the fascists, for when he was left to guard the window he apologised profusely for being mixed up in such an outrage, which he never expected, so he said, to go to such lengths.

I was told that so long as I did not try to escape no physical violence would be offered, as the only intention in kidnapping me was to prevent me from addressing the meeting in Liverpool on the Sunday evening. And, in fact, on Sunday afternoon I was taken to Shrewsbury and got the train to London.

The next morning the incident was the front-page splash of all the newspapers, and when at Tilbury my workmates crowded round me, it would have been God help any of those fascist blackguards if those good pals of mine could have laid their hands on them.

Eventually, the gang was arrested and, after the initial proceedings in the Police Court, remanded to the Assizes, where Judge Fraser was on the bench. The fascists had briefed Sir Henry Curtis Bennett, K.C., but one look at the jury convinced me that they need not have gone to so much expense to make sure that that bunch of middle-class Liverpudlians didn't convict them. And, indeed, so it turned out. For, though in his summing-up the Judge gave a clear and straightforward direction to the jury to find a verdict of "Guilty," they returned with a verdict of "Not guilty." Even the Judge could not hide his disgust, and abruptly left the bench after ordering the release of the fascists.

As a pendant to this story, I might add that later, in 1927, I was involved in a trial at the Old Bailey which lasted for a long time. One of the witnesses against me had been involved in some brawl in Poplar and subsequently died from a fractured skull. The newspapers gave this incident considerable publicity, and I received the following charming letter from the leader of the fascist gang which had kidnapped me in 1925:

> My dear Pollitt,—I have read with interest the enclosed, and would advise you that, after careful consideration, this has been placed to your credit, and will be settled—when the opportunity is ripe—in a befitting manner.
>
> Yours faithfully,
>
> J. Rowlandson.

So much for the belief, honestly held by so many people in England, in spite of all they know of fascist methods in other parts of the world, that "it can't happen here!"

By the summer of 1925, the efforts of the employers to reduce wages and depress the workers' standards of living all along the line came to a head. Mr. Baldwin put it in a nutshell when, in an interview with the miners' representatives, he said: "I mean all the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet." But the last word was not to be with the capitalists—as it need never be when the workers answer their demands resolutely and unitedly.

It was the coal-owners who led the attack by giving notice on June 30th to terminate the existing agreement, intending not only to make drastic wage cuts, but also to abolish national agreements and the principle of a minimum wage. The miners rejected these proposals, and the Communist Party and the Minority Movement played an exceptionally active part in winning support for them from the whole Labour movement.

This rising spirit of militancy throughout the movement as a whole was reflected by the calling of a special Trades Union Congress on July 24th to consider the position created by the mining situation, and a Special Committee of the General Council was appointed to meet the executives of the railway and transport unions. The latter having promised their full support, final plans were drawn up on the 28th and official instructions were issued forbidding the handling or delivery of coal after midnight, July 31st. And these plans were enthusiastically approved of by a conference of trade-union executives on the afternoon of the very morning

when Baldwin had issued his ultimatum, quoted above, to the miners' representatives.

In this critical situation, a special Cabinet meeting was at once summoned, and, as it proved, the Government's bluff was called. They were not, as yet, prepared for a fight to the finish, and after further conversations between Baldwin and representatives both of the miners and the owners, it was finally announced that the Government would grant a subsidy to the coal industry for nine months, during which a Royal Commission would make an enquiry. This decision was announced on Friday, July 31st, which immediately became known as "Red Friday," in contrast to "Black Friday," when in 1921 the miners had been betrayed by the leaders of the Triple Alliance.

The first round thus ended in a victory for the workers, but both sides realised that there was only to be a truce and that a major battle lay ahead. For my own part, having for weeks been working day and night, I took the opportunity to get in a short holiday, and was lucky enough to book a place with the Worker's Travel Association on a trip to St. Malo. On the boat I found that Ernest Bevin had taken a similar lightning decision, but, though we were scrupulously polite to each other on the voyage, the atmosphere was not excessively cordial.

After this holiday it was full steam ahead for the National Conference of the Minority Movement, which we always held the week before the Trades Union Congress. This year its success was ensured by the fact that it was attended by 683 delegates, almost treble the number present in 1924. It was presided over by Tom Mann, and in his opening address he raised the all-important question of preparedness! "The

miners will require a much more disciplined regimentation of the organised forces of the workers when the next battle begins. For this we ought to really prepare, and that without delay."

This note of realistic militancy was again to be heard at Scarborough a week later, running through the whole proceedings of the Trades Union Congress, at which I was present as the Boilermakers' Delegate. The victory of the miners on "Red Friday" had given a feeling of strength and elation to all the delegates, and the President, A. B. Swales of the A.E.U., gave a fine lead in one of the best addresses from the chair I have ever heard at a T.U.C. "We are entering," he said, "upon a new phase of development in the upward struggle of our class. All around are signs of an awakening consciousness in the peoples of all countries that the present system of society is condemned." And he demanded that, in the interests of greater trade-union unity, the General Council of the T.U.C. should be given "full powers to create the necessary machinery to combat every movement by our opponents."

A number of good resolutions were passed by large majorities, including one condemning the Dawes Plan and another unanimously endorsing the General Council's campaign for international unity of the trade-union movement. I took my part in many of the debates, but the resolution I was particularly anxious to speak on was one dealing with British imperialism, which ran as follows:

> This Trades Union Congress believes that the domination of non-British peoples by the British Government is a form of capitalist exploitation having for its object the securing for British capitalists (1) of cheap sources of raw

materials, (2) the right to exploit cheap and unorganised labour and to use the competition of that labour to degrade the workers' standards in Great Britain. It declares its complete opposition to imperialism and resolves: (1) to support the workers in all parts of the British Empire to organise the trade unions and political parties in order to further their interests, and (2) to support the right of all peoples in the British Empire to self-determination, including the right to choose complete separation from the Empire.

It was moved by A. A. Purcell, on behalf of N.A.F.T.A., and amongst those who opposed it was, as I expected, J. H. Thomas.

Now, whenever I attended a National Conference, either of the Labour Party or the Trades Union Congress, I always tried to have my say after J. H. Thomas, who is what you might call my *bête noir.* We used to watch each other, sparring for position like a couple of boxers, but at Scarborough I was very well placed, as the ballot for seats found me immediately behind the redoubtable J. H. T., and on this particular theme I knew he would wax eloquent. During the debate we kept rising together and then bobbing down as if we thought the Chairman had noticed the other first. It was very funny, but I won in the end, and followed Thomas, who, considerably upset by the general Left mood of the delegates, was more than usually lavish in his praise of the Empire. This debate was the last before Congress adjourned, and J. H. T., having obviously decided to excel himself, called upon Congress not to make itself "ridiculous" by supporting the resolution.

Then it was my turn, and in the course of my speech I said:

I hope Congress will support the resolution and that the argument of Mr. Thomas is not going to count. It is unfortunate that they had only three minutes in which all the propaganda that had been carried on by Mr. Thomas could be counteracted. This resolution was simply a clear definition of the policy of the working-class movement towards the subject peoples of the Empire. British imperialism meant the appalling conditions they saw to-day among the textile workers of Bombay and Calcutta; it meant women going down the mines and doing thirty-six hours at a stretch. It meant that the peoples had no right of combination and no legal redress. Imperialism meant the slavery which existed in Kenya at the present time. It meant that the principles they went into war for should be preserved. Empire, to the whole of the exploited races of the world, simply meant that they were being exploited by a set of capitalists. The Indian workers could not hold a strike meeting without being shot. The Egyptians could not go on strike without being shot. China was held down by Britain and America. If they passed this resolution, they would give a message of encouragement and hope to their fellow-workers all over the world, who did not look upon the Union Jack as the last word in economic equity and political freedom. It was not a Wembley Exhibition Empire of fairy coloured lights which they were talking about—it was an Empire in which every single yard of territory was drenched with the blood of British soldiers, and of native soldiers who tried to keep British soldiers out of their country. Empire was simply tyranny and exploitation. I hope Congress will give the answer to the Empire propaganda which has been put forward by the right wing of the movement during the last twelve months.

In the voting that immediately followed it was made clear that not Congress, but Mr. Thomas, was ridiculous,

for the result, taken as a card vote, was 3,082,000 for the resolution and only 79,000 against.

Looking back on this Congress, I can see now how some of us thought the revolution was almost round the corner. In fact, I was so much elated that, having reached the mature age of thirty-five and feeling autumn in the air, Marjorie and I decided to get married.

This event took place on October 10th, 1925, and we went to stay at the Red Lion at Dorking for a week-end. Arriving there and feeling full of the milk of human kindness, I noticed a benevolent-looking gentleman sitting alone in the lounge, and promptly invited him to have one. He equally promptly assented and returned the compliment. The next morning I went out to buy newspapers and politely lent them to the same pleasant gentleman, who was profuse in his thanks.

Now the rest of this story properly belongs in the next chapter, but I shall include it here, for the following Wednesday, October 14th, I was arrested, with eleven other leading members of the Communist Party (and, as may be imagined, on the way to Bow Street, I had to put up with considerable chaffing at the brevity of my honeymoon). However, having been granted bail, I had to go to Scotland Yard to get my personal belongings, which had been taken from my pockets on my arrest. But when the gentleman whom I had to interview in order to recover them turned out to be the same one with whom I had drunk to my happy married life at the Red Lion in Dorking, I can only say that my sense of humour got the better of me and I had a good laugh at having been so thoroughly taken in.

Chapter XIV

THE COMMUNIST PARTY ON TRIAL

In order to understand the political significance of the arrest of twelve leading members of the Communist Party in October, 1925, it must be remembered that the victory of "Red Friday" was only the first stage of a battle which was to reach its climax in the General Strike of May, 1926. However well-founded our elation at that victory may have been, we realised the necessity of preparing for further struggle; and the capitalists, on their side, were not slow to take advantage of the breathing space allowed them by the coal subsidy. As Winston Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, was to put it later on: "We therefore decided to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it, or, if not of averting it, of coping effectually with it when the time comes."

Already in September the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies had been set up, under the control of a number of big shots, amongst whom were Lord Jellicoe and Sir Francis Lloyd. And the precise class nature of this body was made doubly clear by the fact that the President and Vice-President of the existing fascist organisation resigned their positions because "at the present moment effective assistance to the State can best be given in seconding the efforts of the O.M.S."

Moreover, while this private army of the industrialists and bankers was secretly training, the leaders of the Labour Party were openly pursuing their usual

reformist tactics of collaborating with the capitalist Government and splitting the militant rank and file.

The Trades Union Congress had marked the high-tide of this militancy. But the Liverpool Conference of the Labour Party, which followed it in September, served as a mouthpiece for MacDonaldism of the most snivelling kind. It was clear that our reformist "statesmen" had been impressed by Baldwin's warning, uttered after "Red Friday": "We were confronted last week by a great alliance of trade unions. . . . If we are again confronted by a challenge of that nature, let me say that no minority in a free country has ever yet coerced the whole community." There can be no doubt that this solemn humbug was in the Chairman's mind (C. T. Cramp of the railwaymen) when in his opening remarks he meekly asserted: "We transcend the conflict of classes; we ask for the co-operation of all classes"; for he then went on to attack the whole Left Wing of the movement and, in particular, the Communists.

But the attack on the Communists was not merely a verbal one. On the recommendation of the Executive, the Conference voted, by a large majority, that in future no member of the Communist Party should be eligible as an individual member of the Labour Party and that the trade unions should not elect Communists as delegates to the Labour Party Conference. Nor was this the only outcome of Liverpool. The new programme which was adopted was remarkable for the fact that almost every real Socialist demand that had been included in 1918 was now removed.

Indeed, as we can now see, the Liverpool Conference contained the germ of the abject sell-out of 1931. The capitalist Press hailed the exclusion of the

Communists with delight, and J. H. Thomas, perhaps already dreaming of office in a National Government, joined in with an article in the *Weekly Dispatch* of October 11th, "Smash the Reds or They will Smash Us!" History, however, was not to leave the smashing of the Right Honourable Mr. Thomas to the Reds, as that gentleman took matters into his own hands and did the job very successfully in 1936 by his part in the Budget leakage.

The hoisting of the white flag at Liverpool was the signal to the Government to intensify its anti-working-class drive, and the blow was not long in coming. On October 14th, as I have said previously, twelve of the leading members of the Communist Party were arrested and tried before Mr. Justice Swift at the Old Bailey for publishing seditious libel and inciting to commit breaches of the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to run two lines of defence, one in which purely legal considerations would be brought out to show why we should not be convicted; and the other, a political defence, in which we would defend the whole principles and policy of the Communist Party of Great Britain and of the Communist International. Sir Henry Slesser was asked to undertake the legal defence, and William Gallacher, J. R. Campbell and myself were asked to defend ourselves.

The trial aroused a big public interest, and the following extracts from my speech will give some idea of the political line we were defending:

My Speech for the Defence

Pollitt: My Lord, before opening my case, I want to crave your indulgence if, in the presentation of my defence, I do

not stick very closely to the usual legal conduct of this Court. I am afraid I should be more at home in a boiler-shop than I am likely to be in this dock.

This case is the most important political case that has taken place in the last sixty or seventy years. Whatever your decision is, it will have a marked effect upon the future political development of the country; and, therefore, in endeavouring to arrive at a real decision, it will not be enough to have pursued the methods which were adopted by the prosecution. For you will remember that at one stage of these proceedings the learned Judge himself asked what was the meaning of "Bolshevist," and it will be impossible for you to come to any decision at all that is in accordance with what is stated to be justice, unless you are familiar with what that means and its whole implication.

In the opening of this case by the Attorney-General, he said: "First of all I would say this to you: 'Whatever else you do, do not let any political views which you may have weigh with you one way or the other' "; and it would be very fitting, members of the jury, if two very prominent members of the present Conservative Government had taken the advice of the Attorney-General from the very first day that these proceedings were instituted, in regard to not letting political passions sway.

It is impossible for me to take a neutral or an impartial view. I am going to speak about my politics as a worker, devoid of all the opportunities of the people who have been using their favoured position as Cabinet Ministers to fire calumny and misrepresentation at politics with which they do not happen to agree.

Long before these proceedings were instituted, the whole public opinion of this country had been deliberately worked up, in order that whoever from out of the great public might be chosen on some future occasion to function in the capacity in which you are here to-day should have their minds prejudiced before they arrive at a real consideration of the evidence in the case. There were newspaper articles,

there were cartoons—and we secured an injunction against the *Evening News* for publishing a cartoon representing my comrades who were arrested and depicting us in a motor car with whiskers and bombs in our hands, labelled "Mutiny and Sedition."

I propose to put this case, so far as I am concerned, on a much higher plane than that. I thought that when you were called upon to take your places on Monday, after all that you have read about the Reds, Communists, agitators and Bolshevists, you would naturally evince some sort of curiosity as to what the twelve dreadful people would look like when they were marched into the dock. You will notice that there is neither a suspicion of a red tie or a whisker amongst any of the twelve.

