3. THE TRADE UNION CONGRESS

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"To live in contentment with an increasing degree of selfrespect and a fuller realisation of higher duties towards his country"—such is the ideal which the president of the

Trade Union Congress set up before the Indian worker. On the morrow of the Bombay lockout this ideal should have sounded out of tune had the Madras gathering been really representative of the Indian proletariat. While brutal exploitation is making the proletariat more and more conscious of their class interest, the "supreme organ of the Indian labour movement" preaches to the worker "higher duty towards his country". According to this ideal, the Bombay workers should have meekly accepted the wage-cut. Did not the owners argue that the cut was necessary for the welfare of the premier national industry? But the realities of life induced the workers to act rather on the urge of class interest than national interest. The Trade Union Congress, however, is so far removed from the struggle of the proletariat that the experience of such a momentous event as the Bombay lockout did not in the least reflect on its deliberation and policy.

The least knowledge of the situation makes it clear that the struggle of the Bombay workers against insatiable capitalist greed is not over. The president himself admitted that "the workers are still in danger of their wages being reduced by the millowners giving one lame excuse or other". As a matter of fact several mills have in the meanwhile been closed down. The Trade Union Congress did not say a word as to how the workers should meet the situation. "Hundred per cent organisation" was the only remedy prescribed. But hundred per cent organisation is a far cry. What should be done to meet the imminent capitalist offensive? Obviously it should be to rally the entire labour movement in support of the Bombay workers in case their wages will again be attacked, even after the capitalists have gained their point in the abolition of the excise duty. The most effective check to any further attack on the wages of the Bombay workers should be the preparation for a general strike all over the country. But such a revolutionary step cannot be taken by a Trade Union Congress which is against even partial economic strikes.

In reviewing the events of the past year the president

deplored the North-Western Railway strike which was defeated, in spite of the splendid solidarity of the workers, because the rest of the labour movement remained passive. While deploring the "unfortunate North-Western Railway strike" the president remarked with satisfaction that "the threatened strike on the BN Railway was happily averted by the efforts of the union and the All-India Railwaymen's Federation". The BN Railway strike, if not "happily averted", would have taken place about the same time as the NW Railway strike; thus it might have changed the entire position, and the NW Railway strike would be very likely to result fortunately. Instead of recognising and rectifying these mistakes, the Trade Union Congress congratulated itself upon its inglorious record.

The correct tactics in connection with the Bombay lock-out should be to lead the workers from the successful defensive to the offensive. The success in warding off the attack on wages has infused the workers with general enthusiasm and confidence in their strength. Further action must be undertaken to consolidate the position gained. A counteroffensive should be made. The demand for the payment of the wages for the lockout period should be put forward. But a Trade Union Congress that fraudulently testifies to the sympathy of the workers for the millowners and declares that "labour was with them in agitating for the removal of the excise duty" (president's speech) apparently considers that ten weeks' for 150,000 workers was a legitimate sacrifice for the "higher duties towards the country".

Reviewing the dispute in the Tata Works at Jamshedpur—a dispute sabotaged by the Trade Union Congress in connivance with the bourgeois-nationalist leaders—the president admitted that the company "went back on its agreement and dismissed a number of workers prominent" in the union. He also confessed that "the intervention of important leaders of the country was without appreciable success". The intervention was to avert a strike decided upon by the workers themselves. The arbitration committee,

on which sat Motilal Nehru and several other swarajist leaders, forgot the Jamshedpur workers as soon as the strike was averted. The swarajists cooperated with the government in passing the steel industries protection bill while the Tatas dismissed a number of workers, who had headed the strike movement. The president of the Trade Union Congress blinked over these incidents and expressed satisfaction that the situation at last had been eased by the "genius and personality of Mahatmaji". The Trade Union Congress acclaimed the settlement arrived at Jamshedpur under the patronage of the Mahatma. What was this settlement? The question of wages was not touched. The company recognised the union, reinstated its secretary to work, and undertook to collect subscriptions from the wages. This third condition more than compensates for the concessions made by the first two. The company will control the union fund. In consequence of this, the union officials will practically be the employees of the company. In this connection we may profitably recollect some of the remarks made by Gandhi when he came to settle the dispute at Jamshedpur. Addressing a workers' meeting he said, among other things of a similar nature: "I have come here as the friend of the Tatas. I hope that the relations between this great house and the labourers, who work under its care, will be of the friendliest character. They (capitalist and labourers) should be a great family living in unity and harmony. Capital will look not only to the material welfare but their moral welfare also. The capitalists are the trustees of the labouring masses under them... I do hope you (workers) will serve the company faithfully and by the manner of working your union demonstrate to the world that you deserve the generous reconciliation agreed to by Mr Tata." The reconciliation brought about by the "genious and personality of Mahatmaji" and acclaimed by the Trade Union Congress was to deliver the workers to the moral and material trusteeship of labour. As custodian of the welfare of the workers who are fortunate to labour for them, the Tatas will use the fund deducted from the

wages in such propaganda as will teach the labourer to "serve the great house faithfully". The Trade Union Congress accepts this as the best arrangements to settle the dispute in the Tata Works.

Politically, the Trade Union Congress subscribed to the program of dominion status for India. Nothing could show more clearly that it did not represent the interest of the Indian proletariat. Dominion status is a political agreement between imperialist and native bourgeoisie at the expense of the Indian working class. The latter will be forced to produce wealth for the native bourgeoisie in addition to British imperialism. Under the patronage of the missionaries of British labour-imperialism, the Trade Union Congress resolved that the salvation of the Indian working class would be worked through parliamentarism—in a country without a parliament. A request was registered in favour of special electorates if the government would not widen the existing franchise. As if India is not already rent asunder in hostile camps in consequence of the pernicious system of special electorates introduced by the Montagu reforms. The incipient labour parliamentarians of India might begin by learning the ABC of democracy. The usual resolution about the formation of a labour party was also adopted. We have dealt with this matter in our last issue.

The shameful feature of the Madras Trade Union Congress was the omission to mention the moral and material aid received by the Bombay workers from the textile workers of the Soviet Union in the official acknowledgement of international support. Nor was the help received from the International Workers' Relief mentioned. Despicable cowardice!

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