We happen to be members of a political organisation. It is our politics that we are being tried for, and our politics mean our views and opinions. That is why we are standing in this dock—because a reactionary Government is endeavouring to use its temporary power for the purpose of suppressing political ideas hostile to its own.

Much has been said in this case about alien gold. Members of the jury, the majority of you will have longer memories than I have; and I am confident that you will agree that there has never been any case of political persecution in this country in which the Government of the day did not endeavour to justify that persecution by exactly the same sort of talk of alien gold as the prosecution has had to indulge in during these proceedings. When Lloyd George opposed the Boer War, the newspapers said that he was in receipt of German gold; when John Redmond was sponsoring the Home Rule agitation in Ireland, it was Yankee gold which was endeavouring to undermine the constitution of the British Empire. When Mr. Ramsay MacDonald took an attitude which was thought to be unfair towards the War, it was German gold that was endeavouring to undermine and sap the foundations of this great nation. And now that a new political party has come along giving

expression to ideas and to opinions and to politics which are no new thing, but which represents traditions going far back into the history of the working-class movement, now, for want of argument, they again resort to "alien gold." You have heard statements about it. But how little ice it cuts. Even taking the suggestion of the prosecution at its worst, and supposing that everything they had suggested to you is correct—which we deny, because they have not produced a shred of evidence—the suggestion is that the Party is in receipt of about £12,000 from foreign sources. They endeavoured to frighten you by talking about secret channels. Members of the jury, there was a little statement in the evening paper on Tuesday to which I would like to draw your attention, for if we are going to endeavour to bring about a complete change in social and economic conditions on £12,000 a year, what are the Government going to do when they get £12,000 a week? When you see a statement in the Press that Sir Robert Houston will be in Liverpool——

Mr. Justice Swift: You must confine yourself to the charge against you and the evidence in this case. You are entitled to make the comments which you have already done. I have not interfered so far. I shall interfere with you as little as I can. But when you go off into something like that, which it sounded as though you were going to, then I must stop you.

Pollitt: I am afraid, my Lord, you will not let me stray very far.

Mr. Justice Swift: It is my duty not to let you stray at all. I hope I shall not be lax in my duty, though I am afraid I was a little before I did interrupt you. Go along.

Pollitt: The next point, members of the jury, to which I would like to draw your attention is the age of the Act under which we are being tried. It appears that modern civilisation has now reached such a point that in order to crush your opponents you have to go back over 100 years and dig up some musty old Act. And this policy is being

justified by the people who have always declared that they stand for the full and unfettered right of human expression, for freedom of speech, and of the Press and the rest of those slogans. I think that I am entitled to draw your attention to something to which the prosecution are not likely to draw it—that at the time this Act was passed there was actually a mutiny in the British Navy. Pitt was so alarmed at the developments which were taking place that, by the aid of a very corrupt Parliament, he succeeded in putting this Act upon the Statute Book. But the last thought that Pitt ever had in his head, I am confident, was that it would be used in 1925. However, there it is; here we are being charged under an Act which was designed exclusively to deal with a mutiny already in existence. Is there anyone suggesting that there is a mutiny in existence or likely to be in existence at the present time?

Now, as I view the question, members of the jury, the prosecution are looking upon this case from an impartial, judicial point of view. Their case is that it has not anything at all to do with politics. Members of the jury, I want to suggest that if logic is anything at all, the very people who instituted these proceedings themselves, in the years 1912 to 1914, set a standard of uttering seditious libels, inciting to mutiny and getting their nuclei to work in the Army in Ireland as we could never aspire to have done if we had so desired.

If it is logic to prosecute working men under a 1797 Act, then we want to say that the people who are now the heads of this Government should be standing in this dock alongside of us. Many quotations have been read to you, many documents have been read to you; the prosecution or the police, in the raids upon the house of one of our comrades, took a document which the prosecution dare not put in as evidence so far as seditious libel and incitement to mutiny are concerned—simply dare not. It is a document that Mr. Asquith—Lord Oxford—himself described——

Mr. Justice Swift: You must not state facts, you know,

that you are not going to prove by evidence. If you are going to call a witness to produce the document, you are entitled to introduce it to the jury, but you must not state facts which you will not go into the witness box to swear to.

Pollitt: My Lord, you can help me. I want to avoid your having to keep correcting me, but what I am anxious to do at this stage is to quote from a book that was taken by the police which is a compilation of seditious speeches by Lord Birkenhead, Lord Curzon and Joynson-Hicks.

Mr. Justice Swift: No, I am afraid I cannot give you permission to do that. I do not see how seditious speeches by Lord Birkenhead and Lord Curzon and Sir William Joynson-Hicks can be of the slightest assistance to the jury or have anything to do with this case. You know, you might have preferred a Bill of Indictment against them if you had wished to do so; there was no reason why you should not have indicted Lord Birkenhead, Lord Curzon and Sir William Joynson-Hicks, but we cannot have their seditions mixed up with yours.

Pollitt: Well, as regards that last remark, my Lord, I believe that when we are members of the Government we will satisfy you that action shall be taken.

Now, members of the jury, I believe that I have said sufficient, even at this stage, to prove to you that the prosecution is not a judicial prosecution, something to vindicate the law, but is a political prosecution and I want you to bear that fact in mind throughout the rest of the proceedings. The Government have taken this action, not because of anything that is in the documents which you have had quoted at all.

The first thing that prompted the Government to take action was that they found that at the Liverpool Labour Party Conference we were expelled from the Labour movement, and they thought that, seeing we were isolated, seeing we were unpopular, seeing that the official movement had in its own way disowned us, then was the time to attack, so that the official Labour movement would not come to our

assistance. I think that on that point they have already seen the error of their judgment, for two things have happened which have shown quite clearly and conclusively that the Labour movement have not looked upon this trial as being something which is to the glory of the Labour movement and the Conservative Party. By the way, responsible men of the Labour movement have responded to the request to act as bail——

Mr. Justice Swift: No.

Pollitt: May I not, my Lord, give the reasons why I believe this prosecution has taken place?

Mr. Justice Swift: Well, I think you might do that, but again I tell you, you know, you must not state things as being facts of which there is no evidence, and of which there is not going to be any evidence. You may criticise the prosecution as much as you like, and you have pointed out the reason why you think it has been brought, but you may not state as facts why the prosecution has been started if you are not going to prove them.

Pollitt: But, my Lord, I may say what in my opinion is the reason why the prosecution have instituted these proceedings?

Mr. Justice Swift: Yes, well you have said that. If you have any other reasons in your opinion, you can certainly say them, but you must not go on and state facts about who went bail for you or anything of that sort; we have nothing to do with it.

Pollitt: The second reason why the prosecution has been instituted is also a political one. The Government were in difficulties as a result of the mining crisis last July and were compelled to make a settlement as a result of a threat of direct action by the trade unions. The Party to which we belong has been the only party to propagate a certain doctrine of united action, and, because the Government did not feel strong enough to attack the trade unions directly, we are to be made the cat's-paw in order to satisfy the die-hard section of the Conservative Party, who were

compelling the leaders of that Party to attack the Communist Party. At the last conference of the Conservative Party, held after the Liverpool Conference, the die-hard section taxed the leaders of the Conservative Party and the resolution is on record that an attack was to be made upon the Communist Party. These are the main reasons why this prosecution has been instituted.

This is the end of my preliminary statements. I want to say before going into the exhibits that in a political case nothing is easier, nothing is simpler, than to take a document, read a passage and skip a whole series of other passages which may obscure the meaning. We had a little example of that this afternoon when the Attorney-General read out paragraph 45 of an exhibit which had been put to a witness, and the Judge had to draw the Attorney-General's attention to the fact that the next paragraph put quite a different construction on the situation; and if we bear these incidents in mind, we shall see how easy it is to get a completely false idea of the nature of the documents that have been submitted by the prosecution.

You know yourselves that you can read the headlines of a newspaper and get a totally different impression from that conveyed by the article itself. That is what obtains in this case. There is not a single one of you, however hard you may have tried to follow the case of the Attorney-General, who, as a result of that hurried running through a series of political statements, could form a consecutive idea as to what are the theory and politics of the body represented. We want to submit to you that it is not fair, it is not in accordance with the British traditions about which we are always being told, to take isolated passages and then endeavour to form an opinion.

We will take the earliest document that the prosecution have been able to produce, Exhibit 16, the Theses of the Communist International. When the prosecution commenced to read from this document, did they commence to read from the first page or did they take a particular

paragraph which put the whole matter in a false light? The prosecution commenced to read half-way down the fourth page of the document. This document was compiled in 1920. It is essential that you should understand what the situation was in which these documents were compiled. It was a situation where, as a result of the War, as the result of violent upheavals in various Continental countries, the whole world was in a state of revolutionary ferment; kings were going down, emperors were going down and tsars were going down, not as a result of the activities of individuals, but as the result of a movement of the great masses of those countries, as a result of the terrible conditions existing through the War.

Consequently, the story of 1920 is different from that of the present moment; and these documents have to be considered in the light of the time in which they were written. The prosecution never intended to draw to your attention the circumstances under which these documents were produced.

The beginning of the document is headed, "The Statutes of the Communist International," and although you have had many things read to you, I must, in fairness to the case I want to present, take the liberty of reading this extract to you. "In London, in 1864"—not Moscow, members of the jury, London, the capital of Great Britain—"In London, in 1864, was established the First International Association of Workers, afterwards known as the First International." The Statutes of the International Association of Workers read as follows:

> That the emancipation of the working class must be carried out by the working class itself.
>
> That the struggle for the emancipation of the working class does not imply a struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and equal obligations and the abolition of all class domination.
>
> That the economic subjection of the workers to the

monopolists of the means of production and the sources of life is the cause of servitude in all its forms, the cause of all social misery, mental degradation and political dependence.

That, consequently, the economic emancipation of the working class is the great aim to which every political movement must be subordinated.

That all endeavours directed to this great aim have hitherto failed because of the lack of solidarity between the various branches of industry in each country and because of the absence of a fraternal bond of unity between the working classes of the different countries.

That the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national problem, but one of a social character, embracing every civilised country, and the solution of which depends on the theoretical and practical co-operation of the most progressive countries.

That the present revival of the workers' movement in the industrial countries of Europe, while awakening new hopes, contains a solemn warning against the relapse into old errors, and calls for an immediate union of the hitherto disconnected movement.

That was the first document that the First International Association of Working Men had to consider. At that meeting were many names now honoured and revered in the history of the working-class movement of this country.

That document was written by Karl Marx, who in 1847 —as has been previously mentioned—wrote the *Communist Manifesto.*

It went to show that we are the direct successors, not of one or two secret conspirators in Moscow, not of one or two little bands of people centred here, there and everywhere, but that the party we represent and the politics and the principles for which we are being prosecuted are historical politics and historical principles, which are not the creation of individuals, but rose out of the ordinary social and

economic development of the last 200 years. This will give an entirely new point of view to the whole of the proceedings which have been instituted by the prosecution.

The document then goes on:

> The Second International, which was established in Paris in 1889, undertook to continue the work of the First International. At the outbreak of the world slaughter in 1914, the Second International perished—undermined by opportunism and betrayed by its leaders, who rallied to the side of the bourgeoisie.

Do not be afraid of that paragraph, members of the jury. All that it means is that during the War, instead of the Workers' International declaring that there would not be a gun or a soldier for that war, certain of its leaders lined up with the capitalists against the working-class movement —quite a legitimate form of comment in accordance with what actually happened and is now a matter of history.

> The Third (Communist) International, established in March, 1919, in Moscow, the capital city of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, proclaims to the whole world that it takes upon itself the task of continuing and completing the great cause begun by the First International Association of Workers.

You see that the International with which we are associated believes that it is its historical task to fulfil and carry out the work of the First International of Workers which gathered together in London in 1864.

The document goes on to say:

> The Third (Communist) International was formed at a moment when the imperialist slaughter of 1914 to 1918, in which the imperialist bourgeoisie of the various countries sacrificed twenty million men, had come to an end.

Remember the imperialist war! This is the first appeal

of the Communist International to every toiler, wherever he may live and whatever language he may speak. Remember that, owing to the existence of the capitalist system, a small group of imperialists had the opportunity during four long years of compelling the workers of various countries to cut each other's throats. Remember that this imperialist war reduced Europe and the whole world to a state of extreme destitution and starvation. Remember that, unless the capitalist system is overthrown, a repetition of this criminal war is not only possible, but is inevitable.

Then the prosecution began to read the next paragraph, which cannot be understood unless we thoroughly understand the meaning of what I have just been reading. They went on to read:

The aim of the Communist International is to organise an armed struggle for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and the establishment of an international soviet republic as a transition to the complete abolition of the capitalist state. The Communist International considers the dictatorship of the proletariat an essential means for the liberation of humanity from the horrors of capitalism and regards the soviet form of government as the historically necessary form of this dictatorship.

As we go along, members of the jury, I hope to be able to put this paragraph in its true light. At this moment the only point I want to make is that on one or two occasions remarks were made by the Attorney-General in putting his case, which show you that we were getting from discussing politics to actually trying to discuss appeals to political prejudices.

This document alone is sufficient to show you that this is a transitory period that we are discussing. The prosecution say that we are an illegal organisation. The suggestion

has been made, of course, in a whole series of innuendoes that we are believers in personal violence. For instance, the Attorney-General delivered himself like this: "You have a perfect right (if I may take an illustration) to say that in your view property ought to be abolished; nobody can object to your preaching that doctrine. Or you have a perfect right to say that the Prime Minister ought to be thrown out of office. But you have no right to say to the people 'Steal the property of your neighbours, because property ought not to exist,' or to say to people, 'Murder the Prime Minister because that is the only way of getting rid of him.' "

Remember, that at the end of this case, just because he is the Attorney-General, he will have the right to reply. If it was a case in which he was not appearing, the prosecution would have no right to reply, and we hope that the Attorney-General in his reply will show a single document where we advocate the stealing of other people's property or murdering Prime Ministers. That is simply an open appeal to political prejudice, and an attempt to make you believe that that is one of the doctrines to which we subscribe. You can go through every exhibit which has been put in, and you will find nothing about individual acts of terrorism. We ask you to dismiss this trivial sort of argument.

Now, before coming to the documents as a whole, it is necessary to deal with one or two of the statements made by the Attorney-General in opening his case. You will see that he gave you a conception of Communism, of Communist propaganda and Communist agitation that, with the greatest respect in the world, I can only describe as a travesty of the facts. It is necessary to put this question in a light that will stand careful analysis.

I have referred to the Attorney-General's statement that "We have no right to steal other people's property." He then went on to say this: "And so, whilst you have got a perfect right to say, 'I think this form of society under which we live is undesirable and a different society can be built up which will be better for everybody,' while you are

perfectly entitled to preach that, you are not entitled to say, 'Because I believe in that and because I think the form of society which I advocate is better than the existing one and because I cannot attain my object by peaceful persuasion, by legal means, I will stir people up to try and obtain by force what we cannot obtain by persuasion.' "

What is the implication in that sentence? It is that the Communist Party has no faith in its capacity or ability to convert people as a result of argument, as a result of exchange of opinion, as a result of articles in its paper, to see its point of view; and because we are unable to do this, we are somehow or other to try to make the same people do by force what they are not prepared to do as a result of lawful conviction. I submit these arguments will not hold water. And, if past history has anything at all to teach us, it is that the greatest social changes that have happened in this and every other country have happened as a result of breaking with old forms and the emerging of new forms of society and new ideas. The conditions under which the new forms emerge and take place determine whether the change is peaceful or violent. I do not think even the Attorney-General would argue that Cromwell was a believer in peaceful persuasion in that historical incident that happened in the House of Commons a few hundred years ago.

Then the Attorney-General goes on to clinch his point. He says: "The jury have to make up their minds as a question of fact whether or not what was being done was an attempt to excite hatred and hostility and ill will between classes, or merely to point out with a view to their removal matters which have a definitely harmful effect." According to this statement, one of the indictments against us is that we are responsible for stirring up ill feeling, hostility and hatred between different classes. Members of the jury, my comrades and I who stand in this dock have not had the benefits which the people who dominate the political and economic life of this country have had. If, with our feeble propaganda we can stir up ill feeling, hostility and hatred,

the governing classes, with the tremendous potentialities that are at their disposal, could wipe out those feelings tomorrow, if they were simply stirred up by Communist propaganda. The state of society produces these conditions and nothing we can say in this dock, or the Crown can say from the opposing point of view, can alter the conditions which breed ill feeling, hostility and hatred, until you abolish the whole existing régime of society.

The argument of the Attorney-General is that we do not believe that this can be done by peaceable means, and, as I will show a little later, he indicates how, in his view, we propose that this change shall be brought about. In his opening sentences, the Attorney-General went out of his way to make the position clear to you by explaining what the Communist Party is, what the Communist International is and what the Young Communist League is. I propose, members of the jury, to enlarge for a minute or two upon the statements which have been made here. The Communist Party is a political party and I need hardly remind you that a political party is a party which seeks to represent the interests of a particular group, of a particular class. The Communist Party represents the interests of the working class, and it organises, agitates and endeavours to fight, through the ordinary means of propaganda available in this country, to win the working class of this country to our view. Our views may be repulsive, they may be distasteful, they may be totally wrong—but they are our views, and we have the same right of expressing them as the people who are opposed to them.

Our Party has a membership of 5,000, and although attempts have been made to scare you by talking of secret channels, secret removals, you can take it from me that most of the members of our Party have never left the shores of this country. This is a fact which is worth bearing in mind when you remember the talk about conspiracy, about secret methods, about illegal means. What does conspiracy conjure up in the minds of the lay people—not in the legal

minds? Dark corners, secret meetings, hole-in-the-corner mutterings; not letting anybody else know what we are about to do. But we are a perfectly legal political party which has been pursuing the tenor of its way since its formation in 1920, and if what we are saying now is wrong, it was wrong when the party was formed. It was wrong in 1921, it was wrong in 1922, it was wrong in 1923, and it was wrong in 1925. The Home Secretary himself in the House of Commons had to declare, in answer to a question, that the Communist Party was a legal organisation; and, therefore, we can dismiss right away the suggestion that we are some sort of conspiratorial body.

Now our Party, being a working-class party, has street-corner meetings. It runs its paper, the *Workers' Weekly*. It runs its theoretical magazine, the *Communist Review*. It holds public meetings and all this is done to win workers to our point of view. When we put forward our case, we are willing to hear the opposite arguments to that case, and if, in the light of discussion that ensues, we are able to convert people to our opinion, they join our Party. What is the basis of the propositions we make to get people to join our Party? It is that we believe the capitalist system is fundamentally wrong, that it cannot give the workers of the country, the mass of the population, a decent ordinary standard of existence. We declare to the working class of this country that history shows and present experience shows, that the ruling class will not give 6*d.* a week advance in wages if they can possibly help it. If they can get miners to work for starvation wages, as they are doing, by suggesting that the miners are selfish workers and have no regard for the community, we point these facts out to the working class and point out the depths to which the ruling class are prepared to go in order to retain the wealth and privileges they possess.

When the Attorney-General says we do not believe in peaceful persuasion, we are entitled to say to the working class, "Is there any basis for the argument?" The basis of the argument can be estimated, members of the jury, when

we remember that the Government was prepared to forge a letter to get into power. What, then, is it prepared to do to defend its rights of property, privilege and luxury?

I want to deal with one other point with regard to the method of organisation of the Communist Party. You have heard in the evidence a lot of talk about nuclei. There is nothing to be afraid of in this word. It simply means that those members of our Party who are in trade unions, on trades councils and in Labour parties are organised for activity. We believe we cannot have a political party unless it is organised to carry its point of view. Therefore, instead of our members in Manchester saying one thing and the members in Glasgow saying another, we organise them so that their activity takes the same direction. The word "nuclei" is only an expression for our members who are organised to carry out our form of activity, and who are, as has been indicated, members of and affiliated to the Communist International.

Among the documents read to you, considerable stress has been laid on the fact of the Communist International, and I would direct your attention to Exhibit 16, page 11 ["Theses of the Communist International"]. It says: "Resolutions adopted by the Communist International and its Executive Committee are binding on all affiliated parties. The Communist International, operating in a period of acute civil strife, must be centralised in a more effective manner than was the Second International." You see, members of the jury, this was written in 1920, and when it was written there was civil strife all over Central Europe. The document goes on: "At the same time the Communist International and its Executive Committee must, in all spheres of their activity, have regard to a variety of positions, under which the different parties have to work and struggle, and obligatory resolutions should be passed only on questions on which such obligatory resolutions are practicable." Now, have we for a single moment, although we are in this dock, endeavoured to suggest that we want

to be dissociated from the policy of the Communist International? Every one of us is proud and honoured to be part of that International. But this statement makes it perfectly plain that what might be the right tactics in Bulgaria would be the last tactics in the world to be adopted in this country.

The Attorney-General, referring to the questions of the conditions of admission to the Communist International, said: "And you will find that they were afterwards reaffirmed and re-adopted by, I think, the Fourth Congress. One or two of them are of interest on the second point I am making—namely, the fact that, in order to carry out the forcible overthrow of the State, the Communists realise quite well that they would have to deal with the Army and Navy and police, whose bounden duty, of course, by their enlistment is to support the State and to obey the lawful orders of the Government in suppressing disorder and civil war." Now, somehow or other, members of the jury, there is a contradiction here. You will remember that at another part of his speech, he said: "And because I cannot attain my object by peaceful persuasion, by legal means, I will stir up people to try to obtain by force what we cannot obtain by persuasion." You see the implication. We are unable to convert the workers in the mines, the shipyards, the textile factories, the offices, but we have no difficulty apparently in being able to convert the Army and Navy and the police force to our point of view. What it comes down to is this: As a boilermaker working in a boiler-shop, I have a chat with a man who is working next to me, and endeavour to point out to him what I consider to be the inequalities of the system, and it leaves him cold. I say the workers of the world should unite, and he has nothing to do with me. But seeing a soldier going to the theatre with his girl, I say, "Do not shoot the workers," and he listens to me. That is the logic of this type of argument, and nothing could be more shallow, nothing could be more absolutely out of accordance with the actual facts.

Members of the jury, we have got to take a common-sense, realistic view of this situation. If this Party cannot convert boilermakers and engineers to its principles, it cannot convert the soldiers in the Army, the sailors in the Navy and the airmen in the Air Force. It is just a matter of common sense. Then the Attorney-General says: "But it follows from the above that the duty for the moment of the Communist parties consists in accelerating the revolution, without provoking it artificially, until sufficient preparation has been made; such preparation is to be carried on and emphasised by revolutionary activity." In the document that I shall read before the close of this case, a document issued by the Government, I hope to show you what are the causes of the revolution.

The reason why I have dealt at length with this opening speech is that behind the whole speech lies a philosophy absolutely hostile to the working class of this country, so that by insinuation, by innuendo, by suggestion it may be somehow put across that the Party which we represent is a party which has no faith in peaceful agitation, no belief in constitutional procedure, no belief in its ability to win people to its point of view, that all that it consists of is a small bunch of people who are going round whispering one or two slogans in the hope that they can create a social revolution. I venture to suggest, members of the jury, that never in the history of political cases has such a travesty of a political theory been unfolded to any jury in the British Law Courts.

Members of the jury, I want now to come to my second line. I have tried to show you the historical position of the Communist Party. My second line is to try to indicate to you what it is we are after, and how we propose to achieve our object. If you will, therefore, turn to page 7 of this document ["The Draft Programme of the Communist International"], you will find that it reads: "Draft programme adopted at the Fifth Congress of the Communist International" and the first section is headed: "Capitalist

Wage Slavery." I propose to try to explain what this section means. It says: "At the present time almost the whole globe is under the rule of capitalism." What does that mean? It means that we believe that a tiny minority of the population own and control the whole of the land, the banks, the mills and the factories and as a result of this control they have complete economic, social and political control of the forces of the State—of the whole State, both civil and military. This control is used, not on behalf of the whole community, not on behalf of the nation, as is so often suggested, but in the interests of the particular class which owns the whole of the land, etc. As a result of this ownership they are able to dominate the whole of the population of this country, so that we are ruled by a minority and not by a majority at all.

Of course, I dare say it will be suggested that the minority who rule have been elected by the majority, and that at the ballot box all men are equal in the eyes of the law. I cannot forget, however, that when I get to the ballot box to register my vote, other people who go to the ballot box have powerful newspapers to influence millions of votes on their side, and there is no equality in it. Therefore, I am pointing out how things which make life sustainable are under the control of a small class, which we call the capitalist class. As a result of this they are able to dominate the whole of the working-class population, and when we speak of the working-class population, do not think that the term means that the only worker is one who sweeps the streets or is working as a labourer in a factory. When we speak of the working class we mean also small shopkeepers and clerks and all that sort of people. The whole of these various branches of the population are absolutely under the domination of a tiny clique who own the mines, the means of production and exchange.

This document says the capitalist class are in control of education. You know what this means, members of the jury. The section reads: "The rule of the bourgeoisie is also

secured culturally, for it possesses the monopoly of education, which is in the hands of the capitalists." At this stage it is necessary that we should have some idea of what this word "bourgeoisie" means. Sometimes when we have been talking at street corners, somebody thinks it means a racehorse and actually puts his money on it. When we use this word "bourgeoisie" we speak of that section of the population who own the banks, the land, the mines, the mills and factories. If, in the course of this document, another word, "proletariat," comes up, which is also rather a terrifying word, that simply typifies for us the working class, and if we get these two facts in our minds, I do not think we will go far wrong.

Now this section entitled "Monopoly of Education" simply means that the vast mass of the population have to take the type of education which is given to them by the governing classes of this country. It means that the mass of wage-earners of this country could never approach within a thousand miles of Oxford or Cambridge, or Harrow or Eton or Winchester—not that these are likely to make better citizens than a secondary or board-school education. In that connection, I think it well to remind you, members of the jury, that when a policeman giving evidence in this case was asked a question about Poplar, it was not the members in the gallery who were rebuked for laughing, it was the people in the superior seats under the gallery. That shows that, while the capitalists still have the control of education, it does not necessarily mean that this leads to a better standard of conduct. Now look at the paragraph headed: "Contradictions in the Development of the Capitalist System." What does that mean? It simply means that we believe that the capitalist system itself is producing a series of contradictions which will ultimately destroy that system. The system has developed from individual ownership to the small factory and so on, until we see the present complex structure. Not as a result of what Lenin has said or through the *Workers' Weekly*, but as a part of the historical development

of capitalism itself, certain conditions which must bring about the destruction of that system are brought to light.

Look at the section "A"—"The Class War"—on the same page. This section says: "Capitalist society, built upon the exploitation of an overwhelming majority of the population by an inconsiderable minority, is torn in two and its whole history is one of conflicts between the classes." The hostility between the classes arises as a result of the hostility of economic interests. In the early days of the capitalist system the class struggle was mainly concerned in a fight on behalf of the workers to get little concessions, such as the eight-hour day instead of the ten-hour and the fourteen-hour day; such as the abolition of the half-time system in the factories, the better ventilation of workshops and a shilling a week more on wages; that was the keynote of the struggle at that particular time. But as the system becomes more and more powerful and more and more compact, so the class war intensifies, not because we say it will intensify, but the struggle between the working class and the capitalist becomes intensified as the capitalist system itself becomes intensified.

As you may have observed, Boots the chemists set up their shop against some little chemist who may have been in a village for some twenty years, and if he cannot sell his produce cheaper than Boots he is wiped out. And what is true of Boots is true of soap and is true of the railways, is true of the land. The whole of these things do not belong to a widespread mass of the population; they belong to a tiny minority, and every year, as a result of the intensification of the system, this minority gets smaller and smaller. We speak of the Big Five, which everybody knows means the biggest five bankers in this country. They have got more power than the whole combined weight of the Labour Party in this country, just because they are the Big Five and not because their opinions are right. But because they are the Big Five they dominate the banking institutions of this country.

As this struggle becomes intensified, the working class must develop their organisation and the capitalist class theirs. We see the development of the policy of the capitalist organisation, and we see coming into existence a huge combine representing the political and economic interests of the capitalists, which is called the Federation of British Industries. On the other hand, we see the Trades Union Congress increasing its members. The two classes line up, the one to defend what it has won and to get a better existence, and the other to keep what it has and to prevent the working class getting a better existence. This mutual war intensifies as a result of ordinary economic development. Lock-outs and strikes, any political event at all, take on a much more serious character than formerly.

On the next page, page 9, you will see a paragraph headed, "The Struggle of Capitalism for Domination," and a little word, that sinister word "war." The section reads: "The struggle of the capitalist for world domination leads to a special form of competition amongst the capitalist States finally expressed in wars which are inevitable accompaniments of capitalism, as are crises and unemployment." You will see, members of the jury, from that paragraph that our idea as to the origin of wars is slightly different from the other political conception. You see we do not believe that wars are caused for national honour, or caused in order to fight for freedom, or caused in order that we can protect the subject nations. I think the experience of the last War, when all these slogans were used, will have proved how hollow these professions are. We believe that wars are caused by the various capitalist States being compelled to go to war, for a particular reason. What is that reason? It surely is this, that as countries develop their industry, the surplus profits of that industry must be reinvested somewhere in order to produce further profits. As they cannot be invested at home, they must be invested in countries abroad. Thus the struggle for empires, the struggle for territory, is not because we love to shoulder the black

man's burden. In fact, as soon as we get these places, it is the black man who is shouldering ours—at least, he is doing it pretty well in South Africa in the diamond compounds.

Now, if we think we have the right to get new markets and territories, so does the German think he has the right. If he goes to a particular part of the world, thinking he would like to exploit the economic resources of that country, where he sees a cheap source of labour and where he sees, by building up industry and getting profits, he can cut down the standard of life of the people at home by threatening them with competition, he will do so. But if he finds the Union Jack was there before him, he would get a round-table conference and say, "Let us have the Spread Eagle here." If they could, they would agree diplomatically, but if they do not agree diplomatically they have to go to war, and in order to get the various populations of their country to go to war, do you think they would tell them, for instance, that there was oil in Mesopotamia? Do you think they would tell them there were fabulous coal-mines in China or that it was necessary to get gold from India? They would say something about the German Eagle having bitten the Lion's tail. They would suggest in Germany that the British Lion had clipped the Eagle's wing, and international feelings would be roused and the people would have another cause of war.

So you see, members of the jury, our ideas of war are slightly different from the patriotic stuff which is taught in to-day's schools. We believe they fight for trade and for territory and for profits. We do not believe that money is expended and invested in Calcutta because the people who are investing that money love the Calcutta working class, but that the money is sent there because a higher rate of profit can be extracted than from the jute mills of Dundee, and do not forget that many of the people who own the mills in Dundee own the mills in Calcutta, and they take the profits——

Mr. Justice Swift: You are straying into matters of fact

which must be proved by evidence if they are to be established.

Pollitt: I am sure, my Lord, that is the first time I have strayed.

Mr. Justice Swift: It is the first time I have thought it necessary to bring you back to the right line.

Pollitt: The statement I have made throws a light on the material which the Attorney-General read about pacifism where the innuendo is that we do not want peace; that we are not concerned with disarmament; that all we want is blood. But our argument is that under capitalism wars are inevitable, and the talk of pacifism, of disarmament, whilst the capitalist system is in existence, is merely deluding the mass of the working classes. Secondly, we believe that the working class of this or any other country should refuse to go and shoot down each other at the behest and whims of those who ask them to shed their blood on behalf of profits, empires and new territory. We are not afraid to make that declaration because you have heard we are members of the Communist International, and that our slogan is to the workers of the world to unite. We do not believe in shooting each other. We believe that the interests of the working classes of this country and Germany are exactly the same. We believe, if war is declared, in letting the people who declared the war go and fight, and it will soon be finished. The attitude is a perfectly honest attitude; it is not a hypocritical attitude. Our attitude is perfectly definite. In the event of an imperialistic war, we say frankly and openly to the workers everywhere: "Refuse to fight in a war which can mean nothing but misery and degradation to the workers." How true and how sincere that view is, has been proved by the late War, where the people of this country were not told what it was they were fighting for, and when you have to-day the great mass of degradation and poverty in this country, which is a direct result of winning the War.

Will you turn to page 10, members of the jury? You will see a paragraph there headed: "Organisation of Antagonistic

Social Forces." That paragraph means that the growth of the trusts, the combines and the monopolists, which are now such a feature of modern life, is compelling the capitalists to organise into more and more powerful groups. It is compelling them to use the whole resources of the State in order that they can defeat the working class. The working class has been compelled to organise and become more united, not merely as the result of Communist propaganda, but because the struggle for existence is compelling it. When a skilled engineer takes £2 16*s.* 6*d.* home as a result of a week's work, that is the condition which is going to make him determined to fight more unitedly with the labourer for whom formerly he had very little time. Both of them see their condition getting steadily worse, and therefore they are compelled to come closer and closer together. And the capitalist side are compelled to come closer and closer together, because of the general instability of the political situation. Thus the growing antagonism manifests itself. In these days of the disintegration of capitalism, it affects the whole stability of the capitalist State. In order to defeat the working class, the capitalist has got to be prepared to use the forces of the State.

For example, a miners' lock-out; the suggestion of a miners' strike. What does it do? It compels the Government to make Hyde Park like an armed camp, as it did in 1921. Why? Because a mere strike or lock-out is being conducted —not for the revolution, not for the conquest of power, but a miners' lock-out which is being conducted for a living wage for men who get £2 a week for six shifts underground. That fact becomes a potent fact. It affects the stability of the capitalist system, and in order that every attempt should be made by the capitalists to defeat the miners, the State forces are drafted all over the country. The soldiers who are in the London barracks are sent to South Wales; the soldiers who are in the South Wales barracks are sent to Newcastle, because the control and distribution of these forces is in the hands of the people who regulate the working

classes, and they know by distributing their forces they are able to send them to districts where they are most likely to be out of touch with the working class of that district.

This is not any figment of the imagination. It is an historical fact that in modern disputes, simple trade disputes over wages and hours, the State has to intervene, not on behalf of the working classes, but on behalf of private property. I would like to remind you in this connection that Tonypandy and Featherstone are household words in the working-class neighbourhoods. They have experienced the forces of the State in industrial disputes. I would remind you of a fact you ought to be reminded of—that day by day you see preparations being made now for something which is supposed to happen next May (the end of the miners' truce). We do not believe it is we who cause this class war; we believe it is a natural product springing from the system under which we are living.

On page 11 you will find a paragraph headed: "The Universal Character of Capitalism." This paragraph means that capitalism is now the universal system. But the paragraph indicates something else, members of the jury. It indicates that capitalism was not created by wicked capitalists who were tired of another system and immediately brought capitalism into operation. This chapter indicates that before capitalism there were other states of society. The chapter indicates the survival of the fittest. In the past there were feudal states with merchants, handicraftsmen, the peasant, barter and exchange, and capitalism is the legitimate development of these forms of society.

Paragraph (*b*) speaks of the monopolist character of modern capitalism. Here again you have it simply, clearly and tersely expressed, showing how capitalism has developed from a series of private undertakings and competition with one another, and destroying each other in the process of this competition—how they have been replaced by tremendous combines and trusts, banks, etc., the whole consolidated and in many cases under the complete domination of

the banks. This has destroyed competition and has led to the monopoly of the world's resources in the interests of those we described as modern capitalists. To-day the owners of the land, the railways, the mines and the banks are so interlocked that we live under a dictatorship—a dictatorship of the people who have got this ownership. Capitalism has wiped out the small man. You have only to follow the Death Duties in the papers and the bankruptcies and there you will see the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, not because Gallacher made a speech in Moscow, but because the poor cannot compete. Because of this monopoly character of capitalism, the more ruthless will the minority be in defending their ownership.

On page 13 you will find a chapter, members of the jury, "The Intensification of Differences and the War of 1914." We have already shown what, in our opinion, caused the war. This chapter says: "This war shook the foundation of capitalist economics to such an extent, rendered the position of the working class so much worse, destroyed so many imperialistic illusions among the proletariat, that it introduced a new historic phase in the disintegration of capitalist production on a world scale." This is one of the most vital sections that we have to take into consideration. It says that the war shook the foundations of capitalist economics. That is perfectly true, because, as a result of the war, you know that the exchanges went all to pieces, in every country there was political and economic instability; the countries that were engaged in the war have not been able to absorb into industry the men who went to fight in order to make the world a place fit to live in. You know how the streets are littered with men, some with one leg, playing organs and the rest of it.

The paragraph goes on to say: "War Costs and the Destruction of Productive Forces." Is it not a statement of fact? Has not the War made the position of the working classes worse? If you talk to the workers now, they say they

would like to get back to 1914 conditions, and I would suggest, members of the jury, that it is a remarkable commentary on progress, when in 1925 you have got hundreds of thousands of workers saying they would like to get back to what they were in 1914. Owing to the high cost of living and lower wages, they are not able to get the same standard of living in 1925 that they got in 1914. The chapter reads: "It destroyed also many imperialistic illusions among the proletariat." As a result of the late War, there are hundreds of thousands of workers who will never be willing to fight again, because their experience and subsequent treatment has shown them the character of war.

"It introduced a new historic phase into the disintegration of capitalist production on a world scale." What does that mean? As a result of the War capitalism has received a blow from which it can never recover. For four years, in the more important countries, resources were used for the purpose of destruction and not of construction. As a result of the destruction of the best forces of the working class, as a result of the destruction of the means of production which could have been used for productive purposes, as a result of the chaos and poverty which has come out of the War and the political upheavals in Central Europe, capital has received a blow from which it can never recover. If the War did shake capitalism to the extent that I have indicated, it has rendered the position of the capitalists themselves more insecure. They see the advance guard of the working-class movement; they are pointing the way to the emancipation of the working class. The War has left this country and the world generally—but this country in particular—with diminishing trade and a huge army of unemployed, general social disorganisation and increased antagonism between the capitalists and the workers. Society is faced with a breakdown, so that it is no longer possible to guarantee to the mass of the population the standard of living which they had previously been accustomed to. Whereas capitalism in its early stages was a system of society

carrying the community one stage further in the march of human progress, now it has ceased to be a historic necessity. Its ruin has been created, not by the Bolsheviks, not by the Communists, but as the result of the conditions which led to the War and of the conditions left by the War. We find this general instability all over the world. We have seen the destruction of monarchies, the destruction of tsardom, not as the result of Communist propaganda, but as the result of conditions created by capitalism in general and the late War in particular. The working class and the lower middle classes are the sections which are suffering most. The Communist Party does not believe that revolutions can be manufactured like the Meccano toys you buy in Gamages. The Communist Party does not believe that revolutions can be created on the agitation of a propagandist. The capitalist can get more money for propaganda in one day than we are likely to have in the next twenty-five years. If propaganda and agitation can create a revolution, it can also stop one, and against our efforts to create a revolution, if the suggestion of the Attorney-General is correct, we must place the efforts of the ruling classes in this way and in trying to stop revolution.

Members of the jury, you must not be misled by suggestions that have been made in regard to this peaceable persuasion business. When history has instituted social changes in this country of a violent character, they have taken place, not because one or two men wanted them, but because the economic conditions of the time compelled that change to take place in that particular manner. All this endeavour to frighten you about a revolution and an armed struggle would be laughable if it had not a tragic side. Its tragic side consists in the fact that the very Government which has instituted this prosecution, which is trying to make everybody's blood run cold about the Red menace, has never hesitated itself, when it suited it, to subsidise revolutions in the interests of capitalism.

Now, I would like you to turn to page 24. You will

remember that the suggestion of the prosecution is that this party has no belief in the possibilities of the ordinary peaceable and constitutional methods of achieving its objects. Here is a series of draft suggestions of what we will do when the working class has decided to form a workers' Government—and not when the Communist Party have, but the working class, which is a very different thing. You have heard far too much of what is supposed to be the destructive side. We are always accused of wanting to pull down and not build up, but here are our draft suggestions of what we propose to do if the working class is strong enough to form a government. Now, members of the jury, I would like you to turn to page 17. I propose to read this paragraph because I think that it indicates that, even taking the suggestions of the prosecution at their very worst, we have an objective in view and that it is as lofty, as grand and as magnificent as the objective of any political association in existence.

> "The abandonment of Imperialist illusions in the ranks of the working class has freed the proletariat from the influence of social-democracy and fascism, and formed the soil for the development of the Communist parties which are uniting in the course of the struggle in a mighty revolutionary association of revolutionary workers—the Communist International. From out of the chaos and the misery, out of the falling debris of decaying capitalism, out of the mad and monstrous new wars in which the bourgeoisie is ready to destroy millions of workers and the last remnant of its culture—out of all this, the Communist International will lead humanity on to a new path, from the depths of death and destruction to Communism."

Whether you believe our way is the right way or not, members of the jury, at least that indicates that, underlying the whole of our philosophy, every speech, every

article, every action, there is one objective, "The creation of order out of chaos and misery, and to give the mass of the population a chance of a state of society which the existing régime can never give them."

Now, the last section I will trouble you with on this document is page 34. Members of the jury, I want again to recall to your minds that throughout the Attorney-General's speech was one underlying suggestion. That suggestion was that we have no faith in our capacity to win the workers by peaceable means to our standard, and that all that we were concerned with was the provoking of mutiny and insubordination and civil war in the armed forces of the Crown. Now, this document indicates how the minds of those who constitute the Communist International are working. I want you to give this paragraph more consideration than any other statement which has been brought to your notice, for here you have the crux of the whole position. The paragraph is headed: "Strategy of the Communist Party (The Conquest of the Majority of the Workers, the Trade Unions, the Young Workers, etc.)":

> "In order to fulfil its historic task, the Communist Party must preliminarily undertake and carry out the following strategical aims: Bring under its influence the majority of the members of its own class, including the women workers and young workers. Bring under its influence the broad masses of toilers in general (the poor of the towns and villages, the impoverished elements of the intelligentsia, the so-called small men—namely, the petty bourgeois elements in general), and thus to achieve the political hegemony of the proletariat, under the leadership of the Communist Party. It must utilise the conflicts of the ruling classes, both in its country and on an international scale (namely, utilisation of war crises)."

A Juror: May I ask a question, my Lord. Will you direct the defendant to explain the word "hegemony."

Mr. Justice Swift: Can you tell the jury the meaning of the word?

Pollitt: "And thus to achieve political hegemony of the proletariat"—that is, to secure preponderating control.

> "Discredit, expose and destroy the political influence of Social Democracy and the yellow trade-union bureaucrats, who are the most reliable supporters of capitalism, and bring under its influence the mass organisations of the proletariat (trade unions, co-operative societies, factory and workers' councils, and so on)."

Members of the jury, does that paragraph read as if we were out on some sort of secret conspiracy, and trying to get a tiny minority to form an armed insurrection and provoke a revolution? We say quite openly and avowedly we are out to win the majority of the working class to our principles. If our principles are wrong, we shall not win the majority of the working class to them. If they are right, we will. It is the fashion to speak about the innate sense and the common-sense view of the average British working man. Throughout the whole of this document there is not a single suggestion anywhere that, until we have won the decisive majority of the working class—not until then is there any suggestion of violence, armed uprising or the rest of these scare cries which have been used.

How do we propose to get this political leadership? By ordering guns from Germany to be delivered in Ulster, as in 1914? By committing burglaries in Woolwich Arsenal in order to hand out Maxim guns to one or two groups of workers? By endeavouring to corrupt one or two privates that we happen to come across in a railway train? The Party proposes to win the majority of the workers by the methods of political agitation resorted to by every political party in this country. Nothing more and nothing less. Members of the jury, surely we are entitled to put that viewpoint?

When we speak of the working class we mean the workers who are in the Army, the Navy, the police force and the Air Force. The majority who are in the forces are drawn from our ranks. They do not join under any false sense of patriotism. They joined because they were out of a job and they were sick and tired of hanging around street corners. When they have served their time in the Army, Navy and police forces, they have to come back to the ranks of the working classes. They have to stand side by side with us in queues in the Labour Exchanges or work with us in the shop—shipyards, and boiler-shops and engineering shops. But there is another factor; they are citizens, and they are entitled at election times to register their convictions. Therefore, when we speak of winning the majority, we include the workers who are in the forces. When we speak of educating them, we speak of endeavouring to do exactly the same sort of propaganda with them as we do at the street corner or in public halls. We want to familiarise them with the industrial situation. We want to explain to them the origins of wars in order that they may understand their position.

If we are to ask for an enlightened democracy, if we are to make every person, man and woman, whatever their duties or capacity, record intelligent votes—not swayed by forged letters as in the last election, but votes of citizens who have analysed and studied the political problem—if you are going to achieve that object, then you have got to be prepared to allow the fullest freedom of propaganda and agitation amongst every section of the community. The Communist Party will never look upon the forces as some neutral body completely cut off from the rest of the working class. In industrial disputes it might very well happen that a particular regiment is sent to a particular mining village, and that particular regiment may be ordered to shoot strikers (which has been done before) and amongst the strikers may be the fathers or brothers of the soldiers who are called upon to do the job. In

those circumstances our Party declares, "Don't shoot workers."

In the event of war, the Party has sent an equally clear message to the workers who are in the forces. We are out to win this majority, and we cannot win the majority of the working class by whispering one or two little slogans in their ears in dark corners; we can only win them when our political message corresponds with their own political and economic experience.

Does this Party believe that it can only achieve its object by force or does it not? Members of the jury, the question of wars can only be decided when the circumstances are actually at hand. Experience has had so many lessons for us that we cannot neglect them, and we would be failing in our duty to the working classes of this country if we did not explain those lessons to them. The Communist Party believes that force is inevitable, not because we want to believe this, but our past and our present experiences have convinced us. You have only got to take the history of the past 200 years. This belief in progress—that society develops as a result of peaceable persuasion—is it good? It is very plausible, but it is not in accord with facts. Under the régime of militarism itself, what has happened? The Chartist agitation in England, the Revolution in '48, the French Revolution in '79, and the South African War, the Russo-Japanese War and the Imperialist War from 1914 to 1918—are these peaceable advancements under ordinary conditions of capitalism? Did they not all occur under circumstances which necessitated the use of force by the ruling classes? The abolition of slavery in America, for example, was never brought about as the result of peaceable persuasion. As a result of the last War, there was a revolution in Russia. The trouble in Russia only came after the revolution, and not before, when those who had previously been the dominant class endeavoured to regain their supremacy. They not only endeavoured to gain it themselves, but they relied upon the sympathy and munitions.

the men and the money of every capitalist country in the world.

Members of the jury, you know, as a matter of common knowledge, that this country spent 100 million pounds trying to smash the Russian Government. The lesson of history is that whatever ruling class is in power, it will retain that power peaceably and constitutionally, if it can, and if it cannot it will resort to other methods. This is not simply the view of one or two hot-heads who are now in the dock; it is very prevalent among the people in this country. It is very prevalent in the Labour movement all over the world. We work to get our candidates on the local councils and boards of guardians and in Parliament. No one is more delighted than the members of the Communist Party to bring this about, but we have a right to warn the working classes of what happened in the past, and what is happening now before our very eyes.

The facts with which we are surrounded are justifying this point of view. You have the development of the *Fascisti*, you have the development of a new strike-breaking organisation called the Organisation for Maintaining Supplies, and you have the Conservative newspapers telling the people that if a Labour Government endeavoured to do anything that was only in the interests of the working class they would be smashed.

Now, members of the jury, I just want to try to sum up the points I have endeavoured to make. First, to give the historical association and development of the Communist theory which is now on trial; secondly, to endeavour to give you a correct idea, from our point of view, of course, of what we are after; to try to clear away this conception that we are some secret bunch of conspirators meeting in dark corners, and now and again crawling up secret channels, and to show you that we are a working-class political organisation who have a point of view, and who endeavour to establish that point of view in exactly the same way as the rest of the political working class in this

country. It has been suggested by innuendo that when we are talking about our immediate demands it is only for a material motive. Members of the jury, nothing that Lenin ever wrote or Marx ever found in the British Museum made a Communist; it was the conditions under which we lived. When I see it suggested that we stand here accused of uttering seditious libel calculated to bring, I think it is, "ill-will, hostility and hatred and disaffection" amongst the various classes of the people, members of the jury, you will pardon me if I say that that is not seditious libel at all. I saw the best woman in the world carry two children out, morning after morning, while I went with her to work: that made me a Communist.

Mr. Justice Swift: You must not tell facts to the jury which you are not going to prove.

Pollitt: It was the experience all of us in this dock have gone through and had, which made us devote our lives to working for the cause which we believe in. The Prosecution has not been able to produce anyone who has been affected and has shown ill-will, hatred and disaffection; they have not been able to produce a single worker in the forces incited to mutiny as the result of anything he had heard any Communist Party man saying, or anything the Communist Party has written. I say the party is a political party carrying out its political ideas. No jury for seventy years has been empanelled which has to take such a serious verdict as you have to take in this case. Our ideals may be distasteful to you, they may be repulsive to you, but they are our ideals, and it is these ideals which are on trial. I would like my last appeal to you to be this: to remember while you are endeavouring to arrive at your verdict what was the nature and the circumstances of the Act of 1797 under which you are trying us. Believe me, members of the jury, this cause to which we belong, this Party, this Communist International of which I am an accepted member, and proud to acknowledge the fact, is now a permanent factor of current political life; that the ideals

for which we are to be convicted here are ideals which have inspired and will inspire more and more in the future, millions of the very best of the working class.

We are looked upon as the vanguard of the working-class movement. Progress can be hindered and can be retarded, but it can never be stopped. Communism to-day is a general political issue which cannot be wiped out by persecution or repression.

I confidently ask you, members of the jury, to return a verdict of "Not Guilty."

But neither legal nor political defence served to get a verdict of "Not Guilty." Not that any of the twelve comrades in the dock ever had any doubts on this score. We all knew the British legal system too well, and especially did we understand the character of the Tory Government that had ordered our arrest.

Seven of the comrades received sentences of six months in the second division, and five of us got twelve months in the second division. Accordingly we were taken to Brixton Prison for a few days, and from there to Wandsworth Prison to serve our sentences.

I shall never forget the first night we arrived in Wandsworth. I knew that prisoners were allowed to take three photographs into their cell. One that I hung on the wall was of my sister's two lovely children, one about three years old, and the other three months. As usual the parson came in to console me, as he thought. He stood looking at the photographs on the wall, and remembering the newspaper headlines about the "Red Bridegroom," shook his head disapprovingly and said, in frigid tones: "Tch! tch! Born out of wedlock, I suppose!" My rejoinder was couched in language with which his studies of the Old and New Testaments had not made him familiar.

I had another stormy scene with him during the General Strike. It was the custom of the parson to give the prisoners a synopsis of the week's news every Tuesday morning, and on one occasion he took it upon himself to make some excessively outrageous remarks about the miners. I put my name down to see both the Governor and the parson, and told them exactly what I thought about this type of propaganda.

When not in the workshop, we spent our time reading and studying. We all had great hopes of getting in the Marxist classics, in order to make a thorough study of them, but unfortunately they were banned, because they would have had to go into the prison library, where they might have been asked for by other prisoners, to their consequent corruption.

The same type of stupid regulations also applied to fiction. One day, Marjorie sent me in a copy of Anatole France's *The Gods are Athirst*. The Librarian came to my cell one dinner-time and very solemnly said: "A.44. I regret I cannot allow you to have this book. There are certain passages in it calculated to rouse sexual impulses. But as I am glad to notice that you enjoy good literature, I will lend you my own copy of Anatole France's *Red Lily*." With great difficulty I suppressed a smile and rashly took the risk by accepting his offer.

I had always made up my mind that once the prison door closed, the main thing was to keep fit by exercise and study, and get through the time as quickly and easily as possible. Prison affects different people in different ways. The thing that most irritated me was to wash greasy plates in cold water. I always got angry over this. Then there were the senseless restrictions and rules, the absolutely wrong way of trying to reform habitual prisoners, the stupidity of so many of the prison

officers, whose ignorance and brutality only made those who were exceptions stand out as men of really fine character. How a man who has to pass the greater part of his life locking and unlocking doors and shouting "All correct, sir!" can help becoming degraded and brutalised is a wonder to me.

I was fortunate in having as my two companions at work, Albert Inkpin and Wal Hannington. Both have a great sense of humour, and I could write a book on our prison experiences alone. We could always see the funny side of things, and rarely did a day go by during the time we were working together on one table cutting mail bags without something with a funny side turning up to brighten our existence.

The first day we went into the workshop, a prisoner known as Fred—and what a character!—came sliding under the table where we were working and asked, "Are you the Reds?" Proudly we acknowledged this fact. "How long have you got?" "Twelve months." "Serve you bloody well right! You ought to be shot. You 'ave no respect for private property!" Fred was a professional burglar of high standing.

We all rebelled against the disgusting and insanitary shaving facilities, and demanded our own razors. This request was refused, so we decided not to shave and to grow beards. What sights we looked as we met on the exercise grounds! On Christmas Eve, however, our cell doors were opened, and all twelve of us were lined up and led to the Governor's office. Now, ever since we were sentenced, there had been great weekly demonstrations outside the prison, demanding our release. They caused great excitement among all the prisoners, and really did encourage us to hope that they would have an effect on the Government. So on this Christmas

Eve, we all looked joyfully at each other, thinking: "This is it! We're out!" Not at all. We were solemnly handed over the razors which our wives had dutifully sent in to us. So Christmas Day, 1925, is memorable for me because I felt clean once more after losing a truly magnificent beard.

I used to attend the prison chapel regularly. It broke the monotony, and there was a bit of a concert at the end of it. One week-end, a prisoner sentenced to death was brought to Wandsworth. He was appealing on the Monday against the sentence before the Central Appeal Court, so the Chaplain soothed his fears by preaching from the text, "The wages of sin is death."

The man's sentence was quashed next day, but the atmosphere is charged with electricity when a man under sentence of death comes into it. It is uncanny! Everybody feels it, although the hardened customers pretend to joke about it.

The worst thing about it all was the knowledge that we were locked up, powerless to raise a finger to help during the General Strike and the subsequent weeks of the miners' lock-out. This was the bitterest blow—to be out of it just when we were needed most.

Once a week, we went to a French class, at the end of which the teacher took pity on our mental starvation and allowed us to ask questions on general topics. On the first night we literally bombarded him. He was extremely well informed, evidently anxious to do us a good turn, and struggled manfully to cope with the rising tide. But never shall I forget the expression on his face when, after having combed the world to satiate our appetites, Bill Gallacher asked him: could he give us any information about the Riffs and the Druses?

Another thrill was provided when Bill Gallacher

circulated a thesis (written on toilet paper) about the tactics which the Communist Party ought to adopt during the General Strike. Outside prison, it is perfectly easy to have bitter political arguments without tempers becoming in the least ruffled, but just start one inside prison and it's amazing what happens. Bill fought the lot of us, and when I say fought, those of you who have seen Gallacher on the job will know what I mean. We never reached agreement on the thesis—a fact that Gallacher has reminded us of on many occasions.

There was also a General Knowledge class. The teacher was a kindly and tolerant man who knew when to look the other way. Bill Gallacher and I sat together during this class every Thursday night, and what a fascinating occupation it was to watch the process whereby a piece of thick "black twist" the size of my little finger nail travelled from the top bench at the far end of the room to the bottom seat on the bottom bench where Gallacher was sitting.

We used to ask the teacher to recite Shakespeare to us, and one night in the middle of a most impressive recital from *The Tempest* the precious bit of thick black twist fell to the floor, half-way on its perilous journey to Gallacher. What a moment of suspense that was! Would it be picked up and handed to the teacher by some sneak who wanted to get well in? Would it lie where it was and be found after the class, with the possible result that the class would be suspended? Or would it be picked up and passed on until it reached the man to whom its coming meant opening the doors of paradise for an hour? By the seraphic smile on Bill's face a few seconds after, I knew all was well.

I was released on September 10th, 1926. What a lovely feeling it is to step out, a free man once more!

The first days of prison are very trying if, as I am, you are a heavy smoker, but I found the last days, when I knew I would soon be able to smoke again, even more difficult. I smoked fourteen Gold Flake straight off immediately I came out, and promptly paid for my folly by vomiting violently. But it was worth it, all the same.

Chapter XV

THE STRAND PALACE AND THE OLD BAILEY AGAIN

After our release from prison we were sent, after a short holiday, to the various coalfields to work in connection with the miners' lock-out, then in its most difficult period. There had been break-aways in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, and I was accordingly sent to the Leicestershire coalfields to try to stop the rot. I had to change at Leicester for Coalville, and met the late Herbert Smith on the platform. We had a very friendly talk, and he scribbled a note of introduction to the miners, which served me in very good stead during some very difficult times which lay ahead.

I was billed to speak at a great demonstration in Derby in support of the miners, but when I arrived at the hall the Chief Constable served me with a notice prohibiting me to speak on pain of arrest under some regulation in the Emergency Powers Act. I have always made a habit of preparing very fully and easily read notes before every meeting, and on this occasion they came in very useful, for another comrade delivered my speech, while I sat beside him on the platform. I think the Chief Constable felt a little foolish at the end of the meeting.

In November, 1926, I went back to the Graving Dock on ship-repair work. While working there, I got a letter from the Labour Manager at Woolwich

Arsenal to say that the application for employment which I had made seven years previously had now been considered, as a suitable vacancy had occurred. Naturally, I was delighted at the thought of getting into the Arsenal, promptly turned in my job at the Graving Dock, and the next morning found me interviewing the Labour Manager at the Arsenal. He explained that vacancies for platers occurred very infrequently, but that my qualifications had been noted at the time the application was made, and my name had been considered in strict rotation. He asked various technical questions, which I answered to his satisfaction, to which he replied that I was the very man they were looking for. I must go and get vaccinated at once, hand in my Insurance cards and start work on Friday morning. Happy as a sandboy, I made straight for the doctor, and astonished Marjorie by arriving home that night with a big red band on my arm, to be asked if I wasn't red enough without having to advertise it.

I dutifully and punctually turned up at the Arsenal, and was immediately sent to a different office from the one where I had been interviewed. Of course, I smelt a rat straight away, but, like Brer Rabbit, "lay low and said nuffin'." It was a very foggy morning, and hour after hour went by. Finally I asked how long I was to be kept before I started work, and was told that I had to be interviewed by an important official who had been delayed on account of the fog.

At last the great man arrived, and I was asked to step upstairs into a very beautiful room, which I knew could only be occupied by one of the "head yins." This one proved to be a very military-looking gentleman. He coughed and hummed and hawed—no doubt affected by the fog—and seemed to have great difficulty in

getting out what he wanted to say. "I was a very good workman." (They had found that out.) "I was a very good time-keeper." (They had found that out, too.) "There was nothing against me—oh no! nothing whatever!" "It was all a stupid mistake made by some subordinate." "There was no vacancy at all at the Arsenal for a plater. They were very sorry I had been put to so much trouble, but they knew that a sensible man like me would understand that such mistakes do happen."

My eyes were fairly twinkling by this time, and I pointed out that it was doubly strange for such a mistake to have happened, because they already had my Insurance cards, and had thereby given me employment. Secondly, I had been to the expense and discomfort of being vaccinated. I could not accept his explanations. What did he propose to do about it? So we went all over the ground again, and the military gentleman grew more and more apologetic. At last the truth came out. He was very sorry—and he was sure I would believe that he had nothing to do with it—but he had received instructions that Harry Pollitt was not to be employed at the Arsenal.

"Yes, that's fine," I replied. "But you are discharging me after agreeing to employ me. I have given up a good job, and you must give me two weeks' wages in lieu of notice."

He agreed, and gave me a slip which I took to the cashier, and drew £7 10*s*., and then the military gentleman said that he would escort me to Beresford Square. Down the Arsenal Yard we went together, and I noticed salutes on every side. Whether they were for me or for my distinguished escort, I don't know. When we arrived in the Square, my companion invited me to

take lunch with him, but, as I had £7 10s. in my pocket, and had just seen a place where fine jellied eels could be obtained, I offered to act as host instead. My offer was politely declined, and so my career at the Arsenal came to an end. But in 1927 I remember being tickled to death on reading in a die-hard Tory paper of the cunning attempts of the Communists, among whom I was prominently named, to penetrate into Woolwich Arsenal.

I was out of work in the summer of 1927, and after taking my stand for a call at the Graving Dock, made my way to the Communist Party offices in King Street. As I walked up the Strand I noticed some Yarrow boilers being transported to the back of the Strand Palace Hotel. Out of curiosity, I followed the lorry and saw it stop outside the new hotel extension that was then being built.

I went up to the office of the Clerk of the Works, and asked him if they wanted any boilermakers on the job, and he referred me to Yarrow's foreman. After an interview it was agreed that I should take on the job of erecting the superstructure of these boilers. So, all merry and bright, we started on this job on July 15th, 1927.

I finished the job on August 28th, but meantime a very interesting event had taken place. I was coming out of my house in Tollington Park two or three days after starting this job when a solicitor's clerk served me with a notice to attend at Bow Street in connection with a charge of publishing a criminal libel against a man called Scott, who was a member of Havelock Wilson's union.

I understood at once the significance of this, for after work in the East End I used to go to my office in Great

Ormond Street to direct the work of the Minority Movement and to leave instructions for the next day.

We were publishing at that time a little paper called the *International Seafarer*, and one day Tommy Strudwick had shown me an article sent by the International Committee of the Seamen's Section of the Red International of Labour Unions, which made all sorts of charges against Scott and his associations in the Russian port of Novorosisk, which, to say the least of it, were of an unsavoury character. I knew that however true these accusations might be, in English law they were libellous, and so gave instructions that the article should not be published.

I was informed that it was already being printed, so I said that all the papers must be destroyed. I had assumed that this had been done, but apparently some of the comrades thought the story too good to miss, and they had disregarded my instructions, and had distributed the paper at the various seaports. Havelock Wilson sent some of his officials to obtain copies, and others like William Spence sent for them through the post. This interest, I am afraid, was taken as a sign that certain of Wilson's officials were having a change of heart towards the Minority Movement. It turned out to be the method by which they definitely fixed the responsibility of publication and distribution.

I was in a dilemma when I got my summons to appear at Bow Street, because I had special reasons for not wanting to lose my job just then. I knew the charge was a serious one, and would involve long-drawn-out proceedings at Bow Street, and finally would have to go to the Old Bailey for trial by jury. I hit on the time-honoured excuse of having to attend a funeral and got the half-day off. That was all right, but it was not so

good when I saw the newspapers the next morning and my photograph on the front page of one of them; and I naturally wondered which paper the foreman bought.

I had not long to wait before finding out. My check was off the board and the foreman came up and innocently asked "if the funeral had gone off all right." I answered as innocently (though thinking that the funeral would probably end by being my own), "Yes, thanks." Then out came the newspaper with my face confronting all and sundry and the news of the case at Bow Street.

I said, "Has this finished me up?" But he answered, "No. I can see you know your job and I am satisfied so long as you don't start any nonsense here." Then I got his permission to attend the rest of the proceedings at Bow Street.

The day I finished the job at the Strand Palace Hotel, one of Yarrow's big men came down to inspect it, and offered me a three years' contract on a similar job at Devonport Dockyard, but after my experience at Woolwich Arsenal, I knew how long I would be allowed to remain in the Royal Dockyard, and besides I had now other fish to fry. I did not want to be cut off from all my political activities and from playing any effective part in the leadership of the Minority Movement and the Communist Party. So I politely declined the offer.

The next day I had to attend an important conference in Berlin, and had my first experience of travelling by aeroplane. All went well until we got to Hanover, after which it was pretty rough going, and finally we had to make a forced landing. The passengers were badly shaken up, and we had to wait until motor cars could be got to finish the rest of the journey to Berlin,

and then the car I was in broke down. All told, I would have got to Berlin quicker if I had gone by steamer and train all the way, and I decided to give planes the go by in the future.

After concluding my business in Berlin, I was due to attend the Trades Union Congress at Edinburgh, and this turned out to be the last Congress I did attend in the capacity of a delegate, for the reasons related in an earlier part of this book.

The time of the Old Bailey trial was now drawing near. I had conducted my own defence at Bow Street, and was going to do the same again at the Old Bailey. Sergeant Sullivan had been briefed to defend Thomas Strudwick and Dick Beech, the two comrades charged along with me. I think that the Sergeant enjoyed this case more than a little and put all he knew into it, and, together with Maurice Healey, a great defence was put up. He had the idea that at all costs it was necessary to get witnesses from Novorosisk to prove the allegations against Scott, and insisted that I go to Russia immediately to see if this was possible. We had only a small margin of time to do this job, so the Sergeant gave me a personal letter to the German Ambassador, and I got a *visa* right away. The witnesses were arranged for, and the trial came on.

It was a nasty sort of case about prostitution and brothels, and I had no desire to be mixed up in it. It was clear that many attacks would be made on Russia, and so it turned out. Roland Oliver and Travers Humphreys, now Mr. Justice Humphreys, were briefed for the prosecution, and this must have cost Havelock Wilson no end of money.

The details of the case were nasty enough, but no worse than the conduct of Oliver and Humphreys in

their conduct of the case. The Recorder at the Old Bailey at that time was Sir Ernest Wild, and he was extremely anxious that I should admit that I was receiving a fair trial. I will make no further comment as I understand that judges are beyond criticism, or are at any rate themselves the judges of what may be said about them. I have more than a hunch, however, that when a Communist enters the Old Bailey the statue of Justice on top of the building at least winks.

Oliver was studiously offensive to the Russian witnesses until the Recorder was forced to pull him up. Things were going badly for us, but we were let out on bail after each session, and one night, when I was leaving the court at the end of the day's proceedings, a man came up to me and said, "Pollitt, I watch this case from the gallery. Do you know that if you go to the Registrar of Shipping you can find out the full record of Scott at sea and not just the discharges that are in the book that Oliver examined Scott upon?"

These discharges by the way had all been good ones, and when I told Harry Thompson, my solicitor, about it, he was on it like a shot. The result showed Scott's character as being rather different from that presented by his counsel.

So next day I asked permission to cross-examine Scott again, and though the Recorder doubted if this were absolutely necessary, I got my way. I can still recall Sir Ernest Wild's face as he listened to an unsavoury record being elicited from Scott on the basis of one of his ship's discharges that had not appeared in his discharge book produced in court. In addition, the Home Office was compelled to produce a dossier of the lady who was associated with Scott, and her record in this country was not at all that which the

prosecution had described. From that moment the attitude of the Recorder changed.

In my speech I went all out after Oliver, using phrases about using the Oxford accent and the kid gloves to hide poisonous hands. In fact, I enjoyed myself.

My last words to the jury were to the effect that, whether they found me guilty or not, I did not think that any of them would take Scott into their house as a paying guest.

The jury retired, and we were taken to a room to await their verdict and listened to the cheerful warder telling us this was the very room where a murderer called Robinson had waited for the verdict of a jury. Our verdict was "Guilty." I think that at this stage in the proceedings an unprecedented thing happened. The Recorder not only kept reminding us that we had the right to appeal against the verdict, but he did it in such a way as to give the quite definite impression that if we agreed not to appeal against conviction, the sentence he would impose would be of a lighter character.

I stated there would be no appeal. Before passing sentence, the Recorder asked if we had anything to say, and I then said that, seeing I was charged in my capacity as General Secretary of the Minority Movement, I would take full responsibility, and as my two comrades had more domestic obligations than I had, I was prepared to take all the punishment that was to come.

Thomas Strudwick and Dick Beech were fined £50, and bound over to keep the peace for a year. I was fined £100 and bound over to keep the peace for a year. But, when every aspect of the case was taken into consideration, the verdict was really in our favour.

I wonder if the present General Secretary of the National Union of Seamen, Mr. Spence, remembers this case, and how he expressed his regret that he had to be mixed up in it at all.

I had been invited to take part in the Tenth Anniversary celebrations of the Russian Revolution, and immediately the trial was over went to Moscow, but arrived too late for November 7th; not too late, however, to go on a tour of the south of Russia which took us to Tiflis and Baku. John Jagger, M.P., was one of the party that went on this trip, but I was not able to finish it, owing to being taken ill in Tiflis and having to go to hospital for some time. I returned in due course to Moscow in the company of Professor Goode.

When I got back to London I found that an appeal had been lodged against the sentence imposed upon us at the Old Bailey. The reason for this appeal being made was undoubtedly due to the way the Recorder had acted after the jury had returned their verdict of "Guilty."

The case was to come before the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Hewart, the late Judge Avory and Judge Branson. I was very interested to see Lord Hewart at close quarters again, as the last time I had seen him was as plain Gordon Hewart, when he was fighting an election in Manchester.

The appeal was dismissed, but after the case was over one of the hard-boiled *Daily Mail* reporters, who had not then covered himself with glory by his scoops over the Dartmoor Mutiny, his interviews with American gangsters refused permission to enter England or his pernicious dope about Franco Spain, came outside the court and thanked me for having relieved a dull day.

The Brisbane *Daily Mail* published a photograph of

me wearing a tie I had never seen in my life before, over a heading "A Red on Trial," and informed its readers that Harry Pollitt had been arrested, and that "he is at present on trial connected with the forgery of documents of a semi-political nature between bodies in Britain and Russia."

And with this we will end the journey from the Strand Palace Hotel to the Old Bailey. It also ended the period of working with my tools in the shipyard up to the time of writing in December, 1939. But one never knows what may happen in this world, and, as you read in the Preface to this book, "the tools are still in vaseline."

Chapter XVI

PARLIAMENTARY FIGHTS

After the betrayal of the General Strike and the subsequent defeat of the miners at the end of 1926 by those same leaders who are betraying the working-class movement yet again in the present war, a period of reaction set in. With the beginning of a trade boom, all sorts of fine-sounding schemes were brought forward to try to show that there was no need for class struggle—that we were all wrong in thinking that the capitalist system could not be transformed peacefully and gradually, and that the working class would glide through a period of capitalist prosperity into Socialism without anyone being any the wiser or the worse off.

In view of his subsequent rôle, it was not surprising to find H. N. Brailsford launching such a campaign at the Margate Labour Conference (1926). It was quickly adopted by the I.L.P. under the guise of the living wage as a means towards the peaceful conquest of capitalism. This was the epoch of Mondism. And how the Citrines peddled their false doctrines, trying to prove at the Swansea Trades Union Congress in 1928 that, by co-operation with the capitalist class, the workers could participate in the control of industry, standards of living would progressively increase, and, lo and behold! we should find ourselves living under Socialism without all this nasty talk about revolution.

Then, like Brailsford, Ernest Bevin became enamoured

of Fordism, and launched a campaign to show that Marxism was out of date, that a period of organised capitalism was opening out in which economic crises would be a thing of the past, and we should steadily develop into a Socialist state.

The Second International also took up the same line. The leader of the German Social Democratic Party waxed lyrical at the Kiel Congress at the new vistas opened up by these "new" tendencies towards organised capitalism. He stressed the evil and decay of things in the Soviet Union and described in roseate hues the beauty of the capitalist world.

The whole of the bastard philosophy was in full song in 1928, and the workers were in serious danger of being taken in by these pernicious reformist theories. But the Communist International sounded a sharp warning against all these tendencies at the Sixth World Congress in the summer of 1928, and the line of that Congress became popularly known and understood as the slogan of "Class against Class."

There had been serious discussions in the British Communist Party, and in view of the entire political situation it was finally decided that it was necessary to challenge openly the policy of the Tory, Liberal and Labour Parties alike at the General Election, and to bring before the workers the policy of the Communist Party, showing that the only way forward for the workers to the achievement of Socialism lies through the abolition of capitalism.

A number of Communist candidates were adopted, and the first challenge came at a by-election in Aberdeen. Aitken Ferguson stood as the Communist candidate. It was a great fight, as all who took part in it will remember. The gloves were off, and the Communist

Party felt in fine fettle to do battle against all who were deceiving the workers in one way or another.

I have never been enamoured of the idea of getting into Parliament, but I dearly love taking part in election campaigns. I think they are an invaluable means of bringing before the workers the whole programme and policy of the Communist Party, and, by taking advantage of the political interest and discussion that is aroused, of deepening their class consciousness and political understanding. They show that a political party that takes part in elections is also a serious party that has to be regarded as an important factor in the political life of the country.

If there is one question which has been hurled at me more frequently in election campaigns than any other it is: "What can one man do in Parliament?" But to-day the magnificent record of revolutionary Parliamentary activity carried out by William Gallacher, Communist M.P. for West Fife, has shattered this argument once and for all.

I have stood as the Communist candidate at Seaham Harbour, twice in Whitechapel and St. George's, twice in Rhondda East and in Clay Cross. But of all these fights, the one that gave me the most satisfaction was at Seaham Harbour, where I fought J. R. MacDonald in the General Election of 1929. I hated that conceited, self-satisfied creature, and was in my element when the Party decided that I should fight him when he was at the height of his popularity amongst misguided people.

And it was some fight! We had no organisation worth speaking of throughout that large constituency, but that did not trouble my Election Agent, that grand old campaigner, Dave Ramsay, or the comrades whom

we quickly rallied round us. I remember Dave saying to me when we had explored possibilities and realised that we had got to start from zero, that he felt "like an old war-horse, smelling the battle-field once more."

In 1928 it was rank sacrilege to say one derogatory word about MacDonald. Perhaps that is why we enjoyed saying so many. During the election period, a big strike broke out at Dawdon Colliery, one of Lord Londonderry's Durham group. I took a leading part in the strike, and was, of course, accused of being interested in it only with an eye to votes at the General Election. The Dawdon miners put up a great fight, and I made many friends there who still love to talk about that election contest.

My adoption meeting was to take place in the big Miners' Hall in Dawdon. I had to chalk the streets myself to advertise the fact that a fellow called Harry Pollitt was to be adopted that night to contest the Seaham Harbour Division. When, at last, the eventful night arrived, as I walked down the streets, the women stood at their doors laughing—and well they might, for not a single soul turned up. So the Hall was booked for another meeting; the streets were chalked again, and round we went with a handbell, calling on the people to attend.

Better luck this time. Sixty-three people were in the hall, not a soul of whom knew me. I had no Chairman, so I walked on to the platform and stated that it was my pleasure to introduce the Communist candidate to them. These words said, I crossed over to the other side of the platform and said, "This is the candidate who stands before you."

Then I got started, and put into that speech everything I knew about the policy of the Communist Party.

I went round with the hat to take a collection—and it was a very good one—then asked for questions, which I got in plenty.

Following upon that meeting we soon gathered round us a small but splendid band of workers, but we had no car until the day before polling day, when a baby Austin arrived which roused either tears or mirth from those who looked upon it. However, we chalked, belled, walked and travelled in buses all over that scattered constituency, and the meetings grew in size and interest, until some comrades with little experience began to see me as good as elected. But I knew better. Long years of election campaigns had taught me that meetings were no criterion. Time and time again I had noted that revolutionary candidates invariably get the best meetings, the most tireless and devoted workers, the greatest enthusiasm, and while success in electoral victory has so far seldom been achieved, in every case these electoral fights have led to the strengthening of the fight of the workers against capitalism.

There were 58,350 electors in Seaham Harbour, and I thought we should never finish addressing the envelopes, folding the election addresses and putting them in the envelopes. But at last all was ready. Here it is. I reprint it because I have made it the model on which all my election campaigns have been waged:

ELECTION ADDRESS, SEAHAM HARBOUR, 1929

COMRADES, WORKING MEN AND WOMEN OF SEAHAM DIVISION,—I come before you as the candidate of the Communist Party, the Party of the working-class struggle against capitalism all over the world. I am the only trade unionist in the fight, the only candidate with a long workshop experience and trade-union experience.

I know your lives; I understand your feelings and desires.

I stand for the complete transformation of society—the abolition of all class divisions, privilege, monopoly and exploitation which to-day condemn the mass of the population to slave labour and misery for the profit of the few, and for the creation of a free and equal Workers' Socialist Republic.

To achieve this we need a revolutionary workers' government which shall break the power of the capitalist ruling machine, take over the means of production from the exploiters and organise the future free society. Only so shall we find the way out of the economic crisis which is spreading misery on every side and which capitalism cannot solve, in spite of its desperate attempts to rationalise industry—attempts carried out under the slogan of "Industrial Peace," with the active support of Labour and Trade Union Leaders.

The Dawdon Struggle

The magnificent struggle of the Dawdon miners, carried out against Londonderry and the trade-union leadership, is a practical example of this crisis. It is the most important struggle since the end of the 1926 lock-out. It is the greatest fight against rationalisation that has yet been witnessed. The effects of it will be felt long after the election, for it is a concrete expression of the class struggle as apart from the sham Parliamentary struggle that the other three parties carry on whilst the workers fight on the streets to protect their bread and their jobs.

In every pit in this constituency more work is being done with less men and for less pay; pit against pit, rate-cutting everywhere, many miners too terrorised by victimisation even to demand the legal minimum wage. No section of the working class is living in such terrible conditions as you. Bound by a capitalist dictatorship more brutal than can be found anywhere else, you are

held in the grip of a merciless system. Cruelly exploited in the pit for starvation wages, tricked by a system of off-takes, tied to colliery or scheme houses, your lives are robbed of all the happiness that could be yours under Communism. This is what rationalisation means—increased output, increased unemployment, lower wages, longer hours and, finally, as a result of intensified international competition, new wars.

This is what the Conservative, Liberal and Labour Parties are supporting and, if returned as a Government, are pledged to carry out.

Three Capitalist Parties

The Conservative Party is the leader and organiser of the fight against the working class, the dominant Party of Empire slavery and robbery, the enemy of the workers all over the world.

The Liberal Party professes to be in opposition to the Conservative Party, but in all essentials is on the same platform of capitalism. The General Strike, like war and every big crisis, showed the absolute identity of Conservatism and Liberalism as protectors of capitalist property and enemies of the workers.

The Labour Party calls for the support of the workers as the principal opposition to the Conservative Government, but the Labour Party is in reality, no less than the Conservative and Liberal Parties, the servant of capitalism and the capitalist state. The Labour Party professes Socialist aims in principle, but its practical programme is the programme of capitalist re-organisation. It opposes the class struggle of the workers and advocates industrial peace. The Labour Party is the most dangerous enemy of the workers because it is a *disguised* Party of capitalism.

A Parliamentary Labour Government, composed of the present leaders of the Labour Party, all proved

traitors to the workers and accepting responsibility for the existing capitalist state, would only be an instrument of capitalism for the deception and suppression of the workers.

The Communist Party

The Communist Party enters the election to raise the banner of independent working-class struggle against all three capitalist parties, to carry forward under the battle-cry of "Class against Class," the revolutionary fight both inside and outside Parliament.

Only a revolutionary workers' government, based directly on the workers in pit, factory and railway, armed with power to suppress the resistance of the capitalists, can lead the way to Socialism. A revolutionary workers' Government would—

(1) Confiscate the land, banks, mines, railways and all large-scale industries to run them on a single, planned basis with workers' control, in the interests of the working class.

(2) Enforce a seven-hour working day (six for miners and dangerous trades) and forty-hour week, with minimum rates of pay for all workers, with equality for men and women.

(3) Build houses for the workers.

(4) Establish universal free health and education services.

(5) Grant immediate independence to all peoples under the rule of British imperialism and establish fraternal relations with them and with the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

The Immediate Fight

The Communist Party fights for the interests of the workers both in the supreme aim of the conquest of

power and in the day-to-day struggles to secure every concession and reform from capitalism that can assist the workers, knowing that the fight for reforms leads the way to the fight for final victory.

We therefore call upon the workers of the Seaham Constituency to rally to the Communist Party and fight for our programme of immediate demands:

(1) Immediate restoration of the seven-hour day to the miners, with no overtime and a guaranteed week.

(2) United resistance to all wage reductions.

(3) Work or full maintenance for the unemployed.

(4) Repeal of all anti-working-class legislation, especially the Anti-Trade Union Act of 1927, and restoration of complete freedom of strikes and picketing.

(5) Free meals for schoolchildren.

(6) Abolition of workers' contributions to National Insurance.

(7) Repudiation of the Dawes Plan and all forms of Reparations.

(8) Immediate resumption of full diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia and the granting of a State-guaranteed loan to facilitate trading.

Parliament and the Workers

The *Communist Party* does not come before the workers to ask for a Parliamentary majority as the means of the workers' emancipation. Parliament exists only as a puppet show to deceive the workers. The object of sending working-class representatives to Parliament must be to tear aside the sham, to expose the real capitalist dictatorship, to fight it in every sphere, and so to arouse and awaken the real working-class struggle outside.

If returned to Parliament, I pledge myself to

uncompromising war on every capitalist institution, both inside and outside Parliament, to subordinate all my activities to the revolutionary class struggle, and to act throughout as a disciplined member of the workers' revolutionary Party, the Communist Party.

LET SEAHAM DIVISION SEND A MESSAGE OF REVOLUTIONARY WORKING-CLASS SOCIALISM TO THE WHOLE COUNTRY!

DOWN WITH CONSERVATISM, LIBERALISM AND LABOURISM—THE THREE ALLIES OF THE UNITED FRONT OF MONDISM AND EMPIRE!

DOWN WITH THE THREE CAPITALIST PARTIES!

FORWARD WITH THE WORKERS' REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM!

WORKERS, VOTE COMMUNIST!

HARRY POLLITT,
Communist Candidate.

On that policy we went into battle. Most of the halls, with the exception of the Dawdon Miners' Hall, were banned to us. But what did that matter? There were always the street corners and the open spaces, and there we went. We were speaking from morning till night. There were friendly meetings and hostile ones. There were sympathetic discussions and dreadful threats about what would happen if we defeated Ramsay.

At one meeting which I addressed at Wheatley Hill my audience refused to go away. I did not realise that it was a put-up job to make me miss my bus and so walk

eight weary miles to Blackhall Colliery, where I was lodging. But I was lucky. The journey had begun to seem very long when a car came along. I stepped into the middle of the road, stopped it and asked for a lift. The driver replied that he was going to Sunderland and could only take me as far as Easington, so I said that would be fine. We got talking, and he told me he was one of the chief Conservative workers for the Tory candidate, Fearnley Whittingstall. Most of his conversation consisted of unflattering remarks about that Bolshie Pollitt. I was discretion itself. When we came to Easington he apologised for not being able to take me further, for "it's been a pleasure to have such an intelligent conversation." "I'm very gratified," I replied, "because I'm that Bolshie, Pollitt." He stared for a moment in amazement, then burst out laughing and said, "Well, the joke's on me. Jump in. I'll drive you to Blackhall."

During that fight against MacDonald we received many messages of support from all over the country and from abroad. The one I treasured most was the one I received from one of the greatest women who ever lived, Mrs. Charlotte Despard. She was one of my best friends, and during the time that I was General Secretary of the Minority Movement helped us financially on many occasions, especially for any work connected with the fight against imperialism. This is her letter:

ROEBUCK HOUSE,
CLONSKEA,
CO. DUBLIN.
May 15th, 1929.

DEAR COMRADE POLLITT,—As an old Socialist and for many years an active member of what was at one

ST*

time the Labour Party of Great Britain, I am writing to express my satisfaction that in the coming electoral campaign you are fighting against the leader of that Party.

I am not doing this without reason. I have watched the career of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, your present opponent, and it has disillusioned me sadly. When I claimed his help for Irish prisoners and deportees (he was the leader of the Opposition) he did nothing—made no protest. Instead of fighting our great foes, imperialism and capitalism, he has played the double game of diplomacy, refused to support the really forward movement of the workers, preached expediency, agreed to compromise and checked enthusiasm. During his brief period of power, did he put forward any one measure antagonistic either to capitalism or British imperialism? What has he done for the miners? Was he there on the day when all London was moved with enthusiasm and sympathy for the Hunger Marchers?

The truth is that these leaders of the old official party are played out. They have ceased to be in touch with the people.

You, my comrade, belong to the younger, the more consistent and vigorous wing of Labour. You have already shown readiness to take risks and you will take them again if the occasion arises. You don't wish to float over the heads of your fellow-workers, to give them good advice and preach fine sentiments. You are with them in the dust of the road, eager to seize every opportunity of opening through the grime and the gloom a path that may presently lead to such vital changes in thought and action as will create and maintain a new and better order of society.

Therefore I am glad to tell you that I wish heartily—indeed, ardently—your success in the present conflict.

Yours fraternally,

(*signed*) C. DESPARD.

In marked contrast to the attitude of Mrs. Despard was that of A. J. Cook, the General Secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. I first met Arthur in the Workers' Bookshop in King Street in 1921, and had kept up a very close association with him until this Seaham Election. No one had greater reason to detest MacDonald than A. J. Cook. No one had spoken so harshly and vehemently against MacDonald as Cook. But, although my campaign in Seaham was obviously hopeless, the Labour Party decided to bring up Cook to speak against me. I knew, of course, that it was a task he would detest, and if he had been at all firm, he could have got out of it on some pretext or other. So I decided to stand on the street corner by the Miners' Hall at Dawdon, where he would be bound to see me, thinking that at least his conscience would prick him a little.

Up he rolled in a big car, which stopped just where I was standing. He waved a friendly greeting to me, which I studiously ignored. I knew he would be upset, and he was—enough to cause him to make the worst speech he ever made in his life, which made no impression upon the miners, who knew and loved Cook for different activity and a different rôle from the one he was now assuming. We never spoke to one another again after this incident.

At last Election Day came. It was very important, my agent assured me, for a candidate to appear at every election booth. MacDonald was going round in a marvellous Rolls-Royce belonging, I believe, to a Dr. Grant. Our famous Baby Austin stood outside our Central Committee Room in Easington Colliery, the front room of a disabled miner's house.

We decorated our car lavishly with red ribbon, to the amusement of the children who crowded round,

and off we started on the grand tour, but before we reached the top of the street we were pelted with mud and rotten vegetables, our decorations were ruined, and we looked a sad spectacle. But who cared? On we went. Fate ordained that our arrival in Murton coincided with the arrival of MacDonald in the Rolls-Royce. A huge cheer went up, which I did not allow myself to believe was meant for me. Then we got the raspberry good and plenty, and, to put the lid on, just as MacDonald passed us, gazing contemptuously at the driver and the candidate, the wheel of the Austin came off. A roar of delight greeted this catastrophe, to be followed by derisive noises which accompanied us all the way that we pushed the car to a garage to get it repaired.

Nevertheless, every polling booth was visited. On the way through one mining village I noticed in every house on either side of the long street MacDonald's photograph. It was in colour, and big enough to fill a cottage window. The caption read: "Labour's leader. Make him the nation's leader."

As we went slowly down the street, I noticed one window with my photograph in it, cut from the election address. "Stop the car, George," I said. "Whoever has put my dial up in the window in this street has got some guts. We'll go and congratulate him." But alas! for my conceit, it was an empty house, on which some wag had stuck the photograph for a joke.

We took our seats in the counting-room. The votes were being turned out of the boxes by the thousand, and fresh tables had to be brought in to accommodate the thousands which had been recorded for MacDonald. Once in a while, I would note one with the cross against my name. Half-way through the

proceedings, MacDonald graciously entered the room to shake hands with all and sundry. When he came to Marjorie and me, he said in a tone of voice for which I could have killed him: "How do you do? How do you do?" I could not resist saying: "I beg your pardon. I have not been introduced to you." So the cavalcade passed on.

At length the result was declared: MacDonald 35,615; Whittingstall, 6,821; Haslam, 5,266; Pollitt, 1,451. My pathetic little bundle of votes looked like the Golden Fleece to me, and I regarded every one of those 1,451 more preciously than a devout worshipper regards the beads of the rosary. The Returning Officer asked if any of the candidates had anything to say, but I decided that it wasn't worth asking for a recount.

Then we all had to go outside to meet the electors. The streets and the school yard were crowded with MacDonald's supporters. Someone advised me not to address the electors, but naturally I took my place on the stand with the others, and when they had spoken, I began to thank those who had worked for me and voted for me. Not a word could be heard. Roars and catcalls greeted me, and fights broke out between my stalwart supporters and the more pugnacious of MacDonald's men as he was carried off shoulder high.

That evening I left for Manchester, tired but happy about a fight which had been abundantly worth while, a fight which I regard as one of the most valuable political experiences I ever had, although one of the hardest campaigns.

The Seaham miners and their wives revenged me against Ramsay MacDonald a few years later, when he was so decisively repudiated by the people who had idolised him in 1928.

The fight had one interesting sequel. My wife Marjorie had got a job through an agency as confidential secretary to the head of one of the biggest advertising firms in London. When the General Election took place, this firm received the order for carrying out all the Tory Party's publicity, and Marjorie was in charge of all the details worked out between the Tory organisers and the firm's artists and copy-writers as to what publicity material should be used and how it should be displayed. But at week-ends she came up to Seaham to give me a hand in the campaign. On one occasion she was addressing, or rather attempting to address, a meeting in Murton, which was the most hostile village to us in the whole constituency, when she was pulled off the box by angry miners.

She was back at the office as usual the following day, only to be called into the private office of the head of the firm and asked what her married name was. She was then informed that the game was up. He was very sorry, but she would have to go, as he had been informed who she was and, worse still, whose wife she was. He apologetically explained that he didn't care what her politics were—she was the best Secretary he had ever had—but his biggest clients had also been informed, and were demanding her dismissal immediately. He gave her a splendid testimonial, and they parted the best of friends. We were both considerably amused to read some weeks later in a Tory newspaper the following:

An Election Secret

Now that the election is over and the *post mortem* on the Conservative Party's campaign has been held, this story, which I vow is true, can be told. Fearful lest their

rival parties should know of the plans for their campaign, the Conservative Party took the greatest care to ensure secrecy. An old-established and reputable firm of advertising agents, so reputable that their methods are antiquated, was engaged to do the business. Only after many weeks of diligent search was the right Secretary found who could be entrusted with the confidential work. She proved efficient, and as soon as the campaign was in operation, all the information was at her finger-tips. During the last week of the election the young lady did not appear, but the advertising firm received a visit from Scotland Yard and were asked if they knew the past record of the young lady. Their surprise was indeed great when they were informed that their confidential secretary was an active member of the Communist Party. Is it here that lies the secret of the Conservative defeat?

After Seaham, the election I most enjoyed was against Arthur Henderson at Clay Cross. It had much in common with Seaham: the constituency was principally made up of miners and their wives, but there was an entirely different atmosphere. I liked Henderson as much as he liked me, so that made the fight more interesting. His ponderous manner and condescension just got me blazing, and I had never forgiven him for his display of temper when he was the Labour candidate in East Ham in the Coupon Election of 1918. I was asked by the Labour Party locally if I would help, in view of the influence I possessed as a result of my activity in East London. I agreed, and held meetings at the shipyards and street corners, especially in the tough spots where the War victory strongly influenced people at that time. On the eve of the poll there was a big meeting at the Town Hall, and I was asked to carry on

the overflow meeting in another hall until Henderson arrived. It was by no means easy, but I did my best and succeeded in holding the crowd. Henderson arrived while I was speaking, and although the audience were obviously approving of what I was saying, Mr. Henderson did not. Although I hurried to finish my speech and make way for the candidate, I did not do so before he had said in a very audible voice: "Stop that man going on with that stuff!" What's more, I heard him afterwards remonstrating with his agent for allowing me to speak, in language that most people would not use to a dog. I told both Henderson and his agent precisely what I thought of them.

This incident had stuck in my memory and I had many other opportunities for experiencing a similar resentment at Clay Cross, but on one occasion I really felt I had had a little of my own back. The incident occurred during the counting of the votes. Henderson had been declared elected, and therefore was called upon to make the speech of thanks to the Returning Officer. I was standing nearby with my little daughter, Jean, in my arms, as we had nowhere to leave her. In his most pompous manner, Henderson started off, "I venture to propose," and went on to make a nauseating speech of fulsome praise about a returning officer who was known and hated as one of the most reactionary Tories in the place. The look of disgust on the faces of his own most ardent Labour supporters was amusing to see. At this point, my daughter, probably as bored as the rest of us with the lengthy oration, stated in the clear, penetrating voice of a small child, "Daddy, I want the lavatory!" This brief remark completely expressed the feelings of almost everybody in the room and was greeted with a spontaneous roar of laughter

which brought the vote of thanks to a sudden and untimely end. Whatever misdemeanours Jean may commit in later life, I shall always forgive her when I remember how neatly she punctured Henderson's pomposity at Clay Cross.

Our opponents always have plenty to say about the small votes that Communist candidates receive, and the fact that often the deposit is lost, but I can state positively that there has never yet been an election fought by the Communist Party that has not been thoroughly worth while, and which has not had an effect in the neighbourhood that has continued to exist long after the election is over.

Never was this more true than in the General Election campaign in 1929, although it resulted in the return to office of a second Labour Government. For all the dreams of a peaceful advance to Socialism and no more trade depressions, and all the rest of the cheap and easy panaceas which were the Labour Party's current political wares at that period, were to be smashed by the economic crisis that developed in the latter part of 1929. Our exposure of reformism during the campaign and our alternative policy of revolutionary advance were therefore proved to be the only correct line for the working class to follow. Had they only realised this then, the collapse of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the formation of the National Government, with all the terrible blunders that have resulted, might have been avoided.

Chapter XVII

CONCLUSION

In August, 1929, I was appointed to the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party, and at this point I shall conclude these scattered reminiscences, for the ten years from 1929 to 1939 constitute a period which requires fuller, more detailed and more fundamental treatment than is necessary in a book of the present character.

I make no pretence that this is a basic political work. What have I tried to do? Repeatedly, I have been asked by comrades all over the country: "Harry, when are you going to tell us something about your life that will help us a bit?" This is what I have tried to do, to tell something about myself apart from the ordinary round of public meetings, demonstrations and committee meetings, to give my background, upbringing and personal experiences and my constant endeavour to give my best to the working-class movement.

I hope what has been written here will not only be useful to new comrades in the Labour movement, but to all those who are so valiantly fighting at the present time against war and capitalism.

The fundamental history of the Communist Party of Great Britain has yet to be written. Some day, some comrade specially gifted for the task will do it. It will be a history from which no worker need be ashamed to study or from which they will fail to learn.

When I became General Secretary of the Communist Party, it was for me the fulfilment of an ambition which

I had cherished ever since I first came into the revolutionary movement.

All that is described in this book from childhood to maturity, all the experiences and activities that have been referred to, were only really important as steps in my training. I was serving my apprenticeship until my comrades considered I had "come out of my time" and was fitted to become their Secretary.

To hold that position is the greatest honour in the world. It is the position to which every revolutionary should aspire, and every member of the Communist Party in particular should so conduct themselves, so work and study, fight and lead, that they can reach the proud position of being worthy of election to the Central Committee and to hold the leading position in the Party.

It is a position of great responsibility. It means unlimited worry and anxiety, so that one needs the help and support of every Party member to carry out one's duties to the best of one's ability. It gives unique opportunity for the development of the best that is in one and also for helping forward the coming new revolutionary leaders.

No one could have received more comradely help and assistance all through his life than I have. My strong points and weak ones are well known to those intimately acquainted with me. I have been hammered and attacked in many bitter political discussions, and rightly so, for however self-satisfied one tends to become on getting applause at great demonstrations, if this did not take place, political mistakes and flabbiness would develop and the movement held back from its full strength and power.

It is in the course of such discussions and criticism

that one learns from mistakes, and is helped forward to new battles and struggles.

The period that has been covered by these reminiscences has been a crowded historical one. It witnessed the breakaway of Labour from Liberal-Labourism on a mass scale. 1906 saw the election of the first group of Labour M.Ps. and, young as I was then, I remember now the elation felt at those victories in the General Election of 1906.

Next day, Socialist and Labour workmen in Gorton Tank thought the Socialist Commonwealth was round the corner. They went through the boiler and erecting shops feeling inches taller, because Gorton and Openshaw Division had returned John Hodge as Labour M.P.

These same years saw a breaking through of craft sectionalism, of more effective organisation of the unskilled workers, and in this the Workers Union played a great rôle.

They saw, too, the stirring controversy over the Lloyd George "robbing the roost," the first social Insurance Acts, in which 9*d.* for 4*d.* became a heatedly debated topic in every workshop.

They saw the great mass struggles of the railwaymen, dockers, miners and seamen. The use of force against the dockers at Hull, the miners at Featherstone and the railwaymen at Tonypandy by the same Liberals who now demand force against the Soviet Union.

They saw the tremendous campaign carried out by Tom Mann for Syndicalism, and his magnificent protest in 1912 against the soldiers being used to shoot down industrial workers on strike.

1914 and the War. How quickly the workers' movement was swept off its feet, except for a mere handful,

and all the experiences that followed from the betrayal of Socialist principles.

The election of 1918, the jingoism, the greed, the illusions that followed one of the most corrupt general elections in British history.

The employers' offensive and widespread unemployment that began to develop in 1920 and 1921. That great and impressive demonstration after the War past the Cenotaph, when revolution seemed in the air. The great strikes of the miners—Black Friday. The titanic struggle of the engineers in 1922 against the imposition of the principle of managerial functions.

The London Dockers unofficial strike in 1923 in which the Communist Party produced its first daily newspaper.

The Labour Government of 1924, the hopes it aroused in some sections of the workers, the knowledge that it would betray the workers that was known in other sections of the movement.

The defeat of the first Labour Government and the coming to power of a reactionary Baldwin Government, with the workers fighting back, until the wave of militancy won Red Friday in 1925.

The growth of the interest in Communism, as witnessed by the measures taken by the Labour Party and trade unions to deprive Communists of their democratic rights.

Then, as the highest point of all, the glorious nine days of the General Strike in 1926. What an agony that was, to sit in Wandsworth Prison while millions of workers were on the streets in the greatest demonstration of working-class solidarity this country has ever seen.

And, after its shameful betrayal, to have to listen to

George Hicks, M.P., who came to visit me in prison, trying to explain why the betrayal was inevitable, and also trying to deceive us that in reality a victory had been won.

Then the miners left to fight alone. Dauntless, suffering and sacrificing, writing a page of history that time can never fade. That Labour Party Conference at Margate in October, 1926, when the late Bob Williams, in his capacity of Chairman, thought fit to insult the miners and, just out of prison, I thought it my duty to get up and protest at Williams' remarks.

1927: the Trades Disputes Act, the employers and Government gloating that, after the defeat of the General Strike and the miners, they were top dogs, and taking full advantage of the fact. Then came the talk of rationalisation, the Mond-Turner conversations, Mondism, and the second Labour Government in 1929, and the opening of the new world economic crisis.

And from 1920 the Communist Party, battling and fighting against all the illusions of reformism, striving to unite the workers' struggles, to develop political education and class consciousness. Fighting, too, against its own weaknesses and sectarianism, trying to hammer out a united leadership of the most diverse elements. Fighting against all the power of British imperialism and its corruption of the upper strata of the Labour movement. But never giving up, never afraid; its members persecuted and imprisoned, victimised by employers and labour leaders alike. But never giving in. Always getting stronger. We were attacked for everything but our principles. We were "narrow sectarians," we "lacked polish and culture," we "were too harsh with the workers' enemies," we "did not allow for human nature," we "were difficult to work

with," we "were so tactless." How often have I heard all this from 1920 to 1929, until I could have punched the smug, self-satisfied creatures who use these phrases to cover their personal ambitions for a career. These false friends of Labour who have forgotten the class whose pennies and sacrifices have given them their present positions, positions they use to ape the ruling class, their manners, their dress, their food and drinks, their spurious culture, their accents and the whole decadent outfit of capitalism.

We Communists are not activated by malice, jealousy and uncharitableness, but we do hate capitalism and all who uphold it. We do distrust all who do not fight capitalism, and we do look upon them as enemies of the common people.

We hate to see the workers poor and anxious in a land where poverty and anxiety could be abolished to-morrow if all who pretend they are Socialists fought for Socialism and did not defend capitalism.

We do want unity of the workers' forces, not for any tactical reasons or ulterior motives, but for the genuinely sincere reason we want the working class to be as strong as possible against all its enemies, against all its false friends. We want unity because it is the one sure shield the workers have in defending themselves against capitalism to-day, and helping forward their development towards Socialism.

Who could have helped learning from such a period as this? Who could have helped making mistakes in such a period as this? The whole of these rich experiences have given more to revolutionaries than they can ever repay in service to the working class.

Many times comrades have said to me in various parts of the country: "Harry, do you never get tired of

rushing about all over the place?" Leading people in the official Labour movement, true to their own personalities, have on occasion not been backward in suggesting "that there was a great future before you in the Labour Party." Others of the armchair revolutionary type who can settle all problems round the fire, sitting cosy in their homes or clubs, have said: "The workers are not worth bothering with. Not until they know what real starvation is will they move." To all these types, my answer has always been the same. There is no other class but the working class for me. They give me strength, hope and inspiration. Their history is the only history worth knowing and fighting to develop in the conditions of our own time. There is no sacrifice too great to be allowed to serve the working class.

I close on that note. I have supreme confidence in the working class from which I have sprung, and from which nothing will ever separate me. I know that one day they will conquer power in Britain and overthrow the decadent and corrupt clique of degenerates who rule this country to-day.

I know, too, that the Communist Party will lead this struggle to its successful issue. Then, with power in the hands of the workers, they will solve the problems of our social system that the rich can never solve.

Generations of craftsmanship, intelligence, initiative and organising ability and genius lie behind them. For they come from the same stock as the Chartists, those who were the first in the world to win the right to vote, to strike, to speak freely and to publish their own literature. They were the first to form trade unions and their own political and co-operative organisations.

They will bring all their magnificent qualities to bear in the new life they will open out for the working

population of Britain when power is in their hands. They will transform Britain into the finest Socialist country in the whole world; will end poverty, unemployment, insecurity, class nequalities and privileges and war for ever. Every idle loom, machine, furnace and shipyard will be set going. Every inch of idle land brought into cultivation and prosperity. The workers will stand forth in all their strength and dignity as free men and women in a classless Socialist society.

The Britain they will govern will give complete freedom and independence to all the colonial countries now held down by the armed forces of British imperialism, and then, in fraternity and love, we shall help our freed colonial brothers and sisters to likewise transform their own countries also, help them achieve Socialist industrialisation and collective agriculture. Then the products of a free Socialist Britain will be exchanged for the raw materials and foodstuffs of our comrades overseas.

This is the dream and the aim which all the pioneers of our Labour movement have struggled to make real. This is the "gleam" which they have tirelessly followed, which has inspired them to go to the street corners and market-places to speak to a mere handful, has given them eloquence and burning fire to talk to their mates in the workshops and homes, and the certainty which has enabled them to endure crushing poverty and victimisation and made persecution easier to bear, which has steeled them to break down barrier after barrier and build up working-class organisation and power.

It may all seem a dream to-day when the toiling millions are being driven to make war for profit, territory and raw materials for the present imperialist